



TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL COMPETENCE IN ASSESSING EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNERS IN THE GOMOA WEST DISTRICT, GHANA

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' instructional competence in assessing early childhood learners in the Gomoa West Municipality, specifically, the domains of learners assessed by early childhood teachers and the skills required to conduct effective assessments in the Gomoa West Municipality. Using the interpretivist paradigm and phenomenological research design, data were collected from 17 purposively sampled early childhood teachers through semi-structured interviews and observation checklists. Findings revealed that teachers assessed learners across cognitive, psychomotor, and socio-emotional domains, employing various strategies such as structured activities, play-based learning, and observation. The study also identified essential assessment skills, including patience, observation, and knowledge of child development, which supported accurate and holistic evaluation of learners. The study highlights the need for targeted teacher training and structured guidelines to improve assessment practices in early childhood education.

Keywords: early childhood education, learner assessment, cognitive development, psychomotor development, socio-emotional development, teacher competencies, Gomoa West Municipality

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1. Introduction

Assessment plays a central role in early childhood education because it helps teachers understand how children are learning and developing (Aumann *et al.*, 2026). In early childhood settings, assessment should support learning and development rather than just measure outcomes. High-quality assessment informs teaching decisions, supports young children's growth across multiple developmental areas, and strengthens learning experiences (Levy-Feldman, 2025). Educational scholars emphasise that teachers must be competent in planning, carrying out, and interpreting assessment activities for assessment to be meaningful (Black & Wiliam, 2018; DeVries & Zan, 2018). The competence of teachers in assessing young learners is therefore an important factor in the quality of early childhood education.

International organisations like UNESCO and UNICEF emphasise child-centred assessment approaches that look at the whole child, including cognitive, social and emotional development (UNICEF, 2020; UNESCO, 2019). Research in Europe and North America also highlights the importance of teacher competence in assessment practices. For example, Anders, Grosse, Rossbach, Ebert and Weinert (2016) found that teachers who are skilled at observation and interpretation can better support children's numeracy and literacy development between ages three and seven. Likewise, studies on assessment and feedback stress the need for teachers to use evidence from assessment to guide instruction (Evans & Waring, 2024; Shute, 2008). Despite these advances at the global level, gaps remain between recommended assessment approaches and what is practiced in many classrooms because teachers often lack adequate training and support (Darling Hammond *et al.*, 2020; Akyeampong, Pryor & Ampiah, 2016).

However, early childhood reforms across several African countries stress child development outcomes beyond cognitive skills (Ofori Adofo, 2025). Research in South Africa and Uganda, for example, shows that although national curricula encourage broad-based assessment, teachers often rely on informal or unstructured practices because they lack structured frameworks and training (Ejuu, 2018; Mkabela, 2020). These studies suggest that teacher competence in assessment is a widespread concern that affects the quality of early childhood education across different African contexts.

The curriculum framework published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2019) calls for assessment practices that address multiple areas of child development. However, empirical studies indicate that many teachers struggle with implementing these practices. Asante and Oduro (2018) found that kindergarten teachers face challenges in using alternative assessment techniques in Ghana. Similarly, Frimpong, Osei Kesse and Asiedu Ekoom (2021) reported varying levels of assessment knowledge and practice among early childhood teachers in the Kumasi Metropolis. Research from the Sefwi Wiawso Municipality also shows that teachers often implement assessment in limited ways and require more professional development (Martin & Atteh, 2022). These studies reveal that although national policy supports holistic assessment,

practice on the ground remains uneven, suggesting the need for further research on teacher competencies in assessment.

The Gomoa West District has seen growth in early childhood education as more parents enrol children in early childhood centres. Yet little is known about how teachers in these centres assess learners across the domains of development and the skills they use in doing so. Observations from local education offices suggest that teachers might focus more on cognitive and academic skills, with less attention to social, emotional and creative development. In addition, professional development opportunities related to assessment vary from one centre to another, making teacher capacity uneven across the municipality. This makes Gomoa West an important context for examining teacher competencies in assessing early childhood learners.

