

To cite this article: Ibrahim Sesay (2026). CHALLENGES OF ASSESSING PRESCHOOLERS IN SIERRA LEONE: AN EMERGING EDUCATIONAL CONCERN, International Journal of Education and Social Science Research (IJESSR) 9 (5): 201-216 Article No. 1291, Sub Id 1979

CHALLENGES OF ASSESSING PRESCHOOLERS IN SIERRA LEONE: AN EMERGING EDUCATIONAL CONCERN

Ibrahim Sesay

Education Department, Milton Margai Technical University Freetown, Sierra Leone

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2026.9510>

ABSTRACT

The study examined the challenges of assessing preschoolers in Sierra Leone. Although the government of Sierra Leone has expanded access to pre-primary education little attention has been devoted to understanding the challenges that teachers face in assessing children's learning and development. In many preschools setting in Freetown assessment may not adequately capture learners developmental progress, potentially affecting learning outcomes. This study employed a descriptive research design involving 223 participants including teachers, head teachers, parents and Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education officers. Teachers and parents were selected through simple random sampling, head teachers and education officers were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The study observed that preschool assessment faces systemic and practical barriers including large class sizes, limited time, limited teacher training, inadequate assessment materials, and poor record-keeping that undermines its effectiveness. It is suggested that teachers should engage in continuous training on child-centered, play-based assessment methods to move beyond rote learning. Also, advocate for smaller class sizes, strengthening monitoring mechanisms to ensure assessment policies are followed, provision of standardized culturally relevant assessment tools and ensure equitable distribution across regions.

KEYWORDS: Preschool Assessment, Early Childhood Education, Sierra Leone, Child-Centered Assessment, Educational Challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of lifelong learning and holistic development. Globally, preschool assessment plays a vital role in identifying developmental milestones, guiding instructional practices, and ensuring equitable learning outcomes. In Sierra Leone, however, the process of assessing preschoolers is fraught with challenges that reflect broader systemic, cultural, and socio-economic realities. Despite policy strides such as the Integrated Early childhood Development Policy (2021), which mandates pre-primary units in primary schools, assessment practices remain inconsistent, under-resourced, and poorly aligned with international standards (Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, 2021).

Assessment in early childhood settings is not merely about measuring academic achievement; it encompasses the evaluation of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Effective assessment provides teachers and parents with insights into children's progress, identifies learning difficulties early, and informs targeted interventions (Hodges & Gupta, 2025). In Sierra Leone, however, several interrelated factors contribute to the difficulty of assessing preschoolers:

- **Limited Teacher Training:** Many preschool teachers lack specialized training in child-centered assessment methods, relying instead on rote learning and traditional examinations (Hodges & Gupta, 2025).
- **Resource Constraint:** Schools often operate without adequate teaching materials, observation checklists, or developmental scales, while overcrowded classrooms hinder individualized assessment.
- **Cultural Practices:** Child-rearing traditions, including collective caregiving and informal Islamic education, complicate consistent monitoring of children's progress (Hodges & Richards, 2025).
- **Policy Gaps:** Although policies exist, weak implementation and limited funding restrict their impact, particularly in rural communities.
- **Socio-Economic Factors:** Poverty, food insecurity, and child labor reduce children's ability to participate fully in learning and assessment activities.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for strengthening Sierra Leone's early childhood education system. Reliable assessment practices would not only enhance teaching and learning but also contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). By investing in teacher training, resources, and culturally responsive assessment frameworks, Sierra Leone can ensure that preschoolers receive the support they need to thrive academically and developmentally. Existing studies on early childhood education in Sierra Leone have primarily focused on:

- Policy frameworks such as the *Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2021)*, which emphasizes expanding access to pre-primary education (Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, 2021).
- Community-level practices and perceptions, highlighting informal caregiving, cultural influences, and the role of extended families in child development (Hodges & Richards, 2025).
- Teacher practices and opportunities, with attention to the lack of professional training and reliance on rote learning methods (Hodges & Gupta, 2025).

