

Quality Classroom Assessment in Ghanaian Colleges of Education: Lecturers' Perceptions and Principals' Leadership Roles

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Abstract

Quality classroom assessment is central to the implementation of Ghana's teacher-education reforms, yet its effectiveness depends on both assessment practice and institutional leadership. This study used a convergent mixed-methods design to examine lecturers' perceptions of principals' assessment leadership and principals' accounts of the practices and conditions that shape assessment quality in public Colleges of Education in Ghana's Ashanti Region. Quantitative data were obtained from 199 lecturers, and qualitative data were generated through interviews with eight principals. Descriptive statistics and structural equation modelling were complemented by thematic analysis. Lecturers strongly perceived that principals aligned assessment with curriculum standards, promoted fairness and transparent communication, and supported formative assessment. Principals identified workload, limited time, budgetary constraints, inadequate space, and insufficient facilities as factors that reduced the depth of supervision and constrained authentic, performance-based assessment. The structural analysis indicated positive relationships between democratic leadership and assessment of learning and assessment as learning, whereas autocratic leadership was negatively associated with assessment for learning. The findings support the integration of assessment leadership into principal performance agreements, the protection of time for observation and moderation, and dedicated funding for practice-based assessment.

Keywords: classroom assessment; instructional leadership; distributed leadership; Colleges of Education; mixed methods; Ghana.

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1. Introduction

Classroom assessment is central to teaching and learning quality in Ghana's tertiary education sector and forms part of the quality expectations overseen by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). GTEC was established under the Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023), which merged the National Council for Tertiary Education and the National Accreditation Board and assigned the Commission advisory, coordinating, regulatory, accreditation, and quality-assurance responsibilities for tertiary education (Republic of Ghana, 2020; Newman, 2023). In practice, these responsibilities include standards setting, institutional review, quality audits, and the verification of institutional improvement actions.

Teacher-education reforms introduced in 2018 further increased the importance of classroom assessment. Initial teacher education shifted from the three-year Diploma in Basic Education to a four-year Bachelor of Education delivered through university affiliations. The reform requires closer alignment among assessment, curriculum standards, and the National Teachers' Standards and places greater emphasis on assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning (Barnes & Cross, 2020; Baidoo-Anu, 2023). Implementation began with the 2019 cohort, and the first Bachelor of Education cohort graduated in 2022.

Despite these policy expectations, assessment quality depends on how lecturers understand and enact assessment and on how principals organise supervision, moderation, professional development, timetabling, and resource allocation. The Ashanti Region provides a useful setting because its public Colleges of Education serve urban

and peri-urban catchments and differ in infrastructure and resource profiles. These variations make it possible to examine both perceptions of quality classroom assessment and the leadership practices through which assessment quality is pursued.

Accordingly, this study examines lecturers' perceptions of principals' roles in promoting quality classroom assessment and explores principals' accounts of the leadership practices and institutional conditions that shape implementation. It addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. *How do lecturers perceive principals' roles in promoting quality classroom assessment in public Colleges of Education?*

RQ2. *How do principals describe the leadership practices and institutional conditions that shape quality classroom assessment?*

This study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it extends distributed instructional leadership scholarship by explaining how principals' leadership approaches relate to assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning in public Colleges of Education. Second, it provides mixed-method evidence from Ghana's teacher-education sector by integrating lecturers' perceptions with principals' accounts of the institutional conditions that support or constrain quality classroom assessment. This offers context-specific evidence from an educational system undergoing substantial teacher-education and curriculum reforms. Third, the study identifies practical leadership mechanisms, including assessment moderation, lecturer development, protected time for classroom observation, and resource allocation, that can strengthen assessment quality. By linking leadership practices, assessment orientations, and enabling conditions, the study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how classroom assessment quality is promoted or constrained in Colleges of Education.

The remainder of the paper reviews the literature, explains the methodology, presents and discusses the findings, and concludes with implications and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Quality classroom assessment*

Quality classroom assessment comprises practices that are valid, reliable, fair, and useful. It operates as an iterative process in which evidence of learning informs instructional adjustment, supports transparent grading, and strengthens students' capacity to regulate their own learning (Shepard, 2019). In higher education, formative assessment and high-quality feedback are most effective when feedback is timely, specific, actionable, and linked to clear criteria and exemplars that students can use to monitor their progress (Cooney, 2025).