Scholarship on early childhood assessment offers insights into practices, methods and theoretical perspectives relevant to teacher competence. DeVries and Zan (2018) argue that assessment must be embedded in everyday routines and play-based activities so that young children's learning can be accurately captured. Evans and Waring (2024) highlight the role of feedback in learning and how teachers interpret assessment information to shape teaching. Research on assessment practices in Ghana also highlights the importance of cultural context in shaping teachers' approaches (Asante & Oduro, 2018; Frimpong *et al.*, 2021). Methodologically, many studies employ mixed methods designs combining observation, interviews and questionnaires to explore assessment practice. Yet despite these important contributions, debates continue about how well-prepared teachers are to assess development in multiple domains and how professional development can be targeted to improve these competencies.

Recurring challenges in the literature point to gaps that justify further investigation. First, many teachers lack strong skills in observing, documenting and interpreting children's behaviours and learning outcomes. Second, there is often inconsistency between curriculum expectations for assessment and actual classroom practice. Third, most research has focused on larger urban centres, with limited evidence from smaller municipalities like Gomoa West. Studies that focus on teacher competencies can help deepen understanding of how assessment practices vary across contexts and what specific skills teachers need to assess multiple domains of child development.

It is against this backdrop that this study sought to find out the developmental domains that teachers assess and to explore the assessment skills they use in early childhood centres in the Gomoa West Municipality.

As an early childhood teacher in the Gomoa West Municipality, observations during classroom practice revealed that assessment is often limited to cognitive skills, with less attention given to social and emotional development, creativity and communication. Many teachers appear to lack the skills and confidence to use different assessment methods such as observation, portfolios, learning stories, and formative feedback to evaluate children holistically. Assessment activities are often irregular, poorly documented, and rarely used to guide teaching practices in a structured way.

This was a problem because incomplete assessment hindered teachers' ability to identify children's learning needs, provide individualized support and promote holistic development. Without reliable and comprehensive assessment, children missed opportunities to strengthen skills in areas that are less formally assessed, such as social interaction, emotional regulation, problem solving. This can ultimately affect readiness for primary school, as well as children's long-term academic and personal growth (UNICEF, 2020; DeVries & Zan, 2018).

Investigating this problem is important because teacher competence in assessment is directly linked to the quality of early childhood education. Understanding which developmental domains are being assessed, and the skills teachers need to assess them effectively, can inform professional development programs, guide curriculum implementation, and improve learning outcomes for children. Addressing gaps in teacher competencies can also support policy goals, such as those outlined by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA, 2019), which emphasize continuous, developmentally appropriate assessment in Ghanaian early childhood classrooms.

Globally, research highlights the critical role of teacher competence in early childhood assessment. Studies in Europe and North America show that teachers who are skilled in observation, documentation, and feedback can better support holistic development in children (Anders *et al.*, 2016; Evans & Waring, 2024). In Africa, research has shown that early childhood teachers often face challenges in implementing effective assessment practices due to limited training and resources (Ejuu, 2018; Mkabela, 2020). In Ghana, studies in urban areas and selected municipalities indicate that teachers' knowledge and practice of assessment are uneven, with many teachers struggling to implement alternative or formative assessment strategies (Asante & Oduro, 2018; Frimpong *et al.*, 2021; Martin & Atteh, 2022).

Despite this research, few studies have focused specifically on smaller municipalities such as the Gomoa West Municipality. Most previous studies in Ghana examine metropolitan areas like Accra or Kumasi, leaving a gap in understanding how teachers in smaller or semi-urban contexts assess early childhood learners. Moreover, existing studies often examine either teachers' knowledge or assessment practices, but rarely explore both the domains assessed and the skills required by teachers in a single study.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating teachers' competencies in assessing early childhood learners in the Gomoa West Municipality. It examines not only the domains of development teachers assess but also the skills they use to carry out these assessments effectively. By focusing on a context that has received limited empirical attention, this study offers new insights into teacher practice in semi-urban Ghana and provides evidence that can inform targeted professional development, curriculum implementation, and policy refinement.

The following research objectives guided the study:

- 1) Find out the domains of the learner that are assessed by teachers at early childhood centres in the Gomoa West Municipality
- 2) Explore the skills needed by teachers in assessing early childhood learners in the Gomoa West Municipality.

