

ESL TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING IN THE BOLE DISTRICT OF THE SAVANNA REGION OF GHANA

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Abstract

Assessment for learning or formative assessment is a process of gathering and analysing information about what learners know and can do and using that information to make instructional decisions. The role of assessment for learning, especially in an ESL classroom cannot be overemphasized. Among other things, formative assessments can go a long way in helping learners to set learning goals and prepare well for summative assessments. Regrettably, many teachers are unable to implement assessments for learning in their ESL classrooms. This study examined what the ESL teachers at Bole District of the Savanna Region of Ghana think about the assessment for learning, how they implement it, and the challenges they face in implementing it. The study adopted the mixed methods approach and the convergent parallel design. Census sampling was used to select all the 82 ESL teachers in the Bole District. The findings showed that ESL teachers had positive beliefs about assessment for learning practices. However, they did not implement it in their classrooms due to challenges such as inadequate time on timetables, large class sizes, lack of resources, limited access to technology, and overloaded English curriculum. It is recommended that school heads should make every endeavour to provide adequate time on timetables and they should also provide the ESL teachers with the needed assessment for learning resources for effective teaching and learning.

Keywords: Teacher Beliefs, Formative Assessment, Summative Assessment, Teaching English As A Second Language, Learning English As a Second Language

INTRODUCTION

Assessment has been identified as a critical component and a driving force of educational reform, practices, and improvement around the world (Koloji-Keaikite, 2012). In the classroom, assessment helps teachers to be able to identify the gap between what is taught and what is being learnt. Teachers use assessment to know what students know, understand, and can do. Assessment is traditionally intended to find out and report on what has been learnt regarding classroom activities (Amua-Sekyi, 2016). The role of formative assessment or assessment for learning (AfL) in providing teachers with accurate and relevant information about their learners cannot be overemphasized. Assessment information is crucial in taking decisions regarding students' learning abilities, placement in appropriate levels, and achievement (Kankam, et al., 2014).

Teachers have the ability to design assessment procedures and use assessment information to generate appropriate evidence and to inform their future pedagogical practices. This role of teachers is key to the success of AfL in language classrooms (Green, 2018). In AfL, feedback is important. In the context of teaching, teachers' effort in providing feedback was evident in improving students' learning (Zhang & Hyland, 2018). To appraise students' abilities appropriately to result in better learning, Green (2018) suggests that teachers conduct an AfL. According to Green (2018) AfL is a concept that seeks to harness assessment in the service of learning using formative assessment data to guide better teaching and learning processes. Given the importance of assessment for students' learning in today's classrooms, the

necessity for AfL is now widely recognized and is becoming the focus of researchers' attention (Alderson, et al.,2017; Dann, 2014; Zou et al., 2021).

Classroom assessment is one of the influential factors mediating students' learning and teachers' teaching practices (Liu & Yu, 2021). As per McMillan (2013), classroom assessment has two main purposes: (1) assessment for learning (also known as formative assessment) and (2) assessment of learning (also known as summative assessment). Justifiably, assessments have been used as a tool for teachers by providing an understanding of the knowledge acquired through the pathway of classroom instruction. While standardized assessments have been purposefully utilized to collect information on teacher performance in the classroom and to evaluate the schools themselves, they have failed to identify why students are not proficient in their learning (Trumball & Lash, 2013). More importantly, information for the purpose of shaping instruction to meet student needs so that students can understand and advance their learning is the goal of formative assessments which differs from diagnostic or final evaluations of learning or to evaluate the schools.

The purpose of this study is to examine ESL teachers' practices and beliefs about assessment for learning. Until recently, little is known about the teachers' literacy level and practice of formative assessment in the secondary school, particularly in Bole-Bamboi. Arrafii and Suhaili's (2015) qualitative study indicates that the teachers' understanding of formative assessment is inadequate. Several researchers have shown that formative assessment is essential in ESL/EFL teaching and learning (Butler and Lee, 2010; Gattullo, 2000; Hill & McNamara, 2012). Formative assessment is challenging to implement in most circumstances as it requires an array of skills on the part of the teacher and some emerging dispositions on the part of the learner (Berry, 2011).

