

## Original Research Article

### **EXPLORING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT PRACTICES ON LEARNERS IN SEFWI-WIAWSO MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA**

#### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the study was to explore learning areas teachers assess and strategies teachers employ during the assessment practices of Early Childhood learners in Sefwi - Wiawso Municipality of the Western Region of Ghana. Descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The sample size for this study was 110 basic school workers made up of 80 Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers, 29 Head teachers and 1 Basic school coordinator. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select the sample for the study. The instruments used for data collection were close-ended questionnaire and interview for collecting both quantitative and qualitative respectively. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics whilst the qualitative data was analysed using thematic approach. Results from the study indicated that the learning areas or domains Early Childhood Education teachers assess Kindergarten children during assessment process included social skills, cognitive skills, physical development (psychomotor) skills and language skills. Besides, the Kindergarten teachers used strategies such as observation, anecdotal records, visual documentation and checklist to assess their pupils. The following recommendations were made in the light of the findings of the study: Kindergarten teachers should widen their assessment to all learning areas such as, Emotional and affective domains. This will enhance holistic development of the child. Additionally, there should be frequent in-service and refresher programmes by Municipal Education Directorate so as to equip the ECE teachers and those who are directly involve in identification and the use of assessment strategies.

**Keywords:** *Early childhood education, early learners, early learners' assessment areas, KG learners, early learners' assessment strategies*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Due to the new educational reform, early childhood care and development have been integrated into the formal education system in Ghana. Therefore, it has become mandatory before entering primary school. It has been noted that early childhood education is an important foundation in children's lives, especially in today's dynamic society and in a world where an increasing number of children are left unattended in both urban and rural areas (Said, Wallhager, Cungua, & Ngie, 2003). The White Paper on Education and Training defines Early Childhood Development (ECD) as the process by which children between the ages of zero and nine (0–9) grow and thrive in all aspects of life (UNICEF, 2005). It suggests that early childhood education (ECD) is the process of effecting developmental changes in children from birth to eight years old (0–8). It is believed that the main focus of ECD is to

ensure that children are thriving by providing a solid foundation for the physical, emotional, cognitive, and overall healthy development of children (UNICEF, 2005). Such developmental changes in the areas of cognitive, physical, social and emotional aspects of one's life need to be assessed and nurtured.

The primary goal of any assessment of a child should be to help adults make better plans for the child's future growth and development, and this planning should include methods that boost the child's sense of self-worth rather than diminish it (Amponsah, 2004). Evaluation of the curriculum's efficacy is a crucial part of early childhood programs. Goals for a child's growth and learning are established, and it is important to track progress toward those goals (GES, 2009). Assessment practices at the early stages of education are very fundamental as they may determine the later growth of the child. Therefore, a critical factor that helps determine one's academic achievement is the assessment of learners. Assessment is recognized as an important aspect of the teaching and learning process. So, teachers are advised and encouraged to put the whole idea of assessment into practice in their own classes.

In the teaching-learning process, assessment can be a difficult idea to grasp, especially when it comes to early childhood education and how the community views it. Active learning can be promoted by well-designed assessments, especially when they are administered in creative and interesting ways. For instance, peer and self-assessment can help students develop a variety of abilities, including self-awareness, reflection, and critical thinking while also providing them with an understanding of the evaluation process (Race, Brown & Smith, 2005). Moreover, making sure that the purposes and goals of your assessments are clear can also be accomplished by interacting with your students about the methods through which you will conduct your evaluation. For effective assessment to occur, it is worthwhile to invest some time in considering why, what, and how you are going to assess your learners. It can ensure that assessment knowledge and skills are applied as intended and it may create new opportunities for various ways to evaluate your students, some of which may be more effective and efficient (Race et al., 2005).

Assessment is primarily used to help educators and other professionals make pertinent educational decisions (Taylor, 2003; Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Black & William, 2004). As Howell and Nolet (2000) asserted, "the information obtained from appropriate assessment procedures can be used to enhance the teaching-learning process". For this reason, politicians, the business community, and the community have placed a lot of emphasis on the

idea of assessment. Through generating of data that may be used for decision-making in education such as assessing the success of programs, and ensuring that all students are moving toward their learning objectives, the assessment system improves student learning. However, there is now a great deal of intensity surrounding the assessment of young children. The perceived requirement to account for children's learning has resulted in "high stakes testing" and the most flagrant abuse of assessment. Young children continue to be grouped, retained in grade, or assigned to special education classes based on a single test score despite the negative effects of tracking practices (McGill– Franzen & Allenton, 1993).