1.1 Delimitations of the Study

The study was focused on early childhood teachers in the Gomoa West Municipality. It specifically examined their competencies in assessing learners across key developmental domains, including cognitive, social, emotional, and language skills. A qualitative approach was adopted to gain detailed insights into teachers' assessment practices. Data collection was focused on semi-structured interviews and classroom observations using an observation checklist. The study excluded parents and teachers outside the municipality, and it did not address other aspects of early childhood education, such as curriculum design and school facilities.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in Item Response Theory (IRT), first proposed by Frederic Lord, which explained how a learner's probability of responding correctly to an assessment item depended on both their ability and the characteristics of the item, such as difficulty and discrimination (De Ayala, 2013; Embretson & Reise, 2013; Lord, 1980). IRT emphasized individualized assessment, recognizing that learners differed in abilities and responded differently to tasks. In the context of early childhood education, this framework guided the study by highlighting the need for teachers to interpret children's responses accurately and adjust instruction accordingly. Using semi-structured interviews and observation checklists, the study examined teachers' competencies in assessing multiple developmental domains, ensuring assessment practices were reliable, developmentally appropriate, and responsive to learners' diverse needs (DeVries & Zan, 2018; Evans & Waring, 2024).

3. Review of Related Literature

3.1 Concept of Assessment

Assessment in education is a systematic process of gathering and interpreting information about learners' abilities to guide teaching and learning. In early childhood education, assessment extends beyond academic skills to include social, emotional, language, and physical development (DeVries & Zan, 2018; Evans & Waring, 2024). Scholars argue that effective assessment provides teachers with evidence to support individualized instruction, monitor progress, and enhance children's holistic development (Black & Wiliam, 2018). However, research highlights that assessment practices vary widely, often depending on teacher training, experience, and available resources (Frimpong, Osei-Kesse, & Asiedu-Ekoom, 2021).

Globally, studies emphasize the value of formative, observation-based, and performance-focused assessment in early childhood (Anders *et al.*, 2016; Shute, 2008). These approaches allow teachers to capture children's learning in authentic contexts and adjust instruction dynamically. While such methods are praised for promoting motivation, engagement, and self-regulation, they also present challenges. Teachers may struggle with subjectivity in observation or lack sufficient skills to interpret developmental progress accurately (Evans & Waring, 2024). In Ghana, assessment is mandated as a critical component of the early childhood curriculum (NaCCA, 2019). Yet, evidence suggests that many teachers primarily focus on cognitive outcomes, neglecting social and emotional domains due to limited professional development and unclear guidelines (Asante & Oduro, 2018; Frimpong *et al.*, 2021). This indicates a gap between policy expectations and classroom practice.

Synthesizing global and local research, it is clear that while assessment is recognized as essential for child development, effective implementation depends on teacher competence, adequate training, and structured support. Existing studies have largely examined either the domains assessed or teacher knowledge, leaving limited understanding of the skills teachers use to conduct comprehensive, developmentally appropriate assessments. Addressing this gap is crucial for improving early childhood learning outcomes.

3.2 Domains of Learners Assessed by Teachers

Mtati and Munnik (2023) conducted a qualitative review in South Africa, examining instruments for measuring emotional and social competence among preschoolers. They highlighted the critical importance of social-emotional domains, emphasizing that these are often underrepresented in teacher assessment. Pan, Copple, and Bredekamp (2019) used a mixed-methods approach to analyze early curricula internationally. Their study indicated that teachers are expected to assess cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language/literacy domains, but actual classroom practices varied depending on contextual factors such as class size, resources, and teacher training.

In Ghana, Martin and Atteh (2022) employed a survey design, sampling early childhood teachers in Sefwi-Wiawso, and found that assessment focused primarily on social, cognitive, physical, and language domains. Similarly, Agbayisah and Dzakadzie (2025) used semi-structured interviews and observation checklists in Tema West Metropolis. Their findings showed reliance on observation, portfolios, and performance-based methods, yet assessment remained heavily cognitive and academic. Attah Mensah *et al.* (2025) conducted a quantitative study with purposive sampling in the Ejisu Municipality and reported that teachers predominantly used observation and rating scales to assess cognitive skills, neglecting other developmental domains.