Despite the challenges, formative assessment fosters self-learning and provides productive feedback on students' learning outcomes, thereby significantly influencing students' motivation and achievement (Dix, 2017). Looney et al. (2018) concluded that through formative assessment, teachers develop an in-depth understanding of the cognitive gaps in students' learning and aid them in finding new methods for effective teaching, thereby minimizing learning gaps. Teachers' inability to use assessment appropriately could deny students the learning, motivation, and achievement benefits of assessment. It could also leave them unprepared for the high-stakes or summative examinations, which are highly rated. Students who are not well-prepared to take high-stakes examinations may resort to examination malpractices, which are presently an endemic challenge in education (Ugwu, 2023). Examination malpractices are sometimes orchestrated by parents, teachers, school authorities, and students (Lukman & Uwadiogwu, 2012; WAEC, 2017; Ugwu, 2021). This indicates desperation for examination success but the same is hardly applicable to actual learning in the classroom facilitated through the formative assessments. This typical attitude points to a set of assessment beliefs in Ghana.

Chen et al. (2021) found that at the meso-level, there was inadequate support, ineffective dissemination, and insufficient training. At the micro-level, instructors had limited assessment capabilities, there were large class sizes, and students were resistant. Moreover, Osaki et al. (2004) found that many teachers experience difficulty in how to practice formative assessment with regard to practical work. This was attributed to a lack of proper teacher preparation and professional development programmes for in-service and pre-service teachers. Ni Chroinin and Cosgrave (2012) disclosed the difficulties of teachers in including formative assessment and pointed out constraints such as the insufficient amount of time for planning formative assessment practices and difficulties in choosing the assessment strategies suitable for various students' abilities. Effective assessment practice contributes to learning improvement (Shepard et al., 2020). However, studies have shown that many teachers do not use assessment to guide their classroom instruction (Adaka & Ugo, 2015; Ugwu, 2021). Non-

utilization of assessment can affect the quality of teaching and decrease learning opportunities. For example, in a recent study, Ugwu (2021) reported that teachers' non-use of formative assessment in English classrooms made the lessons boring and less productive. Meanwhile, English is one of the secondary school subjects that students fail massively every year in high-stakes examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). In view of the numerous academic benefits of formative assessment in ESL learning (Ugwu, 2023; Ochour et al., 2022, Taylor, 2017; Swaie & Algazo, 2023) and the fact that there exists no empirical study about ESL teachers' beliefs and practices about formative assessment in the Bole District of Ghana. This study seeks to bridge the dearth in literature on the practices and beliefs of ESL teachers about formative assessment in the Bole District of Ghana. The specific objectives of this research are to:

- 1.Examine ESL teachers' beliefs about the purpose and role of assessment for learning in the ESL classroom.
- 2.Examine how assessment for learning is implemented in the ESL classroom.
- 3.Examine the challenges ESL teachers face in aligning their assessment practices with the principles of assessment for learning.

According to Brookhart (2013), assessment for learning is a process that involves gathering and analysing information about what students know and can do and using that information to make instructional decisions. The principles of assessment for learning are based on the idea that assessment should be an integral part of the teaching and learning process and should serve to improve student learning rather than simply measure it. These principles are informed by research in educational psychology and aim to create a supportive and engaging learning environment for students.

Stiggins et al. (2006) posits that the first principle of assessment for learning is that it should be ongoing and integrated into instruction. This means that assessment should not be limited to formal tests or quizzes, but should also include informal assessments such as observations, discussions, and student self-assessments. By integrating assessment into instruction, teachers can gather information about student understanding on an ongoing basis and use that information to make immediate instructional decisions. The second principle is that assessment should be formative rather than just summative. Formative assessment focuses on providing feedback to students to help them improve their learning, while summative assessment focuses on evaluating student learning at the end of an instructional period. Formative assessments can take many forms, including written feedback, peer or self-assessment, and classroom discussions. By providing timely and specific feedback, teachers can help students understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

The third principle is that assessment should be focused on student progress rather than comparison with others. This means that assessments should be designed to help students understand their own learning goals and progress toward those goals, rather than comparing them to their peers. By focusing on individual progress, teachers can create a more supportive and personalized learning environment for students. The fourth principle is that assessment should be transparent and involve students in the process. This means that students should understand the criteria by which they will be assessed, as well as how their work will be evaluated. Involving students in the assessment process can help them take ownership of their learning and understand how to improve. The fifth principle is that assessment should be fair and equitable. This means that assessments should be free from bias and discrimination and should provide all students with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their learning. Teachers should consider the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their students when designing assessments, and provide accommodations or modifications as needed (Stiggins et al., 2006).

