

**CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT AND LOWER ATTAINING  
PUPILS IN PRIMARY AND JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
GHANA**

**By**

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## **DECLARATION**

This thesis is as a result of my investigation and research and it has never been accepted in its substance for any degree.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explored the uses of continuous assessment and the experiences of lower attaining pupils in primary and junior secondary schools at Agona and Affutu Districts in Ghana. The study adopted a range of data collection methods including: self-completed questionnaires, semi-structured and focus groups interviews. A systematic sample of 107 primary and junior secondary teachers answered questionnaires and 12 teachers from the cohort were interviewed. Additionally, four focus groups of primary 6 lower attaining pupils were interviewed.

The main findings of the study were:

- The majority of the teachers in the study felt strongly that continuous assessment enabled teachers to support lower attaining pupils to improve.
- The teachers reported in the interviews that they used the same approach to assess all pupils including lower attainers in classrooms; this caused the pupils to perform poorly and eventually repeat classes.
- The teachers identified policy, larger classes and lack of training as barriers to supporting lower attainers to improve.
- Lower attaining pupils in the study reportedly became anxious, frustrated, and helpless before and during class tests, and upset when they failed.
- They identified difficult tasks, lack of self-regulated learning and supportive environments as barriers to participating in class tests.

The findings have implications for policy, practice, research, teacher training and professional development.

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## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my wife, Margaret Serwaa Hayford and the kids Emmanuel, John, Maame Paintsiwaa and Papa Takyi Hayford for the sacrifices.

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## **Glossary OF Ghanaian Terms**

<b>Agona</b>	Traditional name for Swedru
<b>Affutu</b>	Traditional name for Winneba
<b>Basic School</b>	primary and junior secondary school
<b>BECE</b>	Basic Education Certificate Examination
<b>CEE</b>	common entrance examination
<b>Class-teachers</b>	teachers recruited to teach specific classes
<b>CRDD</b>	Curriculum Research Development Division
<b>Class exercise</b>	classroom tasks used to evaluate pupils' understanding
<b>Extra Classes</b>	Remedial/additional tuition organised for lower attaining pupils after normal school hours.
<b>FCUBE</b>	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
<b>GES</b>	Ghana Education Service
<b>JSS</b>	Junior Secondary School
<b>LAPP</b>	Lower Attaining Pupils Project
<b>Lower primary</b>	primary 1-3
<b>Mental retardation</b>	learning difficulty
<b>Middle School</b>	the last four years of elementary school in the pre-reform educational system
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MoEYS</b>	Ministry of Education Youth and Sport
<b>MSLC</b>	Middle School Leaving Certificate
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SfA</b>	Success for All
<b>SSS</b>	Senior Secondary School
<b>Subject-teachers</b>	Teachers recruited to teach specific subjects in schools



<b>TA</b>	Teacher Assessment
<b>Upper primary</b>	primary 4-6
<b>UCC</b>	University of Cape Coast
<b>Weekly test</b>	short test conducted by teachers in the pre- reforms educational system
<b>2-6-3-3</b>	refers to the structure of basic education, which comprises: 2-year pre-school, 6-year primary, 3-year junior secondary and 3-year senior secondary
<b>6-3-3</b>	the structure of basic education before the inclusion of pre-school education in 2006

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The education policy and practice in Ghana have historically been influenced by the policies and practices in the United Kingdom (UK) and more recently the United States of America (USA). The trends in the UK and the USA have shifted towards centrally prescribed curricula which provide for inclusion of pupils with difficulties or disabilities. In terms of teacher assessment, for example, in England, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2006) directs teachers to use appropriate assessment approaches that:

allow for different learning styles and ensure that pupils are given the chance and encouragement to demonstrate their competence and attainment through appropriate means that are familiar to the pupils and for which they have been adequately prepared (p. 3).

The Authority has provided a framework that enables teachers to recognise attainments below the Level 1 of the National Curriculum (Lewis, 2001).

Although, in Ghana, there is a centrally prescribed curriculum for basic schools (primary and junior secondary), there are no special provisions for children with needs, particularly those who record lower attainments in classrooms. In terms of assessment, the continuous assessment programme does not make any provision for assessing and recording the progress of lower attaining pupils. Teachers use the same approach for assessing all pupils to assess lower attainers' progress in learning. The

use of the same approach to assess all pupils causes those who record lower attainments to continually perform poorly at school.

In a study involving primary schools in England and France, for example, Raveaud (2004) found that in classrooms where all children did the same work, some children found themselves failing repeatedly from a very early age. In England, the researcher found that differentiation had reduced the actual occurrence of errors pupils made. Furthermore, in England, not only are teaching and learning experiences designed to take into account and be appropriate for a wide range of pupil ability, aptitude and preferred learning styles, but the assessment system also provides for a range of ability, aptitude and learning styles (Lee and Henkhusens, 1996; Fletcher-Campbell, 2001; Lewis, 2001; Booth and Ainscow, 2002).

This study reports the uses of continuous assessment and focusing, in particular, on the experiences of pupils who record lower attainments in basic schools in two districts in Ghana. This introductory chapter outlines my interest in the topic; defines the aims of the study; provides definitions of key terms; identifies the research questions and outlines the significance of the study. Additionally, the theoretical context of the study is discussed and the structure of the study outlined.

## **1.2 My interest in the topic**

My interest in the topic stemmed from my desire to research the inclusion of children with mild-moderate learning difficulties in mainstream schools as a follow-up study to my master's thesis (Hayford, 2000). That desire was triggered by the then current search for approaches to address the congestion at special boarding schools for pupils

with learning difficulties in my country, Ghana. All the special schools for individuals with learning difficulties in my country were overcrowded, and had long waiting lists (Avoke, 2002; Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo, 1999; MoEYS, 2004). I felt if mainstreaming was adopted as a placement option it could complement the special boarding school system and reduce the waiting lists of the schools.

However, since mainstreaming was a new phenomenon in the context of educational provision in Ghana, I thought there was the need for research to find out the model of mainstreaming that would suit the Ghanaian context. I planned a tentative research proposal on 'inclusion of children with moderate learning difficulties in the mainstream' to pursue. My original intention was to undertake that study as part of my professional development for personal fulfilment as a university teacher.

Additionally, my interest in researching inclusion was boosted by the then current international debate about inclusion. Ghana was a signatory to the Salamanca Principle and Framework which espoused the principle that the ultimate goal for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is to educate every child in the least restrictive environment possible (Wood and Lazzari, 1997). Ghana also approved the Dakar Framework for Action, which re-affirmed the international commitment to achieve Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015. The government has initiated actions aimed at achieving some of the objectives of the Dakar declaration. In line with this, the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport, MoEYS (2004) and the Ministry of Education, MoE (2003) suggest that the government intends to include all children with non-severe SEN in mainstream schools by 2015.

Following my participation in an international conference on human resource development in inclusion organised by UNESCO in Uganda (1999), my interest in inclusive education was re-awakened. I was moved by the efforts the teachers in the pilot schemes we visited in two districts in Uganda and was touched by the experiences and determination of the children with SEN in those 'hostile' learning environments. I felt that Ghana could follow the example of Uganda and adopt inclusive education to reduce the overcrowding and long waiting lists in special schools.

However, the situation in the schools in Uganda also made me to reflect on the basic school system in Ghana (see Glossary). I questioned the possibility of including children with moderate learning difficulties in mainstream classrooms in Ghana. Since the current education policy does not make any provision for addressing diverse needs in the mainstream (MoEYS, 2004), I wondered whether pupils with moderate learning difficulties would benefit from the centrally prescribed curriculum and the continuous assessment programme. My intention was to explore the possibilities, and particularly the challenges both teachers and pupils with learning difficulties would face as well as the strategies that could be adopted to foster the inclusion of the pupils in mainstream classrooms.

Apart from that, as a requirement for the continued tenure as an academic member of staff at the university at which I was teaching, I felt the need to pursue a doctoral programme. I therefore thought that if I had the opportunity I would pursue that research interest, so fulfilling two significant dreams, to research inclusive education and to improve my status as a university teacher. I was also convinced that work

towards a doctoral degree would improve the conduct of the enquiry as well as the quality of my research and writing, and enable me to undertake further research in my area of specialisation.

However, since none of the universities in Ghana at that time was offering programmes in SEN at the doctoral level, I decided to pursue this level of programme in the United Kingdom. I therefore, sent an application for an offer to pursue a doctoral degree, to the University of Birmingham, known to me through a colleague who had enrolled there. Thankfully, the University of Birmingham and the School of Education offered me a place to do my doctoral degree in September 2002.

Coincidentally, in the same year, 2002, I was nominated by the Department of Special Education and Faculty of Education of my University, for a Ghana Government Scholarship Award for Staff Development (2002/2003) to pursue a doctoral degree in a country of my choice. I was successful in getting the award and as a result my dream was realised.

I started my studies through scheduled tutorial sessions with my supervisors in earnest; some of the earlier sessions were used to explore my perspective of inclusion and the education system of Ghana. Through the review of articles I became familiar with literature relating to other perspectives of inclusive education; I realised that the previous literature I was familiar with had focused exclusively on the human rights' arguments. By becoming familiar with literature reflecting other orientations of inclusive policies and practices, my focus shifted from children with moderate learning difficulties in special schools to children who record lower attainments in the

mainstream. I felt the need to investigate how the basic school system in my country, Ghana, was meeting the needs of lower attaining pupils in classrooms. The feeling was driven by Mittler's Forward to Special Needs in Ordinary Schools, under the subtitle *Elements of a whole-school Approach*, in Norwich (1993) that:

Meeting special educational needs in ordinary schools is much more than a process of opening school doors to admit children previously placed in special schools. It involves a radical re-examination of what all schools have to offer all children (p. viii).

Mittler argues that our efforts will be judged in the long term by our success with children who are already in ordinary schools but whose needs are not being met, for whatever reason. This view was endorsed by Norwich (1993) who notes that the additional challenge of achieving full educational as well as social inclusion for children now in special schools needs to be seen in the wider context of a major reappraisal of what ordinary schools have to offer pupils already in them.

I became more convinced about the link between teachers' continuous assessment practices and the exclusion or inclusion of lower attaining pupils, following the explanation of inclusion offered by the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE) in the UK. According to CSIE (2002):

Inclusion involves change; it is an unending process of increasing learning and participation of all pupils. It is an ideal to which all schools can aspire but which is never fully reached (Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p.3).

I knew that research into teachers' pedagogical and continuous assessment practices in Ghana was undeveloped, and research into teaching and assessing lower attaining children was non-existent. There was no record of published research of the experiences of lower attaining learners in relation to basic schoolteachers' continuous assessment practices in Ghana.

Owing to the non-availability of published records on the uses of continuous assessment and focusing, in particular, on the experiences of lower attaining pupils in basic schools in Ghana, I felt a sense of responsibility to alert policy-makers, or attract government concern to the plight of lower attaining children in schools in my country. By doing so I was hoping to be an agent of change, whilst at the same time providing data that would also fill the gap that existed, concerning the uses of continuous assessments and the experiences of lower attaining pupils from the Ghanaian perspective.

### **1.3 The aim of the study**

The aim of this study was to investigate the uses of continuous assessment in primary and junior secondary in Ghana and focusing, in particular, on the experiences of pupils who record lower attainments. The experiences of pupils in continuous assessment are linked to inclusion; for example, continuous assessment can be based upon a competitive system (exclusion), or can be geared towards promoting inclusion through co-operation and sharing learning experiences (Watkins, 2007). Furthermore, the study provides an opportunity for pupils to talk about their experiences while participating in classroom activities such as class tests.

Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- a) Explore teachers' perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on pupils who record lower attainments in class.
- b) Examine the in-class arrangements that teachers adopt to enhance the participation of pupils who record lower attainments in classroom activities.



- c) Explore the experiences of pupils who record lower attainments during class tests.
- d) Analyse the views of pupils who record lower attainments concerning their performance.
- e) Examine the challenges that teachers encounter while supporting pupils who record lower attainments to participate in continuous assessment tasks.

#### **1.4 Definitions of key terms**

##### *Basic education (school)*

Basic education (school) comprises the first 9 years of formal education in Ghana; it encompasses 6-years primary and 3-years junior secondary education. Generally, primary and junior secondary sections have different staff, but in official documents they are considered as a unit, called basic education (MoE, 1996). Until 2003 basic education did not include pre-school education. However, a Presidential Committee appointed in 2003 to review the reforms of 1987 recommended that pre-school education should be recognised as part of basic education. The government accepted the recommendation and from September 2006 pre-school education has become part of basic education. Basic schools therefore encompass; pre-school, primary and junior secondary schools.

##### *Continuous assessment*

Continuous assessment involves the use of classroom exercises, tests and home work/projects to gather numerical marks which are added to the end of term and year examination to serve as pupils' records. The continuous assessment is gathered throughout schooling, primary one to junior secondary form three (9 years), and then

sent to the external examining body, West Africa Examinations Council (WAEC). The aggregated continuous assessment is calculated as 30% and added to pupils' final examination marks, for the purpose of grading. Continuous assessment is classroom or teacher assessment; however, since the study is on Ghana I have retained the term (continuous assessment) throughout the thesis. With respect to literature from the United Kingdom and other countries the term teacher or classroom assessment has been used.

### *Lower attaining pupils*

The term 'lower attaining pupils' has been used in this thesis to describe a cohort of children who continually record lower attainments at school. In Ghana, lower attaining children are not categorized separately; they are seen as reflecting the continuum of attainments in classrooms. There is no special provision for lower attaining pupils in terms of assessments, curricular or pedagogical approaches; consequently, basic schoolteachers assess lower attaining pupils in the same way as they do other pupils. Thus the education system in Ghana operates with the notion which is in line with Dyson and Hick's (2005) explanation, that there is a group of learners whose progress and attainments cause concern but whose apparent difficulties cannot be explained in terms of any evident or underlying impairment.

However, Dyson and Hick (2005) suggest that in countries outside the UK a category is constructed that enables special provision to be made, but that is clearly differentiated from the categories of special education. For example, in the USA, lower attaining learners are regarded as being 'at-risk' for educational failure; while in the Russia Federation, they fall into the 'compensatory' category. In England, lower

attaining pupils fall within the broad ambit of special education (spanning mainstreaming and special schools), but as special education itself is defined in extremely wide terms it encompasses almost any learner who has difficulty in schooling.

Furthermore, Dyson and Hick's (2005) suggest that lower attaining pupils encompass learners whose profile includes: difficulty with reading, inadequate achievements, poor test results as well as work which is often incomplete and poorly presented. They respond more slowly to learning (Stake and Hornby, 2000). These characteristics are associated with lower attainers in basic schools in Ghana; however, as stated earlier, there is no separate provision them.

### **1.5 Research questions**

From the aims of the study stated earlier (Section 1.3), the following research questions were identified:

- a) What effect does continuous assessment have on pupils who record lower attainments?
- b) What in-class arrangements do basic schoolteachers adopt to support and enhance lower attaining pupils' participation in classroom activities?
- c) What challenges do teachers face concerning supporting lower attaining pupils to participate in classroom activities?
- d) What are lower attaining pupils' feelings about class tests?
- e) How do lower attaining pupils perceive their current classroom performance?

## **1.6 The theoretical context of the study**

Theory can mean very different things to different people; in general terms however, it is an explanation of what is going on in the situation, a phenomenon or whatever it is that we are investigating (Robson, 2002). A number of theories were relevant to understanding data on the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining children in basic schools in Ghana. However, the following two theories were found to be particularly relevant to the study:

- Behaviourist learning theory;
- Cognitive, constructivist theories of learning

### **1.6.1 Behaviourist theory of learning**

In Ghana, the behaviourist learning theory has a long tradition in education policies. Many aspects of general and special education such as curriculum, pedagogy and assessment have been shaped by the principles of behaviourist learning theory. The behaviourists, according to Smith (1999) view learning as a change in behaviour and the purpose of learning is to produce a behavioural change in a desired direction. The teacher's role is to arrange the environment to elicit the desired responses and assessment is used to ascertain whether all pupils, including lower attainers, have achieved the desired responses.

According to James (2006) behaviourism considers the environment for learning to be the determining factor. Learning is viewed as the conditioned response to external stimuli. Rewards and punishments, or at least the withholding of rewards, are powerful ways of forming or extinguishing habits. Praise may be part of such a reward system. These theories also take the view that complex wholes are assembled

out of parts, so learning can best be accomplished when complex performances are deconstructed and when each element is practised, reinforced and subsequently built upon.

James (2006) explains that behaviourist theorists are interested in observable behaviour and claim that this is sufficient. From this perspective, achievement in learning is often equated with the accumulation of skills and the memorization of information (facts) in a given domain, demonstrated in the formation of habits that allow speedy performance. The implication is that the teacher's role is to train pupils to respond to instruction correctly and rapidly. With respect to assessment, the implications are that progress is measured through unseen timed tests with items taken from progressive levels in a skill hierarchy. Performance is usually interpreted as either correct or incorrect and poor performance is remedied by more practice in the incorrect items, sometimes by deconstructing them further and going back to even the basic skills.

This view is endorsed by Harlen (2006a) who suggests that since behaviourism is based upon the principle of reinforcing required behaviour with rewards and deterring unwanted behaviour with punishments, pupil assessment is generally used as the vehicle for applying these rewards and punishments. For their part, Torrance and Pryor (2002) state that in this model, teachers decide on the subject matter, provide instruction, pace the lesson, correct, assess and reinforce pupils' responses. In this context, pupils play a passive role in their assessment.

However, Sebba, Byers and Rose (1993) explain that adherents to behavioural approach to teaching identify three suppositions which lie behind the methodology. One of the suppositions is that, in order to be effective, teachers need to prescribe clear objectives for learners. A neat cyclical process is proposed whereby teachers establish and maintain control over the learning process. Teachers assess learners; set objectives which describe, in terms of observable behaviours, the learners' next steps on the learning ladder; and make records, on the basis of new assessments, of progress measured against performance criteria which are teacher-defined in the first place.

### **1.6.2 The cognitive, constructivist theories of learning**

Learning, according to the cognitive constructivist theorist, requires the active engagement of learners and is determined by what goes on in people's heads. According to James (2006) the reference to 'cognition' makes clear, these theories are interested in 'mind' as a function of 'brain'. Their focus is on how people construct meaning and make sense of the world through organizing structures, concepts and principles in schema (mental models). Prior knowledge is regarded as a powerful determinant of a pupil's capacity to learn new material.

James (2006) suggests that cognitive constructivists emphasize 'understanding'. Problem solving is seen as the context for knowledge construction. Processing strategies, such as deductive reasoning from principles and inductive reasoning from evidence, are important. As a result, differences between experts and novices are marked by the way in which experts organise knowledge structures and their competence in processing strategies. The two components of meta-cognition, self-monitoring and self-regulation are also important dimensions of learning (p. 55).

However, James (2006) observes that cognitivist theories are complex and differentiated and it is difficult to summarize their overall implications. Nonetheless, the role of the teacher is to help ‘novices’ to acquire ‘expert’ understanding of conceptual structures and processing strategies to solve problems by symbolic manipulation with ‘less search’. Owing to the importance of prior learning as an influence on new learning, formative assessment/ assessment for learning emerges as an important integral element of pedagogical practice. Teaching and learning are blended towards the goals of learning, particularly the goal of closing the gap between current understanding and the new understanding sought (p. 55).

In line with this, Gipps (1996) suggests that the current cognitive theory views learning as knowledge-dependent; and that learning is tuned to the situation in which it takes place. Learning occurs, not by recording information but by interpreting it; that is, instruction must be seen not as direct transfer of knowledge but as an intervention in an ongoing knowledge construction process. In constructivist learning theory, pupils learn best by actively making sense of new knowledge, making meaning from it and mapping it to their existing knowledge map/schemata.

Gipps (1996) argues that this view of pupils’ learning which sees the pupil as active constructors of their own worldviews, including school subject matter, means that we can no longer use an atomistic model of assessment. We need to assess level of understanding and complexity of understanding rather than recognition or regurgitation of fact. Standardized achievement tests assess pupils’ abilities to recall and apply facts learnt routinely; even items which are designed to assess higher level

activities often require no more than the ability to recall the appropriate formula and to make substitutions to get the correct answer.

According to Gipps (1996) many pupils are succeeding in objectives tests without necessarily understanding the material they are learning. But real learning involves constructing one's own interpretations and relating this to existing knowledge and understanding. In the traditional model of teaching, the curriculum is seen as a distinct body of information, specified in detail that can be transmitted to the learner. Assessment here consists of checking whether the information has been received. However, the newer models of learning, which see learning as a process of personal knowledge construction and meaning making, describe a more complex and diverse process and therefore require assessment to be more diverse and assess in more depth the structure and quality of pupils' learning and understanding.

Furthermore, Smith (1999) states that the cognitivists' view learning as an internal mental process (including insight, information processing, memory, perception). The purpose of learning is to develop capacity and skills to learn better. The teacher's role in the learning process is to structure the content of learning activities and assessment is used to find out whether pupils have acquired the skills.

In line with this, Torrance and Pryor (2002) point out that the interaction between teacher-pupil goes further than just finding out whether the pupil has reached the target behaviour, as in behaviourism. Teacher-pupil interaction in a test situation goes beyond the communication of test results, the judgements of progress and the provision of additional instruction, to include a role for the teacher in assisting the



pupil to comprehend and engage with new ideas and problems. The process of assessment itself is seen as having an impact on the pupil, as well as the product or the result.

Lambert and Lines (2000) add that the constructivists see learning as interactive. Therefore, quality of teaching and learning depends on communication based on mutual understanding. Teachers working within this framework are not satisfied with the identification of objectives and testing how well they are met but with trying to find out what the pupils can achieve with help. This is also what formative assessment is all about. Lambert and Lines suggest that:

- the processes of assessment are at least as important as the products (marks);
- assessment processes, inasmuch as they can help pupils understand new concepts or refine old ones, are an integral part of teaching; and
- because assessment processes are orchestrated with a future orientation, the role of feedback needs expansion to include notions of feedforward, with pupils shown strategies to promote improvement.

Harlen (2006a) states that the constructivists' view of learning focuses attention on the processes of learning and the role of learners. Teachers engage pupils in self-assessment and use their own assessment to try to identify their current understanding and levels of skills.

In Ghana, the MoE (1996) suggests that the Curriculum Research Development Division (CRDD) of the Ghana Education Service (GES) adopted principles from both behaviourist and the cognitive constructivist's learning theories in developing the

National Curriculum for basic education. It is however, not clear whether the principles are applied in teachers' continuous assessment practices.

### **1.6.3 The social model of educational difficulties and disabilities**

Since this study is linked to the participation of pupils who record lower attainments in class, the social model of educational difficulties and disabilities was considered potentially helpful in understanding the findings and drawing of conclusions. Booth and Ainscow (2002) argue that the use of the concept 'barriers to learning and participation' for difficulties that pupils encounter, rather than the term 'special educational needs', is part of a social model of difficulties in learning and disability. Barriers to learning and participation can exist in the nature of the setting or arise through an interaction between pupils and their contexts: the people, policies, institutions, cultures, and social and economic circumstances that affect their lives.

Booth and Ainscow (2002) explain that in the context of the social model, inclusion involves change. Inclusion is an unending process of increasing learning and participation for all pupils. It is an ideal to which all schools can aspire but which is never fully achieved. The main consideration in the social model is participation of every pupil in the classroom. Participation means learning alongside others and collaborating with them in shared learning experiences. It requires active engagement with learning and having a say in how education is experienced. The social model will help to establish whether basic schoolteachers' continuous assessment practices enhance the participation of lower attaining pupils in classrooms.

## **1.7 The significance of the study**

As argued in the introductory paragraph, there is no specific provision in terms of assessment of lower attaining pupils in basic schools in Ghana. Teachers adopt the same assessment approach for all learners, including lower attaining pupils to record their progress in learning. However, as explained by Dyson and Hick (2005), in educational systems where there are no special provisions for lower attaining pupils in terms of curricular and assessment approaches, teachers use the same approaches for all learners including lower attainers. The use of the same approaches for all pupils creates barriers for some pupils in classrooms.

Previous studies in Ghana however, have focused on senior secondary school (SSS) teachers' continuous assessment practices (Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002), or junior secondary school (JSS) teachers' perceptions about continuous assessment (Angbing, 2001). No published research was located which had examined the effects of teachers' continuous assessment practices on all pupils, including lower attaining children in basic schools.

This study which used a range of data collecting methods to explore the uses of continuous assessment and focusing, in particular, on the experiences of pupils who record lower attainments at basic schools, is significant for the following reasons:

- As stated in the introductory paragraph, in Ghana, teachers' continuous assessment practices are under-developed but have great potential for improving learning. The study will provide explicit information about aspects of continuous assessment that needed improvement and suggest strategies to

improve teachers' assessment practices. The assumption is that improvement for lower attaining children will inevitably affect other pupils.

- Second, improvement in teachers' continuous assessment practices links to another benefit relating to raising standards of all children. Since there are pupils with diverse needs in basic schools, improvement in teachers' continuous assessment practices has the potential to help all pupils, including lower attainers to improve. This will help to achieve one of the objectives of the educational reforms, to provide quality education for all.
- Further, the study is significant because it gives opportunity for children's 'voice' to be heard. Previous studies in Ghana have excluded children, including lower attaining pupils from participating in discussion concerning their assessment and other aspects of their education. The tacit assumption has been that children will be neither sufficiently well informed nor sufficiently articulate or rational to contribute to such discussion. However, in this study, children's views will be explored about their experiences of classroom assessments. The assumption is that, it is only by drawing on such sources of knowledge that basic school environments can be improved in ways that are meaningful and important to all children, particularly those who record lower attainments in classrooms.
- In addition, the study is significant because it will provide explicit information about the constraints imposed on teachers' continuous assessment practices by prevailing educational policies. This will offer policy-makers relevant feedback which if addressed can bring about relevant changes to improve basic schoolteachers' classroom and assessment practices in Ghana.

- As the first of its kind in Ghana, the findings will contribute new knowledge to the existing knowledge about basic schoolteachers' continuous assessment practices and the experiences of lower attaining pupils in the classroom.

### **1.8 The structure of the study**

This thesis has eight chapters; the first chapter encompasses the background, interest in the topic, the aim and objectives of the study, the research questions, definition of terms, the theoretical framework and the significance of the study. Chapter two focuses on the background context, information about the pre-reform education system in Ghana, and the 1987 reforms and SEN as well as the trends and issues in relation to SEN and lower attainment.

Chapter three provides literature related to the study; the main themes include: the nature of continuous assessment programme in Ghana, purposes for which teachers use continuous assessment, the effects of teachers' assessments and lower attaining pupils' perceptions about continuous assessment.

Chapter four is the methodology chapter and encompasses the design of the study, justification for the use of the design, the methods of data collection, sample and sampling techniques, ethical issues, validity and reliability checks, reflections on fieldwork experiences and the conceptual framework.

Chapter five focuses on self-completed questionnaires regarding teachers' perceptions about effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils. Whilst, chapter six

embodies researching in-class arrangements for lower attaining children and teachers' challenges regarding continuous assessment.

Chapter seven concerns the focus groups and individual interviews with lower attaining children regarding their feelings about class tests and current performance at school. Finally, discussion of the findings, conclusions, limitations, implications of the study, recommendations and areas for further research have been presented in chapter eight.

### **1.9 Summary of the chapter**

The introductory chapter has outlined the concern regarding the use of the same approach to assess all learners including lower attaining pupils in basic schools in Ghana. The chapter has also identified the research questions, the two learning theories that are relevant to the study as well as the significance of this research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND CONTEXT**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides background information and context for the study. I have provided information about the pre- reform educational system in Ghana, and the assessment programme during the pre-reforms period in relation to lower attaining children as well as children with special educational needs (SEN).

Information about the 1987 basic education reforms in Ghana, with respect to the aims and objectives, the structure of pre-tertiary education, the national curriculum and assessment programme in relation to lower attaining children are provided.

I have described the issues and trends in basic education in Ghana (see Glossary) under the following sub-headings: enrolments, the dynamics of classrooms, class size, teacher-pupil ratio, and teacher training and professional development in relation to lower attaining children.

## **2.2 The pre- reform education system in Ghana**

When Ghana attained independence from Britain in 1957 she inherited an educational system bequeathed to her by the British colonial government. The system, described as the traditional education, comprised six years primary followed by four years middle school education, making a total of 10 years of elementary education (MoE, 1996). Administratively, primary schools were separated from middle schools, but the selection of pupils to middle schools was contingent on performance in teachers' assessments at Primary 6. However, at the end of the tenth year the pupils wrote the Middle School Leaving Certificate Examination (MSLC) as explained in the next section.

### **2.2.1 Assessment and lower attaining pupils during the pre- reform era**

Assessment for diagnosis and identification of diversity of needs, including difficulties and disabilities, was not well developed in Ghana from the period of independence to the late 1980s. As a result, pupils with less obvious special educational needs enrolled in their community schools. Also, the Ghanaian culture has been tolerant of pupils with physical disabilities and less obvious conditions; such children have been educated along side their non-disabled peers in regular schools (Hayford and Baah, 1997). However, the pre-reform education system did not make provisions in terms of curricula and assessment approaches for pupils who recorded lower attainment in classrooms.

The pre-educational reform assessment programme consisted of teacher assessment and external examinations. Teacher assessment encompassed classroom exercises, weekly/class tests, end of term and academic year examinations; they were used for



two main functions: instructional and administrative. While classroom exercises and weekly tests were used for instructional purposes, end of term and year examinations were used to report pupils' achievements and also to inform decisions about progress to the next classes. As stated in the previous paragraph, since there was no special provision in terms of curricula and assessment approaches for lower attaining pupils during the pre-reform era, teachers used the same approaches to assess all pupils including those who recorded lower attainments their classrooms. However, there were no published studies regarding uses of classroom assessments and the experiences of lower attaining pupils during the pre-reform period in Ghana.

With respect to external examinations, the following, the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) and the Middle School Leaving Certificate Examination (MSLCE) were used for the purpose of selection and certification. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) organized both examinations. The Common Entrance Examination was used solely for selecting pupils for secondary education. Pupils in Primary 6 and Middle Forms 1, 2 and 3 (12-15 year olds) were eligible for the Common Entrance Examination. The Common Entrance Examination, by its nature, was unsuitable for lower attaining pupils; they were generally discouraged from participating in the examination. Literature concerning the participation of children with SEN in the Common Entrance Examination for selection to secondary schools was unavailable.

The MSLC examination, on the other hand, was taken by only middle form four pupils (16-year olds). Pupils, including lower attainers who got to middle form four were registered to write the examination. My understanding is that pupils with SEN in

special schools also participated in the Middle School Leaving Certificate Examination.

### **2.3 Background to the 1987 basic education reform in Ghana**

From the early seventies to the mid eighties, Ghana experienced a serious national economic decline, which affected all social sectors (MoE, 2000b). The education system was deprived of human and material resources, which resulted in poor standards, lower enrolment and retention rates at schools (MoE, 1996). In 1973, the government set up the Dzobo Committee to evaluate the traditional education system and make recommendations for improvement. According to Eshun-Famiyeh (2001), in 1974, the government accepted the report of the Dzobo Committee.

The report was titled, The New Structure and Content of Education for Ghana. Under this report, a new curriculum complete with new syllabuses reflecting new content, to address the identified anomalies, were put in place for Primary One across the country in September 1974. By August 1980 the implementation of the new system had progressed from Primary One through Primary Six. However, in September 1980, when the new system should have continued to Junior Secondary One (JS1) across the country, few experimental schools were established. The Junior Secondary Programme envisaged under the New Structure and Content of Education could not be implemented due to the economic recession of the early seventies to the mid eighties (MoE, 2000b).

In the early eighties, Ghana embarked on a series of structural adjustment programmes with support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As MoE

(2000b) explains the Education Sector Adjustment Credit (EdSAC) was used to revamp the education sector. Under the EdSAC, a review of the Dzobo report was undertaken in 1986, which led to the implementation of the reforms nation-wide in 1987.

### **2.3.1 Related education policies**

A number of education policies were implemented by successive governments before independence to the late eighties. Two of those policies were the Accelerated Development Plan of 1951 and the 1961 Education Act, which brought about free compulsory primary education in Ghana. In 1983, the then military Government enacted the PNDC Law 42 to modify and reinforce among others, the Education Act of 1961. The Government declared that:

Without the provision of basic education for as many of our children for the challenges of this environment, we would only be turning them into misfits and denying ourselves the most essential resources for national development (MoE, 2000b, p. 1).

The MoE (2000b) argued that the Government accepted the challenge to pursue this objective because for sustained and self-reliant economic growth, modern science and technology must be applied to the economy. However, this could not be attained without equipping the potential manpower of the country with the necessary orientation and skills for the task. In fact, the aim could not be achieved in a situation in which about 70% of adult were illiterates and 30% of school-age children were out of school as well as high drop-out rates. The 1987 education reform constituted far-reaching aspiration of the Government and people of Ghana towards diversifying and making education more efficient and productive.

In addition, the 1992 Constitution of the fourth Republic included specific clauses to consolidate the objectives of the educational reforms. Article 38 sub-section 2 of the Constitution states that:

The Government shall within two years after parliament first meets after coming into force of this constitution draw up a programme for the implementation within the following ten years for the provision of a free, compulsory universal basic education (MoEYS, 2004, p. 2).

On assumption of office, the democratically elected Government launched the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme (FCUBE), a 10 year programme (1996-2005) designed to establish the policy framework, strategies and activities to achieve free compulsory universal basic education for all children of school going age (MoE, 2000c; MoEYS, 2004). The implication of this policy as shown later in the discussion is the continual increase in basic school enrolments.

Another relevant policy comes from the Vision 2020 document, considered as Ghana's road map to achieving middle-income status by the year 2020. According to this document (Vision 2020) the priority for education is:

To ensure that all citizens, regardless of gender or social status, are functionally literate and productive, at the minimum... the education system will have the primary responsibility for providing the means for the population to acquire the necessary skills to cope successfully in an increasingly competitive global economy (MoE, 2000f, p. 1- 2).

However, none of these policies made any special provisions in terms of curricula and assessment approaches for lower attaining pupils in basic schools.

Apart from concerns relating to national needs, education policies in Ghana were also influenced by developments at the international level; for example, the policy of quality education for all as outlined by UNESCO in the Dakar Declaration. As

Chinapah (1996) points out UNESCO's current basic education policy is targeted towards programmes of expanding access and improving quality and relevant education. The main objectives are:

- to promote access to primary education ...for all children, with an emphasis on girls and those difficult to reach; and
- to contribute to the overall improvement of quality of basic education with a view to increasing pupils' level of learning achievement.

However, in terms of education of children with disabilities, while the international perspective as reflected in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on SEN (1994) focused on inclusion of all children in regular schools. In Ghana, the trend has remained segregation; the policy is that all school age children without disabilities should have access to quality education in ordinary schools and those with disabilities in special schools (MoE, 2000a; 2004a).

### **2.3.2 The objectives of the 1987 basic education reform**

Some of the principles which formed the basis for the reform were: the importance of education for all, the need for education to be relevant to professional employment opportunities, and the importance of scientific and technological education to national development. According to the MoE (1996) the objectives of the new Educational Reforms Programme were:

- to expand and make access more equitable;
- to change the structure of the school system, reducing the length of pre-tertiary education from 17 to 12 years;
- to improve pedagogy efficiency and effectiveness;
- to make education more relevant by increasing the attention paid to problem solving, environment concerns, pre-vocational training, manual dexterity and general skills training.

The Education Reforms Programme has, since its implementation in 1987, had a significant impact on the education system. The achievements include, increased access to education, redesigning the curriculum towards greater relevance, improving instructional effectiveness and training of teachers.

However, the MoE (2000d) suggests that wide-ranging reforms in the late 1980s have brought the structure of the education system closer to an American model, aiming to make education more responsive to the nation's manpower needs rather than purely academic. In the context of assessment, this is problematic because the American education system has been described as the 'most tested' in the world (Harlen and Crick, 2003). Whilst in the USA there is specific provision for lower attaining pupils, in Ghana, the objectives of the reforms do not include any provision for lower attaining pupils in classrooms.

#### **2.4 The structure of current education system in Ghana**

The structure of the current education system in Ghana is 2-6-3-3, which means two years of pre-school education, followed by six years of primary school education and three years of junior secondary school education. Post basic education varies but includes three years senior secondary school education or technical education. The duration of pre-university education has been reduced from 17 years to 12 years. The structure of education is as follows:

- pre-school education (2-years)
- basic school education (9-years)
- senior secondary education (3-years) or
- technical and vocational education (3-years)

As discussed later in chapter 3, aggregated continuous assessment is added to the external examination, BECE, for grading and selection of pupils from basic schools to Senior Secondary Schools (SSS). Lower attaining pupils do the same tests as all other pupils for the BECE. Also, the continuous assessment contributes 30% of the marks for the BECE, which makes continuous assessment as important as the external examination to all pupils, including lower attaining children.

Importantly, the 1987 Education Reform introduced statutory school entry age of 6 years and pupils spend 9 years continuing education leading to the BECE. The BECE is the solitary examination used for certification and selection of pupils for senior secondary school (SSS). Continuous assessment also determines whether a pupil completes basic education within the statutory period (15-years).

#### **2.4.1 Basic education**

The MoE (2000h) explains that contrary to popular notion, it is important to point out that:

The new structure of education does not make any pretensions whatever to designate the senior secondary school graduate, much less its counterpart the junior secondary school, as having been fully equipped sufficiently for the requisite manpower requirement of the nation (p.13).

The Junior Secondary School pupil has simply been exposed to subject options geared to tease out the child's natural aptitude and talent, while the Senior Secondary School (SSS) level affords the student a transitional consolidation period for higher studies in the student's chosen field of study. Ultimately, it is the tertiary education that equips the individual adequately for the middle level manpower requirement of the country (MoE, 2000h). According to the Ministry, for those individuals who cannot continue

further education, there are numerous practically oriented institutions where they can benefit from apprenticeship programmes.

Although, these apprenticeship programmes have played and continue to play important role in the training of many young people in Ghana, Ghanaians have not accorded these programmes the recognition they deserved. The programmes are not considered as equivalent or complementary to senior secondary education. They are also not properly coordinated and organized as SSS programmes.

#### **2.4.2 Special education**

In Ghana, the education pupils with difficulties and disabilities (SEN) follows the traditional trend of segregated special schools. There are special schools for three main categories of SEN: blindness, deafness and moderate to severe learning difficulties, commonly referred to as the *mentally retarded* in the country (Avoke, 2002, Hayford, 2000; Gadagbui, 1998; MoE, 1996). All the special schools except one, which is privately owned, are boarding institutions. The number of children with SEN has by far outstripped the vacancies available for placement in the country. In addition, the number of children enrolled in special schools represents only a very small proportion of all those estimated to have disabilities and difficulties. The Ministry of Education Youth and Sport, MoEYS (2004) states that:

With a population of between 670,000- 804,000 school age children with SEN against the current enrolment of 4,109 children in both segregated and integrated schools, only 0.6% of the population of children with SEN are receiving any form of education (p. 16).

The pattern of the development of education for children with special education needs in Ghana is similar to many countries across the world. As Pijl (1995) points out for



many years, special schools were the pivot of the education of pupils with special educational needs. In many countries in the Western world educators and administrators put a great deal of effort into the development of acceptable system of special schools. However, the view of special education has gradually changed and segregation of pupils with SEN is largely perceived to be unacceptable. In Ghana, the policy still provides a two-track system of education whereby the mainstream offers quality education for other children and special schools provides quality of education for children with SEN (MoEYS, 2004).

## **2.5 The National Curriculum for basic schools**

In order to achieve the objectives of the Reforms, the Ghana Education Service (GES) states that the new National Curriculum, which was introduced in 1987, was designed to achieve the following objectives:

- developing early numeracy and literacy;
- laying foundation for inquiry and creativity;
- developing ability to adapt constructively to changing environment; and
- laying foundation for developing manipulative skills (MoE, 2000a).

These objectives were incorporated into the National Curriculum for all children including lower attainers. Indeed, the National Curriculum is followed by both regular and special schools, with some levels of modification for individuals with visual and hearing impairments (Gadagbui, 1998).

The curriculum guidelines from the Curriculum Research Development Division (CRDD) of the Ghana Education Service provide general and specific guidelines for all pupils aged between six and 15. The subject syllabi clearly outline both general

and specific objectives of what teachers and pupils have to do at every class. There are no provisions for addressing needs within the National Curriculum. In line with this, the MoEYS (2004) notes that:

Not much has been achieved in the area of curriculum adaptation to address the diverse learning needs of children with special needs in the regular classroom (p.15).

This raises the question of whether it is possible for all children, particularly lower attainers to attain the objectives of the National Curriculum. Can all children achieve the same standards? Will the assessment procedures of the National Curriculum be appropriate for all children and in particular, lower attaining pupils?

However, in England, where inclusive education is now established as the main policy imperative with respect to children with SEN and disabilities (Department for Education and Skills, DES, 2001a), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 2001, 2006) suggests that the statutory inclusion statement of the National Curriculum requires staff to modify the programmes of study to give all pupils relevant and appropriate challenging work at each stage. Byers (2001) argues that this version of the National Curriculum provides a national framework that is designed to enable all schools to respond effectively to national and local priorities, to meet the individual learning needs of all pupils and to develop a distinctive character and ethos rooted in their local communities.

While endorsing this view, Carpenter and Morris (2001) also note that in the foreword to the National Curriculum document for English, Blunkett (1999) writes: “an entitlement to learning must be an entitlement for all pupils”. The National Curriculum Statement clearly outlines the principles that schools must follow right

across the curriculum to ensure that all pupils have a chance to succeed whatever their individual needs and the particular barriers to their learning. Stakes and Hornby (2000) suggest that the Code of Practice requires that the curricular programme offered to pupils with SEN must be set within the National Curriculum and be taught at an appropriate level and pace. For many, particularly those who are lower attainers, the level may be lower than many of their peers.

Furthermore, Stakes and Hornby (2000) point out that the flexibility of the arrangement comes with teacher's freedom to determine their own teaching approaches and the ways of delivering the programme. They concede that in reality this situation has caused some difficulties and there is evidence to indicate that staff face a dilemma in attempting to accommodate the requirements of the National Curriculum with level of work of some pupils with SEN in their classes. In Ghana, basic schoolteachers (primary and junior secondary) face a dilemma in ensuring that lower attaining pupils work towards the same standards in the National Curriculum and programme of study as all other pupils in their classrooms.

In the UK, the issue of a common curriculum for all has been the subject of debate for many years. As far back as the early eighties, questions were raised whether the goals of education could be the same for all when it is recognized that some children may not attain these goals (Norwich, 1993). Norwich suggested that a way of resolving this was to distinguish between long-term goals or aims, short-term goals and specific objectives. Aims could then be taken as common to all, so long as they were formulated in sufficiently general terms to enable different schemes of goals and

objectives to be constructed as examples of the general aims. Nonetheless, even as aims there were some doubts about whether they were applicable to all children.

This was endorsed by Norwich and Lewis (2005) who noted that when referring to a common curriculum for all or an inclusive curriculum, it would be useful to distinguish between levels and aspects of what was referred to in talking about the curriculum. The authors distinguished between four distinct but related aspects namely:

- General principles and aims for a school curriculum.
- Areas of worthwhile learning with their goals and general objectives.
- More specific performances of study with their objectives.
- Pedagogic or teaching practices (p. 10).

According to Norwich and Lewis (2005) we can achieve greater clarity over the curriculum commonality or difference issues by considering various options of commonality and difference for these four aspects. However, there is the need to emphasize that this is a schematic framework that will not map simply on to the different dimensions and facets of the curriculum and programme of study.

### **2.5.1 The core curriculum and teaching syllabus**

The 1987 basic education reform in Ghana necessitated the expansion of the core curriculum and subjects for education system. The Core Curriculum for Basic Education was expanded from the traditional four subjects: English Language, mathematics, history and geography to include new subjects. Table 2.1 illustrates the new expanded Core Curriculum.

*Table 2.1 Core Curriculum for Basic schools*

**Lower primary:** English Language, Mathematics, Ghanaian Language/Culture, Environmental Studies, Religious and Moral Education, Music and Dance, Physical Education.

**Upper Primary:** English Language, Mathematics, Ghanaian Language/Culture, Environmental Studies, Religious and Moral Education, Music and Dance, Physical Education, Integrated Science.

**Junior Secondary:** English Language, Mathematics, Science, Ghanaian Language/Culture, Agricultural Science, Pre-Technical Skills, Pre-Vocational Skills, Religious and Moral Education, Music and Dance, Social Studies, Life Skills, French (optional), Physical Education (MoE, 2004, p- 8-15).

Legend: Lower Primary (Basic1-3) 7 subjects; Upper Primary (Basic 4-6) 8 subjects and JSS (Basic 7-9) 12/13 subjects

Since the subjects are considered as core subjects, they are all examinable. At the Junior Secondary School (JSS) pupils are assessed in 12 subjects or 13 if French is offered. School timetables may become crowded and drastically reduce teachers' ability to create additional time to support lower attaining pupils. Although, in 1996 the Ministry acknowledged that the curriculum was burdensome to both teachers and pupils and needed to be reviewed (MoE, 1996) the curriculum has remained the same to date.

Additionally, the Curriculum Research Development Division of the Ghana Education Service has designed subject teaching syllabuses for all the core subjects in relation to the objectives of Basic Education as outlined in the National Curriculum. The basic structure of the subject teaching syllabuses follows a five-column format as illustrated in table (2.2).

*Table 2.2 A five-column format of the teaching syllabus*

1	2	3	4	5
Unit	Specific Objectives	Content	Teaching/Learning Activities	Evaluation

Source: MoE (2001a, 2001b).

For example, B6 (primary 6), the English language syllabus provides the following information to guide teaching and learning:

- Section one: listening and speaking (4 units),
- Section two: grammar (11 units),
- Reading (3 units), and
- Writing and composition (9 units).

Additionally, each section has the general objectives (aims) and the specific objectives for all pupils. In English Language- grammar, reading, writing and composition, some of the general objectives for B6 are that, the pupil will:

- use grammatical structures/forms accurately in speech and in writing
- read, understand and derive information from different texts
- develop the habit for reading for pleasure
- develop and apply the skills of good handwriting
- communicate ideas through writing (MoE, 2001a, p. 124-140).

With respect to mathematics, some of the general objectives are that the pupil will:

- make use of appropriate strategies of calculation
- recognize and use functions, formulae, equation and inequalities
- use graphical representations of equation and inequalities
- identify/recognize the arbitrary/standard units of measure
- use the arbitrary/appropriate unit to estimate and measure various quantities
- collect, process and interpret data. (MoE, 2001b, p. iii).

In terms of specific objectives, the expectations are similar to the general objectives.

For example, in English some of the specific objectives are the pupil will be able to:

- distinguish between the past perfect tense and the past perfect continuous
- identify the anomalous finites in sentences and use anomalous finites appropriately.

These aims and objectives are for all pupils, including those who record lower attainments. The concern is, ‘can lower attaining pupils work towards the same standards at the same pace as other learners?’

In Ghana, basic schoolteachers use the syllabuses to design their scheme of work and weekly lesson plans. Lesson plan in this context refers to notes teachers prepare to facilitate the teaching and learning process. Since the curriculum and teaching syllabuses do not provide for differentiation teachers give all pupils, including lower attainers the same work to do for their records. As argued in Chapter 1, research has shown that, in countries where pupils in classrooms do the same tasks for their records failure and repetition are inevitable features at schools. Raveaud (2004) reported that primary school classes in France, where all children did the same work, some children found themselves failing repeatedly from a very early year. According Raveaud, ‘already at the age of four, some French pupils were incapable of doing any of the tasks required of them, and were threatened repeating the year. Further, even where teachers showed understanding and caring, mistakes and failure were inevitable features in French classes (p. 200).

However, Dyson and Hick (2005) point out that in some countries there are programmes for lower attaining children and youth. For example, the ‘Lower Attaining Pupils’ Project’ (LAPP) in England, ‘Success for All’ (SfA), which originated from the USA but has spread more widely, and ‘reading Recovery’, which

was developed by a New Zealand researcher but has likewise spread widely. Although the programmes enable the pupils to improve, they are not specifically related to assessment.

In England, where the policy imperative has shifted towards inclusive education (DES, 2001a), one of the three principles of the Curriculum 2000 for all key stages is the setting of suitable learning challenges for all children. This specifically requires that:

For pupils whose attainments fall significantly below the expected levels at a particular key stage, a much greater degree of differentiation will be necessary. In these circumstances, teachers may need to use the content of the programmes of study as a resource or to provide a context, in planning learning appropriate to the age and requirements of their pupils (QCA, 2006, p. 1).

Lee and Henkhusens (1996) cited by Fletcher-Campbell (2001) suggest that it is rare to find a study of integration/inclusion that does not mention ‘differentiation’ – the term is broadly understood in the UK as provision of teaching and learning experiences which are designed to take into account, and be appropriate for, a wide range of pupil ability, aptitude and preferred learning styles. Whilst most reference is to differentiation of the curriculum, differentiation of assessment is now acknowledged to be of equal importance in the UK.

Cheminais (2000) endorses this view and argues that differentiation is considered as synonymous with inclusion and good teaching; it builds on pupils’ past achievement, provides challenges for further achievement and opportunities for successful learning. By differentiation emphasis is shifted from whole class expectation to individual pupil’s achievement. However, task differentiation has implication for classroom



practice and must be viewed with caution. As Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) argue if one multiplies the number of tasks in a typical week by the number of children in an inclusive classroom who might need differentiation; it is easy to appreciate why so many class teachers are keen to claim that differentiation should be the responsibility of support staff.

Stakes and Hornby (2000) suggest that the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) which was introduced in 1999 as an initiative to raise numeracy skills among primary school children, states that teachers must, as one of their duties, accommodate the flexibility, different timing, organization and content within their lessons for both the most able and less able pupils. According to Stakes and Hornby, the Task Force that developed the thinking on the NNS in the publication, *The Daily Mathematics Lesson: Guidance for Professional Development* (DfEE, 1999), asserted that the range of attainment in mathematics in many classrooms, particularly at the upper end of Key Stage 2, is wide. The Guidance (p. 14) maintains that the introduction of this Strategy will reduce the number of children who have long-term problems with SEN.

Stakes and Hornby (2000) state that although the structure of the numeracy hour envisages that all children in a class will work on the same topic at the same time, it will also be necessary to ensure there is a degree of differentiation for some children. The key point is differentiation for some pupils and teachers are reminded to provide appropriate tasks for children with diverse needs, such as lower attainment.

Additionally, Stakes and Hornby (2000) point out that setting realistic and achievable targets for children in their classes is a vital part of teacher's role. It is a complex

process, taking into account the ability of the children, their pace of learning and prior knowledge. In this context, accurate feedback on children's work is essential in order to set future targets as well as having an accurate picture of their own point of development. Although task differentiation can foster lower attainers' participation in classrooms, in Ghana, larger classes, the lack of relevant professional knowledge and support for teachers may hamper differentiation of assessment and task at basic schools.

### **2.5.2 Types of assessments at basic schools**

Since the launch of the basic education reforms the policy on curriculum and assessment has remained wedded to the notion that standards could be raised through frequent assessments. The MoE (2000a; 2000h) suggests that the Ghana Education Service (GES) on behalf of the Ministry of Education has evolved various models of evaluating the performance of pupils and teachers at the basic level of education in the country. The model comprises: Continuous Assessment (CA), Criterion Referenced Testing (CRT), Participatory Performance Monitoring (PPM), and the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). By its nature Continuous Assessment is the only teacher initiated assessment procedure in the National Curriculum (please see detail in Chapter 3). The others are designed for accountability and monitoring purposes, rather than improvement.

For instance, the Participatory Performance Monitoring (PPM) is a test used by the Ghana Education Service to monitor the performance of children in all primary schools in the country. The MoE (2000h) states:

In response to the Ministry's directive that the Ghana Education Service (GES) should establish and implement a Performance Management System

which involves objectives setting, regular performance review and corrective action, with mechanisms for monitoring and accountability, appropriate for decentralized education system, GES has developed a new Monitoring System (p. 25).

It is clear that the focus of the test is accountability. The concern is that, since uniform items are prepared for all children they may be too difficult for those who record lower attainments in class. Also, there is little in the results of CRT and PPM that suggest to the teacher what to teach differently or how to teach better. More often than not, either the pupils or teachers have moved on before the meaning of the results is pondered.

## **2.6 Issues relating to teacher continuous assessment practice**

Apart from implications already mentioned, there are other issues that directly concern teacher continuous assessment practice in relation to lower attaining pupils in Ghana. These include: assessment and diagnosis of SEN, diversity in general education classrooms, larger classes, and peripatetic service. The others are teacher education and professional development as well as teacher assessment competency.

### **2.6.1 Assessment for placement of children with SEN in Ghana**

With respect to assessment for placement of children with SEN, Avoke (2002) suggests that little has been written about the procedure in Ghana. However, Boison (1999) provides some insights into what prevails in some settings in the country. According to Boison in one of the assessment centres, an assessment officer gathers information on the child, and sometimes, a second officer is called to assist when language/expression problem arises. Some of the children who need medical appraisal are referred to the various hospitals for further diagnosis and treatment.

Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) suggest that one of the main differences between traditional and inclusive approaches to assessment of needs is that the traditional approach requires a child's referral to be made by an expert. It is argued that the message inherent in this process is that mainstream teachers are not qualified or competent enough to provide education to a pupil with a significant learning problem. According to the authors, 'expertism' and 'professionalism' have abounded in special education; experts and professionals have in the past promoted the idea that only those with special qualifications are equipped to assess, teach and make decisions about children who are significantly different from others.

Although general education teachers and parents provide information and participate in making decisions concerning the education of children with SEN, it is vital that people with understanding of children's needs made assessment and placement decisions. In Ghana, special education teachers and personnel from the assessment centres are usually consulted for their views concerning the placement of children with SEN (Avoke, Hayford, Ihenacho and Ocloo, 1998; Boison, 1999). Consultation with experts on lower attainments is not widespread in the country.