Critically, these studies reveal a consistent narrow focus on cognitive and academic domains, with social-emotional, physical, and holistic development often underassessed. Methodological differences, such as reliance on self-report versus direct observation, also affect the validity of findings. Synthesizing these works, it is evident

that teachers require enhanced competencies in assessing multiple domains. This study addresses this gap in the Gomoa West Municipality, exploring both the domains assessed and the skills teachers need to implement comprehensive, developmentally appropriate assessment practices.

3.3 Skills Needed by Teachers in Assessing Learners

Research has highlighted a range of skills required by teachers to effectively assess early childhood learners across different contexts. DeVries and Zan (2018) used a qualitative design, reviewing classroom practices across multiple countries, and emphasized teachers' observation and interpretation skills as essential for understanding children's learning processes. Black and Wiliam (2018) employed a meta-analysis of formative assessment studies and highlighted analytical skills in using assessment data to guide instruction and provide meaningful feedback. Similarly, Evans and Waring (2024) conducted a case study using interviews and document analysis, arguing that teachers require documentation and reflective skills to implement effective assessment and adapt their teaching practices. Hattie and Timperley (2007), widely cited in formative assessment literature, underscored the critical role of feedback skills in promoting learner progress.

Moreover, Mkabela (2020) used a systematic review approach, demonstrating that observation, interpretation, and reflective skills remain underdeveloped in many early childhood classrooms across the continent, limiting the effectiveness of assessment practices. In Ghana, Asante and Oduro (2018) employed surveys with purposive sampling and found that kindergarten teachers needed further training in observation, checklists, and portfolio documentation. Frimpong, Osei-Kesse, and Asiedu-Ekoom (2021), using semi-structured interviews and observations in Kumasi, reported the need for analytical and interpretive skills to make meaningful sense of assessment data. Martin and Atteh (2022) identified that teachers required stronger competencies in using holistic assessment tools beyond traditional observation. These studies reveal a consistent gap in teachers' practical assessment skills, particularly in holistic, reflective, and analytical practices. Synthesizing this evidence, it is clear that teachers in the Gomoa West Municipality need targeted skill development to implement comprehensive assessment strategies that capture all domains of early childhood learning.

3.4 Research Paradigm/Approach/Design

In line with the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach, this study adopted a phenomenological research design and qualitative approach to explore the experiences of early childhood teachers in assessing learners in the Gomoa West Municipality. Phenomenology focuses on understanding participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to specific phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design allowed the researcher to capture teachers' perspectives on the domains they assess and the skills they use or require for effective assessment. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is appropriate for examining personal and professional experiences to

reveal the essence of a phenomenon, while Van Manen (2016) highlights its relevance for understanding practices shaped by daily interactions. Using this approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observation checklists, providing rich, detailed insights into teachers' assessment practices and professional realities.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Data for the study were collected using semi-structured interviews and observation checklists, which are widely recognized as effective instruments in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to engage teachers directly, explore their experiences, and clarify responses, providing rich, detailed insights into the domains they assess and the skills they apply (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Observation checklists were used to systematically record teachers' assessment practices in real classroom settings, capturing behaviors and strategies that might not emerge in interviews (DeVries & Zan, 2018). Combining these instruments enabled triangulation, increasing the credibility and depth of findings (Denzin, 2012). Together, these tools provided a comprehensive understanding of teachers' assessment practices and the professional competencies they employed in evaluating early childhood learners.

3.6 Population

The study population consisted of all early childhood teachers in the Gomoa West Municipality, which totaled 118 teachers at the start of the 2023–2024 school year, according to records from the District Education Office. The teachers were distributed across six educational circuits within the municipality. Circuit One had eighteen teachers, Circuit Two had twenty-four, Circuit Three had twenty, Circuit Four had eighteen, Circuit Five had twenty-one, and Circuit Six had seventeen teachers. This distribution reflected the total population of early childhood educators in the municipality and provided a comprehensive overview of the potential respondents for the study. The population was considered appropriate for the research because it included all practicing early childhood teachers within the municipality, offering a complete representation of the professional context in which assessment practices are implemented.

