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Navigating Leadership Complexities: The Roles and Challenges of College Principals in Ensuring Quality Classroom Assessment in Ghana's Colleges of Education

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Abstract

Quality classroom assessment in teacher education depends not only on the technical competence of tutors but also on the institutional leadership conditions under which assessment is designed, moderated, interpreted, and used. This study examined how principals of Colleges of Education in Ghana's Ashanti Region enact instructional leadership in relation to classroom assessment and the challenges that shape this work. An interpretive qualitative design informed by a phenomenological orientation was used. Fifteen participants, four principals, two vice-principals, and nine tutors from four public Colleges of Education were purposively selected. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, document review, and non-participant observation and analysed thematically using NVivo 14. The findings indicate that principals' assessment leadership was enacted through three closely connected

practices: supervision and moderation of assessment, mentoring and professional capacity development, and the cultivation of an institutional culture of assessment integrity. These practices were constrained by inadequate material and technological resources, uneven assessment literacy, tensions between policy expectations and institutional capacity, and substantial administrative workloads. The findings suggest that assessment quality cannot be secured through compliance-oriented supervision alone. It requires leadership arrangements that combine pedagogical oversight, professional learning, distributed responsibility, and institutional support. The study contributes a context-sensitive account of assessment leadership in Ghanaian teacher education and highlights implications for leadership preparation, quality assurance, professional learning, and the organisation of principals' work.

Keywords: Instructional Leadership, Classroom Assessment, Teacher Education, Colleges of Education, Ghana, Assessment Quality, Quality Assurance

1. Introduction

Classroom assessment is a central mechanism through which educational institutions determine what students have learned, identify learning needs, provide feedback, and make decisions about subsequent teaching. In teacher education, its significance is even greater because tutors are not merely assessing current learners; they are also modelling assessment practices that prospective teachers may reproduce in their future classrooms. Assessment quality therefore has implications for both immediate student learning and the professional formation of teachers. The relationship between curriculum and assessment is consequently not incidental: assessment decisions influence what is taught, what students attend to, and how learning is understood (Gleeson, 2022) ^[14].

Instructional leadership provides an important organisational lens for understanding this relationship. The classical model of instructional management proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) ^[15] places mission definition, management of instructional programmes, and promotion of a positive learning climate at the centre of school leadership. Contemporary work, however, suggests that instructional leadership is enacted through relationships, professional learning, contextual judgement, and shared responsibility rather than through hierarchical supervision alone. In teacher education, this distinction matters

because assessment practices are embedded in disciplinary expertise and professional autonomy. A principal who seeks to improve assessment quality must therefore move between formal oversight and the less visible work of professional dialogue, mentoring, coordination, and culture building.

Evidence from Ghana indicates that principals of Colleges of Education already perform several instructional leadership functions, including supporting tutors, promoting collaboration and professional development, and supervising aspects of instruction, although the intensity of these practices varies with principals' experience (Agyeman-Nyarko, 2021) ^[1]. Research on leadership styles in Ghanaian Colleges of Education likewise suggests that leadership practice is shaped by institutional setting and contextual conditions (Esia-Donkoh & Quansah, 2021) ^[12]. More recent work on professional development in Ghanaian Colleges of Education further indicates that institutional policy clarity is important for aligning professional development with educators' actual needs (Owusu-Cole *et al.*, 2025) ^[25]. These studies provide an important foundation, but they do not sufficiently explain how principals enact leadership specifically around the quality of classroom assessment or how they negotiate the tensions that arise when assessment reforms encounter institutional constraints.

The policy environment makes this question increasingly important. The transition to the four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) curriculum has strengthened expectations for learner-centred pedagogy, professional practice, and more purposeful assessment. At the institutional level, principals are expected to translate such expectations into workable systems of quality assurance while also managing staffing, finance, infrastructure, stakeholder relations, and regulatory requirements. This creates a potential contradiction: the same leader who is expected to provide close pedagogical guidance may have limited time, resources, and specialised assessment expertise to do so. Research on leadership in Ghana and other contexts indicates that instructional leadership is strongly mediated by institutional structures, leadership capacity, and the wider policy environment (Kyei-Nuamah & Peng, 2023; Ralebese *et al.*, 2025; Sandvik *et al.*, 2023) ^[18, 27, 28].