Shi (2022) examined primary ESL teachers' perceptions and practices of implementing formative assessment through a mixed-method design, involving a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. A total of 47 ESL teachers from five primary schools in S city were selected as the survey participants and 10 out of the 47 survey respondents were randomly selected as the interview respondents. The findings revealed that teacher respondents' perceptions of FA were inadequate, and their FA practices were not effective enough. The reason may be due to a lack of assessment knowledge, meta-cognition knowledge, pedagogical-content knowledge regarding FA as well as teacher skills in implementing each stage of FA practice cycle. Based on these findings, suggestions are given on how to carry out teacher education on formative assessment.

Ugwu (2023) examined secondary school teachers' beliefs about the purpose, importance, and principles of assessment. Forty-seven Literature-in-English teachers in the Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria, were sampled using the mixed-methods research approach. It was found out that teachers considered assessment an essential element of teaching, but they could not translate their beliefs into practice. Possible causes of the inconsistencies were not established, suggesting areas for future research. Some recommendations were made.

Ochour et al (2022) investigated formative assessment conceptions and practices among the teachers of social studies in the Techiman Municipality of the Bono East Region of Ghana. The research was undertaken with the view of finding answers and making suggestions that could help improve the formative assessment practices specifically in social studies. A census was conducted in the eighty-four (84) public Junior High Schools in the Techiman Municipality in the Bono East Region. All the ninety-five (95) Social Studies teachers in the public Junior High Schools in the Municipality were selected for the study. A 50-item questionnaire including 2 open-ended questions was developed for the teachers. The data collected were analysed by using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The study revealed that, the teachers had correct conception of formative assessment and saw its relevance in the classroom, however, their assessment practices were not formative enough. The teachers' assessment practices were influenced by external factors. It is recommended that pressures such as demand for continuous assessment marks to grade students ought to be reduced to allow the teachers practice assessment as professionals.

Assessment for learning occurs at all stages of the learning process. Students are encouraged to take an active role, become self-regulated learners, and leave school able and confident to continue learning throughout their lives. Assessment for learning is also referred to as formative assessment, i.e. the process of collecting and interpreting evidence for use by teachers and learners to decide where they are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). Traditionally, AFL has been closely associated with formative assessment because practices such as questioning and providing feedback help 'form' or 'shape' student learning. This differs from summative assessment which typically is an attempt to measure student attainment at the end of a period of learning.

Several studies (Akyina & Oduro-Okyireh, 2019; Chen, Zhang, & Li, 2021; Enu, 2021; Ochour, Opoku-Afriyie, & Eshun, 2022) have indicated that there is a significant gap between what the curriculum mandates and what happens in the classroom. Enu (2021) pointed out that there are no adequate measures to ensure its effective integration into the classroom setting in Ghana. This discrepancy has profound consequences for students' growth and development, as they are expected to become critical thinkers and problem solvers who can contribute meaningfully to their communities and the nation at large. Thus, urgent steps need to be taken to bridge this gap and ensure that formative assessment practices are integrated effectively into classroom instruction to enhance student learning outcomes. Although teachers may have positive perceptions of the usefulness of formative assessment (Asare, 2020; Crichton & McDaid, 2016; Ho, 2014; Noori et al., 2017; Ochour et al., 2022), other researchers have also

documented that a significant number of them for various reasons do not practice formative assessment (Alotaibi, 2019; Bezabih et al., 2019; Hui et al., 2017; Yan & Brown, 2021). According to educators, these factors cause a disconnect between the theory and practice of formative assessment in the classroom. This results in many unexploited prospects to enhance student learning.

Asare and Afriyie (2023) investigated the potential resource-related factors that affect basic teachers' adoption of formative assessment in their classrooms. A descriptive survey design with a multistage sampling procedure was employed to select 300 teachers from the six circuits in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. Data gathered were analysed using descriptive (mean values, SD) and inferential statistics (two-way ANOVA). Time, workload, overcrowded curriculum, class size, and the number of lessons were reported as barriers to the effective implementation of formative assessment. Findings also revealed no statistically significant interaction effect of gender and grade level on the resource-related barriers. Moreover, grade level and gender had no statistically significant main effects with respect to the resource-related barriers. Recommendations and implications for policy, practice, and future research are discussed.

