

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**PRACTICES OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN ASSESSING
KINDERGARTENERS' READING AND WRITING SKILLS IN
BOSOMTWE DISTRICT**



MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

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**A thesis in the Department of Early Childhood Education,
Faculty of Educational Studies, submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Early Childhood Education)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

DECEMBER, 2021

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

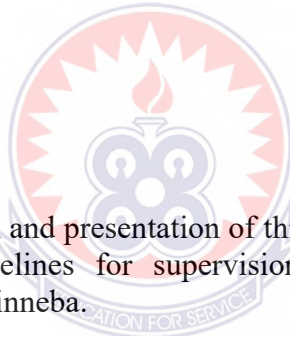
I, Seth Badu, declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work and has not been submitted either in part or whole for another degree elsewhere.

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor's Declaration

I certify that the preparation and presentation of this research was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of research laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



Supervisor's Name: Dr. Michael Subbey

Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

To my uncle, Mr. Yaw Oforu Agyei, whose constant encouragement and support have brought me this far on my educational ladder.



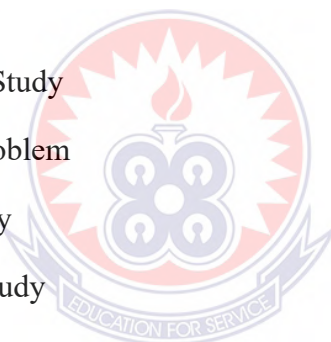
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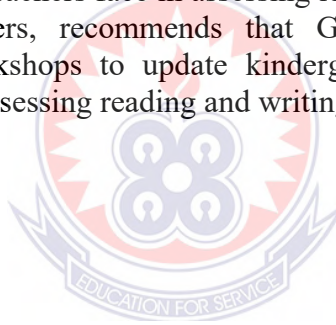
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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate practices of kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergartners' reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study adopted the sequential explanatory mixed methods design, which is characterised by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. A sample of 119 trained early childhood teachers were selected for the study. They were selected using simple random sampling and maximal variation sampling techniques. Questionnaires and interviews were instruments used to collect data for the study. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that kindergarten teachers in Bosomtwe held a positive view on assessment practices concerning reading and writing skills for kindergartners. Kindergarten teachers most frequently employ "teacher-made paper-and-pencil tests", "observation", and "checklist" in assessing kindergartners' reading and writing skills. Nonetheless, the results showed that most teachers do not use "anecdotal records", "running records", "portfolio", "rating scale", and "cloze assessment" in assessing Kindergartners' reading and writing skills. The study identified inadequate assessment standards, large class size, inadequate time, deficiency in aligning curriculum with reading and writing assessment tools as challenges kindergarten teachers face in assessing learners' reading and writing skills. The study, among others, recommends that Ghana Education Service (GES) frequently organise workshops to update kindergarten teachers on contemporary assessment practices in assessing reading and writing skills.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter discusses the background to the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and delimitations of the study. It also looked at the limitations of the study, operational definition of terms, and organisation of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Early childhood education offers a compassionate and essential framework for the learning of children. It provides a firm foundation for early learning as well as future learning. An increasing body of research suggests that early learning experiences are related to later academic success, mental and social well-being, lower grade retention, and decreased juvenile delinquency incidences. These outcomes are all factors associated with later adult productivity (Barnett, 2002). Neuroscience has established that learning is speedy at this stage (0-8 years) due to the rapid growth of the brain at this stage of human development (Tierney & Nelson, 2009). Owing to this rapid development of the brain, handlers of children are advised to enhance the holistic development of all concerned domains of human development: social, cognitive, emotional, physical, and language.

As Kindergarten educators, it becomes more of a herculean responsibility because children spend relatively much quality time in the school during their early stages. In helping and ensuring the holistic development of young children both in and outside the school environment, reading and writing competence are emphasised (Snow, 2006).

Learning reading and writing skills is an essential accomplishment for young learners. Developing reading and writing skills are an essential aspect of children's overall development. It is the cornerstone of performing better at school and socialising with others (Fellowes & Oakley, 2019). The provision of good reading and writing education to children in the early years translates to better outcomes later on (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002). The benefits of the kindergarten period for becoming a skilled reader are highlighted by well-known evidence that Kindergarten children's development in the areas of oral language, phonological awareness, and print knowledge is a result of how well they will learn to read once they start formal reading instruction at the early stage of their life (Lonigan, Allan, & Lerner, 2011). Heightened focus on these skills at the kindergarten level is essential in ensuring the future success of learners.

Neuroscience has established that between the ages of zero and eight, the brain grows more than every other moment. At this stage, if children are not stimulated, if read to; engaged in writing activities; and not asked questions, their brains weaken, thus inhibiting specific skills' acquisition and growth (Diamanti, Asimia, & Ageliki, 2017; Tompkins, 2011). It is therefore important to encourage reading and writing in this early stage of existence. But to aid learners to acquire reading and writing skills, there is the need to establish a baseline performance, and this calls for assessment.

Assessment can be defined as the gathering of information to make informed instructional decisions (National Research Council of the Nations Academies, 2008), and this is its fundamental purpose in early childhood education (Jablon, Dombro & Ditchelmiller, 2007). Assessment offers knowledge from which parents and teachers can better understand each child's developmental progress and status and how well

they are performing, and it can advise caregiving, teaching, and availability of needed services. Assessment helps early childhood programme staff to determine how well they are meeting their objectives for the children they serve, and it informs programme design and implementation. Assessment also provides information needed for programme accountability and contributes to advancing knowledge of child development. It is used to define areas of learning and development where children will require assistance or improvement, render appreciated learning noticeable, and align learning with instruction and programme delivery. (National Association for the Education of Young Children 2003; Brassard & Boehm 2007)

Dunphy (2008) maintains that assessment is an essential part of any curriculum and should be viewed as a vehicle to help the procedure of learning and development in early childhood education settings. Assessing children's work and performance at a regular interval allows an educator to accumulate records of the children's development. With this data, educators can plan an appropriate curriculum and effective individualised education for each child. The data obtained through assessment is also a great tool to share with parents to monitor their children's improvement at school, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and plan how they can provide support in their homes.

Assessment may often be applied to determine the efficacy of an early childhood curriculum (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). Assessment may be in the child's best interests as it contributes to actions that encourage the academic and social contributions of children and consider the abilities, needs, desires, and expectations of children (Bagnato, 2007; Nagle, 2007). Assessment is also used to partner with families and other relevant stakeholders to provide information on children's learning

and progress and better address disadvantage-related problems (Drummond 2012; Featherstone 2011; Siraj-Blatchford 2004).

The assessment of young learners reading and writing abilities has gained new relevance as the investment in early childhood education increases. Various governments are increasingly implementing Programmes for young children to address assessment gaps that exist at the early grade level. This is evident in the adaptation of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Programme by the Government of Ghana in 2015 to assess children reading abilities.

Assessing children's early reading and writing skills is an integral component of a robust early childhood programme (McAfee, Leong & Bodrova, 2004). Assessing reading and writing aspects such as orthographic knowledge, comprehension, phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, letter identification, concepts of print, composition, mechanics, etcetera provide teachers, parents, and other relevant stakeholders with information about the learners' baseline skills to monitor progress and also to provide additional support.

According to Strickland and Riley-Ayers (2006), concerns regarding developments in early reading and writing assessment involve the usage of assessments that rely on a small variety of abilities and the quality of the assessments in use. Both factors may lead teachers, particularly when the stakes are large, to limit their curriculum and teaching practices. For example, the ability to identify letters of the alphabet is invariably assessed in a decontextualized way in which a child is required to name each letter of the alphabet as it is introduced, one at a time. This can contribute to instruction in which the letters of the alphabet are described separately away from children's names or the application of that information to other meaningful written

materials. While children may be capable of identifying letters in a robotic-like, rote memorization way, they may struggle to achieve the long-term target, an awareness of how the letters work for reading and writing, and the capacity to use what they know to make sense of the print in their environment (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006).

Reading and writing skills assessment is carried out in the academic setting using various tools and methods. The preference of an assessment tool depends on what to assess, how to assess, and why to assess. It also depends on the teachers' knowledge of the assessment practices (Martin, 2018). Selecting the right assessment methods and tools requires that teachers consider the variety of conditions in the classroom that learners will experience. There can be a range of tools that may be employed. This can contain, among others, observation, checklists, running records, anecdotal records, rating scales, and rubrics.

“Assessment is an integral aspect of early childhood Programmes. Developmental goals and learning outcomes are set for children, and these must be monitored to see how well they are being achieved” (GES, 2012 cited in Asare 2015 p. 110). Assessment practices are necessary to ensure that teaching and learning are carried out and established following the need of every child in the classroom. Teachers are therefore informed to use appropriate assessment techniques and procedures that cater for all learning styles and ensure that learners are given the opportunity and motivation to show their achievement through appropriate ways that are meaningful to them (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, & Wyse, 2010).

Increased public awareness of assessment and its prospect to have a direct impact on early childhood education practices has resulted in studies (Martin, 2018; Asare 2015, Anane & Anhwere, 2013) that have attempted to describe the state of general assessment in early childhood settings in Ghana. Internationally, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) have jointly published a position statement and have made some recommendations on how children should be assessed (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003).

Currently, it thus appears a number of preschool and kindergarten assessments, mostly teacher-made, are being used across the country (Ghana) with a variety of objectives and collection procedures (Anane & Anhwere, 2013). These assessment practices come, and often than not, as formal assessments and testing, the results of which are often used to “make critical decisions such as tracking children into high- and low-ability groups, (mis) labelling or retaining them, or using test results to sort children into or out of preschools” (Anane & Anhwere, 2013, p. 24).

The upswing in the demand for better ways to assess children's activities and abilities motivates the researcher to delve into the kind of practices Kindergarten teachers adapt in assessing Kindergarteners reading and writing skills within the Bosomtwe district of the Ashanti region of Ghana.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As the early childhood education discourse continues, there have been discussions over children's early reading and writing skills in present-time. Early childhood professionals have long recognised the significance of reading and writing skills in

preparing children to excel in school (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006). Early reading and writing skills are important developmental milestones for kindergarteners. Studies (e.g. Wren, 2004; Stronge, 2017; Schultz, 2017) suggest that providing children with strong reading and writing education in the early years of their lives leads to high academic achievement, higher graduation rates, reduced grade retention and enhanced productivity in adult life (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002).

In considering the role of assessment in kindergarten settings, a distinction has been made between assessment for learning, assessment of learning, and assessment as learning. It has been argued that most assessments at the kindergarten level should be informal, formative, and summative and should occur in authentic literacy contexts such as book reading and early writing (NaCCA, 2012). The importance of observation and observational tools as assessment tools are much emphasized (NaCCA, 2012; NaCCA, 2019). Thornton-Lang (2012) maintains that pencil-and-paper test is not considered a developmentally appropriate form of assessment when teaching early childhood learners. Learners at the kindergarten level, approximately between ages 4 and 6, learn better if they are engaged in activities that allow their thinking to progress in a scaffolder manner (Voza, 2019). Thus, assessment is best accomplished through embedded assessments where the learner demonstrates his or her development or learning within the activities themselves (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova, 2004).

Assessing Kindergarteners reading and writing skills is an essential element of their education (Gray, 2020). Information from reading and writing assessment provides teachers with clear, comprehensive details on the child's current level of early reading

and writing skills. With the data gathered, teachers may establish action programmes that are tailored to the needs of the individual and include a targeted approach to enhance specific skills. These action plans may be carefully tracked and optimised to ensure success or lack of progress (Wren, 2004).

Assessment and teaching are inseparable processes. Given the well-recognised role of classroom assessment in learning and teaching, studies have revealed various issues regarding the quality of classroom assessment in kindergarten (Oduro, 2015). A study conducted by Asare (2015) in Ghana found out that, kindergarten teachers solely employ teacher-made paper and pencil tests in their assessment drive in the classroom. Anane and Anhwere (2013) affirm that “the uses of teacher-made tests as a means of assessing young children appears to be the norm in Ghana and from time to time some kindergarten centres go to the extent of purchasing commercially prepared questions for young children between the ages of 3 and 8” (P. 28). According to Voza (2019), using only a paper-and-pencil test to assess children does not provide an overall picture of the learners' achievement.

Observations made by the researcher appear Kindergarten teachers in some areas of Bosomtwe District do not use developmentally appropriate assessment practices in assessing learning outcomes, especially when it comes to assessing reading and writing skills. Teachers appear to be operating inside their comfort zone while depending on the traditional assessment methods even though the Ghanaian kindergarten curriculum and Early Grade reading assessment spell out the developmentally appropriate assessment practices for reading and writing skills. It seems as though they subject the learners' works to formal assessment instead of the recommended informal assessment. Interaction between the researcher and the head

of supervision at the Bosomtwe education directorate indicated that most kindergarten teachers assess their learners through class exercises, but it remains unreported. There seems to be little or no evidence that kindergarten teachers within the Bosomtwe District adhere to best practices.

Again, studies done in the the past years (Thompson, 2017; Schultz, 2017; Elliott, 2014; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2006; Stronge, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) have enlarged and enriched kindergarten teachers understanding of the instructional techniques used in teaching reading and writing skills, comparatively, to the researcher, much work has not been done in the area of assessing reading and writing skills (Almutairi, 2018). This study intends to bridge the gap in knowledge by investigating the practices of kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study examined practices of kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergartners' reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District of the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study sought to find out:

1. Kindergarten teachers' views on reading and writing skills assessment practices in the Bosomtwe District.
2. Assessment tools used by kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District.
3. Aspects of Kindergarteners' reading and writing skills that are assessed by kindergarten teachers in Bosomtwe District.

4. Challenges Kindergarten teachers in the Bosomtwe District encounter in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What views are held by kindergarten teachers on reading and writing skills assessment practices in the Bosomtwe District?
2. What assessment tools do Kindergarten teachers use for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District?
3. Which aspects of Kindergarteners' reading and writing skills are assessed by kindergarten teachers in Bosomtwe District?
4. What challenges do Kindergarten teachers in the Bosomtwe District face in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study examined practices of kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study's results provides Kindergarten teachers with useful insight into reading and writing skills assessment practices which in turn will help them improve their assessment practices in the classroom.

The findings of the study is resourceful to major stakeholders (GES, MOE, NaCCA, Schools) in identifying thr bottlenecks that exist regarding reading and writing skills assessment among kindergarten teachers and, in turn, provide remedies for bettering reading and writing skills assessment for kindergarteners.

The outcome of the study contributes to the body of existing literature as well as guide future studies in the field of reading and writing assessment practices among kindergartener teachers.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

This study focused primarily on the practices of kindergarten teachers in assessing Kindergarteners reading and writing skills. The study covered all trained Kindergarten Teachers from 139 Kindergarten centres. Geographically, the study was delimited to the Bosomtwe district in the Ashanti region of Ghana.

1.8 Limitations to the Study

Although this study had some unique findings that would contribute to knowledge, it also had some limitations. The major limitation of the study was the unenthusiastic attitude of respondents toward research work and especially completing the questionnaires. This resulted in 111 of the questionnaires being retrieved, representing 96% of the 117 questionnaires distributed. Another noticeable limitation was related to the population of the study. Data were collected only from the trained kindergarten teachers within the Bosomtwe District. So, the results of the study cannot be generalized directly to all kindergarten teachers all over Ghana. Those results can only provide us insights and general opinions from the specific sample.

1.9 Operational Definition of Terms

Assessment: It is a process of collecting and evaluating information about learners and using the information to make decisions to improve their learning.

Assessment tools: They are the informal instruments teachers adapt to collect data about learners' activities for assessment purposes. The instrument includes but is not

limited to a checklist, running records, portfolio, anecdotal record, rating scale, visual documentation.

Kindergarten: It is two years pre-primary education Programme of the basic education system. The Programme is designed for four to six-year-old children to offer them developmentally appropriate learning opportunities across the domains of development and also to prepare them for the transition into primary school and higher education in general

Reading skills: These are the skills that learners need to make meaning from prints.

Writing skills: These are the skills that learners need to create well-formed letters and also express their ideas, opinions, and views in print.

1.10 Organisation of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one dealt with the general introduction of the study, background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, objectives of the study, and research questions, the significance of the study, delimitations of the study, operational definition of terms, organisation of the Study. Chapter two presented on review of related literature. It provided theoretical and empirical evidence on reading and writing assessment practices. Chapter three presented the research methodology. It described the research design, population, sample and sampling technique, research instruments, pilot-testing, validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the data collection instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical consideration. Chapter four focused on results presentation and discussion of the data that was collected from the field. Lastly, Chapter five of the study presented the summary of the research findings,

conclusions based on the findings, recommendations, and made suggestions for further research.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

The chapter presents the literature review on practices of kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergartners' reading and writing activities. The chapter would be discussed under the following subheadings:

1. Theoretical framework,
2. Conceptual Framework,
3. The concept of kindergarten education,
4. The concept of reading skills,
5. The concept of writing skills,
6. The concept of assessment,
7. Teachers' assessment tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills
8. Teachers' views on reading and writing skills assessment practices,
9. Aspects of kindergartners' reading and writing skills assessed by kindergarten teachers,
10. Kindergarten teachers' challenges in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guides this study comprises Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism (1978) theory and Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory.

2.1.1 Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism

The study was underpinned by Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism (1978) theory. Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism sees child development as a socially mediated process through which children learn their cultural norms, beliefs, and problem-solving techniques through collective dialogues with more experienced members of society. (McLeod, 2020). The theory postulates that human learning is dependent on interactions between a learner and a more knowledgeable person within the child's zone of proximal development; a zone where the most sensitive guidance or instruction is to be provided, helping the child to acquire abilities and higher mental functions (Vygotsky 1978). This suggests that learning occurs when there is an interaction between the child and a skilful teacher. This happens when the more knowledgeable teacher model behaviours and/or offer verbal instructions to the child. Vygotsky refers to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue (McLeod, 2020). The child tries to comprehend the behaviour or directions given by the teacher and then internalizes the information, using it to direct or regulate their performance.

Reading and writing assessments offer specific, comprehensive knowledge regarding a child's present degree of reading and writing abilities. The information obtained would enable teachers to develop child-focused action plans that provide a tailored approach to enhance specific skills. These intervention plans may be carefully tracked and optimised to ensure success or lack of progress (Wren, 2004).

The more knowledgeable other (teacher) is not only concerned in what the child knows or has mastered at any given point in time for its own sake but as a basis for the provision of concepts, knowledge, and opportunities for the child to build on what they already know and can do. This goal is to understand a child's zone of proximal

development, as mentioned by Vygotsky (1978); the sector where learning is within reach but puts the child well beyond its current capacity. From this viewpoint, the role of assessment is to provide insight into the kind of educational experiences that will be most effective in helping each child build on his or her reading and writing abilities.

The theory of Vygotsky has inspired and legitimised attempts to improve assessment strategies intended to enhance the learning ability of children (National Research Council, 2001). The theory describes children as active information seekers who come to school with a range of prior skills, understandings, knowledge, and concepts built on experience, which helps the child explore the world around them. This prior knowledge influence what the child notices about the environment and how they interpret it (National Research Council, 1999). The role of assessment, from this standpoint, is to draw out the child's prior knowledge or skills so that the More Knowledgeable Other (teacher) knows how and where to intervene to help the child advance. What the child is capable of at present becomes the pedagogical bridge to what a child can do, given assistance by the teacher who is referred to as 'more knowledgeable other' in the theory.

2.1.2 Transactional theory

The contributions of Rosenblatt (1978) have had a significant influence on the world of reading. Rosenblatt's transactional theory emerged as a challenge to the notion that objective meaning resides only within the print itself (Sanders, 2012; Marhaeni, 2016). Thus, Rosenblatt's (1978) theory stressed that meaning cannot be constructed in isolation from the reader.

Rosenblatt's transactional theory implies that both the reader and the text play significant roles in the development of meaning. Meaning is constructed by the continuous transaction between the reader and the text, employing the meaning potential of the text and the reader's experiential reservoir (Olson, Scarcella, & Matuchniak, 2013). While the reader is active in selecting and synthesizing the potential in his or her reservoir, the text contributes to the shaping of his or her selection and hypotheses, resulting in an interplay between them. Reading and writing are interrelated skills in which transactional theory is also applicable, providing some implications for classroom language instruction (Marhaeni, 2016).

According to Rosenblatt (1982), "reading is a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (p. 268). Rosenblatt emphasised the importance of the interaction between the reader and the text by stating that "a novel or poem or play remains merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols" (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 24).