In Ghana, assessing young children is not a novel procedure. Early childhood educators employ a variety of assessment instruments to evaluate children's interactions, dialogues, thoughts, and expressions in order to better comprehend each child's capabilities, talents, and interests. While the purposes of assessment in early childhood classrooms and schools are the same as those for older children, the design of a comprehensive assessment system in early childhood is necessarily different because of the age of the child. In the preschool and early elementary years, rates of development in all areas outpace growth rates at any other time, and because children develop and learn so rapidly, assessments given at one point in time must be done well to reflect the child's abilities (Perie, et al., 2007). Assessment at this level must be as informal as feasible. Teachers must resist the need to formally evaluate the work of the students. Children are given the opportunity to explore and appreciate the works of others through informal methods like observation, dialogue, and gallery work (MOE, 2019).

### **Problem Statement**

The modern societies of Ghana and the rest of the world have high expectations for the early years of life. Regardless of a child's physical, social, and emotional health, it is widely believed that their future academic achievements will determine their future success in life, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Young children are notoriously difficult to assess accurately, and it is necessary to develop clear guidelines regarding the nature, functions, and uses of early childhood assessments, as well as assessment formats that are suitable for use in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, in order to establish developmentally appropriate assessments in Ghana's preschools. This is crucial since all children have the right to receive early care and educational services, as well as, if necessary, intervention services. This necessitates the availability of competent staff and technologies to evaluate their learning and identify their needs (Anane & Anhwere, 2013).

Ways of assessing children's learning and development cannot be divorced from aspects of the curriculum (such as the degree of formality or informality that characterizes it) and from views of learners and learning that are embedded in that curriculum. The Ghanaian curriculum planners appear to have reached a consensus on this particular point regarding the crucial role of teachers in curriculum implementation and the highly informal nature of assessment in Ghanaian preschools (Asare, 2015). It is crucial that assessments at this point be as relaxed as possible. As tempting as it may be, teachers shouldn't grade their students' assigned tasks formally. Children can learn to appreciate the work of others through more casual means, such as observation, conversation, and gallery works (MOEYS, 2004; MOE, 2019).

The early childhood or kindergarten curriculum designers in Ghana outline the proper methods for evaluating the learners' cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. Even though there are so many rules, it seems that teachers in the early grades don't follow them. However, the domains or areas of assessment aren't clear in how teachers evaluate students, and sometimes the ways teachers evaluate KG students are not appropriate for their age and level of development (Asare, 2015). There is little to no evidence that shows whether or not implementers in Sefwi Wiawso municipal early childhood curriculum are following the apparently quality approach prescribed by the curriculum designers. Similarly, there have been few or no studies on the overall assessment practices used in Ghanaian early childhood or kindergarten assessments. There appears to be a dearth of literature on the implementation of the early childhood curriculum in Ghana, suggesting that the aforementioned assertion may be accurate. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature regarding early childhood assessment practices by teachers in the Sefwi Wiawso municipality, who are the early childhood caregivers or kindergarten teachers, as they are commonly referred to in our local Ghanaian dialect.

### **Research Questions**

1. What learning areas of the child are assessed by teachers at the ECE level at the Sefwi-Wiawso Municipality?
2. What assessment strategies do teachers employ to assess learners in ECE at the Sefwi-Wiawso Municipality?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The main theory underpinning the study is the social development theory of Lev Vygotsky (1978). The proponent of this social development theory opines that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. Leo Vygotsky's social development theory largely discusses how socialization impacts a person's ability to learn. It makes an attempt to explain consciousness or awareness as the outcome of socialization. We frequently internalize what we communicate after speaking with others. For instance, a kid might attempt to arrange the blocks that contain the letters A to Z in chronological order. His performance is pretty awful at first, but as his mother sits next to him and instructs him on how to arrange the letters correctly, he starts to improve. With his parents present, the kid will then learn how to arrange the letters of the alphabet. On the other hand, his mother lets him practice the skill more and more on his own, which makes him better at it.