A recent study by Andersson and Palm (2017) highlighted the need for teacher training in formative assessment, where a unified practice of integrated strategies is essential (p. 94). They found that training is necessary not only in the different aspects of formative assessment, but also into how the 5 key strategies work together. Andersson and Palm conducted their study in a Swedish municipality. One group of teachers in mathematics enrolled into a professional development program (PDP) and spent during one term 144 hours in being taught about formative assessment, as well as 72 hours reading literature, planning and reflecting. The control group did not receive any training. Andersson and Palm found the student results of the PDP group to be significantly higher than of those of the control group. The training provided the teachers with useable classroom activities, ample opportunity to practice with positive outcomes, understanding the connection between theory and practice, expert support, plentiful time to learn, and was process orientated. Andersson and Palms study proves the complexity of formative assessment and shows that training is crucial.

Akyina and Oduro-Okyireh (2019) investigated Senior High School (SHS) teachers' formative assessment practices in the Mampong Municipality of Ghana. Three research questions guided the study: What is SHS teachers' knowledge of formative assessment? What are SHS teachers' formative assessment practices? How does formative assessment contribute to improvement in teaching and learning? Stratified and simple random sampling methods were used to select 80 teachers from the four public SHSs in the Municipality for the study. The study used a questionnaire for data collection. The study revealed that about half of the teachers lacked the conception of formative assessment and its sub-concepts. Generally, the teachers were involved in certain practices which unknown to them were formative assessment practices. They saw these practices as norms and daily routines that needed to be done as part of the teaching and learning procedures. To them, these practices contributed to improvement in teaching and learning. From the findings, the researchers recommended that, to increase the understanding of SHS teachers on formative assessment and its sub-concepts, pre-service teacher training must place much emphasis on the theory and practice of formative assessment and in-service training activities should be organised for teachers already in the field. Stakeholders of education need to give this the needed support.

Mudin (2019) investigated the understandings and assessment practices of three primary ESL teachers. Analysis is based on data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, field notes and documents. The findings indicate that these primary ESL teachers' understandings of the notion of 'formative assessment' were somewhat vague. The participants seemed to lack comprehensive, profound understanding of the vital

importance of formative assessment and its potential to facilitate learning. There were noticeable gaps, variations, and confusions in their articulated understanding of formative assessment. However, despite the disjuncture between the teachers’ understandings and actual practices, there was evidence to suggest that they attempted to incorporate elements of formative assessment in their practices, although not consistent with their espoused understandings. This study found that the three ESL teachers engaged, to some extent, in formative assessment practices such as oral questioning, observation and oral feedback to promote learning in their classes. In spite of the teachers’ significant efforts, factors such as conceptual constraints, traditional means of language assessment, lack of professional development, contextual constraints, teachers’ beliefs and an examination-oriented culture considerably affected their assessment practices. The findings of this study support the recommendation that there is a need to develop appropriate forms of formative assessment strategies that are more conducive to the Malaysian primary ESL context.

METHOD

The mixed methods approach was employed in this study. This approach was deemed necessary for the study because it helps to provide a more complete picture of the beliefs about ESL teachers. The design was convergent parallel. The total population for the study was made up of all the 82 ESL teachers of all the senior high schools in the Bole District as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: ESL Teachers in Bole District

S/N	Senior High Schools	Number of Teachers
1	Bole SHS	23
2	St. Anthony of Padua	17
3	Bamboi Community Day	18
4	Tinga Senior High School	15
5	Bole Technical Institute	9
Total		82

Source: GES, Bole District (2024)

The study adopted the census sampling techniques in covering the entire population identified in the study. The justification for the use of census sampling was to enable the researchers cover all the ESL teachers in the entire study area since they were not many. This means that data was gathered on every member of the population. In collecting data on the quantitative views of the participants, the study employed a questionnaire to solicit information on research questions 1 and 3. The instrument used in this study generally was adapted from Pat-El et al. (2013) and Asare (2020). The first section solicited information on demographic or biological characteristics about participants. The second section concentrated on obtaining information related to the beliefs of ESL teachers about assessment for learning. The third section concentrated on how assessment for learning is being implemented in the study area. The fourth section of the instrument solicited data on qualitative views of the participants about the challenges they faced in implementing assessment for learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Biographical Characteristics

This section discusses the biographical data of participants. The variables considered were gender, years of teaching experience, qualification, and employment grade. For confidentiality, the biographical information (as shown in Table 2 below) excluded personal information such as individual names, addresses, and names of schools of the respondents involved in this study.