In other words, making meaning of a particular passage requires readers to fetch their previous experiences and knowledge to that passage, which facilitate their understanding (Rosenblatt, 1982; Unrau & Alvermann, 2013). Rosenblatt's (1978) theory supported the notion that the meaning does not solely exist in the text or in the reader, however; it is produced as a result of a particular interaction between the reader and the text (Unrau & Alvermann, 2013; Rosenblatt, 2005; Sanders, 2012). That interaction reflects the reciprocal effect of reader and text in one another to construct meaning of reading (Rosenblatt, 2005). Thus, that meaning is influenced by the reader's own previous knowledge and stance. Rosenblatt clarified that influence

by writing that “the reader must have the experience, must 'live through' what is created during the reading” (p.33).

Rosenblatt’s theory encourages teachers to provide instructional support based on the relevant previous knowledge that smooths the transaction between learners and text, as well as supply instructional assistance while learners attempt to understand the text. When learners construct their meaning of a particular text, the transactional process occurs independently of their teachers, and they link to only the passage and the learners’ previous knowledge and experience. Though teachers are not a part of that transactional process, they can still provide learners with various methods to look at the passage to gain meaning, monitor the learners’ responses to the passage, and exchange and discuss ideas of the passages with the learners through a way that improve the students’ comprehension (Rosenblatt, 1982; 1983).

The researcher has decided to use Rosenblatt’s transactional theory as a framework to lead the study because the researcher has found that her point of view regarding reading and writing matches that of the researcher's beliefs. Thus, the researcher acknowledges that reading requires kindergarten children to interact with the provided text to gain meaning, as indicated by Rosenblatt’s transactional theory. Also, the researcher conceptualizes that meaning cannot be gained only from a text itself; thus, through that interaction, kindergarten children need to bring their background knowledge and experiences to that text which supports what Rosenblatt’s transactional theory declared.

In addition, the researcher believes that teachers play a critical role in facilitating the kindergarten learners’ interaction with the text, helping the learners to make a connection between the text and their previous knowledge by establishing a baseline

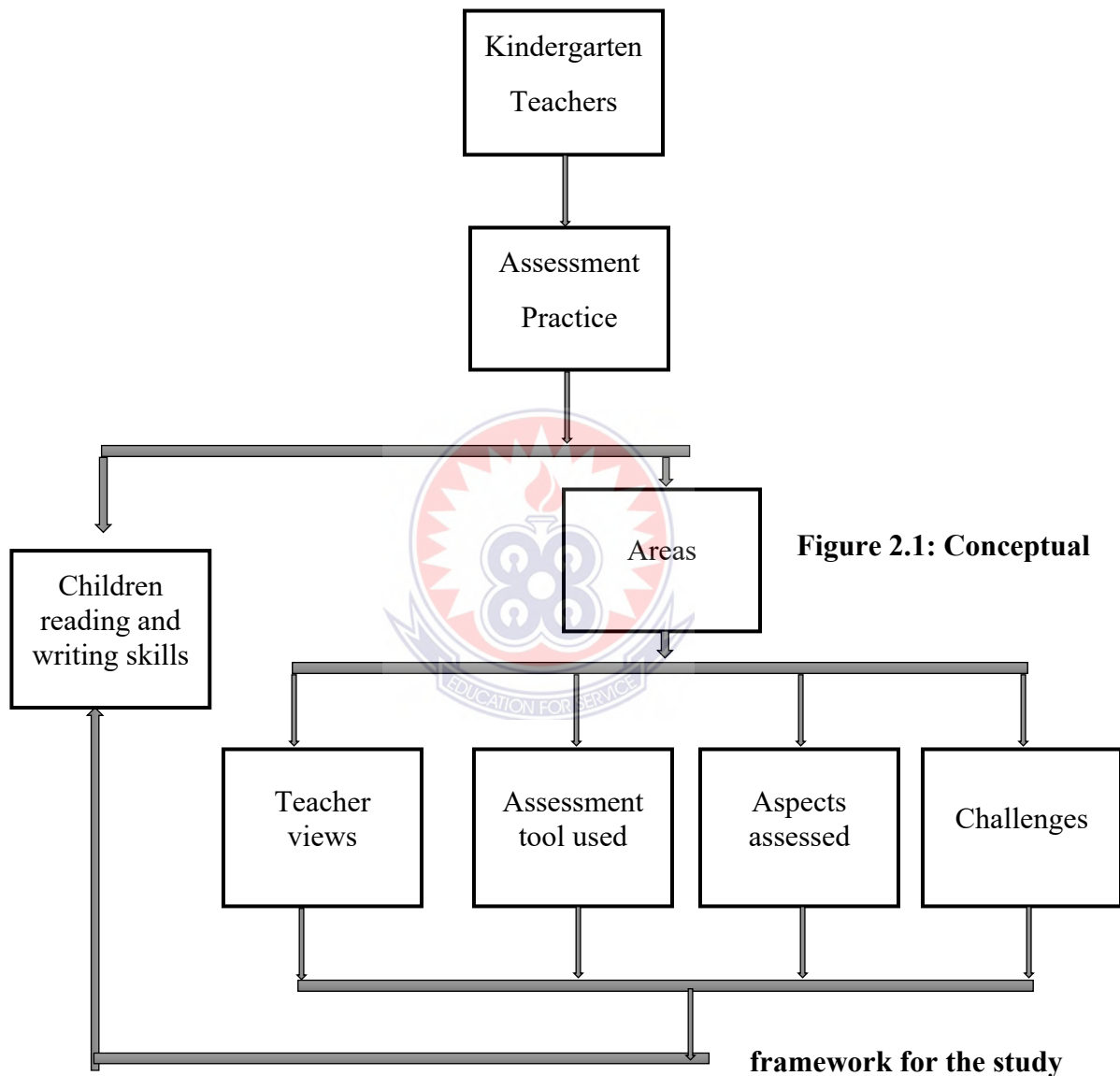
of what the learners already know through an assessment which will result in improving the learners reading and writing skills as postulated by Rosenblatt's transactional theory.

For this study, the researcher wonders if the kindergarten teachers in the Bosomtwe district who are teaching reading and writing skills are looking at reading as a process that requires kindergarten children to make a connection between the text and their background knowledge to gain meaning from that text. Also, the researcher wonders if these teachers either implicitly or explicitly teach reading and writing skills based on Rosenblatt's transactional theory. The findings of this study would therefore help address these issues.



Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework of the study on practices of kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills within the Bosomtwe District is presented in Figure 2.1.



Source: Researcher's construct

The study conceptualises that kindergarten teachers adopt best practices in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills for specific and comprehensive information regarding a child's present degree of reading and writing abilities. The information

obtained enables the teachers to develop child-focused action plans that provide a tailored approach to enhance specific skills.

Constituting the practices are the views the kindergarten teachers hold on reading and writing skills assessment practices, assessment tools used, aspects of reading and writing skills assessed. Nonetheless, they also face some level of challenges with the practices. But surmounting the challenges contributes to effective assessment practices. All these components are geared towards improving the reading and writing skills of kindergarteners.

It is worth noting that when kindergarten teachers have positive views on reading and writing skills assessment practices, employ the appropriate assessment tools, assesses aspects of reading and writing skills they ought to assess, put in measures to address the challenges associated with assessment practices then it will yield positive outcomes. The vice-versa will lead to negative outcomes.

2.2 The Concept of Kindergarten Education

The republic of Ghana with Accra as its capital city is in the West African sub-region of Africa. Ghana was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) to gain independence from Britain in 1957. Ghana is built on the notion of “One nation, One people, One destiny.” Though formal education is one of the important legacies inherited from our colonial masters, the country had its means of educating its citizen even before the onset of formal education (Boadi, 1976; McWilliams & Kwamena-Po, 1975).

This system of education is what is now known as traditional or informal education. There is an indication from undocumented sources that early childhood education traces its root to the “*nnɔboa*” system (communal labour in farming). This was when

during farming seasons, groups of women came together as a team to rotate in working on the individual members' farm. During these periods, one of them would take care of the children on the farm so that the others could have the time and freedom to work without the disturbance of their children. The day's caretaker would stay and entertain the children through singing, storytelling, and playing with them until the day's work was done. This system progressed into leaving the children at home with one caretaker instead of carrying them to the farm. This caretaker, aside from the daily food rations, enjoyed portions of the harvest from other women's farms during the harvest season as a form of compensation.

However, like other formal education systems in Ghana, the formal ECE in Ghana traces its root to colonialism, specifically, to the missionaries who came from abroad to convert the then Gold Coast to Christianity (Morrison, 2001). According to Morrison (2002), early childhood education in Ghana dates back to 1745, when Ghana (then called Gold Coast) was under the control of the European nations. Schools were initially organized in the castles where the merchants resided, so these schools were referred to as Castle Schools. The schools later included a young children section called "attached" (Morrison, 2002). The term "attached" referred to the inclusion of young learners within the ages of 3 to 5 years (p. 215). The attached, which was also known as the infant schools, formed part of what is now referred to as ECE.

The government of Ghana, after independence from the British administration in 1957, continued with this formal education system but due to financial constraint, the nursery and the kindergarten (KG) levels of education were left in the hands of private individuals but were under the supervision of Ministry of Women & Children's

Affairs (MOWAC) and the Social Welfare Department (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2016). The government of Ghana has since put in place policies including free compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE) in 1987 to ensure that all school-going age children would have access to at least formal basic education (MOE, 2004; Senadza, 2012).

Another aim of the FCUBE was to help close the gap of education inequity in Ghana. The basic education in Ghana is the education that serves children from zero to at least fourteen years of age, even though the education of children in their first six years of life had been in the hands of non-governmental bodies. The early childhood education in Ghana consists of crèche (infants below two years), nursery (children between age two to four) and kindergarten (children from age four to six) and the lower primary of the basic school from primary class one to class three (children aged six to eight) (Nyarko & Mate-Kole, 2016).

However, in the 2009/2010 academic year, the FCUBE was expanded to include access to kindergarten (KG) education making KG part of the basic education system in Ghana. Basic education is eleven years minimum schooling envisaged to help children acquire basic literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills as well as skills for creativity and healthy living. It is made of two years Kindergarten, six years Primary school, and three years Junior High School (JHS), which ends on Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE).

Although the education of children before kindergarten is not mandatory and is mostly privately owned, these early childhood programs provide services that expose children to early socialization and conditions necessary for formal schooling as well as child care needs of parents for children below age four; therefore, making their

services crucial to preparing children for formal education (Morrison, 2001; Nyarko & Mate-Kole, 2016). The inclusion of KG into the public school system has improved early childhood education in Ghana. As indicated earlier, currently, KG is a requirement for entry into the primary one. The KG curriculum's key focus is language and literacy instruction but includes other content areas such as numeracy, creativity, music, movement and dance, and physical development (MOE, 2004).

2.3 The Concept of Reading Skills

The concept of reading is generally centred on meaning. Akubuilu, Okorie, Onwuka and Chinyeaka (2015) are of the view that reading is a receptive skill, which involves the ability to meaningfully interpret or decode written or graphics symbols of language. The reader must first convert the print on the page into a linguistic code: the phonetic code, the only code recognized and accepted by the language system.

Shaywitz, Shaywitz, Pugh, Mencl, Fullbright and Skudlarski (2002) argued that, unless the reader-to-be can convert the printed characters on the page into the phonetic code, these letters remain just a bunch of lines and circles, totalling devoid of meaning. Readers must discover that the words they hear come apart into smaller pieces of sound (Shaywitz, 2003). Sounds in words are linked to certain letters and letter patterns called the alphabetic principle. Learners are unable to read unless they decode single letters or words. The first stage of reading is the decoding stage.

The reader processes text by first recognizing the lower-level unit of language, the letters and their sounds and also synthesis these lower-level units into more complex units. When learners have difficulty in decoding and word recognition, they encounter reading difficulties, but once the learner masters decoding skills or can decode a text

very well, using the knowledge of phonics, the child will derive the meaning of the text automatically.

The behaviourist believed that the best way to help non-readers learn to read is by directly and systematically teaching them phonics or the ability to decode letters and then blend the sounds to form words. They contend that efficient decoding leads to comprehension. Smith (2015) suggested that anyone's definition of reading, for example, decoding of the written word into sound, is not adequate to describe its range and diversity.

Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson (1985) defined reading as the process of constructing meaning from written text. They stated that skilled reading is:

1. Constructive: Learning to reason about written material using knowledge from everyday life and disciplined fields of study;
2. Fluent: Mastery of basic processes to the point where they are automatic so that attention is freed from the analysis of meaning;
3. Strategic: Controlling one reading concerning one's purpose, the nature of the material, and whether one is comprehending;
4. Motivated: Able to sustain attention and learning that written material can be interesting and informative; and
5. A lifelong pursuit: continuous practices, development, and refinement.

Reading is the act of getting meaning from printed or written words, which is the basis for learning and one of the most important skills in everyday lives (Guthrie, Benneth & McGough, 2007). Palani (2012) also defined reading as “the skill or activity of obtaining meaning, especially from printed or written words or symbols, from paper, newspapers, magazines, journal, and books”. To acquire this skill of

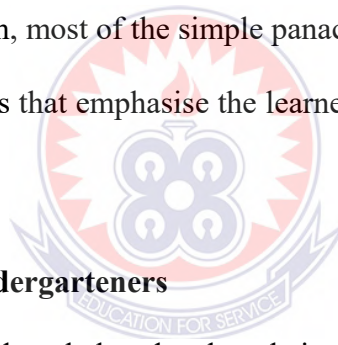
obtaining meaning from print, N'Namdi, (2005) emphasized that children need to practice reading constantly to develop and consolidate the necessary skills in reading faster. N'Namdi further stated that one's a person can do reading well; it becomes an endless source of pleasure and a key to every other sort of learning. Barone (2001) also defined reading as a multi-faceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation. Reading is making meaning of print; it requires that learners:

1. Read from left to right
2. Scan silently
3. Recognize different types of print and handwriting
4. Distinguish between letters or words which are very similar
5. Skim
6. Go over the sentences with the eye without using the finger to trace the words
7. Recognize the punctuation marks involved.

According to Snow (2020), reading is more than word recognition and gleaning concept formation and ideas from the text. She further stressed that reading is the act of getting meaning from a printed or written word. It is basic to learning one of the most important skills in everyday life. According to Gates (1967), Reading is a valuable ability that includes several complex elements throughout an individual's existence. It is essentially a thoughtful process; however, to say that reading is a thought-getting process is to give it a too restricted description. It should be developed as a complex organization of patterns of higher mental processes. Gates added that it should embrace all types of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning, and problem-solving.

Indeed, it is believed that reading is one of the best media for cultivating many techniques of thinking and imagining. The reading programme should therefore make careful provisions for contribution as fully as possible for the cultivating of a whole array of techniques involved in understanding, analyzing, reflecting, imagining, judging, thinking, and reasoning.

Gates explained further that reading is more than mental activity, those emotional responses are also required, and the child does more than understanding and contemplating, his emotions are stirred, his attitudes and purposes are modified as well as his innermost being is involved. From the viewpoint of Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) there is no single pattern of teaching reading that teachers should follow. According to them, most of the simple panaceas in reading instructions are not methods but sets of tactics that emphasise the learners' use of one set of cues or group of related cues.



2.4 Reading among Kindergarteners

Reading to younger children helps develop their thought abilities, teaches them to concentrate and refine their vocabularies. However, reading can be a complex activity requiring many years of experience and use to do well. Effective Reading and Writing involve understanding, fluency, knowledge of basic techniques, and inspiration (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013). English reading and speaking are based on the alphabetical concept of letter signals, which become meaningful when the sound units are merged. Children must recognise that written words are composed of sounds or phonemes before reading or spelling. Children's early language skills are the foundations on which reading well at primary schools are based. For both boys and

girls to learn foundational reading skills, they should be provided equal opportunities to access quality education (Piper & Mugenda, 2013).

Many schools in Britain have achieved impressive results for their pupils in every challenging circumstance, demonstrating that while poverty often makes it harder for a child to learn and achieve, it should not be an excuse for low ambitions (Read on Get on, 2014). In developing countries, however, the case may be different since children from poor backgrounds may be disadvantaged as their parents/guardians may not be able to provide them with educational materials likely to enhance learning to read. Thus, such children will end up attending school without the requisite reading materials, contributing to poor expectations among them relative to children with better backgrounds.

Research has shown that instruction in phonological awareness should begin in preschool to enable children to learn that written words represent spoken sounds, a process known as decoding, involving breaking a word into separate sounds (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013). To decode, children need to be explicitly taught how to sound out words into phonemes. As children learn to decode and read words, they can focus on building their comprehension. The earlier a child learns to read, the stronger he or she would be at reading in later life. Thus, children must learn that words on a page have meaning and that reading is done from left to right and from top to bottom. Children who have not been read to before they enter school may not have experienced listening to rhythm and sounds. They may not have developed an interest in reading and may not be motivated to learn to read (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013).

Study indicates that 50% of problems in reading can be avoided in children by ensuring adequate language learning and successful reading lessons in kindergarten and primary grade (Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2011; Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013).

Other studies have found that children decline from reading at age 8, suggesting that older children are less inclined to enjoy reading and less likely to read for pleasure. Girls more than boys have been found to have positive attitudes about reading and to regularly engage in reading for fun (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013). Thus supporting both boys and girls to have a positive attitude to reading will enhance reading to learn, which is critical in higher grades of schooling.

The key purpose in teaching reading is to help learners grasp the concepts in a piece of text while they read. Effective readers for example strive to understand and use the alphabetic principle on how the sounds of spoken speech can be represented by letters in the alphabet, and how letters are used to identify printed words. English readers have and use background knowledge of words and comprehension strategies to obtain meaning from print, and read fluently and effortlessly except when they come across unfamiliar text when they purposefully use the alphabet principle and comprehension strategies to understand what they are reading (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013).

2.4.1 Importance of reading skills for kindergarteners

Reading plays a significant role in the education of an individual, especially children, hence an integral part of any child's education. Reading is indeed a basic life skill; as such it is the cornerstone for a child's success in school and throughout life. It creates a good foundation and inspiration for a child's development and education. It

awakens children's interest in books, which helps to cultivate a reading culture in them hence a push to future academic excellence. It equally provides an opportunity to develop children's minds and this helps them form enduring habits and character (Akindele, 2012). According to UNICEF (2005) cited in Akindele (2012), young children are in their most important development stage of life, what they learn now and what happens to them now will influence them for the rest of their life.

The early years in the child's life are the most significant of the child's holistic development. Indeed, the reading skills children are introduced to during the early years of school life will to a large extent influence their later reading for learning experiences. Reading for literacy experience and reading to acquire and use the information for instance are two major purposes that account for the majority of reading experiences of young children. Readers make meaning of reading texts in a variety of ways, depending not only on the purpose of reading but also on the difficulty level of the text and the reader's prior knowledge (Martin, Mullis & Kennedy, 2007).

Reading as a language skill occupies a central position in enabling learners to access knowledge, skills, and attitudes in various fields from the early years of a child's life. It is also important for survival purposes and pleasure. A child who reads appropriately stands out to be different from others and outshines the ones who are not good readers. However, the ability to read with understanding is the most important skill, not only in learning the English language but also in other school subjects (Ellis, 1985; Groenewegen, 2008).

Without the ability to read properly, opportunities for personal fulfilment and job success will inevitably be lost. Skills in reading enable learners to benefit from

educational activities and to participate fully in the social and economic activities around them. It is indeed an important foundational skill that influences academic success across the school curriculum and an indicator for overall school achievement (N’Namdi, 2005).

The long-term goal of reading instruction, therefore, is to provide learners with the skills necessary to help them construct meaning from texts they come across. For learners to develop reading skills in the English language fully, the teacher should be in a position to choose reading instructional practices carefully and purposefully. Each reading instructional practice chosen must be meaningful-should be aimed at enabling the learner to acquire a particular reading competency. This should also be followed by enough practice to ensure that the learner can apply the learned skill in new reading contexts.

However, a teacher’s choice of inappropriate instructional practices may fail to develop in the learners the necessary reading skills to enable them to make meaning from reading texts, they encounter in the various fields of knowledge. This may eventually lead to poor examination performance not only in the English language but also in other school subjects.

2.4.2 Factors influencing children’s reading ability

The Education Standards Research Team UK (2012) pointed out that having access to reading resources and having books of their own has an impact on children’s reading attainment. The number of books available in the home has also been found to be positively related to children’s reading and attainment of reading skills (Clark, 2011). Children who have books of their own enjoy reading more and read more frequently than children who do not have books of their own (Clark & Poulton, 2011).

Clark and Rumbold (2006) argued that parents and the home environment are essential supports for the early teaching of reading and fostering a love of reading. Children are more likely to continue to be readers in homes where books and reading are valued (Education Standards Research Team, UK, 2012). Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich, and Kim (2010) pointed out that family members can promote children's literacy through jokes and riddles, narratives, poetry, and informal conversations. According to them, child shared book reading has been found to aid children's learning about print and decoding while they are still young.