In term of assessment centres, a number of hearing assessment centres and eye clinics have been established in many communities in the country. All the main hospitals at the regional capitals have well equipped assessment facilities. Additionally, many of the schools for the deaf have audiology clinics for assessment of hearing and trained personnel to man them. It has become relatively easy to have children assessed for hearing problems. There is also significant improvement concerning the assessment and treatment of problems relating to vision.

However, there is problem in the area of assessment of learning difficulties. The only assessment centre for assessing conditions relating to learning difficulties is sited at the national capital, Accra. The centre is poorly equipped, lacks personnel and other resources. The following statement by the MoEYS (2004) sums up the situation:

Inadequate assessment facilities, the few assessment centres are urban-based and poorly equipped. Many school-aged children are not assessed prior to admission. This affects their placement, resourcing and future schooling (p. 15).

The trend is that, children with moderate to severe learning difficulties in other parts of the country are sent to the nearest psychiatric hospital for evaluation and diagnosis. These hospitals are few and sited at the urban centres as well. Children with mild conditions and no visible signs of impairment are not assessed; they enroll in basic schools and receive education as all other children. However, the education system does not make any special provision to enhance the participation of such pupils in mainstream classrooms.

### **2.6.2 Diversity in basic schools**

There is evidence of diversity in mainstream classrooms in basic schools in Ghana. MoEYS (2004) reports that:

Educational programmes are available for the deaf, the blind and the mentally handicapped (learning difficulties) in both segregated and integrated settings from basic to the tertiary level. The physically disabled are educated in the mainstream and not in special schools (p. 14).

Apart from the Ministry's report, in a 4-year (1996-2000) project involving regular schools in the Affutu district, in which teacher-trainees from the University of Education were attached to basic schools, Avoke and Hayford (2000) reported the presence of pupils with SEN across all the classes in the regular schools. The pupils had mild-moderate learning difficulties, physical impairments including head injuries

sustained from accidents, visual and hearing problems excluding blindness and deafness. With exception of learning difficulties all the other conditions had been medically certified. These reports did not include any information on lower attaining pupils.

### **2.6.3 Basic school enrolments**

As argued previously (Section 2.2.2), there has been a continual increase in enrolment since the launch of the basic educational reforms in 1987. Records from the MoE (1996, 2000g) show that the gross primary school enrolment rate increased from 80.5% in 1988/89 to 82.5% in 1990/91. There is a gradual increase in enrolment rates annually for primary school and Junior Secondary School (MoE, 2000g). Whilst the improvement in enrolment rates is a positive development, the failure to match the growth in enrolment with provision of new school buildings has resulted in larger classes.

### **2.6.4 Larger classes**

Larger classes have been of concern to many practitioners and researchers in education in Ghana. In their book, *Principles and methods in special education*, Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo (1999) noted that sharp increases in enrolment have led to overcrowding in both special and regular schools. Further, Tamakloe et al. (1996) cited by Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) have observed that Ghanaian schools generally have large classes. Although the MoE (2003) has stated that the national ratio of teacher to pupils at the basic education level is 34:1 for the 2003/2004 academic year, the evidence is that the ratio is higher than the national figure in many parts of the country. For example, there are areas where the ratio is 80:1. In fact Gadagbui (1998,

p. 124) has questioned how larger classes, such as '80 pupils in a class' can help transform the country's educational system.

However, Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo (1999) note that the issue about class size is controversial, because the 'ideal' class size can be influenced to some extent by variables such as the subject and age of pupils. This notwithstanding, interactions with teachers in both special and regular schools, as well as student-teachers during both school-attachment programme and teaching practice, unearthed some interesting ideas about the ideal class size. The following were the general views that emerged from these interactions: lower primary 20-25 pupils, upper primary –junior secondary 30-35. "No matter the age of pupils, if class size is 50 and above, it is abnormal" (Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo, 1999, p. 17) and teachers may have difficulty managing the classes.

Additionally, some writers have argued that larger classes adversely affect teachers' continuous assessment practice (Amedahe, 2000; Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002). According to Asamoah-Gyimah (2002), larger classes affect the number as well as the variety of items a teacher includes in her assessment because the time for marking, processing and filling of records has to be considered. On his part, Amedahe (2000) points out that the pressure to finish within a specific time will make teachers inconsistent in their marking. In their studies both Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) and Angbing (2001) reported that teachers identified larger classes as an impediment to their continuous assessment practice. The studies did not include information concerning teachers' continuous assessment and lower attaining pupils. There was a gap concerning uses of continuous assessment and lower attaining pupils in Ghana.

### **2.6.5 Peripatetic Teachers**

In spite of the larger classes, the education policies in Ghana do not provide for recruitment of learning/teaching assistants to help teachers in the classrooms. Importantly, there are peripatetic officers who occasionally visit regular schools to support to teachers in managing pupils with SEN. However, the number of peripatetic officers is few and they are mainly attached to district education offices; they visit schools only by request. Originally, the peripatetic service focused mainly on children with deafness; however, Avoke et al. (1998) suggest that since 1994 the service has been expanded to include the blind and those with learning difficulties. Additionally, peripatetic officers are trained as special education teachers; they are selected after their training (university) to fill the positions at the district offices. The personnel do not have any special training regarding teaching and assessing lower attaining pupils. Consequently it may be difficult for peripatetic teachers to contribute meaningfully towards supporting lower attaining pupils in classrooms.

### **2.7 Teacher education and professional development in Ghana in relation to lower attainments**

The basic education reforms brought about significant changes in pre-service training of teachers in Ghana. The initial teacher training programmes were revised and new syllabuses reflecting the objectives of the 1987 reforms were designed for use in the training Colleges (MoE, 2000h). Further, four different teacher training programmes were scrapped and replaced with a unitary system called 3-year Post-Secondary Teacher Certificate. Also the pre-requisite entrance qualification for teacher training is now the GCE-O level or Senior Secondary Education Certificate (SSEC).



In terms of SEN, since the 1990s courses in aspects of special education have been introduced at all initial teacher training colleges in the country. These courses are offered as part of general education courses to sensitize regular education teachers about issues relating to disabilities, and have emphasized the traditional deficit, ‘medically based’ model of special education. The programmes focus on pupils’ deficiencies rather than skills in managing diversity the classroom. Also, the programmes do not include information regarding lower attainments.

Apart from the initial training colleges, special education programmes are offered at two universities in Ghana, Universities of Cape Coast and Winneba. Teachers pursue programmes leading to diploma, degree and masters in education studies and SEN. Apart from training special education teachers; both universities provide programmes in introduction to special education for teacher-trainees in the other subject-areas. The contents of programmes offered by the two universities differ slightly. Although, Cape Coast focuses on SEN in mainstream, the graduates from the Cape Coast University are mainly posted to senior secondary schools (SSS) and other higher institutions. The University of Education in Winneba has been focusing on specialization, training teachers for special schools for the deaf, blind and learning difficulties. Also, the graduates from Winneba are mainly posted to basic schools and initial training colleges.

However, like the initial training colleges the introductory courses do not include information for teaching and assessing lower attaining pupils. My personal knowledge (as a graduate from Cape Coast and as a teacher at Winneba) is that the programmes

at both universities do not include any information or practical training concerning lower attainments.

Furthermore, the two universities also offer distance education programmes for teachers at diploma and degree levels. In spite of these endeavours, the number of qualified teachers is less than the number required for schools in Ghana. In some areas untrained personnel are managing schools. The MoEYS (2004) states that there are about 24,000 untrained teachers in the education system (basic education) working in some of the most isolated, rural and under-served areas of the country. This situation is not strange; there is a general shortfall in the number of trained specialists to foster the implementation of inclusive practices in many countries.

In the UK, Corbett (2001) argues that the Warnock report in 1978 identified lack of specialist training as a barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive education. Twenty years later the *Programme for Action* (DfEE, 1998) indicated the need for teachers to undertake specific training in relation to SEN. Recently, the government has stated that successful practice was being inhibited by lack of specialist training in SEN (DfES, 2004). In Ghana, the few specialist teachers in SEN are not equipped with innovative skills for teaching and assessing pupils with SEN, including lower attainments in classrooms. The concern is reflected in the following statement by the MoEYS (2004):

Pre-/post- training in special educational needs for regular teachers. Inadequate structures/funds for pre-/post training programmes to equip regular teachers with pedagogical skills to enable them respond to children/youth with SEN (p. 15-16).

Thus, both pre-service education and training, and teacher professional development in relation to SEN including lower attainments is weak. The argument is that teacher-

training programmes have consistently failed to address issues relating to lower attainments. Teachers may therefore lack competence, knowledge and skills in teaching and assessing such children, and may use the same approaches for all pupils to assess lower attainers in their classrooms.

### **2.7.1 Teacher continuous assessment competency**

Regarding pre-service and post-service training in continuous assessment; in Ghana, teacher-trainees are offered modules at both initial training colleges and the universities (Amedahe, 2000; Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002). However, these modules emphasize measurement and statistics and focus on the technicalities of assessment, rather than innovative use of assessment for improvement of learning. The few publications on continuous assessment for example, Amedahe (2000) and Etsey (2001) have raised concern about the validity and reliability of teachers' continuous assessment. They did not consider teachers' skills in organizing, reporting and using assessment information to improve learning of all pupils and in particular, lower attaining children.

With respect to post-service training (in-service), the situation was depressing. For example, Angbing (2001) reported that, 64% of the JSS teachers stated that they did not have in-service training in continuous assessment. A year later, Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) also reported that, 60% of the SSS teachers said they did not have in-service training in continuous assessment. The MoEYS (2004) has acknowledged that teachers lacked skills and competency in the assessment of pupils and in particular, those who have SEN. As stated elsewhere, the report did not mention lower attaining pupils.

This situation is not peculiar to Ghana, writing in the context of the USA a decade ago, Plake and Impara (1997) reported that teachers were ill-equipped to successfully undertake one of the most prevalent activities of their instructional programme: pupil assessment. This was especially salient due to the current trend in pupil assessment, involving an increase in assessment strategies such as performance, portfolio, and other types of ‘authentic assessments’. These strategies required even more knowledge about assessment as they more directly involved the teacher in the administration and scoring of the result than did in multiple-choice assessments. Teachers should be competent in choosing, developing, administering, using, grading, and communicating assessment results of pupils to parents and families.

However, Cizek (1997) points out “many researchers and practitioners consider assessment reform to be the very foundation of general education reforms”. As one leader in assessment reform efforts puts it, “more important for school re-structuring is the need to build local educator capacity and interest in quality assessment” (Cizek, 1997, p. 8).

## **2.8 Policy on inclusive education**

As stated in the previous chapter (1), the Ghana Government’s policy on education of children with SEN has remained largely segregation. For instance, in the Government’s document, Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2003 to 2015, SEN was not featured in the main themes. The MoE (2003) indicated that the structure of the ESP was dictated by the policy goals within the August 2002 Education Sector Policy Review Report (ESPRR), two additional goals had been identified. The policy goals include:

- Increase access to and participation in education and training
- Improve quality of teaching and learning for enhanced pupil/student achievement
- Strengthen and improve educational planning and training
- Promote and extend the provision of science and technology education and training
- Improve the quality of academic and research programmes
- Promote and extend pre-school education
- Identify and promote education programmes that will assist in the prevention and management of HIV/AIDS
- Provide girls with equal opportunities to access the full cycle of education (MoE, 2003, p. 7).

There was no mention of the inclusion of pupils with SEN in the mainstream. In fact, issue concerning children with SEN was mentioned as a sub-theme under, ‘increase access to and participation in education and training -policy goal 1’. The target is to involve children with non-severe SEN in the mainstream by 2015 (MoE, 2003, p. 20).

The current effort at inclusive education is a pilot scheme started in the 2003/04 academic year between the Government of Ghana and a British International Voluntary Agency. According to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS, 2004) owing to the objective of achieving ‘social inclusion by 2015’, as a step forward, the Government in collaboration with the British VSO have initiated pilot projects on inclusive schools in ten districts. A total of 35 schools with 350-500 children with SEN, 500 regular education teachers and 400 parents would be the target beneficiaries. The categories of needs did not include lower attainments.

Although, the Government intends to shift the education policy towards inclusion in 2015, the MoEYS (2004) has identified the curriculum as a potential obstacle to inclusive practice:

Inaccessible curriculum, without identification through assessment and the provision of the needed support children with special educational needs are unable to access the curriculum (p. 15).

The statement supports the concern I raised earlier (see Section 2.7.2); there are many children with diverse needs, including lower attainment whose needs are being ignored in the mainstream. For these children the national curriculum is inaccessible, which the MoEYS (2004) agrees:

Curriculum inflexibility, curriculum remains very structured and examination focused leaving little room for addressing the diversity in children's learning (p. 16).

The concern is that none of these policies mentioned pupils who record lower attainments in classrooms; this can have implications for practice.

## **2.9 Summary of the chapter**

The chapter described the background context of basic education in Ghana with respect to children lower attaining pupils. It also focused on the Pre-1987 educational reform assessment system and lower attainments. Additionally, discussion on the 1987 Educational Reform, objectives of the reforms, the National Curriculum and Assessment programme with respect to lower attainment was provided. I also considered the trends in Basic Education in Ghana since the reforms in relation to teacher continuous assessment practice and lower attainments. Educational policies in Ghana since independence have consistently ignored pupils who record lower attainments in classrooms. The concern is that the lack of policies in relation to lower attainments at basic schools may impact on teachers' continuous assessment practices leading to adverse consequences for lower attaining pupils in classrooms.

# CHAPTER 3

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses literature related to the study; literature from a range of sources was reviewed. However, emphasis was placed on the limited relevant Ghanaian literature where available. The main aim of the study and the research questions have been used as the framework for the review of literature. Since the aim of the study was to investigate the uses of continuous assessment and focusing, in particular, on the experiences of pupils who record lower attainments in school, the following themes were considered as paramount: the nature and purposes of continuous assessment in basic schools in Ghana; and the effects of continuous assessments on pupils in general, particularly those who record lower attainments.

However, since very little has been written on the effects of continuous assessment on basic school pupils in Ghana, I reviewed materials on teacher assessments and other forms of assessment from the UK, the USA and Europe. Mindful of differences in the contexts of these countries and Ghana, I have provided critical commentaries on the potential for adapting rather than merely adopting some of the policies and practices from overseas. As stated earlier in Chapter 1, the education system in Ghana not only models directly the systems in the UK and the USA, but also the education system has been influenced indirectly by policies and practices from the two countries.

### **3.2 The nature of continuous assessment in basic schools in Ghana**

The discussion of the nature of continuous assessment in the context of international perspectives concerning teacher assessments is organised under the following sub-topics:

- the continuous assessment format
- continuous assessment activities
- continuous assessment and curriculum-based assessments
- continuous assessment and criterion referenced assessments
- continuous assessment and teacher assessment
- continuous assessment and external examinations

#### **3.2.1 The continuous assessment format**

The continuous assessment programme was introduced as teacher assessment component of the 1987 Education Reforms in Ghana (see Chapter 1). At basic schools continuous assessment encompasses marks from exercises, tests, homework and end of term examinations. Furthermore, in Chapter 2, I argued that the difference between pre-reform assessments and continuous assessment was that the latter was added to the external examination for the purpose of grading and certification.

Owing to its role in grading and certification, teachers have been provided with guides to follow in order to ensure consistency in their continuous assessment practices. For example, the Ministry has provided a format for gathering, processing and recording marks pupils obtain in all activities for their records. As observed by Amedahe (2002):



The Ministry of Education has prescribed record-keeping practices in terms of students' attainments. The minimum number of assessment scores to be recorded for each student in each subject during a school term using designated assessment procedures, as delineated (p. 6).

The following table 3.1 illustrates the continuous assessment format for both Basic and Senior Secondary Schools.

*Table 3.1: Sample of Termly Assessment Format*

Subject.....							Year.....				
Class.....							Term.....				
Teacher.....							No. on roll.....				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
EXERCISE ASSIGNMENT	SUB TOTAL 40	CLASS TEST	SUB TOTAL 40	HOME WORK	SUB TOTAL 20	TOTAL CLASS SCORE 100	30%	TERM EXAM	70%	OVER ALL TOTAL 30% + 70%	P O S I T I O N

*Source: MoE, 2004.*

The format requires teachers to record summative marks only and does not make provision for descriptive statements of pupils' progress which could help teachers to address difficulties hampering learning.

However, in England, Stakes and Hornby (2000) note that the National Curriculum demands that a record of the work and progress of pupils be kept and varied formats for doing this have been developed in schools throughout the country. These formats include written records, tick boxes, the use of charts by pupils or pie charts or graphs. According to Stakes and Hornby, a wide variety of possible approaches for recording of pupils' progress have been identified, because of the need to meet a large range of individual circumstances.

For her part, Lewis (2001) points out that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has stressed that assessment, record keeping, and acknowledging progress and attainment should be an integral part of teaching and learning for all pupils. A framework has been provided to enable teachers recognise attainments below Level 1 of the National Curriculum. The framework is intended to enable staff to sensitively acknowledge the attainment appropriate to individual pupils as they move through a learning process, and schools are encouraged to develop their own assessment tools from this framework.

Moreover, Lewis (2001) suggests that in each of the subject-specific materials offered by the QCA (DfEE/QCA, 2001), 'performance descriptions' outline early learning and attainment. They chart progress up to Level 1 through eight steps: P1-P3 show general attainment and P4-P8 show subject-specific attainment. The P refers to pre-National Curriculum targets; also, the performance descriptions for P1-P3 are the same across all subjects. Watkins (2007) explains that the 'P' scales provide specifically graded assessment tests for pupils with learning difficulties who are not able to achieve the lowest level national curriculum goals for all pupils.

Lewis (2001) states that the 'performance descriptions' are a significant step forward in celebrating and articulating attainments of pupils with a range of learning difficulties. They can help staff in much the same way as the National Curriculum level descriptions.

Despite the contrasting cultural contexts, Ghana can adopt a similar framework for recording the progress of pupils who record lower attainments in basic schools.

However, as this is a new framework, time will be needed for its incorporation into the existing continuous assessment programme. As Watkins (2007) points out, in England, the 'P' scales were developed over a period of time. Basic schoolteachers in Ghana may lack knowledge in completing the new recording framework.

Additionally, the large classes of basic schools in Ghana (Chapter 2) will make the new framework less attractive because teachers may have additional work to do in terms of writing comments, rather than only marks. Another difficulty that is anticipated is how to report the progress of lower attainers to their parents, they are conversant with the summative marks and may not understand the new framework.

### **3.2.2 Continuous assessment activities**

As indicated in the previous section, as distinct from terminal examination continuous assessment encompasses: exercises, class tests and homework. According to the MoE (2004) for the 'termly assessment plan':

Your pupils will be doing a lot of exercises in class. You will need to find the average (mean) of all the scores every two or three weeks and record of scores. (In the case of SSS, give 4 assignments). There should be four (4) of such scores in the term and the maximum score for all four will be 40 as indicated in column 2 (p. ii).

In terms of class tests, the MoE (2004) state that:

Three class tests you administer should be recorded for this purpose. The tests may be administered after every 3 or 4 weeks of the term. The first two tests should carry 10 marks each and the third should carry 20 marks so that the maximum for all the three tests should be 40 marks as shown in column 4 (p. ii).

Furthermore, the MoE (2004) states:

Sometimes the teacher may give the pupils work to do in groups. For each such group work each member of the group is awarded a maximum of 5 points or marks, the actual mark will depend on each member's contribution to the project. If homework is given and pupils are expected to do this individually,

each task also attracts a maximum of 5 points, the actual mark depending on the quality of the work done. The maximum score for all four (homework/project) in the term is 20 as shown in column 6 (p. ii).

The emphasis on marks raises three concerns: measurement, competition and time. The focus on marks causes teachers to focus on measuring pupils' attainments, which leads to giving pupils feedback mainly in the form of marks. It is imperative that teachers also record information that both teachers and pupils can use to improve learning. As Watkins (2007) points out, assessment is a key tool for teachers in determining not just what pupils need to learn, but also how best they can learn it.

Second, by focusing on marks teachers are more likely to give feedback to pupils, including those who are lower attainers, mainly in the form of marks. However, literature has shown that feedback in the form of marks and grades are not beneficial to pupils, particularly lower attainers (see Black and Wiliam, 1998; 2006a; Butler 1988). Clarke (2005) states that giving grades and marks for every piece of work leads to inevitable complacency or demoralisation leading to regression in progress. Whilst, pupils who continually receive high grades such as 'A' and 'B' may become complacent, lower attainers who get low marks will become demoralised.

In line with this, in the UK, the ARG (2002) advises teachers to be mindful of the impact of comments, marks and grades on learner's confidence and enthusiasm and should be as constructive as possible in giving feedback to learners. For teachers' feedback to be effective the focus should be on the learning or success criteria, aim at closing the gap, and give specific guidance about how to improve. As a result of his review of literature about feedback and the link with pupil motivation, Clarke (2005) concluded that:

The greatest motivational benefits will come from focusing feedback on the qualities of the pupil's work, and not on comparison with other pupils; specific ways in which the pupil's work could be improved; improvements that the pupil has made compared to his/her earlier work (p. 70-71).

The continuous assessment plan should encourage teachers to use information to help each pupil to improve.

However, given that the 1987 Education reforms model the American education system (Chapter 2), which is known for its frequent assessments (Harlen and Crick, 2003), it is not strange that continuous assessment emphasises the grading function rather than improvements in learning. Calfee and Masuda (1997) synthesized literature about classroom assessments in the USA and concluded that, assessment as practised in that country was more akin to appraisal than inquiry, driven by neither curiosity nor the aim of improving conditions. Calfee and Masuda argued that, in the inquiry model the teacher is driven by professional impulse to understand and shape pupils' learning. Such teachers take full responsibility for assessment; they switch from an activity-driven model "assessment is something that you do" to a conceptual model "assessment is a way of thinking about teaching" (p. 83).

Third, the procedure for processing pupils' marks for recording is laborious and time consuming. The amount of time and energy teachers expend in paperwork can reduce efforts for supporting pupils who record lower attainments in class to improve. As Weeden, Winter, and Broadfoot (2002) have argued, when teachers spend so much time on paperwork they have less time to help pupils to improve.

In line with this, Farrell (1997) states that in order to assess the progress pupils are making on the curriculum successfully it is necessary for schools to have a carefully

planned curriculum and accompanying record sheets which enable pupils' progress to be recorded clearly and without taking up too much time. Also, Stakes and Hornby (2000) suggest that records should be straightforward to keep and simple to access.

Besides, the continuous assessment plan does talk about the methods teachers should use to gather pupils' records. This may be seen as flexibility in terms of teachers' choice of methods for assessing their pupils' progress in classrooms. It is vital to state that documents such as, the teaching syllabuses (MoE 2001a, 2001b) provide many options that teachers can use to evaluate their lessons. The options include: narration, dramatisation, and role-play, written exercises, working in pairs and groups, demonstration, as well as observations.

However, Angbing (2001) in his study involving JSS teachers in Ghana, reported that the teachers were confused about the methods they had to use to gather pupils' records. Some of the teachers in his study reported that they used class tests and exercises to gather pupils' records; while others said they used assignments. Angbing, however, did not elaborate on the form the exercises or assignments took.

Elsewhere, in Trinidad and Tobago, Rampaul and Freeze (1992) suggest that continuous assessment measurement methods combine the frequent measurement of specific skills with use of graphs and charts to monitor skill acquisition and maintenance. In a study, Rampaul and Freeze reported that teachers perceived a variety of continuous assessment measures as effective. The methods included behavioural charting, for promptness, homework completion, and attendance; precision teaching of basic mathematics facts and reading; and skill monitoring

through direct daily measurement of pupils' work samples in many subject areas. According to Rampaul and Freeze, all of these assessment methods represented a forward looking approach in which the purpose of assessment was as much to guide future instruction as it was to evaluate past attainments.

Furthermore, in Ghana, the continuous assessment plan directs the basic schoolteachers to give pupils group work to do in homework (MoE, 2004). For homework the plan specifically mentions the use of individual and group work, but does not explain how teachers should organise pupils for exercises and class tests. This may suggest that apart from homework, pupils have to do individual work in exercises and class tests. By focusing mainly on individual work, the continuous assessment plan deprives all pupils and in particular, lower attaining children of the benefits from group work.

In a study in the UK, employing systematic classroom observations of 8-9 year-olds with moderate learning difficulties in the mainstream Croll and Moses (1985) found that group work was particularly successful. Whereas all pupils in the class benefited, those with learning difficulties did so to the greatest extent. The level of engagement increased from 46% when working alone, to over 70% in a group. Also, one of the main findings was that slow learners (lower attainers) recorded low levels of engagement when working on their own (individually).

Watson (2000) reported that pupils with learning difficulties showed impressive gains in reading comprehension while engaged in group work. The pupils moved on to producing their own learning materials, forming a culture of learning, where 'reading,

writing and thinking took place in the service of a recognised, reasonable goal-learning and helping others learn about a topic that deeply concerned them' (p. 124). The researchers judged the nature and quality of their learning to be communal and joint, totally different from that obtained in an individual setting.

Although, Croll and Moses (1985) and Watson (2000) report studies which were conducted in England and the USA, in which the educational policies have largely shifted towards inclusion, Ghana could adapt these classroom practices promoting group work, rather than individual work, for pupil records. This would not be inconsistent with current practice in Ghana, since the teaching syllabuses, (see MoE, 2001a; 2001b), direct basic schoolteachers to use group work in addition to individual tasks to evaluate lessons.

Also, in Ghana the continuous assessment plan directs to give pupils a lot of exercises for their records. Frequent assessments generate substantial information on pupils' learning which teachers can use for improvements (Amedahe, 2000; Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002; MoE, 1988). Writing in the context of England, Pollard, Collins, Simco, Swaffield, Warin and Warwick (2005) note that the strengths of using tasks for enquiry purposes derive both from the frequency and routine nature of the opportunities which are available and from the high validity which this form of assessment is likely to have. As routine exercises are embedded in everyday classroom processes they should provide a rich source of insights about pupil learning strategies and attainments that can be used to foster their inclusion in the mainstream.



Though frequent exercises can provide teachers with substantial information about pupils' learning for the purpose of improvement, the emphasis on summative marks and the elaborate procedure for processing marks to fill pupils' records can drastically reduce the time at teachers' disposal. Also, the pressure to get marks obtained by pupils in all activities ready for recording within the stipulated time can cause basic schoolteachers to ignore the needs of lower attaining pupils. Since the pupils will not get requisite support from teachers they are likely to become demoralised as they constantly face assessments that they are unable to deal with effectively (see Black and Wiliam, 1998, 2006a; Harlen, 2006a; Harlen and Crick, 2003, 2002).

### **3.2.3 Continuous assessment and curriculum-based assessment**

In Ghana, basic schoolteachers use continuous assessment activities, for example, exercises, class tests and homework to assess pupils' progress in the curriculum and programme of study. As Watkins (2007) explains, in countries that have clearly defined national curricula, ongoing, formative assessment is usually goal-related and linked directly to the objectives for the curriculum for all pupils. National guidelines for assessment may state what is to be assessed and how it is to be assessed. Within countries using this approach, a key aspect is that developing and implementing assessment is mainly the responsibility of mainstream schools and class teachers. This fits with the purpose of such assessment for informing decisions about next steps in an individual pupil's learning.

Watkins (2007) points out that curriculum-based assessment is linked to programmes of learning; curriculum-based assessment is used to inform teachers about the learning progress and difficulties of their pupils in relation to the programme of study, "so they

make decisions about what a pupil needs to learn next and how to teach that material” (p 67). Curriculum-based assessments provide only teachers with relevant information in order to improve teaching; the assessments do not provide pupils information on how to make progress in learning.

As Tucker (1985) cited by Frederickson (1992) explanation below shows:

Curriculum-based assessment properly includes ANY procedure that directly assesses student performance within the course content for the purpose of determining that students’ instructional needs. In curriculum-based assessment (CBA) the pupils’ performance is compared in an on-going way to each new set of curriculum demands as they presented in the classroom (p. 147).

The continuous assessment in Ghana has some features of curriculum-based assessments. In curriculum-based assessment, assessment and intervention go hand in hand. For example, Amedahe (2000) suggests that the continuous assessment in Ghana enables teachers to identify pupils including lower attainers’ instructional needs for the purpose of intervention. Teachers use continuous assessment to identify problems pupils encounter in learning for intervention (Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002, Angbing, 2001). However, the larger classes in basic schools may hamper teachers’ efforts regarding using information from continuous assessments to support pupils who record lower attainments in classrooms to improve.

Norwich (1993) points out that curriculum-based assessment refers to the process of assessment involving task analysis, objectives setting and criterion referencing. This assessment requires that the curriculum be defined as a series of tasks which are sequenced and expressed in a behavioural objective form. There is an initial assessment of learner’s starting skills to enable placement on the sequence of objectives - placement assessment. Norwich suggests that there is relationship

between curriculum-based assessment and formative assessment. For instance, suitable methods, materials and classroom arrangements are selected to enable the learner to achieve the next step on the sequence. Progress is monitored and the assessment can be used as feedback to make changes to objectives or methods - formative assessment.

In line with this, Lewis (2001) states that curriculum-based assessment is part of a continuous cycle of teaching and assessment. According to Lewis, recent theoretical work in the field is helping to explain why classroom practices, such as helping pupils to articulate learning strategies used, are fundamental to increasing attainments. Furthermore, research studies for example, Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, and Stecker, (1991), and Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Phillips, and Bentz, (1994) in the USA, have shown that curriculum-based assessment can enhance inclusion of pupils with different abilities and needs including lower attainments in the mainstream (see Section 3.5.1).

#### **3.2.4 Continuous assessment and criterion-referenced assessments**

Apart from curriculum-based assessments, Amedahe (2000) also suggests that in Ghana, the continuous assessment programme is organised within a criterion-referenced framework. Curriculum-based assessment however contrasts with criterion-referenced assessment where the pupils' performance in each area assessed by the test is compared with a stated criterion or level of mastery (Frederickson, 1992). Thus, teachers not only use continuous assessment to identify pupils' learning needs in the content of the curriculum, they also use continuous assessment to compare pupils' performance against specific standards set for their classes.

This is normal, according to Frederickson (1992) some curriculum-based assessments may be criterion referenced. For example, the ongoing teacher assessments currently being conducted in Britain are designed both to assess pupil performance in the National Curriculum, 'in order to clarify the next steps for individual and class planning' and to assess pupils, 'in relation to a criterion given by a Statement of Attainment'. The purpose for which an assessment is being conducted will significantly influence the choice of approach.

Salvia, Ysseldyke and Bolt (2007) assert that school personnel use different terms to refer to criterion-referenced assessments, including for example, curriculum-based assessment, objective-referenced assessment, performance or direct assessment, and formative evaluation of pupil progress. According to Salvia, Ysseldyke and Bolt criterion-referenced assessments do not indicate a person's relative standing in skill development; they measure a person's mastery of particular information and skills in terms of absolute standard.

However, Harlen (2006b) explains that the criterion-referenced approach involves using the same criteria for all pupils because the purpose is to report attainment in a way that is comparable across pupils. There is no feedback into teaching- at least not in the same immediate way as in the assessment for learning cycle.

Also, Stobart (2006) argues that in a criterion-referenced system, in which the pupil must meet every statement at a level to gain that level, the threat is that the standard may become too detailed and mechanistic. This may encourage a surface learning approach in which discrete techniques are worked on in a way that may inhibit

‘principled’ understanding (p. 140). Stobart suggests that there is dilemma in making learning intentions explicit. Among the issues raised were: How do we strike a balance which encourages deep learning processes and mastery learning? If the intentions are general the learner may not be able to appreciate what is required. If they are too specific this may lend itself to surface learning of “knowledge in bits” (p. 139).

### **3.2.5 Continuous assessment and teacher assessments**

The continuous assessment programme is the only teacher (classroom) assessment among the various evaluating models evolved by the Ghana Education Service for use at the basic education level (Chapter 2). Continuous assessment is used as classroom assessment to inform teaching and learning as well as to report pupils’ progress and to contribute to external examination. Thus, continuous assessment is used for both formative and summative purposes in Ghana.

However, in England, Lewis (1997) has drawn attention to the differences between ‘t.a.’ non-moderated teacher assessment, used for formative purposes, or just within the classroom, and ‘T.A.’ moderated teacher assessment used for reporting purposes outside the classroom, and external tests.

In spite of contrasting cultural contexts (see Chapter 1), Ghana can adapt the policy regarding the use of ‘t.a.’ non-moderated teacher assessment, for internal purposes and moderated ‘T.A.’ for external purposes. For example, continuous assessment at the primary school can be used purely for formative purposes to enable teachers to focus on supporting all pupils particularly, those who record lower attainments in

classrooms to improve. At the junior secondary school level, teachers' continuous assessments should be moderated before being added to the final examination (BECE) for the purpose of grading pupils. However, since pupils' continuous assessment records from Primary 1 to JSS 3 are added to the BECE, the policy will be difficult to adapt in the short-term.

### **3.2.6 Continuous assessment and formative assessment**

With respect to formative assessment, Amedahe (2000) suggests that the system of continuous assessment in Ghana is supposed to serve as a mechanism by which pupils are given feedback on their performance by teachers, while teachers obtain some insights into areas of pupils' learning difficulty early enough for intervention. This formative function of continuous assessment is to be realized through the systematic assessment of pupils throughout the course of the academic year. The explanation is insufficient to suggest that the continuous assessment is formative assessment.

In the UK, the Assessment Reform Group, the ARG (2002) explains that 'formative assessment' itself is open to a variety of interpretations and often means no more than that assessment is carried out frequently and is planned at the same time as teaching. However, the ARG notes that generally teacher assessment involves only marking and feeding back grades or marks to pupils. Though carried out by teachers such assessment has increasingly been used to sum up learning; it has a summative rather than formative purpose.

According to the ARG (2002) there is abundant evidence from reports of school inspections that the use of assessment to help pupils learn is one of the weakest

aspects of classrooms across the UK. The situation is not different from other countries; Black and Wiliam (1998) synthesized the literature on teacher assessment and reported that there is sufficient evidence to show that similar situation exists across many other countries.

For her part, James (1998) argues that the requirement to report a teacher assessment score in terms of a numerical level attained by the end of the Key Stage, still demands that teachers should 'sum up' their teacher assessments by aggregating and reducing their supposedly formative judgments, based on criteria expressed in words, to the numerical form used in the tests. Teachers know that they have to produce a numerical 'level' to describe a student's attainment, that concern tends to dominate and block their attention to detail that might have more formative value.

Black (2003) states that for any assessment to be considered formative assessment the first priority in its design and practice should be to promote pupils' learning, provide information for teachers and their pupils to use as feedback to assess themselves and each other. Black and Wiliam (1998) point out that assessment practices in which lower attaining pupils recorded gains in attainments showed enhanced formative assessment procedures. According to Black and Wiliam those studies showed evidence of the provision of effective feedback to pupils, the active involvement of pupils in their own learning, adjustment in teaching to take account of the results of assessment, a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which have crucial influences on learning, and the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

Additionally, there has been debate among commentators and writers on teacher assessment concerning the terms ‘formative assessment’ and ‘assessment for learning’. Stiggins (2002) argues that it is tempting to equate the idea of assessment for learning with the more common term ‘formative assessment’; but the two are not the same. Indeed formative assessment does not necessarily have all the characteristics of helping learning. It may be formative in helping the teacher to identify areas where more explanation or practice is needed. But for the pupils, the marks or remarks on their work may tell them about their success or failure but not about how to make progress towards further learning.

According to Stiggins (2002) assessment for learning must involve pupils in the process. When teachers assess for learning, they use the classroom assessment process and the continuous flow of information about pupil attainment that it provides in order to advance, not merely check on, student learning. Teachers do this by:

- Understanding and articulating in advance of teaching the attainment targets that their students are to hit;
- Informing their pupils about those learning goals, in terms that pupils understand, from the very beginning of the teaching and learning process;
- Becoming assessment literate and thus able to transform their expectations into assessment exercises and scoring procedures that accurately reflect pupil attainment;
- Using classroom assessments to build pupils’ confidence in themselves as learners and help them take responsibility for their own learning, so as to lay a foundation for lifelong learning; and



- Actively involving pupils in communicating with their teacher and their families about their attainment status and improvement (p. 4-5).

Furthermore, Watkins (2007) argues that assessment for learning is used in a general way in many countries to refer to qualitative assessment procedures that inform decision-making about teaching methods and the next steps in a pupil's learning. Class teachers and the professionals that work with teachers usually carry out these procedures in classrooms. However, it has a very specific meaning in the UK, the Assessment Reform Group (2002) cited by Watkins (2007) defines assessment for learning as the:

process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there (p 67).

It is noteworthy, other authorities such as, Black and Wiliam (2006a), Harlen (2006a), the ARG (2002) and Weeden et al. (2002) use the terms interchangeably. Elaborating on the use of the concepts, Harlen (2006a) explains that where individual pupils are concerned, the important distinction is between assessment for formative and summative purposes. Using the terms 'formative assessment' and 'summative assessment' can give the impression that these are different kinds of assessment or are linked to different methods of gathering evidence. This is not the case; what matters is how the information is used. It is for this reason that the terms 'assessment for learning' and 'assessment of learning' are sometimes preferred. In this study the term 'formative assessment' and 'assessment for learning' are used synonymously.

### **3.2.7 Continuous assessment and summative assessment**

The continuous assessment programme models summative assessment; exercises, class tests and even homework are all used to sum up learning in the classroom (see Chapter 1). Further, Amedahe (2000) suggests that the second purpose of continuous assessment is a summative function. It indicates the sum of knowledge and skills pupils have acquired over a period of time.

However, the use of teachers' assessments for important decisions concerning pupils makes such assessments summative (Black and Wiliam, 1998, 2006a; Harlen and Crick, 2003; Harlen, 2006a). Harlen and Crick (2003) suggest that in practice, teacher assessment has more characteristics of summative than formative assessment and often emulates external tests in the assumption that this represents good practice.

### **3.3 Planning of continuous assessment activities**

In terms of planning, in Ghana, basic schoolteachers use the national curriculum, the teaching syllabuses, to construct their schemes of work (MoE, 2002) and their lesson plans (see Chapter 2). At the beginning of every term teachers give their schemes of work to their head teachers for vetting (Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo, 1999). Teachers also show their lesson plans to their head teachers every week for vetting, and lesson plans are individual teacher's responsibility.

In a study involving basic schoolteachers at Bawku district in the Upper east region of Ghana, Angbing (2001) reported that head teachers and sometimes circuit (district) supervisors vetted lesson plans, lesson objectives, core points and evaluation procedures to ensure that teachers assessed intended learning outcomes. Head

teachers occasionally checked pupils' exercise books to assess the quality of assessment activities teachers gave to pupils. This suggests that there is mechanism for ensuring that teachers followed the guidelines in implementing continuous assessment.

However, in the study involving senior secondary schoolteachers (SSS) in the Ashanti region, Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) found that both teachers and assistant headteachers who were supposed to supervise teachers' continuous assessment practice did not adhere to the guidelines. The researcher states that, "in fact, the teachers and assistant headmasters had limited practical knowledge about the practice of continuous assessment" (p. 100).

According to Asamoah-Gyimah (2002), the teachers did not satisfy the requirements of the continuous assessment format. The teachers and assistant headmasters did not know the minimum requirements of tasks for the continuous assessment, and how teachers use information from the records. Asamoah-Gyimah explains that, the inability of teachers to satisfy the requirements of the continuous assessment at that level have direct implication on the validity and reliability of the records of students. The study focused on the nature of tasks and content of the curriculum rather than pupils' progress and planning of future lessons. There was no reference to the teaching-learning-assessment cycle.

In a study of primary schools in England, Torrance and Pryor (2002) reported that some teachers planned their assessment tasks individually in relation to the particular topic they were teaching and the way in which the topic developed. Other teachers

worked as year groups from the start, planned activities which they believed would yield common assessment opportunities and even agreed on common worksheets to be used and common questions to be pursued. In smaller schools, teachers of adjacent classes got together on ad-hoc basis to compare notes, but in the large schools where there were parallel classes joint planning took place on a regular basis.

Pollard et al. (2005) argue that assessment is an integral component of planning, without assessment and the consequent re-evaluation of planning effective teaching cannot be maintained. Above all good planning underpins flexibility. Furthermore, prior to planning teachers should have formative assessment information about their pupils so that specific objectives can be refined and differentiated.

This view is endorsed by the Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 2002) cited by Clarke (2005) who states that:

A teacher's planning should provide opportunities for both learner and teacher to obtain and use information about progress towards learning goals. It also has to be flexible to respond to initial and emerging ideas and skills. Planning should include strategies to ensure that learners understand the goals they are pursuing and the criteria that will be applied in assessing their work. How learners will receive feedback, how they will take part in assessing their learning and how they will be helped to make further progress should also be planned p. 25).

The key points from the review so far indicate that: basic schoolteachers follow prescribed format for recording the progress pupils make in relation to the curriculum. The format does not make provision for recording the progress of pupils with needs, particularly lower attainments. Furthermore, the continuous assessment programme in Ghana has the characteristics of both curriculum-based and criterion-referenced

assessments. The characteristics can have both positive and negative impact on lower attaining pupils in classrooms.

### **3.4 Purposes of continuous assessment**

The relationship between the continuous assessment programme and formative as well as summative assessments has been explored in the previous section (3.2.6 & 3.2.7). In Ghana, basic schoolteachers use continuous assessment for many different purposes. These purposes however, can be categorised into two: formative and summative purposes. The formative purposes of continuous assessment encompass: monitoring, diagnosis of difficulties, intervention, and improving teaching. The summative purposes emphasise the use of continuous assessment for grading, reporting and progress, transfer across schools, and contributing to external examination, BECE.

#### **3.4.1 Monitoring**

Monitoring of pupils' progress is considered as one of the basic activities teachers engage in the continuous assessment process in Ghana. As shown in the teaching syllabuses, MoE (2001a, 2001b) teachers have to use oral and written activities to monitor pupils' progress in learning. During classroom tasks, Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo (1999) point out that teachers interact with pupils checking their work, questioning them to clarify points, and explaining points to them.

Furthermore, as explained earlier in Section 3.2.2, the marking and recording of marks pupils' obtain in exercises, class tests and homework provide teachers with substantial information about pupils' progress in the National Curriculum. However, I

also argued earlier (see Section 3.2.1), that the emphasis on marks could cause teachers to ignore other relevant information about pupils' learning that both teachers and pupils can use for improvements.

For their part, Pollard et al. (2005) explain that teachers use continuous assessment to gather evidence of pupils' responses and adjust the learning programme to meet pupils' needs as a course of study or a lesson progresses. As a result, continuous assessment enables teachers to engage more accurately and directly with the development of the learners' thinking and understanding.

### **3.4.2 Diagnosis**

With respect to diagnosis, teacher-pupil interactions during classroom activities and marking of exercises, class tests and homework help the basic school teachers in Ghana to identify pupils' difficulties for intervention. In line with this Amedahe (2002) suggests that continuous assessment is as a mechanism by which teachers obtain some insights into areas of pupils' learning difficulties, and enables them to adopt strategies to re-dress those difficulties before they become entrenched. In the study among senior secondary school teachers in the Ashanti region of Ghana, Asamoah-Gyimah (2002, p.102) reported that 64% of the senior secondary school teachers (SSS) used continuous assessment to identify students who were experiencing difficulties in their studies in order to "organise remedial instruction for such students to enable them reach the pass level". Although, the study involved SSS teachers as stated earlier (Section 3.2.1) the continuous assessment guidelines and format are the same for basic and senior secondary schools.

### **3.4.3 Intervention**

Monitoring, diagnosis and intervention can be viewed as a continuum in teachers' assessment practices in basic schools in Ghana. Teachers adopt different approaches to address pupils' difficulties. During classroom tasks, such as exercises teachers may use a direct approach which involves either working with children individually or in small groups. If many children in the class make the same error, the teacher involves the whole class in the intervention process.

In Asamoah-Gyimah's (2002) study, 86% of the SSS teachers reported that they used their students' attainment in continuous assessment to guide individual students. However, the researcher did not explain what the teachers meant by 'guide student'. Also, 64% of the respondents reported that they involved their students who did not get the required pass marks in remedial teaching while 36% did not engage their students in any remedial lessons. In this case a large number of teachers (36%) did not use continuous assessment as formative assessment because they did not use information from their assessment to help the students to improve. The study did not explain why more than a third of the teachers failed to use information from their assessments to help their students to improve.

### **3.4.4 Evaluating teaching**

Additionally, teachers use continuous assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching. Pupils' general performance enabled teachers to know whether the lesson was successful. As Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo (1999) point out there is a column in the teacher's notebook for them to write remarks about lessons taught. In this column

teachers are expected to provide their objective assessment of lessons, based on pupils' learning and attainments.

In line with this, Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) suggests that continuous assessment enables teachers to review their own performance and effectiveness in getting their messages across to their students in the most efficient manner. Further, 68% of the SSS teachers in the study reported that they used continuous assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of their own work, while 32% did not use continuous assessment to evaluate their work. Again, a third of the teachers did not use the information from their assessment, and the researcher did not explain why the teachers did not use information to evaluate the effectiveness of their lessons.

However, Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003) state that assessment activities can help learning if they provide information to be used as feedback by teachers, and by their pupils in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Commenting on the position of OFSTED on the purpose of the national assessment in the UK, Lambert and Lines (2000) suggest that, OFSTED are looking for assessment that: helps teachers plan future work; informs pupils of the standards they have reached; shows pupils what they need to do to improve; is diagnostic of strengths and weaknesses; and is constructively critical.

### **3.4.5 Grading**

As explained earlier (Section 3.2.2) from the continuous assessment format the main function of continuous assessment is grading. Indeed, class exercises, tests and



homework are used for gathering marks to fill pupils' continuous assessment (MoE, 2004). As MoE (1988) cited by Amedahe (2002) states, continuous assessment is to enable teachers make judgements about pupils' learning in relation to National Curriculum targets. The grading function facilitates decision making in relation to progress to next class as well as transfer across schools when the need arises. This function highlights summative assessment which can have negative impact on pupils and in particular lower attainers at school (see Section 3.6.3).

### **3.4.6 Reporting progress**

Other basic functions of continuous assessment at basic schools are: reporting and progress to next class. At the end of every term teachers calculate pupils' marks and convert that as 30% to add to examination marks for the purpose of reporting pupils' attainments (MoE, 1988; 2004) to parents and families. Further, at the end of every academic year pupils' aggregated continuous assessment is used to inform decisions about their progress to next class. As Amedahe (2002) reports: "information from continuous assessment is used for decisions such as promotion from one class to the next class" (p 5).

### **3.4.7 Transfer**

Further, in cases where pupils move to new locations the continuous assessment records provide teachers at the new school important information about the child and the level of his/her attainments. In Ghana, it is common at the urban centres where people working in the public sector go on transfer and move with their children. Transfer is a common phenomenon in the world.

In the UK, Pollard et al. (2005) state that assessment information has a very important role in effective transfer (when pupils move from one school to another) and transition (moving from one class to another within the same school). However, Pollard et al. point out that in order that the next teacher and/or school can extend each pupil's present attainment, building on strengths and addressing weaknesses, it is vital that key pieces of information from present teacher's knowledge are passed on in a manageable way. This is not the case with continuous assessment records as explained earlier in Section 3.2.1.

#### **3.4.8 Contributing to external examination**

Another fundamental role of continuous assessment is the contribution of 30% of the marks of external examination, the Basic Education Certificate Examination, BECE. As explained in chapter 2, pupils' aggregated marks are sent to the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) to be added to the external examination, BECE, for the purpose of grading. As explained previously (section 3.2.5), continuous assessment contributes 30% of the marks of final examination (MoE, 2002). The weighting of continuous assessment to external examination was 40:60%, this was changed to 30:70% in 1994 because the Ministry felt teachers did not organise their assessment systematically (MoE, 1996).

Unlike the pre-reform assessments, the BECE is the only assessment used for certification and selection of pupils for further education and training. Although teacher assessment, since continuous assessment contributes 30% to the marks for BECE, all pupils and in particular, lower attaining children have 'high-stakes' in continuous assessment (as shown in the discussion of impact assessment). In Ghana,

selection to Senior Secondary School (SSS) as illustrated in the statement below is very competitive. According to the Director General of the Ghana Education Service, Ameyaw-Akumfi (2003):

Only about 30 percent of all basic school graduates gain access to Senior Secondary schools and about 15 to 20 percent of them being enrolled in GES Technical Institutes and NVTI Vocational Schools and other private technical and vocational schools, the vast majority are expected to work as apprentices in the informal sector or to become self-employed (p. 3).

Many pupils, particularly lower attainers do not qualify for SSS because their grades at the BECE are usually very low.

Commenting on continuous assessment in general, Wolf (1996) explains that the fact that teachers conduct continuous assessment does not mean that it is low stakes or less important, from the pupils' point of view, or low in the stress it creates for pupils particularly, those who record lower attainments. For their part, Black and Wiliam (2006c) state that for assessments that are used outside the school, whether for progress to employment, further stages of education or for accountability purposes the stakes are even higher. These different forms of assessment can be considered to be what Madaus (1988) defines as 'high stakes assessment'. High stakes assessment consists of tests and procedures that provides information perceived by pupils, parents, teachers, policy makers, or the general public as being used to make important decisions that immediately and directly impact upon pupils' educational experiences and futures.

Literature shows that, many systems of public examination consist of a mixture of continuous and terminal assessments. For example, in England, as Torrance and Pryor (2002) report in 1998 the Government introduced a National Curriculum coupled with

a programme of National Assessment designed to measure how much children were learning and how effective schools were implementing the National Assessment. The national assessment is carried out by a combination of externally designed and marked Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) and Teacher Assessment (TA).

Nonetheless, in England, Pollard et al. (2005) state that at the end of Key Stage 1, there are a variety of tests and tasks designed for children working at different levels. The Key Stage 1 tests and tasks are marked by the teachers, with Local Education Authorities undertaking audit to ensure consistency of administration and marking. Also, the end of Key Stage National Curriculum assessment is carried out through tests or tasks and Teacher Assessment and applies to English, mathematics and science. According to Pollard et al., at Key Stage 2, the lowest attaining pupils are assessed through Teacher Assessment alone. For the end of Key Stage Teacher Assessment the teacher makes judgements for each child in the form of a level for each attainment target in English, mathematics and science; an overall subject level in mathematics and science is also calculated.

Writing about Key Stage 2 tasks and tests in England, Lewis (1999b) notes that the then new arrangements for modifying tests and increasing the teacher assessment element have demonstrated that they are flexible enough to be used with children from a wide ability range, thereby adding credibility to the practice of extending inclusion within the confines of the national curriculum. However, Lewis adds that some children may still achieve in ways that cannot be assessed through the present arrangements: 'consequently, more searching and fundamental questions about the appropriateness of curricula goals need to be asked' (p. 14).

As argued earlier (see Section 3.2.1), despite the differences in cultural contexts, Ghana can adopt a similar policy; at JSS 3 lower attaining pupils may be assessed only through moderated teacher continuous assessment (T.C.A.). This will change the present situation whereby the pupils write the BECE only to attain poor grades which portray them as failures. However, this will raise a number of challenges including; certification, further training opportunities as well as public opinion and acceptance of the new assessment programme.

Also, in the UK, there has ongoing debate among writers in education assessment and commentators for example, Weeden et al. (2002), as to whether a single assessment system, such as the one proposed by TGAT for the National Curriculum (DES/WO, 1988) can serve all these functions. Wiliam (2000) cited by Weeden et al. (2002) points out that ‘very few teachers are able or willing to operate parallel assessment systems, one designed to serve “summative” function and one designed to serve a “formative” function (p. 20). Wiliam (2000) suggests that to enhance pupils’ learning, teachers need to find ways to integrate the diagnostic, formative, and summative functions of assessment and not be driven by the evaluative function.

Writing in the context of inclusive assessment in Europe, Watkins (2007) points out that for all countries, assessment of pupils’ learning not only has different methods or processes, but also very different purposes. Educational policy as well as actual classroom practice results in the information different assessment methods may provide being used for very different reasons. In terms of the purposes assessment information can be used for, assessment is not only something a teacher does in the classroom in order to make decisions about next steps in the pupils’ learning

programme. As well as informing teaching and learning, assessment information can be used for administration, selection, monitoring of standards, diagnosis and also resource decision-making. Different forms of assessment can determine pupil placement, provision and support allocations. Assessment practices and discourses are embedded in and emanate from cultural, social, and political traditions and assumptions. These factors affect policies and teachers' practices in subtle, complex and often contradictory ways (Broadfoot, 1996).

The review shows that in Ghana, continuous assessment is largely used for summative purposes but has the potential for formative purpose.

### **3.5 Impact of assessments on lower attaining pupils**

The focus of this section is the impact of assessment on pupils and in particular, those who record lower attainments in classrooms. As explained in the introduction, the review explored the effects of summative and formative assessments on pupils in general and lower attainers in particular. Furthermore, teachers conduct some of the assessments and some are external examinations. Since the continuous assessment is a teacher assessment, emphasis is placed on teacher assessment in relation to lower attaining pupils.

Crooks (1988) cited by Harlen and Crick (2002) looked at the impact of assessment on pupils, including self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation and attribution of success or failure. He found evidence of the importance of motivational aspect in relation to classroom assessment; that the use of extrinsic motivation is problematic and that

intrinsic motivation and self-regulated learning is important to continued learning both within and outside school.

Monteith (1996) explains that knowing what, how, when and why to do something is not enough, 'a person must also want to learn' (p. 214). The interaction between skill and will results in self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning not only provides understanding of why pupils behave in certain manner when learning or completing school-related tasks, but also teaches pupils to take responsibility for their own learning.

In addition, Monteith (1996) suggests that self-regulated learning is defined differently according to different theoretical perspectives, it is generally defined as the degree to which pupils are meta-cognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process. Meta-cognitively, self-regulated learners plan, organise, self-instruct, self-monitor and self-evaluate their learning at various stages during the learning process. Motivationally, they perceive themselves as competent, self-efficacious, self-attributinal and autonomous. Behaviourally, they select, structure and create environments that optimise their learning (Zimmerman, 1990).

### **3.5.1 Effects of formative assessment on lower attaining pupils**

Research studies have shown that teacher assessment practices that emphasise formative functions enable lower attaining pupils to experience gains in their learning. A review of 21 research studies by Fuchs and Fuchs (1986) cited by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2003) of children ranging from pre-school to grade 12

focused on work with children with mild impairments or learning difficulties, and on the use of the feedback to and by teachers. The studies were carefully selected and involved comparison between experimental and control groups, and involved assessment activities with frequencies between two and five times per week.