Table 2: Biographical Characteristics

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentages
Gender	Male	45	54.9
	Female	37	45.1
Teaching Experience	0 - 5years	11	13.4
	6-10years	27	32.9
	11years and above	44	53.7
Qualification	1st Degree	65	79.3
	Master's and above	17	20.7
Employment Grade	Professional	70	85.4
	Non-Professional	12	14.6

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Results in Table 2 show that 45 representing 54.9% of the participants were male English teachers and 37 representing 45.1% were female English teachers. This means that more male teachers took part in the study than female teachers. The difference is not very wide which is an indication that female teachers are mostly aligned to teaching English language. For teaching experience, the study measured how long teachers have been teaching in the service. In this category, 11 teachers representing 13.4% have taught for between 0 - 5years. 27 teachers, representing 32.9% have taught for between 6-10years. 44 teachers, representing 53.7% have taught for 11years and above. This means that the greater number of teachers who took part in the study have taught for a longer time in teaching.

In terms of teacher qualification, 65 representing 79.3% had 1st Degree as their teaching qualification. 17 teachers, representing 20.7% had master's degree and above as their teaching qualification. This means that first degree was the common qualification of the teachers who took part in the study. This finding could be attributed to the fact that the Ghana Education Service (GES) have directed that the minimum qualification for teaching in a senior high school should be a degree. In looking at the employment grade of teachers, the study looked at teachers who had obtained academic training in teaching, 70 representing 85.4% of teachers were professional teachers whereas 12 representing 14.6% were non-professional teachers. Teachers who had received academic training in education (Professional) were more than teachers who had no academic background training in education (Non-professionals).

ESL Teachers' Beliefs about Assessment for Learning

This section examined the beliefs of ESL teachers about assessment for learning (AFL). To do this, a teacher belief scale was used to assess the belief of the teachers. The respondents rated their levels of agreement and disagreement on a five-point scale as 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Not Sure, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

In the analysis, the average marks of responses that are between 1 and 2 indicate that the respondents have negative beliefs about Assessment for Learning practices. Average marks that are 3 indicate that respondents are not sure about their belief on AFL practices. Average marks that are between 4 and 5 indicate that respondents have positive beliefs about AFL practices in the study area. However, the grand average mark determines whether respondents generally have negative, are not sure or have positive beliefs about AFL practices in ESL classes in the study area. The means and standard deviations of the respondents' responses are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: ESL Teachers' Beliefs

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.
I have adequate time to use assessment for learning in the classroom.	4.02	1.144
I feel confident in carrying out assessment for learning of my students.	3.67	1.197
I feel senior high school students will benefit from assessment for learnings.	4.23	1.034
I use evidence from assessment for learning to develop my teaching.	3.77	1.092
I have a positive view of assessment for learning.	3.74	1.109
I would benefit from more training in the use of assessment for learning techniques.	3.65	1.159
Assessment for learning should be carried out frequently.	3.61	1.152
Assessment for learning encourages interaction among pupils which boosts their self-confidence.	3.73	1.248
Assessment for learning promotes a conducive environment which encourages pupils to enhance their learning as they make mistakes.	4.04	1.222
The aim of assessment for learning is to promote learning.	3.68	1.143
Total	3.81	1.15

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

Results in Table 3 summarize the means and standard deviation values of the variables used in examining the beliefs of ESL teachers about AFL practices. From the analysis, it was generally observed that the grand mean of 3.81 with a standard deviation of 1.15 indicates that the respondents have positive beliefs about Assessment for Learning practices in the study area. The respondents further revealed that they have adequate time to use assessment for learning in the classroom with mean 4.02 and standard deviation 1.14. They feel confident in carrying out assessment for learning of their students was agreed with mean 3.67 and standard deviation 1.19. They feel senior high school students will benefit from assessment for learnings was agreed with mean 4.23 and standard deviation 1.03. They use evidence from assessment for learning to develop their teaching was agreed with mean 3.77 and standard deviation 1.09. They have a positive view of assessment for learning was agreed with mean 3.74 and standard deviation 1.109. They would benefit from more training in the use of assessment for learning techniques was agreed with mean 3.65 and standard deviation 1.15. That assessment for learning should be carried out frequently was agreed with mean 3.61 and standard deviation 1.15. That assessment for learning encourages interaction among pupils which boosts their self-confidence was agreed with mean 3.73 and standard deviation 1.24. The assessment for learning promotes a conducive environment which encourages pupils to enhance their learning as they make mistakes was agreed with mean 4.04 and standard deviation 1.22. That the aim of assessment for learning is to promote learning was agreed with mean 3.68 and standard deviation 1.14.