Wambiri and Ndani (2015) noted that caregivers who perceive themselves as having a role to stimulate children's reading in the home environment are likely to get involved in supporting children to learn how to read. They further argued that household income determines the range and abundance of print materials available in the households, which in turn influences the caregivers' involvement in children's reading.

Martucci (2014) noted that children are active agents in their communicative and learning experiences. Thus, engaging them in reading storybooks has been found to inspire their quest for reading that promotes their reading skills. An important factor in developing reading for pleasure is choice. Choice and interest are highly related when it comes to children reading for pleasure as they chose the materials they want to read (Clark & Phythian-Sence, 2008; Schraw, Flowerday & Reisetter 1998).

Literacy targeted rewards such as books or book vouchers have been found to be more effective in developing reading motivation than rewards that are unrelated to the activity (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). Reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationships between teachers and children, and children and families (Cremin,

Mottram, Collins, Powell & Safford, 2009). Thus, creating a good relationship between families, teachers and children will encourage a reading culture among children. Teachers and family members who recognise children who are keen on reading, and commend them for this are likely to have children who are interested in reading, hence promoting their literacy skills.

Socioeconomic factors have also been found to influence children's reading, where children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have been found to read less for enjoyment than children from more privileged social classes. Studies have revealed that boys enjoy reading less than girls (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Clack & Douglass, 2011; Education Standards Research Team, UK, 2012). Research also shows a link between library use and reading for pleasure. Young people who use their public library are nearly twice as likely to be reading outside of class every day (Clark & Hawkins, 2011). This requires parents and teachers to encourage children to visit public libraries to enable these children to develop a reading culture. Introducing children into using school libraries could work to the advantage of encouraging the reading culture among children right from the time they are in early grades.

2.5 The Concept of Writing Skills

Writing is a productive skill in the written mode. Writing is considered a productive skill because the writer creates a new language. It is thought to be the most difficult of the four language skills. Writing is essential to communication and learning. It is considered a powerful mode of communication (Kurniasih, 2011). Like speech, writing helps to produce the language. It is considered that learners can express their thoughts through writing in an organized way. It helps us to convey ideas, solve problems and understand our changing world. When we write we go through a more

complex mental process. We have to think, organize the idea, write, revise, and edit to get perfect writing and thus we can concentrate on language use more precisely (Akhter, 2014). However, writing is considered a much more difficult language to learn like speaking rather than listening and reading (Akhter, 2014). Most of the learners need more time in acquiring writing skills successfully. It is also important for career development. An individual who is good at writing demonstrates that he/she is an articulate person, a good public speaker, and is capable of presenting ideas simply and succinctly.

Writing allows individuals to communicate knowledge and engage in life activities, including education and work (Graham, Struck, Santoro, & Berninger, 2006; McMaster & Roberts, 2016). Although writing is considered one of the basic R's in education (reading, writing, and arithmetic), little is known about handwriting development. Compared to the vast number of studies on reading, few studies exist on early writing skills, and even fewer include handwriting skills in kindergarten.

Effective handwriting skills begin in kindergarten with instruction focusing on forming upper and lower-case letters, understanding sound-letter associations, and combining letters into words. Yet, instruction in handwriting has been practically ignored by educators (Asher, 2006; Graham, Harris, Mason, Fink-Chorzempa, Moran, & Saddler, 2008). A survey of teachers randomly selected from across the United States (first through third grade) indicated that only 12% had college-level courses that prepared them to teach handwriting (Graham et al. 2008). If teachers do not consistently receive effective instruction on what and how to teach, they are unable to provide effective instruction to learners and will have difficulty providing

supplemental or targeted interventions for learners who are at-risk for handwriting problems.

When learners do not have effective instruction in handwriting, they frequently struggle with writing and lack the skills necessary for legible and fluent writing (Clark, 2010). Marr and Cermak (2002) studied the consistency of learners' handwriting performance from the beginning of kindergarten through the middle of first grade. They established three groups, based on the group mean and standard deviation scores from the mean (thus, the low group were children performing less than 1 standard deviation from the group mean, the high group was the children performing greater than 1 standard deviation above the group mean).

Marr and Cermak found that 42% of the kindergarteners who were in the low handwriting group were still performing in the low group in the first grade, 70% of the kindergarteners who were performing in the middle group were still in the middle group, and only 38% of the kindergarteners performing in the upper group were still in the upper group. These results highlight the probability that without early intervention, students who are struggling early in kindergarten will continue to struggle.

Writing skills are critical life skills. A strong relationship between kindergarten performance and performance in later academic years (Marr & Cermak, 2002; Molfese, Beswick, Molnar & Jacobi-Vessels, 2006; Stevenson & Newman, 1986) demonstrates the important roles early childhood teachers and related service staff have in affecting writing performance in later years. Their roles become even more challenging considering the diversity of experience of today's learners. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998) reported that a five-year

range in literacy-related skills was common in a kindergarten classroom. For example, one kindergartener may be unable to identify any letters of the alphabet while another kindergarten student may enter school with the ability to write simple words.

In furtherance Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) reported that at the end of kindergarten students should be able to complete the following skills:

1. Independently write many uppercase and lowercase letters
2. Use phonemic awareness and letter knowledge to spell independently (invented or creative)
3. Write (unconventionally) to express own meaning
4. Build a repertoire of some conventionally spelt words
5. Show awareness of the distinction between kid writing and conventional orthography (thus, writing words with proper letters and spelling)
6. Write own name (first and last) and the first names of some friends of classmates
7. Write most letters and some words when they are dictated (Snow et al., 1998 p. 80).

This infers that writing is an especially important area of communication. At this age, children develop an increased desire to communicate effectively (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Writing is an integral component of language, and when a child writes, thoughts and knowledge are synthesized to create a unique message (Jones, Reutzel, & Fargo, 2010). It is at this time of development when children begin to understand that their thoughts and experiences can be expressed in written form.

According to Olsen and Knapton (2013), kindergarten is the crucial year to teach good handwriting habits. Writing requires fine motor skills with the hands as well as

hand-eye coordination (Grissmer, Grimm, Aiver, Murrah & Steele, 2010). Most learners who enter kindergarten are at the beginning stages of reading and writing development. This is an important year for learners to gain a conceptual understanding of basic writing skills. The earlier that children master the skill of handwriting, the more likely they are to succeed in school (Olsen & Knapton, 2013). Writing is important because it is a basic skill that is incorporated into all subject areas (Spear-Swerling, 2006).

The kindergarten curriculum is evolving and the academic standards for kindergarteners are stronger than ever before. (Litty & Hatch, 2006; Morrison, 2007: NaCCA, 2019). Kindergarten now looks like what first and second grade did in the recent past (Hatch, 2005). Many professionals agree that this trend will continue, making higher expectations for kindergarten learners (Morrison, 2007). As these trends continue, it is important that instruction remains developmentally appropriate and meets the needs of learners.

According to Morrison (2007), the primary goal of kindergarten education is for children to learn how to read and teachers must instruct, support, and guide them in what is necessary to become successful readers. Writing is a complex skill that is as important to literacy as is reading (Berninger, 2002). To promote reading, it is vital that writing is also given appropriate attention in school. As reading and fine motor skills progress, kindergarteners typically move forward in writing skills. Engaging learners in writing helps them increasingly become better readers (Coppie & Bredekamp, 2009).

From the discussion so far, it looks as if little is known about handwriting development in kindergarten in Ghana, yet it is a critical life skill. As a result, there is

little known about the early handwriting skills of kindergartners. Hence, the need for this study to be conducted.

2.6 Concept of Assessment

Johnston and Costello (2009) defined assessment as, “a social practice that involves noticing, representing, and responding to children’s literate behaviours, rendering them meaningful for particular purposes and audiences” (p. 147). From these ideas, it can be seen that assessment is not only about measuring the performance of learners in reading or writing but also considering how the teaching process is impacting the children.

There cannot be effective teaching and learning without effective assessment. It has to do with making meaning out of the learners’ behaviours to find appropriate ways of reducing or removing their challenges. Therefore, the teacher has several questions to reflect on: Do I have children with reading and writing difficulties in my class? How do I identify them? How can I effectively assess my learners in reading and writing skills to bring about positive change? Why should I assess them and how often should this be? What assessment tools are effective for a given task? And above all, how do I interpret the assessment results to benefit the learners? A realistic answer to each of these questions is one of the keys to alleviating children’s reading and writing difficulties.

2.6.1 Assessment explained

Bowman et al. (2001) suggested that the term assessment, as applied in early childhood education and care, generally implies the intention to provide a rich picture of how children act, think and learn. Such a picture focuses on the individual’s learning, is built up over time, and provides evidence of learning in a number of

different contexts. In relation to its importance, they argue that: Assessment has an important role to play in revealing a child's prior knowledge, development of concepts, and ways of interacting with and understanding the world so that teachers can choose a pedagogical approach and curricular materials that will support the child's further learning and development.

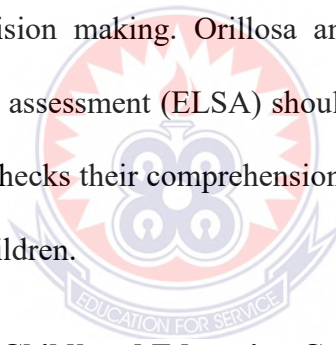
Conceptually assessment practice in early childhood education can be arranged into three categories: assessment of learning; assessment for learning and assessment as learning. Assessment of learning is the most common form of assessment. This is an assessment of a child's learning at a particular point in time, and that summarises all of the learning and development that has preceded it (Taras, 2005). This kind of assessment can be a large-scale assessment in a particular field, such as the West African Examination Council, in which an entire population of children is assessed using a common assessment tool. It can also be a small-scale assessment within an individual early childhood setting to clarify a child's learning to report that learning to families (Earl, 2003), for example, transition learning and development statements.

Assessment for learning and development refers to the formative assessment that takes place for decisions to be made to inform the next stage of learning (Earl, 2003). As assessment for learning informs programme planning decisions about individual children, assessments need to be taken on an ongoing and individual basis. Assessment for learning assists early childhood professionals to make decisions about learning programmes for children every day and is identified in the literature as essential for improving outcomes for children.

Assessment as learning and development occurs when the child is involved in the assessment process. Through this process, the child has the opportunity to monitor

what they are learning and use feedback to make adjustments to their understandings (Earl, 2003). Assessment as learning is linked to higher levels of self-efficacy in children as they see a reward for their learning effort (OECD/ CERI, 2008).

Assessment is an integral component of learning, and it determines whether or not the goals of the curriculum have been attained. Assessment impacts choices on grades, placement, advancement, instructions, and even affect financing. Glossary of Educational Reform [GER] (2013), the word assessment includes the instruments or methods that teachers use in evaluating, measuring, and documenting the readiness, learning progress, and all the educational needs of pupils. In other words, assessment is the process of gathering information or data about certain traits, analysing them, and using them for decision making. Orillosa and Magno (2013) suggested that reading and writing skills assessment (ELSA) should be used in evaluating children's literacy skills because it checks their comprehension, phonological awareness, and the alphabetic principle of children.



2.7 Assessment in Early Childhood Education Centre

The vast majority of empirical research on classroom assessment has focused on upper years learning, mainly because the accountability and standards-based movement in education has only recently begun to impact kindergarten learning (Roach et al., 2010). Within the current context, teachers are expected to integrate assessment data throughout instruction to monitor learners' achievement and guide decision-making to meet mandated standards (Gullo & Hughes, 2011; Stiggins, 2005). To this end, there has been a resurgence of diagnostic and formative assessments to guide teaching and learning. In upper years' education, this resurgence

has been supported by empirical research that effectively demonstrates the benefits of formative assessment on increasing summative results (Gardner, 2006).

While the diagnostic-formative-summative sequence of assessment has traditionally been used to structure assessment integration, more contemporary notions of assessment ‘*as*’: ‘for’, and ‘of’ learning has emerged as a set of strategies that involve learners in using and understanding assessment data to support and guide teaching and learning (Earl, 2003). Specifically, ‘assessment of learning’ and ‘assessment as learning’ involves actively engaging learners in monitoring their learning through self, peer, and instructor-based feedback (Assessment Reform Group, 2002), with the aim of not only developing their understanding of content but also developing learners metacognitive and self-regulating capabilities.

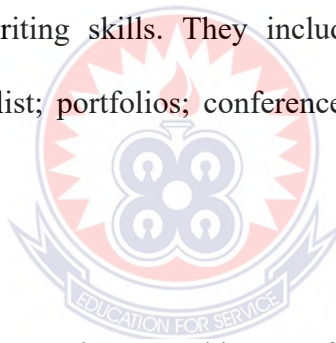
This function of assessment is a critical benefit within the early years of learning, as one of the fundamental aims of kindergarten is to begin learners on a pathway to independence. Further, underpinning contemporary processes and uses of assessment is a view of assessment rooted in a socio-developmental theory of learning, which recognises the importance of classroom context, social interactions, and developmental learning continuums as foundational to children learning (Black & William, 2006).

Brookhart (2004) asserted the importance of integrating assessment with developmentally appropriate, individualised instruction to move learners from their initial level of knowledge toward the achievement of academic standards; thus, connecting developmental and academically-oriented approaches to teaching. As a practical guide to teachers who are endeavouring to balance developmental and academically-oriented approaches, Gullo and Hughes (2011) identified the following

three principles for kindergarten assessment: (a) assessment should be a continuous process, (b) assessment should be a comprehensive process that involves multiple formats that yield information on diverse learning, and (c) assessment should be an integrated process with learning goals and instructional periods (thus, assessment for learning). However, across assessment and early years' literature in Ghana, there remains little empirical research on how teachers navigate these assessment approaches concerning developmental and academically-oriented stances.

2.8 Teachers' Assessment Tools for Assessing Kindergarteners' Reading and Writing Skills

There are various tools that kindergarten teachers can use to assess kindergarten learners' reading and writing skills. They include observation, running records; anecdotal records; checklist; portfolios; conferences; rating scale, cloze assessment (Dunphy, 2010).



2.8.1 Observation

Smidth (2005) defined observation as “taking careful note of everything said or done by a child or children over a defined period in a particular setting or context” (p.18). By documenting anything seen and heard, some questions can be answered by the observers, particularly the teachers, such as, "What is this child reading?" “How is the reading done?” “Is the child aware of top to bottom and left to right orientation?” “Do the child make meaning marks?” “How does the child handle writing tools?” “Is the child able to attribute meanings to the marks he or she makes?” The purpose of responding to these questions is not to find the correct answers; nevertheless, by responding to these questions, teachers have the greatest opportunity to know more about the child when observing the child (Turupcu, 2014).

Observation is the most direct tool for collecting detailed information on the learning and development of Kindergarteners. All other approaches are dependent on observations. Much of the recordings are taken based on the data obtained by simple observation, and most teachers utilise this approach in their classrooms during reading and writing assessment

2.8.2 Running records

A Running record is an assessment tool that provides an insight into a learner's reading as it is happening (Clay, 2002). A Running record provides information on the score of word reading accuracy, analysis of a reader's errors and self-corrections, and analysis of the reading strategies used. With this information, a teacher can quickly and accurately record what the reader says as they read a text or section of a text aloud. After the reading, the teacher completes an analysis.

The procedure enables the teacher to get a 'snapshot' of the reader as she/he engages with the reading process. Errors are recorded according to the child's use of semantic, syntactic, and visual (graphophonic) cueing systems. Errors commonly recorded include the following: omissions, insertions, substitutions, reversals, repetitions, hesitations, self-corrections and teacher-supplied words (Pillai & Paramasivam, 2014). The details in the running record provide the teacher with an idea of the complexity of the text for a specific child. For example, noticing that a child regularly makes word substitutions that begin with the same letter as the printed word will inform the teacher that the child is noticing the beginning letter(s) but does not look beyond the first letter(s) of a word.

2.8.3 Anecdotal records

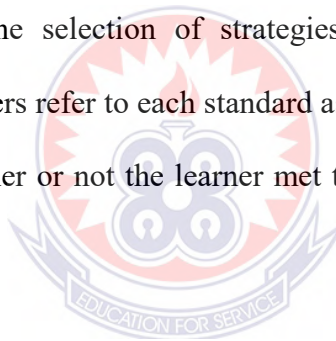
Anecdotal records are brief notes grounded in the close observations of children (Clay 2001). The notes document a range of behaviours in areas such as literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, the arts, social and emotional development, and physical development. When recording observations, it is necessary to provide a detailed overview and appropriate information to guide future teaching strategies (Bates, Schenck, & Hoover, 2019).

Hattie (2012) notes anecdotal records as systematically kept notes of specific observations of learners' behaviours and skills in the classroom that provide cumulative information regarding progress, skills acquired, and directions for further instruction. Anecdotal comments are sometimes made attributable to continuing insights in a lesson, but can also be written in reference to a learner's product. Systematic collection of anecdotal records in the area of reading on a specific learner provides excellent information for evaluating the learning patterns and the consistency of the learner's development concerning reading. Well-maintained anecdotal records on a learner's reading and writing skills provide valuable, practical, and specific references about the learner. Anecdotal records are intended to be neutral observations of a learner's behaviour and interaction. The observations may be simple, such as the way the child handles a book, distinguishing the front page from the back page.

Bates, Schenck, and Hoover (2019) indicated that when teachers are taking anecdotal records, it is important to consider word choice. Bates et al., (2019) stated that statements that begin with words like 'can't' or 'doesn't' promote a deficit view and do not support future instructional planning. For example, the statement "Badu can't identify most letters of the English alphabet" is very different from "Badu identifies

the letters A, C, K, O, V, and W.” Noting down what children can do ensures that instructional decisions are grounded in children’s strengths. Correspondingly, Boyd-Batstone (2004) noted that anecdotal records are facilitated by principles and that in using it as a tool is assessing kindergarteners reading skills, teachers should consider: documenting observable data; using significant abbreviations; writing records in the past tense; supporting records with examples as evidence, avoiding the use the C-word (can’t), avoiding needless repetition of language, avoiding phrases that imply an embedded interpretation, such as “a lot,” “a few,” or “many times.”

According to Jalal (2019), using anecdotal records a tool in assessing learners reading skills is informed by comparing the standards to the child’s performance. The standards also inform the selection of strategies and activities for instructional recommendations. Teachers refer to each standard as they comb through the anecdotal records and decide whether or not the learner met the standard to make instructional decisions.



2.8.4 Checklist

A checklist is an assessment tool that usually offers a yes/no format concerning learner demonstration of specific criteria. This is similar to a light switch; the light is either on or off. They may be used to record observations of an individual, a group, or a whole class. Checklists are easy to use and are especially helpful when many different items need to be observed (Martin, 2018). They often include lists of specific behaviours to look for while observing. Depending on their function, they can vary in length and complexity. Checklists may be designed to assess the aspects of the reading and writing skills of kindergarteners. A checklist that is carefully designed can provide information on a task that learners can perform and not. Checklists may

be developed to survey one child or a group of children. The targeted skills are listed in a logical order with similar items grouped. Therefore, teachers can quickly record the presence or absence of the skill.

2.8.5 Portfolios

At its simplest, a portfolio is a purposeful collection of learners' work that exhibits the learner's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas (Paulson, 2009). As an assessment tool, a portfolio normally comprises more than just the artefacts themselves and includes a reflective dimension. A portfolio allows the learners and teachers to reflect on what they have learned; encapsulates key aspects of their learning, based on their successes and failures as evidenced by the artefacts; and proposes their plans for learning (Baume, 2003).

Meador, (2020) defines a portfolio assessment as a collection of learners' works that are associated with standards they are required to learn. This collection of work is often gathered over a long period to reflect what you have been taught as well as what you have learned. Each item in the portfolio is selected because it is an authentic representation of learners' acquired knowledge and skills. A portfolio by nature is a storybook capturing learners' progression of learning as they move through the year (Meador, 2020).

2.8.6 Conferences

Conferences provide opportunities for learners and the teacher to discuss learning strengths and areas for improvement, and to set learning goals (Jones, 2002). At conferences, it is possible to learn a great deal about learners' understanding of information, attitudes toward learning, and the skills and strategies learners employ during the learning process. Conferences provide an opportunity for individualized

teaching, for guiding learners to more challenging materials, and for determining future instructional needs. Conferences are usually short informal meetings held with individual learners, or a small group of learners, involve diagnostic listening, questioning, and responding. Conferences as an assessment tool is adaptable to assessing reading and writing skills.