These studies provide valuable insights into the structural and cultural context of early childhood education but stop short of systematically examining how preschoolers are assessed in practice. Despite these contributions, there is a notable gap in empirical research on:

- **Standardized assessment tools:** No comprehensive study has evaluated the availability, use, or effectiveness of culturally relevant preschool assessment instruments in Sierra Leone.

- Implementation of assessment practices: Research has not sufficiently examined how teachers conduct assessments in overcrowded, resource-constrained classrooms.
- Impact of socio-economic factors: While poverty and food insecurity are acknowledged, their direct influence on assessment outcomes remains underexplored.
- Comparative analysis: There is little evidence comparing Sierra Leone's preschool assessment practices with those of other low-income or post-conflict countries, which could provide lessons for improvement.

This gap is critical because without reliable, culturally appropriate assessment practices:

- Children with developmental delays or learning difficulties may remain unidentified.
- Teachers lack the data needed to tailor instruction to diverse learner needs.
- Policymakers cannot measure progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Therefore, research is urgently needed to investigate the challenges of assessing preschoolers in Sierra Leone, identify practical solutions, and propose frameworks that bridge policy intentions with classroom realities.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The challenges of assessing preschoolers such as limited time, inadequate materials, large class sizes, poor record-keeping, and insufficient teacher training highlight the tension between ideal theoretical approaches and practical realities. While constructivist and sociocultural theories advocate for individualized, context-sensitive assessments, systemic constraints often push teachers toward behaviorist shortcuts. Bronfenbrenner's ecological lens underscores that these challenges are not isolated but rooted in broader social and institutional contexts.

Limited Teacher Training:

Research has identified that teachers' lack of sufficient knowledge and background in assessment may lead to confusion and misidentification of learning objectives (Taylor & Francis, 2015). Akers L., Del Grosso P., Snell E.K. (2016), highlights that teachers face barriers to using data, including lack of pedagogical content knowledge and insufficient knowledge about conducting and interpreting the resulting data. They noted teachers' consistent calls for additional training and support. This means that teachers are aware that their inadequacies may hinder children's development. Similarly, Hidayat, W. Lawahid, N.A (2021) explains that lack of instruction from the Ministry of Education and teachers' limited understanding of authentic assessment are barriers to proper implementation.

Lack of Assessment Tools

Lack of comprehensive assessment frameworks leads to inconsistencies in teacher evaluations, hinders comparability, and diminishes the trustworthiness of educational outcomes. Alordiah, C.O. (2025), Highlights that early childhood assessment predominantly depends on teachers' observations and

professional evaluations, which are susceptible to inconsistency, subjectivity, and prejudice in the absence of standardized instruments like rubrics and checklists. They identified that not having rubrics and checklists affects both validity and reliability, leading to assessment methods that are not always fair and consistent in early years education. Giese, S., et al (2023) noted that lack of reliable, locally standardized, valid and cross-culturally fair assessment tools for measuring preschool quality outcomes poses an acute challenge. Keenqwe G. (2020), explains that the lack of a standardized way for early childhood programs to measure assessment results in varied approaches, contributes to a scarcity of information on how teachers collect and use assessment data. McLachian C., McLaughlin, T., & Cherrington, S. (2023) notes that assessment tools are not inherently the problem, but rather their use and misuse, can create problems for assessment practices.

Large Class Size

Large teacher-pupil ratios impede the proper implementation of inclusive education and make it impossible to monitor and assess the learning needs of all individual learners with learning challenges (Chinhara, H., Kuyayama, A., (2024). In large groups, teachers find it difficult to have contact with and engage with individual children, resulting in less time for communication and close interaction (Sheridan, S., Williams, P., 2014). Ntumi, S., et al (2026) identifies large class sizes as one of the challenges reported by teachers in Ghanaian early childhood education settings, alongside limited resources and rigid curricular demands. They reported that large classroom sizes consistently undermined learning and engagement in multilingual early childhood classrooms, which negatively impacts assessment. Similarly, Francis, J., Barnett W. S. (2019) examined the effects of preschool class size (20 students vs. 15 students) on classroom quality, teacher-child interactions, and student achievement outcomes like literacy, vocabulary, and math gains, they opined that reducing class size by five children benefited children's cognitive development, specifically literacy skills, indicating that larger class sizes may impede certain learning outcomes.