Assessment for Learning Implementation

To investigate the implementation of ASL among ESL teachers. The respondents rated their levels of agreement and disagreement on a five-point scale as 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Not Sure, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

In the analysis, the average marks of responses that are between 1 and 2 indicate that the respondents do not implement assessment for learning practices. Average marks that are 3 indicate that respondents are not sure about their implementation of AFL practices. Average marks that are between 4 and 5 indicate that respondents implement AFL practices in the study area. However, the grand average mark determines whether respondents generally implement, are not sure of implementation or actually implement AFL practices in ESL classes in the study area. The means and standard deviations of the respondents' responses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: ESL Implementation

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.
I encourage my students to reflect on how they can improve their assignments.	3.16	1.486
After examining test results of my students, I discuss the answers I gave to the test with them.	2.87	1.131
Whilst working on my assignments, I ask my students about how they think they are doing.	1.67	.876
I ask my students questions that help them gain understanding of the subject matter.	3.45	1.433
I inquire what went well and what went badly in my work with students after lessons.	2.80	.838
I encourage my students to reflect on their learning process and to think about how to improve next time.	1.65	.908
I consider with my students' ways to improve their weak points.	1.78	.861
After each assessment given to my students, I inform them how to improve the next time.	3.34	1.509
During class, I provide an opportunity for students to show what they have learned.	1.99	.598
There is an opportunity for my students to ask questions during my lesson.	2.76	.794
Total	2.55	1.04

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

Results in Table 4 summarize the means and standard deviations of the constructs used in identifying the implementation of AFL practices among ESL teachers. The table indicates that the grand mean of 2.55 with a standard deviation of 1.04 shows that respondents generally do not implement Assessment for Learning practices (AFL) practices in their ESL classrooms. The table further details that encouraging students to reflect on how they could improve their assignments was implemented or agreed with mean 3.16 and standard deviation 1.49. After examining test results of students, discussing the answers with them was disagreed or not implemented with mean 2.87 and standard deviation 1.13. Whilst working on assignments, students are asked about how they think they are doing was not implemented or disagreed with mean 1.67 and standard deviation 0.876. Asking students questions that help them gain understanding of the subject matter was agreed or implemented with mean 3.45 and standard deviation 1.43. Inquiring what went well and what went badly after lessons was disagreed or not implemented with mean 2.80 and standard deviation 0.84. Encouraging students to reflect on their learning process and to think about how to improve next time was disagreed or not implemented with mean 1.65 and standard deviation 0.91. Considering students' ways to improve their weak points was disagreed or not implemented with mean 1.78 and standard deviation 0.87. After each assessment given, informing students how to improve the next time was agreed or implemented with mean 3.34 and standard deviation 1.51. During class, providing an opportunity for students to show what they have learned was disagreed or not implemented with mean 1.99 and standard deviation 0.19. There is an opportunity for students to ask questions during lesson was disagreed or not implemented with mean 2.76 and standard deviation 0.79.

Challenges ESL Teachers Face in Implementing AfL

In examining the challenges ESL teachers face in implementing AfL practices, the study collected data on the views of teachers using interviews and open-ended questions. Based on the data analysis, six (6) themes were delved into. These are: (1) Inadequate time on timetables (2) Large class Sizes (3) Resource constraints (4) Limited training and professional development (5) Limited access to technology (6) Overloaded English curriculum creating pressure on teachers to rush through content. The result is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Challenges ESL Teachers Face in Implementing AfL

S/N	Thematic Areas on Challenges	Number of Cases	% Cases
1	Inadequate time on timetables	24	29.27%
2	Large class sizes and inadequate student input	20	24.39%
3	Resource constraints	13	15.85%
4	Limited training and professional development	11	13.42%
5	Limited access to technology	8	9.76%
6	Overloaded English curriculum creating pressure on teachers to rush through content.	6	7.31%

Inadequate time on timetables

Inadequate time on timetables refers to a situation where the allocated time for teaching and learning activities within a school schedule is insufficient to cover the required curriculum comprehensively. This can lead to rushed lessons, limited opportunities for student engagement, and challenges in addressing individual student needs. 24 (29.27%) respondents asserted that disruptive behaviours of students affect student learning and academic performance.