The central assessment benefit of reading and writing conferences is finding out exactly what learners know and what they can do (Gray, 2020). Conferencing provides teachers with a clear snapshot of learners' knowledge and skills. Conferencing encourages learners to be honest about their strengths, weaknesses for a particular skill. Conferencing provides teachers with information to improve learners reading and writing skills. To make conferencing work, the assessor (teacher) needs to have a goal in mind. What skills are most critical in terms of reading and writing assessment? What aspect of reading and writing skills are the learners struggling with the most? Having a clear purpose will make the conference truly effective (Gray, 2020).

2.8.7 Rating Scales

Rating Scale is another assessment tool that is similar to the checklist. In rating scale, there is a rate to determine at which level a skill is represented. With this scale, Kindergarten teachers have more qualitative data to make interpretations on children's development in the area of reading and writing. The completion of these scales is quick and easy, and there are minimum requirements of teacher training in the completion of the scales. Moreover, teachers can develop and use these scales without any effort (Wortham, 2005). In a general perspective, the disadvantages of these scales are listed as the subjectivity and bias of the rater (teacher); and insufficiency in

the determination of the cause of the inability to acquire a particular skill. Although they result in bias and the data gathered through this scale are very subjective, they provide beneficial information about the children's learning process, step by step.

Effective rating scales use descriptors with clearly understood measures, such as frequency. Scales that rely on subjective descriptors of quality, such as fair, good, or excellent, are less effective because the single adjective does not contain enough information on what criteria are indicated at each of these points on the scale (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2008).

2.8.8 Cloze assessment

Cloze testing involves deleting words from a selected text sample and asking children to replace them based on the remaining context. This is an informal tool for assessing reading comprehension. An excerpt of approximately 10 words from a storybook, textbook or information book is chosen. The teacher deletes every fifth/sixth word in the passage and the task for the reader is to reconstruct the text, justifying and making sense of the passage. This approach expands the idea of comprehension so that the reader is interpreting the text and not just answering questions about it (Hall, 2001). Cloze testing can be administered in a group setting, does not require comprehension questions, and has been used successfully with EAL learners. Examples and guidelines for using cloze assessment are readily available (for example, McKenna & Stahl, 2009).

2.9 Teachers' Views on Reading and Writing Skills Assessment Practices

In recent decades, further focus has been called to the significance of young children's education and the number of studies on children's education and, in particular, the assessment of their education has risen (Turupcu, 2014). The results of studies have

revealed that the overall value of assessment in education is stressed, and assessment has begun to be applied by Kindergarten teachers in educational settings. However, there is a piece of limited information concerning teachers' views on reading and writing skills assessment practices. Studies have concluded that the views of teachers have played a significant role in kindergarten education (Brassard & Boehm, 2007; Schappe, 2005). In the kindergarten classroom, there is a significant and positive correlation between learners' performance and teachers' perspectives. Moreover, teachers have positive views on informal assessment, and they express many advantages of it (Turupcu, 2014). Brassard and Boehm (2007) emphasised that "the beliefs of teachers contribute significantly to children's development" (p.30). Although different studies have been conducted on assessment, research stressing teachers' views about reading and writing assessment practices is limited, both worldwide and in Ghana.

A survey study was conducted by Horton and Bowman in 2002 to determine the current state of experts' opinion and public practice concerning the assessment of kindergarten children. The first survey of this study addressed a select group of national leaders in the early childhood field. The aim was to determine the most important components of a child assessment system. The general view of an appropriate assessment system had been determined by the experts. After the survey was conducted with 25 selected national leaders, there was a consensus that the assessment system had to be linked with the applied curriculum in early childhood education settings. The respondents of the survey agreed that informal methods should be used to assess young children. However, some experts' opinions supported the usage of formal assessment instruments to screen children for disabilities and developmental delays, to conduct diagnostic evaluations. Moreover, according to the

experts, the standardized test scores served as program tools rather than individual children's assessments. As for the informal assessment method, on the other hand, experts argued that portfolios, teacher anecdotal records, and teacher checklists were cited as useful resources. As the characteristics of these tools, their cultural and linguistic appropriateness was emphasized. Lastly, teachers' training and supervision had been emphasized as part of the assessment system of young children's education. In the second step of this study, Horton and Bowman (2002) conducted a second survey to represent the child assessment practices in prekindergarten programs. The key findings of the survey were basically on the growing use of developmentally appropriate informal assessment techniques and the increased number of structured state-mandated assessment systems in this method. In practice, the mandate recommended or commonly used informal assessment had been preferred as overall child assessment and program evaluation systems. On the other hand, based on the responses, in practice, there was not a link between the curriculum and assessment. In summary, via these two studies, researchers concluded that if the instruments had not been linked to the curriculum, complemented by other appropriate tools, supported by teacher training, program evaluation, and parent communication, they could not be useful. Therefore, assessment has to be thought of as a comprehensive system that is integrated with the larger program.

In the study of Horton and Bowman (2002), the instruments used during the informal assessment of young children's education are defined by teachers, and according to experts, the link between assessment and curriculum is essential, while teacher training and parent communication are determined as parts of the assessment system as a whole. Moreover, to foster the outcomes of the studies of Horton and Bowman (2002), Brown and Rolfe (2005) conducted a study to determine which child

development assessment instruments are currently used by Australian early childhood teachers working in general preschool programs. The first aim was stated to determine whether Australian early childhood teachers were using formal and/or informal child development assessment instruments in their programs, while the second aim was to establish whether the potential value of developmental assessment was recognized by future early childhood teachers. One of the results of this study showed that most of the early childhood teachers used informal child development assessment rather than formal assessment, while students' choices were using both informal and formal assessment instruments. Checklists were preferred by all respondents of the study as informal assessment instruments. According to the responses of early childhood teachers, they preferred observation while doing an informal assessment. They also indicated more than one type of observation; anecdotal, running records, and event sampling. However, student respondents emphasized the use of checklists, rating scales, inventories, and also observation as parts of informal assessment. The most important factors in using specific instruments were stated as 'the ease of use' and 'accuracy of the instrument', while 'knowledge of the instrument', 'confidence with the instrument', and 'availability of the instrument' received no ratings by the early childhood teachers. Finally, the respondents listed 'identifying children with potential problems' and 'providing a good overall picture of children's development as the most important factors of using assessment in general.

These studies provide a general view that informal assessment is chosen as an assessment measure in early childhood education. The instruments used and the reasons why teachers chose such kinds of instruments are varied. Moreover, the role of assessment in education is stressed one more time. In addition to the experts' views on the assessment tools used in early childhood education settings, Hanes (2009)

conducted a survey study with early childhood practitioners to determine how early childhood practitioners view and understand assessment and their perceptions about assessment measures being used in their school.

One of the research questions of this study was to determine whether preschool educators found the assessment measurement used in their schools purposeful, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive. The results concluded that practitioners thought they used developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and purposeful assessment. The purpose of the assessment was stated as mostly to monitor progress (92 % of the participants), with readiness, achievement, early intervention, improvement in teacher practice, and evaluation of overall programs declared as other purposes.

Based on the responses of participants, they had positive perceptions of assessment and the majority of them chose self-prepared assessments rather than standardized tests in their classrooms. Moreover, the response of participants on the type of assessment applied in their classroom was centred on observation, with nearly 97 % of participants. While checklists and rating scales were the followers of observation, standardized tests were chosen by one-fifth of the participants. The teachers' views on training about assessment had been positive, and most of the respondents agree on the fact that these pieces of training provide a foundation for understanding and using assessment in the classroom has become an important part of their professional growth, and would be used for appropriately assessing their students.

More specifically, Flowers, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Browder, and Spooner (2005) determined the thoughts of teachers from five different countries about alternative assessment approaches in their study. A total of 983 teachers from five states were the participants. In three of these five states, a portfolio approach is used as their

alternative assessment, while a performance-based assessment and a checklist approach are employed as alternative assessment techniques in the other two states. Based on the outcomes of this study, most of the teachers reported that the alternative assessments have an impact positively. However, there are some disagreements between teachers about items assessing the educational benefits of alternative assessments. Moreover, teachers' opinions on the positive impact of alternative assessment between testing approaches (checklist, portfolio, and performance-based) varied. Finally, the main limitation of alternative assessment was reported by teachers as the increase in paperwork and demands on their time.

2.10 Aspects of Kindergartners' Reading and Writing Skills Assessed by

Kindergarten Teachers

The aspects of reading and writing skills assessed in early years children are often defined by the curriculum or framework upon which teaching and learning are based. For this study, aspects of kindergartners' reading and writing skills that are assessed by kindergarten teachers would be limited to the following themes: Oral language, concepts of print, vocabulary and academic language, Alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonic knowledge, reading fluency, comprehension

2.10.1 Oral language

Oral language refers to the ability to produce and comprehend spoken language (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008). It is a broad construct consisting of a variety of discrete language skills such as expressive and receptive vocabulary, semantics, definitional vocabulary, syntax, morphology, and listening comprehension. The skills include the ability to understand the meaning of and use of appropriate words, and to group them into phrases and sentences following standard

organisational rules (grammar) that communicate a message that others can understand. We use words to express ourselves as well as to understand others. The importance of language to an individual's success cannot be overstated (Benner, Nelson, & Epstein, 2002).

children's performance on aspects of oral language embedded in the aims and goals of the communicating theme, including children's ability to use verbal and non-verbal information to get their point across; interact with other children and adults by listening, discussing, and taking turns in conversation; use sound, pattern, rhythm, and repetition in language; use language for giving and receiving information, asking questions, requesting, refusing, negotiating, problem-solving, clarifying and thinking; share their thoughts and feelings through storytelling, roleplaying and problem-solving (NaCCA, 2019).

During an assessment, kindergarten educators monitor broader developmental aspects of children's language, especially semantics, phonology (sounds), and grammar (syntax and morphology), and decide whether development is on track, or whether more detailed assessment may be warranted (Enz & Morrow, 2009; Snow & Oh, 2011; Shiel, Cregan, McGough, & Archer, 2012).

2.10.2 Concepts of print

Concepts of print are usually learned incidentally as children are exposed to books and story readings at school. Concepts of print include an understanding that: print carries meaning, that books contain letters, words, sentences, and spaces (Reading Rockets, 2019). It also includes understanding what books are used for, and that books have parts such as a front cover, back cover, and a spine. Eventually, learners learn more sophisticated ideas such as understanding that we begin reading on the left

and read across the page to the last word on the right, and then we got to the next line, begin reading on the left, and so on (Reading Rockets, 2019).

Concepts of print refer to tasks combining elements of alphabet knowledge, Print awareness, and early decoding. In most instances, the use of print dictates the conventions that are followed (Ezell & Justice, 2005). For example, a list serves a specific purpose and looks different than a story; maps use print for labelling and also include a key or legend. Pictures can be described in many ways, but the words represented through print are the same each time they are read. Following the rules of grammar, stringing words together form sentences and a series of sentences can form stories, represent ideas, and share information.

Exposure to the numerous uses of print is influenced by language and culture and can differ greatly for each child (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004). Print experiences within the kindergarten classroom can be planned by addressing the materials provided, the exposure and uses, and the interactions that occur between adults and children. Children must have many opportunities to experience the varied and meaningful uses of print (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004). Examples of materials for children to access and use that support print awareness includes writing supplies; magnetic letters; alphabet books, boards, and cards; class books; board games; manipulatives, and activities to sort, match, and classify related to shapes and symbols.

To achieve print awareness, Strickland and Schickedanz (2004) postulated that children's names should be used in many ways, such as labelling their cubbies and mailboxes, designating helpers and groups. Also, KG teachers should foster an awareness of print by sharing information, such as looking at the day's schedule, the

alphabet, or reading the daily menu. Again, kindergarten teachers should use print in the classroom in meaningful ways, such as helper charts, weather graphs, and science observations, and solve problems, such as using recipes, and directions for games, maps, and phone directories. Furthermore, KG teachers should encourage children to write their names upon arrival and on their artwork.

Assessing concepts of print focuses on finding out if a learner understands:

1. That print has meaning
2. That print can be used for different purposes
3. The relationship between print and speech
4. relationships between written letters and spoken sounds
5. There is a difference between letters and words
6. That words are separated by spaces
7. There is a difference between words and sentences
8. That there are (punctuation) marks that signal the end of a sentence
9. That books have parts such as a front and back cover, title page, spine, and author
10. That stories have a beginning, middle, and end
11. That text is read from left to right and from top to bottom (Reading Rockets, 2019).

2.10.3 Vocabulary and academic language

Vocabulary knowledge is a key indicator of later oral language development, as well as proficiency in reading (Beck & McKeown, 2007). The size of an individual's word knowledge has been related to comprehension in primary grades (Scarborough, 2002; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002) and fluency and comprehension at the post-primary level

(Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). Further, children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have smaller vocabularies than their middle-class counterparts, even before they begin their schooling (Hart & Risley, 1995; Hoff, 2003). Hence, it is important to assess children's vocabulary knowledge from as early a stage as possible. This can be done informally as children engage in structured activities such as dialogic reading, or more formal contexts involving the administration of standardised measures of receptive vocabulary. Information on vocabulary knowledge (which should be recorded by the teacher) can be obtained by asking for a definition of a word (What does ocean mean?); asking about a characteristic of a word (What would you find in the ocean?); asking for the opposite of a word (What is the opposite of tired?); contrasting two words (What is the difference between a pond and an ocean?); asking for another word with the same meaning (What word has the same meaning as tired?); asking which word in a set is the odd word out (e.g. apple, orange, chocolate, crisps, lemon); asking the child to provide a super-ordinate label (e.g. what do a cow, horse and sheep have in common? Is a bear a farm animal?).

Academic language is identified in this review as a particularly important aspect of early language to develop and therefore to assess. According to Snow and Oh (2011), the use of academic language in early childhood is characterised by particular features. These include knowledge of certain kinds of high-power academic words (p. 379) for example super-ordinates (people, food); cognitive verbs (suggest, think, wish); epistemic markers (perhaps, maybe), and other words used to go beyond what is physically present. Other features of academic language identified by the above authors include the use of connectives (for example, but); greater tense variety; higher lexical density, and greater use of subordinate clauses. Snow and Oh (2011) observed that many of these features emerge in extended discourse such as narratives or

explanations. This suggests that, as with vocabulary knowledge in general, early childhood educators can best assess academic language use in highly interactive and dynamic contexts such as storybook discussions or informal conversations with young children.

2.10.4 Alphabet knowledge

Knowledge of and familiarity with the visual shapes of the individual letters is an important prerequisite to learning to read (Adams, 1990). Children's ability to name letters strongly predicts their future reading achievement. For example, learning letter names often turn spontaneously into an interest in letter sounds and the spellings of words. This may be because some letters contain information about their sounds. Knowledge of letter names is also strongly associated with children's ability to remember the structure of written words and the tendency to treat words as ordered sequences of letters rather than holistic patterns. Lack of letter-name knowledge is associated with difficulty in learning letter sounds and word recognition. It has also been argued that letter knowledge may help direct a child's attention to the components of words and the general idea that they can be represented as smaller units (Burgess, 2006).

Also, Manolitsis, Georgiou, Stephenson, and Parrila (2009) found that letter knowledge in kindergarten predicted non-word decoding and reading fluency in grade 1 'better than any other measure including phonological sensitivity' (p. 478). Further, Leppänen, Aunola, Niemi, and Nurmi (2008) found that a combination of letter-name knowledge and phonemic awareness is a better predictor of reading skill in grade 1 than phonemic awareness on its own. However, the ability to recite the alphabet is not

sufficient on its own; children must be able to recognise each letter in isolation hence the need to find out if learners can perform this task.

2.10.5 Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness is the awareness to recognize that spoken language is made up of series of sounds. Learners need to have the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. Teachers can use a variety of formal and informal activities to assess phonemic awareness or the ability of children to segment words into their constituent sounds which is an important prerequisite for both word reading and spelling.

As with phonological awareness more generally, most instruction and assessment of phonemic awareness occurs in the context of informal activities that are of limited duration. Enz and Morrow (2009) indicated that young children have limited attention span and that teachers should engage kindergarten learners in phonological tasks for just a few minutes at a time, perhaps three or four times a day.

According to Reading Rocket (2019), phonemic awareness put focus on the following:

1. Phoneme matching: the ability to identify words that begin with the same sound.
2. Phoneme isolation: the ability to isolate a single sound from within a word.
3. Phoneme blending: the ability to blend individual sounds into a word.
4. Phoneme segmentation: the ability to break a word into individual sounds.
5. Phoneme manipulation: the ability to modify, change, or move the individual sounds in a word.

2.10.6 Phonics knowledge

As young children move into more formal reading, teachers begin to look at their ability to identify letter sounds. Initially, this can occur in informal contexts such as storybook reading (for example, what is the beginning sound in this word? What other word in this sentence has the same beginning sound? Which of these words have the same beginning sounds? What are the other sounds in this word?).

Assessment of phonics knowledge can occur in both informal and formal contexts. Much information about phonics knowledge can be obtained by listening to children as they read texts. Running records (records of the child's oral reading errors) based on the text at the child's instructional level can be particularly useful in this regard. In assessing a child's oral reading, it is important teachers focus both on knowledge of specific phonic elements (thus, whether a particular sound or generalisation is known) and whether the child has applied his/her knowledge correctly (Clay, 2002). It is also useful to interview the child about the particular strategies he or she used to identify an unknown word, and how well those strategies worked.

2.10.7 Reading fluency

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. This skill enables the learners to become familiar with words so much so that the recognition of such words is automatic to them and they read them without effort. The skill is crucial to language and literacy development because it provides a bridge between word recognition and understanding (comprehension) (NaCCA, 2019; Ritchey et al., 2016).

There are a number of approaches to assessing reading fluency in classroom contexts. Generally, fluency in reading is assessed by having children read letter names, produce letter sounds, read single words and sentences as quickly and accurately as

they can in a specified time (Good & Kaminski, 2002; Howe & Shinn, 2002). This can be done using stand-alone tools such as a rating scale for assessing prosody or counting the number of words read correctly per minute. Others are components of broader approaches to assessment (e.g., running records) (NaCCA, 2012)

2.11 Handwriting Fluency

Handwriting fluency refers to how well children access, retrieve, and write the letters of the alphabet reliably and automatically (Ritchey, McMaster, Al-Otaiba, Puranik, Grace-Kim, Parker & Ortiz, 2016). Similar to fluency in reading, fluency in writing is also considered an important ingredient to the overall scholastic success of kindergarteners (Puranik, Patchan, Sears & McMaster, 2017). Berninger (2002) notes that training in hand-writing fluency transfers to an increase in compositional fluency in kindergarteners. As learners' handwriting fluency develops, they are able to devote less effort to maintaining letter forms in working memory (McCutchen, 2000). Rather, they use this capacity for higher-level processes needed to improve composition. Therefore, beginning-writing assessment should focus not only on assessing the formation of alphabet letters but also on automatization of the retrieval and production of alphabet letters (Puranik, Patchan, Sears & McMaster, 2017).

One thing teachers do in assessing learners' handwriting fluency is to instruct learners to write from memory the letters of the alphabet in order. This strategy is one of many strategies used to assess handwriting fluency in kindergarten learners'. Another similar strategy sentence-copy task in which learners copy as many sentences as possible within some time frame (Parker, McMaster, Medhanie, & Silberglitt, 2011).

2.11.1 Handwriting Legibility

Handwriting in alphabetic systems is the graphic representation of written language by hand. Legibility involves the readability of letters, as well as spacing within and between words (Staats, Oakley, & Marais, 2019). Learning to produce legible handwriting at sufficient speed allows children to keep up with classwork and demonstrate their knowledge. Legibility is influenced by letter/number awareness and formation; writing on (not above) the line; leaving appropriate spaces between letters and words, and letters being the correct size. At a very basic level, it is also dependent upon the ability to form the 'pre-writing shapes' that combine to form letters and numbers (Prunty & Rosenblum, 2017).

Kindergarteners' handwriting is considered readable, in context, if at least 70% of letters are legible and these students can be expected to become more proficient with time (Case-Smith, Holland, Lane & White, 2012; Feder, Majnemer, Bourbonnais, Blayney & Morin, 2007). Generally, however, legibility for learners who are learning to handwrite is highly variable and this can be a challenge for assessment (Feder et al., 2007; Graham et al., 2006). Nonetheless, previous handwriting studies using both global and analytic assessment methods to measure performance have consistently identified letter formations, letter size, space between words, space within words, slant, and line placement as aspects of legibility (Simner & Eidlitz, 2000). When learning to handwrite, assessing success through writing activities may help with diagnosis and intervention to improve handwriting proficiency. (Staats, Oakley, & Marais, 2019).