The problem, therefore, is not simply whether principals perform assessment-related duties. It is how those duties are interpreted, prioritised, and enacted in everyday institutional practice. A compliance-oriented understanding of assessment leadership may emphasise approval of examination materials and adherence to procedures, whereas a developmental understanding places greater emphasis on assessment literacy, feedback, moderation, professional dialogue, and the use of assessment evidence to improve teaching. The distinction is consequential because procedural compliance does not necessarily guarantee pedagogical quality. Authentic and appropriately designed assessment, for example, can support academic integrity and the development of meaningful skills when it is aligned with learning purposes (Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2019) ^[29].

Against this background, the present study investigates how principals in four public Colleges of Education in Ghana's Ashanti Region enact instructional leadership in promoting quality classroom assessment and the challenges that constrain their practice. It addresses two questions: (1) How do principals enact instructional leadership in relation to

classroom assessment? (2) What challenges do principals and other key staff encounter in sustaining quality assessment leadership? By focusing on the lived experiences of principals, vice-principals, and tutors, the study moves beyond prescriptive accounts of leadership and examines assessment governance as a socially and organisationally situated practice. The study is intended to contribute to debates on instructional leadership, assessment governance, and quality assurance in teacher education, particularly in resource-constrained settings where policy expectations and institutional capacity may not always develop at the same pace.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Instructional Leadership in Teacher Education

Instructional leadership has traditionally been concerned with the principal's direct influence on teaching and learning. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) ^[15] influential framework conceptualised this influence through defining the institutional mission, managing instructional programmes, and developing a positive learning climate. Although developed within school leadership research, these dimensions remain useful for examining Colleges of Education because principals are responsible for creating conditions in which teaching, assessment, professional learning, and curriculum implementation can be coordinated. However, teacher education institutions differ from conventional schools in their stronger emphasis on professional autonomy, disciplinary expertise, and the preparation of future teachers. Instructional leadership in this setting consequently requires more than direct supervision; it requires the capacity to facilitate professional judgement and collective learning.

The Ghanaian literature supports a contextual rather than purely universal understanding of instructional leadership. Agyeman-Nyarko (2021) ^[1] found that principals of Colleges of Education engaged in collaboration, staff support, induction, and in-service development, while direct instructional supervision was less consistently demonstrated. This suggests that leadership roles may be distributed unevenly across the instructional domain. Esia-Donkoh and Quansah (2021) ^[12] similarly show that principals' leadership styles vary across institutional settings. Such findings are consistent with the argument that leadership is embedded in organisational and cultural contexts rather than being a portable set of behaviours (Noman & Gurr, 2020) ^[23].

The literature also points towards relational and developmental dimensions of instructional leadership. Leadership that creates opportunities for professional growth, dialogue, and shared problem-solving can strengthen staff engagement and institutional learning (D'Ascoli & Piro, 2022; Ghamrawi *et al.*, 2024) ^[10, 13]. Distributed leadership is particularly relevant because complex educational work cannot be sustained by a single office-holder. Rather, leadership is enacted through an institutional infrastructure in which formal leaders and professional staff jointly interpret problems and coordinate responses (Larsson & Löwstedt, 2020) ^[20]. For assessment, this means that principals' influence may be strongest when formal accountability is combined with opportunities for tutors to develop and exercise assessment expertise.

2.2 Assessment Leadership and Quality Classroom Assessment

Quality classroom assessment involves more than producing examinations or assigning grades. It requires alignment between intended learning outcomes, assessment tasks, criteria, marking processes, feedback, and subsequent instructional decisions. The curriculum–assessment relationship is therefore central to educational quality because assessment can reinforce or distort curricular intentions (Gleeson, 2022) ^[14]. In teacher education, the quality of this alignment has an additional professional dimension: tutors' assessment decisions become part of the professional environment in which prospective teachers learn what constitutes fair, valid, transparent, and educationally useful assessment.