“The regular timetable is occupied with many subjects making it difficult to practice anything apart from the normal lesson” (Respondent 31)

“Teachers may find it challenging to incorporate formative assessment practices effectively within the limited time available for instruction due to various curriculum requirements and constraints” (Respondent 12)

“One of the challenges faced in practicing Assessment for Learning in ESL classes is the lack of sufficient time allocated on timetables for assessment activities” (Respondent 45)

“I think that we need to have an organized timetable for assessment for learning to effectively take place” (Respondent 50)

“You will either have to spend the whole of your time for assessment or use the whole time for teaching. Having a balance is always a problem for both” (Respondent 63)

“I mostly prefer giving assignments in order to make the scanty allocated time meaningful. This means that we don’t have enough time (Respondent 14).

Large class sizes and inadequate student input

Large class sizes indicate a scenario where the number of students in a classroom exceeds the ideal capacity for effective teaching and learning. This can result in reduced individual attention from teachers, difficulty in managing student behavior, and limited opportunities for personalized instruction. Inadequate student input indicates that the attitude of students in AfL is not encouraging. Students remain silent when assessment questions are posed to them. One indication that could be associated with this was their language and cultural differences in the English language class. 20 (24.39%) respondents claimed that student disruptive behaviours undermined authority of the school.

“The free senior high school policy has increased the enrolment of students in almost every English language class. As a result, following assessment for learning practices become limited” (Respondent 33)

“I am unable to attend to individual needs in class because of large class size” (Respondent 74)

“Large class sizes pose a significant challenge to implementing AFL in ESL classrooms” (Respondent 16)

“Most students do not respond to assessment questions and allow a lot of time to get wasted from the already limited time” (Respondent 62)

“With a high number of students, teachers may struggle to provide individualized feedback and support necessary for effective formative assessment practices. This can hinder the

ability to accurately assess student progress and tailor instruction to meet their diverse needs” (Respondent 81)

“Attending to the needs of all students to reflect AFL is highly impossible because a class with minimum number of students is around thirty-eight to forty-six” (Respondent 13).

Resource constraints

Resource constraints refer to limitations in the availability of essential educational resources such as textbooks, laboratory equipment, and other materials necessary for delivering quality education. These constraints can hinder effective teaching and learning processes and impact student outcomes. 13 (15.85%) respondents asserted that disruptive behaviour of students leads to destruction of school properties. The following responses show that the teachers faced resource constraints in their attempt to implement AfL in the classroom.

“The proper teaching and learning materials are not available for students to be engaged in effective assessment for learning practices” (Respondent 22)

“I think that if the school had assessment for learning textbooks for students, carrying out assessment would be smoother” (Respondent 1)

“Students are not able to buy the needed books that could easily facilitate assessment for learning” (Respondent 16)

“If students have access to textbooks, learning and conducting assessment would be easy” (Respondent 69)

“Marking the work of students is difficult. You will write everything on the board for them to copy and mark them later. This makes their assessment difficult” (Respondent 11).

Limited training and professional development

Limited training and professional development signify a lack of opportunities for educators to enhance their skills, knowledge, and instructional practices. This can impede teacher effectiveness, hinder innovation in teaching methods, and ultimately affect student achievement. 11 (13.42%) respondents affirmed that disruptive behaviour of students creates safety concerns in the school.

“I have not had time to go into the details for organizing assessment for learning” (Respondent 54)

“We don’t receive any training on assessment for learning on the job” (Respondent 2)

“We hardly attend workshops on AFL” (Respondent 10)

“When they organize training programmes, teachers are asked to pay from their pocket, and this prevents me from attending most of training programmes that may address AFL issues” (Respondent 38)

“Without proper guidance and support, we struggle to effectively integrate formative assessment techniques into our teaching practices, impacting the quality of feedback provided to students” (Respondent 61)

“Recently, we observe professional learning communities, but we hardly focus on assessment for learning practices. I have to make time to reflect on the practices myself” (Respondent 14).

Limited Access to Technology

Limited access to technology denotes a situation where schools lack sufficient technological resources such as computers, internet connectivity, software applications, and digital tools. This can restrict opportunities for digital learning, research, collaboration, and skill development among students and educators. 80% of the respondents indicated that they had very limited access to computers and the Internet. Some of the schools had computer laboratories but the computers were not adequate to meet the growing numbers of students due

to the government policy of free senior high school education for every Ghanaian child. The following were some of their responses.