2.11.2 Comprehension

Comprehension is the ability to understand spoken language as well as a written text. Having rich interaction and frequent reading to learners promote their comprehension of words or utterances (NaCCA, 2019). Kindergarten teachers need to support children's development of comprehension skills and will need to assess their progress in understanding texts (NaCCA, 2012).

According to Enz and Morrow (2009), the following sub-skills comprehension skills should be assessed in Kindergarten:

1. Attempts to read storybooks resulting in well-formed stories.
2. Participates in story reading by narrating as the teacher reads.
3. Retells stories and includes the following elements: (a) setting; (b) theme; (c) plot episodes; and (d) resolution.
4. Responds to text after listening with literal comments or questions.
5. Summarises what is read.
6. Responds to text after listening with interpretative comments or questions.
7. Responds to text after listening, with critical comments or questions.
8. Generates questions that are literal, inferential, and critical.
9. Participates in social activities to enhance comprehension (e.g., partner reading, visual imagery, discussion, tape-assisted reading).

2.12 Kindergarten Teachers' Challenges in Assessing Kindergarteners' Reading and Writing Skills

In their study "Assessment in Preschools in Ghana: Issues and Challenges", Anane and Anhwere (2013) identified some challenges of assessing young children appropriately in Ghana. These challenges were:

2.12.1 Inadequate assessment standards

Most of the previous reforms in Ghana lacked standards, even though, more often than not, policymakers and stakeholders in education talk of ‘falling’ standards. For assessment results to be meaningful and useful, they must be linked to clear development or knowledge continua, with benchmarks along the way to illustrate what progress looks like (National Education Goals Panel [NEGP], 1998). On the whole, teachers and early childhood programmes cannot develop standards on their own and it appears the central government is not ready for such an undertaking, the results of which caregivers, teachers, and school proprietors are running their programmes as and when it suites them (Anane & Anhwere, 2013).

2.12.2 Young children as test-takers

Powell and Sigel (1991) noted that traditional assessments are inappropriate for young children. They assert that “young children are not good candidates for taking traditional tests. The reliability and validity of test results are greatly compromised by the child’s rapid changes in development, fluctuations in the intensity and focus of interests, and the unfamiliarity of the assessment situation” (p. 194). Conversely, the uses of teacher-made tests as a mode of assessing young children seem to be the norm in Ghana and sometimes some early childhood centres go to the extent of buying commercially prepared questions to be administered to young children between the ages of 3 and 8 (Anane & Awhere, 2013). This situation poses problems in achieving curriculum goals and is likely to limit the appropriate developmental processes of the children in their early years in school.

2.12.3 Managing the negative effects of testing on curriculum

Shepard (2000) wrote about the ‘negative history of standardized testing of young children in the past decade,’ which includes a distortion of the curriculum in the early grades, including a “skill-driven” “kindergarten curriculum” and “escalation of the curriculum” or “academic trickle-down” (p. 206). “Developmentally inappropriate instructional practices, characterized by long periods of seat work, high levels of stress, and a plethora of fill-in-the-blank worksheets, placed many children at risk by setting standards for attention span, social maturity, and academic productivity that could not be met by many normal 5-year-olds” (p. 207).

Anane (2007) described influences that caused many teachers to align their curriculum and instruction to the specific focus of the tests that are nationally conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the uses to which the results are put. Thus, the results have brought about a narrowing curriculum, a concentration on those skills most acquiescent to testing, a constraint on the creativity and flexibility of teachers. These outcomes represent a vast alteration in educational policy, aided and abetted by the inappropriate use of tests. It is therefore feared that this can tackle down and create an emerging crisis in the early childhood education enterprise.

2.12.4 Teachers’ expertise and assessing young children

Quality kindergarten teachers are, also, essential in early childhood programmes and yet, in developing countries, such as Ghana, those who work with young children typically receive less training than their primary school counterparts. Even in urban areas where early education is quite ‘refined’, very few highly trained educators often work alongside a huge number of untrained childcare workers. Kindergarten

educators, therefore lack the necessary competence in aligning curriculum with reading and writing assessment tools (Anane & Anhwere, 2013)

2.12.5 Abuses and misuses of tests for assessing young children

The problem of high stakes and accountability has crept into our education system, including early childhood education. In other developed worlds such as the USA, abuses, and misuse of tests for assessing young children have been documented (Meisels, Atkins-Burnett, Xue, Nicholson, Bickel, & Son, 2003; Shepard, 2000). Excessive use of standardised tests is especially inappropriate (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987). Standardised achievement tests alone cannot fulfil the major purposes of assessment in programmes for young children.

Those purposes are instructional planning and communicating with parents, identification of children with special needs, and programme evaluation and accountability (Hills, 2010). Yet, educators in early childhood years seemed to have been overtaken by the pressures in the school system and are putting undue pressure on young children to sit for pencil and paper tests of which some of the ‘candidates’ cannot even read what the test papers present. Teachers and caregivers have to sometimes read examination questions to pupils, and pupils give responses presumably based on what they hear from their teachers (examiners). And results from these tests are interpreted by people, who are mostly not trained in early childhood education, and those who are trained, have limited or no knowledge in assessment in basic schools.

2.12.6 Inadequate time for assessment

Another issue kindergarten teachers face in assessing learners reading and writing skills are inadequate time (Martin, 2018). It takes time to administer properly to

young learners. Assessments should primarily be given to each child in a one-on-one setting by his or her teacher. Furthermore, since a child's attention span is always limited, the assessment can be given in small chunks over many days or even weeks (Martin, 2018). While early childhood educators seek developmentally appropriate assessments for their learners, they constantly complain about the time it takes to administer them and the resulting loss of instructional time in the classroom. However, when quality assessment mirror quality instruction, assessment, and teaching become almost seamless, complementing and informing one another (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2000).

2.13 Summary of Literature Reviewed

In the learning setting, assessment is a complicated problem and is in a progress particularly in kindergarten education. Owing to the short attention spans of young learners and their characteristics as poor test-takers, assessment is found daunting and complex at an early age. Therefore, assessments in children rely on informal methods such as observation (Turupcu, 2014).

The role of a teacher does have a great significance on kindergarten children's learning and assessment. They serve as both a moderator and a planner for assessment procedures. In this regard, kindergarten teachers' perspectives on assessment gain more significance, and their perceptions influence the assessment of children and their learning. While there have been studies regarding teachers' views of assessment, research about kindergarten teacher's views on reading and writing assessment is limited. Hence, further research of kindergarten teachers' views on reading and writing assessment is merited.

Assessment in kindergarten environments may well be carried out using various instruments and processes. The preference of a tool of assessment depends on what is to be assessed, how it is assessed, and why. It also relies on the teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment. Choosing assessment tools require that teachers take into account the range of classroom situations that learners will experience. Various instruments may be used for assessment. They include but are not limited to observation, running records, anecdotal records, checklists, rating scales, and conferences. Even though there have been studies conducted on assessment tools, few of these studies discussed these tools concerning reading and writing skills assessment at the kindergarten level, hence, the need for further studies of kindergartners' reading and writing skills assessment tools.

This chapter also reviewed literature on aspects of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills that are assessed by kindergarten teachers. Besides challenges that are usually encountered in the assessment were looked at. But, in all the literature reviewed, none of them has focused on practices of kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District. Therefore, this present research aims to bridge the information gap that has been existing for some years.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter discusses in detail how the researcher carried out the study. It presents the design for the study, philosophical position, population, sample, and sampling procedures. This chapter further discussed research instruments, validity, and reliability, trustworthiness of the instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis plan, and ethical consideration.

3.1 Philosophical Underpinning

This study is underpinned by the pragmatist paradigm which argues that adopting two or more paradigms works to answer the research questions under study. To the pragmatist, either subjective or objective meaning can provide facts to the research question; they focus on the practical application of issues by merging views to interpret data. Pragmatism is concerned with action, change, and the interplay between knowledge and action. This makes it appropriate as a basis for research approaches intervening in the world not merely observing the world (Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 2). A philosophical position/research paradigm is a worldview or perspective about research held by a community of researchers that is based on a set of shared assumptions, concepts, values, and practices. More simply, “it is an approach to thinking about and doing research” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014 p. 79). Guba and Lincorn (1994) state that, “a paradigm may be viewed as a set of beliefs that deals with ultimate or first principles. It represents a world view that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its part as for cosmologies and theories do” (P.107).

Literature in social sciences highlights many other research paradigms which include but are not limited to positivist, interpretivist, and pragmatist paradigm.

3.2 Research Approach

The study employed a mixed-method approach. The approach adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods to find answers to the research questions. In mixed research, the researcher uses a mixture or combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, approaches, or concepts in a single research study or a set of related studies (Johnson & Christensen, 2014 p. 79). This approach harmonises the tenets of positivism and interpretivism in the same study which is consistent with the pragmatic philosophy. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) define mixed method approach as an approach for a scientifically rigorous research process comprised of a qualitative or quantitative core component that directs the theoretical drive, with qualitative or quantitative supplementary component(s). These components of the research fit together to enhance description, understanding and can either be conducted simultaneously or sequentially.

The rationale for mixing both kinds of data within one study is grounded in the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient, by themselves, to capture the trends and details of a situation. When used in combination, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for more robust analysis, taking advantage of the strengths of each (Green, Caracelli & Graham 1989; Miles & Huberman 1994; Green & Caracelli 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Mixed method approach enhance triangulation and improve validity; facilitate a better understanding of the relationship between variables, aid understanding of quantitative results (Green et al., 2015). The researcher considered the mixed method approach as

appropriate for this study because it was useful in capturing the best of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to better understand the research problem.

3.3 Research Design

Explanatory sequential mixed-method design was adopted for this study. This design consists of two distinct phases: quantitative followed by qualitative with the overall purpose of using qualitative data to explain or build upon initial quantitative data (Creswell et al. 2003; Creswell & Cresswell, 2018). In this design, the researcher first collected and analysed the quantitative data. The qualitative data was collected and analysed second in sequence and helped elaborate on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase. Much emphasis was placed on the quantitative data than the qualitative data. The rationale for this design is that the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provided a general understanding of the research problem (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). The qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth (Creswell, 2003).

3.4 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kindergartens within Bosomtwe District in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Bosomtwe District is located at the central part of the Ashanti Region and lies within latitudes 6° 24 South and 6° 43 North and longitudes 1° 15 East and 1° 46 West. It is bounded on the north by Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, on the east by Ejisu Municipal, on the south by Bekwai Municipal and Bosome-Freho District, and on the west by Atwima-Kwanwoma District. The district has a land size of about 422.5 sq. km. It is the eleventh largest district in the Ashanti Region. The Bosomtwe District has 67 communities. Kuntanse is the district capital. The district is

sub-divided into three area councils namely, Jachie, Kuntanase, and Boneso. In education, almost every community with a population of more than 300 has a primary school. Junior and Senior High schools are found in a number of towns and villages. There are 139 kindergartens, made up of 56 public and 83 private schools. There are also 143 primary schools out of which 60 are public schools and 83 privates, whilst there are 117 Junior High Schools, made up of 57 public schools and 60 privates (Bosomtwe District Assembly, 2017).

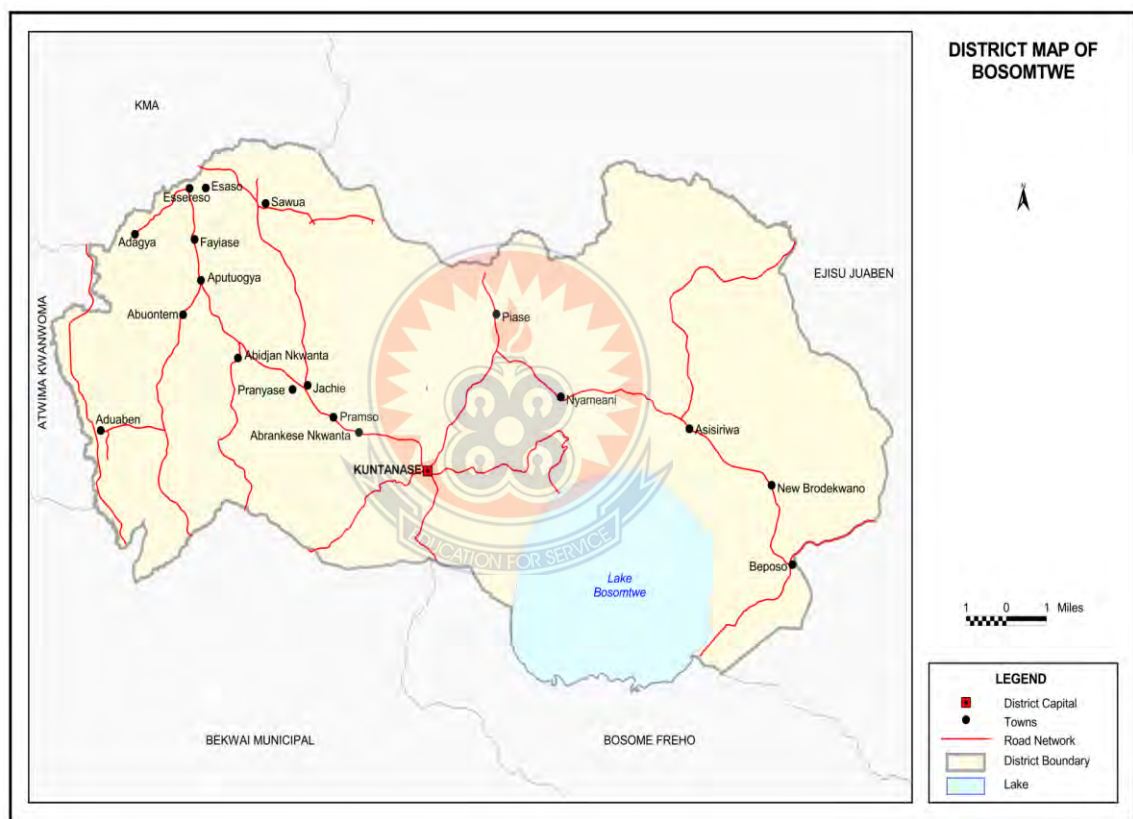


Figure 3.1: Map of Bosomtwe District

Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2014)

3.5 Population

There are 139 Kindergarten centres with 170 trained and 291 untrained teachers (Bosomtwe District Assembly, 2017). The target population for this study was 461 Kindergarten teachers from 139 Kindergarten centres within the Bosomtwe District.

However, the accessible population comprised 170 trained Kindergarten teachers within the Bosomtwe District. Population refers to a complete set of elements (persons or objects) that possess some common characteristic defined by the sampling criteria established by the researcher. Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012) defines population as a comprehensive group of people, institutions, and objects who have common characteristics to which the researcher wishes to generalize the study findings. The authors further noted that the elements (people or objects) meet a set of criteria (trained kindergarten teachers) that is of interest to the researcher.

3.6 Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the study consisted of 119 kindergarten-trained teachers. This sample size was determined using Yamene's (1967) formula at a 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. According to Yamene's (1967) formula, an accessible population of 170 should have a representative sample of 119 for successful generalisation of the findings over the entire population. Although Yamane (1967) formular appears to be relatively old, however the researcher find its usefulness to this current study because gives a sample size that provides proportionately more information for a small population than for a large population (Yamene, 1967).

A sample is a smaller (but hopefully representative) collection of units from a population used to determine truths about that population (Field, 2005). Sample size determination involves establishing the number of observations to include in a statistical sample while ensuring representativeness (Field, 2005).

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 119 kindergarten-trained teachers. This was done using the rand function in Microsoft excel. The excel rand

function returns unique random numbers between 0 and 1 to each individual within the sampling frame. With this, the names of the teachers were arranged in a single column in a systematic order. Each teacher was assigned a random number using the rand function. The function is volatile, meaning the assigned values changes anytime a cell is edited. To stop the random numbers from being updated, the researcher copied and pasted the values. The researcher proceeded by sorting the random numbers, the first 119 kindergarten-trained teachers were selected for the study. The sample selected was used for the quantitative phase of the study. The purpose of using simple random sample was to reduce the potential bias in the selection of trained kindergarten teachers to be included in the sample.

Finally, the researcher selected 10 teachers for interview using the maximum variation sampling technique for the qualitative phase of the study. In this sampling technique, a wide range of individuals are purposively selected such that all or most types of individuals used in the quantitative phase are used for the qualitative phase (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017). The maximal variation sampling ensures that the sample constitutes a wide range of characteristics so that the various viewpoints are represented in the study. Using this technique, the researcher selected the sample based on their highest academic qualification (diploma, degree, and master's) and the number of years in service as a kindergarten teacher.

3.7 Instruments for Data Collection

Data collection instruments are tools and mechanisms that are used in gathering data for a study. A good and appropriate instrument is a very key part of the research, which contributes to the quality of data collected (Kuranchie, 2016). Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) noted that data collection is central to every research since the conclusion of every single research is dependent on what the data exposed. They

further stated that the sort of data gathered and the scoring of the data gathered need to be considered with care. In light of this, the researcher employed a Likert scale questionnaire and semi-structured interview as data collection instruments for this study.

3.7.1 Structured Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was used to gather data on the Kindergarten teachers' views on reading and writing skills assessment practices; assessment tools used by kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills; aspects of Kindergartners reading and writing skills that are assessed by Kindergarten teachers; challenges Kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills.

A structured questionnaire is an instrument for research, which consists of a list of questions, along with the choice of answers, printed or typed in a sequence on a form used for acquiring specific information from the respondents (Aryal, 2020). Questionnaires are doubtless one of the primary sources of obtaining data in any research endeavour. However, the critical point is that when designing a questionnaire, the researcher should ensure that it is “valid, reliable and unambiguous” (Zohrabi, 2013).

The structured questionnaire used was a Likert scale questionnaire with choices presented in a four-point scale ranging from: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA). Each of the options was valued as follows: SA (4), A (3), D (2), and SD (1). It was a self-constructed questionnaire with 2 parts, namely; 'I' and 'II'. Part 'I' focused on the demographic data of the respondents. Section, 'II', focused on themes derived from the research objectives.

The structured questionnaire was selected because it is used for collecting statistically quantifiable data, allowing straightforward statistical analysis of the responses. Also, it is proven to be excellent statistical data to obtain quantitative data about people's attitudes, values, experiences, and past behaviour (Bell, 2008). Again, when similar questions are administered simultaneously to a large number of people, the acquired data are more identical, correct, and standard (Zohrabi, 2013). A structured questionnaire is as well an efficient means of collecting data on a large-scale basis. Nonetheless, a structured questionnaire lacks detail. Because the responses are fixed, there is less scope for respondents to supply answers which reflect their true feelings on a topic. It can also lead to dishonest responses. Though the use of a structured questionnaire has some weaknesses, its strengths outweigh the when weaknesses when used to collect quantitative data; hence the use of a questionnaire for quantitative data collection in this study.

3.7.2 Semi-structured Interview

A semi-structured interview guide was employed for the qualitative phase of this study. Asamoah-Gyimah and Duodu (2007) identified semi-structured interview as the most suitable format for inquiry because it is more versatile than the structured interview format. A semi-structured interview is flexible to a greater extent and offers the interviewees the opportunity to express their views, feelings, and experiences freely (Kusi (2012)). There is an opportunity for an interviewer to probe into certain issues of interest and responses given by interviewees when necessary (Kuranchie, 2016). The goal of the semi-structured interview is to allow the researcher to probe the responses of the interviewee for clarity and to gain in-depth information.

The semi-structured interview guide had four sections, namely (A, B, C, and D). Section 'A' asked questions on the 'Kindergarten teachers' views on reading and writing skills assessment practices. Section 'B' asked questions on 'assessment tools used by kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills. Section 'C' asked questions on 'aspects of Kindergartners reading and writing skills that are assessed by Kindergarten teachers'; Section 'D' asked questions on 'challenges Kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills'.

3.8 Pre-Testing of the Questionnaire

Pre-testing is a try-out test for the reliability of the data collection instruments before the actual fieldwork. During pre-testing, respondents could be permitted to comment on the clarity and relevance of the items, format, order, and sequence of the questions, and any other thing that can help improve the instrument for the main study (Kuranchie, 2016). Pre-testing of data collection tools is significant because it gives the researcher the opportunity to obtain information on any potential ambiguities in the tools. Additionally, pre-testing enables the researcher to revise the items on the instruments to be more relevant and suitable for the research objectives. Hence, the need for pre-testing the data collection instruments before the actual fieldwork.

The research instruments were pre-tested in fifteen (15) Kindergarten centres in the Atwima-Kwanwoma District. Forty (40) Kindergarten trained teachers were selected for the pre-test.