Principals can influence this process through several complementary functions. First, they can establish expectations for assessment quality and ensure that institutional procedures are followed. Second, they can support moderation and review processes that reduce inconsistency and strengthen the defensibility of grading decisions. Research on grading across cultures demonstrates that grading is not a purely mechanical act; it involves professional judgement and can vary in how value and consistency are constructed (Cheng *et al.*, 2020) ^[9]. Third, principals can facilitate professional development so that assessment is treated as an area of continuing professional learning rather than an administrative task. Recent research on professional development needs in Ghanaian Colleges of Education reinforces the importance of institutional structures that identify and respond to staff development needs (Owusu-Cole *et al.*, 2025) ^[25].

Assessment leadership should also be connected to the ethical purposes of assessment. Authentic assessment has been associated with academic integrity, skill development, and employability when assessment tasks are meaningfully connected to intended learning (Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2019) ^[29]. Consequently, institutional quality assurance should not be reduced to checking whether documents have been completed. It should ask whether assessment practices generate credible evidence of learning and whether that evidence is used constructively. Sandvik *et al.* (2023) ^[28] similarly emphasise the importance of leadership and assessment capability, particularly when educational systems face disruption and changing expectations. These perspectives support a view of principals as both guardians of assessment standards and facilitators of professional learning.

2.3 Challenges in Assessment Leadership

The exercise of instructional leadership is conditioned by the resources, authority, expertise, and time available to leaders. In Ghanaian Colleges of Education, principals operate within institutions undergoing curriculum and quality-assurance reforms while also managing substantial administrative responsibilities. Kyey-Nuamah and Peng (2023) ^[18] show that leadership practice in Ghana is shaped by contextual constraints, while Agyeman-Nyarko (2021) ^[1] indicates that direct instructional supervision can be less

prominent than other leadership behaviours. These findings raise an important question for assessment: even where principals recognise the importance of assessment quality, can they sustain close pedagogical engagement when administrative demands compete for attention?

Assessment literacy represents a second challenge. Effective assessment governance requires knowledge of assessment design, validity, reliability, moderation, feedback, interpretation of evidence, and the limitations of assessment results. Where leaders or staff have uneven expertise, quality assurance can become procedural rather than developmental. Paramole *et al.* (2025) ^[26] emphasise the importance of assessment literacy for strengthening teaching and learning, while Sandvik *et al.* (2023) ^[28] connect leadership with assessment capability. Professional development should therefore be understood as an institutional capacity rather than an optional individual activity.

A third challenge concerns policy–practice alignment. Educational reforms frequently specify desired practices without fully resolving questions of staffing, infrastructure, professional learning, time, and institutional autonomy. Research on decentralisation in Ghana demonstrates how formal policy arrangements can produce weak implementation when participation, capacity, and institutional conditions are not adequately aligned (Dzakaklo *et al.*, 2023) ^[11]. In teacher education, the practical implication is that principals may become intermediaries between national expectations and local realities, translating policy into routines that must be workable within particular colleges.

2.4 Context and Analytical Position

Leadership in Ghanaian education should also be interpreted in relation to culture, institutional relationships, and expectations concerning authority. Contextual leadership scholarship cautions against treating leadership models as universally transferable without considering local meanings and organisational conditions (Noman & Gurr, 2020) ^[23]. Reflective leadership similarly emphasises the importance of examining how leaders interpret organisational problems and adapt their actions to changing circumstances (Castelli, 2016) ^[8]. In Ghanaian Colleges of Education, these considerations are particularly relevant because principals work through established professional hierarchies while also being expected to encourage collaboration, innovation, and reflective practice.

Taken together, the literature suggests that assessment leadership can be understood as an intersection of three processes: quality assurance, professional learning, and institutional culture. The present study uses this intersection as an interpretive lens rather than treating instructional leadership as a fixed checklist of behaviours. This position allows the analysis to examine both what principals do and the conditions that enable or constrain what they can do.

Fig 1 shows the conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between instructional leadership practices, contextual challenges, and the quality of classroom assessment in Ghana's Colleges of Education.