However, assessment in the early years examines, and documents children's perceptions and capabilities, seeking to understand how children think and learn, to track their progress, and further facilitate learning (Dunphy, 2008). It serves as a platform for social action and thought that is communicated through debate and reciprocal feedback (Fleer & Richardson, 2004). Gullo and Hughes (2011) see effective assessment as a process, and as such it should be ongoing, use multiple sources of information, be integrated with teaching and curriculum. Six types of assessment are outlined by Wood and Attfield (2005): formative (interpreting children's progress and planning accordingly), impassive (assessment that is oriented toward the child rather than external norms), diagnostic (observing particular contexts and planning interventions), summative (overview of a child's progress during a certain period), evaluative (reviewing the effectiveness of curriculum and provision), and informative (using assessment information to share with parents and other stakeholders). Utilizing both formative and summative assessments—the former as a tool for planning and the latter as a window into a kid's capabilities throughout time—is necessary to get a complete picture of the child (Linfield, Warwick & Parker, 2008). This enables children's learning potential to be recognized in addition to their accomplishments (Nutbrown & Carter, 2010). In addition, assessment serves an evaluative function that enables educators to gauge the effectiveness of the interventions and assistance they have planned for students (Nutbrown & Carter, 2010; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Black (2013) asserts that formative and summative assessment procedures are equally important in teaching and learning and that they must complement one another. Therefore, it is clear that assessment encompasses both a knowledge function and an auditing role, both of which are interrelated (Wood & Attfield, 2005). The knowledge

function is all about understanding children's needs, traits, and identities, as well as using assessment to learn more about curriculum and teaching methods.

Assessment is described as an ongoing process of gathering, documenting, reflecting on, and using information to construct rich profiles of children as learners in order to support and enhance their future learning, and it's claimed that it is fundamental to educators' interactions with children (NCCA, 2009). Depending on the teacher's choice, these four components—collecting, documenting, reflecting on, and utilizing information—can be employed simultaneously rather than independently of one another. A **good assessment** method is one that benefits children and makes sense to them. It uses a range of techniques over time and involves not just children but also their families. Because of the amount of information from the family, which offers context and is taken into consideration in understanding each kid, this partnership aids educators in developing a more accurate and comprehensive picture of a child, his or her skills, and development (Chan & Wong, 2010; Gilkerson & Hanson, 2000; NCCA, 2009). **Educators analyze the assessment data and draw conclusions by applying their knowledge of child development theory, the child's social and cultural background, and the learning and development outcomes in the curriculum frameworks.** In order to form a clear picture of the child's talents, abilities, and interests, they also discuss their interpretation with the child, the child's family, and other professionals where necessary. **Additionally, people who work in early childhood divisions use this information to plan programs for children that are** effective and responsive (Hattie, 2009).

Every day, the preschool instructor has the responsibility of observing the kids and interacting with them in a way that promotes their cognitive, social, physical, and emotional **development. After gathering this knowledge,** the adult then uses activities, dialogues, resources, and questions to encourage children to explore and learn more about their surroundings. This shows that early childhood education specialists are well aware that average, healthy children develop at varying speeds in many domains (Worth & Grollman, 2003). Teachers must comprehend both child development and the required learning sequences across a variety of domains in order to successfully meet this challenge. All the domains of **development and learning which are physical, social, emotional, and cognitive are** important, and they are closely interrelated. Children's development and learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains. Children are thinking, moving, feeling, and interacting human beings. To teach them well involves

considering and fostering their development and learning in all domains. Early care and education must cover all of these areas of development and learning because they are so important to a child's life and future as a contributing member of society.

However, Kern (2007) lists five methods in their definition of assessment as "a systematic procedure for obtaining information from observation, interviews, portfolios, projects, tests, and other sources that can be used to make judgments about children's characteristics" (p. 27). Birjandi (2009) offers three broad categories of assessment methods useful for formative purposes, which are observations, tasks, and interviews. A similar study by Herman (2005) offers the following list of assessment tools to include: "(1) record review/developmental history, (2) interviews, (3) observations, (4) checklists/rating scales, (5) portfolios, and (6) tests" (p. 13). Through practice, caregivers must learn to closely observe children to better understand their actions and development. In order to completely understand a child's progress, observations should be made at a variety of children's activities and be continuous.