The respondents were given draft copies of the questionnaire. They were made to answer the questions and discuss with the researcher, clarity, and relevance of the items on the instrument, format, order, and sequence of the questions, and any other

thing that can help improve the instrument for the main study. All the issues raised during the discussion were duly acknowledged and all necessary corrections were effected before the actual data collection commenced in the study area.

3.9 Validity of the Questionnaire

Validity is a means of finding an accurate representation of the phenomena to which they refer (Silverman, 2009). It is the extent to which a measure truly reflects the idea under study. Similarly, Kuranchie (2016), defined validity of the instrument as the extent to which the content measuring instrument sufficiently represents all items under study. This is achieved through judgment and panel discussion (Piesie-Anto, 2012).

To establish the validity of the instruments for this study, face and content validity was adopted. To establish face validity, a draft of the instruments was given to the researcher's colleagues for them to share their opinions on the readability, feasibility, clarity of language and consistency of style and formatting of the questionnaire items and also whether the instruments will obtain the desired data. To ensure content validity, the researcher presented the instruments to the supervisor to assess whether the content measure what it intends to measure before using it for data collection.

3.10 Reliability of the Questionnaire

Reliability refers to the consistency of results generated by a research instrument. Reliability is used to indicate the extent to which the different items, measures, or assessments are consistent with one another and the extent to which each measure is free from measurement error (Leech, Barrett & Morgan, 2015).

Reliability of the questionnaire was checked by using Cronbach alpha. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was selected because it is a much more reliable way of

checking the internal consistency of the instrument (Creswell, 2013). The obtained reliability coefficients were calculated or determined in sections. For section 'A' which measures the "Kindergarten teachers' views on reading and writing skills assessment", a reliability coefficient of .854 was obtained. Section 'B' which measured "Teachers' assessment tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills" obtained a reliability coefficient of .773. With respect to "Aspects of kindergarteners reading and writing skills assessed by kindergarten teachers" which was section 'C', .795 was obtained as the reliability coefficients. Section 'D' which sought for "Kindergarten teachers' challenges in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills obtained a reliability coefficient of .821. The overall, reliability coefficient of .810 was obtained. This was an indication that the questionnaire was reliable. This is because according to (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000), if a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient value of 0.7 is obtained, then, the instrument is reliable.

3.11 Trustworthiness of Semi-structurd Interview Guide

Trustworthiness criteria were established for the semi-structurd interview guide. One major aim of research is to put the knowledge created into practice. As a result, it is critical that researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and the general public understand and accept the findings as legitimate. Trustworthiness criteria are one-way researchers can convince themselves and readers that their study findings are worthy of attention (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The criteria established were dependability and credibility.

The audio-taped responses from the interview were played back to the respondents for confirmation or otherwise. Also, the interviewees were given the chance to read through the transcriptions to make corrections where necessary.

2.12 Data Collection Procedure

An introductory letter was obtained from the office of Early Childhood Education to facilitate the process. Before the administration of the data collection instruments of this study, Permission was sought from the Office of Bosomtwe Education Directorate, headteachers, and all relevant authorities to enable the researcher to collect the data.

On arrival at each school, the researcher sought the consent of the respondents, explaining to them the purpose and educational implication of the study. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents to fill at their own convenient time within the week. The questionnaires were retrieved three days after issuance. 95% return rate data were obtained from 111 participants for the study. This implies that out of the targeted sample of 119, a total of 111 questionnaires were retrieved for the study. The interview was conducted a week after retrieving the questionnaires.

3.13 Data Analysis

Inferential statistics was used to analyse the quantitative data (questionnaires). The items on the questionnaire were coded and fed into the Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS) version 21 and analyzed using inferential statistics.

According to Creswell (2008), an analysis of the qualitative data is done thematically which indicates a shift from reporting facts to making interpretations of people and activities. The interview data recorded were transcribed, coded, and built into relationships. Themes were then developed from the relationships for discussion.

3.14 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in educational research are those issues that are related to how the educational researchers conduct themselves or their practices and the consequences of these on the people who participate in their research (Kusi, 2012 P. 87). In research studies, researchers are expected to cautiously and ethically analyze any ethical concerns (Jack & Norman, 2003). Therefore, in designing both qualitative and quantitative studies, it is important for the researcher to strictly adhere to ethical codes. Ethical issues that were considered in this study are; access, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity.

On access, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Department of Early Childhood Education of the University of Education, Winneba to enable him to seek approval from relevant authorities to access the participant and relevant documents for the study. To gain the informed consent of participants for this study, they were informed about the purpose of the study, how it will be carried out, their expectant role in the study, the time requirement, the kind of data to be collected, and how they will be used and reported. This enabled the participants to determine whether or not to participate in the study because people make decisions to participate in a study depending on the quality of information, they receive about it (Kumar, 2005 cited in Kusi, 2012). Ensuring confidentiality, the researcher made sure the information provided by the participants were not shared with any other person but for the research purpose only. To ensure anonymity, participants were encouraged not to provide their names and addresses on the questionnaire. The researcher also ensured information about the schools selected for the study does not appear in the report of the study. Again, codes were assigned to the verbatim transcription of data.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Overview

This chapter comprised the presentation, analysis, and the discussion of findings of the study based on the responses from teachers about practices used for assessing kindergartners' reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District of the Ashanti Region of Ghana as structured in the questionnaire. The analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis and interpretation of data were carried out based on the results of the four (4) research questions formulated to guide the study. The first part of this chapter describes the demographic characteristics of the respondents (Kindergarten teachers). The obtained data on the demographics were analysed using frequencies and percentages. In the second part, the research findings are presented based on the research questions formulated for the study.

4.1 Background Information of Respondents

This section deals with the analysis of pertinent issues related to the respondents' demographic characteristics. These include distribution of respondents by gender, age distribution, area of specialization, rank in GES, number of years serving as a Kindergarten teacher.

Table 4.1: Background Profile of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	13	11.7
	Female	98	88.3
Total		111	100
Age	21 - 30 years	16	14.4
	31 - 40 years	29	26.1
	41 - 50 years	44	39.6
	51 - 60 years	22	19.8
Total		111	100.0
Area of Specialization	Early Childhood Education	111	100.0
Qualification	Certificate	2	1.8
	Diploma	40	36.0
	First degree	68	61.3
	Master's degree	1	0.9
Total		111	100.0
Rank	Superintendent I	1	0.9
	Superintendent II	1	0.9
	Senior Superintendent II	5	4.5
	Senior Superintendent I	30	27.0
	Principal Superintendent	37	33.3
	Assistant Director II	27	24.3
	Assistant Director I	10	9.0
Total		111	100.0
Years in Service	0 – 5 years	40	36.0
	6 – 10 years	31	27.9
	11 – 15 years	25	22.5
	16 – 20 years	9	8.1
	21 years and above	6	5.4
Total		111	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 4.1 depicts the proportion of the respondents by various categories such as gender, age, area of specialisation, rank in GES, number of years serving as a Kindergarten teacher. In the gender category, the result reveals that male teachers

constitute 11.7% of the respondents which obviously resulted in female teachers accounting for 88.3% of the respondents. This indicates that females constituted the majority of the population. This survey's findings were influenced by the views of more female kindergarten instructors than male kindergarten teachers. Since no comparison was made with respect to male and female teachers, the outcome did not affect the study since the questionnaire was not gender-specific.

With regards to the age of the respondents, results suggest that 14.4% of the respondents were between the ages of 21 to 30 years; 26.1% of them were between 31 to 40 years; most respondents (39.6%) were within the ages of 41 to 50 years, and a relative number of respondents (19.8%) were within the age group of 51 to 60 years. By implication, the results mean that most of the teachers were within the active working group. Although, the large size of teachers with the ages of 31-40 years did not affect the results since no comparison was made on age distribution of the respondents.

Also, the result showed that all the teachers (111) sampled for this study were specialized in Early Childhood Education. Thus, it could be observed that 1.8% of the respondents possess a certificate in early childhood education; 36% of them had a diploma in early childhood education; 61.3% of them had a first degree in early childhood education and finally, the rest 0.9% of them had master's degree in early childhood education. Furthermore, in relation to the rank in GES, the result showed that majority of about 33.3% of the respondents belonged to the principal superintendent rank; followed by about 27.0% of them were senior superintendent I; 24.3% of them were assistant director II; 4.5% of them were senior superintendent II; 0.9% of them were superintendent I and finally, 0.9% of them were superintendent II.

In addition, result based on the number of years in service as a kindergarten teacher shows that most respondents (36%) served for at most 5 years; 27.9% of them served as kindergarten teachers for about 6 to 10 years; 22.5% of them served between 11 to 15 years; 8.1% of them served between 16 to 20 years and finally, the rest 5.4% of them served as kindergarten teachers for about 21 years and above. The results imply that most of the teachers had been in the service for a quite number of years and could provide the needed information for the study. Nevertheless, the large size of the teachers had taught for 1-10 years but did not affect the results there was no comparison on years in service.

4.2 Research Question One: What views are held by kindergarten teachers in the Bosomtwe District on reading and writing skills assessment practices?

This question aimed at finding out the views of held by kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District. To answer the question, items 7 – 13 under section ‘B’ of the questionnaire and questions under section ‘A’ of the interview guide were used. Data in Table 2 present the results followed by interview results.

Table 4.2: Teachers Views on Reading and Writing Skills Assessment Practices

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean/Std.
Teachers' perspective on reading and writing assessment affects learner's performance	90 (81.1)	21 (18.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.81/0.39
Assessing children's early reading and writing skills is an integral component of a robust early childhood programme.	94 (84.7)	17 (15.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.85/0.36
The key purpose of assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills is to gather information to make informed instructional decisions.	88 (79.3)	23 (20.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.79/0.41
Informal assessment techniques are preferred to formal assessment techniques concerning reading and writing skills assessment of Kindergarteners.	103 (92.8)	8 (7.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.93/0.26
In assessment, learners are assisted to play their roles and to take responsibility for their own learning to improve performance.	92 (82.9)	16 (14.4)	0 (0.0)	3 (2.7)	3.77/0.58
Information from reading and writing assessment provides teachers with clear, comprehensive details on the child's current level of early reading and writing skills.	103 (92.8)	8 (7.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.93/0.26
Information gained from reading and writing skills assessment allows teachers to know if learners are mastering the content covered.	92 (82.8)	19 (17.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.83/0.38

NB: SA=Strongly agreed; A=Agreed; SD=Strongly disagreed; Std=Standard deviation

Table 4.2 presents response ratings to various statements on kindergarten teachers' views on reading and writing skills assessment practices using a Likert scale which ranges from 1 as strongly disagree (SD) to 4 as strongly agree (SA). The result shows that 90 respondents which represent 81.1% strongly agreed that 'teachers' perspective on reading and writing assessment affects learner's performance' and 21 of them which represent 18.9% also agreed with this statement. Furthermore, the overall result based on the mean score of 3.81 (Std=0.39) shows that the respondents mostly rated the statement "teachers' perspective on reading and writing assessment affects learner's performance" as strongly agreed. This implies that kindergarten teachers believed the

perspective they have held on kindergarteners reading and writing skills assessment could affect their performance positively or negatively.

The analysis also showed that 84.7% and 15.3% of the respondents respectively either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that “assessing children’s early reading and writing skills is an integral component of a robust early childhood programme”. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.85 (Std=0.36). Also, the result shows that 88 of the respondents, representing 79.3% and 23 of them, representing 20.7% either strongly agreed or agreed respectively that “the key purpose of assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills is to gather information to make informed instructional decisions”. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.79 (Std=0.41). This result undoubtedly, therefore, shows that the most frequent response to this statement was strongly agreed. This means that kindergarten teachers appreciated that kindergarteners early reading and writing abilities is a necessary component of a well-designed early childhood programme. The results further connote that kindergarten teachers are much informed of the purpose of assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills.

Similarly, the analysis revealed that about 103 of the respondents which represent 92.8% and 8 of them, representing 7.2% either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that “informal assessment techniques are preferred to formal assessment techniques concerning reading and writing skills assessment of kindergarteners”. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.93 (Std=0.26). Furthermore, the result shows that 92 of the respondents which represent 82.9% and 16 of them, which represent 14.4% respectively either strongly agreed or agreed that “in assessment, learners are assisted to play their roles and to take responsibility for their own learning to improve

performance” whereas about 3 of the respondents which represent 2.7% disagreed to this statement. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.77 (Std=0.58). The conclusion is that kindergarten teachers understand that the use of informal assessment techniques on regular basis throughout the school year provides useful information that can help them to identify the individual strengths and weaknesses of each learner in the area of reading and writing — and most importantly, guide the next steps in instruction. The results also suggest that kindergarten teachers believe kindergarteners take responsibility for their learning to aid them to get much better ideas of what they are best at and what they need to improve on.

Moreover, the study reveals that 92.8% and 7.2% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed respectively that “Information from reading and writing assessment provides teachers with clear, comprehensive details on the child's current level of early reading and writing skills”. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.93 (Std=0.26). Finally, the analysis reveals that 92 of the respondents which represent 82.8% strongly agreed that “Information gained from reading and writing skills assessment allows teachers to know if learners are mastering the content covered” while 19 of them representing 17.1% agreed to this statement. This result in this statement being rated mostly by respondents as strongly agreed. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.83 (Std=0.38). The inference is that believed that assessment provides them with the information to determine the baseline performance and also track the progress of their learners to develop appropriate lessons and improve instruction for all learners.

Regarding the interview responses under the first research question, the following emerging themes were noted under which discussions were made on kindergarten teachers' views concerning reading and writing skills assessment.

Reading and writing skills assessment: Teacher perspectives

To find out more about kindergarten teachers' views on reading and writing skills assessment practices, teachers were asked during an interview session to share their views. In their accounts, the participants highlighted their perspectives on reading and writing skills assessment practices. For instance, one kindergarten teacher said:

The practices are things that teacher goes through to determine whether or not a child reads well or write legibly. When I determine that, I think I will be able to help my children to perform better when it comes to reading and writing at this level (TR2, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Another respondent reported that:

Actually, what I know about reading and writing skills is that it shows how active and how ready the kindergarten pupils or kids may be. Thus, it shows the readiness of the child to write and read, because when the child is not ready to read and write, the child will not even come close to whatever you want to do (TR3, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Similarly, one teacher further said:

My understanding is that, as an early childhood teacher, assessment of reading and writing will help the children to be fluent, when the child, can speak clearly, and the child also can be confident by talking to anyone without fear. And the writing aspect too, when the child writes well, the child's handwriting becomes very clear and when the teacher wants to mark the child's work, the student will be happy, and the teacher will also mark it well. This important activity helps me to know my learners so I can help them if there are challenges (TR1, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Another teacher shared her views by saying:

Reading skill is where the child can recognize ten or more letters of the alphabet, know some sounds of the letters and which helps to recognize their names and that of friends, and writing skills have to do with the concept of print awareness, thus, learners being able to write the letters they have learned, handling of pencils and where to begin the writing from (TR7, Interviewed Data, 2021).

The analysis of the data obtained suggests that views of kindergarten teachers on reading and writing skills assessment practice are positive. The results lend ample support to the work of Turupcu (2014) who concluded that teachers have positive views on assessment, and they express many advantages of it. Specifically, the findings revealed that kindergarten teachers believe their perspective on reading and writing skills assessment affect learning outcome as put forward by McAfee, Leong & Bodrova, 2004).

In similar evidence, it was established that kindergarten teachers believe information from reading and writing assessment provides them with clear, comprehensive details on the child's current level of early reading and writing skills. With the data gathered, teachers create action programmes that are tailored to the needs of the individual and include a targeted approach to enhance specific skills (Wren, 2004).

More so, the finding showed that teachers sided with the sustained clamour for the use of informal assessment methods in assessing young children reading and writing skills. This finding is consistent with Horton and Bowman, (2002) who conducted a study conducted a survey in Chicago to provide practical information on the current state of expert opinion and public practice with regard to the assessment of prekindergarten children. Horton and Bowman, (2002) established those informal methods are preferred and should be used to assess young children.

Analysis of teachers' views on the purpose of reading and writing assessment revealed that teachers believe assessment information is used to make instructional decisions. The finding of this present study substantiates earlier findings that the purpose of reading and skills assessment is to gather information to make informed instructional decisions as argued by Jablon, Dombro and Ditchelmiller (2007).

4.3 Research Question Two: What assessment tools do kindergarten teachers use for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District?

Assessment tools teachers use in assessing learners is one of the critical issues in assessment practice. However, in the Bosomtwe District, there is no study to provide evidence in the Ghanaian context. This informed the researcher to conduct the study within the Bosomtwe District. To answer the question, items 14 – 29 under section 'B' of the questionnaire and questions under section 'B' of the interview guide were used. Data in Table 3 present the results followed by interview results.



Table 4.3: Assessment tool teachers use in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean/Std.
I solely employ teacher-made paper and pencil tests in assessing Kindergarteners' reading and writing skills.	24 (21.6)	86 (77.5)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	3.21/0.43
I use observation as a tool in assessing reading and writing skills.	53 (47.7)	58 (52.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.48/0.50
I believe observation is the most direct tool for collecting detailed information on kindergarteners reading and writing skills.	57 (51.4)	53 (47.7)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	3.50/0.52
I use anecdotal record as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	48(43.2)	62(55.8)	1.45/0.51
Anecdotal records are brief notes grounded in the close observations of children.	53 (47.7)	54 (48.6)	2 (1.8)	2 (1.8)	3.42/0.63
Anecdotal records provide a detailed overview and appropriate information to guide future teaching strategies	54 (48.6)	52 (46.8)	5 (4.5)	0 (0.0)	3.44/0.58
I use running record as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	53(47.7)	57(51.4)	1.50/0.52
Running Record provides an insight into a learner's reading as it is happening	53 (47.7)	54 (48.6)	3 (2.7)	1 (0.9)	3.43/0.60
When using running record, I pay attention to the following errors: omissions, insertions, substitutions, reversals, repetitions, hesitations, self-corrections, and teacher-supplied words.	3 (2.7)	2 (1.8)	51(45.9)	55(49.5)	1.58/0.67
I use checklist as a tool in assessing reading and writing skills.	44 (39.6)	53 (47.7)	11 (9.9)	3 (2.7)	3.24/0.74
I use building portfolios on the learning outcomes of pupils.	12 (10.8)	7 (6.3)	43(38.7)	49(44.1)	1.84/0.96
Each item in the portfolio is selected because it is an authentic representation of learners' acquired knowledge and skills.	11 (9.9)	6 (5.4)	43(38.7)	51(45.9)	1.79/0.94
I assess learners reading and writing skills using conferences.	1 (0.9)	3 (2.7)	49(44.1)	58(52.3)	1.52/0.61
To make conferencing effective, I usually have a goal in mind.	2 (1.8)	2 (1.8)	50(45.0)	57(51.4)	1.54/0.63
I use rating scale as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills.	1 (0.9)	3 (2.7)	49(44.1)	58(52.3)	1.52/0.60
I use cloze assessment as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills.	2 (1.8)	3 (2.7)	67(60.4)	39(35.1)	1.71/0.61

NB: SA=Strongly agreed; A=Agreed; SD=Strongly disagreed; D=Disagreed; Std=Standard deviation

Table 4.3 displays the responses to a series of statements regarding the various assessment tools used by kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills using a Likert scale which ranges from 1 being strongly disagreed (SD); 2 being disagreed (D); 3 being agreed (A) and 4 being strongly agreed (SA). The results reveal that about 24 of the respondents which represent 21.6% and 86 of them representing 77.5% respectively either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that "I solely employ teacher-made paper and pencil tests in assessing Kindergarteners' reading and writing skills", while only 1 of the respondents which represent 0.9% disagreed to this statement. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.21 (Std=0.43). This rating, therefore, suggests that the statement "I solely employ teacher-made paper and pencil tests in assessing Kindergarteners' reading and writing skills" was mostly rated by respondents as agreed. Also, the result reveals that 53 of the respondents which represent 47.7% and 58 of them representing 52.3% either strongly agreed or agreed respectively to the statement that "I use observation as a tool in assessing reading and writing skills". The statement recorded a mean value of 3.48 (Std=0.52). This implies kindergarten teachers employed teacher made paper-and-pencil tests and observation as tools in their reading and writing skills assessment practices.