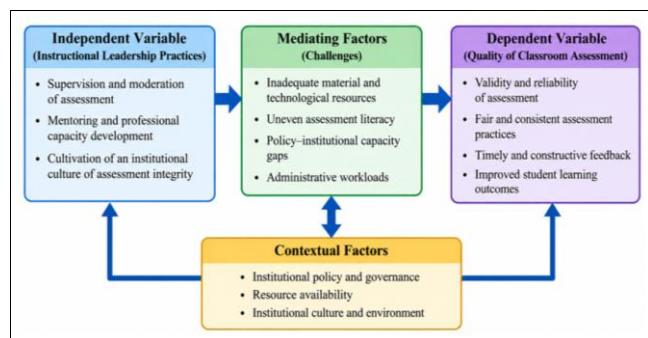


Fig 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between instructional leadership practices, contextual challenges, and the quality of classroom assessment in Ghana's Colleges of Education

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Paradigm

Fig 2 illustrates the methodological flowchart of the study. The study adopted an interpretive qualitative design informed by a phenomenological orientation. The choice was appropriate because the study sought to understand how participants experienced and interpreted principals' assessment leadership rather than to estimate the prevalence of particular behaviours across the Colleges of Education sector. An interpretive orientation recognises that leadership practices acquire meaning through participants' interactions, institutional norms, and contextual circumstances. The phenomenological emphasis therefore directed attention to participants' accounts of how assessment leadership was experienced in practice. Brion and Ampah-Mensah (2021) ^[7] demonstrate the value of qualitative inquiry for examining leadership and culturally embedded experiences in Ghanaian educational settings.

3.2 Study Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in four public Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The colleges were purposively selected to provide variation in institutional histories, administrative arrangements, and academic contexts while remaining within the same regional policy environment. The study population comprised principals, vice-principals, and tutors who were directly involved in teaching, supervision, assessment, or academic administration. Fifteen participants were selected purposively: four principals, two vice-principals, and nine tutors. Purposive sampling was used because participants needed direct knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation; this is consistent with qualitative sampling approaches that prioritise information-rich cases over statistical representativeness (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024) ^[24]. Participants had between five and thirty years of professional experience, allowing the study to incorporate both established and more recent perspectives on assessment leadership.

The sample should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all Colleges of Education in Ghana. Its value lies instead in the depth and contextual specificity of the accounts generated across different institutional roles. Including principals, vice-principals, and tutors also provided an opportunity to examine leadership from more than one organisational position, reducing reliance on principals' self-reports alone.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were generated through three complementary sources: semi-structured interviews, documentary review, and non-participant observation. Semi-structured interviews were the primary source and explored participants' understanding of instructional leadership, approaches to assessment supervision and moderation, staff development practices, and constraints affecting assessment quality. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, was conducted in English, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and was transcribed verbatim. The relatively short interview duration is a methodological limitation because complex leadership experiences may require extended engagement; this was partly addressed through the use of documentary and observational evidence.

Documents reviewed included institutional quality assurance manuals, moderation reports, and academic board minutes. These documents were used to examine the formal structures within which assessment leadership operated and to contextualise participants' descriptions. Non-participant observations were undertaken during staff meetings, moderation activities, and workshops. Field notes recorded relevant interactions, communication patterns, decision-making processes, and contextual features. The use of interviews, documents, and observation provided methodological triangulation and allowed convergence and divergence across sources to be considered rather than treating interview accounts as the sole evidence base.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2019) ^[6] reflexive approach. Interview transcripts, documentary material, and field notes were organised in NVivo 14. The analysis involved familiarisation with the dataset, generation of initial codes, development and review of candidate themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final analytic account. Coding was informed partly by the study's focus on instructional leadership and assessment governance, while remaining open to meanings emerging from participants' accounts. The final analysis concentrated on the practices through which principals influenced assessment quality and the institutional conditions that constrained those practices.

Interpretation was iterative rather than purely mechanical. Codes were compared across participant groups and data sources to identify recurring patterns as well as differences in how principals, vice-principals, and tutors experienced assessment leadership. NVivo was used as an organisational aid for coding and retrieval; it was not treated as a substitute for interpretive judgement.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed using the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) ^[21]. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation across interviews, documents, and observations and through member checking of participants' accounts. Dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail of the research and analytical decisions. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling and attention to the distinction between participants' accounts and the researchers' interpretations.

Transferability was addressed through contextual description of the participating institutions, participant roles, and research procedures so that readers can judge the relevance of the findings to other teacher education settings. The study does not claim statistical generalisability.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Education, Winneba Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured that their identities and institutional information would be treated confidentially. Data were used solely for the study. Institutional protocols and local expectations concerning access, authority, and professional relationships were respected throughout the fieldwork. The ethical procedures were consistent with the principle that participants should be able to contribute without undue pressure and that qualitative accounts should be presented without compromising confidentiality.