According Black et al. (2003) for each study the researchers first calculated the difference between the gains in scores of the experimental over the control group, and then divided this figure by a measure of the spread of the scores across the children of either group. The researchers did that because they could use this ratio, which is known as 'effect size', to compare different studies with one another. The overall mean of the effect sizes was 0.73 for children with SEN and 0.63 for those without SEN. Where teachers worked with systematic procedures to review the assessments and take action accordingly, the mean effect size was 0.92, whereas where action was not systematic it was 0.42. The researchers concluded that, the main learning gains from formative work were only achieved when teachers were constrained to use data in systematic ways, which were new to them.

As Black and Wiliam (2001) argue, "many of the studies show that improved formative assessment helps the (so-called) low attainers more than the rest, and so reduces the spread of attainment whilst also raising it overall" (p. 9). The study was conducted in the England, where the policy imperative concerning children with SEN is inclusive education (DES, 2001a). In Ghana the policy directs teachers to use continuous assessment to gather summative marks to complete pupils' records, rather than inform teaching and learning. Teachers are not trained to use information to support pupils, particularly those who record lower attainments (see Chapter 2).



In a study in the USA, involving public schools in Chicago, where policies were introduced to gain social promotion (recognition), and pupils were to achieve minimum scores in mathematics and reading in order to earn promotion. Roderick and Engel (2001) reported that the lower attaining pupils reacted negatively to policies that placed strong emphasis on attainment. However, the majority of the lower attaining children in the study responded positively to the policy. The need to reach the test score cuts-offs became a factor that shaped the pupils' attitudes towards school and essentially transformed the value that they placed on learning.

According to Roderick and Engel (2001) pupils' responses showed that creating incentives for lower attaining pupils through goals that provide opportunities for feedback, tangible rewards and ways to construct meaning regarding learning could have positive impact on their motivation and effort in school. Pupils with the lowest skills were the least likely to respond positively. According to Roderick and Engel even if being promoted was something the pupils valued, they might not have felt that the goal was attainable or that they could influence their own outcomes, given the low skills or lack of support, or both. Pupils with low motivation were more likely to lack external support and to have problems outside of school that created barriers to their engagement in their schoolwork.

Roderick and Engel (2001) argued that teachers play a crucial role in shaping pupils' outcomes in 'high-stakes' testing environments, helping pupils understand the policy, making them feel supported and efficacious in achieving goals and structuring meaningful activities are all essential components. Schools giving higher support were markedly more successful in terms of pupil effort than schools that give little

support. High support meant creating environments of social and educational support, working hard to increase pupils' sense of self-efficacy, focusing on task-centred goals, making goals explicit, using assessment to help pupils succeed and having a strong sense of responsibility for their pupils.

For their part, Crooks (1988), Harlen and Crick (2003) suggest that a person's perceptions of the causes of success and failure are of central importance in the development of motivation for learning. Causes have three dimensions. The first is *locus*, whether causes are perceived to originate from within the person or externally. The second is *stability*, whether the causes are perceived to be constant or to vary over time. The third has to do with *controllability*, whether the individual perceives that she or he can influence the causes of success or failure (p. 174).

According to Harlen and Crick (2002, 2003), and Harlen (2006a) ability and effort are two frequently used causes of success or failure at a learning task. Both are internal to the learner, but perceptions of their stability and controllability vary among learners and teachers. Learners who attribute success to ability, which they perceive as stable and uncontrollable, are likely to respond negatively to summative assessment. Concomitantly, learners who attribute success to effort, and who perceive ability to be changeable and controllable are likely to deal with failure constructively, and to persevere with learning tasks.

Wragg (2001) notes that while pupils who are more anxious than their peers may perceive continuous assessment as good, lower attainers and pupils with difficulties on the other hand, as they face series of appraisals that they cannot manage

particularly well may become demoralised. Wragg suggests that personality also influences the extent of the impact of assessments on pupils. Some pupils may be motivated by a critical assessment and strive to improve, others may feel demoralised by it and erect a block against the subject, topic or teacher.

In the USA, Brookhart and DeVoge (1999) studied a third grade pupils' perception of assessment 'events' taking place in the course of regular classroom work. Four different classroom assessment events were selected in each class in consultation with the teachers. They used different methods to investigate pupils' perceptions of their ability to do the task, their effort, and their attainments. Pupils' self-efficacy judgements about their abilities to do particular classroom assessments were based on previous experiences with similar kinds of classroom assessments. Results of previous spelling tests, for example, were offered as evidence of how pupils expected to do on the current spelling test. Pupils used judgemental feedback from previous work as an indication of how much efforts they needed to invest.

However, Brookhart and DeVoge (1999) noted that pupils who are sure that they will succeed in the work may put effort into it, which depends on their goal orientation. That is, whether they have learning or performance goals. Those who see goals as performance may apply effort, if this is how they will be judged, in order to gain approval. Formative feedback is crucial to further learning; judgemental feedback might influence future learning through pupils' use of it as evidence of their capability to succeed at a particular kind of assessment. In addition, teachers' explicit instructions and how they present and treat classroom assessment events affect the way pupils approach the tasks. Furthermore, research indicates that pupil with

learning goals show more evidence of superior learning strategies, have a higher sense of competence as learners, show greater interest in school work and have more positive attitude to school than do pupils with performance or attainment goals (Ames, 1990; Dweck, 1992; cited in Harlen and Crick, 2002).

Duckworth, Fielding and Shaughnessy (1986) found that pupils' feeling of efficacy and futility are functions of the level of clarity regarding tests expectations created by teachers' practices in communicating test expectations. Efficacy and futility are functions of the correspondence of tests to those expectations resulting from teachers' practices in constructing tests. According to Duckworth, Fielding and Shaughnessy feelings of efficacy are a promising mediating variable between teachers' class testing practices and pupils' efforts to study. The individual level efficacy positively correlated with effort across all ability levels and subject. Pupils' perceptions about communication, feedback, correspondence and helpfulness of their teachers are strongly related to their feelings of the efficacy versus futility of study and the pupil feelings of their own effort to study. The researchers state that increasing pupils' perceptions of desirable class testing practices may increase feelings of efficacy and level of effort.

Also, Johnston (1996) argues that the 'will to learn' is at the very heart of the learning process and that this is very closely aligned with the concept of motivation. This will to learn is derived from a person's sense of deep meaning, or sense of purpose, and can be described as the energy to act on what is meaningful. Johnston continues that the will to learn is related to the degree to which the learner is prepared to invest

effort in learning, and is that which engages their motivation to progress, perform and develop as a learner over time.

In terms of self-regulation, in a study carried out in Canada, Perry (1998) cited by Harlen (2002) reported that children in high self-regulated learning classes showed interest in their work and were motivated by their work (intrinsic motivation). The children indicated a task focus when choosing topics or collaborators for their writing and focused on what they had learned about a topic and how their writing had improved when they evaluated their writing products. In contrast, the pupils in low self-regulated learning classrooms were more focused on their teacher's evaluations of their writing and how many they got right on a particular assignment. Both high and low attainers in these classes were concerned with getting 'a good mark'.

The findings of Perry (1998) compare interestingly with those of Pollard, Triggs, Broadfoot, McNess, and Osborn (2000) that children tend to judge their own work in terms of whether it is neat, correct and completed, following the criteria that they perceive their teachers to be using. Also Benmansour (1999) notes that emphasising assessment promotes pupils to embrace extrinsic goals and concludes that in order to counterbalance the emphasis placed on grades, teachers need to cultivate in pupils more intrinsic interest and self-efficacy, which are potentially conducive to the use of effective strategies and better performance.

### **3.5.2 Effects of curriculum-based assessment on lower attaining pupils**

The following studies on the impact of curriculum-based assessment were conducted in the USA. The first study by Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Phillips, and Bentz (1994) involved

randomly assigning teachers to three treatments: (a) Curriculum-Based Measurement with instructional recommendations (CBM-IN, N = 10), (b) Curriculum-Based Measurement without instructional recommendations (CBM-NoIN, N = 10), (c) a contrast group of no Curriculum-Based Measurement (no CBM, N = 20). Teachers in both CBM-IN and CBM-NoIN conditions employed curriculum based assessment for 25 weeks.

The Curriculum-Based Measurement consisted of weekly measurements in which teachers assessed each pupil's performance weekly, on a test representing the grade level's annual operations curriculum. Each test comprised 25 problems; at grades 2–5, respectively pupils had 1.5, 2, 3 and 5 minutes to complete the test. Further, teachers administered the test in whole-class format and responses were entered into a computer program that scored the test and managed the data. With respect to pupil feedback, software summarized each pupil's performance in terms of a graph, displaying total number of digits correct over time and a skills profile, showing pupil's mastery status on each type of problem included in the year's curriculum. Teachers taught pupils to read and interpret graphs and skills profiles in two 20-minute sessions; they also taught pupils to ask themselves questions about their graphs.

In addition, Fuchs et al. (1994) reported that teacher feedback was twice monthly; teachers received a computer-generated copy of each pupil's graph and skills profile, and a report summarizing the performance of the class. The CBM-NoIN teachers received descriptions of performance; in the CBM-IN condition the report provided descriptions of performance, as well as instructional recommendations for: (a) what to teach during the whole-class instruction, (b) how to constitute small groups for instruction on skills on which pupils experienced common chronic difficulty, (c) skills and computer-assisted

programmes each pupil should use for the next two weeks, and (d) class wide peer tutoring (CWPT), listing pupils who required and those who could provide assistance with skills. The contrast teachers used their standard procedures for monitoring pupil progress, providing pupil feedback, and planning their instruction.

Forty general education teachers (Grades 2–5) participated in this study. Each of them had included at least one pupil with an identified learning disability in their mainstream math instruction. Teachers identified three pupils for whom treatment effects would be evaluated:

- a pupil who was chronically low achieving in mathematics, and had been classified as learning disabled according to state regulations (LD);
- a pupil who was chronically low achieving in mathematics but had never been referred for special education assessment (Low-Achieving);
- a pupil whose mathematics attainment was near the middle of the class (Average-Achieving).

In order to establish the attainments of pupils an analysis was conducted on pre- and post-treatment tests between subjects: Curriculum-Based Measurement with instructional recommendations vs. Curriculum-Based Measurement without instructional recommendations vs. a contrast group of no Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM-IN vs. CBM-NoIN vs. contrast) and within subjects Learning disabled vs. Low-Achieving vs. Average-Achieving (LD vs. LA vs. AA). The following were the main findings:

- In terms of attainment, in the CBM-NoIN condition, the attainment of 4 out of 10 lower attaining pupils was higher than their contrast treatment peers, whereas in the

CBM-IN condition the attainment of 9 out of 10 lower attaining pupils was higher than the mean growth of their contrast treatment peers.

- In both CBM conditions, the attainment of 7 out of 10 average achieving pupils was higher than the mean growth of their contrast treatment peers.
- In both CBM conditions the attainment of only 6 of 10 learning disabled pupils was higher than the mean growth of their contrast treatment peers.
- Satisfaction: Teachers' overall satisfaction with CBM was high, regardless of treatment condition; however, CBM-IN teacher rated their treatment reliably higher than did CBM-NoIN teachers.

Fuchs et al. (1994) reported that the study failed to separate the effects of the various components of the advice sections of the CBM-IN report. It is not known whether teachers effected similar outcomes with one or more instructional practices like computer-assisted instruction and CWPT without the use of CBM.

The second study by Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, and Stecker (1991) focused on the effects of curriculum-based measurement and consultation on teacher planning and student attainment in mathematics operations. The study involved 33 teachers in 15 schools in a south-eastern metropolitan area who were randomly selected to one of three treatments: (a) Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) with recommendations about the nature of instructional adjustments (expert system instructional consultation, CBM-ExS); (b) CBM without ExS advice (CBM-NExS); and (c) control (no CBM). Each teacher selected two pupils for whom treatment effects would be evaluated. These pupils were in grades 2–8, were chronically low achieving in mathematics, and had been classified as learning disabled or emotionally disturbed according to state regulations. In the CBM-ExS, CBM-NExS, and control group respectively were (a) 14, 15 and 15 boys and 7, 5



and 7 girls; (b) 5, 6 and 7 minority and 16, 14 and 15 non-minority pupils; and (c) 20, 16 and 20 learning disabled and 1, 4 and 2 emotionally disturbed pupils. Pupils were comparable on age, grade, math grade level, years in special education and IQ.

According to Fuchs et al. (1991) teachers adopted curriculum based assessments to track pupils' progress toward operations goals for 20 weeks. This computer-assisted monitoring comprised: (a) goal selection and ongoing measurement on the goal material (teachers determined an appropriate level on which to establish each pupil's goals; using a standard measurement task, teachers assessed each pupil's performance at least twice weekly, each time on a different test representing the type and proportion of problems from the goal level they had designed); and (b) evaluation on the database to adjust instructional programs (each week, teachers employed software to graph the pupils' scores automatically, apply decision rules to the graphed scores, get feedback about those decisions, and conduct a skills analysis of the pupils' responses to the test items). Whenever prompted by the graphed decision rules, teachers were asked to adjust the pupil's programme.

Furthermore, Fuchs et al. (1991) reported that tests indicated that for digits and problems, pupils' attainment of the Curriculum-Based Measurement with expert system instructional consultation group (CBM-ExS) exceeded those in the Curriculum-Based Measurement without expert system instructional consultation (CBM-NExS) and the control groups. The use of CBM does not directly lead to higher student attainment. To increase performances, the use of a computer program, which gives recommendations about instructional adjustments, appears to be essential.

As stated earlier in this chapter, continuous assessment can be considered to be curriculum-based assessment. As a result, it is possible for Ghana to adapt some of the measures the teachers in the studies adopted. However, lack of resources- in terms of personnel to support teachers and equipment such as computers at basic schools- can hamper the process.

### **3.5.3 Effects of summative assessment on lower attaining pupils**

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, teachers' continuous assessment practices emphasise grading purpose to get marks to fill pupils' records, which are used to inform decisions within and outside schools. Thus continuous assessment emphasises summative assessment. However, the evidence is that lower attaining pupils are doubly disadvantaged by summative assessments (Black and Wiliam, 1998, 2006a; Harlen, 2006a; Harlen and Crick, 2003, 2002).

As Harlen (2006a) explains being labelled as failures has impact on how the pupils feel about their ability to learn. It also lowers their already low self-esteem and reduces the chance of future effort and success. It is only when such pupils have a high level of support from school and/or home, which shows them how to improve, do some escape from this vicious circle.

According to Meighan (1991) research evidence shows that pupils tend to perform well, or badly, as their teachers expect. Views of children by significant others such as parents and teacher also influence children's perceptions about themselves. Such a concept of self relates closely to personal self-esteem. This is the case for all pupils but particularly pertinent for those with general learning difficulties. It is the case that

teachers' views and expectations of pupils are communicated to them frequently and often unintentionally influencing the behaviour that follows.

In addition, Coopersmith (1968) reported marked variations in the behaviour of pupils with different levels of self-esteem. His study, which concentrated on boys only, categorised three levels of self-esteem. The results indicated that those with high self-esteem have a positive and realistic view about themselves and their abilities. Boys in this group were confident, not unduly worried by criticism and enjoyed participating in activities. These children, his study indicated, were generally successful both academically and socially. Those boys, Coopersmith described as having medium self-esteem has some of the qualities outlined above but were conformist, less confident of their own work and more in need of social acceptance. Boys with low self-esteem as 'a sad group', who were self-conscious, isolated, reluctant to participate in activities, underrated themselves and were over-sensitive to criticism.

Although this report focused exclusively on boys and is now dated, Coopersmith's research supports the view that, in school, failure repels and success attracts. In this respect constant failure or continually telling children that they are failure acts like water torture, producing a self-fulfilling prophecy through labelling. Furthermore, children fulfil the prophecies that others expect of them.

The study by Leonard and Davey (2001), funded by the Save the Children, was designed to reveal and publish pupil's views on the 11+ tests. Pupils were interviewed in focus groups on three occasions, and they wrote stories and drew pictures about their experiences and feelings. The researchers conducted the interviews just after the

pupils had taken the test, then in the week before the results were announced and finally a week after the results were known. This enabled the various phases of the process to be studied at times when they were uppermost in the pupils' minds. The tests had devastating impact on the self-esteem of pupils who did not meet their own and others expectations. Despite, teachers' efforts to avoid value judgements being made on the basis of grades achieved, it was clear that among the pupils, those who achieved grade A were perceived as smart and grade D pupils were perceived as stupid. The self-esteem of those who received a grade D plummeted.

In terms of tests anxiety, Leonard and Davey (2001) reported that majority of the pupils approached the tests with fear and anxiety. The pupils' drawing gave evidence of the negative feelings for the whole process; only four out of 193 drawings collected could be interpreted as positive towards the tests. Those confident of passing were likely to be more positive to testing. Leonard and Davey found that pupils across all grade levels tended to be highly critical of the 11+ and wanted it to be abolished. They favoured instead, given that selection was inevitable, continuous assessment by the teacher. In Ghana, there was no published research on continuous assessments and the experiences of lower attaining pupils (Chapter 1).

Pollard, Triggs, Broadfoot, McNess and Osborn (2000) found that teachers' assessment interactions with pupils which were intended by teachers to be formative were interpreted by pupils as purely summative in purpose. Pupils realised that whilst efforts was encouraged, it was attainment that counted. Indeed, in the early 1990s, the researchers found that pupils did interpret class assessment interactions with their teacher as helping them in 'knowing what to do and avoiding doing it wrongly'.

However, in later years, the pupils were much less positive about assessment interactions that revealed their weaknesses.

Pollard et al. (2000) reported that the anxiety that pupils felt was arguably a consequence of being exposed to greater risk as performance became more important in the teacher's eyes. Pupils incorporated their teacher's evaluation of them into the construction of their identity as learners. In addition, the researchers also reported that interest and effort are related and pupils will put effort and practice in tasks that interest them. Similar results were reported by Reay and Wiliam (1999), they noted that all the pupils in the class they observed, except the most able boy, expressed anxiety about failure, with girls being more anxious than boys.

In line with this, Pollard, Collins, Maddock, Simco, Swaffield, Warin and Warwick (2002; 2005) state that children often feel vulnerable in classrooms, particularly because of their teacher's power to control and evaluate. This affects how children experience school and their openness to new learning. Furthermore, Roberts (2002) cited by Pollard et al. (2005) points out that children only learn effectively if their self-esteem is positive. Pollard et al., therefore, suggest that teachers should be "positive"; being positive involves constant attempt to build on success. The point is to offer suitable challenges and then to make maximum use of the children's attainments to generate still more (p. 131).

In addition, Stiggins (1999) argues that self-efficacy does not develop by itself. In order to promote efficacy, teachers must help pupils to honestly believe that what counts, indeed the only thing that counts, is the learning that results from the efforts

expended. They must perceive effort that does not produce learning as just not good enough. If pupils are to believe in themselves, then they must first experience some believable form of academic success as reflected in a real classroom assessment. Even a small success can rekindle a small spark of confidence that, in turn, encourages more trying. If that effort brings more success, then student's academic self-concept will begin to change. Stiggins continues that;

The direction of the effect is critical. First comes academic success, and then comes confidence. "With increase confidence comes the belief that learning just might be worth a try. Students must experience success in terms of specifically focused, rigorous academic attainments, not as general often misleading, and manipulative statements, such as its good that you're trying harder" (p. 7).

### **3.6 Approaches for enhancing lower attaining pupils' performance**

A number of studies from the USA have shown some strategies teachers use to foster participation of children with SEN, including lower attainment in mainstream classrooms. The materials reviewed focused on peer-assistance and collaborative problem-solving strategies.

#### **3.6.1 Peer-assisted learning strategies**

The first study by Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, and Simmons (1977) explored the effectiveness of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS), a version of Classwide Peer Tutoring. The researchers compared the reading progress of three learner types (low-attaining with and without learning difficulties and average-attaining pupils) to corresponding controls. The PALS were conducted during regularly scheduled reading instruction, 35 minutes per day, 3 times per week, for 15 weeks. The teachers paired all pupils by ranking them on reading performance. The top-ranked pupil in the stronger half was paired with the strongest reader in the weaker half. Teachers were advised to determine whether the

pupils were socially incompatible. If so, a coupling was changed. Within a pair, the role of tutor and tutee was reciprocal. Pairs remained together for 4 weeks, after which the teacher announced new pairings.

According to Fuchs et al. (1977) the pupils engaged in three strategic reading activities: partner reading with retell, paragraph summary and prediction relay. In addition to assigning pupils to pairs, teachers assigned pairs to one of two teams, to give PALS a competitive and co-operative dimension. Pupils earned points by reading without errors, working hard, behaving co-operatively, identifying correct subjects, making reasonable predictions and checking predictions. Points were awarded by tutors and teachers and recorded on scorecards. At the end of the week, the teacher summed up the teams' points and announced the winner. Members of the winning team stood and applauded by the second-place team. After 4 weeks, new team assignments were made. Teachers used whatever reading materials they believed were appropriate, the programme did not require teachers to acquire, develop, or modify materials. The No-PALS teachers conducted reading instruction in their typical fashion. They were told that the purpose of the study was to examine how teachers accommodate pupil diversity; they were not informed that they were a control group.

The participants were 120 pupils from 40 classrooms (grades 2–6) in 12 schools representing 3 districts. All teachers identified 3 pupils in their reading class: a learning disabled (LD) student certified as such in reading in accordance with state regulations, a non-disabled but low-performing (LP) pupil, and a pupil estimated to be an average achiever (AA). These 120 target pupils (3 pupils x 40 teachers) were the only pupils on whom data were collected systematically.

Fuchs et al. (1977) reported that pupils with disabilities, lower performing and average attainers in peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS) classrooms made significantly greater progress than their counterparts in No-PALS classrooms across the three reading measures. Teachers believed PALS positively affected lower performing (LP), learning disabled (LD) and average achiever (AA) pupils' reading attainment and social skills (although they seemed to view PALS as benefiting LD and LP children more than AA pupils). All peer-assisted learning strategies pupils expressed a belief that the treatment had helped them to become better readers. This study focused on mainly on reading activity and not written tasks.

As argued in previous sections, in spite of cultural and contextual differences, Ghana can adapt PALS to enable pupils who record lower attainments to receive assistance from their more capable peers during classroom activities. The strategy would not require any changes in policy or re-training of teachers.

### **3.6.2 Collaborative problem solving**

Furthermore, in another study in the USA, Salisbury, Evans, and Palombaro (1997) found that collaborative problem solving promoted the physical, social and instructional inclusion of pupils with SEN in the mainstream. The perceived outcomes identified by the teachers and project staff from field notes, observations and interview sources of data: pupils develop concern for others, accept and value diversity, empowered to create change, work with others to solve problems, develop meaningful ways to include everyone, foster understanding and friendship. Pupils used perspective talking, advocacy, and creative thinking as well as communications skills to change classroom routines.



Moreover, Stevens and Slavin (1995b) investigated the academic and social outcomes of using co-operative integrated reading and composition (CIRC) programme as an approach to mainstream academically handicapped pupils (at least 2 years behind their grade level, for example, learning disabled, educationally mentally handicapped) (op. cit). Experimental teachers used the CIRC programme for two years. The CIRC programme consists of three main elements: story-related activities, direct instruction in comprehension strategies, and integrated writing and language arts.

According to Stevens and Slavin (1995b) the results showed that CIRC can provide a vehicle for effectively mainstreaming academically handicapped pupils into regular education classes (op. cit). After the first year academically handicapped pupils in CIRC had significantly better attainment on reading vocabulary and reading comprehension than did their counterparts in traditional pullout special education programmes. After the second year, the pupils had significantly better performance in reading vocabulary, reading comprehension, and language expression, results that essentially mirror those of all pupils in CIRC. Mainstreamed academically handicapped pupils improved academically and socially (op. cit).

Although the CIRC programme has the potential to help lower attaining pupils to improve, the lack of computers at basic schools may hamper the introduction of the programme in Ghana.

### **3.7 Pupils' role in continuous assessment**

In Ghana, the basic school continuous assessment guide as described earlier in Sections 3.2.1 & 3.2.2, requires the teacher to plan, and sets learning objectives,

designs activities, mark and records pupils' scores (MoE, 2004). The only role pupils play in the continuous assessment process is performing tasks assigned to them by the teacher.

The situation in Ghana reflects Gersch's (1992) observation that although the process and purpose of assessment may vary from professional to professional, and indeed there are different emphases on test, observation and other techniques, pupils themselves are conventionally ascribed a subservient role in the whole assessment process. They are often expected to carry out specified tasks, answer specific questions, undertake written activities or follow set of procedures. The child is generally seen as a relatively 'passive object', and assessment is viewed as something which is 'done to the child' than involving very actively (p. 25). According to Gersch, if a child joins in too actively, or becomes too questioning or challenging, he or she might be regarded as interfering. Perhaps, historically, the idea of 'children knowing their place' and 'being seen and not heard' has left its mark when it comes to pupil assessment (p. 25).

For their part, Tilstone, Lacey, Porter and Robertson (2000) suggest pupils themselves have little role to play in the traditional perspective on assessment. It is something done for them. However, in a dynamic view of assessment, pupils have a central part to play. They are involved in setting their own targets and monitoring their own progress. There are several frameworks that can support pupil involvement, such as records of attainment. Currently, in Ghana, there is no provision in terms of pupil involvement in their assessment. It will be impossible for basic school pupils to play

any meaningful role in their assessments. There are no frameworks to support pupils' involvement in their assessment.

As discussed earlier (Section 3.2.2), in Ghana, the continuous assessment model seems to apply the principles from the behaviourist learning theory. For example, the teachers assess and reinforce pupils' responses (James, 2006) and make records on the basis of new assessments; the pupils' progress is measured against performance criteria which are teacher-defined (Sebba, Byers and Rose, 1993). The literature for example, (MoE 2004) shows that in Ghana pupils' role in continuous assessment is limited to answering questions and working on tasks designed by teachers. If pupils' involvement is to be fostered then in addition to principles drawing on behaviourist theory, the continuous assessment programme in Ghana has to adopt some principles from the cognitive, constructivist theories of learning (see Chapter 1). This however, requires radical changes in teachers' beliefs, competencies and their conceptualisation of continuous assessment; these shifts may not occur easily.

### **3.7.1 Self- and peer-assessment**

Literature shows that self- and peer-assessment are largely adopted in assessment practice that applies principles from the constructivists' learning theory (Pollard et al., 2005). Self- and peer- assessment when applied in classrooms can foster improvement of all pupils, including those who record lower attainments in class. Black and Wiliam (1998) point out that assessment that involves pupils in their own self-evaluation is a key element in improving learning. This is succinctly, expressed by Assessment Reform Group (2002) cited by Clarke (2005) as follows:

Independent learners have the ability to seek out and gain new skills, new knowledge and new understandings. They are able to engage in self-reflection

and to identify the next steps in their learning. Teachers should equip learners with the desire and the capacity to take charge of their learning through developing the skills of self-assessment (p. 109).

Clarke (2005) suggests that one reason that peer-assessment is so valuable is because pupils often give and receive criticisms of their work more freely than in the traditional teacher/pupil interchange. Another advantage is that the language used by pupils to each other is the language they would naturally use, rather than school language. Further, peer-assessment can involve a few minutes of pupils helping each other to improve their work.

However, Rose, McNamara and O'Neil (1996) point out that in considering approaches to the greater involvement of pupils in self-assessment and the planning process, it is necessary to be clear about the purpose to be served by such an approach, and the practicalities of its implementation. Further, greater involvement of pupils in the management of their assessment and learning is dependent upon the development of teachers' confidence in their own abilities to maintain effective classroom management.

Self-assessment does not occur automatically; Rose, McNamara and O'Neil (1996), in considering the involvement of pupils in self-assessment, identifies the importance of providing pupils with a range of skills before they can take more responsibility for their own learning. He lists the ability to recall, to summarise, to organise evidence, to reflect and to evaluate as prerequisites for effective self-evaluation. Also, Rose, McNamara and O'Neil (1996) describes the skills of attending, completing tasks, and joint goal setting as essential components of 'learning to learn', and provides

examples of ways in which pupils with learning difficulties have been encouraged to move towards achieving these requirements.

Since teacher education in Ghana does not emphasise assessment for learning in its programmes, teachers may lack competence, knowledge, skills and confidence to foster self-and peer-assessments in classrooms (see Chapter 2).

### **3.8 Summary of the chapter**

The review has revealed that the nature of continuous assessment in Ghana, in relation to international perspectives of teacher assessment. Unlike teacher assessments done elsewhere, the continuous assessment comprises three distinctive activities: classroom exercises, tests and homework. These activities are designed specifically to measure attainments in order to get marks to fill pupils' records. Pupils' aggregated continuous assessment is added to external examination (BECE) for grading and certification.

However, literature from the UK and USA reveals that classroom assessments that focus more on informing teaching and learning (formative assessment), support lower attaining pupils to improve. These countries have relevant policies, support and resources to enhance teachers' practices. The materials from Ghana, the UK and the USA will facilitate the discussion of the data from the fieldwork in Chapters 5, 6, 7. This will enable me to draw conclusion as to whether teachers' continuous assessment practices support and enhance lower attaining pupils' learning in classrooms.

# CHAPTER 4

## METHODOLOGY, DESIGN, METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD WORK EXPERIENCES

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the methodology and the design used in the study. It also elaborates on the methods used in the collection of data. I used a mixed methods design and have explained the choice of the design. I have discussed the sample and sampling techniques, the procedures employed for collecting data: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with teachers, focus groups and individual interviews with lower attaining pupils, documents, informal interviews and classroom observations.

Additionally, I have provided discussion about reliability and validity, ethical issues, negotiation of access and my experiences during the fieldwork. Further I have offered the outline for linking themes from results of the study and framework for presentation, analysis, and discussion. I have also provided detailed records of achievement of lower attaining pupils who participated in the study.

## **4.2 Background to choice of approach and methods**

The main aim of the study as stated in Chapter one was to investigate uses of continuous assessment and focusing, in particular, on the experiences of lower attaining pupils in basic schools (primary and junior secondary) in Ghana. I was conscious of Noble and Smith's (1994) suggestion that the relationship between assessment, teaching and learning is complicated because of the underlying interplay and intertwining variables within each specific educational context where the assessment takes place. I considered the following issues: impact of continuous assessment, procedures, challenges and pupils' experiences to formulate a set of research questions reflecting both school-and classroom-levels.

Questions pertaining to school-level were designed to provide data in relation to teacher continuous assessment practice across different schools; while classroom-level data focused on the continuous assessment context of individual teachers. As Hammersley (2000) states, I developed a study that speaks to policy and policy-makers and that informs practice. The choice of design was influenced by the need to collect the most appropriate data that would help to achieve the aim of the study and answer the following research questions.

- What effects does continuous assessment have on pupils who record lower attainments?
- What in-class arrangements do basic schoolteachers adopt to support and enhance lower attaining pupils' participation in classroom activities?
- What challenges do teachers face concerning supporting lower attaining pupils to participate in classroom activities?
- What are lower attaining pupils' feelings about class tests?
- How do lower attaining pupils perceive their current classroom performance?

#### **4.2.1 Paradigm components**

Following the advice of many writers in research methodology, for example, Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher and Pérez-Prado (2003) I have included a definition of the components of a paradigm as well as the perspectives before the description of the mixed methods design. Paradigm is explained as a worldview (Rocco et al., 2003) as such, it is a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide a researcher's inquiry (Creswell, 1998). Greene and Caracelli (1997) suggest that researchers bring to their research a set of interlocking philosophical assumptions and stances; these include the researchers' ontological beliefs, that is, those about the nature of reality.

According to Creswell (1998) and Rocco et al. (2003) the nature of reality is explored through researchers' answers to problems such as: what is the nature of the world, including social phenomena? Whether reality is orderly and lawful; the existence of a natural social order; whether reality is fixed and stable or constantly changing? Whether reality is unitary or multiple? Whether reality can be constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation.

Additionally, Rocco et al. (2003) state that connected to researchers' beliefs about what is real are those epistemological beliefs concerning 'what can we know, and how can we know it?' 'What does it mean for researchers to claim objectivity?' (p. 20). In line with this, Brannen (2005) argues that the paradigmatic position assumes working from the principle that choice of method is not made in a philosophical void: research questions should be thought about in relation to epistemological assumptions.



Apart from that, paradigm also includes axiological beliefs including those concerning ethics. Rocco et al. (2003) state that researchers ask what it means to, “Do the right thing” (p. 21). Thus researchers’ beliefs about reality, knowledge, and values as Greene and Caracelli (1997) explain “guide and frame” their beliefs about research methods (p. 6). For example, do they turn to quantitative or qualitative methods of data collection or data exclusively? Do they only ask questions that can be answered in one way, or they ask questions best investigated using multiple methods?

#### **4.2.2 Paradigm perspectives**

There are purists whose answers to the questions in the previous sub-section lead them to separate qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. As suggested by Rocco, et al. (2003) one purist perspective is articulated by the positivists and post-positivists; for them reality may be, at least to some degree, objectively known, and some degree of causal linkages may be legitimately claimed. This is possible only when they strive to keep their values out of their research and when they employ primarily deductive logic and quantitative methods of research.

This view is endorsed by Weinreich (2006) who suggests that quantitative research uses methods adopted from the physical sciences that are designed to ensure objectivity, generalizability and reliability. These techniques cover ways research participants are selected randomly from the study population in an unbiased manner, the standardized questionnaire or intervention they receive and the statistical methods used to test predetermined hypotheses regarding the relationships between specific variables. The researcher is considered external to the actual research, and results are expected to be replicable no matter who conducts the research.

The second purist perspective, according to Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher and Pérez-Prado (2003), is associated with the constructivists or interpretivists. They believe reality to be socially constructed and only knowable from multiple and subjective points of view. The knower and the known are seen as inseparable. Inductive logic and qualitative methods are generally employed with the goal of understanding a particular phenomenon within its social context. Not surprising, from this perspective, inquiry is considered to be inevitably value laden.

Furthermore, Rocco et al. (2003) state that researchers make knowledge or truth claims when they report what they have discovered as a result of their research, and when they report what their findings mean. While they disagree on which paradigm is more accurate, the one belief purists from both paradigms hold in common is that the two paradigms embody such fundamentally different understandings of the world and what constitutes legitimate truth or knowledge claims that they should not be mixed within a single study.

For their part, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that both qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned with the individual's point of view. However, qualitative investigators think they can get closer to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing and observation. Denzin and Lincoln continue that qualitative researchers are more likely to confront and come up against the constraints of everyday social world. As a result, they see the world in action and embed their findings in it.

Brannen (2005) suggests that there is another dimension too which relates to the transcendence of paradigms. Some social scientists are concerned with generating understandings of the micro level while others are concerned with the macro level. Those in the former group emphasise the agency of those they study through an emphasis upon studying subjective interpretations and perspectives. Those working at the macro level are concerned with larger scale patterns and trends and seek to pose structural explanations. However, all researchers aim to understand individuals in society. If one is to transcend conceptually the micro and the macro levels then methods must be developed to reflect this transcendence (Kelle, 2001).

Further, Brannen (2005) notes that whether those who apply paradigm rationality will apply both qualitative and quantitative methods will depend upon the extent to which they seek to produce different levels and types of explanation. However, if research paradigms are all important in shaping the choice of methods then the researcher is likely to rule out particular methods from the start and not be governed by the research process and the context as it unfolds.

Irrespective of the dogmatic positions taken in favour of either quantitative and qualitative research the issue is not primacy, rather when and how each paradigm might be useful and practical to the researcher (Bauer, Gaskell and Allum, 2000). There is a school of thought which suggests that the dichotomy way of viewing the two research traditions must be challenged and replaced by a continuum way of discussing their usage in research (Bavelas, 1995). In this way, the researcher is given the opportunity to select his/her methods within this continuum and based their

justification on a mixture of philosophical assumptions and technical/paradigmatic consideration rather than on purely theoretical and ideological arguments.

Also, most recent textbooks argue that sound methodological practice is to choose a method appropriate to the research question (Blaikie, 2000; De Vaus, 2001; Mason, 2002; Creswell, 2003). In line with this thinking, Rocco, et al. (2003) state that researchers whose worldviews reject these purist claims as extreme often find it advantageous to mix methods. Two positions developed among mixed methods advocates are: the pragmatist and the dialectical positions; and each position has different rationale for conducting mixed methods research. In this study, I adopted the pragmatist position (Patton, 1988; Reichardt and Cook, 1979; Reichardt and Rallis, 1994; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998), which calls for the use of “whatever, philosophical and/or methodological approach that will work for the particular research problem under study” (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, p. 5).

### **4.3 Mixed methods design**

In this study I adopted the mixed methods research design which is characterized as research that contains elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher and Perez-Prado, 2003; Brewer and Hunter, 1989; Patton, 1990; Reichardt and Cook, 1979). As Creswell (2005) explains mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to understand a research problem.

Another dimension of mixed methods research is the type, according to Creswell (2005) mixed methods designs most commonly used in educational research are: the

triangulation design, the explanatory design, and the exploratory design. However, Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) have developed a framework of six types of mixed methods studies and two types of more complex mixed methods models based on three discrete “stages”: type of study, type of data collection, and type of data analysis and inference (p. 55). Methods of data analysis are seen as related to research questions rather than to methods of data collection.

#### **4.3.1 Exploratory study**

Since very little investigation has been undertaken in relation to the topic; “the effects of continuous assessment on Primary 6 lower attaining pupils in basic schools in Ghana”, the study was exploratory. It was driven by five research questions relating to: (a) the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining children; (b) in-class arrangements; (c) challenges teachers face in their classroom assessments; (d) the lower attaining pupils’ experiences; and (e) perceptions about school performance. These general questions were refined into the five specific research questions stated in Section 4.2. Thus the mixed methods design was adopted for an exploratory study (Rocco et al., 2003; Crews and Alexander, 1999).

The process of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to complement the quantitative results is described by Creswell (2005) as ‘explanatory mixed methods design’. Furthermore, Creswell suggests, the design also called a ‘two-phase model’ is perhaps the most popular form of mixed methods design in educational research. In this study, the quantitative method consisted of self-completed questionnaires to a purposive sample of 107 basic education teachers (please see Glossary) across Agona and Affutu districts of the central region of

Ghana. The purpose of which was to gather teachers' views about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils.

The questionnaire was followed by the collection of qualitative data involving the use of semi-structured interviews of 12 teachers systematically selected from the cohort who answered the questionnaire. Teachers' interviews provided rich data describing their classroom assessment procedures, perceptions and individual classroom contexts. This in-depth information not only illuminated the social and educational factors affecting teachers' continuous assessment practices, but also provided further elaboration of the findings from the questionnaires.

Additionally, I purposely selected four schools for the focus groups and individual interviews of Primary 6 lower attaining pupils. This method was used to answer two different research questions and also to complement data from other sources. Furthermore, data from classroom observations of class test events, documents such as cumulative records, the continuous assessment register, report cards and exercise books were used to complement information from the interviews. From these different sources evolved a comprehensive picture of basic education teachers' continuous assessment policies and practices in relation to lower attaining children's participation in mainstream classrooms.

#### **4.3.2 Justification for using mixed methods design**

The use of mixed methods in the same research study has become common in recent time. Creswell (2003; 2005) suggests that the concept of mixing different methods probably originated as far back as 1959 when Campbell and Fiske used multiple

methods to study the validity of psychological traits. Since then, mixed methods have been used in research activities in various fields including education. In fact, Brewer and Hunter (1989) state, “it is a legitimate inquiry approach” (p. 28).

Since the beginning of the 1980s many papers have been published which argue that, even if there are differences in the philosophical assumptions, quantitative and qualitative methodologies are not mutually exclusive, and that the use of the concept of ‘paradigm’ in educational research is not appropriate in general (Hammersley, 1992; Bryman, 1988; Reichardt and Cook, 1979). According to Niglas (2004), the position of such authors is that a paradigmatic view of social and educational research is neither true empirically nor historically.

In practice, it has become feasible to combine quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study for different reasons. For example, when methods are combined in the same study there are a number of possible outcomes four of which are:

- *Corroboration*, the ‘same results’ are derived from both quantitative and qualitative methods.
- *Elaboration or expansion*, the qualitative data analysis exemplifies how the quantitative findings apply in particular cases.
- *Complementarity*, the qualitative and quantitative results differ but together they generate insights.
- *Contradiction*, where qualitative data and quantitative findings conflict (Brannen, 2005, p. 176).

However, in a review of 57 mixed methods studies, Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) identified and gave the following examples of evaluation projects that demonstrated five purposes for adopting mixed methods design strategies: triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion. Greene, Caracelli and Graham added that design that seeks to marry the two traditions are

without inherent dangers which requires one to thread cautiously when applying them in a single research endeavour.

Brannen (2005) reminds researchers that working quantitatively and qualitatively involves considerations at each phase of the research enquiry. Further, Bryman (2001) and Creswell (2005) distinguish between the ways in which qualitative and quantitative research are combined in terms of: (a) the importance given to qualitative and quantitative approaches in the research investigation, (b) the time ordering or sequencing of the approaches; and (c) compare the results from quantitative and qualitative analyses (Creswell, 2005).

However, Bryman (2001) cautions that such distinctions are not always possible in practice because they rely on being able to identify the dominance of one approach. As explain in the previous section, I collected quantitative data first; this was followed by qualitative data collection. Separate reports concerning the self-completed questionnaires, teachers and lower attaining children' interviews were made, leading to the discussion chapter. The study is one of the many possible outcomes as suggested by Brannen (2005), with characteristics of complementarity (Rocco et al., 2003).

Also, from a systematic analysis of 48 research studies Niglas (2004) reports that more than a third of them included qualitative and quantitative aspects and/or features of inquiry in different phases of the study. Further, the aims of the studies were not as fundamentally different for different types of studies as a paradigmatic view would suggest. The types of claims made by the authors of the studies using qualitative,



quantitative and mixed methodologies follow the same pattern and show no clear divide between qualitative studies and quantitative ones.

Brannen's (2005) review of current journal articles on methodology reveals strong support for using quantitative and qualitative data in the same study. Many writers have stated that, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is not only feasible and beneficial in solving puzzles but such combination can solve some problems that 'pure designs' cannot overcome (Brannen, 1992; Patton, 1990; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

Literature shows that, for example, the analyses by Niglas (2004) and Brannan (2005), it is the research problem or aims rather the philosophical position which determines the design or overall strategy of the study. Also, as Hammersley (1992), Bryman (1988), and Creswell (2003) suggest, in this study the nature and complexity of the research problem *uses of continuous assessment and focusing, in particular, the experiences of lower attaining pupils*, led to the choice of mixed methods design. I followed Creswell's (2003; 2005) suggestion that instead of methods being important, rather the problem was considered more important. I therefore used a range of methods to address the problem.

However, Gaskell and Bauer (2000) caution that "approaching a problem from two perspectives or with two methods will inevitably lead to inconsistencies and contradictions". Gaskell and Bauer suggest that some of the inconsistencies may be due to methodological limitations; however, they may also demonstrate that social phenomena look different they are approached or viewed from different angles.

As explained earlier (Section 4.2), this study has two purposes: first, to provide a more general type of information which would be acceptable to policy-makers. Second, to provide information concerning continuous assessment practices that would be useful to teachers (Husén, 1999; Hammersley, 2000). Also, since this study is indirectly about the inclusion of lower attainers in classrooms, it is guided by the notion, ‘research in inclusion is concerned with the particularities of complex interactions between practice and values in a given organisational context’ (see Clark, Dyson and Millward, 1995). They noted that whatever generalisations might be possible, they lose their validity if they could not be used to bring about transformations in particular contexts.

In line with Clark, Dyson and Millward’s (1995) suggestion, this study is broadened from practices-in-themselves to practitioners, the values they hold and any factors, which impinge upon practices and values. Since practice is set within the context of classrooms, schools and national educational systems, inquiry has to address the extent to which these factors facilitate or inhibit inclusion.

#### **4.4 Sample and sampling technique**

A target population of the study comprised all the 673 basic education (upper primary and junior secondary English and mathematics) teachers in public schools at Agona (n = 347) and Affutu (n = 326) districts in the Central Region of Ghana. They consisted of professionally qualified teachers with Teacher’s Certificate ‘A’. The teachers either taught in good schools with ‘relatively’ good facilities and materials for teaching; or deprived schools with poor facilities and inadequate materials for teaching. The schools included those for local authorities and those for missions or churches; some

schools were co-education and few were single sex schools. The pupils served by the schools in the area of the study included all the socio-economic backgrounds and fell within the age range of 6-18 years.

Further, in Ghana though some basic schools are still referred to as mission schools (Methodist, Catholic, and AME Zion) in reality, the churches are considered as overseers. The Ghana Education Service managed the schools are on behalf of the Ministry of Education. Officials from District Education Offices inspect schools in their districts. The churches play complementary roles such as, requesting for teachers, helping in inducting newly trained teachers, supporting the Government in renovating and providing school supplies.

Additionally, the language policy from 1927 to 2003 was that English language was subject of study and vernacular was used as medium of instruction at lower primary (class 1-3) but from the upper primary (class 4-JSS 3) English was used as both the medium of instruction and a subject of study. However, from 2004 the policy is that English language is used as both the medium of instruction and a subject of study throughout basic education (B1-B9; see Glossary). Since English is not the first language of Ghanaians many basic school children are not fluent English language speakers. My decision to do the study at the Central region was partly influenced by pupils' involvement. As a native speaker (Akan) I communicated effectively with the Primary 6 children in their local language who were not fluent in English.

Also, back home in Ghana I reside at Winneba, the capital of Affutu district, and Swedru, the capital of Agona district, which is only ten miles north of Winneba. The

two towns are linked by a good trunk road which facilitates movement. Practical factors such as language, proximity and accessibility had an impact on the sample.

Sampling considerations pervade all aspects of research and crop up in various forms no matter what research strategy or investigatory technique we use. Robson (2002) argues that it is unusual to be able to deal with the whole of a population in a survey, which is where sampling comes in; “a sample is a selection from the population”. Particular attention needs to be given to the selection of the ‘people sample’ in planning a survey (p. 260).

In quantitative methods, it is acceptable for researchers to use either probability or non-probability sampling (Creswell, 2005; Robson, 2002). According to Robson (2002) in non-probability samples, you cannot make statistical inferences; however, it may still be possible to say something sensible about the population from non-probability samples. Creswell (2005) suggests that it is not always possible to use probability sampling in educational research; instead a researcher can use non-probability sampling, where the researcher selects individuals because they are available, convenient, and represent some characteristic the investigator seeks to study. This study employed a non-probability sampling.

In terms of sample size, Mertens (1998) notes that in quantitative research the optimum size is directly related to the type of research being undertaken; in some cases the sample size will be determined by very practical constraints, such as how many people are participating in a programme or are in a classroom. In survey

research the researcher can use 100 observations for each major subgroup, and 20 to 50 for a minor subgroup.

In this study a purposeful sampling technique was used to select 107 teachers teaching P5 (n =33), P6 (n =33) and English (n = 21) and mathematics (n = 20) at the JSS from a target population of 673 basic education teachers from Affutu and Agona districts. Thus while the main group was above 100, the three sub-groups have at least 20 or more members. In terms of sub-groups, the sample consisted of 56 teachers at Agona and 51 at Affutu. My confidence was boosted by Oppenheim's (1962; 1999) suggestion that sampling required compromises between theoretical sampling requirements and practical limitations such as time. Oppenheim argues that a sample's *accuracy* is more important than its size.

Further, purposive sampling, according to Robson (2002) rests on the researcher's judgement as to typicality or interest. The sample is built up to enable the researcher to satisfy the specific needs of the study. Also, Mertens (1998) states that if a purposeful sampling procedure is used, the researcher needs to provide sufficient detail about the people in the study to communicate to the reader their important characteristics. In this study teachers of B5 and B6 classes, together with those teaching English and mathematics at the JSS were selected for the following reasons:

- By the basic education set up (Chapter 2) B6 is regarded as transition class to the junior secondary school (JSS); however, selection to the JSS is dependent mainly on pupils' performance in continuous assessment activities including the end of term examinations. Further, since pupils' aggregated continuous assessment contributes to external examination, teachers and in particular, B6

teachers have to ensure that pupils' records at the primary section are up-to-date before they move to the JSS. These reasons seem to suggest that this group of teachers play central role in keeping pupils' records at the primary section.

- In terms of the B5 teachers, they were involved in order to enable me to analyse and examine teachers' continuous assessment practices across the same level – upper primary but different classes (B5 & B6). This is part of school-level perspective of teachers' continuous assessment practices to help explain how teachers at different level use pupils' records.
- I further intended to establish whether primary teachers, who are generally class-teachers, have any different opinions about continuous assessment from their JSS counterparts, who on the other hand are mostly subject-teachers.

## **4.5 Procedure**

The procedure of the study provides detailed discussion about the various instruments used and how data collected were analysed. The following sections have provided detailed discussion about the range of methods used for collecting the data as well as how the data were analysed.

### **4.5.1 Instruments**

Owing to the adoption of mixed methods design for this study the following range of research instruments were employed: self-completion questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and classroom observations with documentary analysis also being used where appropriate.

#### **4.5.2 Self-completed questionnaire**

Participants completed and returned questionnaires to the researcher. The questionnaire enabled me to achieve a high response rate. It provided a relatively simple and straightforward approach to the study of teachers' perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils. The questionnaire was efficient at getting information from many people in a short time and at relatively low cost. It also allowed anonymity which encouraged frankness in responses on sensitive issues (Robson, 2002). Although, I requested teachers who wished to participate in the second stage (interviews) to put a tick in a space provided, the teachers who did not participate in the face-to-face interviews remained anonymous.

Additionally, as Hakim (1987) cited by Robson (2002) suggests, the main attraction of the sample survey (for example, self-completion questionnaire) is its *transparency (or accountability)*. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) state that highly structured, closed questions are useful in that they can generate frequencies of response amenable to statistical treatment and analysis. They also enable comparisons to be made across groups in the sample (Oppenheim, 1999).

#### **4.5.3 Questionnaire designing**

Available literature on continuous assessment did not yield a study which I could adapt or replicate. I therefore, developed an instrument for data collection. I used the aim of the study and 'tentative' research questions to formulate the purpose of the questionnaire (Mertens, 1998; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003). The aim of the study was to examine the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils in classrooms (see detail in Chapter 1). I went through the process of 'operationalizing

the questionnaire' as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) term the process. After the primary objective of the questionnaire had been specified, I considered the following concepts as the core items: class characteristics, assessment methods, pupils' role, intervention, pupils' attainments and experiences. These concepts were considered as subsidiary topics that related to the central purpose.

I then developed a number of questions for each broad concept. The factual questions were informed by literature from Ghana. However, since the focus of the study was on lower attaining pupils' participation in classrooms I used the *Index for Inclusion*, the sub-section on assessment (Booth and Ainscow, 2002) to inform the designing of items reflecting teachers' views on effects of continuous assessment. The material enabled me to link continuous assessment to the concept of inclusive practices and lower attaining pupils. The link with literature on continuous assessment from Ghana made the questionnaire meaningful for the basic schoolteachers.

In designing the self-completed questionnaire I used simple and clear language, avoided biased and leading questions, cut down on open-ended items, and made instructions consistent. These measures made the questionnaire sharp and focus for the purpose (see Oppenheim, 1966; 1999). Furthermore, guided by advice of Mertens (1998) and Robson (2002), I checked for logical sequencing, made the layout attractive and ensured that the alternative responses provided were mutually exclusive, exhaustive and accurate.



#### **4.5.4 Piloting**

After a series of discussions, the first draft of the questionnaire was pre-tested informally. I asked colleagues and friends to read the draft and provide constructive comments on the wording. The focus of that pre-test was to get feedback about individual items, whether each question was clear, simple and unambiguous (Robson, 2002).

Pilot phase 1, was undertaken with five Ghanaian students at the School of Education, University of Birmingham. They were previously basic education teachers (primary and junior secondary) who had come to England to pursue higher degrees in education. I asked for their comments on the wording, clarity, ambiguity and other related issues in addition to the responses to the items. I had feedback from four. The fifth person had left Birmingham. The comments from the students were carefully considered and the relevant aspects were used to improve the questionnaire for further piloting.

In pilot phase 2, I sought advice from two experts in Research methods at the University of Birmingham, School of Education, on the content and appearance of the questionnaire. Their suggestions were used to improve the questionnaire prior to piloting in Ghana. The pilot phase 3 involved teachers in Ghana between April and June 2003, and intended to enhance validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Fifteen copies of the questionnaire were used for piloting in Ghana. The piloting was done in two different districts in the Greater Accra and Western regions. The reason was to move away from the area that the actual study was intended for (Central region). However, since pre-service training programmes for teachers across the

country are similar the issues that were raised during the piloting helped to make the questionnaire more focus and relevant for teachers at Agona and Affutu. A Research Assistant in the Department of Special Education, University of Education at Winneba in Ghana, conducted the pilot testing on my behalf, because I was then in the UK.

After ten weeks 13 out of 15 completed questionnaires were received by post from Ghana. Following the advice of Oppenheim (1962; 1999) I prepared a detailed question-by-question report on the pilot work, which involved checking all response frequencies. Four open-ended questions were combined and three attitudinal questions reflecting views about self-esteem, belief and achievement were added to make the number four (see Appendix 4A). The report on pilot phase 3 was compiled and used for Research Module 3 Assignment titled: Using Resource/Producing Analysis.

The following key changes were made after the three piloting phases: a covering note at the front page, inclusion of contact addresses to foster correspond, bullet points to highlight the purposes of the study, and space for teachers' comments at last page. Finally, pilot phase 4, was done in the first week of March 2003. I gave copies of the questionnaire to three colleagues at my University in Ghana for their comments. A nine-page questionnaire with 31 items, five of them (19, 20, 21, 22 and 29) requiring answers on a 6-point scale was developed (Appendix 4B).