3.7 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed criterion purposive sampling to select 17 early childhood teachers from the Gomoa West Municipality. This sampling technique was used to deliberately select participants who met specific criteria relevant to the study, ensuring that those included could provide rich and meaningful insights into assessment practices (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The sample size was guided by Taherdoost (2016), who recommended that studies exploring a phenomenon are best conducted with 5 to 20 participants to achieve depth and detail. The inclusion criteria required teachers to hold qualifications in early childhood education, have at least five years of teaching experience, have undergone in-service training in assessment practices, and be actively

involved in assessing learners. These criteria ensured that participants possessed the expertise and practical exposure necessary to inform the study's focus on assessment domains and skills.

4. Results

4.1 Research Objective 1: The domains of the learner that are assessed by teachers at early childhood centres in the Gomoa West Municipality.

This research objective explored the various domains of learners that early childhood teachers seek to assess at the early childhood centres in the Gomoa West Municipality. Here are the themes that came out of the interview;

Theme 1: Cognitive Domain

"I utilise different assessment tools and methods to evaluate children's intellectual abilities and cognitive skills. During structured activities and play-based learning experiences, I observe children's curiosity, problem-solving approaches, and ability to make connections between concepts. Through observations and documentation, I track children's progress in areas such as language development, mathematical reasoning, and scientific inquiry." (T1)

"I employ various strategies to gauge their intellectual abilities and understanding across different subject areas. For instance, during literacy activities, I observe children's letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and comprehension skills. In mathematics, I assess their understanding of numbers, shapes, patterns, and problem-solving strategies through hands-on activities and games." (T5)

These responses indicated that teachers used multiple assessment tools and strategies to evaluate children's cognitive abilities. They observed problem-solving, curiosity, and concept connections during structured and play-based activities. Literacy, mathematics, and science skills were monitored through hands-on tasks, games, and documentation, capturing children's language development, numerical understanding, and reasoning progress.

Theme 2: Psychomotor/Physical Domain

"I employ a variety of assessment strategies to evaluate children's gross and fine motor skills, coordination, and overall physical development. During outdoor playtime and structured movement activities, I observe children's abilities to run, jump, climb, balance, and manipulate objects. I also incorporate activities that promote fine motor skills, such as cutting, threading, and drawing." (T11)

"During structured physical activities, outdoor play, and sensory experiences, I observe children's movements, balance, hand-eye coordination, and manipulative skills. Additionally, I incorporate games, obstacle courses, and art activities that require physical dexterity and control. Through systematic observations and documentation, I track children's progress and identify areas for growth." (T4)

These quotes emphasised children's gross and fine motor skills through structured activities, outdoor play, and sensory experiences. They observed running, jumping, balancing, climbing, hand-eye coordination, and manipulative skills. Activities like games, obstacle courses, cutting, threading, and drawing were used, with systematic observation and documentation tracking progress and identifying areas for development.

Theme 3: Socio-Emotional Domain

"I observe children's interactions with peers and adults, their ability to express emotions, and their problem-solving strategies. I also incorporate storytelling and role-playing activities that encourage empathy. Through these observations, I track children's progress and identify areas where they may need additional support or guidance." (T13)

"During group activities, I observe children's cooperation, sharing, and conflict-resolution skills. I also incorporate mindfulness exercises and a social-emotional learning curriculum to promote self-regulation and empathy. Through conversations, reflections, and informal assessments, I gather insights into children's feelings, attitudes, and behaviors." (T12)

These quotes highlighted that teachers focused on children's social and emotional development by observing interactions, cooperation, sharing, and conflict resolution. Activities like storytelling, role-playing, and mindfulness exercises promoted empathy and self-regulation. Through conversations, reflections, and informal assessments, teachers monitored children's emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and progress, identifying areas needing additional support or guidance.

4.2 Observational Analysis

Observations conducted at the early childhood centres in the Gomoa West Municipality confirmed that teachers actively assessed multiple domains of learners. In the cognitive domain, teachers employed both structured and play-based activities to evaluate intellectual abilities, problem-solving, and conceptual understanding. Observations revealed that children's literacy, numeracy, and scientific reasoning skills were monitored through hands-on tasks, games, and documentation, aligning with what teachers reported in interviews. In the psychomotor domain, teachers emphasized both gross and fine motor skills. During outdoor play, structured movement activities, and art tasks, children demonstrated abilities in running, jumping, climbing, balancing, and

manipulating objects. Teachers systematically documented progress, using games, obstacle courses, cutting, threading, and drawing activities to track development.