Limited Time

Time management decisions in early childhood education are frequently dictated by adult agendas and imposed schedules, thereby creating constraints in organizing routines that respond effectively to children's interests and needs (Pereira M., Santos, N. N., & Brito, A.T., 2026). They explored how rigidity in schedules and limitations in time management decision-making restrict educators' ability to respond to children's needs, often due to curricular and extracurricular activities or set arrival and departure times, they found out that the time available for educators to work effectively with children is often limited by what the school curriculum offers, which consequently restricts the children's time for free choice of activities. Rintakorpi, K. (2016) Identifies time constraints as the greatest barrier to implementing documentation for assessment and pedagogical development, with 69% of participating teachers raising the issue, he notes that insufficient time is organized for pedagogical planning and assessment, which hinders teachers from fully utilizing pedagogical documentation; he stated that

time-related problems contributed to teachers having difficulties learning new documentation methods and incorporating them into their work.

Poor Record Keeping

Documenting children's learning processes is still a difficult and complex task for early childhood educators. Educators face difficulties in making descriptive records of children's actions, potentially due to lack of time or knowledge, and notes that educators demonstrate difficulties in implementing children's assessments and often focus on evaluating products rather than processes (Azevedo, M., Mesquita, C., & Mocino-Gonzalez, 2022). Widiana, I. T., Arifin, I., & Yafie, E. (2026) indicated that the quality of assessment in early childhood education (ECE) is dependent on documentation competence, which directly relates to record-keeping skills; they noted that ECE teachers often struggle to record children's developmental progress systematically and consistently, confirming poor record-keeping as a challenge. They suggested that digital portfolios and documentation platforms can reduce fragmented record keeping which aligns with Nordin, N., Abdulrahman, M. S. who suggested that the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is needed to improve the efficiency of the assessment process, potentially addressing record keeping issues.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive survey research design was used which utilized quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect data. The mixed-method approach is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to obtain comprehensive information regarding the challenges of preschool assessment. The quantitative component generated numerical data through questionnaires administered to preschool teachers and parents, while the qualitative component provided deeper insights through interviews with head teachers and education officers.

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 40 preschool institutions, comprising 20 preschools from Western Area Urban and 20 preschools from Western Area Rural. This approach ensures adequate representation of both urban and rural contexts. 223 participants which included 118 teachers 60 from Western urban and 58 from Western rural, 40 head teachers, 60 parents and 5 MBSSE officers from Freetown formed the sample. The unequal representation between urban and rural teachers is a result of non-returned questionnaires. Two teachers from Western rural did not return the questionnaires. Teachers and parents were selected through simple random sampling because of their large numbers while head teachers and MBSSE officers were selected through purposive sampling because of their supervisory roles and specialized knowledge in the affairs of their institutions.

Structured questionnaire containing closed-ended and Likert-scale items and semi structured interview schedule were used to gather information from the respondents. Questionnaire was used because it provides a systematic, efficient, and reliable way of collecting data from a relatively large group of respondents. Interviews were used because they provide an opportunity to explore the perspectives of head teachers and education officers into depth, allowing for clarification, probing, and follow-up questions that yield richer and more distinct data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

Validity of the instrument was ensured through experts' review. Educational research experts examined the instruments to confirm that the items were aligned with established research standards, ensuring clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the study's objectives. Their input helped refine the wording of questions and strengthened the overall methodological accuracy

In addition, early childhood education specialists validated the instruments to ensure that the content was age-appropriate and contextually relevant to preschool settings. Their expertise guaranteed that the questions accurately reflected the realities of early childhood learning and assessment practices (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

The reliability of the research instruments was established through a pilot study conducted in two schools outside the main sample. This preliminary testing allowed the researcher to identify ambiguities, refine questions, and ensure that the tools were both understandable and contextually appropriate for preschool teachers, parents, and administrators. Following the pilot, the internal consistency of the questionnaire items was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.74. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 is generally considered acceptable for social science research, indicating that the items reliably measure the intended constructs. This result demonstrates that the instruments possess satisfactory reliability, ensuring that responses are consistent and replicable across different participants. After data was collected, the responses were analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The data were presented using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages.