Similarly, the analysis reveals that 57 of the respondents which represent 51.4% and 53 of them representing 47.7% respectively either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that "I believe observation is the most direct tool for collecting detailed information on kindergarteners reading and writing skills", however, only 1 of them which represent 0.9% disagreed to this statement. This, therefore, results in the most response to this statement being strongly agreed. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.50 (Std=0.52). The inference is that kindergarten teachers regarded observation as

an effective tool for gathering comprehensive information on learners reading and writing skills. This informed them to employ observation in their assessment practices.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that only 0.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement “I use anecdotal record as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills” whereas, 43.2% and 55.8% of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “I use anecdotal record as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills”. This, therefore, results in the most response to this statement being strongly disagreed. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.45 (Std=0.51) Similarly, the analysis reveals that 47.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that “anecdotal records are brief notes grounded in the close observations of children”, whereas 48.6% of them agreed to this statement. However, it could be observed that 1.8% of them disagreed that “anecdotal records are brief notes grounded in the close observations of children” and the rest 1.8% of them also strongly disagreed with this statement. This result thus suggests that most respondents rated this statement as agreed. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.42 (Std=0.63). moreover, the analysis revealed that 48.6% of the respondents rated the statement “anecdotal records provide a detailed overview and appropriate information to guide future teaching strategies” as strongly agree while 46.8% of them rated it as agreed, however, the result shows that about 4.5% of the respondents disagreed to this particular statement. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.44 (Std=0.58). This implies that kindergarten teachers have some level of knowledge on anecdotal record but do not use it in assessing their learners' reading and writing skills. It can further be deduced that the teachers do not use this tool because of some challenges may have with it.

In addition, the result reveals that only 0.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement that “I use running record as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills”, however, about 47.7% of the respondents disagreed with this statement and the majority of about 51.4% of them also strongly disagreed to the statement that “I use running record as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills”. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.50 (Std=0.52). Also, it could be seen in Table 4.3 that 47.7% and 48.6% of the respondents respectively either strongly agreed or agreed that “running record provides an insight into a learner’s reading as it is happening”, however, 2.7% and 0.9% of them respectively either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement that “running record provides an insight into a learner’s reading as it is happening”. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.43 (Std=0.60). Besides, the analysis shows that only a few of the respondents, thus, 2.7% and 1.8% of them either strongly agreed or agreed respectively to the statement that “when using running record, I pay attention to the following errors: omissions, insertions, substitutions, reversals, repetitions, hesitations, self-corrections, and teacher-supplied words” whereas about 45.9% and 49.5% of the respondents respectively either disagreed or strongly disagreed to this particular statement. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.58 (Std=0.67). This implies that kindergarten teachers have some level of knowledge on running record but do not use it in assessing their learners' reading and writing skills. It can further be deduced that the teachers do not use this tool because of some challenges may have with it.

Again, the analysis reveals that 39.6% and 47.7% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that “I use checklist as a tool in assessing reading and writing skills”, however, 9.9% and 2.7% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed to this statement respectively. This result therefore thus indicates

that most of the respondents rated this statement as agreed. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.24 (Std=0.74). The conclusion is that kindergarten teachers employ a checklist is assessing learners reading and writing skills.

It could further be observed from Table 4.3 that few of the respondents resulting in about 10.8% and 6.3% respectively either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement “I use building portfolios on the learning outcomes of pupils”, however, about 38.7% and 44.1% of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement that “I use building portfolios on the learning outcomes of pupils”. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.84 (Std=0.96). The data in Table 4.3 also shows that 9.9% and 5.4% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed respectively to the statement that “each item in the portfolio is selected because it is an authentic representation of learners' acquired knowledge and skills”. However, it could be seen that 38.7% and 45.9% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement in this regard. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.79 (Std=0.94). This means that ‘building portfolio’ is found not to be an assessment tool used by kindergarten teachers in assessing learners reading and writing skills.

Similarly, the analysis reveals that only 1 of the respondents which represent 0.9% and 2 of them representing 1.8% respectively either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that “I assess learners reading and writing skills using conferences”, however, about 49 of them which represent 44.1% and 58 of them which represent 52.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed to this statement respectively. This, therefore, results in the most response to this statement being strongly disagreed. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.52 (Std=0.61) Furthermore, the result that only 1.8% of the respondents and another 1.8% of them either strongly agreed or agreed to the

statement that “to make conferencing effective, I usually have a goal in mind” respectively whereas, about 45% and 51.4% of them either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement that “to make conferencing effective, I usually have a goal in mind”. This, therefore, results in the most response to this statement being strongly disagreed. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.54 (Std=0.63). The conclusion is that kindergarten teachers do not employ ‘conferencing’ in their assessment practices in respect to reading and writing skills assessment.

The data again reveals that 0.9% and 2.7% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed respectively to the statement that “I use rating scale as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills”, whereas, about 44.1% and 52.3% of them respectively either disagreed or strongly disagreed to this statement. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.52 (Std=0.60). The inference is that kindergarten teachers do not use a rating scale in assessing Kindergarteners' reading and writing skills.

Finally, the result reveals that about 1.8% of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement “I use cloze assessment as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills”, while about 2.7% of them agreed to it. However, it could be observed that 60.4% of the respondents disagreed and 35.1% of them strongly disagreed with the statement “I use cloze assessment as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills”. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.71 (Std=0.61). This means that kindergarten teachers do not use cloze assessment in their assessment practices concerning reading and writing skills assessment.

Regarding the interview responses under the second research question, the following emerging themes were noted under which discussions were made on assessment tools teachers use in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills.

Reading and writing: Assessment tools teachers employ

To validate the quantitative results, the selected teachers were to share their views on the tools they use in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills. These results from the interviews were in line with what was produced in the quantitative analysis. For instance, one kindergarten teacher said:

For us, we don't employ checklist as a tool in assessing reading and writing. Most of the time, we use observation. At our place, we use the observation because we observe the child, and we just mark it as the child is doing it. Because you can call a child and ask them anything as a way of assessing them, but the child is unable to respond. However, some of the child do their own work, but when you call the child and you are talking to the child, sometimes are afraid or fear to talk to you. But when you check the child is playing and talking to their friend. And things that the teacher will be doing in the class, you will see the child to be doing it with their friends. So, we use the observation more (TR1, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Similarly, one teacher further stated that:

We use tools such as paper-and-pencil, observation, and checklist for assessing learners reading and writing skills. I will say we mostly use paper-and-pencil works to assess the reading and writing skills because with that almost every lesson, right after we finish with every lesson, I want to give a test to know those who got it right and those who got is wrongly (TR2, Interviewed Data, 2021).

The results from the current study lend support to evidence in the literature. Dunphy (2010) notes that there are varied tools that kindergarten teachers can use to assess kindergarten learners' reading and writing skills. Dunphy (2010) pointed out that observation, running records, anecdotal records, checklist, portfolios, conferences, rating scale, cloze assessment, are some of the tools used by kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills.

The results of the study revealed that kindergarten teachers use paper-and-pencil tests in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills. This finding is in agreement with Asare (2015); and Anane and Anhwere (2013) who reported that kindergarten teachers solely employ the use of teacher-made paper and pencil tests in their

assessment drive in the classroom. They further reported that the paper-and-pencil test is a norm in Ghana and from time to time some kindergarten centres go to the extent of purchasing commercially prepared questions for young children between the ages of 3 and 8.

Additionally, observation and checklist emerged as tools used by kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills. It was found that the majority of the kindergarten teachers agreed to the use of observation and checklist as tools for obtaining information about kindergarteners reading and writing skills. This response is in line with Martin (2018) who surmised that checklists are easy to use and are especially helpful when many different items need to be observed.

Even so, the findings revealed that kindergarten teachers do not use anecdotal records, running records, portfolio, conferences, rating scale and cloze assessment in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills. The implication for this situation is that the teachers are rather not following recommended best practices governing assessment in kindergarten which is in line with developmentally appropriate practices.

4.4 Research Question Three: Which aspects of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills are assessed by kindergarten teachers in Bosomtwe District?

This question sought to find out the aspects of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills assessed by kindergarten teachers. To answer the question, items 30 – 41 under section 'B' of the questionnaire and questions under section 'C' of the interview guide were used. Data in Table 4 present the results followed by interview results.

Table 4.4: Aspects of reading and writing skills assessed

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD(%)	Mean/Std.
I assess oral language skills of learners	80 (72.1)	30 (27.0)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	3.71/0.48
I assess learners' skills in alphabetic principle	73 (65.8)	38 (34.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.66/0.48
I assess learners' skills in concept of letters and words	90 (81.1)	21 (18.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.81/0.39
I assess learners' directionality skills	78 (70.3)	32(28.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	3.68/0.52
I assess learners' skills on orientation of books	79 (71.2)	31 (27.9)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	3.69/0.52
I assess learners' knowledge in vocabulary	88 (79.3)	23 (20.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.79/0.41
I assess learners' alphabet knowledge	85 (76.6)	26 (23.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.77/0.43
I assess learners' knowledge in phonemic awareness	82 (73.9)	29 (26.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.74/0.44
I assess learners' phonics knowledge	88 (79.3)	23 (20.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.79/0.41
I assess learners' reading fluency	80 (72.1)	31 (27.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.72/0.45
I assess the handwriting legibility of learners	84 (75.7)	27 (24.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.76/0.43
I assess learners' comprehension skills	93 (83.8)	18 (16.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.84/0.37

NB: SA=Strongly agreed; A=Agreed; SD=Strongly disagreed; D=Disagreed; Std=Standard deviation

Table 4.4 displays the responses ratings to a series of statements that relates to the aspects of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills that are assessed by kindergarten teachers using a Likert scale which ranges from 1 being strongly disagreed (SD) to 4 being strongly agreed (SA). Result reveals that 80 of the respondents which represent 72.1% strongly agreed with the statement "I assess oral language skills of learners", whereas 30 of them which represent 27% agreed to this statement, however, the analysis further shows that 1 of the respondents which represent 0.9% disagreed to "I assess oral language skills of learners" as an aspect of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.71 (Std=0.48). This implies that kindergarten teachers assess oral language skills of kindergarteners.

Also, it could be observed that 73 of the respondents which represent 65.8% strongly agreed to the statement “I assess learners’ skills in alphabetic principle”, while 38 of them which represent 34.2% agreed to it as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that 90 of the respondents which represent 81.1% strongly agreed with the statement “I assess learners’ skills in the concept of letters and words” as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers, while 21 of them accounting for 18.9% also agreed to this statement as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.66 (Std=0.48). This means that kindergarteners’ skills in the concept of letters and words are assessed by kindergarten teachers.

Similarly, the result reveals that about 78 respondents which represent 70.3% strongly agreed with the statement “I assess learners’ directionality skills”, while 32 of them which represent 28.8% agreed to it as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. However, it could be seen that 1 of the respondents which represent 0.9% strongly disagreed with “I assess learners’ directionality skills” as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.68 (Std=0.52). Additionally, the analysis reveals that 71.2% and 27.9% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement “I assess learners’ skills on orientation of books” respectively as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers, however, 1 of the respondents which accounted for 0.9% strongly disagreed to this statement. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.69 (Std=0.52). The inference is that kindergarten teachers assess kindergarteners’ directionality skills and skills on orientation of books.

Furthermore, the data in Table 4.4 shows that 79.3% and 20.7% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed respectively to the statement “I assess learners’ knowledge in vocabulary” as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.79 (Std=0.41) Besides, it could be observed that 85 of the respondents which represent 76.6% strongly agreed to the statement “I assess learners’ alphabet knowledge”, whereas 26 of them which represented 23.4% agreed to this statement as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.74 (Std=0.44). The conclusion is that kindergarten teachers assess Kindergarteners' knowledge in vocabulary, as well as their alphabet knowledge.

In addition, the analysis revealed that 73.9% of the respondents rated the statement “I assess learners’ knowledge in phonemic awareness” as strongly agreed while 26.1% of them rated this same statement as agreed. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.74 (Std=0.44) Moreover, the result reveals that 79.3% and 20.7% of the respondents either respectively strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “I assess learners’ phonics knowledge” as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.71 (Std=0.48). This implies that kindergarteners’ teachers assess learners’ knowledge in phonemic awareness and phonic knowledge.

Also, the result in Table 4.4 shows that 80 respondents representing 72.1% and 31 of them, representing 27.9% either strongly agreed or agreed respectively to the statement “I assess learners’ reading fluency” as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. The statement obtained a

mean value of 3.72 (Std=0.45) The data again reveals that 75.7% and 24.3% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed respectively to the statement that “I assess the handwriting legibility of learners” as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.76 (Std=0.43) And finally, the result reveals that 83.8% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement “I assess learners’ comprehension skills” as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers, while 16.2% of them agreed to this same statement as an aspect of kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills that are normally assessed by teachers. The statement obtained a mean value of 3.84 (Std=0.37). the conclusion is that kindergarten teachers assess learners' reading fluency, handwriting legibility and comprehension skills.

Regarding the interview responses under the third research question, the following emerging themes were noted under which discussions were made on aspects of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills assessed by teachers.

Reading and writing skills: Aspect teachers assess

To complement the results, interviews were conducted to ascertain the qualitative view of the teachers. The accrued results of the interviews suggest that most of the trained kindergarten teachers in the Bosomtwe District assess most important aspects of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills. One of the teachers had this to share;

For me, there is no exception to these skills that I do not assess, the various aspect of reading and writing skills are all assessed. For example, we normally assessed are learners’ oral language skills, their phonemics awareness, reading fluency, and their handwriting legibility etc. (TRI, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Similarly, one teacher further said:

There are no other subskills that we do not assess. We assess oral language skills, pupils' alphabetic principles, their phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge, reading fluency, handwriting legibility of learners and others (TR2, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Correspondingly, TR4 said:

We assess kindergarteners' oral language skills, and their phonemic awareness, their phonics knowledge, reading fluency, and their handwriting legibility (TR4, Interviewed Data, 2021).

The results from Table 4.4 suggest that kindergarten teachers assess the oral language skills of learners. The teachers agreed to assess kindergarteners' oral language skills. Some teachers pointed out the relevance of assessing the oral language skills of kindergarteners. Benner, Nelson and Epstein (2002) offer evidence to support the fact that oral language skill is useful and its importance to learners' success cannot be overstated. The authors mentioned that oral language skill lend itself to understanding the meaning of and use of appropriate words, and to group them into phrases and sentences following standard organisational rules (grammar) that communicate a message that others can understand.

Besides, oral language skills, skills in the concept of letters and words emerged as an aspect of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills assessed by teachers. The finding corresponds with Strickland and Schickedanz, (2004). According to Strickland and Schickedanz (2004), Print experiences within the kindergarten classroom can be planned by addressing the materials provided, the exposure and uses, and the interactions that occur between adults and children. They further commented that children must have many opportunities to experience the varied and meaningful uses of print by fostering awareness of print by sharing information, such as looking at the day's schedule, the alphabet, or reading the daily menu.

Furthermore, directionality, book orientation, alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary handwriting legibility and comprehensions skills came out as aspects of reading and writing skills of kindergarteners assessed by teachers. Inferring from the results presented in Table 4.4, and excerpts from the interview, it can be concluded that kindergarten teachers assess the various aspects of reading and writing skills of kindergartners.



4.5 Research Question Four: What challenges do kindergarten teachers in the Bosomtwe District face in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills?

This section identifies the various challenges kindergarten teachers in the Bosomtwe District encounter in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills. To answer the question, items 42 – 49 under section 'B' of the questionnaire and questions under section 'D' of the interview guide were used. Data in Table 4.5 presents the results followed by interview results.

Table 4.5: Challenges encountered in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean/Std.
There are inadequate assessment standards	56 (50.5)	55 (49.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.50/0.50
National examination conducted by West African Examination Counsel influence me to align my curriculum and assessment practices with a specific focus of the tests that are nationally conducted	76 (68.5)	35 (31.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3.68/0.47
I perceive Kindergarteners as good test-takers and I make no effort to adapt other tools to assess learners reading and writing skills	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	5 (45.0)	60 (54.1)	1.47/0.52
I do not have adequate knowledge of tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills	6 (5.4)	8 (7.2)	52 (46.8)	45 (40.5)	1.77/0.81
I have adequate knowledge of tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills	53 (47.7)	49 (44.1)	5 (4.5)	4 (3.6)	3.36/0.74
I am deficient in aligning curriculum with reading and writing assessment tools	96 (86.5)	13 (11.7)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	3.83/0.50
I have adequate time to assess learners reading and writing skills	1 (0.9)	2 (1.8)	55 (49.5)	53 (47.7)	1.56/0.58
I do not have adequate time to assess learners reading and writing skills	56 (50.5)	54 (48.6)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	3.50/0.52

NB: SA=Strongly agreed; A=Agreed; SD=Strongly disagreed; D=Disagreed; Std=Standard deviation

The result shows that 56 of the respondents which represent 50.5% strongly agreed that the statement “there are inadequate assessment standards” is a challenge kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills, whereas 55 of them which represent 49.5% also rated this challenge statement as agreed. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.68 (Std=0.47). Also, it could be observed that 76 respondents, representing 68.5% strongly agreed to the statement “National examination conducted by West African Examination Counsel influence me to align my curriculum and assessment practices with a specific focus of the tests that are nationally conducted” as a challenge kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills, whereas 35 of them which represent 31.5% also rated this challenge statement as agreed. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.50 (Std=0.50). The conclusion is that kindergarten teachers believe that there are inadequate assessment standards and it poses a challenge.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that only 1 respondent which represents 0.9% rated the statement “I perceive Kindergarteners as good test-takers and I make no effort to adapt other tools to assess learners reading and writing skills” as a challenge kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills, however, 50 of the respondents which represent 45% and 60 of them which represent 54.1% either disagreed or strongly disagreed to this statement as a challenge. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.47 (Std=0.52). The inference is that kindergarten teachers do not consider kindergarteners as good test-takers but make do adapt other appropriate tools to assess learners reading and writing skills.

Similarly, the result shows that 5.4% and 7.2% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement “I do not have adequate knowledge of tools for assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills” as a challenge kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills, however, it could also be observed that about 46.8% and 40.5% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed respectively to this statement as a challenge teachers encounter. The statement generated a mean value of 1.77 (Std=0.81). The data in Table 4.5 again shows that 47.7% and 44.1% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to “I have adequate knowledge of tools for assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills” as a challenge kindergarten teachers encountered in assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills, however, the study shows that 4.5% and 3.6% of the respondents also either disagreed or strongly disagreed to this statement as a challenge. The statement scored a mean value of 3.36 (Std=0.74). This suggests that kindergarten teachers have a fair knowledge of tools for assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills.

Additionally, the analysis reveals that 86.5% and 11.7% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed respectively to the statement “I am deficient in aligning curriculum with reading and writing assessment tools” as a challenge kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills, however, about 1.8% of them strongly disagreed to this statement as a challenge kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills. The statement scored a mean value of 3.83 (Std=0.50). This could imply that kindergarten teachers have a fair knowledge of assessment tools but do not know how to use them in their assessment practices.

Besides, it could be seen from Table 4.8 that few respondents of about 0.9% and 1.8% either strongly agreed or agreed respectively to the statement “I have adequate time to assess learners reading and writing skills” as a challenge kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills, however, majority of 49.5% and 47.7% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed to this statement as a challenge kindergarten teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills. The statement obtained a mean value of 1.56 (Std=0.58). And finally, the analysis reveals that the statement “I do not have adequate time to assess learners reading and writing skills” was either rated as strongly agreed or agreed by 50.5% and 48.6% of respondents respectively, however, 0.9% of them rated this statement as disagreed. The statement scored a mean value of 3.50 (Std=0.52). This implies that kindergarten teachers do not understand that assessment is embedded in instructional hours and do make time to adopt the appropriate tools to assess the learners reading and writing skills.

Consequently, to confirm results, the researcher interviewed some respondents and their responses highlighted various challenges that are encountered because of assessing the kindergarteners’ reading and writing skills. Inadequate assessment standards, teacher deficiency in aligning curriculum with assessment tools, inadequacy of time, and large class size emerged as themes under which discussions were made.

Inadequate assessment standard

To support the figures, kindergarten teachers expressed their views on assessment standards for kindergarten. The teachers stated their views in many ways. following excerpts are some typical responses. One teacher expressed that:

It is true that there are inadequate assessment standards and it possess a challenge to kindergarteners' reading and writing skills assessment. We all do what we are comfortable with.....I can't strain myself to use tools that and not comfortable with (TR1, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Another teacher added:

I do believe people claim that there are inadequate assessment standards in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills. the standards on instruction are ok but I don't see those on assessment. So, I use what I know best (TR4, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Teacher deficiency in aligning curriculum with assessment tools

The majority of the teachers interviewed in the various schools expressed the fact that they had some level of difficulty in aligning curriculum is the assessment tools used in assessing learners reading and writing skills. for instance, one teacher stated:

I think kindergarten teachers have knowledge on meaning of the tools that are used for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills but do not know how to use them and as a result pose as a challenge. Me in particular, I know the tools we have talked about but I don't know how to use them so I won't use them. The paper-and-pencil is simple (TR3, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Similarly, one teacher said:

When you ask me what the tools are, I can tell you but I don't know the procedures to follow to use them so it is very difficult to use them to assess the children reading and writing skills (TR9, Interviewed Data, 2021).