Continuous assessment is essential if teachers are to acquire a thorough understanding of their students (Oli & Olkaba, 2020). Every aspect of growth, including the intellectual, linguistic, social-emotional, and physical can be regularly observed by educators. Basford and Bath (2014) say that informal assessments of children's learning and development are most likely to give a fair and accurate picture of their growth and learning. Moreover, assessments should be based on what students can do independently and with assistance from peers and adults (NAEYC, 2009a).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design and Population**

The researcher employed a descriptive survey design for this study. A descriptive survey design was used for the study because the study was intended to explore teachers' assessment practices of early childhood learners in Sefwi-Wiawso Municipality. The instruments that were used to gather the necessary data for the study were the questionnaire and interview. For the questionnaire, a four-point Likert-type scale was used. The questionnaire with the Likert scale started with "1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree". The questionnaire had 30 items that collected data on assessment practices in early childhood schools. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was used to solicit views on the teachers' assessment practices on early learners in the Sefwi-Wiawso municipality from the teachers.



The semi-structured interview suited the study because it is flexible and adaptable (Mears, 2009). The semi-structured interview focuses on the two objectives of the study: the main learning areas ECE teachers assess during assessment and the strategies teachers use during assessment of their ECE learners.

The targeted population for the study was all 277 Kindergarten (KG) teachers and heads of public schools in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipality. The population comprised 84 head teachers, 192 teachers who taught the KG pupils, and 1 early childhood coordinator from the municipal office. Corbin and Strauss (2008) opined that a population is a set or collection of all elements possessing one or more attributes of interest. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 110 people for the study. This is comprised of 80 early childhood teachers, 1 early childhood coordinator from the municipal office, and 29 head teachers from selected public schools in the municipality. These people were chosen because they had experience as far as teaching and assessing young children is concerned. In all, 10 head teachers were interviewed to elicit a response using a simple random sampling method. Out of the one hundred and ten (110) samples selected, one hundred (100) of them presented the questionnaire. The response rate was 90.9%, which is statistically a good return rate for analyses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). Out of the 100 early grade educators, 73% ( $n = 73$ ) were females and 27% ( $n = 27$ ) were males.

The data collection instrument was first scrutinized by the researcher's colleague lecturers, and it was later checked by early grade experts at the University of Education, Winneba for the suitability of the items before the administration of the pilot study. This was done to check whether the items measure the intended purpose (face validity), cover all the research questions (content validity), and the extent to which the items measure a specific construct (construct validity). All the necessary corrections to the items were made and declared valid by the experts. A pilot test of the questionnaires and the interview were conducted among teachers and head teachers in a district outside the study area in the western north region prior to the study. After the pilot test, Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the reliability of students' questionnaires, which gave a value of 0.80, suggesting a good reliability instrument.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The frequency of each item was assessed on a point scale, and the scores were afterwards converted to percentages for discussion. For ease of the analysis, strongly agreed and agreed



respondents were pooled for the purposes of the analysis, as were strongly disagreed and disagreed respondents. Tables of frequencies and percentages were utilized to summarize the information gathered from the respondents. Making meaning of text and images is necessary for qualitative data analysis. A thematic approach was used to analyse the data collected. The qualitative data for the study was analyzed based on each theme drawn from the research question raised.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The areas of learning teachers assess at the ECE level.

Table 1 represents the views of teachers on learning areas ECE teachers assess learners on.

**Table 1: Learning Areas ECE Teachers Assess**

Areas ECE teachers assess	S. A f %	Agree f %	Disagree f %	S. D f %	TOTAL f %
<b>Cognitive Skills</b>					
I assess learners understanding of the concept	69(69.0)	30(30.0)	0(00.0)	1(1.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners' ability follow simple instructions	80(80.0)	19(19.0)	0(00.0)	1(1.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners sorting, ordering and matching skills	74(74.0)	23(23.0)	0(00.0)	3(3.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners thinking and creative abilities	59(59.0)	38(38.0)	2(2.0)	1(1.0)	100(100.0)
<b>Language Skills</b>					
I assess learners speaking skills	76(76.0)	20(20.0)	2(2.0)	2(2.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners listening skills	61(61.0)	34(34.0)	1(1.0)	3(3.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners reading skills	68(68.0)	30(30.0)	1(1.0)	1(1.0)	100(100.0)
<b>Social Skills</b>					
I assess learners interaction skills	57(57.0)	35(35.0)	1(1.0)	7(7.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners participation in group activities	56(56.0)	36(36.0)	4(4.0)	4(4.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners self-confidence skills	55(55.0)	43(43.0)	1(1.0)	1(1.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners outdoor- indoor play skills	43(43.0)	53(53.0)	3(3.0)	1(1.0)	100(100.0)
<b>Psychomotor Skills</b>					
I assess learners' grip of objects and writing tools	37(37.0)	51(51.0)	9(9.0)	3(3.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners outdoor- indoor manipulative skills	43(43.0)	53(53.0)	3(3.0)	1(1.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners writing skills	47(47.0)	41(41.0)	11(11.0)	1(1.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners drawing skills	50(50.0)	43(43.0)	4(4.0)	3(3.0)	100(100.0)