#### **4.5.5 Distribution and collection of questionnaires**

I arrived in Ghana on February 28, 2004. I used the week after arrival, March 1-5, 2004 to process the questionnaires. I personally distributed 107 copies of the

questionnaire to the teachers at their schools. I distributed 56 questionnaires at Agona in the first week and distributed 51 copies at Affutu in the following week. The second week was hectic as I combined the distribution of questionnaires at Affutu with the picking of completed questionnaires from teachers at Agona. In spite of that heavy schedule, I checked questionnaires with teachers to ensure they were filled in completely. The distribution and collection of questionnaires were completed in 9th – 31st March 2004, before schools went for the second term holidays.

By the end of the month (30th March, 2004) 95 completed questionnaires had been retrieved from teachers. On third day after re-opening of schools, 27th April 2004, I received additional three questionnaires to bring the total to 98. I achieved a recovery rate of 92%.

#### **4.5.6 Semi-structured interviews with teachers**

In terms of the semi-structured interviews, a cohort of 52 from the total of 96 teachers indicated on their questionnaires that they would be happy to participate in the second phase (interviews) of the study. I divided the 52 questionnaires into two, representing Agona and Affutu districts. Further, I divided the two groups into the three categories B5, B6, and JSS representing the levels at which the teachers were teaching. From the six sub-groups I selected six experienced teachers (more than six years in teaching) and six less experienced teachers (six years or less) for the interviews. The purpose was to examine whether teachers' background characteristics such as teaching experience and class would have any effect on their practice.

The following table (4.1) shows dates and times on which the interviews were held.

*Table 4.1 Schedule for interviews with teachers*

Date	Teacher	Time
11/05/2004	Atta-Adu JSS (F)	9.45- 10.45
11/05/2004	Justine B6 (F)	12.20-1.10
13/05/2004	John B5 (M)	9.45- 10.35
13/05/2004	Adom B6 (F)	12.20- 1.05
14/05/2004	Franco B5 (M)	9.45- 10.35
18/05/2004	Sammy JSS (M)	3.30- 4.15
19/05/2004	Emma JSS (M)	9.25- 10.15
19/05/2004	Marietta B6 (F)	2.00- 2.50
20/05/2004	Atsu JSS (M)	9.25- 10.15
20/05/2004	Anita B4-6 (F)	12.20-1.05
21/05/2004	Abass B4-6 (M)	9.25- 10.15
21/05/2004	Bell B6 (M)	3.00- 3.50

Interviews were semi-structured, with the aim being to allow teachers to shift the agenda and contribute their own line of thought whenever they wished (Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998). The aim was to obtain accurate uninhibited accounts from informants that were based on their personal experience and knowledge. Further, as Fetterman (1998) suggests, the use of semi-structured interviews also enabled me to explore further interesting dimensions that were not anticipated prior to the interviews. This view is endorsed by Kitchin (2000) who states that interviews allow teachers to ‘express and contextualise their true feelings, rather than having them pigeon-holed into boxes with little or no opportunity for contextual explanations’ (p. 43).

I used the following four main issues: background detail; views about continuous assessment policy; implementation process at school level; and in-class arrangements if any, for lower attaining pupils for the interview process (Appendix 6A). Three of the four components of the interview focused on issues relating to teachers’ continuous assessment practices and experiences of lower attaining pupils. The interviews were carried out on a one-to-one basis. All the main issues were broken

down into items and used as prompts to facilitate further exploration of teachers' responses.

#### **4.5.7 Focus groups of lower attaining pupils**

In addition to teachers' interviews, I also interviewed focus groups and individual lower attaining pupils. The focus groups consisted of children I selected and assembled to discuss and comment on aspects of continuous assessment from their personal experiences. Although focus groups are forms of group interviewing, there are differences between focus groups and group interviewing. According to Gibbs (1997) group interviewing involves interviewing a number of people at the same time, the emphasis being on questions and responses between the researcher and the participants. Focus groups on the other hand, rely on interaction within the groups based on topics that are supplied by the researcher. Further, Mertens (1998) explains that the key feature which distinguishes focus groups from group interviews is the insight and data that are produced by the interaction between participants.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that the term "focus group" was coined by Merton et al., in 1956 to apply to a situation in which the interviewer asks group members very specific questions about a topic after a considerable research has already been completed (p. 365). Kreuger (1988) defines a focus group as a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 18). In this study I adopted the focus groups after I had done the self-completion questionnaires and interviews with teachers. I also asked the lower attaining pupils specific questions concerning their feeling about class tests and general performance.

As compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional aspects of information in a shorter period of time. Focus groups interviews were particularly effective in enabling primary 6 lower attaining children who otherwise would shy away or say very little in the presence of an adult to engage in healthy discussions about their classroom experiences. Lewis (1999) explains that the focus group method provided a nurturing environment that encouraged the children's disclosures.

Furthermore, the method enabled the lower attaining children to challenge and extend each other's ideas and introduced new ideas into the discussion (Lewis, 1992). As Catterall and Maclaran (1997) point out focus groups interviews enabled me to gather valuable information about lower attaining children classroom experiences, how such children respond in situation where they are exposed to views and experiences of others.

As explained in the previous paragraph, I used focus groups in conjunction with other data collecting techniques in the study. This is acceptable in research, Fontana and Frey (2000) state that focus groups can be used in conjunction with other data collecting methods in a study. It is essentially a qualitative data collecting technique that relies upon systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in either a formal or informal setting.

Opinion varies on the optimum size of focus group; whilst some authorities suggest 8-12 (Robson, 2002); others have suggested 6-10 (MacIntosh, 1993); 15 people (Goss and Leinbach, 1996; Kreuger, 1988) or as few as four (Kitzinger, 1995). Lewis

(1992) notes that a group of around six or seven is an optimum size, though it can be smaller for younger children. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) the size of the focus group depends on the objective of the research. However, Kreuger (1988) suggests that smaller groups are preferable when the participants have a greater deal to share about the topic and have had intense or lengthy experiences with the topic of discussion. In this study the size of each focus group was five ( $n = 5$ ) and the children had a great deal to share because of lengthy experiences of lower attainments.

Also, Gibbs (1997) points out that the number of times researchers meet focus groups varies. In some studies researchers use only one meeting with each of several focus groups, others meet the same focus groups several times. In the present study I used one meeting of each of the four focus groups. In addition, I organised the interviews at a neutral location (the senior staff house at the University of Education at Winneba) for two groups because there was no convenient place at their schools. However, this is acceptable in research, according to Powell and Single (1996) and Gibbs (1997) the use of neutral locations in focus groups interviews can be helpful for avoiding either negative or positive association with a particular site or building. Following the advice of Lewis (1992) at Swedru I ensured that the teachers of the children did not interfere with the interviews. I conducted the interviews with the pupils in a classroom away from where their teachers and other children were.

Another issue worth discussing is the focus groups' characteristics. Some authorities prefer the use of heterogeneous group while others like homogeneous. As noted by Gibbs (1997), there is a debate about whether or not it is beneficial to use homogeneous or heterogeneous groups. Some authorities argue that if a group is too

heterogeneous the differences between participants can make a considerable impact on their contributions, on the other hand if the group is homogeneous diverse opinions and experiences may not be revealed.

However, Bines, Swain and Kaye (1998) state that homogeneous groups provide better forums in which pupils feel freer to participate and comment. This is endorsed by Robson (2002) who explains that the use of homogeneous groups facilitate communication, promote exchange of ideas and experiences, give a sense of safety in expressing conflicts or concern which may result in 'groupthink', that is, unquestioning similarity of position or views.

In this study, the homogenous background facilitated open discussion among the pupils. The focus group method in a way helped the children to recall common experiences in continuous assessment events which provided additional insight from the interaction of ideas among the group participants (Fontana and Frey, 2000). The data from the focus groups were both revealing and diverse as shown in Chapter 7. For example, there were diverse opinions about current performance and feelings about class tests.

In terms of duration of interactions, Gibbs (1997) suggests that focus group sessions usually last from one to two hours. However, in this study, each focus group session lasted for twenty minutes. This was partly due to the fact that, the Ghanaian basic school child by nature talks less in formal sessions or presence of adults, because of factors such as cultural beliefs, up-bringing and training. Also lower attaining children by nature talk less than children who are higher attainers. Nonetheless, I collected



invaluable information within those short sessions to address the questions that made me to include children in the study.

Furthermore, Stewart and Shamdasani (1998) point out that ‘focus group research may be one of the research tools available for obtaining data from children or from individuals who are not particularly literate’ (p. 509). The use of the focus group method was appropriate since lower attaining children by nature are less ‘literate’ (Chapter 1). In fact, during the interviews some of the pupils mostly agreed with views from their peers and where they were encouraged to elaborate they ended up repeating the views their friends had made earlier on. This was not strange Lewis (1992) has identified this as one of the difficulties in children’s interviews.

In spite of these merits, research involving focus groups has its limitations; paramount among these are: the variable impact on dominant and shy participants (Estrada and Laurence, 2002 Greenbuam, 1988), and the relative lack of researcher control compared with quantitative or one-to-one interviewing (Gibbs, 1997).

To elaborate as Greenbuam (1988) explains, a dominant group member can influence the tone of the group or inhibit comments from other participants. A dominant group member is someone who likes to talk. Greenbuam (1988) suggests using the dominant participant “as a straw man against which the researcher can play the reactions of the rest of the group” (p. 65). Asking other group members whether they agree or disagree with the dominant member and why they feel that way allows others to talk and encourages a variety of opinions. In line with this, Estrada and Laurence (2002) advise seating the dominant individual beside the facilitator to exercise some control

through the use of body language and non verbal communication. When this strategy does not work, then the use of a more frontal tactic of verbally shifting attention may be required. For example, saying: “Thank you. Are there others of you who would like to comment on the question?” (p. 18).

On the other hand, shy respondents tend to say little and speak in soft voices. Extra effort is required to get these individuals to elaborate their views and to feel that their comments are wanted and appreciated. The researcher should place shy respondents directly across the table to maximize eye contact (Estrada and Laurence, 2002). The moderator has to allow participants to talk to each other, ask questions and express doubts and opinions, while having very little control over the interaction other than generally keeping participants focused on the topic (Gibbs, 1997). However, some of these problems can be overcome through careful planning.

In order to ensure that I did not lose any of the information provided by the children, I recorded the interviews and took notes; this is acceptable practice. Robson (2002) indicates that audiotaping is generally recommended and it is good practice to have written notes made even if the session is recorded. The recording also enabled me to describe accurately what transpired during the interviews in order to eliminate biases. According to Wright, Hycox and Leedhan (1994) accurate description of information from participants is vital because it enables researchers to understand the world of the participants through their own eyes using their own frames of references.

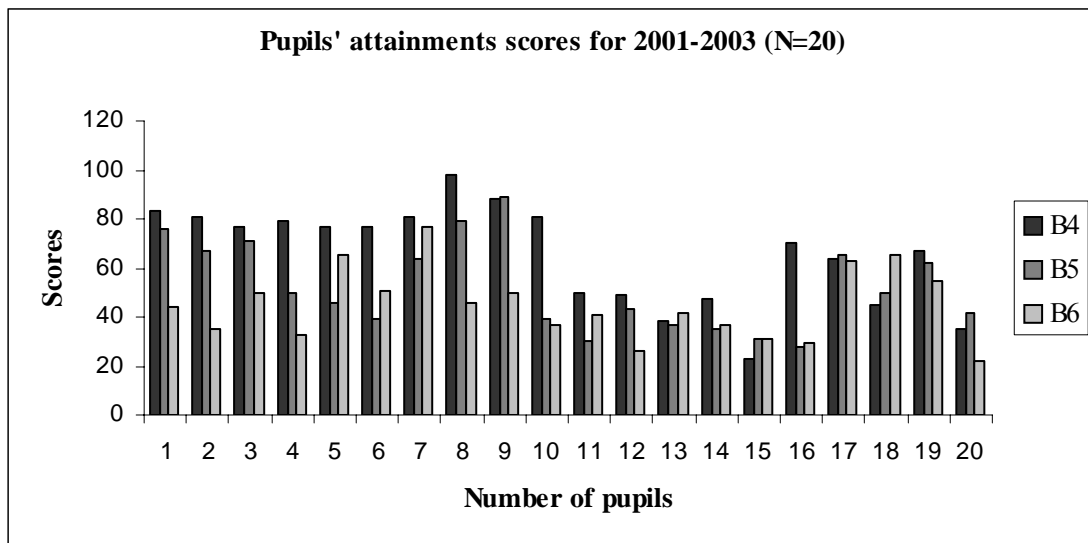
However, Gibbs (1997) states that tape recorders are prone to pick up background noises. The microphone and recorder should be set up prior to the interview and

should be visible to participants. The moderator must encourage participants to speak one at a time to avoid garbling the tape (Kreuger, 1988). Howe and Lewis (1993) suggest that members of the group need to identify themselves before they speak. Although, I used the tape recorder I also took notes during the focus groups' interviews. As Morgan (1988) suggests the pieces of advice I followed facilitated the analysis of data.

With respect to the selection of focus groups, I asked each teacher to provide a list of ten pupils who generally performed poorly in continuous assessment tasks. The following records were used to inform the decisions about the performance of the pupils: exercise books and previous records (see detail in figure 4.1). In order not to bias the sample of children, I selected the names with odd numbers from the lists that had been provided to form the focus groups. I therefore, used a systematic sampling technique as recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) to select the focus groups.

Figure 4.1 shows pupils' aggregated achievement scores in English for 2001-2003.

Figure 4.1: Lower attaining pupils' aggregated achievement scores 2001-2003



The scores comprised aggregated marks obtained by the pupils, for example, in English for the first and second terms of the respective years (B4, B5 and B6). I did not include the third term of each year because that of B6 was not ready during the fieldwork. I did not compare pupils across schools because the motive to use the records was to establish whether each pupil had improved (self-comparison), rather than compare pupils across schools.

#### 4.5.8 Participant observation

Participant observation was used together with teacher and pupil interviews to elicit what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) describe as the participants' definitions of the situations and their organizing constructs in accounting for situations and behaviours. I visited the four schools over time as a means to reducing reactivity effects. That is, the effects of my presence on teachers and pupils. As a participant observer, I took up some of the roles such as, distributing and collecting materials, supervising, engaging in conversations, and marking pupils' test papers.

Additionally, I made video recordings of some of the class test sessions to complement the observations. As explained in the section for ethical considerations, I obtained permission from the staff (head teachers and teachers) and also explained the purpose of the video recording to the pupils before the recordings were made. This decision was informed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2003) suggestion that in addition to field notes, video recordings of classroom events could be made. The benefits for using the video recording have been provided in the next section.

#### **4.5.9 Documentary analysis**

According to Creswell (2005) documents have been used for gathering information in mixed methods designs. Documents were used as complementary to other methods and fostered explanation and elaboration of results from those methods. The following documents were used: continuous assessment registers; cumulative records; report cards; lesson plans encompassing schemes of work; subject teaching syllabi for English language and Mathematics as well as pupils' exercise books. The documents provided the following information: marking, feedback system, and scores, which reflected teachers' continuous assessment practices.

Pupils' records were available with headteachers and teachers' consent, instead of parents and the children themselves. In Ghana, pupils' records are kept in schools. In principle, head teachers are regarded as custodians; they usually make decisions concerning the use of pupils' academic records on behalf of parents and guardians.

During the fieldwork I realised how invaluable these documents were to teachers. Each document was accorded its own respect as seen in the way they were handled

and/or organised. For example, owing to the delay of supplying the continuous assessment register at the beginning of the academic year, all the teachers in the two districts were given notebooks to keep records of the marks pupils got in continuous assessment activities in the previous terms. When the continuous assessment registers were received in mid May (third term of the academic year) teachers organised special sessions over a period of two weeks to have all records transferred from the notebooks into the registers, under the supervision of their head teachers. That event is indicative of Rose and Grosvenor's (2001) suggestion that documents are credible, authentic, and have meaning to the issues of interest. It also shows teachers concern about the validity and reliability of pupils' records.

Another useful source used in this study was the video material. Sessions of class tests were recorded and they were viewed from time to time to complement data from the observations. The use of the video material was to overcome any partiality that would emerge from my observations. Pupils were given prior information about the video recording as a measure to reduce reactivity. In order to vary the coverage I also used the movable rather than the fixed camera at a point. The recordings were made by a technician provided by the university I was teaching as resource for the study.

#### **4.5.10 Informal interviews**

In addition to teachers and pupils I also had informal interviews with a consultant on continuous assessment and lecturer at the University of Cape Coast, in Ghana. He wrote his doctoral thesis on continuous assessment; however the focus was on higher institutions. A second informal interview was held with another lecturer at the same

university. These informal discussions helped to shape sections on background contexts and literature from Ghana.

#### **4.5.11 Analysis of data from different methods**

Different approaches were used to analyse data collected by the different methods. In terms of the self-administered questionnaire, following the advice of Mertens (1998) I made a fresh copy of the questionnaire and coded the responses. Also, as suggested by Robson (2002), I used the following numerals to represent the options for closed items; for example, I used “1” and “2” to represent male and female. I compiled all the responses for open-ended items; put them into broad categories and coded them as for the closed items. This process made it easier to organise, quantify and analyse the data.

Further, descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the sample who responded to the questionnaire. I also used factor analysis to explore the underlying constructs of the attitudinal items that were used to investigate teachers’ perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils.

Finally, I used the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) repeated measures to compare the teachers’ perceptions about the constructs that emerged from the factor analysis and their demographic characteristics. The purpose was to see if teachers’ perceptions about the impact of continuous assessment on pupils differed according to teaching experience and year group.

With respect to the interviews of teachers, the first step involved the transcription of the entire interviews for both teachers and lower attaining pupils. This provided a complete record of the discussion and facilitated analysis of data (Lewis, 1999, 2000). All data were analysed using a constant-comparative method. This involves examination and re-examination of the data to discover the inherent themes (Thomas, Walker and Webb, 1998). Themes which appeared from first reading were refined and developed as more data emerged from review of literature. Further, suggestions from three colleagues were used to refine the themes. McCracken (1988) developed the constant-comparative method and an adaptation of his methodology for data analysis was used in this study.

It is worth noting that specific efforts were made to include the 'voice' of the pupils in the study. As stated earlier in the chapter, this is unique in Ghana because previous studies concerning basic schoolteachers' continuous assessment practices have ignored the voice of the pupils. In terms of the focus groups' interviews, the next step after transcription involved analysis of the content of the discussion in order to look for trend and patterns that would re-appear within either a single focus group or among the four focus groups. I started to compare the words used in the answers (Lewis, 1999, 2000) and comments I put down in my notes.

Further, the analysis was informed by Catterall and Maclaran's (1997) proposed approaches in analysing focus groups' data: on-screen when dealing with transcript content; and off-screen when dealing with the interaction aspects of focus groups. The on-screen analysis involves content analysis to extract themes from lower attaining children reflecting understanding of continuous assessment, performance and



feelings; while the off-screen analysis concerns the various group exchanges, showing agreements and disagreements.

In addition to that, I used the suggestions of two colleagues to refine the themes and further compare those gathered in the teachers' data (see detail at Chapter 7).

#### **4.6 Ethical issues**

Since the study used a range of methods for collecting data, a number of common ethical issues were considered at various stages of the research, such as: self-completed questionnaires, teachers' interviews and the focus groups of pupils, as well as the use of documentation. Some of the issues included; guaranteeing anonymity/confidentiality, consent, the right to participate and to withdraw, and explaining the purpose of the research study, the use of tape recorder and reporting the findings.

In relation to the self-completed questionnaires, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2003) state that 'the obligation to protect the anonymity of research participants and to keep research data confidential is all-inclusive. It should be fulfilled at all costs unless arrangements to the contrary are made with the participants in advance' (p.61). In this study, all the teachers who completed the questionnaires, except those (12 teachers) who indicated their willingness to participate in the interviews were guaranteed anonymity. The 12 teachers from the cohort who did the face-to-face interviews were assured of confidentiality.

The essence of anonymity as Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2003) explain is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identify. This was not the case for the 12 teachers that participated in the interviews, since they indicated by putting a mark in a box on their questionnaire that they were willing to do the interviews. This enabled me to follow them up at their schools for the interviews (Appendix 5A). Also, the covering page of the questionnaire provided information relating to the purpose of the study, highlighting its relevance to teachers' classroom practices. This information was designed to encourage the teachers to complete the questionnaires. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, respondents cannot be coerced into completing a questionnaire. During the distribution of the questionnaires, I told the teachers they were not under any obligation to complete the questionnaire if they felt strongly about it. I added that the decision whether to become involved and when to withdraw from the research was entirely theirs.

As explained in the previous paragraph, the 12 teachers and the pupils who participated in the focus groups could not be guaranteed anonymity; rather they were assured of confidentiality. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2003) this is the second way of protecting a participant's right to privacy. In line with this, all the names of teachers and pupils in the transcriptions from the interviews were pseudonyms (Chapters 6 & 7).

Furthermore, prior to each interview, I re-stated the purpose of the research study, assured teachers of confidentiality and told them they had the right to withdraw when they felt so. I also sought permission from each teacher to record the conversation by using a tape recorder. Additionally, as Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2003) suggest I

made the teachers aware that the research report might be accessed by many people both in Ghana and abroad. Other aspects of the ethical considerations regarding the interviews with the teachers have been outlined in Chapter 6.

In terms of interviewing children, many of the issues considered in teachers' interviews were considered in that of the pupils. However, Lewis (2002) states that concerning interviews of children the concern has revolved around six areas: access/gatekeepers, consent/assent, confidentiality/anonymity/secretcy, recognition/feedback, ownership, and social responsibility.

In terms of access/gatekeepers, I sought permission from headteachers, teachers and parents to interview the lower attaining children involved in the study. However, as Lewis and Porter (2004) point out, the consent of headteachers, teachers and parents was not taken as conclusive of the final sample. Although consent was given by these adults on behalf the children to be interviewed, there was the need for assent from the lower attaining children to either agree or disagree to participate in the study (Lewis, 2002). In order to get informed consent/assent from the children I spoke to them about the chance to participate in the study, their rights to withdraw, what I expected from them (role) and the purpose of the study (Lewis, 2002) in their native language.

Also, as Lewis (2002) suggests, these steps were taken in order to respond to four issues regarding informed consent: the children or their proxies received the information, I explained the information to enable them to understand and respond to it. However, Lewis (2002) argues that this not only shows how daunting it is to obtain informed consent but also how difficult it is in genuinely obtaining informed consent

from the children. As Lewis and Porter (2004) point out it is critically important to provide opportunities to assent or dissent from involvement. Children have the right to privacy that researchers have a moral responsibility to acknowledge.

According to Lewis and Porter (2004) the consent process has often been described as ongoing; that is, that there are series of decision points as the research process unfolds and at which participants should be given the opportunity to express their view about their continued involvement and whether they would like to opt out. This view was upheld in the process of the research.

For example, I observed each child closely to ensure that none of them was pressurised in any way as they participated in the interviews. I noted their body language, facial expressions and general attitudes before and during the interviews to ensure that every child was happy to participate and continue with the interviews. Through careful observations of the pupils I noted that pupil (girl) was poorly. I called the child and had a chat with her; she told me that she felt they were going to be tested. I spent some time to explain the purpose of the interviews and what they were going to do. After that, I inquired from her whether she wanted to participate. She declined and was excused. In that process I ensured that none of the children felt uncomfortable or threatened (Lewis, 1992) and also upheld the right of the children to participate or decline (Lewis and Porter, 2004).

I also assured all the pupils about confidentiality and explained to them that everything that was said at the interviews was to be used only for the study and nothing else. Their names would not be made public or referred to when the data were

being discussed at any time and anywhere. In line with that assurance the names I used in the analysis of the data were pseudonym.

Prior to the use of the tape recorder I sought the pupils' consent. The purpose for recording the conversations was to ensure that I retained the whole information as provided by the pupils during the interviews. In terms of ethical considerations, the recording enabled me to describe accurately what transpired during the interviews in order to eliminate biases (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2003). Other issues have been outlined in Chapter 7.

In appreciation for the information, their time and their involvement in the interviews I organised a group 'treat' for the children after the interview sessions. This is acceptable in research; Lewis (2002) suggests that the basis of this exchange is respect for the children's time and efforts.

#### **4.7 Reliability and validity issues**

Commenting on quality criteria for assessing mixed method research, Brannen (2005) suggest that universal agreement seems to have been reached that quality concepts developed for quantitative research such as generalizability, validity, reliability and replicability cannot nor ought not be applied to qualitative research (Spencer, Lewis, and Dillon, 2003). Rather, drawing upon Lincoln and Guba (1985), broadly equivalent concepts can be found that apply to qualitative research. For example,

- credibility/trustworthiness: internal validity;
- fittingness: external validity
- auditability: reliability.

However, Brannen (2005) poses the question, “in doing mixed methods research how far do we work with these separate criteria or do we develop new specific or convergent criteria for mixed method research?” Brannen suggests that the criteria are likely to depend upon the dominance of the qualitative or quantitative method and type of data analysis used within the research study. Thus if the qualitative component is dominant, then it may be more appropriate to use the criteria by which such research is judged and similarly when the quantitative component dominates, although a further consideration is how far the different results are integrated in the overall analysis.

Brannen (2005) admits that currently the solution is less obvious or satisfactory where both qualitative and quantitative components are equally significant. Bespoke or convergent criteria may be required here. As Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003b) suggest, a new nomenclature could be created; they suggest the term ‘inference quality’ as a substitute for validity/trustworthiness in order to convey the quality of the conclusions that can be drawn from a mixed methods study. In this study, I have discussed the criteria for both quantitative and qualitative research because I considered the two methods as equally significant.

Regarding the quantitative method, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) argue that it is impossible for research to be 100 per cent valid; that is the optimism of perfection. Quantitative research possesses a measure of standard error which is inbuilt and which has to be acknowledged. In quantitative data validity might be improved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical

treatments of the data. The sampling technique I used in selecting the sample and the time expended in developing the questionnaire have been outlined.

Robson (2002) points out that the validity and reliability of questionnaire data depend to a considerable extent on the technical proficiency of the researcher. In this study I also sought advice and suggestions from experts during the designing of instrument. A great deal of technical proficiency was therefore employed. Consequently, more enduring processes were adopted in designing and piloting the questionnaire as already outlined at Sections 4.5.3 & 4.5.4. Also, Robson suggests that the validity issue concerns the response rate, the higher the response rate the better. In this case the response rate was very high, 92%, as explained at Section 4.5.5. In terms of reliability, since I presented all the respondents with the same standardized questions, which had been carefully worded and piloted; it was possible to obtain high reliability of responses.

Additionally, as stated at the section for analyses of data, I used factor analysis for the main aspect of the questionnaire used to address the research question. According to Field (2005) if factor analysis is used to validate a questionnaire, it is useful to check the reliability of the scale. In practice, the simplest way to do this is to use split-half reliability. However, Field argues that, the problem with this method is that there are several ways in which a set of data can be split into two and so the result could be a product of the way the data were split. To overcome this problem, Cronbach in 1951 came up with a measure that is loosely equivalent to splitting data into two in every possible way and computing the correlation coefficient for each split. The average of these values is equivalent to Cronbach's alpha,  $\alpha$ , which is the most common measure

of scale reliability. In this study the Cronbach's alpha,  $\alpha$  was used to check the reliability of the whole scale as well as the three-factors or themes (see detail in Chapter 5).

In relation to the qualitative data, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) state that validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher. In this study, teachers' transcriptions were typed and given back to them to read through to check the content. I also checked the tapes with children, put special marks for the purpose of identification, check the translated transcription with a colleague in the Department of Ghanaian Languages, at the University of Education in Winneba, Ghana; and used notes made during the fieldwork to authenticate information. I also involved three disinterested colleagues in extracting themes from the transcription, two of whom were also involved in the pupils' transcription. I used verbatim quotations; I also adopted the constant comparative methods which involved examination and re-examination of the data to discover the inherent themes and use of information from other sources to refine the themes.

Another advantage is the use of different sources within the qualitative methods such as: teachers, lower attaining pupils, documents and observations or triangulation (Cohen and Manion, 1985), or 'gathering account' (Elliot and Adelman, 1976) of continuous assessment from four different points of view. As Denzin (1989) suggests, "by combining multiple observers, theories, methods, and data sources, researchers can hope to overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-methods, observer,



and single-theory studies” (p. 307). However, Patton (2002) clarifies the notion that the purpose of triangulation is to test for consistency rather than to achieve the same result using different data sources or inquiry approaches. Concerning inclusive practices, Clarke, Dyson and Millward (1995) suggest that the inclusion of the experiences of pupils (lower attainers) who are currently excluded, not only reflects internal consistence but also the authenticity (validity) of the voices that are heard.

I also participated in a seminar in Ghana on April 7, 2005 involving 16 academic staff of the Department of Special Education, University of Education, Winneba. The rationale of the seminar was to discuss the methodology and methods of data collection with a group of academics who were familiar with the Ghanaian educational system. I spoke for 20 minutes and spent 15 minutes answering questions. The major issue that emerged at the seminar concerned the rationale for using the mixed methods design and whether the design was adopted for the purpose of triangulation. I explained that the choice of design and the range of methods for data collection were driven by the aim of the study and the research questions. I explained that while it was possible to use questionnaire to address research question one, the other questions involved specific classroom arrangements and experiences of lower attaining which required the use of in-depth interviews, observations and documentary analysis.

I was asked whether the sampling technique would enable me to generalize the findings of the study. As explained earlier, the sampling technique was rather influenced by the aim of the study. I adopted non-probability samples, which according to Robson (2002) cannot be used to make statistical inferences. However, it

may still be possible to say something sensible about the population from non-probability samples. The ultimate purpose of this study was to provide a basis for action, methods of assessing pupils and using the information to support pupils in the classroom. While policy-makers, planners and administrators want generalizations and rules, classroom practitioners are not helped by generalizations which apply to the whole. Nonetheless, the findings are relevant for both policy-makers and classroom teachers.

Further, I was asked to explain the concept *lower attaining children* and how I sustained the interest of such children during the focus groups' interviews, since these children were normally quiet and withdrawn in the presence of adults. With respect to *lower attaining children*, I explained that the group encompasses pupils who record lower attainments in all or many school subjects as reflected in the continuous assessment records (see figure 4.1). Since the lecturers were conversant with the continuous assessment records they understood the explanation I offered.

The seminar provided a unique opportunity to talk about the research study to people who are familiar with the Ghanaian education system. The seminar was beneficial and I would recommend that the Department continued to organise such seminars to enable the staff discuss and debate issues relating to their practices.

#### **4.8 Negotiating access**

A letter from my supervisors (Appendix 8) was sent to the Director General of the Ghana Education Service about my intention to involve schools in the Agona and Affutu districts of the Central region in the study. Further, letters were sent to the two

District Directors of Education at Agona and Affutu in November 2003 asking for permission to do the study in schools in their districts. Telephone conversations were held as follow up to ensure the Directors acted on the letters. I was asked to meet them on arrival in Ghana from England (Appendix 8A). On arrival I phoned the District Directors to arrange meetings with them to explain the purpose and significance of the research study. I met the two District Directors of Education personally and they granted me permission to do the research.

Apart from verbally granting me access to the schools, the District Director of Agona was unable to write an introductory letter for me to take to the schools. This was because she was on national assignment and had to leave for Accra soon after that meeting. She however delegated her representative (officer-in of examinations) to accompany me to the schools I had selected in the sub-district and introduce me to the teachers. The officer accompanied me to the schools and introduced me to head teachers. After the introduction I explained the purpose of the study and requested a meeting with only the teachers I wanted to complete the questionnaire.

Thus apart from the Directors I also sought permission from head teachers and teachers at different stages. As Scott (1997) explains, gaining access to research settings involves far more than simply being granted permission to begin research. It is a continuous series of negotiations and re-negotiations, with different personnel at different levels within the organisation school.

Further, I also wrote to the head teachers to ask them to inform the teachers about the interviews (Appendix 8B). However, because I did not make provision for names on

the questionnaire, for the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, I sent the letter to the schools and met teachers who had volunteered to do the interviews. I then negotiated with each teacher a convenient time for the interview.

#### **4.9 My experiences in the field**

Although considerable input had gone into preparation for the fieldwork; I realised that the elaborate preparation had not been exhaustive as the following issues emerged:

- Owing to the then impending of the independence anniversary both District Directors had gone to Accra, the national capital for briefing and were away for a whole week. When they came back to the districts they had not only to brief head teachers in their districts but also travel to some communities to meet with local leaders. From their schedules it became clear it was impossible to meet them within normal office hours. However, I made arrangements to meet the Agona District Director late in the evening at her office. I also met the Affutu District Director the following day early in the morning and he asked the Assistant Directors in charge of Administration to write a letter of introduction to take to the schools (Appendix 8C).
- A teacher was unable to answer the questionnaire because she was new to the school and was also experiencing personal problems; another female teacher started her maternity leave soon after the distribution of the questionnaire and so I could not retrieve that questionnaire.
- Apart from that, there was difficulty finding suitable rooms in all the schools for interviewing teachers since there were no facilities for such purposes in the schools. Although I finally managed to find rooms for the interviews the

environments were so noisy during the break time. In fact, this affected the quality of the tape recording. However, the respondents (teachers, focus groups) were audible enough for me to type the transcriptions.

- Further, because of this problem, at Agona, I had to arrange with the schools to hold the children's interviews during the extra classes' periods. However, at Affutu, because the schools were not organising extra classes, the interviews were conducted while one of the schools was having school worship, praying and singing hymns. The other during general grounds work: weeding, sweeping and general cleaning of the compounds. Also, I had to move the pupils to the senior staff house of the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana. The head teachers gave me permission to send the pupils by taxi.
- Generally, I received maximum cooperation from the teachers but I had to spend a lot of money because when the teachers heard I was studying abroad some openly asked for gifts after they had answered the questionnaire; I also spent a lot in distributing and collecting completed questionnaires personally from teachers. The movements across 34 schools spread over the two districts were simply beyond what I had imagined.

Several studies, for example, Shaw et al. (2001) and Goetz et al. (1984) have examined the effect of monetary enticements on the quality and completeness of data. The use of an incentive was associated with greater completeness in both the open- and closed-ended items. However, incentives have little or no effect on data quality and representativeness of the sample (Scholder, McNiece, Gearan, and Casey, 2001). Church (1993) found that the inclusion of incentives increased response rates in postal surveys.

Owing to some of these unexpected difficulties in fieldwork, some writers have argued that no study is ever carried out as precisely as planned (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993). Besides, as observed by Bryman (1988) mixed methods designs adopt procedures that are time consuming, requiring extensive data collection and analyses. These difficulties notwithstanding, the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods offered “a very powerful mix” (Creswell, 2005, p. 510) which neither quantitative nor qualitative methods alone could provide.

The table (4.2) in the next page illustrates the conceptual framework adopted for the explanation of results of the research.

#### **4.10 Linking themes from the results of the study through framework for presentation, analysis and discussion of Chapter five, six and seven**

The following table (4.2) shows how basic education teachers’ continuous assessment policies and practices were conceptualised. The process features seven main themes illuminating different dimensions at which teachers’ continuous assessment policies and practices could differ, the combination of which reflects the use of continuous assessment to support lower attaining pupils’ participation in classrooms. This framework also influenced the literature review, data collection and the context for analyses, and discussion of results of the study.

*Table 4.2: The conceptual framework for presentation, analysis and discussion*

	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
<b>Main features</b>	<b>Continuous assessment approach focusing on improvement in learning.</b>	<b>Continuous assessment approach focusing on grading purpose.</b>
Approach to continuous assessment.	Flexible, teachers are ready to modify approaches to suit different abilities and needs.	Inflexible, teachers adopt the prescribed approaches and do not modify to suit needs.
Methods for gathering pupils' records.	Individual and group work for all classroom tasks.	Mainly individual work for all classroom tasks.
In-class arrangements during class tests.	Provide support to pupils found struggling in learning.	No support, focus on individual achievements.
How evidence is used (Critical view of teachers).	Priority - formative purpose: improve learning. Summative purpose is secondary.	Priority given to summative purpose: reporting, progress, and contribution to BECE.
Level of support to lower attaining pupils.	Focus on helping pupils to understand exercises and class tests.	Focused on coaching pupils to get higher marks in exercises and class tests.
Perceptions about contexts.	Adopt creative ways to circumvent some of the contextual factors.	Contextual factors are regarded as directives to follow.
Pupils' experiences.	Supported, relaxed and perceived improvement in learning.	Unsupported, always stressed and anxious about failure.

A conceptual model is a proposed set of linkages between specific variables, often along a path from input to process to outcome, with the expressed purpose of predicting or accounting for specific outcomes (Tuckman, 1994). In other words, it is a complex proposal of all the variables and their interconnections that make a particular outcome, such as supporting lower attaining pupils' participation in class.

#### **4.11 Summary of the chapter**

This methodology chapter discussed issues such as the background to the choice approach and methods, because of the use of mixed methods design I described paradigm component and perspectives, explained mixed methods research and the type adopted for this study.

In addition, I made a justification for using mixed methods, described the sample and sampling technique, procedures and instruments for data collection. Furthermore, I discussed the ethical issues, reliability and validity, negotiation of access, background data of pupils' achievement records and framework for linking themes and findings of the study.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **STUDY ONE**

### **RESEARCHING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS**

### **ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF CONTINUOUS**

### **ASSESSMENT ON LOWER ATTAINING PUPILS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides discussion of the method and findings of the self-completed questionnaires reflecting perceptions of basic schoolteachers in Ghana about the uses of continuous assessment and the experiences of pupils who record lower attainments in class. Understanding Ghanaian teachers' perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attainers was essential because studies in other countries have shown that teachers' beliefs about pupil self-confidence, morale, creativity, and work are 'closely linked to their choice of assessment techniques (Brown, 2004, p. 303).

The content of the questionnaire and the analysis of the section dealing with demographic information about teachers have been provided. Also, information on the factor analysis of the items reflecting teachers' perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils, the results of ANOVA analyses as well as the discussion of the first research question have been provided.

## Summary of findings

There are three major themes from teachers' responses with respect to uses of continuous assessment and the experiences of lower attaining pupils. These are:

- i) Participation and achievements.
- ii) Attention and confidence.
- iii) Needs identification, improvement and self-image.

There is variability in patterns of teachers' responses in relation to teaching experience or class/grade.

## 5.2 Method

A researcher-designed questionnaire derived from the literature was used as the data-gathering instrument (please see Chapter 4). Questionnaires were sent to 107 basic school teachers (primary and junior secondary) purposively selected at Agona and Affutu districts of the central region of Ghana. From the 107 questionnaires that were sent out 98 copied were returned resulting in a response rate of 92%. However, two of three questionnaires that were returned later had incomplete or missing data, they were not included in the analysis.

The questionnaire had two sections (A & B). Section 'A' contained items on demographic information about teachers. This included district, gender, school, class (grade) taught, class size, professional qualification and teaching experience. Class (grade) and teaching experiences were designed to have three categories: B5, B6 and JSS (primary 5 & 6 and junior secondary); and teaching experience - one to six years, seven to 12 years and 13 to 18 years+. The two variables, class/level taught and teaching experience, were used in the main analyses to explore teachers' response patterns. The section 'B' of the questionnaire consisted of attitudinal and factual questions on teachers' continuous assessment practices (Appendix 4B). Teachers were asked to respond to the attitudinal statements by selecting one of the six responses

ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The responses were coded in the following order: I strongly disagree (1); I disagree (2); I tend to disagree (3); I tend to agree (4); I agree (5) and I strongly agree (6) prior to analyses.

The analysis of the demographic data of the teachers has been provided in the next section.

### 5.2.1 Demographic information

The following table provides the demographic information of the teachers who participated in the survey.

*Table 5.1: Distribution of teachers according to gender*

District	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Agona	27(28%)	20(21%)	47(49%)
Affutu	22(23%)	27(28%)	49(51%)
Total	49(51%)	47(49%)	96(100%)

There was a split between male and female participants. However, a greater number of male teachers participated from Agona district than from Affutu district.

The next table highlights the distribution of teachers according to their ages.

*Table 5.2: Distribution of teachers according to age*

District	Age			Total
	20-25yr.	26-37yr.	38yr+.	
Agona	5(5%)	15(16%)	27(28%)	47(49%)
Affutu	8(8%)	17(18%)	24(25%)	49(51%)
Total	13(13%)	32(34%)	51(53%)	96(100%)

Table 5.2 shows that about one in two teachers were 38 or more years of age while about one in 10 were 20-25 years of age. However, there was a split between older

and younger teachers in the sample. The implication of this result has been discussed in the section on teaching experience (table 5.5).

The following table (5.3) highlights the distribution of teachers according to professional qualifications.

*Table 5.3: Distribution of teachers according to professional qualifications*

District	Professional Qualification		Total
	Initial training	Graduate teacher	
Agona	37 (39%)	10 (10%)	47 (49%)
Affutu	37 (39%)	12 (13%)	49 (51%)
Total	74 (77%)	22 (23%)	96 (100%)

The analysis revealed that all the teachers in the study were professionally qualified. In fact, over three in four teachers had the basic professional qualification, Teacher's Certificate 'A' and the remaining were graduate teachers. The concentration of qualified teachers in the area of the study could be attributed to the technique used in selecting the sample. It could be speculated that only qualified teachers had been recruited to teach upper primary and JSS classes in the area of the study. The profile of teachers in the area of the study was better than many districts across the country (MoEYS, 2004) as described in Chapter 2. This result is particularly significant; teachers' qualification and experience have positive impact on access and quality of provision for pupils (UNESCO, 2006), particularly lower attainers.

The next table illustrates the distribution of teachers according to the types of training in special educational needs (SEN).

*Table 5.4: Distribution of teachers according to training in SEN*

District	Types of training in SEN			Total
	Training College	University programme	No training	
Agona	32(33%)	10 (10%)	5 (5%)	47 (49%)
Affutu	36 (38%)	12 (13%)	1 (1%)	49 (51%)
Total	68 (71%)	22 (23%)	6 (6%)	96 (100%)

The majority of the teachers (94%) in the study had training in SEN, while only 6% did not have any training in SEN. About nine in 10 teachers in the sample had background training in special education. The information suggests that the majority of the teachers have fundamental knowledge about special education. However, as argued earlier (see Chapter 2), since the trend in the education of pupils with SEN in Ghana is historically segregation (Avoke, 2002; Gadagbui, 1998; MoEYS, 2004), the training of teachers in special education has emphasized the deficit, ‘medically based’, model focusing on pupils’ deficiencies rather than inclusive practices. The teachers lack innovative skills to support and enhance the participation of pupils with SEN, including those who record lower attainments in classrooms.

The following table (5.5) shows the distribution of teachers according to the number of years in teaching.

*Table 5.5: Distribution of teachers according to teaching experience*

District	Teaching experience			Total
	1-6 yr.	7-12yr.	13-18+ yr.	
Agona	7(7%)	20(21%)	20(21%)	47(49%)
Affutu	14(15%)	24(25%)	11(11%)	49(51%)
Total	21(22%)	44(46%)	31(33%)	96(100%)

The results showed that one in three teachers had taught for 13 or more years while one in five had 1-6 years experience. Thus about three in four teachers had taught for 7 or more years. The number of teachers who had taught for 1-6 years at Affutu

district outnumbered that at Agona by 2:1. There was a split between experience and less experience.

As stated earlier (table 5.2), the background data revealed a split between youth, experience and gender within the sample. As UNESCO (2006) explains, this is a healthy situation because balance between youth, experience and gender can have a positive impact on both access to education and the quality of provision. Teacher age provides a proxy for the overall ‘experience’ of the teaching force which is based on the assumption that older teachers have accrued greater years of service. An older profile reflects more experience but a younger age profile can indicate a higher level of pre-service training.

The next table (5.6) illustrates distribution of teachers according to class taught.

*Table 5.6: Distribution of teachers according to class taught*

District	Class (Level)			Total
	B5	B6	JSS	
Agona	10(10%)	12(13%)	25(26%)	47(49%)
Affutu	12(13%)	17(18%)	20(21%)	49(51%)
Total	22(23%)	29(30%)	45(47%)	96(100%)

With respect to class taught, table 5.6 shows that 47% of the teachers were JSS (junior secondary school) teachers and less than a third were primary 6 (B6) teachers. As explained earlier in chapter 4, the large number of JSS teachers was due to the inclusion of the English and mathematics teachers. The study focused on these two subjects because they were considered as the basic subjects. Further, as described in chapter 2, in Ghana primary teachers are recruited as class-teachers while their colleagues at the JSS level are recruited as subject-teachers. However, there are few primary schools where the teachers practise subject teaching.

The table 5.7 below highlights the ages of pupils handled by the participants.

*Table 5.7: Distribution of teachers according to age of pupils they were teaching*

District	Pupils' ages			Total
	10-13yr	10-14yr	Others (15yr+)	
Agona	10(10%)	31(32%)	6(6%)	47(49%)
Affutu	14(15%)	32(33%)	3(3%)	49(51%)
Total	24(25%)	63(65%)	9(9%)	96(100%)

One in four teachers taught children aged 10-13 years and less than one in 10 had children who were above 15 years of age in their classes. Thus, the majority of the children in the schools were within the statutory basic school age, 6-15 years, as described in chapter 2. It could not be established at this stage whether the few older children in the schools were there because they had repeated classes and/or enrolled late at school. The issue will be further explored in data from pupils' interviews (Chapter 7).

The following table considers the distribution of teachers with respect to class-size.

*Table 5.8: Distribution of teachers according to class size*

District	Class size			Total
	32-45	46-65	66-85+	
Agona	13 (14%)	25(26%)	9(9%)	47(49%)
Affutu	10(10%)	18(19%)	21(22%)	49(51%)
Total	23(24%)	33(45%)	30(31%)	96(100%)

The table (5.8) shows that, 45% of the teachers taught class sizes that ranged from 46-65 children and less than 25% taught classes of 32-45 children. Further, Affutu district had a greater number of schools with larger classes than Agona district. The majority of the schools in the area of the study had large classes. This was anticipated, as argued in chapter 2, the educational reforms of 1987 and free compulsory universal basic education policy (FCUBE) have resulted in steady increase in school enrolment

rates (MoE, 1996, 2000a) leading to larger classes in many parts of the country (Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo, 1999; Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002).

However, larger classes adversely impact teachers' continuous assessment practices (Amedahe, 2000; Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002). Amedahe (2000) stated that larger classes make teachers inconsistent in their marking. In two studies involving senior secondary school (SSS) and junior secondary school (JSS) teachers in Ghana, Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) and Angbing (2001) reported that the teachers identified larger classes as one of the major impediments in their continuous assessment practices. According to Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) larger classes affected the number and the variety of items teachers included in tasks for pupils' records.

Additionally, larger classes affect the quality of education that children receive (Gadagbui, 1998; MoE, 2000a). Also UNESCO (2006) pointed out that larger classes show that the teaching staff have become overstretched. The information did not consider the impact of larger classes on teachers' continuous assessment and lower attaining pupils.

The following table highlights the types of SEN identified by the teachers.

*Table 5.9: Types of SEN identified by teachers*

Type of SEN	Total (%)
Lower attaining	90 (94%)
Hearing problems (not deafness)	32 (33%)
Visual problems (not blindness)	38 (40%)
Behaviour problems	53 (55%)
Physical problems	12 (13%)
Epilepsy	5 (5%)
Health problems	33 (34%)
Communication problems	34 (35%)



From table 5.9, the majority of the teachers (94%) reported that they had lower attaining pupils in their classes. Also, lower attainment emerged as the predominant need among children in the schools in the area of the study. This information was vitally important; it established teachers' awareness about the presence of pupils with SEN and in particular, lower attainments in their classrooms. Literature, for example, Avoke and Hayford (2000) and the MoEYS (2004) reported the presence of children with SEN in mainstream classrooms; however, none of the published work included information specifically about those pupils who recorded lower attainments.

The next section provides analyses of data reflecting teachers' perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils.

### **5.3 Analysis of data**

As stated in the introduction (section 5.1), factor analysis was used to analyse teachers' responses reflecting their perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils. The aim of the analysis was to answer the following research question:

- What effect does continuous assessment have on pupils who record lower attainments in class?

#### **5.3.1 Factor analysis**

In order to address the first research question I selected the following 16 items from the attitudinal questions that I considered as relevant: 20a-20g; 21a - 21g, 22a and 22e (please see detail at Appendix 4B). I was selective because I wanted to generate

factors that were relevant to the aim of the study and would enable me to address the research question stated above.

I used factor analysis to reduce the 16 items to a more manageable set of variables before using them in the analysis of variance (Pallant, 2001). Many educational statisticians and researchers believe factor analysis can be used as an exploratory tool to help make sense of a large number of items or correlations between variables (Stevens, 1986; Robson, 2002; Field, 2005; Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). Factor analysis helps researchers to explain the underlying constructs of the variables from questionnaires.

### **5.3.2 Removal of unwanted items**

My initial inspection of the correlation matrix of the 16 items showed that items 20g and 21a had very low correlations with the other items; I therefore, eliminated them from the analysis. As pointed out by Blaikie (2003) items with very low correlations with others in a correlation matrix would eventually not find their way into any factor.

### **5.3.3 Determining the suitability of data for factor analysis**

Prior to the analysis I used the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to establish the suitability of the data for factor analysis. These measures according to educational statisticians such as Field (2005) and Pallant (2001) are used for the purpose of establishing the suitability of items for factor analysis. The KMO value was .82, which was higher than the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1974; Blaikie, 2003; Stevens, 1986) and the Bartlett's Test of

Sphericity (please see detail at Appendix 5A) reached statistical significance supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix (Stevens, 1986; Pallant, 2001).

#### **5.3.4 Extraction of factors**

The initial unrotated solution produced four factors, but the majority of the items loaded highly on factor 1 (.785 - .366) (Appendix 5C). The four factors had eigenvalues that were above one and explained a total of 63.8% of the variance. However, because some items loaded highly on more than one factor it made the interpretation of the statistics difficult, there was a need for further analysis for easy interpretation of factors. As explained in the next section, I used the orthogonal (varimax) rotation method for that purpose. Further the screen plot also revealed that I could use either two- or four –factor solution to explain the underlying constructs of the attitudinal variables from the questionnaire (Appendix 5B).

#### **5.3.5 Orthogonal (Varimax) rotation method**

I used the orthogonal or varimax rotation method to make the extracted factors more meaningful by reducing the number of items loading highly on different factors. According to Stevens (1986), the varimax rotation was designed (by Kaiser, 1960) for the purpose of ‘cleaning up’ factors. This method made the interpretation of the resulting factors easier. However, following both empirical and logical considerations I adopted a three-factor solution instead of the four. The three factors not only accounted for 51% of the total variance, but the factors were also meaningful to the study.

The following table (5.10) illustrates the factors' loading using the varimax rotation method.

*Table 5.10: Factor loading using principal components rotation*

Item	Component		
	1	2	3
Q20a	<b>.797</b>	-	-
Q20b	<b>.687</b>	-	-
Q20c	-	-	-
Q20d	<b>.695</b>	-	-
Q20e	<b>.640</b>	-	-
Q20f	-	-	<b>.567</b>
Q21b	-	<b>.682</b>	-
Q21c	-	<b>.639</b>	-
Q21d	-	-	-
Q21e	-	-	<b>.526</b>
Q21f	-	<b>.613</b>	.503
Q21g	-	<b>.771</b>	-
Q22a	<b>.589</b>	-	-
Q22d	-	-	-
Q22e	-	-	<b>.837</b>

*Key: Factor loadings less than .50 were suppressed.*

The logic behind suppressing loadings less than .5 was informed by Stevens's (1986) suggestion that this cut-off point was appropriate for interpretive purposes. That is, loadings greater than .40 represent substantial values. However because the sample for this study was less than 100 I used .525 as the cut-off point.

### **5.3.6 Forming themes from factors**

From the table (5.3.1) the three factors were composed of five, four and three items respectively. The content of the five items that loaded highly on factor 1 reflected the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils' pace of learning, participation in learning, improvement in performance, desire to learn and grades at

external examinations. The contents of the items illuminated the pupils' participation in learning and achievements in class; I termed the factor 'participation and achievements'.

The second factor consisted of items that illustrated the effects of continuous assessment on pupils' feeling about tasks, attention from teachers, experiences and belief. I termed the factor 'attention and confidence'. The third factor illuminated the use of continuous assessment for identification of learning problems for redress, improvement in learning and pupils' self-concept. I called the factor 'needs intervention, improvement and self-image'. Additionally the means and standard deviations of teachers' responses in relation to the three factors have been highlighted in next section.

### 5.3.7 Means and standard deviations of teachers regarding the three factors (Themes)

Table 5.11 shows the distribution of means and standard deviations of teachers in relation to the three themes.

*Table 5.11: Means and standard deviations (SD) of teachers' responses regarding the three themes*

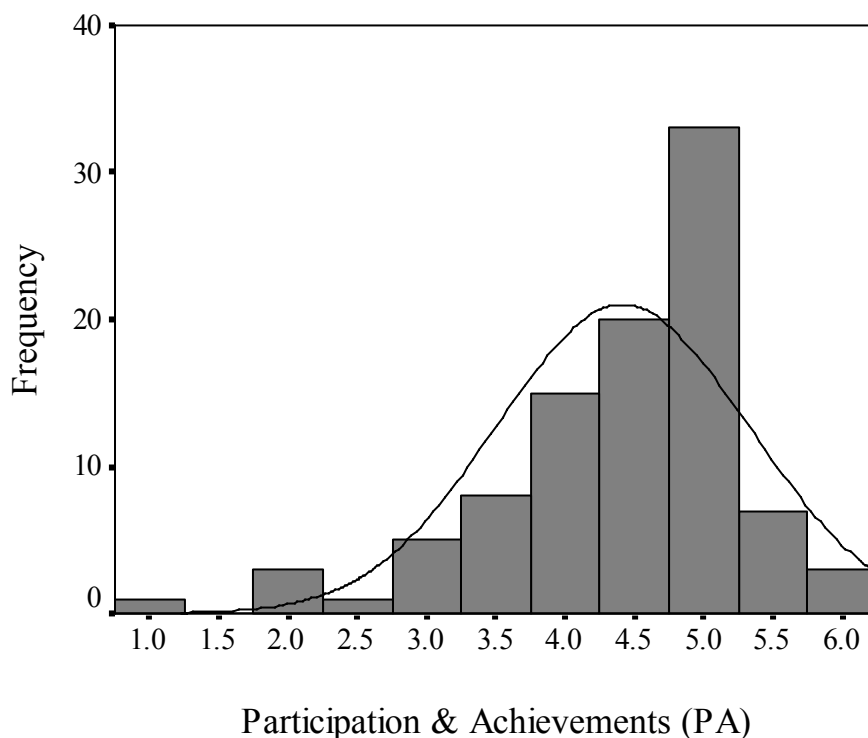
Factors (Themes)	Mean	SD	Skewness
Participation & Achievements	4.41	.91	-1.08
Motivation & Attention	4.64	.86	-1.50
Needs Intervention, Improvement & Self-image	4.54	1.02	-1.37

All the three factors were negatively skewed, which indicated that the majority of the teachers strongly felt that continuous assessment has positive effects on lower attaining pupils in relation to the three factors.