One respondent also said:

It is true that teachers do not have adequate knowledge of tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills and as a result pose as a challenge. This is because some of the tools, I do not know much about them so how can I even use them (TR6, Interviewed Data, 2021).

The response varied from the quantitative results that revealed that kindergarten teachers have knowledge of the assessment tools.

Inadequacy of time to adapt other relevant tools

Kindergarten teachers interviewed expressed their views that they have inadequate time to adapt other relevant and appropriate tools in assessing their learners' reading and writing skills. A teacher stated:

I think there is inadequate time to assess learners reading and writing skills. This because, we will need ample time, for instance with the observation like this or the running record. I don't use them often because there is very little time on the timetable, you are supposed to use it as well as assess. And so, what time am I going to use to prepare these and be checking them, recording the events or observed them. So that is why after the lesson I give them a homework or exercise that they will do after the lesson. But in between the lesson, I can't risk that time to assess because if I do that, I can't complete my days' work (TR10, Interviewed Data, 2021).

In furtherance to the inadequacy of time, one of the teachers pointed out that:

Another challenge in my view is the inadequacy of time. I think this due to the fact that you will have to teach all the time and the assessment book will not be given to you every day, that when the child is doing something then you mark it. You wait for a week for vacation before they will give you the assessment book for you to assess the children, meanwhile the assessment book is supposed to be with you while the children are doing every then you be marking it. So, the time for teaching and assessment becomes a problem (TR3, Interviewed Data, 2021).

Large class size

The teachers expressed the view that large class size is a challenge they face when assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills. A teacher stated:

The number of pupils in the class are too many, I have 56 pupils in my class and it is somewhat impossible for me to use of the tools we are talking about here. In order to use those tools very well, I need very small class size of about 10 to 15 pupils.

The results from Table 4.5 suggest that kindergarten teachers are confronted with some level of challenges that inhibit the assessment process. The teachers agreed to the assertion that there are inadequate assessment standards. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Anane and Anhwere (2013) who indicated that most reforms

in Ghana lacked standards, even though, more often than not, policymakers and stakeholders in education talk of ‘falling’ standards. NEGP (1998) posited that for assessment results to be meaningful and useful, they must be linked to clear development or knowledge continua, with benchmarks along the way to illustrate what progress looks like. On the whole, teachers and early childhood programmes cannot develop standards on their own and it appears the central government is not ready for such an undertaking, the results of which caregivers, teachers and school proprietors are running their programmes as and when it suits them.

The findings of the study also revealed that teachers have a deficiency in aligning curriculum with reading and writing assessment tools. This finding is in agreement with Anane and Anwhere (2013) who stated that kindergarten educators do not have the necessary competence in aligning curriculum with assessment tools to achieve the national goals.

Additionally, the findings of the study revealed that most kindergarten teachers have large class sizes and it poses a challenge to their assessment practices.

Moreso, the findings of the study revealed that teachers do not have adequate time to assess learners’ reading and writing skills. The finding is consistent with Martin (2018) who conducted a study on teachers’ assessment practices on early childhood learning in Sefwi-Wiawso Municipality. Martin (2018) found that it takes time to properly administer an assessment to young learners and that teachers do not have adequate time in assessing learners. While early childhood educators seek developmentally appropriate assessments for their learners, they constantly complain about the time it takes to administer them and the resulting loss of instructional time in the classroom. However, when quality assessment mirror quality instruction,

assessment, and teaching become almost seamless, complementing and informing one another (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2000).



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

This chapter deals with a summary of the findings of the study. Conclusions are drawn based on the findings and recommendations made based on the objectives.

5.1 Summary of Main Findings

Between the ages of zero and eight, the brain grows more than every other moment. At this stage, if children are not stimulated, if they are not read to; if they are not engaged in writing activities; if they are not asked questions, their brains weaken, thus inhibiting certain skills' acquisition and growth. It is therefore important to encourage reading and writing in this early stage of existence. But to aid learners to acquire reading and writing skills, there is the need to establish a baseline, and this calls for assessment. Assessment can be seen as an umbrella term that includes the use of various strategies to determine the extent to which learners are achieving the predetermined learning objectives and outcomes of a lesson.

Assessment process gathers and discuss information from multiple and diverse sources to develop a deep understanding of what learners know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning. This implies that assessment is very vital and critical in the formative years. This made the researcher to investigate assessment practices of kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills within the Bosomtwe District. Specifically, the study was to ascertain kindergarten teachers' views on reading and writing skills assessment practices in the Bosomtwe District; identify assessment tools used by

kindergarten teachers in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills in the Bosomtwe District; find out aspects of kindergartners' reading and writing skills that are assessed by kindergarten teachers in Bosomtwe District, and finally the challenges kindergarten teachers in the Bosomtwe District encounter in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills. To achieve this purpose, the mixed-method approach or the pragmatist paradigm was adopted for this study while explanatory sequential mixed method design was used as a research design.

The study's target population was made up of 139 Kindergarten centres with 170 trained and 291 untrained early childhood teachers. Consequently, the study using a simple random sampling technique selected a sample of 119 trained kindergarten teachers. Results from the opinions of respondents based on the responses from a closed-ended questionnaire and interview guide which was developed based on relevant literature were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. In particular, the quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 21 while the qualitative data was thematically analysed.

5.2 Key Findings

Results from the study revealed that views leading to findings of this research are about 11.7% of the time from males and 88.3% of the time from females, thus, implying that views leading to the conclusion in this study could be attributed to female kindergarten teachers within the Bosomtwe District of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Also, results showed that all sampled teachers majored in early childhood. Furthermore, results reveal that majority of the respondents were principal superintendents in Ghana Education Services (GES) ranks. In addition, the majority of the sampled respondents have been in service as kindergarten teachers.

1. Concerning respondents' views on reading and writing skills assessment practices, results show that majority of the respondents were unanimous in presenting their perceptions regarding the assessment of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills. The most significant views presented as to how they viewed reading and writing skills assessment practices was first related to the fact that "information derived from reading and writing assessment provides teachers with clear, comprehensive details on the child's current level of early reading and writing skills". Besides, their views suggested their preference for "informal assessment techniques as compared with formal assessment techniques concerning reading and writing skills assessment of Kindergarteners". Additionally, the teachers are of the view that assessing children's early reading and writing skills form an integral component of a robust early childhood programme. Inferring from the study, it can be established that kindergarten teachers in Bosomtwe hold a positive view on assessment practices concerning reading and writing skills for kindergarteners.
2. Results in relation to the assessment tools used by teachers in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills, showed that the sampled teachers most frequently employ "teacher-made paper and pencil tests", "observation", and "checklist" in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills. Nonetheless, the results show that most teachers do not use "anecdotal records", "running records" and "portfolio" "rating scale" and "cloze assessment" in assessing Kindergarteners' reading and writing skills.
3. With regards to the aspects of Kindergarteners' reading and writing skills that are assessed by teachers, the result indicates that almost every aspect of the kindergartener's reading and writing skills are usually assessed by teachers. In

particular, results showed that aspects such as oral language skills, pupils' alphabetic principles, phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge, reading fluency and the handwriting legibility of learners are usually assessed by teachers. However, these aspects are mostly measured not using the appropriate assessment tools used in assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills.

4. In examining the challenges teachers encounter in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills, results of the analysis generally reveal that teachers although teachers possess some level of knowledge on the tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills, they are faced with inadequate assessment standards; large class size poses a challenge, and there is inadequate adequate time to assess learners reading and writing skills. Besides, teachers are deficient in aligning curriculum with reading and writing assessment tools.

5.3 Conclusions of the Study

Conclusively, the study finds that the majority of teachers within the Bosomtwe District view reading and writing skills assessment practices as a means through which teachers assess their learner's willingness and ability to read and write contents that are appropriate for their level. As a result, they have the chance to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to deliberate on how to develop abilities that are lacking.

Additionally, the study concludes that “observation”, “checklist” and “teacher-made paper and pencil tests” are the tools used mostly by kindergarten teachers within the Bosomtwe District to assess kindergarteners' reading and writing skills. Besides, it could also be concluded that the best assessment tools for kindergarten teachers is a continuous process of observation, running record, rating scale, conferences,

anecdotal records, and since young children demonstrate their understanding by doing, showing, and telling.

Additionally, the study concludes that almost every aspect of the kindergartener's reading and writing skills that are ought to be assessed are usually assessed by teachers. In particular, results showed that aspects such as oral language skills, pupils' alphabetic principles, phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge, reading fluency and the handwriting legibility of learners are usually assessed by teachers. .

Finally, the study established that various challenges that are faced with kindergartener's reading and writing skills assessment practices. Notably, are inadequate time, inadequate assessment standards; and large class size.

5.4 Recommendation of the Study

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of the study;

1. To ensure that assessment reflects learners' progress and understanding, the study recommends that GES and school managements should consider motivating kindergarten teachers to hold on to the positive views about kindergarteners' reading and writing skills assessment. Specific motivational packages in form of funding for refresher courses, study leave should be instituted for such teachers to frequently update their knowledge on reading and writing skills assessment.
2. Also, the study recommends that workshops be organised for kindergarten teachers on the need for teachers to employ assessment tools that are in line with the current school curriculum and classroom practices. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to assess children's progress in reading and writing by using the recommended and appropriate assessment tools.

3. Again, the study recommended there is a need for teachers to align aspects of kindergarteners' reading and writing skills that are critical to their improvement in reading and writing skills by adopting the right assessment tools.
4. Finally, since there is inadequate time and assessment standards, it is recommended that National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) of Ghana organise workshops on the defined assessment tools used in assessing kindergarteners. Moreover, there is a need for stakeholders to organize adequate training on assessment standards and the need for teachers to follow these standards.



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Introductory Letter

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FES/DECE/S.6 June 22, 2021

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Ghana Education Service
P.O. Box 6,
Bosomtwe
Ashanti Region

Dear Sir/Madam

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

I write to introduce to you Mr. Seth Badu with index number 200025235 who is an M.Phil student in the above department. He was admitted in 2018/2019 academic year and has successfully completed his course work and is to embark on his thesis on the topic: *“Practices of Kindergarten Teachers in Assessing Kindergarteners’ Reading and Writing Skills in the Bosomtwe District”*.

Mr. Seth Badu is to collect data for his thesis, and I would be most grateful if he could be given the needed assistance.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,


Yaya Dzakadzie, Ph. D
Ag. Head of Department

APPENDIX B

Introductory Letter from GES

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

BOSOMTWE

*In case of reply the
Number and date of this
Letter should be quoted*

Our Ref: GES/ASH/BD/PG.25/93

Your Ref



REPUBLIC OF GHANA

DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICE
P. O. BOX 6
KUNTANASE
ASHANTI-GHANA

DATE: 3RD AUGUST, 2021

MR. SETH BADU
DEPARTMENT OF EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
WINNEBA.

INTRODUCTION LETTER

I refer to your letter dated 22nd June, 2021 and wish to inform you that permission has been granted.

This is to enable Mr. Seth Badu embark on his thesis on the topic "Practices of Kindergarten Teachers in Assessing Kindergartens'. Reading and Writing Skills in the Bosomtwe District.

Headteachers/Masters are kindly requested to give him the necessary support.

Counting on your usual cooperation.


.....
AGYENIM BOATENG (MR)
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, HRMD
For: DISTRICT DIRECTOR

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire for Teachers

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

Dear Respondents,

I am Seth Badu, a Master of Philosophy candidate of the University of Education, Winneba researching on the topic “Practices of Kindergarten Teachers in Assessing Kindergartners’ Reading and Writing Skills in the Bosomtwe District of the Ashanti Region of Ghana”. I wish to request you to fill this questionnaire with frankness and objectivity to obtain important information for the research. Your contribution towards the completion of this questionnaire will be highly appreciated and the information provided will be used for academic purposes only and shall be treated with the utmost confidentiality it deserves.

Thank you.

Instruction: Please indicate your answer by ticking (✓) and writing where applicable.

PART I

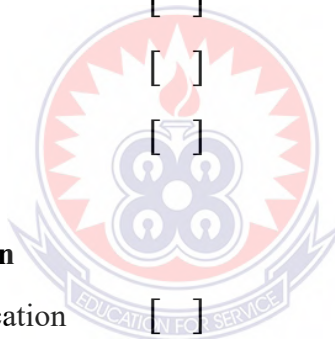
SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF RESPONDENTS

1. Sex

- a. Male []
- b. Female []

2. Age Range

- a. 20 and below []
- b. 21 – 30 []
- c. 31 – 40 []
- d. 41 – 50 []
- e. 51 – 60 []



3. Area of Specialisation

- a. Early Childhood Education []
- b. Basic Education []
- c. Other (specify).....

4. Highest Professional Qualification

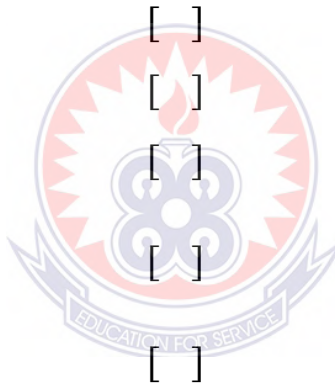
- a. Certificate in ECE []
- b. Diploma in ECE []
- c. Degree in ECE []
- d. Masters in ECE []
- e. Other (specify).....

5. Rank in the Ghana Education Service

- a. Superintendent I []
- b. Superintendent II []
- c. Senior Superintendent II []
- d. Senior Superintendent I []
- e. Principal Superintendent []
- f. Assistant Director II []
- g. Assistant Director I []
- h. Other (specify)

6. Number of Years in Service as Kindergarten Teacher

- a. 0 – 5 years []
- b. 6 – 10 years []
- c. 11 – 15 years []
- d. 16 – 20 years []
- e. 21 years and above []



PART II**DATA ON RESEARCH OBJECTIVES****SECTION A: Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Reading and Writing Skills Assessment Practices.**

The table below presents data on Kindergarten teachers' views on reading and writing skills of assessment practices. Read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by ticking (✓) 4=Strongly Disagree (SD), 3=Disagree (D), 2=Agree (A) and 1=Strongly Agree (SA)

S/N	Statement	SD	D	A	SA
		1	2	3	4
7	Teachers' perspective on reading and writing assessment affects learner's performance				
8	Assessing children's early reading and writing skills is an integral component of a robust early childhood programme.				
9	The key purpose of assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills is to gather information to make informed instructional decisions.				
10	Informal assessment techniques are preferred to formal assessment techniques concerning reading and writing skills assessment of Kindergarteners.				
11	In assessment, learners are assisted to play their roles and to take responsibility for their own learning to improve performance.				
12	Information from reading and writing assessment provides teachers with clear, comprehensive details on the child's current level of early reading and writing skills.				
13	Information gained from reading and writing skills assessment allows teachers to know if learners are mastering the content covered.				

SECTION B: Teachers' Assessment Tools for Assessing Kindergarteners'**Reading and Writing Skills**

The table below presents data on teachers' assessment tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills. Please read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by ticking (✓)
4=Strongly Disagree (SD), 3=Disagree (D), 2=Agree (A) and 1=Strongly Agree (SA)

S/N	Statement	SD 1	D 2	A 3	SA 4
14	I solely employ teacher-made paper and pencil tests in assessing Kindergarteners' reading and writing skills.				
15	I use observation as a tool in assessing reading and writing skills.				
16	I believe observation is the most direct tool for collecting detailed information on kindergarteners reading and writing skills.				
17	I use anecdotal record as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills				
18	Anecdotal records are brief notes grounded in the close observations of children.				
19	Anecdotal records provide a detailed overview and appropriate information to guide future teaching strategies				
20	I use running record as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills				
21	Running Record provides an insight into a learner's reading as it is happening				
22	When using running record, I pay attention to the following errors: omissions, insertions, substitutions, reversals, repetitions, hesitations, self-corrections, and teacher-supplied words.				
23	I use checklist as a tool in assessing reading and writing skills.				
24	I use building portfolios on the learning outcomes of pupils.				
25	Each item in the portfolio is selected because it is an authentic representation of learners' acquired knowledge				

	and skills.				
26	I assess learners reading and writing skills using conferences.				
27	To make conferencing effective, I usually have a goal in mind.				
28	I use rating scale as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills.				
29	I use cloze assessment as a tool in assessing learners reading and writing skills.				

SECTION C: Aspects of Kindergartners' Reading and Writing Skills Assessed by Kindergarten Teachers

The table below presents data on aspects of kindergartners' reading and writing skills assessed by kindergarten teachers. Please read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by ticking (✓) 4=Strongly Disagree (SD), 3=Disagree (D), 2=Agree (A) and 1=Strongly Agree (SA)

S/N	Statement	SD 1	D 2	A 3	SA 4
30	I assess oral language skills of learners				
31	I assess learners' skills in alphabetic principle				
32	I assess learners' skills in concept of letters and words				
33	I assess learners' directionality skills				
34	I assess learners' skills on orientation of books				
35	I assess learners' knowledge in vocabulary				
36	I assess learners' alphabet knowledge				
37	I assess learners' knowledge in phonemic awareness				
38	I assess learners' phonics knowledge				
39	I assess learners' reading fluency				
40	I assess the handwriting legibility of learners				
41	I assess learners' comprehension skills				

SECTION D: Kindergarten Teachers' Challenges in Assessing Kindergarteners' Reading and Writing Skills

The table below presents data on kindergarten teachers' challenges in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills. Please read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by ticking (✓)
4=Strongly Disagree (SD), 3=Disagree (D), 2=Agree (A) and 1=Strongly Agree (SA)

S/N	Statement	SD	D	A	SA
		1	2	3	4
42	There are inadequate assessment standards				
43	National examination conducted by West African Examination Counsel influence me to align my curriculum and assessment practices with a specific focus of the tests that are nationally conducted				
44	I perceive Kindergarteners as good test-takers and I make no effort to adapt other tools to assess learners reading and writing skills				
45	I do not have adequate knowledge of tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills				
46	I have adequate knowledge of tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills				
47	I am deficient in aligning curriculum with reading and writing assessment tools				
48	I have adequate time to assess learners reading and writing skills				
49	I do not have adequate time to assess learners reading and writing skills				

Thank You for Your Participation. I'm Very Grateful for Your Time

APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Teachers

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

RESEARCH ON PRACTICES OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN
ASSESSING KINDERGARTNERS' READING AND WRITING SKILLS IN
THE BOSOMTWE DISTRICT OF THE ASHANTI REGION OF GHANA
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

Name of Interviewee (Pseudonym):

Interview Date:/...../.....

Duration:

Time:

SECTION A: Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Reading and Writing Skills Assessment Practices.

1. How do you understand reading and writing skills assessment practices?

Prompts:

- a. Does assessment form an integral component of a robust early childhood programme?
- b. What is the purpose of assessing kindergarteners reading and writing skills?
- c. How well do appreciate informal assessment techniques?
- d. What is the importance of reading and writing skills assessment?

SECTION B: Teachers' Assessment Tools for Assessing Kindergarteners' Reading and Writing Skills.

1. What are some of the assessment tools you frequently employ to assess kindergarteners' reading and writing skills?

Prompts:

- a. Do you use a checklist?
- b. What about anecdotal records?
- c. Do you employ running records?
- d. What about observation?
- e. Do you use conferencing?
- f. Do you employ a portfolio?
- g. Which other assessment tools do you employ?

SECTION C: Aspects of Kindergarteners' Reading and Writing Skills Assessed by Kindergarten Teachers.

1. Which aspects of reading and writing skills do you concentrate on when you are assessing your children?

Prompts:

- a. Do you assess oral language skills?
- b. Do you assess the alphabetic principle?
- c. What about phonemic awareness?
- d. Do you assess phonics knowledge?
- e. Do you assess reading fluency?
- f. Do you assess the handwriting legibility of learners?

SECTION D: Kindergarten Teachers' Challenges in Assessing Kindergarteners' Reading and Writing Skills

1. What challenges do you face in assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills?

Prompts:

- a. Do you think there are inadequate assessment standards?
- b. Do you have inadequate knowledge of tools for assessing kindergarteners' reading and writing skills?
- c. Is there adequacy of time to assess learners reading and writing skills?

Thank You for Your Participation. I'm Very Grateful for Your Time



RELIABILITY TEST RESULTS OF THE INSTRUMENT

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	111	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	111	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.773	43