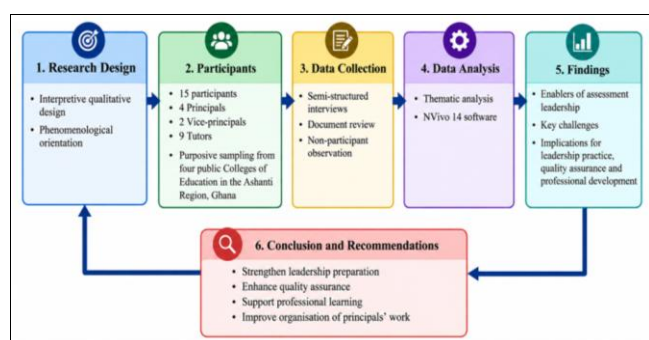


Fig 2: Methodological flowchart illustrating the research design, participant selection, data collection, thematic data analysis, and interpretation of findings

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis generated two overarching dimensions of assessment leadership. The first concerns what principals do to influence assessment quality; the second concerns the institutional conditions that enable or restrict those actions. Across the dataset, assessment leadership was not experienced as a single activity. It was enacted through supervision, professional support, and the construction of shared expectations about fairness and integrity. At the same time, these practices were constrained by resources, assessment expertise, policy–practice tensions, and competing administrative demands. The findings are discussed below in relation to the literature and the Ghanaian teacher education context.

4.1 Supervision and Moderation as Quality-Assurance Practices

Participants described principals as having a direct supervisory role in assessment quality assurance. This involved reviewing examination questions, marking schemes, moderation documentation, and related assessment processes before assessment activities were authorised. The underlying purpose was not simply procedural approval; participants associated supervision with consistency, fairness, alignment with intended learning outcomes, and protection of assessment integrity. This finding is consistent with the instructional management tradition in which leaders monitor instructional programmes and establish organisational expectations for teaching and learning

(Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) ^[15]. It also supports Agyeman-Nyarko's (2021) ^[1] observation that instructional supervision remains an important, although not always consistently enacted, dimension of principals' leadership in Ghanaian Colleges of Education.

The finding also illustrates a limitation of viewing assessment quality as a compliance problem. Moderation can identify technical inconsistencies, but it cannot by itself guarantee that assessment tasks are educationally meaningful. Cheng *et al.* (2020) ^[9] show that grading involves professional judgement and culturally situated understandings of value and consistency. Similarly, Gleeson (2022) ^[14] demonstrates that curriculum and assessment are closely connected. Principals therefore have an important role in asking not only whether assessment procedures have been followed but also whether assessment evidence appropriately represents the learning outcomes it is intended to measure. In this sense, supervision is most valuable when it becomes a mechanism for professional dialogue rather than a final administrative checkpoint.

However, the findings suggest that the supervisory role remains highly dependent on principals' personal involvement. Where institutional systems are weak, the principal becomes the central point through which multiple assessment processes are checked. This may protect quality in the short term but creates a sustainability problem because a system that depends excessively on one individual is vulnerable to workload, turnover, and differences in leadership competence. The finding therefore strengthens the case for distributed assessment governance rather than simply increasing the volume of principal-level inspection.

4.2 Mentoring, Professional Learning and Assessment Literacy

A second prominent dimension was the mentoring and capacity-building role of principals. Participants referred to staff meetings, workshops, informal discussions, and peer learning as opportunities through which assessment concerns were discussed and professional practice improved. This moves assessment leadership beyond surveillance towards professional learning. The finding is consistent with research showing that principals' instructional leadership can support teachers' professional development and collaborative cultures (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2024; Karo & Nyakundi, 2023) ^[3, 17]. It also resonates with Ghamrawi *et al.* (2024) ^[13], who emphasise the relationship between professional development and the development of teacher leadership.