In addition, the following figures show the distributions of the mean scores of teachers' responses concerning the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils in relation to the three factors. Following the advice of Borg et al. (1991) and Blaikie (2003), each teacher's responses to the variables were reduced simply by taking the mean score across the factor to get the mean distributions of the teachers for the analysis and illustrations.

Figure 5.1 provides the distributions of the mean scores of teachers' perceptions of the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils in relation to factor1 (participation and achievements).

*Figure 5.1: Distributions of mean scores of teachers' perceptions of the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils in relation to factor 1 (N=96)*

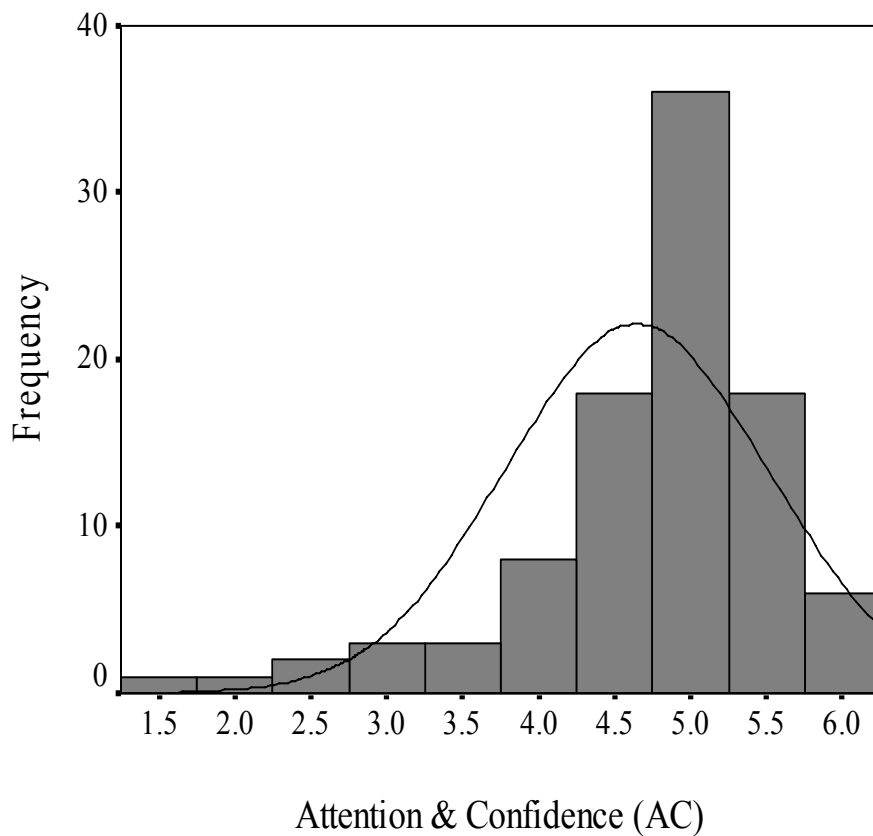


[Legend: Standard Deviation = .91; Mean = 4.41; N = 96]

The figure (5.1) shows that the teachers felt strongly that continuous assessment has positive effects on lower attaining pupils' participation and achievements in classrooms.

The next figure (5.2) highlights teachers' perceptions of the impact of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils concerning factor 2 (attention and confidence).

*Figure 5.2: Distributions of mean scores of teachers' perceptions of the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils in relation to factor 2 (N=96)*

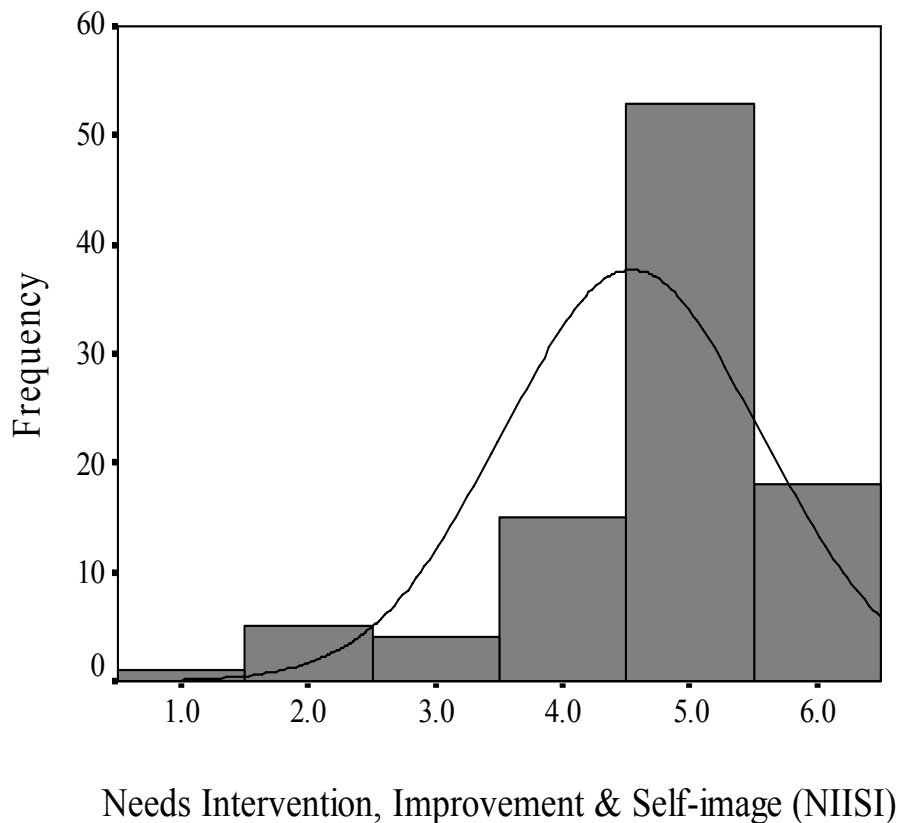


[Legend: Standard Deviation = .86; Mean = 4.64; N = 96]

The figure (5.2) shows that the teachers felt strongly that continuous assessment enabled teachers to provide attention to lower attaining pupils and enhanced their confidence in class.

The following figure (5.3) illuminates teachers' perceptions of the impact of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils regarding factor 3 (needs intervention, improvement and self-image).

Figure 5.3: Distributions of mean scores of teachers' perceptions of the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils in relation to factor 3 (N=96)



[Legend: Standard Deviation = .91; Mean = 4.41; N = 96]

Figure 5.3 shows that the teachers strongly felt that continuous assessment enhanced needs intervention, improvement in learning and self-image of lower attainers in class. Furthermore, I conducted reliability checks on the three factors (scales).

### 5.3.8 Reliability check of factors

The Cronbach's alpha reliability test on all the items in the three-factor solution and the values in *Corrected Item-Total Correlation* were higher than .3. The values were



considered high and encouraging (see Field, 2005, p. 672). Further the Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for the whole scale was .8180. Thus  $\alpha$  was above .8, as explained by Field (2005) was indicative of a good reliability. In terms of internal consistency, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values for the sub-scales were .7716, .7622 and .6257 as shown in the following table (5.12).

*Table 5.12: Tests of reliability for the three factors*

Factor	Items	Item-to-item Correlation	Alpha if item deleted	Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Participation & Achievements	Q20a	.60	.71	.77
	Q20b	.53	.74	
	Q20d	.67	.70	
	Q20e	.51	.74	
	Q22a	.44	.76	
Attention & Confidence	Q21b	.39	.72	.71
	Q21c	.48	.65	
	Q21f	.52	.63	
	Q21g	.61	.57	
Needs Intervention, Improvement & Self-image	Q20f	.43	.53	.63
	Q21e	.45	.51	
	Q22e	.43	.54	

The item-to-item correlations among the five items: Q20a, Q20b, Q20d, Q20e and Q22a were high; the range was (.6661-.4403). Thus the following constructs: 'learn at own pace', 'active participation in learning', 'improvement in performance', 'desire to learn' and 'grades at external examination' influenced one another. Logically, if teachers adopt strategies in their assessment to enable lower attaining pupils to learn at their own pace and to participate actively in learning, the pupils can improve their performance and develop desire for learning. Further, if teachers explain to lower attaining pupils that their continuous assessment will contribute 30% to the external

examination for grading, and give them the needed support to improve the pupils will understand the essence of doing the various tasks for continuous assessment.

In terms of factor two, the item-to-item correlations among the four items were high (.6133 - .3941). Again, there were positive correlations among the four variables. The logic is that if teachers provide consistent attention during learning it can encourage lower attaining pupils to work happily, experience success and develop belief in self. I named the factor as 'attention and confidence'. The alpha levels of factors one and two were 0.7, which according to educational statisticians showed that they were reliable (Field, 2005).

The third factor had an alpha level of 0.6, which was not strange because it had fewer items than the others. Nonetheless, there were high correlations among the three items, which meant the items were positively correlated. That is, there is a positive relationship between the use of assessment to identify lower attaining pupils' learning problems for redress, enhance improvement in learning and perceptions about self. Logically, when teachers use assessment to identify and address learning problems of lower attainers it can result in improvement in learning. Further, real improvements in classroom tasks will lead children to believe in own capability and develop positive self-image. This sequence of events will inevitably make lower attaining pupils feel they are important members of the class; detailed discussion has been provided in section 5.6.

Apart from this, I conducted one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to find out whether differences in gender, teaching experience and class (grade) taught had influence on the teachers' responses.

## 5.4 Results of ANOVAs

A one-way repeated measure ANOVAs were conducted to compare the three factors in relation with differences in gender, teaching experience, class taught and class size.

### 5.4.1 Gender differences

The following table shows the means and standard deviations for male and female teachers regarding their perceptions of the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils.

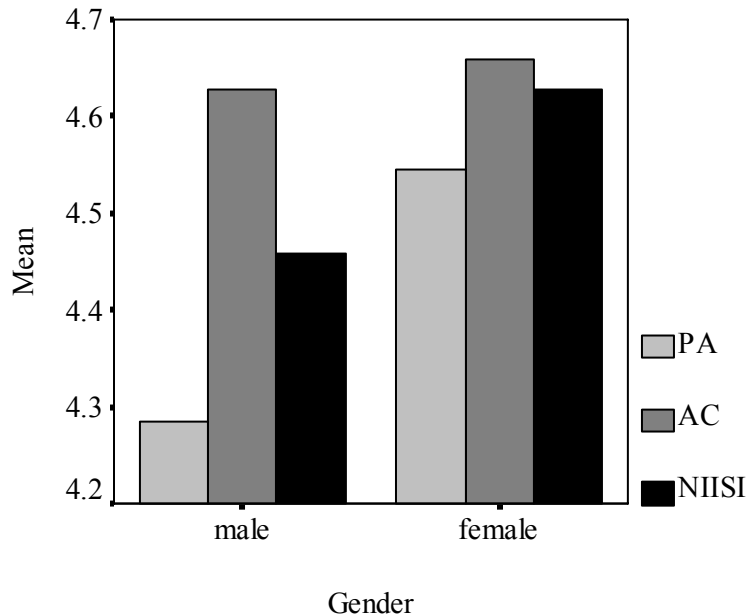
*Table 5.13: Means and standard deviations for male and female teachers*

Factor	Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
1. Participation & Achievements	Male	4.29	1.05	49
	Female	4.55	.72	47
	Total	4.41	.91	96
2. Attention & Confidence	Male	4.63	.90	49
	Female	4.66	.84	47
	Total	4.64	.86	96
3. Needs Intervention, Improvements & Self-image	Male	4.46	1.09	49
	Female	4.63	.94	47
	Total	4.54	1.02	96

More female teachers strongly agreed that continuous assessment has positive effects on lower attaining pupils than male teachers. This suggests that, the female teachers focused more on lower attaining pupils' participation and achievements, attention and confidence as well as needs intervention, improvements and self-image in their continuous assessment practices than their male colleagues did. The information seems to imply that female teachers tend to be more concerned about lower attaining pupils' participation in class than their male counterparts. However, the issue was not explored further because gender was not among teacher background characteristics selected for the discussion of results.

The following figure (5.4) illustrates the mean differences between male and female teachers in relation to the three factors.

Figure 5.4: Mean differences of teachers' perceptions according to gender



Legend: (PA) – participation and achievements; (AC) – ability and confidence; (NIISI) – needs intervention, improvements and self-image.

These differences notwithstanding the Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was non-significant,  $F(2, 188) = .590, p > .05, \eta^2 = .006$ . This implied relative stability of teachers' perceptions regardless their gender. That is, teachers' perceptions were not significantly affected by difference in gender. Following the advice of Pallant (2001) and Field (2005) I did not carry out any further analyses.

#### 5.4.2 Differences in teaching experience

The following table shows the analyses of means and standard deviations for teachers according to their teaching experiences.

*Table 5.14: Means and standard deviations for teachers' perceptions according to teaching experience*

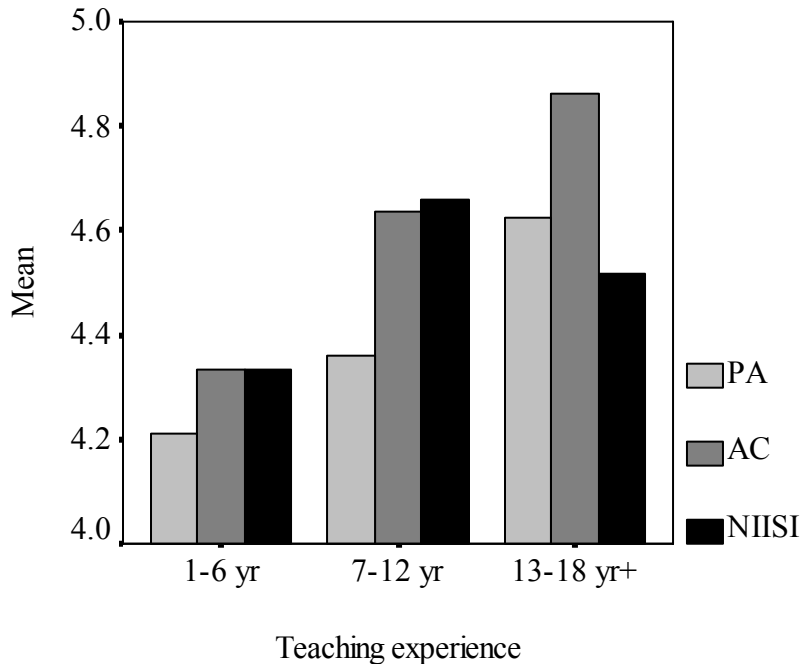
Factor	Teaching experience	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
1. Participation & Achievements	1-6years	4.21	1.15	21
	7-12years	4.36	.88	44
	13-18years+	4.63	.75	31
	Total	4.41	.91	96
2. Attention & Confidence	1-6years	4.33	1.13	21
	7-12years	4.64	.89	44
	13-18years+	4.86	.86	31
	Total	4.64	.86	96
3. Needs Intervention, Improvements & Self-image	1-6years	4.33	1.23	21
	7-12years	4.66	.86	44
	13-18years+	4.52	1.07	31
	Total	4.54	1.02	96

In terms of teaching experience, the table (5.14) shows that, the most experienced teachers (13-18 years+) showed stronger agreement with factors 1 & 2. Thus, the most experienced teachers in the sample emphasised the participation and achievements, and attention and confidence of lower attaining pupils in their continuous assessment practices more than the experienced and the less experienced teachers did. This was not strange, as argued in the introductory paragraph (Section 5.1), teachers' belief about pupils' self-confidence, morale and work are closely related to their choice of assessment techniques (Brown, 2004).

However, in terms of factor 3, the experienced teachers (7-12years) showed stronger agreement than the most experienced and less experienced teachers. Thus, experienced teachers' continuous assessment practices focused more on needs intervention, improvement, and self-image of lower attaining pupils than the most experienced and less experienced teachers did. As I stated section 5.2, I have provided further discussion of this result in section 5.5.

The following figure (5.5) illustrates the pattern of teachers' responses in relation to their experiences.

*Figure 5.5: Means differences of teachers' perceptions according to teaching experience*



Legend: (PA) – participation and achievements; (AC) – ability and confidence; (NIISI) – needs intervention, improvements and self-image. 1-6 yr: inexperienced; 7-12 yr- experienced; 13-18yr+-more experienced

The figure illustrated variations in the response patterns of the teachers. Indeed, the responses of teachers in the category of 13-18years+ teaching experience differed from those in the other two categories.

In spite of the variations the Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was non-significant,  $F(4, 186) = .969, p > .05, \text{Eta squared} = .020$ . This implied that teaching experience did not significantly influence teachers' perceptions in relation to the three factors. I did not carry out any further analyses.

### 5.4.3 Differences in class taught

The following table shows differences in the means of teachers' perceptions in relation to class taught and the three factors.

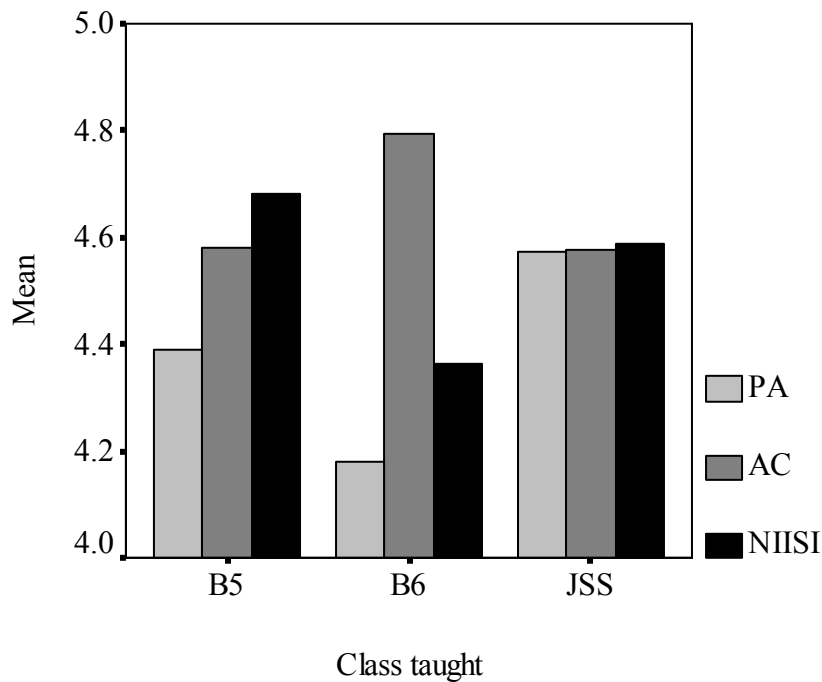
*Table 5.15: Means and standard deviations for teachers according to class taught*

Factor	Class	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
1. Participation & Achievements	B5	4.39	.67	22
	B6	4.18	1.04	29
	JSS	4.57	.91	45
	Total	4.41	.91	96
2. Attention & Confidence	B5	4.58	.86	22
	B6	4.79	.94	29
	JSS	4.58	.82	45
	Total	4.64	.86	96
3. Needs Intervention, Improvements & Self-image	B5	4.68	.85	22
	B6	4.36	1.25	29
	JSS	4.59	.93	45
	Total	4.54	1.02	96

The means showed that each category of the teachers strongly agreed with one of the three factors. For example, JSS teachers showed stronger agreement with 'participation and achievements', while B6 teachers strongly agreed with the second factor termed 'attention and confidence'. Further elaboration has been provided in the discussion section since class/level taught was one of the background characteristics I used for the discussion.

The following figure illustrates the mean differences of teachers' perceptions in respect of class taught.

Figure 5.6: Means differences of teachers' perceptions according to class taught



Legend: (PA) – participation and achievements; (AC) – attention and confidence; (NIISI) – needs intervention, improvements and self-image.

As stated in the previous paragraph, there was variability in the response patterns of teachers with respect to differences in class taught. The results revealed that teachers at different classes felt differently about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils. These findings revealed aspects of pupils' experiences teachers' continuous assessment practices affected most. For example, JSS teachers (junior secondary school) showed the strongest agreement with factor 1 (participation and achievements). This suggested that the JSS teachers' continuous assessment practices focused more on enhancing lower attaining pupils' participation and achievements than their B6 and B5 colleagues did (primary 5 and 6; see Glossary). The further interpretation of the response patterns of B6 and B5 teachers has been provided in the next section.



However, the Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was non-significant,  $F(4, 186) = 2.007$ ,  $p > .05$ , Eta squared = .041. Thus, the class taught did not affect teachers' responses.

#### 5.4.4 Differences in class size

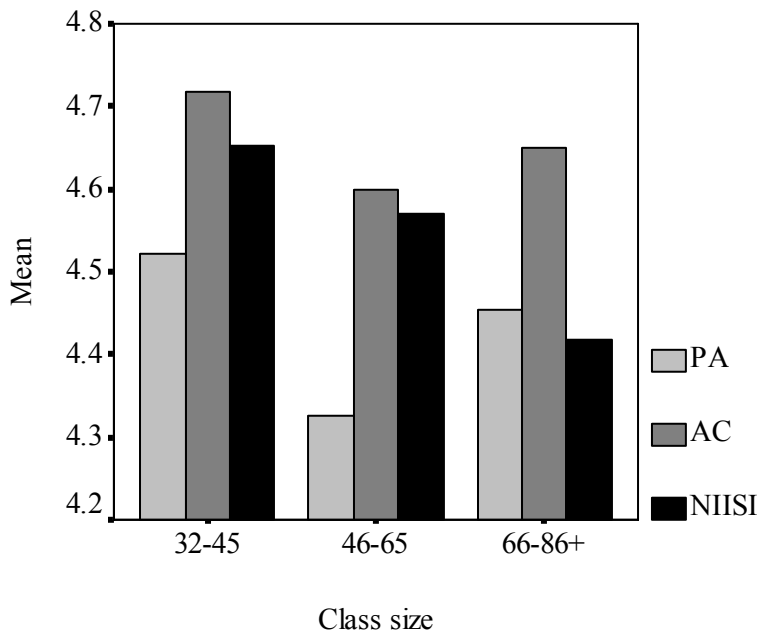
The means differences of teachers in respect to class size also revealed that those in the category of 32-45 class size showed stronger agreement with all the three factors compared with teachers of larger classes (table 5.8). This was not surprising; teachers managing large classes (32-45) were able to use their classroom assessments to foster participation and achievements, attention and confidence, needs identification, improvements and self-image of lower attaining pupils than those managing extremely large classes (46+). Arguably, the teachers who managed extremely large classes were unable to create time to work with all lower attainers in their classes.

*Table 5.16 Means and standard deviations for teachers according to class size*

Factor	Class size	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
1. Participation & Achievements	32-45	4.52	.89	23
	46-65	4.33	.95	43
	66-86+	4.45	.87	30
	Total	4.41	.91	96
2. Attention & Confidence	32-45	4.72	.83	23
	46-65	4.60	.89	43
	66-86+	4.65	.87	30
	Total	4.64	.86	96
3. Needs Intervention, Improvements & Self-image	32-45	4.65	.89	23
	46-65	4.57	1.08	43
	66-86+	4.41	1.03	30
	Total	4.54	1.02	96

The following figure illustrates the pattern of teachers' responses in relation with class size.

Figure 5.7: Means differences of teachers' perceptions according to class size



Legend: (PA) – participation and achievements; (AC) – attention and confidence; (NIISI) – needs intervention, improvements and self-image.

There was no variability in the pattern of responses of teachers in relation to class size. Again the Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was non-significant,  $F(4, 186) = .359$ ,  $p > .05$ , Eta squared = .008. Thus, teachers' responses were not affected by the size of the classes they were teaching.

#### 5.4.5 Differences in teachers' background training in SEN

The mean differences of responses in relation to teachers' training in special education have been provided in the following table.

*Table 5.17 Means and standard deviations of teachers according to background in special education*

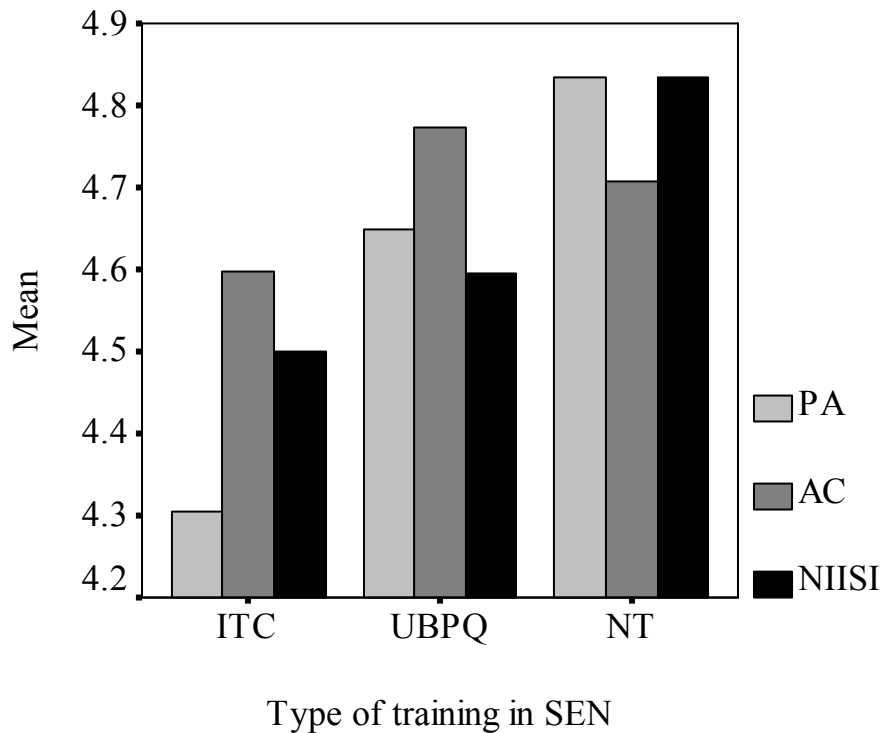
Factor	Training in special education	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
1. Participation & Achievement	ITC	4.30	.89	68
	UBQP	4.66	1.01	22
	NT	4.83	.29	6
	Total	4.41	.41	96
2. Attention & Confidence	ITC	4.60	.90	68
	UBQP	4.76	.83	22
	NT	4.71	.58	6
	Total	4.64	.86	96
3. Needs Intervention, Improvements & Self-image	ITC	4.51	.99	68
	UBQP	4.57	1.21	22
	NT	4.83	.41	6
	Total	4.54	1.02	96

Legend – ITC (initial training college); UBQP (university-based professional qualification programme); NT (no training)

Teachers who had no training in special education showed the strongest agreements with factors 1 and 3 while those who had university based training in special education showed the strongest agreement with factor 2. This meant that teachers with no training in special education used their continuous assessments to enhance lower attaining pupils' participation and achievements, as well as needs intervention, improvements and self-image, than teachers with training in SEN. Also, teachers with university-based training emphasised the provision of attention and confidence of lower attaining pupils in their continuous assessment practices than those with training in special education.

The following figure (5.8) illustrates the differences in perceptions of teachers in relation to their background in special education.

Figure 5.8: Mean difference for teachers' perceptions according to types of training in special education



Legend: (PA) – participation and achievements; (AC) – attention and confidence; (NIISI) – needs intervention, improvements and self-image. (ITC) – Initial training college; (UBQP) – university-based professional qualification; (NT) – no training

There was variability in the response pattern of teachers in relation to their background in special education. These variations notwithstanding the Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was non-significant,  $F(4, 186) = .548, p > .05$ , Eta squared = .012.

By and large the analyses indicated the relative stability of teachers' perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining children in class. Thus, not only was this study conducted with a relatively homogeneous sample but also, the views of teachers concerning the effects of their classroom assessments on lower attaining pupils were relatively similar.

## **5.5 Discussion of results**

The main purpose of this discussion was to address the first research question:

- What effects does continuous assessment have on pupils who record lower attainments in class?

As stated in section 5.2, the discussion focuses on the following two background characteristics: classification and teaching experience. While it was impossible to discuss all the background characteristics, the use of teacher's experience and the class taught can reveal vital information about basic school teachers' continuous assessment practices in Ghana. I have included brief discussion about teachers' training in special education and the presence of children with special needs in the mainstream because the two issues are linked to the aims of the research.

### **5.5.1 Knowledge in special educational needs**

The results revealed that about nine in ten teachers (94%) had knowledge in special education. However, as argued elsewhere (Chapter 2), since of the policy of education in Ghana has historically remained segregation, the training of teachers in special education emphasises the deficit, 'medically based' model focusing on pupils' deficiencies rather than inclusive practices. The Government of Ghana intends to introduce inclusive practices in 2015 (MoEYS, 2004). Consequently, training of teachers in inclusive education is yet to receive official assent. Details about the content and duration of the programmes will be explored in the next chapter. Importantly, the results have established the presence of lower attaining pupils and those with SEN in the basic schools included in the study.

### **5.5.2 Effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils**

As shown in sub-section 5.3.6, the following three factors were extracted by factor analysis: participation and achievements; attention and confidence; as well as needs intervention, improvements and self-image. The distributions of means and standard deviations (figures 5.1-5.3) showed that majority of the teachers in the study felt strongly that their continuous assessment practices have positive effects on lower attaining pupils in the classroom. This implied that the teachers were aware of the consequence of their assessments on pupils, particularly those who recorded lower attainments in classrooms. Possibly, the teachers adopted strategies to support and enhance the pupils' participation in classrooms.

Further analyses of teachers' responses using ANOVAs produced mean differences in relation to teachers' background characteristics. These statistics suggested that the priority of teachers' continuous assessment practices differed in relation to their background experience and class/grade. However, the Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was non-significant in relation to all the background factors that were explored. The implication was that the teachers were relatively homogeneous in character. This was not surprising, in Ghana teachers follow the same programme at the training colleges and their training in classroom assessments is similar (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, teachers follow the same guide (the continuous assessment plan), and headteachers and education officers monitor teachers to ensure that their classroom and assessment practices reflect the continuous assessment plan (Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo, 1999; Angbing, 2001). The concern is that, by its nature if teachers adhered strictly to the continuous assessment plan it may hinder lower attainers' participation in classrooms.

## **5.6 Fostering participation and achievements (Factor 1)**

As shown in section 5.3.6, Factor 1, titled participation and achievements (PA), consisted of the following issues: learn at own pace, participate actively in learning, improve in attainments, desire for learning, and grades at final examinations. The mean analyses of the responses showed that teachers differed in perceptions about the effect of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils' participation and achievements according to teaching experience. The results showed that although the three sub-groups of teachers in the study were positive, the most experienced teachers (13-18 years+) were more positive about the use of continuous assessment to enhance lower attaining pupils' participation and achievements. The mean of the most experienced teachers as shown in table 5.14, was 4.63 and higher than the total sample (4.41).

The finding showed that, the continuous assessment practices of the teachers irrespective of teaching experience all teachers focused on enhancing lower attaining pupils' participation and achievements. However, the very experienced teachers focused more on 'participation and achievements' than did the experienced and less experienced teachers (7-12years and 1-6years). This information implied that although the majority of the teachers used continuous assessment to help pupils to improve, the number of very experienced teachers who used their assessment to enhance the participation of pupils exceeded the other two categories.

In terms of classification or level of teaching, table 5.15 and figure 5.6 revealed that the JSS teachers had the highest mean (4.57) among the three categories of teachers - B5, B6 and JSS. Like the argument in the previous paragraph, although all the

teachers emphasised ‘participation and achievements’ of the lower attaining children in their continuous assessment practices, the JSS teachers focused more on this aspect than their B5 and B6 colleagues. This suggested that the JSS teachers were more concerned about pupils’ achievements at school. As explained in the literature review in Chapter 3, there is a relationship between school performance and performance at the final examination, Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). The JSS teachers therefore saw continuous assessment not only as contributing marks for grading pupils at that examination but also, as the actual process for preparing pupils particularly, lower attaining children for the external examination.

Basically, the JSS teachers knew that if the pupils got higher marks for their continuous assessment records that would give them head start at the BECE. On the other hand, if lower attaining pupils continually performed poorly and got low marks for their continuous assessment that would affect their progress and eventually lower their grades at the final examination. In Ghana, junior secondary schools tend to be associated more with pupils’ performance at the BECE and tend to be blamed for poor performance than primary schools. However, continuous assessment records from primary through JSS (Basic school) are added to calculate pupils’ grades at the BECE, and pupils spend more years at primary schools (6 years) than JSS (3 years).

### **5.6.1 Pace of learning**

As explained in sub-section 5.3.6, one of the five elements of the first factor is pace of learning. From the results, the majority of teachers in the study felt strongly that their continuous assessment practices enabled lower attaining children to learn at their own pace. This was understandable; teachers largely used continuous assessment to



evaluate pupils' progress in the National Curriculum (Amedahe, 2000; Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002; MoE, 1988). As Watkins (2007) noted, in countries that have clearly defined national curricula, ongoing, formative assessment is usually goal-related and linked directly to the objectives for the curriculum for all pupils. This fits with the purpose of such assessment for informing decisions about next steps in an individual pupil's learning.

As a curriculum-based assessment, continuous assessment can enable lower attainers to learn at their own pace. Curriculum-based assessment is linked to programmes of learning; they are used to inform teachers about the learning progress and difficulties of their pupils in relation to the programme of study, so that teachers make decisions about what a pupil needs to learn next and how to teach that material (Frederickson, 1992; Norwich, 1993; Tucker, 1985; Watkins, 2007).

However, unlike formative assessment, curriculum-based assessments do not provide information to pupils on how to improve, which can hamper lower attainers' improvement in classrooms. As argued in Chapter 2, in Ghana, basic schools not only follow a common National Curriculum but also teachers and pupils work towards the same goals and objectives outlined in the teaching syllabuses (MoE, 2001a; 2001b). Teachers use the syllabuses to plan their scheme of work which outlines the goals for all pupils, including lower attainers for their headteachers to vet at the beginning of the term (Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo, 1999). The tendency is that teachers may carry on with their schemes of work and ignore the needs of lower attainers in their classrooms.

However, Pollard et al. (2005) pointed out that teachers' planning and schemes of work should be flexible to accommodate pupils' needs as they progress in learning. At this stage there is insufficient information to explain how teachers ensure lower attaining pupils learn at their own pace; the issue will be explored further in the next study (Chapter 6).

In a study, Angbing (2001) reported that headteachers and sometimes circuit supervisors (district education officers) vetted lesson plans, lesson objectives, core points and evaluation procedures to ensure that teachers assessed intended learning outcomes. Additionally, headteachers occasionally checked pupils' exercise books to assess the quality of assessment activities teachers gave them. In line with this, Amedahe (2000) and Angbing (2001) explained that continuous assessment programme is organised within the criterion-referenced framework.

However, criterion-referenced assessments involve using the same criteria for all pupils because the purpose is to report achievements in a way that is comparable across pupils (Frederickson, 1992; Norwich, 1993; Tucker, 1985). There is no feedback into teaching, at least not in the same immediate way as in the assessment for learning cycle (Harlen, 2006b). This view is endorsed by Stakes and Hornby (2000) who stated that children learn at different speeds and in different ways, as a result, teachers should provide useful and enjoyable tasks rather than setting predetermined goals to be met by the end of the term.

### **5.6.2 Participation in learning**

Like the previous element, the majority of teachers, particularly very experienced and JSS teachers, strongly felt their continuous assessment practices enabled lower attaining pupils to participate actively in learning activities. As explained in the previous section, as curriculum-based assessment, continuous assessment could enable pupils to participate in learning.

However, as Black and Wiliam (2006a) explained there is the need to ‘engineer’ learning environments in order to involve pupils more actively in learning tasks. The emphasis should be on the pupils doing the thinking and making that thinking public. In their study, Black and Wiliam reported that, the teachers changed their role from presenters of content to leaders of exploration and development of ideas in which all pupils were involved. However, the early stage was ‘scary’ because teachers felt they were losing control of their class (p. 17).

Also, Pollard et al. (2005) pointed out that the degree of involvement of pupils raises the notion of ‘incorporative classroom’. Incorporative classroom is one which is consciously designed to enable each child to act as a full participant in class activities and also to feel him/herself to be valued member in the class.

In the context of inclusion, Booth and Ainscow (2002) stated that in order to increase the participation of all pupils and in particular, lower attaining children in their assessment, there should be a variety of ways of demonstrating and assessing learning that engage with differences in pupils’ characters, interests and range of their skills. For her part, Lewis (2001) noted that there is the need for flexibility of content and

approach so that assessment methods will suit pupils' learning styles, interests, and ages. Again at this stage of the study it is impossible to state whether teachers' continuous assessment processes are flexible enough to foster lower attainers' participation in learning activities. The issue will be explored in the next chapter.

### **5.6.3 Improvement in achievements**

In addition, the majority of the teachers in the study and in particular, very experienced teachers and those at the JSS, felt strongly that their continuous assessment practices enabled lower attaining pupils to improve their attainments. The continuous assessment provided relevant information about pupils' learning that teachers used to monitor progress in classrooms (Amedahe, 2000; Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002; Angbing, 2001).

For their part, Pollard et al. (2005) noted that the continuous assessment programme ensures that teachers engage more accurately and directly with the development of learners' thinking and understanding. Teachers use continuous assessment to gather evidence of their pupils' responses and adjust the learning programme to meet pupils' needs as a course of study or a lesson progresses. As a classroom/teacher assessment, the priority of continuous assessment is to improve learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998, 2006a; Phye, 1997).

However, this primary aim can be achieved if teachers' continuous assessment practices emphasise formative rather than summative functions. Indeed, studies show that teachers' assessments that enable lower attainers to improve manifest enhanced formative practices (Black, 2003; Black and Wiliam, 1998; 2006a; ARG 2002). As

the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2003) explained formative or assessment for learning involves both teachers and pupils constantly reviewing and reflecting on pupils' performance and progress in learning. In formative assessment teachers have a commitment that every pupil can improve. There is insufficient information to establish whether continuous assessment enables teachers and lower attaining pupils to engage in constantly reviewing and reflecting on pupils' progress. This will be explored in Chapter 6.

Nonetheless, as explained previously, continuous assessment could be considered as curriculum-based assessment (see Section 3.2.3). Studies in the USA have shown that curriculum-based assessment enables pupils and in particular, lower attaining children to make significant improvement in performance. In a study, Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Phillips, and Bentz, (1994) reported that, the achievement of 9 out of 10 lower attaining pupils was higher than the mean growth of their contrast treatment peers. The curriculum-based assessment was accompanied by instructional recommendations. Even in curriculum-based assessment without instruction recommendations, the researchers reported that the achievements of 4 out of 10 lower attaining pupils was higher than their contrast treatment peers.

Similar improvement was reported for average pupils in the study. In their case, the achievements of seven out of 10 average achieving pupils were higher than the mean growth of their contrast treatment peers. However, the achievements of only six out of 10 learning disabled pupils were higher than the mean growth of their contrast treatment peers.

In another study, concerning pupils' attainment in mathematics operations; Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, and Stecker, (1991) reported that tests indicated that for digits and problems, the achievements of lower attaining pupils in the curriculum based assessment with expert system instructional consultation group (CBM-ExS) were higher than the achievement of those in curriculum-based assessment without expert system instructional consultation (CBM-NExS) and the control groups. According to Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, and Stecker, the results were not uniformly related to improvement in pupils' achievement. Rather, only the combination of curriculum-based assessment and consultation to support teachers' use of sound instructional adjustments resulted in differential achievement.

#### **5.6.4 Desire for learning**

Another aspect that emerged in the factor was desire for learning. Like the previous aspects results showed that, the continuous assessment practices of majority of teachers in the study enabled lower attaining pupils to develop the desire for learning. This was not surprising, logically if lower attaining pupils learned at their own pace, participated actively in learning activities, and improved in learning, they would develop desire for learning.

As Monteith (1996) explained, in achievement contexts, self-efficacy provides the will to study. Learners who previously performed well in a certain area of content or particular task usually believe that they are capable of further learning, while those who experienced difficulties may doubt their capabilities and refrain from learning (Schunk, 1988; cited by Monteith, 1996; Brookhart and DeVoge, 1999). However, Monteith (1996) noted that knowing what, how, when and why to do something is not

enough, a person must also want to learn. The interaction between skill and will results in self-regulated learning.

Johnston (1996) also noted that the ‘will to learn’ is related to the degree to which the learner is prepared to invest effort in learning, and is that which engage their motivation to process, perform and develop as a learner over time, life-long learning.

At this stage it is difficult to substantiate teachers’ views concerning lower attaining pupils’ desire to learn. Data from the pupils’ interviews (Chapter 7) will be explored to ascertain.

#### **5.6.5 Grades at final examination**

In addition, the fifth element in the factor concerns pupils’ knowledge about the contribution of continuous assessment to external examination. The results showed that the majority of the teachers, including the most experienced and the JSS teachers had informed the lower attaining pupils that their continuous assessment would contribute to their grades in the external examination, the Basic Education Certificate examination (BECE). This is understandable; one of the main purposes of continuous assessment is the contribution to the external examination, BECE (Amedahe, 2000, 2002; Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002; MoE, 1988; 1996; 2000).

It is acceptable to inform pupils about the purpose of their assessments and some of the implications. For example, Booth and Ainscow (2002) explained that in order to increase the participation of all pupils in the mainstream pupils should be helped to

understand why they are being assessed and should honestly be made aware about the consequences of assessment.

Literature shows that, many systems of public examination consist of a mixture of continuous and terminal assessments. In England, Torrance and Pryor (2002) noted that the national assessment is carried out by a combination of externally designed and marked Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) and Teacher Assessment (TA). However, Pollard et al. (2005) stated that at the end of Key Stage 1, there are a variety of tests and tasks designed for children working at different levels. At Key Stage 2, the lowest attaining pupils are assessed through Teacher Assessment alone. The concern is that in Ghana, teachers not only use the same tasks to assess all pupils, including lower attainers but also, pupils' aggregated continuous assessment are added to final examination for the purpose of grading and certification. Furthermore, lower attaining pupils write the same examinations as other learners at the final examinations (BECE).

However, Wragg (2001) noted that where teacher assessment contributes to the final overall grades of pupils, it is much more similar in its external importance, and in a way it may be perceived as final assessment. Wolf (1996) also pointed out that the fact that teachers conduct continuous assessment does not mean it is in any sense low stakes from the pupils' point of view, or low in the stress it creates for pupils. For their part, Black and Wiliam (2006c) argued that if teachers' assessments are used outside the school, whether for progress to employment, further stages of education or for accountability purposes the stakes become higher for pupils.



## **5.7 Fostering attention and confidence (Factor 2)**

The second factor; fostering attention and confidence (AC), comprised the following four elements: teacher attention; experience success; perform tasks happily; and believe in ability. The results from table 5.15 & figure 5.6 showed that, with respect to teaching experience, the very experienced teachers had the highest mean of 4.86 while the total mean for the three sub-groups was 4.64. However, with respect to classification the results showed that, B6 teachers (primary 6) obtained the highest mean of 4.79; whilst, the total mean for all the three sub-groups was 4.64 (table 5.15).

The finding was not surprising; the very experienced teachers adopted strategies that enabled them to provide attention to lower attaining pupils in their classrooms. As explained earlier, teachers' attention inevitably brought about improvement in learning and made lower attaining pupils to feel confident in classrooms.

The results concerning classification were quite revealing. According to the results, although the majority of the teachers (B5, B6 & JSS) possibly adopted strategies to provide attention for lower attaining pupils in their classrooms leading to improvement in their confidence; the B6 teachers (Primary 6) emerged as those who emphasised this particular aspect than did their B5 and JSS colleagues.

It could be speculated that, as the transition class, B6 teachers felt it was essential to create more time to attend to the needs of the pupils in order to develop their confidence. This could be seen as part of the preparation of all pupils, particularly lower attainers for the challenges at the junior secondary level (JSS). As described in Chapter 2, though the primary and junior secondary are considered as a unit, basic

education, primary schools are administratively different from junior secondary schools. The three years at the junior secondary is normally regarded as preparation towards higher (secondary) education. Pupils do 12/13 subjects where French is offered and have subject-teachers instead of class-teachers as pertains in the primary. To an extent, pupils and in particular, lower attainers move from a ‘more caring’ environment at the primary school to a ‘less caring’ environment at the junior secondary.

Also as class-teachers, the B6 teachers were able to create more time to support and enhance lower attaining pupils’ participation in classroom activities for their records. The teachers were able to make adjustments in their school timetables, and create additional time for the lower attaining pupils in their classrooms. Attention from teachers not only enabled lower attaining pupils to improve but teachers’ attention also, enabled the pupils to develop confidence in classrooms.

### **5.7.1 Teacher attention**

As explained in the previous section the majority of the teachers in the study and in particular, very experienced and B6 teachers, probably adopted strategies that enabled them to attend to the needs of lower attaining pupils in classrooms. This was understandable, the teachers in the study understood the need to provide attention to pupils and in particular, lower attaining children in their classrooms. However, given that schools in the area of the study had larger classes it was not clear how the teachers, whether class-teachers or not, managed to provide attention for all lower attainers in their classrooms. The issue will be explored further in the subsequent

chapter, to establish whether teachers were able to attend to all lower attainers in their classrooms.

For their part, Pollard et al. (2005) have noted that all teachers wish to provide attention to all pupils in their classrooms, but there is plenty of evidence that, in the context of curriculum pressures, large class-sizes and the requirements of many assessment procedures, it is difficult for teachers to achieve. Pollard et al. (2005) argued that there are variations in both the quantity and quality of teacher attention that is given to different categories of children. West and Pennell (2003) cited by Pollard et al. (2005) suggested that there are four obvious categories around which such variations have often been found. They are: ability, gender, race and social class. It is understandable if teachers tend to deal with children whose needs press most or whose actions necessitate an immediate response.

Studies have shown that teachers adopt different strategies to create additional time to address pupils' needs. For example, in the study on culture pedagogy across five countries, Alexander (2000) reported three different patterns of teacher attention: 'planned unequal attention, planned equal attention, and random attention' that were adopted. In the first pattern, involving planned unequal attention the teacher made a deliberate decision to attend to one or two groups only during the lesson's central phase, and the remaining pupils undertook tasks which some teachers called self-monitoring (p. 366).

According to Alexander (2000) in the second variant the teachers sought to interact with each group, if not each individual, in turn. Teachers had the option of interacting

with groups as well as with individuals and the whole class; although their individual interactions took place both in the whole class setting and in one-to-one monitoring. The third pattern involving random interactive differentiation, here during the central lesson phase teachers interacted with both groups and individuals. Teachers' progress from one child or group to the next was either of a random supervisory nature or directed by whichever pupils sought their attention or by their behaviour required attention.

In the whole class context, Alexander (2000) suggested that several of the Russian and French teachers came closest to an equal distribution of time across the class, directing questions at specific pupils in turn, and in a manner which suggested that they aimed to engage most, if not all, of them in the lesson. However, Alexander reported that even here there were exceptions; one of the teachers cited in the study had additional tasks ready to support those of her children who encountered difficulties in mathematics or French and therefore, looked to be in danger of lagging behind the rest of the class. She also expected to give them extra attention in the class.

Alexander (2000) explained that teachers' attention meant more than classroom interactions. 'Equal attention' to Russian teachers, for example, meant a common school, a common curriculum, unstreamed classes, common learning tasks, common outcomes and as far as is realistic, an equitable distribution of teacher time and attention while lessons are in progress. According to the researchers if the teacher spent more time with one child than with another in a particular lesson, it was because that child deserved to achieve no less than the one who was 'better developed'. This symbolised equalizing rather than equal attention, perhaps (p. 365).

Also Alexander (2000) suggested that differentiation by time and attention are two most prominent forms of differentiation revealed in the studies. No teacher, anywhere, gave all their pupils equal time and attention, in either of the two contexts within which teachers and pupils typically interact: whole class teaching, and the monitoring of individual and groups.

Writing in the context of Europe, concerning instruction of pupils with SEN in mainstream classrooms Pijl (1995) reported that teachers' attention was one of the invaluable resources in managing children with needs in the mainstream. Teachers increased available time through the use of educational assistants. They also rearranged available resources across the pupils in the classroom. For example, they encouraged above-average pupils to work more independently, or work with computers and to help each other, so that more teaching time was left for pupils with special needs.

### **5.7.2 Experience success in learning**

In addition to the above, the results also revealed that, the most experienced teachers and B6 teachers reported that their continuous assessment practices enabled lower attaining pupils to experience success in learning. As stated in the previous section, teachers' attention inevitably enabled lower attainers to experience success in learning. The teachers have to spend more time with pupils to support them to overcome their difficulties in learning.

However, as Black and Wiliam (1998) pointed out, assessment practices in which lower attaining pupils recorded gains in attainments showed enhanced formative

assessment procedures. According to Black and Wiliam (2003) improved formative assessment helped low attainers more than the rest, and so reduced the spread of attainment raised it overall. Such assessments were associated with the following; the provision of effective feedback to pupils, the active involvement of pupils in their own learning, adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment, a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which have crucial influences on learning, and the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

The results from the questionnaires did not include information concerning possible direct links between teachers' continuous assessment practices and lower attaining pupils' experience of success in the classroom. The research question relating to the questionnaire focused on teachers' perceptions regarding the effects of continuous assessment on pupils. Data from the teachers' interviews will be explored to establish whether continuous assessment reportedly enabled lower attainers to actually experience success in classrooms.

### **5.7.3 Happy to perform learning tasks**

The results revealed that very experienced teachers and B6 teachers not only showed more concern about enhancing morale in classrooms but also, created classroom environments that enabled lower attaining pupils to perform learning tasks happily. Arguably, as teachers provided support to lower attaining pupils, the pupils were able to participate successfully in learning activities. As stated earlier (section 5.6.4), the pupils' will to learn was at the heart of the learning process (Johnston, 1996) and pupils based their self-efficacy judgment on previous experience of similar learning

activities (Brookhart and DeVoge, 1999; Monteith, 1996). In line with this, Brookhart and DeVoge, (1999) pointed out that pupils use judgemental feedback from previous work as an indication of how much efforts they need to invest their work.

However, as explained in the literature review (Chapter 3), Brookhart and DeVoge (1999) noted that pupils who are sure that they will succeed in the work may put effort into it; this, to an extent, depends on their goal orientation. That is, whether they have performance goals. Pupils who see goals as performance may apply effort, if this is how they will be judged, in order to gain approval.

#### **5.7.4 Belief**

Additionally, the majority of the teachers and in particular, very experienced teachers as well as B6 teachers felt very strongly that their continuous assessment practices enhanced lower attaining pupils' belief in their ability to learn. As stated in the previous sections, teachers' attention and support to lower attaining pupils not only enabled the pupils to experience success in learning but also enabled them to develop belief in their abilities. Studies show that pupils' previous performance, teacher feedback and communication between teacher and pupils are factors that contribute to the development of self-efficacy.

For his part, Monteith (1996) noted self-efficacy as a key variable which influenced self-regulated learning. Pupils who hold low self-efficacy for learning may avoid tasks, while those who judge themselves to be efficacious are more likely to participate. When facing difficulties, self-efficacious pupils tend to work harder and persist longer than those who doubt their capabilities.

From their study, as Brookhart and DeVoge (1999) reported pupils' self-efficacy judgements about their abilities to do particular classroom assessments were based on previous experiences with similar kinds of classroom assessments. Formative feedback was crucial to further learning; judgemental feedback influenced future learning through pupils' use of it as evidence of their capability to succeed at a particular kind of assessment. Also teachers' explicit instructions and how they presented and treated classroom assessment events affected the way pupils approached tasks.

Additionally, Duckworth, Fielding, and Shaughnessy (1986) found that pupils' feeling of efficacy and futility were functions of the level of clarity regarding tests expectations created by teachers' practices in communicating test expectations. Individual level efficacy positively correlated with effort across all ability levels and subject. Furthermore, pupils' perceptions about communication, feedback, correspondence and helpfulness of teachers were strongly related to feelings of the efficacy versus futility to study and the pupil feelings of their own effort to study. The researchers therefore, suggested that, increasing pupils' perceptions of desirable class testing practices might increase feelings of efficacy and level of effort.

In line with this, Stiggins (1999) explained that self-efficacy does not come by itself in order to promote efficacy, teachers must help pupils to honestly believe that what counts, indeed the only thing that counts, is the learning that results from the efforts expended. Pupils must perceive effort that does not produce learning as just not good enough. According to Stiggins, if pupils are to believe in themselves, then they must first experience some believable form of academic success as reflected in a real



classroom assessment. A small success can rekindle a small spark of confidence that, in turn, will encourage more trying. If that new trying brings more success, then student's academic self-concept will begin to change. Stiggins continues that;

The direction of the effect is critical. First comes academic success, and then comes confidence. "With increase confidence comes the belief that learning just might be worth a try. Students must experience success in terms of specifically focused, rigorous academic attainments, not as general often misleading, and manipulative statements, such as its good that you're trying harder" (p 7).

Black (2003) suggested that feedback that focuses on what needs to be done can encourage all pupils to believe that they can improve and thereby support their motivation to invest effort in work. Furthermore, belief is also connected to pupils' feeling in relation to the control of their learning, the locus of control (Harlen, 2006a). A sense of internal control is evident in those who recognise that their success or failure is due to factors within themselves, either their effort or ability. Pupils including lower attainers who see themselves as capable of success are prepared to invest effort to meet challenges.

### **5.8 Needs intervention, improvement and self-image (Factor 3)**

The third and final factor: needs intervention, improvements and self-image (NIISI) consisted of the following three elements; identification of learning problems for intervention, improvement in learning and self-image. It is noteworthy, to clarify the difference between improvement in learning and improvement in performance as contained in the first factor. In this context, improvement in learning concerns the way the individual learns as reflected in self-regulation (qualitative); whereas improvement in performance reflects higher achievements (quantitative).