I assess learners colouring skills	67(67.0)	30(30.0)	2(2.0)	1(1.0)	100(100.0)
<b>Emotional Skills</b>					
I assess learners individual behaviour	4(4.0)	16(16.0)	39(39.0)	41(41.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners peer relationship	15(15.0)	21(21.0)	55(55.0)	9(9.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners teacher-pupil relationship	17(17.0)	15(15.0)	59(59.0)	9(9.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners reactions towards outdoor and indoor events	15(15.0)	15(15.0)	61(61.0)	9(9.0)	100(100.0)

Source: Field data (2022).

The results in Table 1 indicated ECE teachers assess cognitive skills during assessment. ECE teachers strongly agreed that during assessment, they assess learners' thinking (cognitive) ability. Assessment of language skills was another sub theme which emerged. On assessing learners' social skills (interaction skills), majority of the teachers strongly agreed that they assessed such skills. The Table further showed that assessing learners' physical development (psychomotor) skills was another sub theme which emerged from the learning areas ECE teachers assess during assessment. However, it was realized that majority of ECE teachers do not assess learners' emotional skills in the Sefwi Wiawso municipality.

### Interview Responses from the Early Childhood Teachers

ECE teachers do well to do comprehensive assessment of their children which involve physical, cognitive, emotion and social skills. In doing comprehensive assessment, the following sub-themes were developed; social skills, language skills and cognitive skills. Though 10 head teachers were interviewed but the responses were put together based on similarities that were in their response to the questions.

#### Cognitive skills

Cognitive skills emerged as a sub theme under the main areas ECE teachers assess during assessment

Views of one teacher is worthwhile

*I assess learners understanding of the concept. This is done to assess their recall and retention knowledge* (verbatim comment from Teacher A)

Another teacher stated that

*I record whatever I see about learner based on time, date. In order to get holistic information about the pupils I assess them both inside and outside the*

*classroom to ascertain the knowledge level (verbatim comment from Teacher F)*

A teacher also commented

*I gather learners' exercises and other works for making decision about them. This is because I give the different work to assess their total cognitive development (verbatim comment from Teacher D)*

From the above comment on cognitive domain ECE teachers assess during assessment it could be deduced that teachers assess pupils understanding of the concept knowledge level and their total cognitive development.

### **Language skills**

Language skills was another sub theme which emerged from the learning areas ECE teachers assess during assessment

Views of one teacher is worthwhile

*I assess learners speaking skills when they are talking to their friends on how to respond to their colleagues during conversation. Their ability to request for permission (verbatim comment from Teacher B)*

Another teacher stated that

*I assess learners listening skills. I do this by giving them oral work and dictation in order to ascertain their level of development as far as their listening skills are concerned (verbatim comment from Teacher G)*

A teacher also commented

*I assess learners reading skills. I give pupils short passages and selected words to assess their level of achievement (verbatim comment from Teacher C)*

Inferring from the above, it is obvious in ECE teachers attempt to assess KG children's language skills; Kindergarten teachers in Sefwi Wiawso assess learner's speaking skills, reading skills and listening skills.

### **Social and psychomotor skills**

Social skill emerged as a sub theme under the main domains ECE teachers assess during assessment

One teacher commented as follows:

*I assess learners speaking skills; with this skill I use a lot of oral activities to help pupils develop their communication skills* (Verbatim comment from Teacher E)

The view of one teacher is noteworthy here:

*I write down information on learners when they are playing to gather adequate information about my pupils so as to take varied decision about them* (verbatim comment from Teacher H)

Another teacher intimated that:

*I closely watch learners when they are performing an activity, watch them during classroom work and when they are doing co-curricular work such as during ground work and playing activities* (verbatim comment from Teacher J)

Judging from the above, it is obvious in ECE teachers attempt to assess KG children's social and psychomotor skills. Kindergarten teachers in Sefwi Wiawso assess learner's speaking skills through how they play during playing time, how they perform an activity individually and in group and social and psychomotor skills they exhibit.