3.1 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical principles in educational research.

Permission was first obtained from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and the respective school authorities to ensure that the research was officially sanctioned and respectful of institutional protocols. All participants including preschool teachers, parents, head teachers, and MBSSE officers were provided with clear information about the purpose of the study, their role, and how the data would be used. Informed consent was secured from every participant, emphasizing that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without penalty. *Confidentiality* was maintained by ensuring that responses were anonymized and used solely for academic purposes. No identifying details of schools, teachers, or parents were disclosed in the reporting of findings.

The study also prioritized *non-maleficence*, ensuring that no harm; physical, psychological, or social came to participants. Data collected was stored securely and analyzed responsibly, in line with accepted ethical standards in educational research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

By following these ethical procedures, the study upheld integrity, respect and fairness, ensuring that participants' rights and dignity were protected throughout the process.

4. RESULTS

The results present responses on the challenges faced by teachers from all categories of respondents, namely, teachers, head teachers, parents and Ministry of Education authorities.

Table 1. Teachers Responses on the Challenges in Assessing Preschoolers

Item	Western Urban	Western Rural	Total	Total Percentage
Large class sizes	42 (35.5%)	53 (44.9%)	95	80.5
Lack of Assessment Materials	48 (40.6%)	50 (42.3%)	98	83.0
Inadequate training	28 (23.7%)	36 (30.5%)	64	54.2
Limited time	52 (44.0%)	55 (46.6%)	107	86.4
Poor record keeping skills	32 (27.1%)	41 (34.7%)	73	61.8

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The data shows that teachers encounter several challenges in implementing assessment practices. The most common challenge reported was limited time 107 (86.4%), followed closely by lack of assessment materials 98 (83.0%) and large class sizes 95 (80.5%), which together highlight significant structural and resource constraints. Poor record keeping 73 (61.8%) was also noted as a major issue, while inadequate training 64 (54.2%) was reported by just over half of the teachers.

TABLE 2. Parents Awareness of the Challenges in Assessment Practices of their Children

NO	Item	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
1.	Large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to assess children effectively	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.6%)	41 (68.3%)	18 (30.0)
2.	Lack of assessment materials affect the quality of preschool assessment	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.3%)	32 (53.3%)	26 (43.3%)
3.	Teachers need more training to improve their assessment practices	2 (3.3%)	2 (3.3%)	5 (8.3%)	23 (38.3%)	28 (46.6%)
4.	Limited time prevents teachers from conducting thorough assessments	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (10.0%)	22 (36.6%)	32 (53.3%)

5.	Poor record-keeping practices among teachers affect the tracking of children's progress	2 (2.6%)	3 (5.2%)	10 (17.4%)	32 (53.9%)	13 (20.9)
----	---	-------------	-------------	---------------	---------------	--------------

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The data in table 6 reveal a nearly unanimous consensus among parents that large class sizes hinder teachers' ability to assess children effectively. With 59 respondents (98.3%) either strongly agreeing or agreeing, parents overwhelmingly recognize overcrowding as a major barrier to individualized assessment in preschool education. The 1 neutral response (1.6%) suggest that only a very small minority of parents are uncertain about the impact of class size. Importantly, no respondents disagreed, which highlights the strength of this perception.

The data on lack of assessment materials reveal an overwhelming consensus among parents that the absence of adequate assessment materials negatively impacts the quality of preschool assessment. With 58 respondents (96.6%) either strongly agreeing or agreeing. The 2 neutral responses (3.3%) suggest that only a very small minority of parents are uncertain about the role of materials in assessment. No respondents disagreed, which underscores the strength of this perception.