The results revealed that, the experienced teachers (7-12 years teaching experience) were more positive about the use of continuous assessment to facilitate needs intervention, improvement and self-image of lower attaining pupils than the other categories of teachers did. The mean of this sub-group of teachers was 4.66 whilst the total was 4.54 (table 5.15). Thus, experienced teachers rather than very experienced teachers in this case were more positive about this theme. As explained in the previous paragraph, the elements within the factor included: self-regulation; and self-value or image. Whilst both self-regulation and value are not easy to achieve, conditions at basic schools in Ghana can also hinder the use of continuous assessment to identify children's learning difficulties for intervention. From their experience in teaching therefore, the very experienced teachers felt less positive about the use of continuous assessment to foster these elements than their experienced colleagues did.

In terms of classification, the results showed that B5 teachers felt very strongly that continuous assessment facilitated needs intervention, improvement in learning and self-image (Table 5.15 & Figure 5.6). The results mean that, B5 teachers were more inclined to use their continuous assessment practices to identify pupils' learning problems for intervention, enhance the way the pupils learned and their self-image than B6 and the JSS teachers did. Thus teachers in pre-transition class emphasised these aspects in their continuous assessment as part of the general preparation of primary school children for challenges at the transition class (B6) and the junior secondary.

### **5.8.1 Identification and intervention of problems**

In terms of the elements, the results showed that, the continuous assessment approach of the majority of the teachers in the study and in particular, the experienced and B5 teachers focused on identifying lower attaining pupils' learning problems for intervention. There is no doubt, marking of exercises, class tests and homework will enable teachers to identify pupils' learning problems for intervention. Amedahe (2002) explained that continuous assessment serves as a mechanism for identifying pupils' learning difficulties for intervention.

In his study, Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) reported that majority of the teachers (64%) used continuous assessment to identify students who were experiencing difficulties in their studies in order to “organise remedial instruction for such students to enable them reach the pass level” (p.102). The study involved senior secondary school teachers (SSS) and not basic schoolteachers per se. However, the findings are relevant because basic schoolteachers and SSS teachers use the same guide to organise their continuous assessments (see Chapter 3).

Pollard et al., (2005) argued that teachers must engage in critical or analytical marking in order to identify the types of problem pupils have in learning for intervention. Analytical marking takes a lot of time to accomplish; given that teachers in Ghana assess pupils in many subjects, nine and 13 at the primary and junior secondary respectively, it is doubtful if teachers have time to do critical marking. Data from the questionnaires did not include information concerning whether teachers had time to do critical marking. The issue will be explored in Chapter 6 concerning the teachers' interviews.

### **5.8.2 Improvement in learning**

The results also revealed that, experienced teachers showed more concern about lower attaining pupils' improvement in learning than most experienced teachers as well as less experienced teachers did. In terms of classification, the B5 teachers showed more concern about this aspect than their B6 and JSS colleagues did. Thus, the majority of teachers in the study and in particular, experienced and B5 teachers felt strongly about the use of continuous assessment to help lower attaining pupils to improve how they learn (self-regulation).

Writers and researchers in education assessment in other countries have argued that formative assessment has the potential to enhance self-regulation in pupils. For example, in the US, Stiggins (1999) suggested that the use of classroom assessments to build pupils' confidence in themselves as learners and to help them take responsibility for their own learning, could lay a foundation for lifelong learning.

Additionally, in the UK, Black and Wiliam (1998) argued that if teachers use their classroom assessment procedures to support learning by emphasising the formative functions it will enable all pupils and in particular, lower attainers to improve, experience success, participate actively in learning, and improve how they learn. Further, from the summary of findings of studies the Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 1999) concluded that:

The important message now confronting the educational community is that assessment which is explicitly designed to promote learning is the most powerful tool we have for both raising standards and empowering life-long learning (p. 2).

Self-regulation learning refers to the will to act in ways that will bring about learning. It refers to learners consciously controlling their attention and actions so that they are able to solve problems or carry out tasks successfully.

In a study conducted in Canada, Perry (1998) cited by Harlen (2002) reported that children in high self-regulated learning classes showed interest in their work and were motivated by their work (intrinsic motivation). For her part, Harlen (2006a) noted that self-regulated pupils select and use strategies for their learning and evaluate their success. They take responsibility for their own learning and make choices about how to improve. Those not able to regulate their own learning depend on others to tell them what to do and to judge how well they had done it.

Again, the data from the questionnaires did not include information on whether teachers' continuous assessment practices enabled lower attaining pupils to develop self-regulated learning skills. The issue would be explored further in the chapters concerning results from teachers and pupils' interviews (Chapters 6 & 7).

### **5.8.3 Self-image**

As discussed in the two previous sub-sections, experienced teachers were more positive than their very experienced and less experienced colleagues concerning the use of continuous assessment to enhance lower attaining pupils' self-image. Also in terms of classification B5 teachers emerged as being more positive than B6 and JSS teachers about the use of continuous assessment to enhance lower attaining pupils' self-image. Generally, the majority of teachers in the study felt strongly that continuous assessment enhanced lower attaining pupils' self-image.

This is important; Roberts (2002) cited by Pollard et al. (2005) pointed out that children only learned effectively if their self-esteem was positive. Teachers needed to be positive; being positive involved constantly building on pupils' success. Teachers have to offer suitable challenges and then make maximum use of the children's achievements to generate more successes.

### **5.9 Research question one**

To address the first research question:

- What effect does continuous assessment have on pupils who record lower attainments?

The results revealed that the majority of teachers in the study felt strongly that continuous assessment has positive effects on lower attaining pupils. The mean differences from the ANOVA revealed that teachers' perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils were affected by their background characteristics.

In terms of experience, the most experienced teachers showed stronger agreement with the use of continuous assessment to foster lower attaining pupils' participation and achievements (factor 1) than experienced and less experienced teachers did. Further, the most experienced teachers showed greater agreement with the use of continuous assessment to enhance attention and confidence of lower attaining pupils in classrooms (factor 2) than experienced and less experienced teachers. However, in terms of factor 3, experienced teachers (7-12 years teaching experience) showed the greatest agreement with the use of continuous assessment to enhance needs

intervention, improvement and self-image (factor 3) of lower attaining pupils in classrooms than most experienced and less experienced teachers did.

The implication of the results is that: experience in teaching is an important factor in the use of continuous assessment in supporting and enhancing lower attaining pupils' participation in classrooms. The more experienced the teacher the more confident he/she is in the use of continuous assessment to support and enhance pupils' participation and achievements as well as to provide attention for pupils and develop their confidence. However, the more experienced the teacher the less confident he/she is in the use of continuous assessment to foster needs intervention, improvement and self-image. As explained in section 5.8, this result was not strange; the very experienced teachers in the study understood the difficulty in creating additional time to attend to pupils' difficulties; developing self-regulation and self-esteem in the context of the continuous assessment at basic schools in Ghana.

With respect to classification, JSS teachers expressed stronger agreement with the use of continuous assessment to foster lower attaining pupils' participation and achievements than B6 and B5 teachers respectively. That is, JSS teachers emphasised participation and achievements of lower attaining pupils in their continuous assessment approaches. This was anticipated, the JSS section is generally regarded as preparation for the external examination (BECE). In Ghana, JSS teachers tend to have dual focus; ensuring that pupils and in particular, lower attainers get higher marks for their continuous assessment records since these marks are added to the BECE for grading, and coaching pupils to pass the examination itself.

Also, JSS teachers tend to be blamed for pupils' poor performance at the BECE; although, aggregated continuous assessment from primary to the JSS are used to contribute to the grades at the BECE. In fact, pupils' BECE results are commonly termed 'JSS results'.

In terms of factors two, B6 teachers showed the greater agreement with the use of continuous assessment to enhance attention and confidence of lower attaining pupils in classrooms. It was explained that, as transition class the teachers focused on developing the confidence of the pupils and in particular lower attainers as a way of preparing them for further and bigger challenges at the JSS and beyond.

Finally, with respect to the third factor, needs intervention, improvement and self-image, B5 teachers showed greatest agreement with the use of continuous assessment to facilitate needs intervention, improvement, and enhance self-image of lower attaining pupils in classrooms than JSS and B6 teachers respectively. This was seen as pre-transition class preparation. The bigger picture is that, pupils' preparation for life-long learning is the shared responsibility of all teachers and in particular those at the upper primary level. The data focused mainly on teachers' perceptions and did not include information regarding support for improvement.

#### **5.10 Summary of the chapter**

The chapter provided information about the self-completion questionnaire and results reflecting teachers' perceptions about the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils. Three main themes were extracted from the items that reflected perceptions of teachers concerning the uses of continuous assessment. The themes



were further analysed using ANOVAs. The findings revealed that teachers generally felt that continuous assessment enhanced lower attaining pupils' participation in class. Indeed, the results showed that, the majority of teachers felt strongly that continuous assessment enabled lower attaining to learn at their own pace, improve their performance and learning, have desire for learning and to see themselves as important members in their classes. These findings provided more general views about teachers' continuous assessment practices in relation to lower attaining pupils. The results did not provide detailed information concerning teachers' approaches, the challenges they encountered and how teachers responded to conflicts and tensions in their classroom assessments. As argued in the methodology chapter, the use of the range of data collecting methods was to enable me to get more data on classroom-level factors to get a holistic picture about individual teacher's continuous assessment practice, and in particular, the experiences of lower attaining pupils in classrooms.

The next two chapters involving in-depth interviews with teachers and lower attaining pupils will provide further insights into teachers' continuous assessment practices, individual classroom contexts and experiences of pupils. The data will complement and extend the findings in this chapter.

# CHAPTER SIX

## STUDY TWO

### RESEARCHING IN-CLASS ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUPPORTING LOWER ATTAINING PUPILS AND TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on data from semi-structured tape-recorded interviews with 12 basic schoolteachers (primary and junior secondary) from Agona and Affutu Districts in the Central region of Ghana. The aim is to address the following two research questions:

- What in-class arrangements do basic schoolteachers adopt to support and enhance lower attaining pupils' participation in classroom activities?
- What challenges do teachers face concerning supporting lower attaining pupils to participate in continuous assessment activities?

The following sub-sections provide detailed information about the procedure for conducting the interviews, the ethical issues, reliability and validity checks as well as background data of teachers. Also, the analysis and discussion of data reflecting in-class arrangements and the challenges teachers face in their continuous assessment practices concerning supporting lower attaining pupils to improve have been provided.

## Summary of findings

The findings are presented in two sections. First, the strategies for supporting lower attaining pupils to improve. These are:

- i) Planned and un-planned attention during class exercises.
- ii) Additional tuition during break time.
- iii) Extra classes.

The second section illustrates constraints imposed on teachers' continuous assessment practices and the consequence on the pupils. These include:

- i) Macro-level factors such as, curriculum and assessment policies, pre-service and in-service training programmes.
- ii) Micro-or school level factors such as, larger classes, crowded timetables.
- iii) Poor performance and repetition.

## 6.2 Methods

The methods used included semi-structured interviews of teachers organised in the third term (summer term in the UK); each interview lasted about 30 minutes. The 12 teachers were systematically selected from a cohort who stated on their questionnaires that they were willing to participate in the second phase of the study. In the interviews I sought teachers' perceptions about the continuous assessment policy, and the types of in-class arrangements they provided for lower attaining pupils during class exercises and tests. I also sought teachers' views about the challenges they faced with respect to helping lower attaining pupils to participate in class tests and exercises for their records.

### 6.2.1 Sample

The following four criteria were used in selecting the 12 teachers for the interviews: district, class taught, training in special education and the number of years in teaching (teaching experience). This was to ensure that there was a split between the number of

teachers from the two districts and teaching experience, as further explained in section 6.2.6.

### **6.2.2 Ethical issues**

In pursuance of research protocol I sent letters to the schools of selected teachers and visited to negotiate dates for the interviews with the teachers (Appendix 8D). During the visits I explained the purpose of the interviews, roles teachers would play, the right to participate and to withdraw when they wanted to (Chapter 4). All the names used in the study were pseudonyms; however, the statements were verbatim quotes from what the teachers said at the interviews.

### **6.2.3 Procedure**

I had a face-to-face interview with the 12 teachers at pre-specified times (Chapter 4). Nine of the 12 teachers were interviewed during break times at their schools and three after school hours at the Senior Staff House of the University of Education in Winneba, where I was teaching. The interviews were undertaken during break time and after school hours to ensure that the process did not interfere with the normal school work.

### **6.2.4 Respondents' reliability check**

I printed out copies of teachers' transcriptions focusing on the main issues for them to check whether the information was representative of their views. During the respondents' reliability check one teacher became concerned about her transcription and offered more explanation for being critical about continuous assessment programme. I re-assured her that the information would be treated confidentially and the identities

of participants would not be revealed at any stage (see Chapter 4). I told her that the research was to inform decisions in order to improve practice and not to victimise teachers; it was helpful for teachers to provide objective information.

### **6.2.5 Content validity and formation of themes**

All the tapes were typed verbatim into transcriptions. I involved three assistants with research training background to select salient themes from a teacher's transcript. I did not provide them with any prior information about the themes because I did not want to impose my views on them. I held discussions with them in order to arrive at a consensus. The following five broad themes were the refinement of their views as well as the examination and re-examination of the data: perceptions about continuous assessment, purpose, organisation, in-class arrangements for lower attaining learners and challenges imposed on teachers' practices (see detail at Appendix 6B).

However, since the purpose of this chapter was to address the two research questions stated in the previous section (6.1), the data reflecting in-class arrangements for lower attaining children and the challenges teachers faced in relation to enhancing lower attaining pupils' participation in classroom tasks were analysed. It was anticipated that in addressing the two research questions further insights would emerge to foster understanding of the results of the questionnaires in chapter 5. The six main findings were based on teachers' interviews and available documentation.

### **6.2.6 Demographic data of teachers**

The following table (6.1) shows the demographic data of teachers who participated in the interviews.

*Table 6.1: Distribution of teachers according to years of teaching*

Category	1-6 years	7-12 years	13-18+years	Total
Female	2	0	3	5
Male	4	1	2	7
Total	6	1	5	12

Table 6.1 shows that, there was a split between the number of less experienced ( $n \leq 6$  years) and experienced teachers ( $n \geq 7$  years). This was important because it would reveal whether teaching experience had an impact on teachers' continuous assessment approaches and how they responded to the needs of lower attaining pupils. As explained in the previous chapter (5), the split in the number of experienced and less experienced teachers was a healthy situation. Indeed, UNESCO (2006) suggested that a split between youth and experience has positive impact on both access to education and the quality of provision.

The next issue concerns the category of the teachers involved in the interviews. Table 6.2 highlights the categories of the teachers.

*Table 6.2: Distribution of teachers in relation to class taught*

Category	B4-B6	B5	B6	JSS (Eng)	JSS (math)	Total
Female	1	0	3	0	1	5
Male	1	2	1	1	2	7
Total	2	2	4	1	3	12

Legend: (Eng) English language; (math) mathematics; B4-B6 (subject-teachers)

From table 6.2, there was a split between subject-teachers and class-teachers. Two of the six subject-teachers worked at the primary school. Four of the 12 teachers were B6 class-teachers and two of the 12 were subject-teachers for B4-B6 classes. The B6

teachers were more than the other categories of teachers because the study focused more on the B6 class. As explained in the methodology chapter, B6 is the transition class in the basic education system in Ghana. Transition class in this context means a class from where pupils move to another level (higher) on the educational ladder. However, pupils do not write any external examination to progress to the JSS; pupils' continuous assessment records are used to inform decisions concerning their progression to the JSS.

Furthermore, since the JSS is separated from the primary, B6 teachers have the responsibility for ensuring that pupils' continuous assessment records are completely filled with all their scores before they are sent to the JSS. It can be suggested that B6 teachers and their headteachers work together to up-date pupils' continuous assessment records before they send records to the JSS.

The following table illustrates teachers' background training in SEN.

*Table 6.3: Distribution of teachers in relation to training in SEN*

Category	Initial Training College	University Programme	Distance learning programme	No training in SEN	Total
Female	2	1	1	1	5
Male	4	1	0	2	7
Total	6	2	1	3	12

Table 6.3 shows that, the majority (9 of the 12) of the teachers interviewed had training in SEN. As explained earlier in chapter 2, in Ghana, there are programmes in SEN at the initial training college, the regular university programmes and also through distance learning programmes for teacher-trainees. However, since aspects of

special education were introduced as introductory course in training colleges and the universities in the early nineties, teachers who qualified before the nineties did not have any training in SEN.

With respect to the content, the following statements made by two of the teachers:

*In the training college they gave us some form of education in that area (special education). How you detect pupils with problems but they didn't go into details (Harris).*

*At the training college we did not do special education we did some aspects of special education under general education courses (John).*

The pre-service programmes emphasised a deficit, 'medically based' model of special education that focused mainly on pupil's deficiencies; that is, the causes, characteristics and identification of disabilities. As argued previously (see Chapter 2), the training did not provide the teachers with innovative skills for addressing differences such as, lower attainments in classrooms. Additionally, the duration of the 'Introduction to Special Education Programme' for teacher-trainees was a semester as shown in the following statement from one of the teachers:

*I have started Distance Education programme and I learned some aspects of special education in first term/semester. However, I didn't do it at the initial training college (Justine).*

One semester course of study was inadequate to equip teachers with relevant skills for addressing needs such as lower attainments in classrooms.

The information links to the strategies the teachers adopt to help lower attaining pupils while they perform tasks for their records.



### 6.3 In-class arrangements for supporting lower attainers in classroom tasks

In terms of in-class arrangements to support lower attaining pupils during classroom tasks for their records, three teachers made the following comments:

*For the lower attainers sometimes after I had finished teaching from their reactions you could see that they did not understand some aspects of the topic so I go round and give them the necessary help... I then spend time to explain to them. Sometimes when they are writing class tests I help them to solve some of the questions because their intellectual levels are low and I do not want them to score zero (John).*

*We have ability groups, I group them and they do the same exercise but those in difficulty I call them, sit down with them and teach them until they are okay. Some are very weak and as for the weak pupils I have to advise them to work hard. I use to go to them while they are doing the exercise, when I come to your table and you are facing difficulty I help you (Adom).*

*Yes sometimes is like those who are not performing well I know them I usually pay attention to them than those who are good. Sometimes, after marking their books I arrange them according to the number of marks they had, I just encourage them to be serious. Because we are all in the same class with the same pupils so when I give them certain things I want them to do well, I encourage them to study hard (Franco).*

Three of the 12 teachers provided personal attention to the lower attaining pupils during classroom tasks for their records. The personal attention involved teacher-pupil interactions during class exercises. The statements from the three teachers revealed some differences in the patterns of interaction with the pupils in their classrooms. Table (6.4) illuminates the differences in the patterns of teacher-pupil interactions and the effects of each of the three patterns of interaction on lower attaining pupils' in classrooms.

Table 6.4: Quotes illustrating the patterns of teachers' interactions with lower attaining pupils and the effects on their participation in classroom tasks

Quote	Pattern of interactions	Effects on pupils
<i>Sometimes after I had finished teaching from their reactions you could see that they did not understand some aspects of the topic so...</i>	The teacher used unplanned teacher-pupils interactions to give help to the pupils. He randomly selected pupils to work with.	The lower attaining pupils who attracted teacher's attention got requisite help to enable them to participate in the tasks.
<i>I go round and give them the necessary help (John).</i>	Evidence of the use of one-on-one interactions.	
<i>Ability groups... those in difficulty I call them, sit down and teach them until they are okay... I use to go to them while they are doing the exercise when I come to your table (Adom).</i>	The teacher adopted pre-planned approach to work with the pupils during class exercises. She adopted both one-on-one and group approaches.  'Call them' = group approach. 'Go to them' = individual approach.	All the lower attaining pupils in the class got help from the teacher to foster their participation in classroom tasks. Also, pupils had opportunity to work with their peers with similar difficulties in learning.
<i>Those who are not performing well I know them I usually pay attention to them than those who are good... (Franco).</i>	Pre-planned approach. However, it was unclear whether the teacher used group and/or individual approaches.	Lower attaining pupils got help during class exercise; but it was unclear whether the pupils worked in groups and/or individually.

As shown in the table (6.4) the following two approaches were evident; planned teacher-pupil interaction adopted by Teacher Adom and Teacher Franco, and unplanned teacher-pupil interaction adopted by Teacher John during class exercises.

### 6.3.1 Planned interactions

The two teachers who adopted the planned interactions strategy had 'mental picture' of the lower attaining pupils they intended to work with during class exercises for their records. While pupils were engaged in the tasks the teachers spent time with those they had in mind to help. Class exercise in this context referred to routine tasks

pupils performed for their continuous assessment records. Class exercise is one of the three main strategies/activities teachers use to gather pupils' records for continuous assessment (see Chapter 3). It is important to state that both teachers did not support pupils during class tests (see detailed discussion in next section). The information however, revealed differences in the two teachers' classroom organisation. Teacher Adom put the pupils into mixed ability groups, adopted both one-on-one and group approaches to interact with the lower attaining pupils in her classroom during class exercises. The teacher sometimes worked with the pupils at their tables or called them to her table to work with them in groups.

Teacher Franco, on the other hand, did not put his class into any specific groups. It was not clear whether he used both group and individual approaches while working with the pupils (see Table 6.4). However, by allowing the more capable pupils to work on their own both teachers managed to create additional time to support lower attaining pupils during class exercises. The strategy the teachers adopted to support lower attainers in their classrooms were not strange. Literature shows that teachers use planned teacher-pupil interaction to provide attention to pupils with needs and difficulties, including lower attainments in mainstream classrooms.

In the study of cultural pedagogy across five countries Alexander (2000) reported that the teachers adopted three different patterns of attention: planned unequal attention, planned equal attention, and random attention, to help pupils with SEN in the mainstream. As explained previously (see Chapter 5), the interactions between teachers and pupils in Alexander's study were part of the central lessons and the focus was to foster pupils' participation in learning activities. Also, the study focused on

children with SEN and did not indicate whether that group included lower attaining learners.

In the present study, and Ghana, classroom tasks such as exercises and tests are used to gather summative marks to fill pupils' continuous assessment records. The focus of the tasks is to measure pupils' achievements in learning, rather than foster their participation in learning. The concern is that when teacher assessment focuses largely on gathering summative marks lower attaining pupils become disadvantaged.

### **6.3.2 Unplanned interactions**

As shown in table 6.4, Teacher John adopted an unplanned interaction procedure to support lower attaining pupils in the classroom. In this approach the teacher relied on the pupils' reactions and behaviour during the classroom activities to determine those who were experiencing difficulties in the activities. The teacher's approach reflected a random supervisory role whereby help was only offered to pupils who attracted teacher's attention. The procedure could be described as, 'first-come, first-served' method.

Nonetheless, the teacher's approach was not strange; as Broadfoot (1996) suggested apart from written work, facial expressions and gestures could provide teachers with invaluable feedback about pupils' learning for them to act upon. As discussed earlier in Chapter 5, Alexander (2000) reported that some of the teachers' progress from one child or group to the next was either of a random supervisory nature or directed by whichever pupils sought their attention or by their behaviour required attention.

In addition, the three teachers in the present research used individual and/or group interactions to support lower attaining pupils in their classrooms. This was normal practice; generally, teachers use both individual and small group approaches to address pupils' learning needs and difficulties in the mainstream (Watson, 2000; Croll and Moses, 1985).

In a study involving of 8-9 year-olds with moderate learning difficulties in the mainstream, in the UK, Croll and Moses (1985) found that group work was particularly successful. Whereas all pupils in the class benefited, those with learning difficulties did so to the greatest extent. The level of engagement increased from 46% when working alone, to over 70% in a group. Also, one of the main findings was that slow learners (lower achievers) recorded low levels of engagement when working on their own (individually).

Watson (2000) also reported that lower attaining pupils made impressive gains in reading comprehension while engaged in group work. The pupils moved on to produce their own learning materials, form a culture of learning, where 'reading, writing and thinking took place in the service of a recognised, reasonable goal-learning and helping others learn about a topic that deeply concerned them'. The researchers judged the nature and quality of the pupils' learning to be communal and joint, totally different from that obtained in an individual setting (p. 124).

Pollard et al. (2005) noted that group work provides teachers with opportunities to observe children's learning more closely and, through questioning or providing

information, to support them as they move forward to new knowledge, skills or understanding.

The information from the present study showed that the three teachers who worked with lower attaining pupils during class exercises were primary school ‘class-teachers’. This implied that primary school ‘subject-teachers’ and the JSS teachers did not adopt teacher-pupil interactions as strategy to help lower attaining pupils in their classrooms. As explained in the section concerning the challenges teachers faced, whilst the primary school ‘class-teachers’ could make adjustment to their timetable, the primary school ‘subject-teachers’ and the JSS teachers were unable to make adjustments in their timetable.

### **6.3.3 Peer-assistance and collaborative problem solving**

Apart from the above, a teacher also adopted what could be described as peer-assistance and collaborative problem solving approach. The teacher made the following statement:

*Those who are not performing well there are some boys in class who are very good so I have shared the weaker ones amongst the groups for the boys to help them. I have put the class into mixed abilities groups so those who have been performing poorly in the continuous assessment activities from time to time get assistance from the higher achievers in the groups (Justine)*

Comments such as; ‘*I have shared the weaker ones ...*’, ‘*...get help from higher achievers in the groups*’, suggested that the teacher had specifically assigned the lower attaining pupils to their more capable peers in the class. The aim of the teacher was to foster collaborative problem solving or peer-assisted learning strategy during classroom tasks for pupils’ records. The strategy enabled the teacher to assume a

supervisory role and to have more time to interact with the pupils who needed more attention in class.

It was understandable that only one of the 12 teachers in the interview adopted peer-assisted learning strategy to help the lower attaining pupils in classroom tasks. In Ghana, pupils are expected to present their work individually for their records (see Chapter 3). The teacher's strategy, which allowed the lower attaining to get help from their more capable peers, was considered effective in fostering improvement.

Studies have shown that peer assistance or collaborative problem solving is an effective approach for enabling lower attaining pupils and children with SEN to participate in learning in the mainstream. In fact, Udvari-Solner and Thousand (1995) noted that the quality of instruction from peers may be more effective than from adults (teachers) because children use more age-appropriate, meaningful language and may better understand their partner's potential frustrations. Also, pupils who teach concepts and procedures understand them at a deeper level, thus engaging in meta-cognitive activity.

In the USA, in a study of primary school pupils, Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, and Simmons (1977) reported that learning disabled, lower attaining and average achieving pupils in peer-assisted learning strategy classrooms made significantly greater progress than their counterparts in non-peer-assisted learning strategy classrooms across three reading measures- partner reading with retell, paragraph summary and prediction relay. According to Fuchs et al., the teachers reported that peer-assisted learning strategy positively affected the learning disabled, lower attaining and average achieving pupils'

reading achievement and social skills. Also, the teachers reported that the approach benefited learning disabled and lower performing children more than average achieving pupils. All the pupils involved in the peer-assisted learning strategy project expressed a belief that the treatment had helped them to become better readers.

Further, Stevens and Slavin (1995b) reported that collaboration or cooperative integrated reading and composition (CIRC) enabled 'academically handicapped' students to attain significantly better achievement on reading vocabulary and reading comprehension. Stevens and Slavin added that CIRC enabled mainstreamed 'academically handicapped' pupils and lower attaining pupils to improve academically and socially (op. cit).

Also, Salisbury, Evans, and Palombaro (1997) reported that collaborative problem solving (CPS) encouraged physical, social and instructional inclusion of pupils with disabilities in the classroom. Collaborative problem solving enabled the pupils to develop concern for others, accept and value diversity. They were empowered to create change, worked with others to solve problems, developed meaningful ways to include everyone, fostered understanding and friendship. Further, the pupils used creative thinking, advocacy, perspective talking and communications skills to change classroom routines.

#### **6.3.4 Additional tuition and extra classes**

In addition to teacher attention and peer assistance, another strategy that emerged was additional tuition. One of the 12 teachers reported that he organised additional tuition during break time for the lower attaining pupils in his classroom. The teacher made the following statement:



*Sometimes I call them during break or after classes and ask them what their problem was? May be they didn't understand or they just made mistake. I discuss the topic with them again. I don't organise extra classes. I don't know if I'll be allowed to organise extra classes, but if anything I know the head should organise it...I am going to sell, I am hungry (Bell).*

The teacher's comment, '*sometimes I call them during break...*' showed that he was unable support lower attaining pupils whilst they performed class exercises. The timing of the teacher's help was problematic; the support came late and did not help pupils to participate or improve. For the pupils to derive 'full' benefit from the teacher's attention, it should come while the exercise was in progress. Help during the exercises would foster the pupils' participation and improve their work as it develops.

Also, the comment, '*I discuss the topic with them again*' implied that the teacher repeated the lesson with the pupils who responded to his invitation. The strategy probably enabled the teacher to move at a slower pace and to address the needs of the lower attaining pupils. Literature shows that lower attaining learners require more attention from teachers and also react more slowly in learning (Stake and Hornby, 2000). As explained in Chapter 5, teacher attention is one of the invaluable resources for addressing difficulties in mainstream classrooms (Pijl, 1995; Alexander, 2000).

Additionally, four of the 12 teachers organised extra classes after school in order to provide additional teaching for the lower attaining pupils in their classrooms. One of the four teachers made the following statement:

*Before we do any class exercise or test we take all the children through revision to bring them to the standard that the lower attaining ones and/or those who have other problems will understand what we are going to test them on. We prepare them very well before we give it to them. Also at times during the extra classes' time what we test them we normally ask them oral questions and if we see that they having problems answering them we go over (Atta-Adu).*

The statement describes how the teacher organises extra classes. Table (6.5) illustrates the teacher’s extra classes approach to help lower attainers to improve.

*Table 6.5 Quote from the transcript illustrating practice test approach adopted by the teacher during extra classes’ session*

<b>Quote</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<i>Before we do any class exercise or test we take all the children through revision to bring them to the standard...we test them we normally ask them oral questions ... we go over (Atta-Adu).</i>	Evidence of practice tests, as teacher spent more time to teaching pupils to get high marks. ‘Standard’ = high marks. ‘... go over’ = coached pupils how to answer questions in order to pass, rather than understand class tests.

As explained in the table above, the teacher’s strategy reflected practice tests. Generally, teachers coached pupils how to answer questions in order to get high marks for their records during extra classes. Extra classes in this context, referred to additional teaching teachers provided to lower attaining pupils after normal school hours. Arguably, the emphasis on coaching pupils to score higher marks could be attributed to the use of pupils’ records for important decisions concerning reporting, progress at school and contributing to grades at the external examinations, the BECE, in Ghana.

As Pollard et al. (2000) noted, making teachers accountable for test scores but not for effective teaching, encourages the administration of practice tests. However, repeated tests, in which pupils are encouraged to perform well to get high scores, teach them that performance is what matters. This practice affects pupils’ approach to their work (Pollard et al., 2000; Reay and Wiliam, 1999).

In their studies, Gordon and Reese (1997) and Leonard and Davey (2001) found that many teachers went further and actively coached pupils in passing tests, rather than

spending time in helping them to understand what was tested. Harlen (2006a) noted that coaching pupils in test taking enables them to perform well even when they do not have the required knowledge, skills and understanding. Teachers spend more time in direct instruction and less in providing opportunities for pupils to learn through enquiry and problem solving. This impairs learning, and the feeling of being capable of learning, for pupils who preferred to do this in a more active way.

Furthermore, owing to the use of continuous assessment for decisions affecting pupils' education and training, teachers were generally concerned about the marks each pupil got for their records. As reflected in the following remarks by Teacher John, '*...levels are low and I do not want them to score zero*'.

Also, comments such as, '*...as for the weak pupils I have to advise them to work hard*' (Adom); '*I encourage them to study hard*' (Franco) '*...and give them books to study*' (Atsu) seemed to reflect the teachers' perceptions of lower achievements. The information seemed to imply that the teachers thought the lower attaining pupils performed poorly because they did not learn during their free time. Some of the teachers advised and encouraged the pupils to work hard, while others gave the pupils books to read. Also two of the teachers (Justine and Adom) reported that they sometimes visited homes to speak to parents about their children's school performance. The teachers recognised that promoting pupils' learning was shared responsibility between the family and school.

Surprisingly, none of the teachers talked about making changes in their classroom and assessment practices for the lower attaining pupils. The teachers failed to notice any

link between their continuous assessment approaches and pupils' poor performance. As highlighted in the following statement by one of the teachers, the general feeling was that the lower attaining pupils did not learn at home:

*For instance, when I am preparing the class for a class test or something for their continuous assessment and then I ask /tell them that tomorrow we are going to have this or that so they should revise only the higher achievers are able to do so, the lower attainers do not learn at home (Justine)*

This was not surprising though; as explained previously, this was partly due to teachers' background training which did not include any programme on lower attainments and partly to the conceptualisation of lower attainments (see Chapter 1).

Apart from that, two of the 12 teachers, reported that they used extra classes' sessions for additional instruction (teaching of new topics) in order to complete their scheme of work. The teachers made the following statements:

*I chose such pupils as my target to help them to improve and pass the exams in the year. Three of the five occurred somehow by accident had been repeated. One of the three not knowing had not passed exams since she started school, passed one of the papers. She had (58). She said sir, if not I will never pass exams... I use after school hours to do extra classes with the children to cover those topics. I am paid for the extra classes I do with pupils (John).*

*Also, those who can't perform well in class you organise extra classes for them ... where I have not been able to cover at the end of the previous week I use extra classes to cover ... I am able to cover my scheme of work and syllabi (Abass).*

The use of part of extra classes' sessions for teaching new topics in order to complete the scheme of work was problematic. There was the likelihood that the teachers might focus more on teaching new topics rather than addressing the difficulties of lower attaining pupils in their classes. In the long-term, the main purpose for organising extra classes would be lost as the teachers might spend greater part of the time

teaching new topics. Since extra classes were mainly optional and focused on lower attaining pupils, there was the likelihood that higher achieving pupils could miss out of the new topics their teachers taught during extra classes.

One of the 12 teachers reported that he sometimes organised extra classes in order to complete his scheme of work:

*We look for extra time or do extra classes so that we have time for those topics that were not treated... We meet for at least one hour, though all the topics cannot be treated but at least we can cover some portion (Emma).*

Unlike the other three teachers, Teacher Emma organised extra classes purposely to complete his scheme of work. Since teachers had to seek permission from the district education office before they organised extra classes, it implied that the teacher was granted permission to organise extra classes purposely to complete the scheme of work. The information and the comments from the two previous teachers seemed to suggest the completion of scheme of work was so important that teachers could obtain permission to organise extra classes in order to complete their scheme of work. However, emphasis on completion of scheme of work could compromise the needs of lower attaining pupils (see Section 6.4). This revealed a lack of focus of extra classes.

The information concerning in-class arrangements provided further insights about themes extracted from the questionnaires: achievements and participation as well as attention. For instance, teachers reported that continuous assessment enhanced pupils' participation, achievements, and attention from teachers (see Chapter 5). However, the information did not include the strategies teachers used to enhance those aspects of pupils' learning. The qualitative data from the teachers' interviews not only supported the quantitative results but the data also, **provided detailed descriptions of**

the strategies that teachers adopted to support lower attaining in classrooms. As outlined above, seven of the 12 teachers used different strategies to address pupils' needs. For example, teachers used planned and unplanned attention, peer-assisted learning strategies, break time or extra classes to address pupils' needs. These strategies, to a large extent, enabled lower attaining pupils to receive attention which possibly led to improvement in classrooms. Thus, the qualitative data provided insights into strategies teachers used to enhance participation, improvement and attention. The in-depth information illuminated and elaborated the findings from the questionnaires (Brannen, 2005; Creswell, 2005) (see Chapter 4).

All the teachers (12) reported that some lower attaining pupils repeated classes in their schools at the end of every academic year. For example, in the statements concerning in-class arrangements, Teacher John remarked that, '*Three out of the five occurred somehow by accident had been repeated*'. Also the following statements from three of the 12 teachers provided evidence concerning repetition:

*Yes, some of the pupils (few though) were repeated in class due to very poor performance last year. Repetition is usually done by the head teacher in consultation with the form teacher (Atta-Adu).*

*Those who generally do not perform well are sometimes repeated at the end of the academic year. Such decisions are taken by the head teacher and the class teacher with consultation with the parents (Adom).*

The information seemed to suggest that some teachers could not enforce the decision on repeating the children. This was understandable; the education reform placed a ban on repetition in order to encourage retention at school (Chapter 2). Repetition of pupils was therefore not a national policy it was a school-level policy. Since it was not a national policy the staff (teachers) had to consult parents before they implemented

the decision to repeat a child. In one case, it was difficult for the school to enforce the decision as shown in the following statement by a teacher:

*Some of the pupils were failed because their records showed that they did not perform well at all. But few of them still managed to run to the JSS and were allowed to remain in the class. I did not request the head teacher to send those pupils back to B6. However, those who remained in the class are now doing quite well. So I'll say repetition has been effective for such pupils (Justine).*

However, two of the 12 teachers reported that they managed to help pupils who repeated classes to improve their performance. For example, Teacher John, reported that, '*...had not passed exams since she started school, passed one of the papers. She had (58)*'. This was not surprising; possibly the number of pupils who improved was comparatively small. Besides, many factors could be responsible for the pupils' improvements. For example, the use of practice tests during extra classes, additional tuition during break time, familiarity and maturation. Indeed, practice tests, as explained in previous paragraphs, can result in improvements in attainments; however, the evidence is that this practice is not effective with respect to life-long learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998, 2006a; Harlen, 2006a; Gordon and Reese, 1997; Leonard and Davey, 2001; Pollard et al., 2000; Reay and Wiliam, 1999).

On the whole, the picture was different, the information from pupils' continuous assessment records (Figure 4.1) in Chapter 4, however, revealed that only two of the 20 pupils made significant improvements in their current performance. Furthermore, since some lower attaining pupils repeated classes annually in the schools of all the teachers, it could be speculated that teachers' strategies failed to bring about requisite improvements for all pupils. The information regarding 'repetition' not only revealed

inconsistencies in teachers' statements but it also contradicted results from the questionnaire (Chapter 5). This was however, not strange.

One of the characteristics of mixed methods designs is that data from quantitative and qualitative methods may reveal contradictions and inconsistencies (Brennan, 2005; Gaskell and Bauer, 2000; Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989). Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) noted that design that sought to marry the two research traditions were without inherent dangers which required one to thread cautiously when applying them in a single research endeavour. For their part, Gaskell and Bauer (2000) pointed out, "approaching a problem from two perspectives or with two methods would inevitably lead to inconsistencies and contradictions" (p. 345). Gaskell and Bauer argued that some of the inconsistencies might be due to methodological limitations; however, they might also demonstrate that social phenomena looked different as they were approached or viewed from a different angle.

In this study the use of the range of methods for collecting data was for the purpose of complementarity, rather than triangulation to test consistency of findings obtained through different methods (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989) (see Chapter 4).

#### **6.4 Challenges facing teachers concerning enhancing lower attaining pupils' participation in classroom activities**

With respect to challenges, the information from this study and documentations revealed that, the basic school teachers faced the following inter-related challenges in their continuous assessment practices with respect to lower attaining pupils: core



curriculum, continuous assessment format, overcrowded timetables, larger classes, lack of in-service training.

#### **6.4.1 The core curriculum**

In terms of the core curriculum, two of the teachers made the following comments:

*As for us in the primary school we are suffering. Our problem is the number of subjects that we teach as class-teachers... We have too much to do. The continuous assessment is tedious and difficult particularly where I have to mark all the work of the pupils in all the 9 subjects (Adom).*

*The subjects that we have to teach in a day are too many for me, if you want to go according to the timetable teaching will not be effective. I think there are about 5 subjects on the timetable for a day. Most of the time I do 3 subjects and sometimes if I see that there is more time after the third subject and the children are not tired I take another subjects to make four. I have never done 5 subjects in a day before (Marietta).*

Teachers' comments such as, 'we are suffering' and 'are too many for me' implied the subjects were too many for effectively teaching and assessment. The core curriculum affected the workload of both class- and subject-teachers at the primary and JSS respectively. As explained in Chapter 2, the primary school class-teachers had eight core subjects on the timetable. Consequently, they taught and assessed (gave exercises) pupils, including those who recorded lower attainments in four subjects everyday.

For their part, subject-teachers taught two different subjects to three or more classes and assessed (gave exercises) those classes everyday. Since assessment involved monitoring pupils' progress, checking, explaining, asking questions, providing clues, and marking, it was difficult for the teachers to go through these processes four or more times everyday. It was not surprising that one of the teachers described the continuous assessment programme as 'tedious and difficult' to implement. In 1996,

.the Ministry described the basic education curriculum as burdensome for both teachers and pupils and stated that it needed to be reviewed (MoE, 1996). Eight years later the Ministry reported that the national curriculum was crowded (MoEYS, 2004), yet nothing had been done. The pressure from the core curriculum affected the teachers' ability to create additional time to support lower attaining pupils in classrooms. Further, discussion has been provided in the section on timetable.

#### **6.4.2 The continuous assessment process**

Additionally, the continuous assessment procedure posed problems for the teachers; three of the 12 teachers made the following statements:

*I do four exercises in maths and English every week respectively. In the other subjects I give the pupils one or 2 exercises a week ... I do three class tests in each subject. I do not give homework everyday; I sometimes give the pupils homework once every fortnight (John).*

*The continuous assessment we have a booklet, which outlines the format to use, we have a column for exercises... we have to record the number of exercises that we give to the children (Atta-Adu).*

*I do class tests every 4 weeks and I also give the pupils class exercises always. Since I have to record the marks for these activities as their continuous assessment I just pile it and record (Adom).*

Teachers' comments such as; '*I do four exercises in maths and English every week respectively*', '*...the term I do three class tests in each subject*', '*The continuous assessment we have a booklet which outlines...*', implied that the teachers followed the prescribed format for gathering pupils' records as outlined in chapter 3. The general impression was that the process for recording pupils' achievements was laborious. Teachers spent considerable time processing and recording marks pupils got in classroom activities into the continuous assessment register. However, Weeden

et al. (2002) pointed out that when teachers spend so much time on paperwork they have less time to help pupils, such as those who record lower attainments, to improve.

In line with this, Farrell (1997) argued that in order to assess the progress pupils are making on the curriculum successfully it is necessary for schools to have a carefully planned curriculum and accompanying record sheets, which enable pupils' progress to be recorded clearly and without taking up too much time. For their part, Stakes and Hornby (2000) stated that records should be straightforward to keep and simple to access.

Also, comments such as, '*I have to record the marks for these activities*' and '*I just pile it and record*' suggested some of them failed to see the relationship between teaching, learning and continuous assessment. However, many researchers and writers in formative assessment have pointed out that there is a close relationship between teaching, learning and assessment, as in Black and Wiliam (1998, 2006a), Harlen (2004, 2006a) and Clarke (2005).

Writing in the context of inclusive assessment in Europe, Watkins (2007) pointed out that assessment is a key tool for teachers in determining not just what pupils need to learn, but also how best they can learn it. For her part, Lewis (2001) however, pointed out that the framework that was provided by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England for recording pupils' progress should not be used mechanistically as a tool to measure hierarchical and linear progress. It was intended to enable staff sensitively acknowledge the attainment appropriate to individual pupils as they moved through a learning process.

From their synthesis of literature on classroom assessments in the USA, Calfee and Masuda (1997) noted that assessments as practised was more akin to appraisal than inquiry, driven by neither curiosity nor the aim of improving conditions. According to Calfee and Masuda, for assessments organised in the inquiry model teachers were driven by their professional impulse to understand and shape pupils' learning. Such teachers took full responsibility for their assessments and switched from an activity-driven model, which perceived assessment as something that you do, to a conceptual model, assessment as a way of thinking about teaching.

### **6.4.3 Methods for gathering pupils' records**

With respect to the method for gathering pupils' records, there was awareness among the teachers that the method for gathering pupils' records was unfair to lower attaining learners. This was revealed in the following statements by two of the teachers:

*The method favours those children who are intelligent because they understand what they are doing. But those who have difficulties or are not good in class find it difficult to do well as many of them can't even read. So it is worrying them very much since they are not allowed to look at their friends' work or get any help from the teacher because continuous assessment is competitive (Anita).*

*The methods we use for continuous assessment benefit pupils who are higher achievers because they have been learning, but the lower attainers don't benefit much... (Justine).*

Further analysis revealed that three of the four teachers who complained that the method for gathering pupils' records was unfair to lower attaining pupils were experienced teachers at B6. The other belonged to the less experienced category and was teaching B5. Thus none of the JSS teachers made that complaint. The following table (6.6) illustrates teacher's opinion about the method for gathering pupils' records.

Table 6.6: Quote from transcript illustrating a teacher's opinion about methods for gathering pupils' records

Quote	Commentary
<p><i>The method favours those children who are intelligent ... But those who have difficulties or are not good in class find it difficult to do well as many of them can't even read.</i></p>	<p>The teacher's statement suggested that the same method was used for all pupils including the lower achievers. 'Can't even read' = suggested the tasks were mainly in written form.</p>
<p><i>... They are not allowed to look at their friends' work or get any help from the teacher because continuous assessment is competitive (Anita).</i></p>	<p>'Not allowed' = emphasis on individual work, competitive = reinforced the measurement of attainments, rather than improve learning.</p>

The information however, suggested that the teachers used mainly written tasks to gather pupils' records. As explained in Chapter 1, lower attaining pupils have difficulty in reading (Dyson and Hick, 2005) and are associated with slowness to learn writing and number skills (Stake and Hornby, 2000). It was not strange that in the present study, the lower attaining pupils continued to perform poorly and some of them repeated classes. In fact, Salvia, Ysseldyke and Bolt (2007) have noted that when pupils are faced with tasks that are overly challenging they do not learn successfully.

However, Booth and Ainscow (2002) stated that to foster inclusion teachers' assessment practices should include a variety of ways of demonstrating and assessing learning that engage with differences in pupils' characters, interests and range of their skills. The content and approach should be flexible so that teachers' assessment methods will suit pupils with various learning styles, interests, and ages (Lewis, 2001).

In the study at Trinidad and Tobago, Rampaul and Freeze (1992) reported that teachers perceived methods such as: behavioural charting, for promptness, homework

completion, and attendance to be effective for continuous assessment of pupils. Other writers, for example, Broadfoot (1996) and Phye (1997) have suggested the use of many methods including: oral-questions, spontaneous and structured performance assessment, portfolios, exhibitions, demonstration, rating scales, seatwork and homework, peer and self-assessments, pupil records, observations, questionnaires, interviews, and projects and products, to gather pupils' records.

Apart from the methods, 10 of the 12 teachers frowned upon peer-assistance and did not encourage pupils to seek help from their peers during class exercises. Also, all the 12 teachers discouraged peer-assistance during class tests. Arguably, owing to the use of continuous assessment largely for administrative purposes in Ghana, the perception of the teachers in the study was that continuous assessment was based upon a competitive system rather than geared towards promoting inclusion through cooperation and shared learning experiences.

Writing in the contexts of learning difficulties in South Africa, Monteith (1996) observed that despite the importance of managing social sources to facilitate learning, it was a learning strategy that was not always encouraged by teachers. Teachers should encourage pupils to solicit the support of fellow-pupils, themselves, other teachers and adults, not only to help them solve their learning problems, but also to provide opportunities to discuss their work.

Although the teachers reported that the method was appropriate they did not modify the work for lower attaining pupils in their classes. For example, three of the teachers made the following statements:

*I generalise them and give them the exercise, I do this because I want to know their standard. In class test and class exercises I let them work individually and I also monitor them so that they will not copy (Atsu).*

*I give them the same exercises, because they are in the same class and I teach them the same thing. If I give the higher achievers difficult work and they get lower marks, for example, 3/5 then I'm cheating some of them (Bell).*

*They are not allowed to look at their friends' work or get any help from the teacher because continuous assessment is competitive. You don't have to consider the person's disability or difficulty and read for him. Teaching does not permit that, if you do that you are not fair (Anita).*

The analysis showed that the teachers held similar opinions about the use of the same tasks to gather records of all pupils, including lower attainers in their classes. Table 6.7 highlights teachers' stance concerning giving all pupils, including lower attainers the same work for their records.

*Table 6.7: Teachers' stance on giving same work to all pupils in their classes*

<b>Quote</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<i>I generalise them... work individually and I also monitor them so that they will not copy...the true reflection of each student (Atsu).</i>	<i>Generalise</i> = same tasks. Class tests emulated external examination; pupils were held accountable for their learning. True reflection = measures of achievements.
<i>They are in the same class and I teach them the same thing (Bell).</i>	<i>'Teach the same thing'</i> = stressed, common standards and learning goals; criterion-referenced.

This was understandable; in Ghana, the education policy provides a common curriculum and the same educational goals for all pupils, including lower attainers in the mainstream. The syllabuses designed by the Curriculum Research Development Division (CRDD) had outlined what teachers and pupils should do in their classes (see Chapter 2). These documentations and the continuous assessment plan (MoE, 2004) did not provide for task level differentiation for lower attaining pupils in classrooms.

However, studies have shown that in classes where pupils did the same work for their records some of them faced repetition at early age, as by Raveaud (2004) in France. In England where the policy imperative is towards inclusive practices (DES, 2001a), the QCA (2006) directs teachers to use appropriate assessment approaches that allow for different learning styles and ensure that pupils are given the chance and encouragement to demonstrate their competence and attainment through appropriate means. The assessment system provides for a range of ability, aptitude and learning styles (Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Fletcher-Campbell, 2001; Lee and Henkhusens, 1996; Lewis, 2001). Task differentiation had reduced the actual occurrence of errors pupils made (Raveaud, 2004).

#### **6.4.4 School timetables**

Another problem that linked with the core curriculum was the timetable, as shown in the following statements by two of the teachers:

*The timetable poses some problems to me at times. At times I have to give the children exercises to do after the lesson but my time for that period is over and the next subject-teacher has to come to teach the class. The longer I stay on with the children the shorter the time my colleague will have for his/her lesson (Anita).*

*I use 30 minutes in teaching and I give them exercise sometimes they take more than 20 minutes to do 2 exercises so the 30 minutes period will not be sufficient...So sometimes, I don't do all the subjects on the timetable. Sometimes I do 4 double periods or sometimes I'll take 3 double periods (Bell).*

All the three categories of teachers, B5, B6 and the JSS complained that the school timetable impinged on their practices. For example, the timetable made it impossible to create more time to work with lower attaining pupils during class exercises. It is critical to point out that is not the case of all teachers. The primary school class-



teachers reported that they managed to make adjustment to their timetable. This was illustrated in the following statement from one of the class-teachers:

*If I'm teaching a subject and I think I won't finish within that period I have to complete to make the children understand it before I move to next topic (Sammy).*

The subject-teachers, at both primary and the JSS, were unable to do so. Subject-teachers swapped classes as such, if a teacher overstayed her/his time it affected the time of the colleague whose lesson was next. This could disorganise the teacher as well as the children and lead to misunderstanding among the teachers. To forestall such problems the teachers worked within their time slots, as much as possible.

The information was vitally important; it provided further insights into why none of the JSS or primary school subject-teachers used teacher-pupil interactions as a strategy for supporting lower attaining pupils during class exercises (Section 6.3). Thus, the information illuminated the results from the questionnaires regarding the use of continuous assessment to enhance lower attaining pupils' attention and confidence in class (see Section 5.7, Chapter 5). The quantitative results showed that B6 teachers felt more strongly that continuous assessment enhanced attention for lower attaining pupils than did their B5 and JSS colleagues. The qualitative results showed that the B6 teachers, the majority of whom were class-teachers, were able to make adjustments in their timetables to create additional time for pupils. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was beneficial in addressing research questions (Brannen, 1992; Patton, 1990; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998), and provided "a very powerful mix" (Creswell, 2005, p. 510) which neither quantitative nor qualitative methods alone could have provided (see Chapter 4).

#### 6.4.5 Larger classes

Furthermore, the teachers identified larger classes as a factor that adversely affected their assessment practices in relation to creating time to work with lower attaining pupils. Four of the 12 teachers made the following statements:

*My class is 42 but that number to me is manageable. However, this number affects the work I usually mark. I am not able to mark all their exercises everyday, but I try (hmmm) I try to mark some and leave the rest for the next day (Marietta).*

*I have 40 children in my class, and I feel the class size is big; it affects the way you want to get ample time to teach very well (Franco).*

*The numbers of children in the three classes I teach are 39, 39, & 41; this makes the whole process very tiring. For example, I am handling mathematics and science and I have to set exercises and mark the whole thing, so the continuous assessment is tiresome (Abass).*

*There are 60 children in the class. This makes class control very difficult; the class is also very noisy. I have to threaten them some are naturally noisy (Bell).*

The information revealed that, all the 12 teachers had 35 or more pupils in their classes, and the general feeling was that the large number of pupils in their classes made marking difficult. Further, larger classes were more noisy and difficult to control. This was understandable; Avoke, Hayford and Ocloo (1999) noted that larger classes were more noisy and presented challenges to basic schoolteachers.

The launch of the 1987 educational reforms resulted in steady increase in school enrolment (MoE, 1996, 2000g); the national target of 34 pupils to a class for basic schools by 2004 (MoE, 2003) was not been realised. Many basic schools across the country, Ghana, were overcrowded (Tamakloe et al., 1996; cited by Asamoah-Gyimah, 2002). In their studies Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) and Angbing (2001) reported that larger classes adversely affected teachers' continuous assessment

practices. Arguably, the teachers in the study were overstretched (UNESCO, 2006). As Pollard et al. (2005) pointed out, the number of pupils inevitably affects the time teachers can spend with each 'lower attaining' pupil in classrooms. Larger classes make it impossible for teachers to work with all lower attaining pupils in the classrooms.

In spite, of the larger classes in Ghana, the policy does not provide for the recruitment of teaching/learning assistants at the basic schools. Teachers manage their classes individually. Although, peripatetic officers have been recruited at some district education offices in the country, the number of schools in each district makes it impossible for a single peripatetic officer to have any impact. Furthermore, peripatetic teachers do not have any training in managing lower attainers (see Chapter 2).