2.2 *Assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning*

Classroom assessment is commonly organised around three complementary purposes. Assessment for learning uses evidence generated during instruction to adjust teaching and address learning gaps (Shepard, 2019). Assessment as learning emphasises metacognition through self-assessment and peer assessment, enabling students to internalise success criteria and regulate their learning strategies (Ebrahimi et al., 2021). Assessment of learning provides summative judgements for certification, grading, and reporting. In standards-referenced systems, quality depends on a balanced use of all three purposes rather than an exclusive reliance on summative judgement (Radford, 2022; Maki, 2023).

2.3 *Instructional leadership and assessment culture*

Instructional leadership shapes how assessment evidence is generated, interpreted, and used for improvement. Leadership influences learning principally through indirect practices such as setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing instruction (Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2020). Within assessment systems, these practices include classroom observation with feedback, assessment moderation, rubric calibration, professional learning, and reviews of feedback quality (Bonsu et al., 2022; Somuah et al., 2024). GTEC's quality-assurance and accreditation responsibilities provide an institutional context in which principals are expected to organise and monitor these routines (Republic of Ghana, 2020; Newman, 2023).

2.4 Time, resources, and space as enabling conditions

High-quality assessment requires conditions that make effective practice feasible. Structured observation schedules create opportunities for formative feedback to lecturers, and moderation routines strengthen reliability and fairness through calibration and cross-checking of standards (Moss & Brookhart, 2019). Appropriate laboratories, workshops, equipment, and consumable materials increase the validity of performance-based assessment in practice-intensive programmes. Dedicated time and predictable funding also support assessment-literacy development, moderation, and feedback processes (Somuah et al., 2026). Principals therefore play a central role in allocating time, convening moderation, and advocating for the resources required for authentic assessment.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Distributed instructional leadership

The study is anchored in distributed instructional leadership, which views leadership practice as stretched across formal leaders, organisational routines, and professional communities (Gronn, 2000, 2002; Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2008). From this perspective, responsibility for assessment quality is shared among principals, quality-assurance officers, heads of department, assessment committees, and lecturer teams. Principals influence assessment indirectly by clarifying expectations, building staff capacity, coordinating routines, and creating the organisational conditions within which assessment evidence can be used.

3.2 The assessment for, as, and of learning framework

The second theoretical anchor is the assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning framework, developed within the formative-assessment tradition (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2009; Stiggins, 2002; Earl, 2003). The framework recognises that assessment evidence can support instructional improvement, students' metacognitive development, or summative accountability. It therefore provides a basis for interpreting what lecturers and principals regard as quality assessment and for assessing whether institutional leadership supports a balanced assessment system.

3.3 Integrative expectations

Together, the two perspectives suggest that strong assessment leadership should be reflected in clear expectations, regular observation and moderation, staff development, and adequate provision of time and resources. They also imply that positive leadership intentions may not translate into consistent practice when workload, funding, space, or equipment constrain implementation. These expectations informed the quantitative measures, the principal interview guide, and the integration of the two strands.

4. Methods

4.1 Research design

A convergent mixed-methods design was used to provide breadth and depth on the same phenomenon within a single phase of fieldwork (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Amadi, 2023). The quantitative and qualitative strands were conducted concurrently, analysed separately, and integrated during interpretation through side-by-side comparison and joint displays. The design quantified lecturers' perceptions and used principals' accounts to explain leadership practices, implementation mechanisms, and constraints.

4.2 Setting and participants

The study was conducted in eight public Colleges of Education in Ghana's Ashanti Region. The institutional population comprised approximately 330 lecturers and eight principals. The quantitative sample consisted of 199 full-time lecturers who had classroom-assessment responsibilities during the study semester. The qualitative sample comprised all eight principals, one from each participating college. The setting provided variation in institutional infrastructure and resources relevant to the study's focus.

4.3 Instruments and measures

4.3.1 Lecturer questionnaire

The lecturer questionnaire contained four sections. Section A captured demographic and professional characteristics. Section B measured perceptions of quality classroom assessment across validity, reliability, fairness, and usefulness. Section C assessed orientation towards assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning. Section D measured perceptions of principals' assessment-leadership roles, including supervision, moderation, professional development, protection of time, and resourcing. The items used

five-point Likert-type response scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Lindner & Lindner, 2024). Item pools were adapted from the higher-education assessment literature and refined through expert review for relevance to Colleges of Education. The instrument is reproduced in Appendix A.