The significance of this finding is particularly clear in relation to assessment literacy. Assessment leadership requires more than familiarity with institutional procedures. Leaders and tutors need sufficient understanding of assessment design, criteria, moderation, feedback, and the interpretation of evidence to determine whether an assessment practice is fit for purpose. Paramole *et al.* (2025) ^[26] identify assessment literacy as an important foundation for effective teaching and learning, while Sandvik *et al.* (2023) ^[28] link leadership and assessment capability. The present findings indicate that principals can contribute to this capability by making assessment a continuing topic of professional conversation rather than an issue raised only when errors occur.

At the same time, mentoring should not be interpreted as a substitute for formal professional development. Where

principals themselves have limited specialised assessment training, informal mentoring may reproduce established institutional practices rather than introduce evidence-informed alternatives. This points to a structural implication: leadership development programmes for College of Education administrators should include explicit assessment leadership components. Owusu-Cole *et al.* (2025) ^[25] similarly highlight the importance of aligning professional development with identified institutional and staff needs.

4.3 Building an Institutional Culture of Assessment Integrity

The third leadership role concerned the construction of an institutional assessment culture. Participants described assessment as an issue of fairness, transparency, professional responsibility, and institutional credibility rather than merely an examination function. Principals were therefore perceived as setting expectations about academic honesty, procedural fairness, and accountability. This cultural dimension is consistent with contextual leadership perspectives, which emphasise that leadership is embedded in shared meanings, relationships, and institutional norms (Noman & Gurr, 2020) ^[23].

The cultural interpretation also helps explain why technical procedures alone may not be sufficient. Assessment integrity depends partly on the values that staff and students attach to assessment practices. Sotiriadou *et al.* (2019) ^[29] show that authentic assessment can support academic integrity and meaningful skill development when it is appropriately designed. In the present context, principals' symbolic and relational actions what they emphasise, how they respond to inconsistencies, and whether they encourage open professional discussion can shape whether assessment is treated as a learning process or as an administrative obligation.

This finding should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously. The study demonstrates participants' perceptions and observed institutional practices; it does not establish a causal relationship between principals' leadership behaviour and student learning outcomes. The contribution is therefore explanatory rather than predictive: it shows how assessment quality is understood and pursued within the participating institutions and identifies the organisational mechanisms through which leadership may influence practice.

4.4 Resource Constraints and the Material Conditions of Assessment

Participants identified inadequate material and technological resources as a persistent barrier to assessment quality. Constraints affecting computing, printing, moderation logistics, and related assessment activities made implementation more difficult and required staff to work around institutional limitations. The importance of this finding is that assessment leadership cannot be separated from the material conditions in which assessment is produced. A principal may insist on timely moderation and well-designed assessment tasks, but these expectations are difficult to sustain where the basic infrastructure required to prepare, reproduce, store, analyse, or securely manage assessment materials is unreliable.

The finding is consistent with the broader argument that leadership effectiveness depends on institutional conditions rather than individual disposition alone (Kyei-Nuamah & Peng, 2023; Ralebese *et al.*, 2025) ^[18, 27]. It also reinforces

the contextual perspective of Noman and Gurr (2020) ^[23]: leadership practices acquire their meaning and feasibility within particular organisational environments. Consequently, quality-assurance policy that focuses primarily on compliance without addressing infrastructure may place additional responsibility on principals without resolving the underlying implementation problem.

4.5 Uneven Assessment Literacy and Leadership Capacity

Participants also identified uneven assessment literacy among leaders and staff as a constraint. The issue was not described simply as a lack of willingness to improve. Rather, it concerned the extent to which principals and tutors possessed specialised knowledge to design, review, interpret, and improve assessment. This distinction is important because accountability without capability can produce superficial compliance. Leaders may be able to verify whether a moderation form has been completed while lacking the technical basis to interrogate the quality of an assessment task or the evidence generated from it.

The finding aligns with the emerging emphasis on assessment capability in educational leadership (Sandvik *et al.*, 2023) ^[28] and with evidence that professional development in Ghanaian Colleges of Education needs to be more systematically aligned with institutional needs (Owusu-Cole *et al.*, 2025) ^[25]. It also supports the broader instructional leadership literature, which treats professional learning as part of the leader's responsibility rather than as an activity external to leadership (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2024) ^[3]. The implication is that assessment leadership should be incorporated into leadership preparation and continuing professional development rather than assumed to develop automatically through administrative experience.