### The assessment strategies teachers employ for learners in ECE

Data from Table 2 represents the views of teachers on the strategies they use to assess ECE learners.

**Table 2: Strategies ECE teachers use when assessing ECE learners**

Strategies ECE teachers in assessing ECE learners	S Agree f %	Agree f %	Disagree f %	S. D f %	TOTAL f %
I closely watch learners when they are performing an activity	48(48.0)	38(38.0)	10(10.0)	4(4.0)	100(100.0)
I gather learners exercises and other works for making decision about them	69(59.0)	28(28.0)	1(1.0)	2(2.0)	00(100.0)
I take pictures of children art and play for assessment	48(48.0)	41(41.0)	7(7.0)	2(2.0)	100(100.0)
I take and examines videos of learners dramatic play in and outside the class for assessment	35(35.0)	28(28.0)	30(30.0)	7(7.0)	100(100.0)

I write down information on learners when they are playing	34(34.0)	31(31.0)	23(23.0)	12(12.0)	100(100.0)
I record whatever I see about learner based on time and date	41(41.0)	25(25.0)	25(25.0)	9(9.0)	100(100.0)
I write down beginning and end of every term	49(49.0)	26(26.0)	9(9.0)	16(16.0)	100(100.0)
I build a comprehensive portfolio on learners for assessment	3(3.0)	10(10.0)	46(46.0)	41(41.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners specifically on different domains during exercise	46(46.0)	41(41.0)	8(8.0)	5(5.0)	100(100.0)
I assess learners individually and in groups about their creative skills.	65(65.0)	30(30.0)	2(2.0)	3(3.0)	100(100.0)

Source: Field data (2022).

From Table 2, the statements on strategies ECE teachers use when assessing ECE learners; it emerged from the responses from the teachers that, teachers closely watch learners when they are performing activities (observation), take videos of learners' dramatic play in and outside the class for assessment, using anecdotal records strategies, and the use of visual documentation. Checklist is another strategy ECE teachers use when assessing ECE learners individually and in groups about their creative skills. However, it was realized that majority of ECE teachers do not employ portfolio assessment strategy in Sefwi Wiawso municipality.

### **Interview Responses from the Early Childhood Teachers**

ECE teachers employ array of strategies to ensure proper and reliable result for their pupils. Observation, anecdotal records, visual documentation and checklist are some of the key strategies adopted by teachers.

#### **Observation**

Observation emerged as a strategy ECE teachers use when assessing the pupils. Regarding observation, ECE teachers it emerged that;

A teacher stated:

*I closely watch learners when they are performing an activity in order to make judgment about their performance in activities. (Teacher F)*

Another teacher stated:

*I assess learners on daily basis both in the classroom and outside classroom so as to gather the necessary information about them. (Teacher I)*

Another teacher stated:

*Sometime I use group work to observe children's ability to socialize, tolerate and cooperate with their friend in and outside the classroom (Teacher C)*

Inferring from the above comments it is clear that observation is an assessment strategy ECE teachers use in assessing ECE learners. ECE teachers observe children individually and in a group. They also observe children during class activities and outside classroom.

### **Anecdotal records**

The emerging sub-theme coping strategies are discussed below.

One of the participants stated:

*I used structured text and hand on activities to assess my children in order to get vital information to make the necessary decision. They sometimes come to the board and deliver (Teacher G)*

Another teacher stated:

*I write down information on learners when they are playing. This helps me to gather the necessary information about them to make decision (Verbatim comment from Teacher E)*

A teacher has this to say:

*I record whatever I see about learner based on time, date. I write down beginning and end of every term. This helps me to get necessary information about the children in order to take vital decision about the children (Teacher C)*

Inferring from the above comments it is clear that ECE teachers adopt anecdotal record strategy to assess their pupils. These include recording the vital information about the children.