For the socio-emotional domain, teachers focused on interactions, cooperation, sharing, conflict resolution, and emotional expression. Storytelling, role-playing, and mindfulness exercises supported empathy and self-regulation. Observations confirmed that teachers used informal assessments, reflections, and discussions to monitor behaviors, attitudes, and socio-emotional growth.

The observational data supported the interviews, demonstrating that teachers in the Gomoa West Municipality engaged in comprehensive assessment practices across cognitive, psychomotor, and socio-emotional domains.

4.3 Discussions

The findings from this study align with global and local research on early childhood assessment, highlighting the domains teachers prioritize and the methods they employ. Consistent with Pan, Copple, and Bredekamp (2019), assessment in early childhood is expected to cover multiple developmental areas, including cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language domains. However, their study revealed that actual classroom practices often vary depending on contextual factors such as resources, teacher training, and class size. Similarly, Martin and Atteh (2022) found that teachers in the Sefwi-Wiawso Municipality predominantly assessed social, cognitive, physical, and language domains, suggesting a recognition of holistic development but with differing levels of emphasis across domains. In Ghana, Agbayisah and Dzakadzie (2025) reported that early childhood teachers relied heavily on observation, portfolios, and performance-based methods, yet assessment remained largely cognitive and academic. Attah Mensah *et al.* (2025) further reinforced this trend, showing that in the Ejisu Municipality, teachers focused primarily on cognitive skills using observation and rating scales, while social-emotional and physical domains were comparatively underassessed.

In the African context, Mtati and Munnik (2023) highlighted the underrepresentation of social-emotional domains in preschool assessment, emphasizing that these areas are critical for children's holistic development. Collectively, these studies suggest a pattern where cognitive assessment receives greater attention, while other domains, particularly socio-emotional and physical development, are less systematically evaluated. The current study in the Gomoa West Municipality confirms this pattern, indicating a need for enhanced teacher competencies in using comprehensive and developmentally appropriate assessment strategies across all learner domains.

4.4 Research Question 2: What Skills are Needed by the Teacher in Assessing Early Childhood Learners in Gomoa West Municipality?

Understanding the skills that are required of teachers in assessing learners at early childhood centres is very necessary when it comes to assessing young children. The following are the themes that emerged from the excerpts from the interview.

Theme 1: Patience

"In assessing children at the early childhood level, I believe one key skill that is needed is patience. During assessments, I approach each child with patience, allowing them to engage at their own pace and comfort level. Whether it's waiting for a child to formulate a response, providing gentle guidance during an activity, or allowing for repeated attempts, patience is key." (T2)

"In assessing early childhood learners, patience is not just a skill; it's a virtue. Children develop and learn at their own pace, and patience is essential in allowing them the time and encouragement they need to shine. Whether it's waiting for a hesitant learner to express themselves, providing extra support during a challenging task, or guiding them through a process, patience is at the core of effective assessment." (T7)

These responses indicated that teachers considered patience a critical skill in assessing early childhood learners. They emphasized allowing children to work at their own pace, providing gentle guidance, supporting repeated attempts, and encouraging hesitant learners. Patience was viewed as essential for creating a supportive environment that enables children to demonstrate their abilities fully and confidently.

Theme 2: Observational Skills

"I see observation as a foundational skill in assessing early childhood learners. Through keen observation, I gather valuable insights into each child's unique abilities, interests, and developmental progress. Whether it's during structured activities, free play, or social interactions, I closely observe children's behaviors, interactions, and problem-solving strategies." (T12)

"By carefully observing children during various activities and routines, I can assess their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills in context. This holistic approach to observation allows me to capture the complexity of children's learning experiences and identify their strengths and areas for improvement." (T17)

The implication of these quotes is that teachers regarded observational skills as essential for assessing early childhood learners. Through careful observation during activities, play, and social interactions, teachers gathered detailed insights into children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. This skill enabled a holistic understanding of each child's strengths, progress, and areas needing support.