Regarding the need for more training for teachers the data reveal that a clear majority of parents (51 respondents, 84.9%) either strongly agreed or agreed that teachers require more training to improve their assessment practices. The 5 neutral responses (8.3%) suggest that some parents may be uncertain about the extent to which training impacts assessment quality. Meanwhile, the 4 respondents (6.6%) who disagreed or strongly disagreed may believe that teachers are already adequately trained.

The data on limited class time reveal that a large majority of parents (54 respondents, 89.9%) either strongly agreed or agreed that limited time prevents teachers from conducting thorough assessments. This strong consensus highlights the reality that teachers often face significant time constraints, which hinder their ability to observe, document, and analyze children's learning comprehensively.

The 6 neutral responses (10.0%) suggest that some parents are uncertain about the extent to which time limitations affect assessment quality. However, the absence of disagreement indicates that parents generally recognize time as a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of preschool assessment.

On poor record-keeping the data reveal that a clear majority of parents (45 respondents, 74.8%) either strongly agreed or agreed that poor record-keeping practices among teachers negatively affect the tracking of children's progress. The 10 neutral responses (17.4%) suggest that some parents are uncertain about the extent to which record-keeping impacts assessment. Meanwhile, 5 respondents (7.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, possibly believing that teachers rely more on direct observation or informal communication rather than written records.

TABLE 3. Head Teachers Response on the Challenges faced by preschool teachers on assessing learners

Item	Response	No.	Percentage
Challenges faced by preschool teachers in assessment	Unconducive classroom atmosphere, small classrooms, lack of space for play-based activities	40	100
Effect of large class size on assessment practices	limits individualized learning and assessment, leads to group instruction, inadequate feedback leading to group feedback	40	100
Adequacy of assessment materials	Inadequate play-based assessment materials, leads to use of improvised inaccurate materials to teach	40	100
Training opportunities for teachers on assessment	Very limited teacher training opportunities	40	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The table shows the challenges of assessment in preschools from the interviews of preschool head teachers. The all 40 (100%) reported that unconducive classroom atmosphere, small classrooms, and lack of space for play based activities were some of the challenges of assessment. On the effect of large class size on assessment, all 40 (100%) respondents stated that large classes limit individualized assessment, lead to group instruction, and result in inadequate feedback leaving group feedback as the sole option. Also, for training opportunities for teachers on assessment; all the respondents reported very limited training opportunities 40 (100%).

The data shows unanimous agreement among head teachers (100%) across all categories, highlighting that classroom conditions, large class sizes, inadequate materials, and limited training are universal challenges affecting assessment practices in Sierra Leone.

TABLE 4. MBSSE Officers Responses on the Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing Assessment Methods

Question	Response	No Responding	Percentage Response
What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing assessment methods?	Overcrowded classrooms, and lack of standardized early childhood assessment tools	05	100
How does MBSSE support teachers in overcoming these challenges?	Policy and curriculum alignment, workforce and resource support, system coordination and monitoring	05	100
What additional resources or training do you think are necessary to strengthen assessment practices in preschools?	Necessary training programmes, critical materials and structural resources	05	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

In Table 8, all MBSSE officers 05 (100%) reported that teachers encounter challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and lack of standardized early childhood assessment tools. They further indicated that MBSSE supports teachers in overcoming these challenges through policy and curriculum alignment, workforce and resource support, again with unanimous responses of 05 representing 100 percent. Additionally, they highlighted that necessary training programmes, critical materials, and structural resources are required to strengthen assessment practices in preschools, with all five (100%) officers equally in agreement.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Large Class Sizes

With 80.5% of teachers identifying large class sizes as a barrier, overcrowding emerges as a critical issue. In both urban and rural schools, the high pupil-to-teacher ratio makes individualized assessment difficult, limiting teachers' ability to give each child the attention required, which aligns with Sheridan, & Williams (2014) who identifies that in large groups, teachers find it difficult to have contact with and engage with individual children, resulting in less time for communication and close interaction. Similarly, 98.3% of parents also stated that large class makes it difficult to assess children effectively. Head teachers and MBSSE officers emphasized that large class sizes negatively affect assessment practices. They explained that overcrowding limits individualized learning and assessment, forcing teachers to rely on group instruction. This often results in generalized feedback rather than tailored support, making it difficult to address each child's unique strengths and weaknesses. This resonates

with Chiphara, & Kuvavama, (2024) who notes that large teacher-pupil ratios impede the proper implementation of inclusive education and make it impossible to monitor and assess the learning needs of all individual learners with learning challenges.