#### **6.4.6 Marking**

As mentioned in the previous section, larger classes affected teachers' marking as illustrated in the following statements by three of the teachers:

*Marking is very difficult, I've to let children help me to send their exercise books home to mark because the next day they have to do their correction, so sometimes I stay in school to mark all before I go home (Sammy).*

*It is tedious and difficult to mark all the work of 39 children in all the 9 subjects (Adom).*

*Sometimes I mark the exercises after classes. Sometimes too, I take the books home to mark. I ask some pupils to help me take their books to my house to mark. I don't involve the pupils in marking their work; they can't do it well. I don't want a case whereby they seeing their friends' work and saying that you don't know this so I do it by myself (Bell).*

As stated in previous sections, the number of the core subjects and the sizes of their classes affected teachers' work in terms of marking. Whilst some of the teachers

stayed over to mark pupils' work at school, others solicited help from pupils to send their exercise books to the teachers' home to mark. The teachers spent so much time on marking pupils' work. For example, if a teacher had 35 pupils in her class and gave them exercises in three different subjects, then in a day she had 105 exercise books to mark. If the teacher used 5 minutes to mark a book then she would spend 525 minutes or 8 hours 45 minutes marking every day. This illustration shows that a basic schoolteacher may spend over a third of a day marking pupils' exercises.

Naturally, by spending so much time marking pupils' exercise books teachers were unable to identify specific mistakes of individual pupils in their classes for intervention. This finding was not consistent with the result from the questionnaires, which suggested that the continuous assessment process enabled majority of teachers in Ghana to identify pupils' difficulties for intervention (Chapter 5). The results also, explained why very experienced teachers were less supportive of the statement that continuous assessment enabled pupils' difficulties to be identified for intervention.

However, Pollard et al. (2005) noted that pupils' work is an important source of evidence of their learning, and marking that work is a critical form of teacher enquiry into the progress, or otherwise, of each child. Marking can also be extended to offer wide-ranging analyses. For instance, to study a pupil's development over time the teacher can consider each piece of work as part of a sequence. It is only by comparing each example with previous work that it is possible to assess whether any learning has taken place and what significance to attach to any mistakes.

Furthermore, Pollard et al., (2005) suggested that if pupils' mistakes are analysed carefully they can provide valuable clues to possible learning difficulties. Critical marking can reveal whether errors are consistent or one-offs. Also, such diagnostic marking can provide useful information upon which to base subsequent discussion, or be used when making judgements about matching future tasks. Owing to larger classes in schools in the area of the study and the number of subjects teachers assessed their pupils it could be argued that the teachers were unable to do critical marking.

Although, teachers spent considerable time marking pupils work, the number of books they marked made it impossible for teachers to engage in critical marking, in order to identify the types of pupils' mistakes for intervention. This result is crucial; it provides further insights into findings from the questionnaires. Particularly, why the most experienced teachers were less enthusiastic about using continuous assessment for needs identification and intervention (see Section 5.8 in Chapter 5). Thus, the qualitative data have again provided more information to illuminate and elaborate the findings from the questionnaires (Brannen, 2005; Creswell, 2005).

In Ghana, basic schoolteachers also did not involve pupils in their own assessment. The general impression among the teachers the pupils would not be able to participate in marking their own work. For example, Teacher Bell states that, *'I don't involve the pupils in marking their work; they can't do it well'*.

However, Marietta stated that:

*If we do dictation, I allow the children to mark but there are certain subjects you can't give it to children to mark. You have to use your discretion.*

*Sometimes spelling mistakes you have to correct them...Sometimes they tick and I give the marks, (heaves a sigh, and shakes of the head) they will laugh at their friends (Marietta).*

The teachers cited lack of skills on the part of the pupils as the main reason for not involving them in their own assessment. This was understandable; teachers' background training did not provide them with competence, knowledge and skills in self-and peer-assessment (see Chapter 3). However, Black and Wiliam (1998) and Pollard et al. (2005) noted that self-assessment is concerned with thinking about your own performance in relation to clearly stated objectives. It is not checking your work against an answer sheet. Self-assessment is therefore a skill, which like any other skill needs coaching and practice.

Furthermore, Rose, McNamara and O'Neil (1996) outlined the following skills: ability to recall, summarise, organise evidence, reflect and evaluate, as prerequisites for effective self-evaluation. Greater involvement of pupils in the management of their assessment and learning is dependent upon the development of teachers' confidence in their own abilities to maintain effective classroom management. Whilst some teachers appear to believe that the promotion of pupil involvement in planning and assessment is dependent upon age or ability, they (Rose, McNamara and O'Neil) contend that the key factor is the flexibility of the teacher and the nature of the relationship established with pupils.

For her part, Clarke (2005) stated that one reason that peer-assessment is so valuable is because pupils often give and receive criticisms of their work more freely than in the traditional teacher/pupil interchange. Another advantage is that the language used by pupils to each other is the language they would naturally use, rather than school

language. Further, peer-assessment can involve a few minutes of pupils helping each other to improve their work.

#### **6.4.7 Attitude of education officers**

Another challenge that the teachers faced in their continuous assessment practices in relation to lower achievement was the attitude of education officers. The teachers complained that education officers were not supportive; they were rather harsh and vindictive. The following statements from three of the teachers illustrated their complaints:

*During inspection the officers look at everything from the beginning of the term and expect teachers to get everything ready for them to check. This time they have made a rule that they have given a number, a specific number of exercises teachers should give the children (Atta-Adu).*

*Well as a teacher ... the programme is planned in relation to how the syllabus is designed. The syllabi are designed from above and the teacher has to implement it exactly as it has been designed; if you do something different you can be penalized... Also, the scheme of work is planned at the beginning of the school term (Abass).*

*Because officers from the office will not understand our inability to do the required number of exercises... (Emma).*

The teachers' complaint was that education officers focused on quantity of work done with the pupils, rather than the quality of pupils' work. The officers were critical of teachers who did fewer activities with their pupils. There was evidence that, a teacher was removed from B6 to lower primary for failing to give the pupils 'sufficient' exercises. The comments such as; '*they have made a rule*', and '*from above and the teacher has to implement it exactly*' suggested that the teachers did not have control or ownership of their classroom assessment.

Second, the teachers felt their job was to implement what the policy-makers had handed down to them. The continuous assessment programme had been imposed on them. Teachers were unable to exercise control over their classroom practice (assessment). The implication was that, the teachers felt they did not have the mandate to introduce any innovative practices in their classroom in general and assessment in particular. If teachers made adjustment/innovation in order to meet the needs of the children they could be sanctioned. As illustrated by the following comments '*...can be penalized*' and '*officers will not understand...*' since teachers wanted to save their positions they tried to please the officers, rather than to help learners to improve. Teachers' scheme of work was viewed as fixed and not to be changed to reflect the needs of the pupils.

Consequently, the teachers worked towards completing their scheme of work as they had planned at the beginning of the term, and conducted their continuous assessments as outlined in the plan (see Chapter 3). The pressure to complete the scheme of work and implement continuous assessment as outlined in the plan, largely contributed to teachers' ability to support lower attaining pupils.

However as argued in the introductory chapters, in the UK, where there are provisions in terms of policies on differences in classrooms, government agencies like the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2003) and the Assessment Reform Group (2002a) promote assessment for learning, and continually provide guides to help teachers to use their classroom assessments to support pupils with different abilities (Lewis, 2001). Furthermore, the ARG (2002) cited by Clarke (2005) pointed out that planning should enable teachers to provide opportunities for both learner and teacher



to obtain and use information about progress towards learning goals. It has to be flexible to respond to initial and emerging ideas and skills.

However, the information revealed that was not the situation in the schools, the attitude of the education officers affected teachers' continuous assessment practices in a negative way. As reflected in the following statement from one of the teachers:

*...Teachers do not get time to explain, and teachers have to do between 90 and 97 exercises with their children every term... So you see that teachers some of them do not care, some pupils do not get the real understanding of topics that the teachers teach (Atta-Adu).*

The comment such as; '*some of them do not care*', summed up some of the teachers' attitude toward continuous assessment. This was worrying a development; the teachers had difficulties implementing the continuous assessment programme for the benefit all children and in particular, the lower achievers. The information conflicted with the results from the questionnaire (Section 5.6.1), which suggested that teachers' continuous assessment practices enabled lower attaining pupils to learn at their own pace. The overarching evidence was that lower attaining pupils were hurried along the national curriculum, since teachers focused more on completing their scheme of work, rather than helping pupils to improve.

Stakes and Hornby (2000) noted that children learn at different speeds and in different ways, with this in mind teachers should provide useful and enjoyable tasks rather than setting predetermined goals to be met by the end of the term.

Some of the teachers made disparaging remarks about the assessment programme.

The following statements were made by three of the teachers:

*I'll say this is what they say is government policy you have to give them something so that you can record what they are able to do (Sammy).*

*The continuous assessment is now a burden, it is not working because it is not helping the children... it is difficult for teachers to do it genuinely (Anita).*

*But when we were in school there was no continuous assessment but we were able to make it, now they have brought continuous assessment and many things (Adom).*

Five of the 12 teachers felt the continuous assessment policy was not useful because it was not helping the children to improve. This was not strange; as Broadfoot (1996) explained assessment practices and discourses are embedded in and emanate from cultural, social and political traditions and assumptions. These affect teachers' policies and practices in subtle, complex and often contradictory ways.

Generally, pressure on teachers to complete their schemes of work and implement continuous assessment as laid down by policy did not help lower attaining pupils. Thus, contrary to the results from the questionnaires which suggested that pupils learned at their own pace (Section 5.6.1), the data from the interviews seemed to suggest that lower attaining pupils were hurried through the National Curriculum and programmes of study.

#### **6.5.8 In-service training (professional development)**

In addition, teachers' professional development was identified as a factor that impinged upon their assessment practices in relation to lower attaining pupils. The following statements were made by three of the teachers:

*Since I came to this school I haven't attended any workshop or in-service training on continuous assessment, we use what we were taught at the training college. The head teacher ... just tells us, 'do your class test' and the stuff. She gives us those instructions. Though we have been having INSET at the school, we have not done INSET on continuous assessment (Marietta).*

*The INSET on continuous assessment was organised for teachers when the programme was introduced in 1987; thereafter, head teachers have to organise INSET for the new teachers that come on the staff. However, apart from that initial INSET, I have not participated in any INSET on continuous assessment again (Anita).*

*The headmaster has been organising INSET for us over here; but as a teacher I think I need INSET on continuous assessment (Atsu).*

Apart from being infrequent, my personal experience was that, the occasional in-service training programmes for teachers with respect to continuous assessment had focused on advice to teachers about marking, recording, and processing of the scores to fill the register. Teachers were not trained in the use of information to support and enhance lower attaining pupils' progress in learning. This information was vitally important; it revealed a major drawback in in-service training programmes organized for teachers in Ghana. In fact, the MoEYS (2004) acknowledged that the fundamental challenges facing the government in its pursuits of inclusive practices were general teachers' lack of competence to respond to the needs of pupils including lower attaining children in classrooms and lack of resources for pre- and post-service training of teachers.

Also, in their studies Angbing (2001) reported that 64% of the JSS teachers did not have in-service training in continuous assessment; while, Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) reported that 60% of the SSS teachers said they did not have in-service training in continuous assessment. The information from the study and literature reviewed showed that teachers in Ghana were generally ill equipped in assessment for learning, particularly, to support lower achievers. This was not an isolated case, writing in the context of the USA a decade ago, Plake and Impara (1997) found teachers were ill-

equipped to successfully undertake one of the most prevalent activities of their instructional programme: pupil assessment.

James and Pedder (2006) suggested that effective assessment for learning (formative) involves radical transformation in classroom teaching and learning through the development of two key aspects. First, new understanding and perspectives need to be developed among teachers and pupils about each other and, about the nature of teaching and learning. Second, new attitudes to and practices of learning and teaching, shaped by explicit and critically reflective modes of participation, need to be acquired and implemented. In Ghana, basic schoolteachers need to radically transform their understanding of lower achievement, and learn innovative ways of teaching and assessing lower attaining pupils.

According to James and Pedder (2006) just as transformation requires new dimensions of pupil learning, so it is essential for teachers to learn if they are to promote and support change in classroom assessment roles and practices. As one of the Assessment reform Group's (ARG, 2002a) ten principles explicitly states:

Assessment for learning should be regarded as a key professional skill for teachers. Teachers require the professional knowledge and skill to: plan for assessment; observe and support learners in self –assessment. Teachers should be supported in developing these skills through initial and continuing professional development (p. 29).

Thus professional development is vital for enhanced assessment practices.

## **6.5 Summary of the chapter**

The evidence was that the majority of the teachers did not support the lower attaining pupils in their classes during classroom tasks for their records. The teachers adopted the same approach for assessing all pupils, for lower attaining pupils. The approach was unfair to the lower attaining pupils; they were unable to participate in classroom tasks for their records. Consequently, lower attaining pupils continually performed poorly in classroom tasks, failed and some repeated classes every academic. Furthermore, study revealed that factors such as, the core curriculum and continuous assessment format, school timetable, larger classes, teacher training and professional development adversely affected teachers in relation to supporting pupils who recorded lower attainments in classrooms.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## STUDY THREE

### RESEARCHING LOWER ATTAINING PUPILS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CLASS TESTS AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on data from semi-structured tape-recorded interviews with four focus groups of B6 (primary 6) children from four basic schools in Agona and Affutu districts in the Central region of Ghana. The chapter provides analysis and discussion of data concerning lower attaining pupils' feelings about class tests and perceptions about performance at school. I have also provided discussion of the following two research questions that drove me to use focus groups and individual interviews with the pupils.

- What are lower attaining pupils' feelings about class tests?
- How do lower attaining pupils perceive their current classroom performance?

The four main findings were based on interviews with the lower attaining pupils and available documentation.

## Summary of findings

The findings are presented in three sections. First, pupils' feelings about class test. The pupils became:

- i) Anxious and worried prior to class tests.
- ii) Frustrated and helpless during the tests.
- iii) Sad and upset after class tests.

The second section illustrates reasons assigned by the pupils. These are:

- i) Lack of self-regulated learning.
- ii) Difficult tasks.
- iii) Lack of help at home and school.
- iv) Previous experience of failure.

Third section concerns pupils' perceptions about their performance. There are two views. These are:

- i) Majority reported improvement.
- ii) Minority reported lack of improvement.

## 7.2 Method

The four focus groups were selected from four basic schools in Agona and Affutu districts; two groups were taught by class- teachers and the other two by subject- teachers. Furthermore, two of the focus groups were selected from schools in which the teachers organised extra classes (additional tuition after school hours) for lower attaining pupils while the other two were selected from schools in which the teachers did not organise extra classes for such pupils. The four focus groups were selected from schools that were more accessible and where the staff (head teachers and teachers) were enthusiastic (that is, demonstrated happiness, readiness and commitment) about the study.

I asked the teachers to provide lists of ten pupils with the worst general performance (extremely poor) in their classes. We (teachers and I) used the pupils' exercise books as well as achievement records (see Chapter four) to pick those who were to constitute

the focus groups. From the lists we picked the names with odd numbers to constitute the focus groups. Each group consisted of five pupils. I conducted the interviews with the two focus groups in the schools at Agona after school hours while the children were having extra classes on the dates agreed with the teachers. I had to do the interviews after school hours because the head teachers' offices were too noisy and busy during school hours to do interviews there. Furthermore, none of the schools had an unused classroom or room in which I could organise the interviews with the pupils during school hours.

The situation in schools at Affutu was similar to those at Agona; thus for the same reasons assigned above I had to rent a taxi to send the pupils to the staff common at the University where I was teaching to do the interviews. I did the first focus group interview on a Thursday morning while the school was engaged in general grounds work (weeding and sweeping the school compound). The second focus group interview was done on the next day, Friday (when the school was engaged in singing and school worship). The interviews were organised towards the end of the third term (summer term in the UK). Each focus group interview lasted about 20 minutes and each member of a focus group was individually interviewed for 10 minutes.

Also, prior to the focus group interviews, I explained the purpose of the study to the children and asked them to ask questions for clarification of any aspect they did not understand. I asked if they were happy to participate and told them that they could withdraw from the interviews at anytime they wanted to do so. I made it clear to them that they were under no obligation to participate if they did not feel happy to continue. I had face-to-face interviews with all the four focus groups and the individuals in each



group. Before the interviews I sought permission from the pupils to use the tape recorder to record the conversations.

Howe and Lewis (1993) suggested that in order to facilitate the analysis of the data from focus groups interviews each member of the group should identify himself/herself before they spoke. In line with this suggestion, I asked each member of a group to identify himself/herself before they spoke. After the interviews I encouraged pupils to ask any question(s) they had in mind in relation to the study and made them aware of how much I appreciated their contributions. I told them their role in the study would be duly acknowledged (see detail in Chapter 4). Although, background noises affected the taped recordings, pupils' responses were audible and facilitated transcription of the data.

Furthermore, I involved B6 (Primary 6) pupils in the study because of the unique position of the class in the basic school system (transition between primary and the junior secondary) (Section 4.4; Chapter 4). I felt at that level the pupils were mature enough to understand the research process and to share some of their classroom experiences. My knowledge of child development indicates that, at the age of 12 the child is capable of abstract thinking, and children at that age can engage in objective discussion about their classroom experience. For example, Piaget (1950) calls the period from 12 years onwards as the formal operations stage in which children are able to do abstract thinking.

### **7.2.1 Access**

I followed the necessary research protocol: sought official permission from the two district Directors of Education at Agona and Affutu (Appendix 8A); the head teachers and teachers of four schools prior to interviews of pupils (see detail at Chapter 4). The head teachers sent verbal information through pupils to inform their parents to solicit their consent, to which they agreed. I had permission to do the focus groups' interviews at the pre-specified dates negotiated with the staff of the four schools.

### **7.2.2 Reliability and validity check**

Each focus group listened to the tape recording of their transcripts which was an attempt to represent precisely their views as recorded. The pupils identified their responses and also agreed that the statements reflected views expressed during the conversations. I solicited the assistance of a colleague, a Ghanaian research student in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham, to help check the validity of the content of the transcription. She listened to a tape of transcription of a focus group and read a copy of typed transcription.

### **7.2.3 Content validity and extraction of themes**

Additionally, a copy of the transcript was given to two of the three colleagues (research students of School of Education) who had previously helped in forming themes from the teachers' data to identify the salient themes in the pupils' data. Each of the colleagues got a number of themes. These ideas were put together and refined and developed following examination and re-examination of the data. The following themes were extracted through these processes: understanding of continuous assessment; purpose; feelings about class tests; current performance; and help in

learning (see detail at Appendix 7B). However, since the purpose of the analysis was to address the two research questions stated at section 7.1, I focused on data concerning pupils' feelings about class tests and perceptions about their performance.

#### 7.2.4 Background information

Prior to analysing pupils' perceptions of class tests and current performance at school, it was critical to examine the demographic data of the pupils who participated in the focus groups' interviews. This would help to make the following issues in the discussion clear; statutory age, repetition, younger and older pupils. Table 7.1 shows the background data of the four focus groups of pupils who participated in the study.

*Table 7.1: Background data of the four focus groups*

<b>Focus group 1</b>			<b>Focus group 2</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>
Bright	M	11 years	Boateng	M	13 years
Daniel	M	12 years	Romeo	M	12 years
Ezekiel	M	12 years	Peggy	F	12 years
Wendy	F	13 years	Sam	M	13 years
Lucy	F	13 years	Joy	F	13 years
<b>Focus group 3</b>			<b>Focus group 4</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>
Abena	F	12 years	Cecilia	F	14 years
Aboa	F	15 years	Abigail	F	13 years
Essah	M	15 years	Emma	M	16 years
Godfred	M	16 years	Sonny	M	14 years
Jacob	M	14 years	John	M	18 years

(All the names used in table 7.1 and for the analyses were pseudonyms).

The data show that, pupils in focus group 1 were younger than those in the other three focus groups. The average age of focus group 1 was 12 years, while that of focus group 4 was 15 years. Furthermore, the majority of the pupils (three in five) were within the statutory age for B6 (Primary 6), (see Chapter 2). The information revealed

that two in five lower attaining children in the study were above the statutory age for their class (primary 6). These pupils might have repeated previous classes and/or entered school late. This was not surprising; even though the 1987 Reforms policy placed a ban on the repetition of pupils in classes as a measure to encourage retention at school (MoE, 2000h), as reported in the previous chapter (6), the teachers in the study repeated pupils who recorded lower attainments annually.

### **7.3 Lower attaining pupils' feelings about class tests**

The lower attaining pupils' feelings about class tests were examined from three perspectives: feelings prior to class tests; during and after the tests. This was to provide a holistic picture of lower attaining pupils' experiences of class tests at school.

#### **7.3.1 Pupils' feelings prior to class tests**

The lower attaining pupils reported that they became anxious, worried and preoccupied by the thoughts of impending class tests. The following comments were made by two of the focus groups:

*Sometimes you don't want to think about the test but you can't stop thinking about it, you keep on having at the back of your mind that you have class tests to write and you feel scared (FG1).*

*During the days before class tests you have strange feelings, you can't sleep well, you keep on thinking about the tests, the more you think about the tests the more worried you become (FG3).*

The comments such as; '*you can't stop thinking about it*', '*feel scared*', '*have strange feelings*', '*you can't sleep well*', and '*more worried...*' by the pupils seem to suggest that they experienced this pattern of emotions time and time again. The information shows that the lower attaining pupils experienced anxiety during the period leading to

class tests. This is not surprising; studies have shown that lower attaining pupils tend to approach tests with anxiety.

In a study concerning the National Assessment in Northern Ireland, for example, Leonard and Davey (2001) reported that majority of the children approached the tests with fear and uncertainty. Only four out of 193 drawings the researchers collected from the children were interpreted as positive towards the tests. The study highlighted the stress and pressure that all children experience during the preparation for the test and the periods leading to the test.

In their study conducted in England, Pollard, Triggs, Broadfoot, McNess, and Osborn, (2000) reported anxiety prior to tests, feelings of tension, uncertainty and test anxiety among pupils. They argued that the anxiety that pupils felt was a consequence of being exposed to greater risk as performance became more important in the teacher's eyes. According to Pollard et al. pupils incorporate their teacher's evaluation of them into the construction of their identity as learners.

Furthermore, Pollard et al. (2002, 2005) suggested that children often feel vulnerable in classrooms, particularly because of their teacher's power to control and evaluate. This affects how children experience school and their openness to new learning.

The lower attaining pupils offered some reasons to explain why they became anxious and scared as class tests approached. For example, two focus groups made the following statements:

*We become anxious ... because we can't tell whether we'll perform well (FG2).*

*You become worried because class tests are difficult and you always perform poorly (FG4).*

The statement from focus group 4 seems to imply that the members of that group are more pessimistic about their performance in class tests. However, from the analysis of the transcriptions of all the children it became clear that both younger and older lower attaining pupils approached class tests with anxiety and uncertainty.

The following table (7.1) provides commentary to elucidate pupils' views about their performance as they approach class tests.

*Table 7.2: Quote illustrating pupils' reasons for approaching class tests with anxiety*

<b>Quote</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<i>We can't tell whether we'll perform well... (FG2)</i>	Lack of self- efficacy, stemmed from past experience of failure.
<i>...class tests are difficult and you always perform poorly... (FG4)</i>	Feelings of futility, created by teachers' feedback from previous class tests.

In terms of self-efficacy, comments such as, '*we can't tell whether we'll perform well,*' and '*...you always perform poorly,*' show that the pupils lacked self-efficacy, which is directly related to pupils' past experiences of class tests. As Duckworth, Fielding, and Shaughnessy (1986) pointed out pupils' self-efficacy and judgements about their abilities to do particular classroom assessments are based on previous experiences with similar kinds of classroom assessments. Learners who have previously performed well in a certain area of content or particular task usually believe that they are capable of further learning, while those who have experienced difficulties may doubt their capabilities and refrain from learning (Monteith, 1996). As argued in Chapters 1 and 6, in the present study, because pupils did the same work

for their records some of them continually performed poorly in class, those pupils were usually pessimistic about their performance in class tests.

In addition to previous experience of poor performance, other factors that were directly linked to the anxiety the lower attaining pupils experienced as class tests approached were lack of self-regulated learning and lack of help at home to learn. The pupils expressed concern about not knowing what to learn as class tests approached and not getting anyone at home to help them to learn. For example:

*I become anxious because I don't know what to learn in order to pass the test, and I don't have anyone at home to help me to learn (Emma).*

*I become scared when the time for class tests draws nearer, I don't do well in class tests (John).*

Table 7.3 provides commentary to illustrate some other issues in the transcriptions.

*Table 7.3: Quote and commentary reflecting pupils' preparation towards class tests and outcomes*

<b>Quote</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<i>I don't know what to learn in order to pass the test...</i>	The pupil lacked skills in self-regulated learning. Self-regulated pupils know how to learn and prepare for tests. Pupils who lack such skills rely on others to tell them what/how to learn for tests.
<i>I don't have anyone at home to help me to learn.</i>	Lacked support from family. Parents might not be literate or did not have time to help their children to learn at home.

The information suggests that the pupil lacked skills in self-regulated learning to enable him to prepare for class tests. This was not surprising; as argued in the previous chapter (6), the pupils in the study were not taught self-regulated learning at school. Their teachers spent more time (extra classes) in direct instruction, coaching

them how to answer questions to get higher marks, rather than helping pupils to understand the questions. The teachers spent less time in providing opportunities for pupils to learn through enquiry and problem solving. However, Harlen (2006a) pointed out that this approach impairs learning and the feeling of being capable of learning.

In a study on self-regulated learning conducted in Canada, Perry (1998) stated that some teachers' teaching styles encouraged self-regulated learning. In high self-regulated classrooms teachers provided complex activities, offered pupils choices, enabled them to control the amount of challenge, to collaborate with peers, and to evaluate their work. On the other hand, in low self-regulated classrooms teachers were more controlling, offered few choices, and pupils' assessments of their own work were limited to mechanical features (spelling, punctuations).

For his part, Monteith (1996) noted that a core component of self-regulated learning is a pupil's repertoire of learning strategies. Self-regulated learners select, structure and create environment that optimise their learning (Zimmerman, 1990); they take responsibility for their own learning (Monteith, 1996). Harlen (2006a) endorsed this suggestion and pointed out that self-regulated is the will to act in ways that bring about learning. It refers to learners' consciously controlling their attention and actions so that they are able to solve problems for learning and evaluate their success. They take responsibility for their own learning and make choices about how to improve. Those not able to regulate their own learning depend on others to tell them what to do and to judge how well they have done it.



Furthermore, Monteith (1996) suggested that self-regulated learning is defined differently according to different theoretical perspectives, it is generally defined as the degree to which pupils are meta-cognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process. Meta-cognitively, self-regulated learners plan, organise, self-instruct, self-monitor and self-evaluate their learning at various stages during the learning process. Motivationally, they perceive themselves as competent, self-efficacious, self-attributational and autonomous. Behaviourally, they select, structure and create environments that optimise their learning.

Additionally, the information in the study also revealed that some lower attaining pupils did not get the necessary help from home to learn. This information also agreed with the teachers' report (see Chapter 6). The pupils seemed to suggest that their parents and older siblings did not support them to learn at home. This lack of support from the home could be attributed to several factors, such as, illiteracy, poverty, and attitude towards education. Roderick and Engel (2001) pointed out that pupils with low motivation were more likely to lack external support and to have problems outside of school that created barriers to their engagement in their schoolwork.

The study did not explore reasons for lack of help at home. There was insufficient information to explain why the children did not get help at home to learn. A further research would be needed to investigate the support pupils get from home to improve their learning and achievement at school. This research is important because the evidence is that both home and school play key role in supporting pupils to learn. Kellaghan et al. (1996, p. 13-14) cited by Harlen (2006a, p. 65) stated that:

Social and cultural considerations are important aspects of context because they can influence students' perception of self, their beliefs about achievements, and

the selection of goals...Even if academic achievement and the rewards associated with it are perceived to have value, a student may decide that home and school support are inadequate to help him or her succeed.

Harlen (2006a) explained that it is only when pupils have a high level of support from school and/or home, which shows them how to improve, do some of them escape from the vicious circle of continual failure.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that both younger and older pupils became anxious, and concerned during the period leading to class tests. However, a girl reported that she did not experience anxiety prior to class tests. The following was the statement she made:

*I don't have any feeling when we are going to write class tests; because I don't worry about the marks I score (Lucy).*

The comment seems to imply that the girl is insensitive to the consequence of failure. It is unusual for a lower attaining girl to report that she does not experience anxiety during the period leading to class tests. However, studies have shown that girls tend to experience high test anxiety than boys, for example, in Benmansour (1999).

### **7.3.2 Pupils' feelings during the tests**

The feelings of the lower attaining pupils while they took class tests were also characterised by frustrations, upset and the sense of helplessness. Some of the pupils made the following statements:

*You feel very bad when your friends are able to do the work and you can't do it, sometimes you feel like crying (FG1).*

*You look round to see if the teacher is not looking at you so that you ask a friend to tell you an answer.... You feel helpless and frustrated (FG4).*

Similar feelings emerged from the individual interviews as shown in the following statements by two pupils:

*It gets on your nerves when you see your friends doing the work but you can't answer the questions. The teacher doesn't allow anyone to talk to you (Bright).*

*There are times I have problems but I know if I talk to a friend the teacher will not be happy with me and may punish me ... If the teacher goes out of the class I take my chance and ask a friend to help me (Daniel).*

The following table 7.4 illuminates pupils' feelings during the periods of the class tests.

*Table 7.4: Quotes from pupils' transcriptions illuminating their feelings during class tests*

<b>Quote</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<i>Very bad when your friends are able to do the work and you can't do it, sometimes you feel like crying (FG1).</i>	Pupils experienced strong emotions; sometimes so intense that the pupils wished they could let it out - cry.
<i>You feel helpless and frustrated ...to see if the teacher is not looking at you (FG4).</i>	A stage of desperation; characterised by the 'will' to act to protect self-image.
<i>The teacher doesn't allow anyone to talk to... (Bright).</i>	Help-seeking during class tests was viewed as an offence and attracted punishment from the teachers.
<i>The teacher will not be happy with me and may punish me so I don't talk. (Daniel).</i>	Pupils avoided the wrath of their teacher. However, the pupils faced a dilemma; to obey and fail or to disobey and pass.

The finding was that the lower attaining pupils tended to seek help when they experienced difficulties in classroom tasks, but their teachers prevented them from soliciting help from fellow-pupils. As noted in the previous chapter (6), writing in the context of South Africa, Monteith (1996) argued that despite the importance of

managing social sources to facilitate learning, it is a learning strategy that is not always encouraged by teachers.

Additionally, the lower attaining pupils reported that they experienced frustrations and helplessness during class tests. This was understandable; as Salvia, Ysseldyke and Bolt (2007) pointed out, when pupils face tasks that are too difficult for them to do they do not learn efficiently and often experience frustrations. The frustrations the lower attaining pupils in this study experienced could be attributed to their teachers' continuous assessment approaches as described in the previous chapter (6). In fact, Brookhart and DeVoge (1999) noted that teachers' explicit instructions and how they presented and treated classroom assessment events affected the way pupils approached the tasks.

In spite of teachers' opposition to asking for help, some of the lower achievers managed to seek help from friends during class tests. A pupil made the following statement:

*During class tests when I notice that I can't answer the questions I ask my friends to help because I don't want to score low marks (Ezekiel).*

The behaviour is understandable; in every task situation pupils generate effective responses that make them to engage in different behaviours. Vispoel and Austin (1995) stated that when given a particular task in some situation, pupils generate an effective response prompting them to engage in certain behaviour. In other words, pupils exhibit patterns of beliefs and emotions which serve to direct behaviour. As a result, when pupils are presented with a task, they make judgement about the task and respond emotionally based upon the task and the personal characteristics.

### 7.3.3 Lower attaining pupils' post-class tests feelings

With respect to post-class test feelings, the feelings reported by the lower attaining pupils were not different from their feelings prior to or during the tests. The following were some of the statements the pupils made:

*Yes, at times when you see the test papers you have strange feelings in the stomach; it's a nery moment. If you get your paper and you have failed you feel very sad (FG1).*

*When we see that we have done well we feel happy because if you get high scores and go home with your report cards your mother will be happy but if you score low marks they will beat or insult you (FG2).*

Similar views emerged in the individual interviews, as shown in the following statements made by two pupils:

*When the teacher brings our test papers I become nervous, my heart beats faster because I fear that I have failed or I scored zero (Abigail).*

*I'm worried because I fear that I failed the tests (Sonny).*

The following comments from both groups and individuals suggested that the period preceding getting information about class test results were characterised by anxiety and stress. In fact, comments such as '*you have strange feelings in the stomach; it's a nery moment*', and '*... worried*' were similar to the experiences prior to class tests, and highlighted the pupils' anxiety as they waited for their class test results. The pupils reported that they became upset when they failed the tests.

Arguably, the lower attaining pupils' reaction to failing class tests could partly be attributed of the reactions of their parents. As shown in the following statement made by Focus Group 4, '*...if you score low marks they will beat or insult you*', some parents punished their children when they failed their examinations. This seems to suggest that some parents blame their children for poor examination results.

However, Cizek (1997) explained that for each lower attaining pupil, better performance depends on the complex interrelationships among a number of variables, including pupil's background, prior learning, motivation, teacher characteristics, instructional quality, classroom environment, parental support, and the assessment system. This links to the next issue which concerns the lower attaining pupils' perceptions of their current performance at school.

#### **7.4 Lower attaining pupils' views about performance at school**

With respect to pupils' views about their current performance at school, two views emerged from the pupils' interviews. While the majority reported that they had made improvement in their performance at school, the minority of the pupils felt they had not made any improvements in their performance at school. The following sections provide detailed analyses and discussion of the two views reported by the pupils.

##### **7.4.1 Pupils' perceptions reflecting improvements in performance**

Two focus groups reported that their current performance was better than it used be. The groups made the following statements:

*Our performance has improved; we're doing well in the classroom (FG1).*

*We are doing well; we participate in classroom activities and are able to answer some questions in classroom (FG2).*

At the individual pupils' level, the following statements were made by some of the pupils who felt that they had made improvement:

*I have been doing well in classroom activities and getting high scores in continuous assessment. Sometimes I get more than the average in the activities we do in class (Emma).*

*I feel I'm improving; it is those who don't do well that do not see that they are making progress. I sense that I am doing well. I take part in classroom discussions and group work (Jacob).*

The information from the comments seemed to suggest that the pupils who reported that they had made improvement in their current performance used their participation in classroom activities to inform their judgement.

The following table 7.5 illustrates pupils' judgement about their classroom performance and learning.

*Table 7.5: Quotes and commentary reflecting lower attaining pupils' judgement about their current performance at school*

<b>Quote</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<i>We are doing well; we participate in classroom activities ... able to answer some questions in classroom (FG2).</i>	Perception of improvement reflecting what the group were able to do in learning activities.
<i>Getting high scores in continuous assessment. Sometimes I get more than the average in the activities we do in class (Emma).</i>	Perception of improvement reflecting scores in learning activities. Judgement based on criterion used by teachers-marks.

Pupils' views about their performance were informed by feedback from sources such as class exercises, tests, teachers' classroom comments and remarks, as well as their continuous assessment records. In a way, the pupils were using their teachers' criteria to determine whether or not they had improved. From this group of pupils' perspectives they had made improvement in their classroom performance. This was not surprising; as shown in the previous Chapter (6) teachers adopted different strategies for example, extra classes to support and enhance the performance of pupils who recorded lower attainments in their classrooms.

In fact, in a study in Ghana, Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) reported that 64% of the senior secondary school teachers (SSS) used continuous assessment to identify students who

were experiencing difficulties in their studies in order to organise additional instruction for such students to enable them reach the pass level. The researcher reported that 86% of the SSS teachers used their students' attainment in continuous assessment to guide them. As explained in Chapter 3, basic and senior secondary schoolteachers follow the same continuous assessment format (guide) for their assessment practices.

Also, Harlen (2006b) explained that to all intents and purposes the term 'formative assessment' includes diagnostic assessment, which is often taken to concern difficulties in learning since formative is concerned with both difficulties and positive achievements. However, from the literature the evidence was that assessment practices in which lower attaining pupils recorded gains in attainments showed enhanced formative assessment procedures, for example, as in Black and Wiliam (1998; 2006a) and Black et al. (2003).

#### **7.4.2 Lack of improvement**

Furthermore, other children reported that they had not achieved improvement in their current performance. The following were the statements made by some of the pupils:

*We are not doing well in the classroom; our performance is deteriorating (FG4).*

*When I was in class 4, I was doing well but now I feel I am not doing well, my performance is going down ... I am not able to do the exercises correctly and score high mark (Essah).*

*Currently I have not improved. I cannot read or perform well as some of my friends in the classroom. Also, I don't participate in discussions as the others (Godfred).*

*My performance is getting worse. I am unable to read well and I don't get my sums correct most of the time. I am also unable to take part in classroom*



*discussions because most of the time I don't know the answers of the questions* (John).

The analysis did not show any difference in the views of older and younger lower attaining pupils concerning their current performance. Both categories of pupils made similar comments about their performance as shown in the statements in the texts. In this context, older lower attaining pupils referred to all those who were above the statutory age for B6 (primary 6), that is, 14-18 year olds. The younger lower attaining pupils referred to those within the statutory age, that is, 11-12 year olds (see detail in Chapter 2).

The information from the study revealed that, some pupils felt that their current performance was worse than previous performance. The comments such as, '*When I was in class 4, I was doing well*', and '*my performance is getting worse. I am unable to read well*' implied that the lower attaining pupils' performance had deteriorated. The pupils offered reasons to support why they felt they had not improved, which was understandable.

Naturally, pupils know their relative performance in class through the different sources of feedback from their teachers. As Pollard et al. (2005) pointed out children are aware of teacher judgements and where they personally stand in relation to them. Even in routine classroom life there are often relatively overt indicators of attainment and, despite the best efforts of teachers, children are often aware of their position in reading, maths or grouping systems. Pupils are also aware of more subtle indicators of teacher assessment and disposition, for these are revealed through the quality of rapport or interaction that develops between the teacher and particular individuals.

As argued in the literature review in Chapter 3, the continuous assessment programme tends to emphasise summative functions such as, reporting and contributing marks to the final examination. The continuous assessment model does not enable teachers to use information to help pupils to improve. Literature shows that teacher assessments that emphasise summative functions do not enable lower attaining pupils to improve (Black and Wiliam, 1998; 2006a; Harlen, 2006a; Weeden et al., 2003).

### **7.4.3 Factors causing poor performance at school**

The lower attaining pupils in the study provided a number of reasons to explain why they perform poorly at school. The following statements were made by some of the pupils:

*I don't study at home; I am always doing house chore and after that I play with my friends and don't do any private study. I can't read the textbook fluently (Daniel).*

*When I get home I perform many errands and so I don't get time to study (Cecilia).*

*I always sell after school to earn some income to support my self (Godfred). It's because I don't attend school regularly (Sonny).*

The pupils attributed the causes of their poor school performance to external factors such as; 'house chore', 'playing with friends', 'selling' and 'poor school attendance'. Some of the factors mentioned by the pupils were beyond their control; for example, performing errands at home and selling. Others are controllable; for example, playing with friends. This information is significant because it highlights the pupils' perceptions of the causes of their poor performance at school.

Harlen and Crick (2003) explained that a person's perceptions of the causes of success and failure are of central importance in the development of motivation for

learning. The causes of success and failure have three dimensions. The first is *locus*, whether causes are perceived to originate from within the person or externally. The second is *stability*, whether the causes are perceived to be constant or to vary over time. The third has to do with *controllability*, whether the individual perceives that she or he can influence the causes of success or failure

The lower attaining pupils' stance reveals that they perceive the causes of their poor performance (failure) as external and controllable. It is also unstable because if the appropriate actions are taken the pupils can influence the causes of their poor performance. At the pupils' own level, they have to reduce their playtime and use some of that time to learn. This point complements teachers' views in the previous Chapter (6) that pupils spend less time to learn and are not serious with their studies.

However, Evans and Engelberg (1988) argued that lower attaining pupils make more external attributions than higher achieving pupils. This according to Harlen (2006a) suggested that lower attaining pupils attempt to protect their self-esteem by attributing their relative failure to external factors. Also, as stated previously, Evans and Engelberg (1988) noted that pupils with low motivation are more likely to lack external support and to have problems outside of school that create barriers to their engagement in their school work.

The results revealed contradictions and inconsistencies between the qualitative focus group interviews with pupils and quantitative data from teachers' questionnaires. For example, in the questionnaires teachers reported continuous assessment enabled lower attaining pupils to participate in learning, get attention, believe in their ability,

experience success, and happy whilst they performed tasks (Sections 5.7.2 & 5.7.3, Chapter 5). However, findings from focus groups with pupils showed that pupils reportedly were stressed, unable to learn, performed poorly in class tests, became upset and repeated classes (Chapter 7). Lower attaining pupils did the same tasks as other learners which caused them to experience difficulties. The contradictions as explained in the previous Chapter (6) were not surprising; the results came from three different methods of collecting data. Gaskell and Bauer (2000) stated, “approaching a problem from two perspectives or with two methods would inevitably lead to inconsistencies and contradictions” (p. 345). In this study, the results from the questionnaires and qualitative interviews with teachers and focus groups with pupils were different, but together they generated insights into uses of continuous assessment and the experiences of lower attaining pupils at basic schools in Ghana (Chapter 4).

### **7.5 Summary of the chapter**

The findings showed that there was general feeling of anxiety and stress among the pupils in the period leading to class tests. The pupils reported frustrations and feeling of helplessness when they found that the classroom tasks were too difficult for them to do and they could not get help to do the tasks. The pupils’ post-class test experience was characterised by anxiety during the wait for results and sadness when they failed. They lacked support from home and school as well as self-regulated learning. Pupils attributed the causes of poor performance to external factors such as; lack of time and support. Chapter 8 provides further discussion of findings, the summary of the main findings and reflections on the research methodology used.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 8.1 Introduction

This research focused on investigating the uses of continuous assessment and focusing, in particular, on the experiences of Primary 6 lower attaining pupils in basic schools in Ghana. The purpose was to find out whether teachers' continuous assessment practices supported and enhanced the participation of such pupils who were vulnerable to exclusion.

I used a range of data collection methods to address five research questions concerning: the effects of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils, in-class arrangements for lower attainers, challenges teachers faced, lower attaining learners' feelings about class tests and perceptions of their performance.

Although the discussion of the findings of each aspect of the study has been provided in the respective chapters, it is important to provide a summary of the findings in the present chapter to enable clear recommendations to be outlined. I have also provided an evaluation of the methodology and the methods.

## **8.2 Summary of the main findings**

The themes discussed were formulated from the research questions. The following were major findings:

From the self-completed questionnaires, the basic schoolteachers recognised that their continuous assessment practices affected lower attaining pupils in their classrooms. The general feeling was that teachers' continuous assessment practices supported and enhanced lower attaining pupils' progress. The mean analyses of teachers' responses revealed that teachers' perceptions with respect to the three themes that were extracted from the questionnaires differed in relation to their background characteristics (see Chapter 5).

However, the results from the teachers' interviews contradicted the information from the questionnaires. Teachers reported that the continuous assessment approach was unfair to pupils with difficulties, particularly those who record lower attainments. Consequently, these pupils continually performed poorly and some of them repeated classes every academic year. Furthermore, the education policy, curriculum and continuous assessment pressures, and lack of training in teaching and assessing lower attaining pupils impinged on the ability of teachers to support lower attaining pupils in classrooms (see Chapter 6).

The lower attaining pupils reportedly became anxious, frustrated and helpless before and during class tests, and upset when they failed the tests. From the findings the following three issues were considered for further discussion:

- continuous assessment at basic schools in Ghana;
- experiences of lower attaining pupils in basic schools; and
- teacher training and development with respect to continuous assessment and lower attaining pupils in basic schools in Ghana.

### **8.2.1 Continuous assessments at basic schools in Ghana**

In Chapter 1, I stated that the main reason for doing the research was to investigate the uses of continuous assessment and focusing, in particular, on the experiences of pupils who record lower attainments in basic schools in Ghana. The research was important for gaining a broader perspective of basic schoolteachers' continuous assessment policies and practices as a basis for making recommendations for improving policy and practice. Continuous assessment is the only teacher assessment at the basic school level in Ghana (see Chapter 3). From the findings, teachers followed a prescribed format for conducting continuous assessment in their classrooms. The format included the use of exercises, class tests and homework to gather summative marks to complete pupils' records (see details in Chapter 6).

The use of a prescribed format raises the following two concerns, inflexibility and summative evaluation, regarding assessment of pupils' progress in learning. In terms of inflexibility, for example, the teachers complained that the continuous assessment approach did not favour individuals with difficulties, particularly lower attainers in classrooms. The teachers however, used the approach to the detriment of such pupils; they reportedly were implementing their continuous assessments according to the format. The teachers explained that education officers (school inspectors) expected them to follow the continuous assessment format. The officers reprimanded teachers

who were unable to meet targets set in the format. For example, in one of the schools, a teacher was reportedly demoted to teach a lower class because he was unable to give pupils expected number of exercises within the term. Demotion in this context referred to a teacher being moved to a lower class within an academic year as a disciplinary measure (see Chapter 6).

Teachers reportedly felt pressurised and complained about the attitude of education officers. The teachers' concern raised two issues: impact on practice, and pupils' experience of school. For the teachers, the attitude of education officers stifled their continuous assessment practices; they were unable to make any changes in their continuous assessments to address needs of lower attaining pupils (Chapter 6). Lower attaining pupils reportedly experienced stress whenever they participated in class tests for their continuous assessment records. They continually performed poorly and some eventually repeated classes every academic year (Chapter 7).

The problems associated with teachers' continuous assessments could be attributed to the educational policies in Ghana, for example, FCUBE (MoE, 2000c; MoEYS, 2004) and Vision 2020 (MoE, 2000f). None of the policies included any provisions in terms of curricular, pedagogical and assessment, specifically for lower attaining pupils. The notion was that pupils irrespective of their needs should receive the same education and work towards the same targets in the National Curriculum and programmes of study (see Chapter 2). Consequently, the continuous assessment programme was used to evaluate pupils' progress along the curriculum and to report attainments at school. Continuous assessment was organised within the criterion-referenced framework (Amedahe, 2000) and did not focus on informing teaching and learning.



Harlen (2006b) noted that criterion-referenced assessments involve using the same criteria for all pupils because the purpose is to report attainment in a way that is comparable across pupils. There is no feedback into teaching- at least not in the same immediate way as in the assessment for learning cycle.

However, as argued elsewhere (see Chapters 1 & 2), in England where the policy imperative has shifted towards inclusive education (DES, 2001a), teachers are directed to use appropriate assessment approaches that allow for different learning styles and ensure that pupils are given the chance and encouragement to demonstrate their competence and attainment through appropriate means that are familiar to them and for which they have been adequately prepared (Fletcher-Campbell, 2001; Lee and Henkhousens, 1996; Lewis, 2001; QCA, 2006).

In a study in Trinidad and Tobago, Rampaul and Freeze (1992) reported that teachers perceived a variety of continuous assessment methods as effective. These assessment methods represented a forward-looking approach in which the purpose of assessment was as much to guide future instruction as well as to evaluate past attainments.

Both the literature from Ghana and the present findings showed that the focus of continuous assessment was largely to gather summative marks for pupils' records. Teachers used exercises, tests and homework specifically to gather summative marks to complete pupils' records. However, the emphasis on summative marks shifted teachers' attention from information that could be used to inform teaching and learning to foster improvement of lower attaining pupils. In the process, teachers inevitably focused on finding out how well each child was performing against the

stated targets for each class, leading to comparison of pupils in classrooms. Teachers not only provided feedback mainly in the form marks but also, compared pupils' attainments in learning (see Chapter 6).

Studies have shown that feedback in the form of marks and grades are not beneficial to pupils, particularly lower attainers for example, Black and Wiliam (1998; 2006a) in the UK and Butler (1988) in Israel. Feedback in the form of marks tells lower attaining pupils that they lack ability (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Also, the giving of marks for every piece of work may lead to complacency or demoralisation leading to regression in progress. Whilst, pupils who continually receive high grades such as 'A' and 'B' may become complacent, lower attainers who get low marks may become demoralised (Clarke, 2005).

In order to avoid these deleterious repercussions on the experiences of lower attaining pupils, teachers' continuous assessment must emphasize formative functions and provide information about their learning to foster improvement. Studies have shown that improved formative assessment helps low attainers more than other learners, and so reduces the spread of attainment whilst also raising it overall as shown by Black and Wiliam (2003) in England. Enhanced formative assessment includes features such as, adjustment in teaching to take account of the results of assessment, the recognition of the influence assessment has on motivation and self-esteem of pupils, and the need for pupils to assess themselves and understand how to improve (Black and Wiliam, 2003; Stiggins, 2002; Clarke, 2005). However, none of these features are found in the continuous assessment practices of the teachers in the study (see Chapter 6) and Ghana as a whole (Chapter 3).

### **8.2.2 Experiences of lower attaining pupils in continuous assessment environments**

The experience of lower attaining pupils whilst they participated in class tests for their continuous assessment records was characterised by stress, frustrations and sense of helplessness. The stress pupils reportedly experienced was attributable to the following factors; difficult tasks, lack of self-regulated learning skills, lack of self-efficacy and support (see details at Chapter 7). Teachers used the same tasks to assess all pupils, including lower attainers in classrooms. The use of the same tasks to assess all pupils in classrooms caused lower attainers to continually perform poorly leading to repetition in classes (see Chapter 6).

Studies elsewhere have shown when lower attaining pupils constantly face assessments that they are unable to deal with effectively they become demoralised as by Black and Wiliam (1998, 2006a) in England, Harlen (2002) in Europe, Pollard et al. (2000) in England. The pupils become frustrated and do not learn effectively (Salvia, Ysseldyke and Bolt, 2007); some repeat classes even at early age (Raveaud, 2004).

Furthermore, Crooks (1988) cited by Harlen (2006a) pointed out that lower attaining pupils are doubly disadvantaged by summative assessments. Being labelled as failures impacts not just on current feelings about their ability to learn, but lowers further their already low self-esteem and reduces the chance of future effort and success. Only when low attainers have a high level of support (from school and/or home), which shows them how to improve, do some escape from this vicious circle.

However, in England, Raveaud (2004) found that differentiation had reduced the actual occurrence of errors in pupils' work. In line with this, Cheminais (2000) suggested that differentiation was synonymous to inclusion. Careful and systematic differentiation allows teachers to use appropriately challenging tasks to assess pupils in their classrooms (Fletcher-Campbell, 2001; Lee and Henkhusens, 1996; Lewis, 2001; QCA, 2006).

Undoubtedly, repeated poor performance and past experience of failures had caused the lower attaining pupils to lack self-efficacy. For example, when pupils were asked why they felt anxious about impending class tests they reported, "class tests are difficult" and "we always don't do well" (see Chapter 7). The comments were understandable. Studies have shown that pupils' self-efficacy and judgements about their abilities to do particular classroom assessments are based on previous experiences with similar kinds of classroom assessments, as by Duckworth, Fielding, and Shaughnessy (1986). Learners who have previously experienced difficulties in a certain area of content or particular tasks usually doubt their capabilities and refrain from learning (Monteith, 1996). Crooks (1988) reported that test anxiety has a debilitating effect on attainments but this effect can be reduced if teachers avoid comparisons between pupils.

There is a link between lack of self-efficacy and lack of self-regulated learning skills; they are components of motivation (Harlen, 2006 Harlen and Crick, 2002). Self-regulated learners select, structure and create environment that optimise their learning (Zimmerman, 1990); they take responsibility for their own learning (Monteith, 1996). The evidence was that lower attaining pupils lacked self-regulated learning; the pupils reportedly did not know what to do learn in order to pass class tests (see Chapter 7).

This is not strange; for self-regulated learning does not develop automatically; like any other skills lower attaining pupils have to be trained in order to acquire self-regulated learning.

In a study in Canada, Perry (1998) reported that teachers' teaching styles encouraged self-regulated learning in pupils. In self-regulated classrooms teachers provided complex activities, offered pupils choices, enabled them to control the amount of challenge, to collaborate with peers, and to evaluate their work. Apart from complex activities which did not emerge in this study, all the other components listed above were lacking in the teachers' continuous assessment practices (see Chapter 6).

Additionally, lower attaining pupils lacked requisite support both at school and home to improve. At school, teachers were unable to support lower attaining pupils due to overcrowded timetables and larger classes. Besides, and perhaps ironically, teachers disapproved of peer assistance and collaborative problem solving strategies in their classrooms. In fact, only two of the 12 teachers interviewed reportedly used peer-assisted strategy to support lower attainers during exercises (see Chapter 6). This was particularly problematic, since the tasks teachers used to assess pupils were overly difficult for lower attainers. By discouraging peer assistance in their classrooms, the teachers deprived lower attaining pupils invaluable resource to foster improvement. Writing in the context of South Africa, Monteith (1996) also noted that despite the importance of managing social sources to facilitate learning, it is a learning strategy that is not always encouraged by teachers.

However, there is evidence, for example, in Roderick and Engel (2001) and Harlen and Crick (2003) that schools that give higher support are markedly more successful in terms of pupil effort than those which give little support. High support means creating environments of social and educational support, working hard to increase pupils' sense of self-efficacy, focusing on task-centred goals, making goals explicit, using assessment to help pupils succeed and having a strong sense of responsibility for pupils.

Studies have shown that peer teaching and collaborative problem solving are effective tools for supporting lower attaining pupils' improvement; for example, as by Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, and Simmons (1977); Salisbury, Evans, and Palombaro (1997); and Stevens and Slavin (1995b) in the USA. Furthermore, Udvari-Solner and Thousand (1995) pointed out that the quality of instruction from peers may be more effective than from adults (teachers) because children use more age-appropriate, meaningful language and may better understand their peer's potential frustrations. Also pupils who teach concepts and procedures understand them at a deeper level, thus engaging in meta-cognitive activity.