“If an entire class could have access to computers all the time with AFL questioning after each lesson, I think we are good to go” (Respondent 54)

“My students don’t have access to computers in this school. Many of the computers in computer lab have broken down. (Respondent 2)

“I particularly have a challenge with the absence of adequate computers in my school” (Respondent 10)

“The laboratory is always occupied, and this makes the use of orthodox means of assessing students difficult” (Respondent 7)

“If government could provide tablets matching the number of students and that could be readily used anytime, students could easily be accessed and receive their feedback, but this is not so” (Respondent 11)

“Without adequate access to technology resources, I often face challenges in incorporating innovative assessment strategies into my teaching. The use of traditional means is difficult” (Respondent 45).

Overloaded English curriculum creating pressure on teachers to rush through content

An overloaded English curriculum creates pressure on teachers to rush through content when there is an excessive amount of material or topics to cover within a limited timeframe. This can lead to superficial understanding of concepts, reduced focus on critical thinking skills, and challenges in catering to diverse learning needs. 6 (7.31%) respondents claimed that disruptive behaviour of students could lead to the cancellation of final examinations.

“The various aspects of the curriculum limit me in organizing AfL in my class” (Respondent 9)

“I think the curriculum is too loaded, however we are obliged to complete it before the students sit for the exam. I think there would be no need to rush to complete the curriculum” (Respondent 10)

“The overloaded English curriculum creates pressure on me to rush through content, leaving limited time for meaningful formative assessment practices” (Respondent 67)

“I do sometimes engage my students in assessment for learning practices but the nature of load in the curriculum does not allow me always observe the practice” (Respondent 11)

“As a teacher you are compelled to rush through the curriculum, for this reason you forget about AfL in the classroom.” (Respondent 4).

CONCLUSION

In examining the beliefs of ESL teachers about AfL practices, it was revealed that ESL teachers have positive beliefs about assessment for learning practices in the study area. In identifying the implementation of AFL practices in ESL classrooms. The study indicated that respondents generally do not implement assessment for learning practices (AfL) in their ESL classrooms. Finally, in looking at the challenges ESL teachers face in implementing AFL, the study identified six themes as underlying challenges. These challenges were inadequate time on timetables, large class sizes and inadequate student input, resource constraints, limited training and professional development, limited access to technology and finally, overloaded English curriculum creating pressure on teachers to rush through content. Respondents were also hopeful that the challenges could be resolved.

Based on the findings from the study, the following conclusions could be made. In the first place, a lot of male English teachers took part in the study. For teaching experience. Most of the teachers were in their youthful age and most of them held first degree as their qualification. They were mostly professional teachers. English as Second Language teachers

had favorable beliefs about Assessment for learning practices. Despite having favourable beliefs, the ESL teachers did not implement Assessment for Learning practices in their classrooms as required. The teachers identified inadequate time on timetables, large class sizes and inadequate student input, resource constraints, limited training and professional development, limited access to technology and finally, overloaded English curriculum creating pressure on teachers to rush through content as challenges they encounter in the attempt to implement ADL in the study area.

The following policy implementation and recommendations have been proposed based on the study's results and conclusions. The study revealed that all the respondents believed that the challenges of AfL in ESL classrooms could be resolved. It is therefore recommended that short-term courses, workshops, seminars and other necessary in-service training activities should be organized by the Ghana Education Service (GES), the Bole Municipal Directorate of Education and by the various headmasters for the ESL teachers. At such courses, teachers could be exposed to other forms of assessment for learning practices, which they could adopt to enhance students' learning. School heads, school improvement and support officers (SISOs) and heads of department being immediate supervisors should ensure frequent supervision of assessment processes of teachers to make sure that they align with AfL practices. During Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in the schools, the curriculum leads should be encouraged to infuse PLC education and practices.

Finally, school heads should work to provide adequate time on timetables, they should provide needed AfL resources, they should organize training and professional development programmes. Further, they should collaborate with other stakeholders and government to put up adequate classrooms, provide sufficient access to technology and finally to reconsider examining the English curriculum so as to add enough teachers to handle the various aspects of the subject to reduce the pressure on teachers. Various motivation strategies should be adopted by English language teachers to enable students active take part in AfL practices.

This study focused on ESL teachers' beliefs and practices about Assessment for Learning among senior high schools in the Bole District. Therefore, it is suggested that a replica of the study should be conducted in other districts in Ghana to give more national outlook for generalization.

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