5.2 Lack of Assessment Materials

A higher proportion (83%) of teachers highlighted that lack of assessment materials is a major challenge in preschool education in Freetown. This points to systemic resource constraints across both settings, where teachers often lack the tools needed to carry out effective assessments, thereby reducing the quality and reliability of the process. Head teachers also pointed out that assessment materials are inadequate. They stated that teachers often resort to improvised tools, which may be inaccurate and unreliable this supports CO Alordiah-INNOVATION (2025) who revealed that the lack of comprehensive assessment frameworks leads to inconsistencies in teacher evaluations, hinders comparability, and diminishes the trustworthiness of educational outcomes. 96.6% of parents opined that the lack of assessment materials affects the quality of preschool assessment. This compromises the quality of assessment and reduces its ability to provide a clear picture of children's progress. This highlights that inadequate resources significantly undermine effective assessment practices.

5.3 Limited Time

A significant majority of teachers (80%) reported that limited time prevents them from conducting thorough assessments. This suggests that both urban and rural preschool teachers struggle to balance instructional duties with the demands of assessment, leaving little room for detailed evaluation of each child's progress. Also, a significant number of parents identified limited time as another major challenge teachers face in assessing children. They stated that limited time prevents teachers from administering thorough and authentic assessment, this supported by Rintakorpi, (2016) who identified time constraints as the greatest barrier to implementing documentation for assessment and pedagogical development, he furthered that time-related problems contributed to teachers having difficulties learning new documentation methods and incorporating them into their work.

5.4 Poor Record-Keeping

About 61.8% of teachers acknowledged poor recording practices as a challenge. This indicates that tracking children's progress over time is inconsistent in Sierra Leone's preschools, which undermines continuity in learning and makes it harder to identify long-term developmental trends which agrees with Widian, et al. (2026) who indicated that the quality of assessment in early childhood education (ECE) is dependent on documentation competence, which directly relates to record-keeping skills; they noted that ECE teachers often struggle to record children's developmental progress systematically and consistently, confirming poor record-keeping as a challenge. 53.9% of parents stated that poor record keeping affects tracking of children's progress which resonates with Azevedo, Mesquita, & Mocino-Gonzalez (2022) who explains that documenting children's learning processes is still a difficult and complex task for early childhood educators. They indicated that educators face difficulties in making descriptive records of children's actions, potentially due to lack of time or knowledge, and

notes that educators demonstrate difficulties in implementing children's assessments and often focus on evaluating products rather than processes. This points out that weaknesses in documentation systems, hinders consistent monitoring of children's development.

5.5 Inadequate Teacher Training

More than half of the teachers (54.2%) reported inadequate training as a challenge. This shows that while teachers recognize the importance of assessment, many feel underprepared to apply methods effectively, pointing to gaps in professional development opportunities in both urban and rural contexts, this agrees with Taylor & Francis (2015), who identified that teachers' lack of sufficient knowledge and background in assessment may lead to confusion and misidentification of learning objectives. The majority of parents (84.9%) agreed that teachers need more training to improve on their assessment practices this supports Akers et al (2016) who noted that teachers made persistent calls for training and support in using data which includes lack of pedagogical content knowledge and insufficient knowledge about conducting and interpreting the resulting data. This indicates a clear demand for professional development to strengthen teachers' skills in assessment. Thus, head teachers pointed out that with insufficient professional development, teachers struggle to keep up with best practices in assessment. This gap in training undermines teachers' confidence and preparedness, leaving them to rely heavily on experience rather than structured guidance.