Apart from the above, lower attaining pupils also lacked support at home to improve. Pupils performed errands and some engaged in income generating activities, rather than spending time to learn (Chapter 7). The findings were not surprising though, they raised a significant concern; indeed, owing to reasons such as low incomes, unemployment and poverty, pupils in a developing country such as Ghana would be expected to undertake such chores. Nonetheless, parents and families are gradually becoming more informed about their responsibilities and obligations concerning their

children's education. Since pupils were overburdened they could not engage in activities to promote learning; thus pupils did not get requisite help from school and home to foster improvement in learning.

The evidence is that both school and home play key role in supporting all pupils, particularly lower attainers to progress. Harlen (2006a) pointed out that social and cultural considerations are important aspects of context because they influence "pupils' perception of self, their beliefs about attainments, and the selection of goals..." Even if academic attainment and the rewards associated with it are perceived to have value, a pupil may decide that home and school support is inadequate to help him or her succeed (p 65). Furthermore, pupils with low motivation are more likely to lack external support and to have problems outside of school that create barriers to their engagement in their schoolwork (Roderick and Engel, 2001).

### **8.2.3 Lower attaining pupils at basic schools in Ghana**

In Ghana, lower attainers are not categorized separately; they are seen as the continuum of attainments in the classroom. As a result, there is no specific provision in terms of curricular, pedagogic and assessment policies for such pupils in basic schools (see Chapter 1). Owing to lack of recognition and specific provisions, teacher education and professional development programmes in Ghana do not provide information and practical experiences regarding teaching and assessing lower attaining pupils to teachers (see Chapter 2). Teachers assess lower attaining pupils as other learners in classrooms (see Chapter 6). As argued in the previous section, the use of the same approach to assess all pupils in classrooms has deleterious effects on those who record lower attainments.

It is evident from the findings in this thesis that issues of provisions in terms of curriculum, teaching and assessment of pupils who record lower attainments should be given important consideration. Separate provisions will make teachers consistent in teaching and assessing pupils who record lower attainments. The provision should be drawn up and established within a legislative framework.

Literature shows that some countries have categories constructed that enable special provisions to be made, but that is clearly differentiated from categories of special education. In the USA, for instance, lower attaining pupils are regarded as being 'at-risk' for educational failure whilst, in the Russia Federation they may fall into the 'compensatory' category. In England, such learners may fall within the ambit of special education, but special education may itself be defined in extremely wide terms so that it encompasses almost any learner who has difficulty in schooling. Also, these categorizations prove to be extremely fluid; not only are boundaries between 'low attainers', 'average attainers' and pupils with 'SEN' difficult to define, but the categories themselves shift over time (Dyson and Hick, 2005).

Dyson and Hick (2005) suggested in some countries there are special programmes for lower attaining children and youth. For example, the 'Lower Attaining Pupils' Project' (LAPP) in England, 'Success for All' (SfA), which originated from the USA but has spread more widely, and 'Reading Recovery', which was developed by a New Zealand researcher but has likewise spread widely. The programmes are not available at the basic schools in Ghana; education policies have consistently overlooked the needs of lower attaining pupils in the school system.



#### **8.2.4 Repetition**

One significant finding from the study was repetition; some lower attaining pupils repeated classes every academic year. This has partly contributed to the presence of older pupils in classrooms, particularly primary 6. There were 15 - 18 year olds in primary 6 in some schools (see Chapter 7). The situation might be widespread in the country. Since the statutory school entry age in Ghana is 6 years, 15-18 year olds should either be in JSS 3 or have completed basic school (Chapter 2).

#### **8.2.5 Theoretical underpinning of continuous assessment**

The discussion has illuminated how factors such as, policy, cultural and contextual issues have shaped teachers' continuous assessment policies and practices in basic schools in Ghana. Writing in the context of Europe, Watkins (2007) pointed out that assessment policy and practice in a country is a result of developments in legislation as well as understandings of conceptions of teaching and learning. For her part, Broadfoot (1996) noted that assessment practices and discourses are embedded in and emanate from cultural, social, and political traditions and assumptions. These factors affect policies and teachers' practices in subtle, complex and often contradictory ways. This was endorsed by Gipps (1996) who explained that assessments come not only in a range of forms but also, with different purposes and underlying philosophies.

Theoretically, the findings seemed to suggest that teachers emphasized behaviourist approaches in their continuous assessments, rather than the approaches from the constructivist theories. For example, teachers set tasks for pupils to do, controlled

classroom events, enforced individual work, marked and recorded pupils' progress of learning (Chapter 6). As pointed out by James (2006), in the context of behaviourist approach, teachers assess and reinforce pupils' responses; they set objectives which describe the learners' next steps on the learning ladder; and make records, on the basis of new assessments, of progress measured against performance criteria which are teacher-defined (Sebba, Byers and Rose, 1993). Additionally, pupils play a passive role in their assessment (Pollard et al., 2005; Pryor, 2002), Performance is usually interpreted as either correct or incorrect and poor performance is remedied by more practice in the incorrect items (James, 2006).

It could be argued that, the over-emphasis of behaviourist approaches has not enabled teachers to use continuous assessment for improvements. On the other hand, the literature reviewed has shown that teacher assessments which adopted the constructivist's approaches fostered improvement of all pupils, particularly lower attainers (Watson, 2000). In the constructivist's paradigm, teacher-pupil interactions in 'continuous' assessment will go beyond the communication of test results, the judgements of progress and the provision of additional instruction, only during corrections and extra classes as has been happening in Ghana (Chapter 6); it will include a role for the teacher in assisting the pupil to comprehend and engage with new ideas and problems (Torrance and Pryor, 2002) whilst, they are engaged in exercises and tests for their records. Pupils including lower attainers will play more active role in their assessment, engage more in supporting one another (Harlen, 2006a; Gipps, 1996; James, 2006; Pollard et al., 2005; Watson, 2000). The constructivist's approaches are more akin to formative assessment (Lambert and Lines, 2000).

Also, a shift towards the constructivist's approaches will influence the conception of basic schoolteachers in Ghana about continuous assessment, change it from making pupils accountable for their learning (Chapters 3 & 6); to a conceptualisation that sees continuous assessment as for improvement of teaching and learning (see Brown, 2004; Black and Wiliam, 2006b; and Harlen, 2006a).

### **8.2.6 Teacher training and professional development**

The basic schoolteachers' initial, in-service training and professional development with respect to the use of continuous assessment to inform teaching and learning, particularly supporting pupils who record lower achievements was very weak. Review of literature and my findings revealed that pre-service education and training of teachers did not focus on practices relating to teaching and assessing lower attaining pupils. The programmes for teacher-trainees in Ghana tended to focus on evaluation of pupils' achievements (Chapter 2). Although, teachers were equipped with skills in designing and implementing summative assessments, they were ill equipped in the use of information for improvement in general, particularly in supporting pupils who recorded lower attainments in classes. The teachers lacked innovative skills in teaching and assessing pupils whose attainments fell below the 'average' in class (Chapters 5 & 6).

With respect to in-service training, such programmes were not only rare but also, in-service programmes concerning the use of continuous assessment to support lower attaining pupils were non-existent. The few in-service training courses and workshops

did not consider continuous assessment practices and/or lower attaining pupils (see details in Chapter 6).

### **8.3 Reflections on the research methodology**

The present study used a range of methods drawing on both quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Self-completed questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from teachers; whilst, semi-structured interviews with teachers, focus groups and individual interviews with lower attaining pupils, and documents were used to collect the qualitative data. As explained in the methodology Chapter (4), the choice of methodology and methods for collecting data were informed by practical considerations, the research questions (Bryman, 1988), assumptions and beliefs (Creswell, 1998; Greene and Caracelli, 1997), purpose and audience of the study (Hammersley, 2000).

#### **8.3.1 The use of a range of data collecting methods**

Basic schoolteachers' continuous assessment practices and discourses are embedded in and emanate from cultural, social, and political assumptions (see Chapter 2). These factors affect teachers' policies and practices in subtle, complex and often contradictory ways (Broadfoot, 1996). Basic schoolteachers use continuous assessment for different purposes. Moreover, the relationship between continuous assessment, teaching and learning is complicated because of the underlying interplay of factors within each basic school classroom where the assessment takes place (see Chapter 6). As a result of the nature and complexity of themes in the research problem, "uses of continuous assessment" and "lower attaining pupils", I used a range

of data collecting methods from both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Hammersley, 1992; Bryman, 1988, Creswell, 2005).

I intended to get types of information that would be acceptable to policy-makers in Ghana, and useful to basic schoolteachers. Whilst, views of teachers across different schools were considered valuable to policy makers, data from individual teachers' continuous assessment context were considered useful to teachers (Husén, 1999; Hammersley, 2000). As stated in the previous section, the decision to utilise both quantitative and qualitative methods in collecting data on the topic stated above, was partly informed by the intended audience of the research and partly by the complex nature of the themes in the inquiry.

Essentially, published studies concerning teachers' perceptions of continuous assessment in Ghana such as, Amedahe (2002), Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) and Angbing (2001) used only questionnaires. However, in critiquing these materials I realised the limitations of using evidence based on questionnaires alone; the 'voices' of pupils were not included. To correct that, I included qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups to let both teachers and children speak and when they did, I discovered new information that none of the published studies in Ghana had provided.

For instance, data from focus groups with lower attaining pupils showed how the pupils reportedly experienced stress and a sense of helplessness before and during class tests. The data illustrated the impact on them of the assessment process; for example, the pupils reported that when they failed class tests they 'became sad' and

‘sometimes wanted to cry’. Furthermore, the pupils reported that their parents ‘insulted’ and ‘smacked’ them for failing. This information provided interpretive colour of rich text that captured the feelings of lower attaining pupils who participated in the research.

Additionally, the use of a range of methods provided information that explained the impact of macro-level and micro or classroom-level factors on teachers’ continuous assessment policies and practices with respect to lower attaining pupils. For example, from the interviews teachers reported the continuous assessment guidelines did not make provisions for lower attaining pupils. As a result, they gave all pupils, including lower attainers the same tasks to do in classrooms. Also, continuous assessment was largely used for the purpose of reporting attainments at school. As a result, teachers used classrooms tasks such as, exercises and tests to gather summative marks to complete pupils’ records. Teachers’ continuous assessment practices were set within the context of the national education system, schools as well as classrooms; it was the qualitative data that illustrated the extent to which these factors facilitated and inhibited the inclusion (Clark, Dyson and Millward, 1995) of lower attaining pupils.

### **8.3.2 Difficulties regarding the use of a range of methods**

One difficulty I encountered in the use of quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study was the consequent contradictions in findings. For example, from the questionnaires teachers reported continuous assessment enabled lower attainers to participate in learning, improve, develop desire for learning as well as believe in their ability to learn and receive attention (see Chapter 5). From pupils’ interviews they reportedly experienced stress, found classroom tasks too difficult to do, did not know

what to learn and how to prepare towards class tests, and continually performed poorly (see Chapter 7). Also, teachers reported that overcrowded timetables prevented them from creating additional time to work with pupils in classrooms.

Essentially, contradictions are common features of studies that combined different methods. In view of that, Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) pointed out that any design that seeks to marry the two research traditions are not without inherent dangers, this requires one to thread cautiously when applying them in a single research endeavour. Also, Gaskell and Bauer (2000) stated that “approaching a problem from two perspectives or with two methods would inevitably lead to inconsistencies and contradictions” (p. 345). They argued that some of the inconsistencies might be due to methodological limitations; however, they might also demonstrate that social phenomena looked different when approached from different conceptual angles.

The purpose of using a range of methods was to produce a complementary study (see Chapter 4), as a result, the different data sets from questionnaires and interviews with teachers and pupils were put together to provide what Brennan (2007) called ‘insights’ into basic schoolteachers’ continuous assessment policies and practices.

For their part, Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher, and Pérez-Prado (2003) pointed out that the potential for problems exists when a researcher attempts to combine research paradigms (quantitative and qualitative methods) in a single study; one may end up not doing either type of research well. In order to overcome this problem, I spent a considerable time learning the various processes involved in developing, using and

analysing questionnaires (quantitative method). The process was largely hands-on experiences in utilising numerical data (see Chapter 4).

I also, expended time on conducting interviews, particularly focus groups of lower attaining children (qualitative methods). I sought and received expert advice during the research process and discussed aspects of the study with other research students at conferences (for example, the British Education Research Association, BERA and The Research Students' Conference, University of Birmingham). For example, following my presentation at the BERA conference I was advised to use 'T-Tests' to do further analysis of teachers' responses to make findings more robust. At the Research Students' Conference I discussed issues concerning validity, reliability and ethics of the research. The discussion led to reflection on the research process. In this way, the methods of data collection and other aspects of the study were subject to robust evaluation.

I spent a considerable amount of time in designing, piloting, and analysing the data from the self-completed questionnaires (see Chapter 4), which yielded substantial data reflecting different aspects of basic schoolteachers' continuous assessment practices and perceptions of teachers concerning the effects on lower attaining pupils in Ghana. However, I addressed only one research question, which focused on teachers' perceptions, as a result, a substantial amount of the data that were yielded were not used. If the research question had focused on how teachers conducted continuous assessment with respect to lower attaining pupils substantial amount of the data would have been used. In view of this explanation, the research question that was addressed



was considered inappropriate. Possibly, re-focusing of my research question could have avoided this lack of use of some data.

The strength of the study was that the questions addressed by data from the interviews compensated for the shortcomings regarding the first research question. The process has enabled me to not only put the excess data from the questionnaires in the appendix but also, to create space to include the pupils' 'voices'. The latter is extremely unusual in this context of researching teachers' continuous assessment practices in Ghana (see Chapter 1). However, the following two issues; dominant group member and shy respondent were encountered during the focus group interviews. First, dominant group member; in all the four focus groups few pupils, particularly boys were outspoken during the interviews; the pupils talked for long time and also tried to respond to every issue. I maintained eye contact with such pupils, asked other pupils whether they agreed or disagreed with the dominant pupil (Greenbaum, 1988), and also asked other pupils to comment. By asking pupils whether they agreed or disagreed with the dominant pupil and why they felt that way allowed other pupils to talk and encouraged variety of opinions.

Second, the quite or shy pupil; also few pupils said little and spoke in soft voices. I encouraged such pupils to speak up, tried to maintain eye contact, called them by name, and asked them follow up questions to generate useful responses from them (see Chapter 4).

In spite of these difficulties focus groups provided invaluable data source. As Stewart and Shamdasani (1998) noted, focus group research is one of the few research tools

available for obtaining data from children or individuals who are particularly, not literate.

Also, the documents such as pupils' attainments records and continuous assessment register were useful primary data. However, very little original data for example, pupils' attainment records were used. For any future research, opportunity would be sought to include substantial amount of such documents in their original forms in the final report. The necessary measures would be taken to ensure anonymity of pupils.

Another difficulty experienced and possibly typical when conducting research in developing countries such as Ghana was non-availability of a suitable extra room in which to interview children. The nature of primary school buildings in Ghana makes the school environment overly noisy and inappropriate for conducting interviews (Chapter 4). There are no extra rooms in schools and headteachers' offices are too busy and noisy for such purposes.

Furthermore, teachers in developing countries such as Ghana, are often underpaid, overworked and demoralised (Baine, 1996). Engaging with basic schoolteachers about the continuous assessment policies and practices in Ghana required considerable investments in terms of time, resources, and patience. It also required careful planning and imagination. These factors called for diplomacy and the use of financial rewards to encourage teachers' participation, since they spent additional time at school in order to participate in the interviews. In terms of diplomacy, apart from introductory letter from the District Directors, many of the headteachers and teachers in the area of the study were acquaintances. Some of them were colleagues

and others were former students. My personal interactions, appeals and enthusiasm during the distribution of questionnaires galvanised teachers' participation. It was not surprising that I had over 90% response rate (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, over 50% of those who completed the questionnaires also indicated their readiness to participate in the interviews. I gave each respondent a token in appreciation for the time. This gesture is acceptable in research practice. However, Church (1993) found that the inclusion of incentive increased response rates in mail surveys. As explained in Chapter 4, incentive has little or no effect on data quality and representativeness of the sample (see Scholder, McNiece, Gearan, and Casey, 2001).

### **8.3.3 Feedback to teachers and pupils**

Another area of concern was feedback to teachers and pupils after the interviews. In terms of the teachers I provided copies of the typed transcriptions reflecting the key issues to all of them to read through. It was impossible to type full interviews for the teachers to read while doing the focus groups' interviews with pupils and classroom observations. If time had allowed, full transcripts of teachers' interviews would have been made for them to widen respondent validity processes.

For pupils, the form of feedback given was to allow them to listen to the tape recordings of their interviews. These approaches were intended to check the authenticity, validity and trustworthiness of the data. As with the teachers, I would have preferred to make full transcripts of pupils' interviews; however, the transcripts would have been read as well as, possibly, translated into native languages. This would ensure that their views were accurately represented.

It is important to point out that the processes were not an effective means for validating the responses of participants, given that teachers did not have full transcripts of their interviews and pupils merely listened to their own voices. Nonetheless, these strategies ensured that the participants were provided with opportunities (albeit unsatisfactory) for feedback and the sense of participation in the research. Validity is important within any research, since the researcher needs to be sure that people's experiences and views are represented as accurately as possible (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003; Rogers, 1999). I have provided detailed discussion of validity earlier in Chapter 4.

#### **8.3.4 Difficulties regarding consent**

Consent was one of the main methodological difficulties in this study. Consent was sought from the Directors of Education in the two districts, headteachers, teachers, and parents as well as from the pupils themselves. Although the children assented to being interviewed, it was difficult to establish the extent to which they understood the implications of the study. Lewis (2002) noted the difficulties some researchers have in gaining informed consent; the permission I sought from the adults (head teachers, teachers and parents) were an unhappy compromise.

I explained the purpose of the study to the pupils in their native language to foster their understanding of what it was about. I also observed pupils' body language and facial expressions for any signs of apprehension. However, when a child was poorly prior to a focus group interview possibly out of nervousness, it reminded me of the pupils' inability to appreciate the implications of the research. I excused the pupil from taking part.

### **8.3.5 Alternative research design and methods of future research**

In spite of the difficulties and shortcomings, if I were to do the research again I would adopt the mixed methods approach to research. The design allowed the use of data gathered with one method to be verified and clarified with data from other methods.

However, if repeating the study now, I would make changes to the research questions and focus more on how teachers conduct continuous assessment and reasons to explain the approaches that teachers use in their continuous assessments. Thus many of the items in the questionnaire would not be included and there would be fewer redundant data. The excess data were put in the Appendix (5) to create space for ‘pupils’ voices’.

In terms of feedback to lower attaining pupils, I would follow the advice of Lewis (2002) that feedback may be provided through adults known to the children. At the same time I acknowledge the fact that little seems to have been written on feedback in published accounts of children’s views, particularly in the African context. There is a lot to be learnt from Lewis’s suggestions; future research involving lower attaining children in basic schools in Ghana could explore the possibility of giving feedback through class teachers who are familiar with the pupils and so have more established relationships and possibly effective means of communication with the children than has an outsider researcher.

## **8.4 Recommendations from the findings of the research**

The findings reveal that not only are the continuous assessment policies and practices of the basic (primary and junior secondary) schoolteachers from the two districts

similar but also, the teachers have similar background training and operate within similar contexts.

In line with these observations, the main issue emerging from the study in relation to uses of continuous assessment and focusing, particularly, on the experiences of pupils who record lower achievements in basic schools in Ghana is clear:

If basic (primary and junior secondary) schoolteachers are to use continuous assessment to improve all pupils' learning, particularly those who record lower attainments in classroom activities, then there is the need for policy guidelines and teacher training in relation to lower attainments in Ghana.

The specific recommendations that relate to this principle can be grouped as outlined below:

- policy guidelines relating to lower attainments in basic schools;
- curriculum and programmes of study and lower attainments;
- teacher training and professional development;
- support and resources for basic schoolteachers; and
- community-based vocational training centres.

#### **8.4.1 Policy guidelines concerning lower attainments in basic schools**

Current educational policies in Ghana do not include provisions in terms of curriculum, teaching and assessing lower attaining pupils. The pupils work towards the same targets in the National Curriculum and programme of study as all other pupils. Also, teachers use the same approach for assessing all pupils to assess lower

attainers. Pupils including lower attainers do the same tasks to get summative marks for their records. Lower attaining pupils find tasks overly challenging and continually perform poorly leading to repetition (Chapter 6). Ensuring basic schoolteachers use continuous assessment to support and enhance lower attaining pupils' learning requires:

- introducing legislative framework outlining specific provisions in terms of curricular, pedagogic and assessment policies for lower attaining pupils;
- de-emphasising uses of continuous assessment for summative purposes such as reporting attainments; emphasising uses of continuous assessment to inform teaching and learning for all pupils, particularly lower attainers. For example, using continuous assessment specifically for informing teaching and learning at the primary schools; whilst, at the junior secondary moderated continuous assessment is used for external purposes;
- enabling lower attaining pupils to be assessed by the use of only moderated continuous assessment (T.A); and.
- reducing the number of core subjects in which lower attaining pupils are assessed from 12/13 to 4: English, mathematics, Ghanaian languages and basic science.

#### **8.4.2 Curriculum and programme of study and lower attainments**

The curriculum guidelines from the Curriculum Research Development Division (CRDD) of the Ghana Education Service (GES) provide general and specific guidelines for all pupils aged between six and 15. The subject syllabi clearly outline both general and specific objectives of what teachers and pupils have to do at every class (see Chapter 2). However, as follow up to the recommendations regarding

policy-guidelines, and for lower attaining pupils to be taught at an appropriate level and pace, the level of materials should be lower than other learners (Stakes and Hornby, 2000). For such pupils a greater degree of differentiation would be necessary (QCA, 2006).

In the long-term, the CRDD of the GES must provide information relating to appropriate tasks for lower attaining within the National Curriculum. The guidelines would enable teachers:

- adopt differentiation in activities, such as exercises, class tests and homework; give lower attaining pupils appropriately challenging tasks for their records.

In the short-term, teachers must:

- emphasise group work; and
- encourage peer-assisted learning and collaborative problem solving during exercises and class tests.

### **8.4.3 Teacher training and professional development**

Well-trained staff are the most important factor in general education reforms (Baine, 1996; Cizek, 1997). Initial training programmes in Ghana do not provide for using continuous assessment to inform teaching and learning, and lower attainments in school. Furthermore, in-service training programmes are few and they do not include practical knowledge relating to assessing lower attaining pupils (see Chapter 6). On-going, in-school, follow-up training is essential. Effective in-service training programmes must provide explanations and demonstrations in using continuous



assessment to promote improvements of all pupils, particularly lower attainers. The following recommendations must be considered:

- providing information that makes the theory and rationale for continuous assessment to support lower attainers clear;
- providing practical experiences in implementing continuous assessment for supporting all pupils, particularly lower attainers;
- using continuous assessment as a tool for teaching. Training should provide teachers with the information and tools to effectively develop the relationship between teaching, learning and continuous assessment in relation to lower attainments;
- access to appropriate training in assessment methods. This includes training in using techniques as well as training in implementing and interpreting different types of assessment information that fulfils different educational and administrative purposes;
- providing consistent in-service training. The Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) must put their resources together and design consistent in-service training programmes for teachers. The programmes should include demonstrations of new practices as well as opportunities to practise using assessment to support pupils, particularly lower attainers in supportive contexts;

In the short-term:

- making reading materials such as leaflets, handouts, and handbooks on how to use continuous assessment for improvements available;

- encouraging teachers to undertake research into their classroom practices; engage in peer observations in classrooms and joint planning for teaching and assessing pupils;
- using the National Television (GTV) to provide programmes on best practices for teachers during the weekend; programmes must highlight enhanced assessment practices by experts to serve as models to teachers to adapt in their classrooms.

#### **8.4.4 Support and resources for basic schoolteachers**

Teacher attention is an invaluable resource for enhancing pupils, particularly lower attainers participation in classroom activities. In addition to overcrowded timetables, larger classes make it difficult for teachers to work with all lower attaining pupils in their classrooms (Chapter 6). In Ghana, teachers normally manage classes alone (see Chapter 2). In order to use continuous assessment to foster improvements, teachers require support and resources. This can be facilitated by:

- re-deploying retired teachers to work as assistants in primary schools;
- appointing more peripatetic teachers and assigning them directly to cluster of schools; and
- recruiting National Service Personnel to assist teachers at basic schools, particularly primary schools with larger classes (30+ children).

#### **8.4.5 A school ‘organisational culture’ that promotes continuous assessment for improvement of lower attaining pupils**

Next to the work of basic schoolteachers, the way basic schools are organised is crucial for improved continuous assessment practice. In Ghana, teachers use continuous assessment largely for gathering numerical marks to complete pupils’

records. Continuous assessment is competitive and teachers' assessment practices emulate external examination (see Chapter 6).

If basic schoolteachers are to implement continuous assessment practice that promotes learning of all pupils, particularly those who record lower attainments, then schools should promote an 'assessment to support learning culture', and plan for continuous assessment to support lower attaining pupils should be appropriately organised. The process requires:

- a view of lower achievement that leads them to re-think and re-structure their teaching and assessment practices, in order to improve education of all pupils, particularly pupils who record lower attainments;
- develop a positive school philosophy and 'culture' that is based on the belief that effective assessment supports effective education and school improvement; and
- share the attitude that assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning, and that all teachers have a responsibility to identify and overcome barriers to assessment for lower attainers existing in schools' assessment procedures.

#### **8.4.6 Community-based vocational training programme**

Pupils who do not qualify for senior secondary schools following poor grades at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) train in private apprenticeship centres (see Chapter 2). These private centres must be organised into community-based vocational centres and supervised by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the GES. Community-based vocational training centres will provide quality post-basic education training for older lower attaining pupils, if the programmes are well organised. The MoE and the GES can support the process by:

- monitoring and assessing programmes;
- making centres accessible to older lower attaining pupils; and
- tailoring programmes towards the needs of the nation to make centres more appealing to pupils and Ghanaians at large.

In the long term, the MoE and the GES must structure the programmes and design special certificates for those who train at the centres.

## **8.5 Future research plan**

I have the intention to work with the four schools where I carried out the focus groups' interviews as follow up to the present study. This will enable me to evolve strategies to help the teachers to improve their assessment practices. It will also serve as a launch pad for my involvement in programmes relating to uses of continuous assessment to support lower attaining pupils and other learners in schools in Ghana.

I intend to publish and disseminate the findings of the study with the view to bring about changes in policy and teachers' practices in Ghana.

### **8.5.1 Workshops**

As I stated in chapter 1, as an agent of change I will avail myself to the MoE and GES and participate in every workshop that they will organise to improve teachers' classroom practices and in particular, assessment for learning.

I also intend to stimulate more debate regarding teaching and assessing of lower attaining pupils in the media, as a way of creating interest in the experiences of such pupils in the basic school system in Ghana.

### **8.5.2 Closing the research**

In Chapter 1 of this research study, I argued that a PhD would enable me to improve my personal research skills, which will facilitate the undertaking of further research in the connected fields of special and inclusive education. I also stated the significance of such a degree in enhancing my status as a university teacher in Ghana. The experience of working towards a doctoral degree in the United Kingdom has served as a preparation towards meeting these challenges and expectations. In view of this, while this chapter is closing, a new chapter into the world of research and teaching is about to begin at the University of Education, Winneba, in Ghana. The new chapter will be influenced by my experiences as a research student at the University of Birmingham over the past four years.

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**10. How many of these pupils failed in all subjects in the last term exams?**

**a) Boys...**

**b) Girls...**

**11. How many times do you conduct class tests within a term?**

**12. Name the types of test you give to your class within a term**

**a)**

**c)**

**b)**

**d)**

**13. State any two purposes of these tests.**

**a)**

**b)**

**14. Has your class taken part in any standardized test within the year?**

**a) Yes...**

**b) No....**

**15. What type of standardized test did the class participate in?**

--

**16. Were all the pupils including those who are lower attainers involved in the standardized test?**

**a) Yes...**

**b) No....**

**17. Do you give pupils who are lower attainers any assistance when they are writing class tests?**

**a) Yes...**

**b) No...**

**18. If yes, what type of assistance do you provide?**

--









## Appendix 4B

### A survey - Teachers' views on the impact of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils in basic schools

Our educational reforms require teachers to gather data on their pupils for their *continuous assessment* records. This process largely involves computing and recording pupils' scores in class tests and exercises over the school term. The purposes of this questionnaire are to:

- Assess how continuous assessment processes and outcomes *impact lower attaining* pupils at basic schools; and
- Explore how these processes can be improved to enhance learning among these children.

The results of this survey will be used to examine current practices in the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service (GES) and to support these bodies in promoting the continuous assessment policy in a manner that will be beneficial for all school children and more *importantly to empower* teachers in conducting the process. Could you therefore please spare some time to answer the following questions?

The questionnaire is confidential and anonymous. I shall not identify individual teacher's views. However, I will contact some respondents for the follow-up interview and observations of their classrooms as part of the study. If you are happy for me to involve you in *these aspects* please make a tick in the space provided

Thank you for your co-operation.

---

Samuel K. Hayford  
University of Birmingham  
[Address]

University of Education  
Department of Special Education  
[Address]  
Ghana  
[email address]

**Instructions: Please read through the questionnaire carefully and respond as objectively as possible to all the questions.**

**Section A: Background data**

**1) Name of school:**

**2) District:** \_\_\_\_\_

**3) Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_**

**4) Age: (circle the age that represents your age range)**

1	2	3	4	5
20-25years	26-31years	32-37years	38-43years	44years+

**5) Teaching experience: (circle the range that represents your choice)**

1	2	3	4	5
Less than 1year	1-6years	7-12years	13-18years	19years+

**6a) Class taught: (circle the grade that corresponds with your class)**

1	2	3
B5	B6	JSS1

**6b) Age range of your pupils: (circle the age range that corresponds with your answer)**

1	2	3	4	5
10-13years	10-14years	11-13years	11-14years	Others please state _____

7) **How many children are in your class?** Boys \_\_\_\_\_ Girls \_\_\_\_\_

8) Your school's enrolment is? (Circle the number that corresponds with your answer)

1	2	3	4	5
99-200	201-300	301-400	401-500	501 +

9) **Which of the following describes your training in special education?**

1	2	3	4
Initial training college	University-based professional course	Special Education Teacher	In-service training

9b) If none of the options above describes your training in special education, please state yours in the space provided \_\_\_\_\_

## Section B      Data on Lower attaining Pupils

10) How many pupils in your class score poorly in all class exercises?

Boys \_\_\_\_\_ Girls \_\_\_\_\_

11) **How many of these pupils failed all subjects in the last term exams?**

Boys \_\_\_\_\_ Girls \_\_\_\_\_

12) Which of the following procedures do you use to collect data on your children's continuous assessment in the named subjects? (**Circle all the numbers that apply**)

Subject	Class test only	All three methods	Ex/tests & observation	Exercises & class tests	Others (specify)
English	1	2	3	4	5...
Mathematics	1	2	3	4	5...

13) **How many class tests do you conduct in each of the subjects in a term?**

\_\_\_\_\_

14) What are your views about involving lower attaining children in all class tests?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

15) Has your class taken part in a criterion-referenced test (CRT) or the performance-monitoring test (PMT) within the year?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

15b) If (yes), how many pupils were selected to take that test?

Boys \_\_\_\_\_ Girls \_\_\_\_\_ Whole class \_\_\_\_\_

16) Did you explain the purpose of CRT/PMT to your children?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

16b) Which pupils took the standardized test?

<i>Lower attaining pupils only</i>	<i>All but the lower attaining</i>	<i>A cross section of the children</i>	<i>Abler group of children</i>	<i>All pupils in the class</i>	
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	

17a) Do lower attaining pupils get any help from you when they are answering CLASS tests?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

17b) If no, what is your reason for not giving these pupils any help?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

17c) If yes, why do you help them? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

17d) If yes, what type of help do you provide? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

18) From your experience do lower attaining pupils show any need for help while they take tests?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ I am not sure \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

19) Please circle the number that best describes your view about the following statements. There is no correct answer; the best answers are those that reflect your opinion.

**D** I disagree

**d?** I tend to disagree

**A** I agree

**SD** I strongly disagree

**a?** I tend to agree

**SA** I strongly agree

The first group of statements refer to how you organise continuous assessment

a.	Class tests are the best method of getting data for children's continuous assessment.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
b.	Marks from class tests ONLY are used for pupils' continuous assessment records.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
c.	Marks from teacher's observations and classroom questioning are also used for continuous assessment.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
d.	Lower attaining children should not be made to take ALL class tests for continuous assessment records.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
e.	Teachers should explain questions to lower attaining children if they face difficulties while taking class tests.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
f.	If teachers explain questions to lower attaining children in class tests, the results for continuous assessment will not be valid.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
g.	Class tests for continuous assessment can reveal the difficulties of individual children for teachers to address.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
h.	Pupils work individually in class tests for their continuous assessment.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA

20) The second group of statements refers to impact of continuous assessment on learning. Use same method as above in answering these questions.

a.	Continuous assessment enables lower attaining pupils learn at their pace.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
b.	Continuous assessment enables lower attaining pupils to participate actively in learning	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
c.	Continuous assessment allows lower attaining pupils to receive assistance from their peers.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
d.	Continuous assessment enables lower attaining pupils to improve their performance.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
e.	Continuous assessment makes lower attaining pupils have the desire for learning.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
f.	Continuous assessment enables lower attaining pupils improve the way they learn.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA
g.	Continuous assessment puts excessive pressure on lower attaining children.	SD	D	d?	a?	A	SA

**21) This set statements reflect pupils' school attendance and self-esteem.**

a.	Continuous assessment makes lower attaining pupils skip classes to avoid class tests,	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
b.	Lower attaining pupils are happy while they perform tasks for continuous assessment.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
c.	Continuous assessment enables lower attaining pupils receive daily attention from the teacher.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
d.	Continuous assessment creates better opportunities for lower attaining pupils to learn with peers.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
e.	Continuous assessment enables all pupils including lower attaining pupils to see themselves as important members of their class.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
f.	Continuous assessment enables lower attaining pupils to experience success in learning.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
g.	Continuous assessment makes each pupil including lower attaining pupils believe they can learn.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>

**22) This set of statements reflect pupils' perceptions about school and impact of continuous assessment on teacher**

a.	Lower attaining pupils are aware that their continuous assessment records form part of their final school grade at the BECE.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
b.	All pupils including lower attaining ones are aware that final grade at BECE will influence their admission to senior secondary schools.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
c.	Lower attaining pupils believe school education will benefit them for life	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
d.	Lower attaining pupils do not understand the relevance of school education	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
e.	Teachers use continuous assessment to address learning problems encountered by lower attaining pupils.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
f.	Pupils' continuous assessment outcomes determines when teachers introduce new topics from the scheme	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
g.	Pupils' performance in continuous assessment determines the pace for completing scheme of work	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
h.	Pupils' performance in continuous assessment influences teacher's planning of subsequent lessons	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>

23) State the number of children in your class who have the following problems:

Problem	Girls	Boys	Total
<i>Lower attaining</i>			
Hearing problems (not deaf)			
Deafness			
Visual problems (not blind)			
Blindness			
Behaviour problems			
Physical problems			
Epilepsy			
Health problems (e.g. asthma, sickle cell...)			
Communication problems (e.g. stuttering/ stammering...)			
Any other condition (please state)			

24) State the number of those who have two or more of the problems listed above.

**Boys** \_\_\_\_\_ **Girls** \_\_\_\_\_

25) How many of these pupils fall in the category of lower attaining children?

Boys \_\_\_\_\_ Girls \_\_\_\_\_

26) How many of these pupils have been sent for assessment to diagnose their needs? \_\_\_\_\_

27) Complete the statement, whenever I realise that a lower attaining child in my class requires support I \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**28) How frequently do you give lower attaining pupils assistance?**

During the lesson	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
At break time	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
After classes	Rarely	Sometimes	Often

29) If you were given a choice what arrangements would you make for lower attaining pupils and those with problems in your class?

**1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. I tend to disagree 4. I tend to agree 5. Agree 6. Strongly Agree (Circle the choice that reflects your position).**

		<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
a.	Send them to lower class.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
b.	Make them repeat the present class.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
c.	Send them to new school.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
d.	Let them stay in class and progress with their peers.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
e.	Organise remedial classes for them.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
f.	Put them in small groups and work with them.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
g.	Assign them to their peers to work with.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>d?</b>	<b>a?</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>

30) If you were given a choice what two strategies would you use in collecting data on lower attaining pupils for their continuous assessment records?

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b)

\_\_\_\_\_

**31) What suggestion would you like to offer in respect to organising data for pupils' continuous assessment?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE. PLEASE PUT IT IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED FOR COLLECTION.**



I value your views and will be happy if you have any further comments to make.

Please use the reverse side of the sheet to write further your views concerning  
continuous assessment.

Views concerning continuous assessment

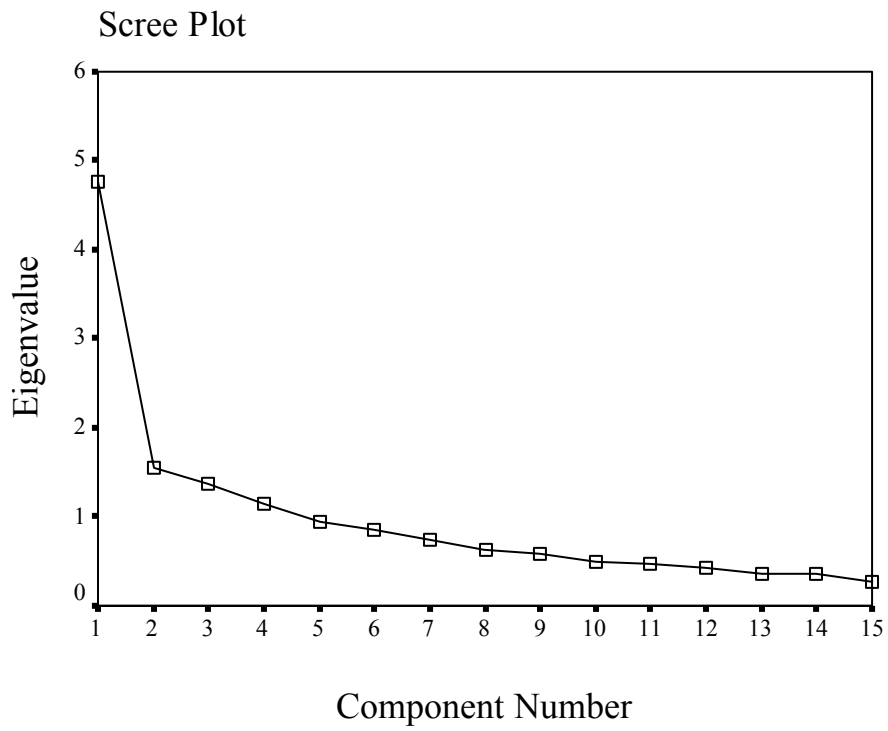


**Appendix 5A**

**KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.829
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	379.702
	df	78
	Sig.	.000

**(5B)**



**(5C) Component Matrix**

	Component
--	-----------

	1	2	3
Q20A	.604	.363	-.406
Q20B	.526	.348	-.289
Q20C	.339	-.205	-.547
Q20D	.779	.118	-.250
Q20E	.607	.310	-.105
Q20F	.536	.102	5.920E-02
Q21B	.438	7.130E-02	.414
Q21C	.556	-.566	8.176E-02
Q21D	.605	-.470	-7.462E-02
Q21E	.713	-4.144E-02	4.701E-02
Q21F	.612	-.283	.423
Q21G	.697	-2.221E-02	.329
Q22A	.566	.433	.151
Q22D	.121	.400	.498
Q22E	.430	-.403	-9.181E-02

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
a 4 components extracted.

**(5D) Rotated Component Matrix**

Item	Component		
	1	2	3
Q20A	.797	3.542E-02	8.112E-02
Q20B	.687	6.202E-02	5.499E-02
Q20C	.327	-2.616E-02	.168
Q20D	.695	.264	.311
Q20E	.640	.205	.145
Q20F	.369	6.572E-02	.567
Q21B	.191	.682	-.119
Q21C	-2.258E-04	.639	.328
Q21D	.144	.444	.458
Q21E	.418	.325	.526
Q21F	5.427E-02	.613	.503
Q21G	.338	.771	9.046E-02
Q22A	.589	.335	2.672E-02
Q22D	.105	6.158E-02	.174
Q22E	3.814E-02	-2.143E-02	.837

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax  
with Kaiser Normalization.  
a Rotation converged in 9 iterations.

**(5E)**

**Items on questionnaire reflecting teachers' views on lower attaining pupils and class tests**

Items (N= 96)	Responses	Percentage
Q14. Views about involving lower attaining pupils in all class tests.	Assess performance	10.4%
	Assess strength and weakness	9.4%
	Encourage pupils to improve	21%
	Policy	21%
	Prepare for exams	5.2%
	Others	32%
Q17. Do lower attaining pupils get any help from you during class tests?	Yes	43.8%
	No	56.2%
Q17b. Reasons for not providing help.	Enhance individual work	10.4%
	Get true standard of pupils	15.6%
	Other pupils will feel cheated	12.5%
	Teacher belief	19%
Q17c. Reasons for helping.	Close gap	7.2%
	Enhance understanding	23%
	Get more marks	7.2%
Q17d. Type of help given.	Additional tuition	7.3%
	Read & explain	29%
Q27. What I do if I realise a pupil is having difficulty in class.	Contact parents	7.2%
	Peer support	2%
	Provide support	57.3%
	Probe further	3%

**Q23A**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	26	27.1	27.1	27.1
	4-6	41	42.7	42.7	69.8
	7-10	22	22.9	22.9	92.7
	11+	7	7.3	7.3	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

**Q23B**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	86	89.6	89.6	89.6
	4-6	4	4.2	4.2	93.8
	7-10	4	4.2	4.2	97.9
	11+	2	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

### Q23C

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	95	99.0	99.0	99.0
	4-6	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

### Q23D

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	81	84.4	84.4	84.4
	4-6	7	7.3	7.3	91.7
	7-10	4	4.2	4.2	95.8
	11+	3	3.1	3.1	99.0
	NA	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

### Q23E

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	96	100.0	100.0	100.0

### Q23F

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	66	68.8	68.8	68.8
	4-6	19	19.8	19.8	88.5
	7-10	10	10.4	10.4	99.0
	11+	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

**Q23G**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	95	99.0	99.0	99.0
	4-6	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

**Q23H**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	96	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Q23I**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	88	91.7	91.7	91.7
	4-6	7	7.3	7.3	99.0
	7-10	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

**Q23J**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	82	85.4	85.4	85.4
	4-6	9	9.4	9.4	94.8
	7-10	4	4.2	4.2	99.0
	11+	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

**Q23K**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0-3	96	100.0	100.0	100.0

### Q24

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	75	78.1	78.1	78.1
	4-6	14	14.6	14.6	92.7
	7-10	4	4.2	4.2	96.9
	11+	3	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

### Q26

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-3	92	95.8	95.8	95.8
	4-6	2	2.1	2.1	97.9
	7-10	2	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

## **Interview schedule for teachers**

### **Part 1 Background details**

- School
- Years in teaching
- Special education background (training type/ duration)
- Future plans & prospect

### **Part 2 Views about continuous assessment as a policy**

- Perception about continuous assessment
- Methods/procedures/
- Benefits to children/lower achievers
- Purpose/uses

### **Part 3 Implementation of continuous assessment at school**

- Planning/vetting/collaboration if any?
- Scheme of work/ lesson plan/ teaching
- Time table/ number of subjects/
- Class size/ work load
- INSET & support from other personnel/resources

### **Part 4 Impact of continuous assessment on lower attaining pupils & SEN**

- Motivation
- Learning/performance
- Attendance
- Suggestions (how to improve your capacity in relation to continuous assessment?)

## **Appendix 6B**



## **A synthesis of key themes and phrases relating to various themes and sub-themes**

### *Meaning and perception about continuous assessment*

Process for gathering marks

Evidence of teachers and pupils have done

Scores from classroom activities

Assess different areas of development

Assess in and out of classroom

Evidence of what teachers and pupils have done

Continuous assessment in a way is the various exercises you intend to give the children.

The marks that they get you record as their continuous assessment.

### *Uses and benefits (purpose)*

It helps the teacher to get to know level of pupil's achievement.

Continuous assessment helps the teacher to know individual children's ability in the classroom.

It helps teacher identify weaknesses and strengths.

Continuous assessment serves as evidence of what the teacher and the pupils have done over a period of time.

Continuous assessment outcomes tell the teacher whether the children understood the lesson or not.

From their own reactions you could see that they did not understand certain parts of the topic.

It gives the teacher chance to assess his own teaching.

Feedback helps children to know causes of low performance.

It helps you to know their abilities.

It motivates them to work hard.

Use continuous assessment to make report to parents.

Truants are motivated to attend school.

Feedback from continuous assessment gives me the go-ahead to re-teach a lesson.

Good, helping all children.

Good if a child transfers to new school.

I use pupils' general continuous assessment performance to make decision on their promotion to upper.

Decide to promote or repeat class.

Continuous assessment justifies BECE.

I repeat those who do not do well.

We consult the parents and show them the results and ask is that fine.

Continuous assessment is used to assess the children's performance, interview the children for vocational placement.

Continuous assessment helps the teacher to decide whether a child can do art or something else.

### *Methods (organisation)*

We plan the scheme of work and from that we do about 40 exercises over the term, and every 4 weeks we conduct a class test and record the marks.

Continuous assessment tasks are planned from scheme of work.

The programme is planned in relation to how the syllabus is designed.

The scheme of work is designed from the curriculum though the syllabus is reliable to change.

At the end of the day they have to ensure that they teach what have been stated in the syllabus in line with the curriculum.

The scheme of work determines what a teacher should do within a term.

It is always planned at the beginning of the term.

Our head teacher has given us one exercise book purposely for the continuous assessment so we set our questions in it.

As for class tests and other continuous assessment activities we don't send it to the committee to vet.

Give pupils class exercises, class tests and homework/project.

I do four exercises in maths and English every week respectively.

In the other subjects I give the pupils one or 2 exercises a week.

I also do class test in each of the subject I teach every month.

I do three class tests in each subject every term.

They do individual work.

I don't allow pupils to teach their friends.

I use extra classes to complete scheme of work.

We look for extra time or do extra classes so that we have time for those topics that were not treated.

Lesson plans are vetted by the head teacher.

They (pupils) can't do it (mark) properly.

They will laugh at their friends.

I ask them to help me send books home to mark

Mark all exercises and fill the scores.

I use after school hours to do extra classes with the children and to cover those topics.

I don't organise extra classes.

I am not allowed to organise extra classes, but if anything I know the head should organise it.

I make some arrangements for pupils with different abilities.

I go round and give them the necessary help.

Sometimes when they are writing class tests I helped them to solve some of the questions.

I guide them, I go round as they are marking.

Now they are good so I allow them to give the marks.

I don't have time to do individual work or teaching except that if some are not performing very well during break time I call those pupils to discuss with them.

They are not interested.

These methods or procedures favour those children who are intelligent.

They understand what they are doing.

Those who have difficulties or are not good in class find it difficult to do well as many of them can't even read.

They are not allowed to look at their friends' work or get any help from the teacher because continuous assessment is competitive.

You don't have to consider the person's disability or difficulty and read for him.

Teaching does not permit that, if you do that you are not fair.

I don't give lower attaining pupils different exercises to do.

They all do the same exercises.

Reading is an aspect of the course work since we have language item, composition and comprehension.

I put all the marks together to get marks for English as a subject.

I don't plan different exercises for such children.

They are in the same class I don't see the reason why I should plan different activities for them.

All the pupils take the same kind of questions because I actually want to check what I taught them has gone down well.

### *Challenges (contextual factors)*

In some schools it is so rigid.

Education officers when they come for inspection it is the continuous assessment that they want to see.

When they come too they have a number of exercises that they want to see and teachers are compelled to do many exercises with the children.

When officers come for inspection they inspect the scheme of work of each teacher to determine the output.

Because officers from the office will not understand our inability to do the required number of exercises.

If the children understand the lesson or not the teachers are interested in doing many exercises.

At times they look at your lesson notes to see if you have done the quantity of work you are supposed to do with your class within the period.

The teacher has to set about 40 exercises (language & mathematics), do 3 class tests, and projects/assignments.

There are 11 columns in the continuous assessment register to fill.

This forces some teachers to sometimes copy work for their children to copy in their exercise books.

So you see that some of the children just copy the work without understanding what they have copied.

The timetable poses some problems to me at times.

Because at times I have to give the children exercises to do after I have taught but my time for that period had run out.

The next subject teacher had to come in to teach.

Continuous assessment register should be brought early.

Teachers should be motivated.

In fact over the whole year the continuous assessment register has just been brought by the district office.

Not helping the children.

Just the marks.

Large class size.

I have too many books to mark.

My class is 42 but that number to me is manageable.

There are 60 children in the class.

This makes class control very difficult; the class is also very noisy.

The number of children in a class makes the whole process very tiring.

I try to mark some and leave the rest for the next day.

There are too many subjects to teach.

As for us in the primary school we are suffering.

We have too much to do.

It is tedious and difficult and some teachers therefore consider the face and give marks.

When we were in school there was no continuous assessment.

We were able to make it.

Continuous assessment is tedious and difficult.

Lazy teachers will not implement it well.

Go about to give marks to their favourites.

Teachers make up marks.

So you see that teachers some of them do not care.

Continuous assessment is not necessary.

Now they have brought continuous assessment...

You can't assess all the children.

The teachers want to get the number of exercises ready because they are under pressure.

Some pupils do not get the real understanding of topics that the teachers teach.

Because teachers are not given enough time to explain.

The officers have made it in a way that they want more exercises.

It is exercises they want to see about 90-97 exercises for a term.

Officers will not understand.

The syllabi are designed from above and the teacher has to implement it exactly as it has been designed.

If you do something different you can be penalized.

Continuous assessment is just output or product of work done in the classroom.  
The children have to do a number of exercises.  
By doing these exercises the authorities think children's standards will improve.  
We are told to give children more exercises for the more they work or do their tasks they will keep on learning.  
Timetable does not sometimes give teacher enough time.  
There are times you are unable to teach a lesson because the time is insufficient.  
If it is a single period it runs into the next period.  
The filling of scores is very difficult especially in this district that the report cards do not come early the assessment book do not come early.  
Filling all the records for continuous assessment is not easy; it is very tedious it also adds up to the work of the teacher.  
Here we are doing subject teaching and I handle maths and science.

#### *Professional development*

The in-service training in continuous assessment was given to teachers when the programme was introduced.  
Thereafter head teachers have to organise in-service training for the new teachers on the staff.  
We do have in-service training which most of the time is school-based or in-house.  
When it comes to that time the head-teacher selects teachers to teach related topics.  
This is done so that during in-service training the school does not have to close down.  
However, none of these in-house in-service training has been on continuous assessment practices.  
I have not attended any in-service training in continuous assessment since then.  
No, I have not received any in-service training in continuous assessment since I passed out of training college and started teaching.  
I need some in-service training in continuous assessment.  
No I have not participated in any in-service training on continuous assessment since I completed training college and started teaching.  
I do the continuous assessment as I was taught at the training college.  
I need some in-service training.

## **Appendix 7A**

### **Interview schedule for children**

#### **Part 1 Background details**

- Age
- Gender
- Favourite subjects
- Future plans

#### **Part 2 Views about the continuous assessment policy**

- Meaning of continuous assessment
- Purposes
- Procedures
- Benefits

#### **Part 3 How continuous assessment is implemented at your school**

- Preparation before doing tasks
- Methods used
- Support to improve work
- Feeling about performance
- Suggestions

## **7B**

### **A synthesis of key themes and phrases relating to various themes and sub-themes**

#### *Understanding of continuous assessment*

Records kept by teachers at the office.

By the continuous assessment what each pupil scores in activities are recorded.

These records are kept by teachers at the office.

What each pupil scores in classroom activities.

When you score high marks in class test that will give you advantage.

The marks are added to your exams score.

You will get high score and therefore a better position.

Send to our parents to see how well we are performing at school.

The teacher asks us to bring our report cards.

### *Purpose of continuous assessment*

We know that the marks would be recorded in the continuous assessment book.  
Teachers record marks pupils get in the terminal reports.  
Use to decide whether or not pupils should go to the JSS.  
Used inform decisions on the progress of pupils.  
These activities help us to make progress in their academic studies.  
To make progress in their academic studies  
Make decisions on the progress of pupils  
Get in the terminal reports.  
Give high continuous assessment scores to be added to my examination scores at the end of the term to get better report.

### *Feeling about class tests*

Feel very scary when teacher brings papers to class the next day.  
It's scary because we can't tell whether or not you had high marks.  
When you get your book and you had scored high marks you become content and happy.  
If your score is very low you feel sad indeed.  
I don't feel scared any more  
I always know I would get the pass mark.  
I feel very happy when I score high marks in all class activities.  
During class tests when I notice that I can't do some if the task I ask my friends to help.  
I always feel nervous when the teacher brings our books.  
I don't want to score low marks.  
Yes I know that it is not good to do that; we do this during class exercises.  
The children claim that most of the time you feel 'butterflies' in your stomach.  
If you don't get high marks and you take your report cards home your mother may beat you.  
If you get high scores and go home with your report cards your mother will be happy but if you score low they will insult (abuse) you.  
When we see that we have done well we feel happy.



### *Classroom performance*

We are currently improving, our current performance is better than previous year.

We have been learning hard and doing well in classroom exercises, tests and homework.

We do our best in classroom questions and answer those that we have ideas in classroom.

We are doing well.

We participate in classroom activities and answer questions asked by the teacher.

I am doing well in my studies.

My general performance has improved.

I am better than I used to be.

I am able to read some chapters of the textbook.

I am also able to get some sums correct everyday.

I sometimes make contributions in discussions

I can't speak or read fluently

I am not performing very well at school my performance is poor.

I have not been doing well in all classroom activities and participate very little in classroom discussions.

I think this is because I don't study at home.

I am always doing house chores and after that I play with my friend.

I don't do any private studies.

I can't read the textbook fluently.

Well, I do not contribute much in classroom discussions.

I get many sums wrong and my participation in classroom discussion is poor.

There are times when the teacher calls me I don't know the answer to give.

The boys will laugh when you make mistake.

I'm always among the average.

We attend school regularly.

He doesn't come to us individually.

I am not learning well.