Theme 3: Knowledge of Child Development

"I believe that understanding child development is paramount in assessing learners at early childhood centers. Just as every child is unique and progresses through developmental milestones at their own pace, with a strong foundation in child development, educators can recognize and appreciate these individual differences, tailor their teaching methods accordingly, and provide appropriate support and intervention when needed." (T5)

"My understanding of child development plays a central role in my assessment strategies at early childhood centers. Firstly, it helps me establish realistic expectations for each child based on their developmental stage." (T4)

These quotes indicated that teachers considered knowledge of child development essential for effective assessment. Understanding developmental milestones and individual differences enabled educators to set realistic expectations, tailor teaching methods, and provide appropriate support. This knowledge guided assessment strategies, ensuring that evaluation was responsive to each child's abilities, growth, and learning needs.

4.5 Discussions

The findings regarding the skills needed by teachers to assess early childhood learners emphasize the importance of observation, analytical reasoning, reflective practice, and feedback competence. Teachers require strong observational skills to accurately capture children's learning behaviors and developmental progress, as highlighted by DeVries and Zan (2018), who argued that careful observation is central to understanding learners' abilities across cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical domains. Similarly, Asante and Oduro (2018) reported that many kindergarten teachers in Ghana struggled with alternative assessment methods due to insufficient training, revealing gaps in observation, documentation, and interpretive skills.

Analytical and interpretive skills were also found to be critical. Frimpong, Osei-Kesse, and Asiedu-Ekoom (2021) showed that teachers in Kumasi often lacked the ability to analyze assessment data meaningfully, limiting their capacity to make informed instructional decisions. Black and Wiliam (2018) and Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasized that assessment data must be interpreted and accompanied by constructive feedback to enhance learning outcomes. Evans and Waring (2024) added that reflective skills and proper documentation are necessary for adapting teaching practices effectively based on observed learning patterns.

However, Mkabela (2020) observed that underdeveloped observation and reflective skills continue to constrain holistic assessment practices, while Martin and Atteh (2022) identified a need for teachers to move beyond traditional observation and employ comprehensive assessment tools.

4.6 Key Findings

The study revealed that early childhood teachers in the Gomoa West Municipality assessed learners across three main domains: cognitive, psychomotor/physical, and socio-emotional. Cognitive assessment focused on children's problem-solving, literacy, numeracy, and scientific reasoning, often through structured activities, games, and observation. Physical assessment emphasized gross and fine motor skills, coordination, and manipulative abilities, while socio-emotional assessment captured children's interactions, empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation. Observation, documentation, and play-based activities were the predominant assessment methods employed by teachers.

In terms of skills needed by teachers, patience emerged as essential for allowing learners to engage at their own pace. Observational skills enabled teachers to gather nuanced insights into children's abilities, while knowledge of child development informed expectations and guided assessment practices. Analytical and reflective skills were also necessary for interpreting assessment data and providing meaningful feedback. Despite these strengths, the study found that teachers often focused more on cognitive domains, with limited use of holistic tools and systematic documentation for other developmental areas.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings indicate that while teachers in the Gomoa West Municipality assessed multiple domains of early childhood learning, cognitive skills received the most attention. Effective assessment was linked to a combination of patience, observation, analytical reasoning, and knowledge of child development. However, gaps in skill application, training, and the use of comprehensive assessment tools limited the capacity to evaluate learners holistically. Strengthening teacher competencies and expanding assessment practices are therefore critical to ensuring balanced monitoring of all aspects of child development. It is accordingly recommended that the Educational Directorate of Gomoa West Municipality should organize targeted professional development programs to strengthen early childhood teachers' assessment skills. Focus should be on enhancing observation, interpretation, documentation, and feedback abilities, enabling teachers to assess learners holistically across cognitive, psychomotor, and socio-emotional domains. Additionally, the Educational Directorate of Gomoa West Municipality should provide guidelines, resources, and mentorship to facilitate diverse assessment methods, including portfolios, checklists, performance-based tasks, and play-based observations. This will ensure teachers can capture all aspects of learner development and improve the quality of early childhood assessment within the municipality.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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