4.6 Policy–Practice Disjunction

A further challenge was the gap between policy expectations and institutional capacity. Participants experienced national and institutional assessment expectations as demanding practices that were not always accompanied by equivalent training, resources, time, or operational flexibility. This is a classic implementation problem: policy may define what should happen while leaving institutions to negotiate how the intended changes can be made workable. The finding is consistent with evidence that policy and decentralisation reforms can encounter implementation difficulties when local capacity and participation do not adequately match formal expectations (Dzakaklo *et al.*, 2023) ^[11].

The implication is not that policy standards should be weakened. Rather, standards need to be accompanied by implementation infrastructure. In the Colleges of Education context, this includes sustained professional learning, clear guidance, opportunities for peer moderation, realistic workloads, and mechanisms through which colleges can communicate implementation challenges to regulatory and coordinating bodies. Policy coherence should therefore be evaluated not only by the consistency of written requirements but also by the extent to which institutions have the capacity to enact them.

4.7 Administrative Overload and the Limits of Principal-Level Leadership

Administrative workload emerged as another major constraint. Principals were expected to manage academic

and operational responsibilities while also providing instructional oversight. This creates a structural tension between the breadth of the principal's formal responsibilities and the depth of engagement required for meaningful instructional leadership. Research on instructional leadership has repeatedly highlighted the challenge of balancing managerial and pedagogical functions, particularly where leaders operate in complex institutional environments (Lani & Pauzi, 2024) ^[19].

The finding has a direct bearing on sustainability. If assessment quality depends on principals personally reviewing large volumes of assessment material, resolving routine issues, and facilitating professional development while simultaneously carrying extensive administrative responsibilities, leadership becomes reactive. Distributed leadership offers a potential response because responsibility can be allocated across vice-principals, heads of department, quality-assurance personnel, and experienced tutors while the principal retains strategic oversight (Larsson & Löwstedt, 2020) ^[20]. The purpose is not to dilute accountability but to create an organisational structure in which responsibility for quality is shared, and professional expertise is mobilised more effectively.

4.8 Integrative Interpretation

Taken together, the findings reveal a central paradox: principals are expected to function as instructional leaders of assessment, yet the conditions of their work can push them towards managerial rather than pedagogical leadership. They respond to this tension by combining supervision, mentoring, and cultural leadership. These practices can strengthen assessment quality, but their effectiveness is conditional on resources, expertise, time, and organisational arrangements. The study therefore supports a relational and contextual conception of instructional leadership in which leadership effectiveness is produced through the interaction between individual practice and institutional infrastructure. The findings also suggest that assessment quality should be understood as an organisational capability rather than the product of isolated individual competence. Supervision establishes accountability; mentoring develops capability; and institutional culture gives assessment practices their normative direction. None of these functions is sufficient alone. A strong moderation system without professional learning may enforce consistency without improvement, while professional development without institutional accountability may not translate into consistent practice. Sustainable assessment leadership requires the three functions to operate together within a supportive institutional environment.

5. Implications and Recommendations

The findings have implications at three interconnected levels: leadership development, institutional governance, and system-level policy implementation.

5.1 Strengthen Assessment Leadership Development

GTEC and relevant teacher-education stakeholders should incorporate assessment leadership into continuing professional development for principals, vice-principals, heads of department, and quality-assurance personnel. Training should move beyond general leadership theory to include assessment design, alignment with learning outcomes, moderation, grading judgement, feedback,

assessment ethics, interpretation of assessment evidence, and the use of digital tools for assessment management. The emphasis should be on sustained professional learning rather than one-off workshops. This recommendation is supported by the importance of assessment literacy and professional development identified in the literature (Paramole *et al.*, 2025; Owusu-Cole *et al.*, 2025) ^[26, 25].

5.2 Institutionalise Distributed Assessment Governance

Colleges should establish clearly defined assessment-quality responsibilities across principals, vice-principals, heads of department, assessment committees, and tutors. Distributed leadership should not mean transferring responsibility without authority or resources. Roles, reporting lines, moderation responsibilities, and escalation procedures should be explicit. Such arrangements would reduce overdependence on the principal while retaining strategic accountability at the institutional level. The recommendation is consistent with distributed leadership scholarship, which emphasises the organisational infrastructure required for shared leadership to function effectively (Larsson & Löwstedt, 2020) ^[20].