## **Visual documentation**

Another area is the use of visual documentation strategy

View of a teacher worthwhile here;

*I take pictures of children art and play for assessment. Most children love drawing and matching objects so I used them frequently to assess them*  
(Teacher B)

Another teacher stated that;

*I take and examine videos of learners' dramatic play in and outside the classroom to assess their emotional, affective and mental development*  
(Teacher A)

Grounded from the above comments, it is clear that ECE teachers used pictures of children art and play for assessment. They also use videos of learners' dramatic play to gather the necessary information of the pupils.

## **Checklists**

A teacher stated:

*I use writing and listening activities to assess the level of my pupil's achievement. It is common practice I apply. Also, I test their mind by using questions and answers orally or written which help me to ascertain whether they have understood what I have taught* (Teacher B)

Another teachers had this to say;

*I assess learners specifically on different domains. I used prepared items to gather necessary information about the children I teach in order to make decision about them.* (Teacher G).

Grounded from the above comments it is clear that ECE teachers adopt Checklists strategies such as structured writing and listening and questionnaire in assessing as ECE learners.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

The results of the study revealed the learning areas that ECE teachers assess during assessment; it was found that ECE teachers agreed that they assess the cognitive skills of their learners. It was also obvious from the interview responses on the learning areas ECE teachers assessed during the assessment that teachers assess pupils' understanding of the



concept, knowledge, and their total cognitive development. The aforementioned information is consistent with Gelman, Brenneman, Macdonald, and Román's (2009) assertion that the preschool teacher is responsible for observing kids every day and interacting with them in ways that support their development in the cognitive, social, physical, and emotional domains. Additionally, Tomlinson and Hyson (2012) stated that young children's social and emotional growth and learning occur as a result of their interactions with others and are interconnected with their development in the physical and cognitive domains. After gathering this knowledge, the adult then uses activities, dialogues, resources, and questions to encourage children to explore and learn more about their surroundings. Teachers must first comprehend child development and the anticipated learning sequences across several domains in order to fulfill all of these needs.

Another area which emerged as the learning areas ECE teachers assessed during assessment was children's language skills. It was also clear from the interview responses that ECE teachers assessed KG children's language skills; kindergarten teachers in Sefwi Wiawso assessed learners' speaking skills, reading skills, and listening skills. Social skills were another learning area which emerged from the learning areas ECE teachers assessed during assessment. It was also clear from the interview responses that in ECE, teachers attempt to assess KG children's social skills. Sefwi Wiawso ECE teachers assessed learners' speaking skills, how they play during play time, how they perform an activity individually and in group, and the social skills they exhibit. The finding is in line with Chittenden and Jones (1999), who stipulated that the evaluation process involves identifying evidence of children's learning during everyday classroom activities by collecting data over time from multiple sources. These sources comprise children's individual and group-produced activities, conversations, and artifacts. Individual student portfolios are composed of teachers' descriptions of on-going behaviour and conversations as well as children's work products that provide evidence used to assess children's understandings (Gelman et al., 2009; Worth & Grollman, 2003). To facilitate new learning and to inform education, this data is interpreted and put to use. Teachers who regularly use these evaluation techniques improve their ability to notice students' scientific behavior and thinking, and they are consequently in a better position to assist preschoolers in their learning and development across all learning areas. Tomlinson and Hyson (2012) stated that young children's social and emotional growth and learning occur as a result of their interactions with others and are interconnected with their development in the physical and cognitive domains.

More so, physical development (psychomotor) skills were also identified as the learning areas ECE teachers assessed during assessment. The teachers agreed that they should assess the learners' outdoor and indoor manipulative and play skills. It was also clear from the interview responses that ECE teachers assessed KG children's physical development (psychomotor) skills. This is in agreement with Tomlinson and Hyson (2012), who opine that a high-quality preschool program requires dedicated and qualified teaching staff, working in partnership with children's families, to systematically assist children in developing manipulative competence and confidence. As children move through the preschool day, their teachers carefully observe and listen to them, adapting their responses to suit individual children's social, physical, and emotional needs.