5.6 Classroom Environment

Head teachers unanimously reported that preschool teachers face difficulties due to an uncondusive classroom atmosphere. Small classrooms and lack of adequate space were highlighted as major barriers, particularly limiting play-based activities. Since play is central to early childhood assessment, the absence of space reduces the effectiveness of this method and restricts children's opportunities for holistic learning.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings from teachers, head teachers, parents, and MBSSE officers collectively highlight the systemic and practical barriers that undermine effective preschool assessment in Sierra Leone. Across all groups, there is a shared recognition that the current environment makes it difficult to capture the holistic development of young learners.

- Teachers persistently stressed the strain of large class sizes, which limit individualized attention and force reliance on group-level assessments. They also pointed to inadequate training and poor record-keeping practices, which leave them ill-equipped to track children's progress systematically.
- Head teachers reinforced these concerns, stressing that the classroom environment is uncondusive; small, overcrowded spaces restrict play-based learning and meaningful observation. They also noted that the lack of assessment materials compels teachers to improvise, often with inaccurate or unsuitable tools.

- Parents expressed frustration that their children's progress is not adequately monitored, linking this to limited time for thorough assessments and the absence of structured feedback. Their voices underscore the demand for more transparent and reliable systems that connect home and school learning.
- MBSSE officers acknowledged these challenges at the policy level, recognizing that while frameworks exist, implementation gaps persist. They highlighted the need for stronger investment in teacher training, provision of materials, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that assessment practices align with national educational goals.

Put together, these perspectives reveal a critical gap between policy intentions and classroom realities. Large class sizes, inadequate materials, limited time, poor record-keeping, insufficient training, and unconducive environments form a web of constraints that hinder effective assessment. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach: empowering teachers with training and tools, supporting head teachers with resources and infrastructure, engaging parents in the assessment process, and ensuring that MBSSE officers strengthen policy implementation and oversight.

Recommendations

Based on the challenges identified; large class sizes, lack of assessment materials, limited time, poor record keeping, inadequate teacher training, and unconducive classroom environments, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen preschool assessment practices in Sierra Leone:

For Teachers

- ❖ **Professional Development:** Engage in continuous training on child-centered, play-based assessment methods to move beyond rote learning.
- ❖ **Record Keeping:** Adopt simple, standardized record-keeping tools (e.g., observation checklists, developmental progress charts) to track children's growth consistently.
- ❖ **Time Management:** Integrate assessment into daily classroom routines through observation and play activities, reducing reliance on formal testing.

For Head Teachers

- ❖ **Classroom Management:** Advocate for smaller class sizes by working with education authorities to redistribute enrollment and resources.
- ❖ **Resource Mobilization:** Support teachers by sourcing or improvising low-cost assessment materials, and encourage collaboration among staff to share tools.
- ❖ **Monitoring and Supervision:** Establish regular internal reviews of assessment practices to ensure consistency and accountability.

For Parents

- ❖ **Active Participation:** Engage with teachers to understand assessment outcomes and provide feedback from home, creating a bridge between school and family learning.
- ❖ **Supportive Environment:** Reinforce developmental milestones at home through play, storytelling, and early literacy activities.
- ❖ **Advocacy:** Collaborate with community groups to demand better resources and accountability in preschool education.

For MBSSE Officers

- ❖ **Policy Implementation:** Strengthen monitoring mechanisms to ensure that assessment policies are effectively applied in both urban and rural schools.
- ❖ **Provision of Materials:** Supply preschools with standardized, culturally relevant assessment tools and ensure equitable distribution across regions.
- ❖ **Capacity Building:** Invest in large-scale teacher training programs focused on early childhood assessment, with refresher courses to sustain quality.
- ❖ **Infrastructure Development:** Improve classroom environments by expanding facilities, reducing overcrowding, and creating spaces conducive to observation and play-based learning.