5.3 Move Quality Assurance from Compliance to Improvement

Quality assurance processes should examine the educational quality of assessment rather than only the completion of procedural requirements. Moderation reports should identify recurring weaknesses, professional-learning needs, and actions for subsequent assessment cycles. Academic boards and quality-assurance units should review whether assessment tasks remain aligned with curriculum intentions and whether feedback and assessment evidence inform teaching. This approach is consistent with the curriculum–assessment relationship emphasised by Gleeson (2022) ^[14] and the broader role of authentic assessment in promoting meaningful learning and academic integrity (Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2019) ^[29].

5.4 Address Material and Technological Constraints

Institutional and system-level planning should treat assessment infrastructure as a quality-assurance requirement rather than an incidental operational cost. Colleges need reliable access to computing, printing, secure assessment storage, moderation facilities, and appropriate digital systems. Resource planning should be informed by the actual assessment workload and by the requirements of the B.Ed. curriculum. Without such support, additional regulatory requirements may increase administrative burden without producing corresponding improvements in assessment quality.

5.5 Create Structured Professional Learning Communities

Colleges should institutionalise regular professional learning communities in which tutors and academic leaders jointly examine assessment tasks, marking criteria, moderation outcomes, and emerging assessment challenges. Such communities can reduce the isolation of individual tutors and make assessment expertise a collective institutional resource. The recommendation builds on evidence concerning collaboration, professional development, and teacher leadership (Agyeman-Nyarko, 2021; Ghamrawi *et al.*, 2024) ^[1, 13].

5.6 Align Policy Expectations with Implementation Capacity

Regulatory and coordinating bodies should accompany assessment reforms with practical implementation guidance, professional development, monitoring, and feedback mechanisms. Policy reviews should consider whether colleges possess the time, expertise, staffing, infrastructure, and institutional flexibility required to implement new assessment expectations. This would help reduce the policy–practice gap identified in the study and would support a more developmental form of quality assurance.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved fifteen participants across four public Colleges of Education in one region. The findings therefore provide contextual insight rather than statistical generalisation to all Colleges of Education in Ghana. Second, the interviews lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, which limits the depth with which some complex experiences could be explored. The use of documents and observations partly strengthened the evidence base, but longer interviews could have generated richer individual narratives. Third, the study focused on principals, vice-principals, and tutors and did not directly include students, external examiners, or regulatory officials. Future studies could incorporate these groups to examine whether leadership intentions correspond with student experiences, external quality judgments, and regulatory expectations.

Future research could also use comparative case studies across regions or institutional types to examine how differences in resources, leadership experience, and organisational structures shape assessment governance. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable for examining whether leadership-development interventions and distributed assessment structures produce sustained changes in assessment practice. Mixed-methods studies could complement the present qualitative evidence by examining relationships among principals' leadership practices, tutors' assessment literacy, moderation outcomes, and student learning indicators.

7. Conclusion

This study examined how principals of Colleges of Education in Ghana's Ashanti Region enact instructional leadership in relation to quality classroom assessment. The findings show that assessment leadership is enacted through three closely connected functions: supervision and moderation, mentoring and professional capacity development, and the cultivation of an institutional culture of assessment integrity. These functions demonstrate that principals' influence extends beyond administrative approval of assessment materials to the development of professional norms and institutional conditions that shape how assessment is understood and practised.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that principals cannot secure assessment quality through individual effort alone. Inadequate resources, uneven assessment literacy, policy–practice tensions, and administrative overload restrict the extent to which instructional leadership can be sustained. The central issue is therefore not simply whether principals are committed to assessment quality, but whether the institutional system gives them sufficient capability,

time, authority, and distributed support to act on that commitment.

The study contributes to the literature by positioning assessment leadership as an organisational and relational practice rather than a narrow compliance function. In the Ghanaian Colleges of Education context, effective leadership requires the integration of accountability with professional learning, and formal quality assurance with collaborative institutional culture. The practical priority is consequently to strengthen leadership preparation in assessment, distribute assessment responsibilities, improve institutional infrastructure, and align policy expectations with implementation capacity. Such measures would enable assessment to function not merely as a mechanism for judging learning, but as an integral part of improving teaching, learning, and the professional preparation of Ghana's future teachers.

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