However, on the strategies used in assessing ECE learners, the findings of the study revealed that one of the strategies ECE teachers use when assessing ECE learners is observation. It was also obvious from the interview responses that teachers used observation as an assessment strategy in assessing ECE learners. The findings revealed above is consistent with Forman and Hall's (2013) argument that it is important to observe children in order to learn about their ideas, expectations, and presumptions in order to have fruitful, high-quality interactions with them. They claim that although observation is useful for gaining knowledge about children's interests, abilities, and personalities, it does not result in more extensive or in-depth interactions that promote learning. This breadth and depth can only be gained by looking further than a basic recording of what children say and do and by considering the meaning behind these things (Forman & Hall, 2013). According to Glazzard et al. (2010), an efficient assessment technique for building a complete picture of the child's abilities is to assess children based on observations in their environment through independent learning and adult-directed learning. Through practice, caregivers must learn to closely observe children to better understand their actions and development. To get a full picture of a child's progress, observations should be made at a variety of activities they do and should be done over time.

The study identified that anecdotal records emerged as another strategy ECE teachers use when assessing ECE learners. It was also obvious from the interview responses that ECE teachers adopt an anecdotal record strategy to assess their pupils. These include recording vital information about the children. The above revelation is in agreement with what Chan and Wong (2010) said that anecdotal can be recorded in any setting and requires no special training. All you need is paper and a writing tool to record what happened in a factual, and

objective manner. The observation is open-ended, continuing until everything is witnessed. It is like a short story in that it has a beginning, middle, and end. The process of recording the incident requires a careful eye and a quick pencil to capture all of the details. You will need to note who was involved, what happened, when it happened, and where it occurred. It needs to be done promptly and accurately.

The study again identified that visual documentation was another strategy ECE teachers used when assessing ECE learners. From the interview responses, it was clear that ECE teachers used pictures of children's art and play videos for assessment. This finding is in tandem with Katz and Chard's (1996) assertion that well-done documentation (visual documentation) is said to promote quality in early childhood programs by enhancing children's learning, demonstrating serious consideration for children's ideas and work, serving as a channel for planning and evaluating with children, encouraging parent appreciation and participation, acting as a form of educator research, and making children's learning visible. A critical analysis of the discourses about children and childhoods that are prevalent in practice is prompted by the documentation (visual documentation). Teachers are made aware of the strengths and skills of the students through documentation (visual documentation), which acts as an educational tool for planning and self-reflection (Buldu, 2010). Additionally, research demonstrates the importance of documentation (visual documentation) for formative assessment and how it may help educators better understand how children develop holistically by addressing the problems with traditional or standardized tests (Casbergue, 2010).

The study revealed that the checklist is another strategy ECE teachers use when assessing ECE learners. From the interview responses, it was clear that ECE teachers adopt checklist such as structured writing and listing or questionnaires in assessing ECE learners. The above findings are in line with Chan and Wong (2010), who asserted that checklists may be designed for any developmental domain (physical, social, emotional, or cognitive). A checklist that is carefully designed can tell a lot about one child or the entire class. Checklists may be developed to survey one child or a group of children. The targeted behaviors are listed in logical order, with similar items grouped together. Therefore, you can quickly record the presence or absence of a behavior. Typically, a checklist indicates the presence of a behavior. You may be able to purchase commercially prepared checklists. Most teachers

working in child care centres structure their own (Chan & Wong, 2010), since it is helpful to their work.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the learning areas ECE teachers assess during assessment **included pupils' total cognitive development skills, language skills and** physical development (psychomotor) skills. It was also observed that ECE teachers assess KG children's social skills. Additionally, the study further concluded that KG teachers use strategies such as observation, anecdotal records, visual documentation and checklist to assess their pupils. Therefore, kindergarten teachers in Sefwi Wiawso assess learners through a number of domains using different strategies on how they perform activities individually and in **groups base on the** kind of skills they exhibit.

The study recommended that;

- KG teachers should widen their assessment to all learning areas such as, Emotional and affective domains. This will enhance holistic development of the child.
- ECE teachers should use other strategies like, rating scales, portfolio assessment to enhance their practice in early childhood education.
- The authorities of Municipal Education Directorate should organise frequent in-service and refresher programmes so as to equip the KG teachers on additional learning areas of assessments and strategies to assess the needed skills.

### Disclaimer

This paper is an extended version of a **Thesis** document of the same author.

The **Thesis** document is available in this link: <https://afribary.com/works/teachers-assessment-practices-on-early-childhood-learning-in-sefwi-wiawso-municipality-of-the-western-region-of-ghana>

**[As per journal policy, pre-print article can be published as a journal article, provided it is not published in any other journal]**

## Consent

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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