REFERENCES

- Hodges, M. H., & Gupta, A. V. (2025). *Early childhood development practices and opportunities in Sierra Leone*. Thrive briefing, Oxford Policy Management.
- Hodges, M. H., & Richards, P. (2025). *Early childhood development perceptions and practices at the community level: Opportunities and barriers for strengthening informal provision in Sierra Leone*. Oxford Policy Management.
- Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education. (2021). *Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy*. Government of Sierra Leone.
- Akers, L., Del Grosso., Snell, E. K., Atkins-Burnett., Wasik, B., Carta, J., Boller, K., Monahan, S. (2016). Tailored Teaching: Emerging Themes from the Literature on Teachers Use of Ongoing Child Assessment to Individualize Instruction. *The Dialog*, 18930. 133-150. ISSN:1930-9325. journals charlotte.edu. <https://doi.org/1055370/hsdialog.v1912.433>
- Guzelvurt, T., Ertekin, B.D., Sezer, B.B., & Aras, S. (2025) Challenges, Struggles and needs in assessment: voices of early childhood teachers. *Early Years*, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2025.2552415>

Alordiah, C.O. (2025). A Guided Assessment Model for Improving Validity and Reliability in Early Years Education: Moving Towards Consistency and Fairness. *RNSA Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation* (216-230). <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2917-9302>

Giese, S., Dawes, A., Biersteker, L., Girdwood, E., & Henty J. (2023). Using data tools and systems to drive change in early childhood for disadvantaged children in South Africa. *Children*, 10(9), 1470. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children10091470>

Keengwe, G. (2020). Early Childhood Teacher's Approach to Assessment: A look at Data Collection, Organization, and Lesson Planning Practices. The Pacific Early Childhood Research Association. *Asia-Pacific journal of research in early childhood education*, vol.14 No.3 (11-22). DOI: 10.17206/apjrece.2020.14.3.1

Hidayat, W., Mujahidah, N.A.L. (2021). Problems and Constraints of Authentic Assessment among Children's Early Education Teachers. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research*. (87-109/2021 Vol.15 No.2. openurl.ebsco.com

Ntumi, S., Subbey, M., Laryea, T, et al. (2026). Culturally Responsive Teacher-Child Interactions and Differentiated Assessment in Multilingual Early Childhood Classrooms in Ghana: Pathways to Equity and Inclusion. *Early Childhood Educ J*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/sl0643-026-02216-6>

Francis, J., Barnett, W.S. (2019). Relating preschool class size to classroom quality and student achievement. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 49(4) 49-58. DOI: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.05.002

Sheridan, S., Williams, P. (2014). Group size and organizational conditions for children's learning in preschool: a teacher perspective. *Educational Research*, 56(4), 378-397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2014.965562>

Pereira, M., Santos, N.N., Brito, A.T., & Mata, Lourdes. (2026) Time and routines organization in early childhood education and care—participation, opportunities, and constraints. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 40:2, 391-410, DOI: 10.1080/02568543.2025.2461545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2025.2461545>

Rinatakorp K. (2016). Documenting with early childhood education teachers: pedagogical documentation as a tool for developing early childhood pedagogy and practises. *Early Years An International Journal of Research and Development* 36(4) 399-412. DOI:10.1080/09575146.2016.1145628. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2016.1145628>

Nordin, N., Abdurahman, M.S., Afnizul, A. N. (2021). Issues and challenges in the assessment of children in nursery. Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini | p- ISSN 2087-1317 | e-ISSN 2621-8321 Vol. 12. No.I Mei 2021 | Hal 1-6. <https://ejournal.upi.edu>

Widiana, I.T., Arifin, I., Yafie, E. (2026). Pedagogical Competence in Early Childhood Education: A Systematic Literature Review on Assessment and Observation Practices. NUSARA: Jurnal Penelitian dan Ilmu Pendidikan, 7(3), 1469-1487, [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.55681/nusra.v7i3.6401](https://doi.org/10.55681/nusra.v7i3.6401)

Azevedo, M., Mesquita, C., Mociño-González, I. (2022). Pedagogical documentation in childhood education: A review of concepts. Instituto Politecnico de Braganca. Proceedings of EDULEARN22 conference 4th-6th July 2022, Palma, Mallorca, Spain. ISBN: 978-84-09-42484-9. <https://bibliotecadigital.ipb.pt>