4.3.2 Principal interview guide

A semi-structured interview guide elicited principals' accounts of how they assured assessment quality, organised observation and moderation, supported assessment literacy, and responded to constraints related to time, space, facilities, and funding (Naz et al., 2022). The probes were aligned with distributed instructional leadership and the assessment for, as, and of learning framework. The guide is presented in Appendix B.

4.4 Data-collection procedures

Following receipt of an institutional review board introductory letter, access was granted by each participating college. Data were collected during the same academic term. Lecturers completed the self-administered questionnaire during scheduled staff meetings or through supervised drop-off arrangements. Principals participated in one-to-one interviews conducted in private offices at mutually convenient times. All participants provided informed consent. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and de-identified during transcription.

4.5 Data management and quality assurance

Quantitative responses were screened for completeness, outliers, and straight-lining. Missing values were addressed through item-level rules and pairwise deletion where appropriate after the data were assessed as missing at random. Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha. Composite reliability and average variance extracted were assessed during the structural equation modelling stage where applicable. The qualitative corpus was managed in NVivo. A codebook specifying node definitions, inclusion and exclusion rules, and exemplar quotations was developed and refined through iterative coding.

4.6 Data analysis

Quantitative analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and a structural equation modelling package. Descriptive statistics summarised central tendencies and dispersion. Structural equation modelling examined theoretically informed relationships between leadership variables and perceived assessment quality and explored relationships among assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning. Model adequacy was evaluated using standard fit indices, and assumptions were assessed through normality diagnostics, multicollinearity tests, and residual inspection.

Qualitative data were analysed through open, axial, and selective coding with constant comparison. Open coding generated data-driven labels for practices and constraints. Axial coding organised these labels into categories related to leadership work and the three assessment purposes. Selective coding refined themes that explained the quantitative patterns. Credibility was supported through coder discussion, an audit trail, attention to negative cases, and the use of thick, anonymised quotations.

4.7 Integration of the quantitative and qualitative strands

Integration occurred after the independent analyses. Quantitative patterns were compared with qualitative themes in joint displays. Convergence strengthened inferences about the assessment practices valued by lecturers and the leadership routines that enabled them. Divergence was examined for contextual explanations, including workload, facility limitations, and resource constraints.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained through the appropriate institutional review mechanism. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was documented, and confidentiality was protected through anonymisation and secure data storage. Results are reported in aggregate, and interview excerpts are de-identified to avoid revealing institutions or individuals.

5. Results

5.1 Data overview

The quantitative dataset comprised 199 completed lecturer questionnaires from eight public Colleges of Education, and the qualitative dataset comprised eight in-depth interviews with the college principals. The

colleges served urban and peri-urban catchments and differed in staffing, facilities, and resource profiles. The mixed-methods design therefore enabled quantitative patterns to be interpreted alongside qualitative accounts of implementation mechanisms and constraints.

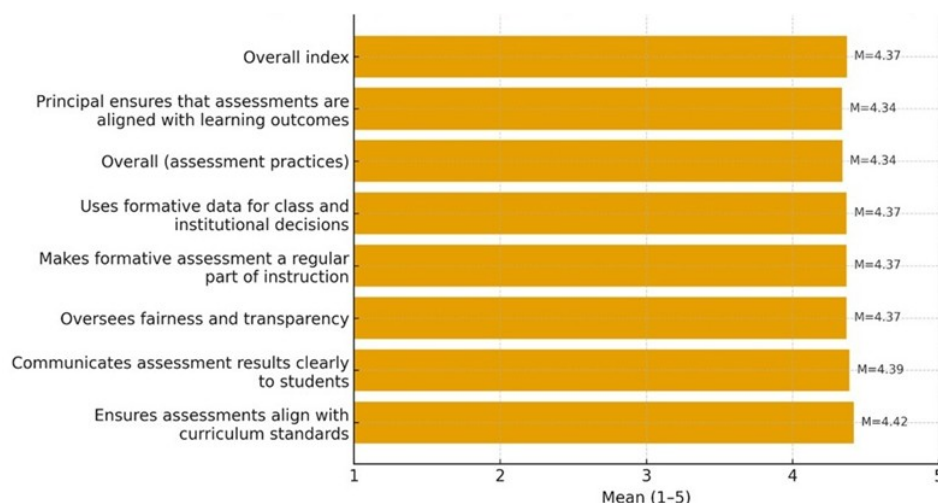
5.2 Lecturers' perceptions of principals' assessment roles

Lecturers reported strong endorsement of principals' assessment-leadership roles. Using the scale midpoint of 3.00 as the reference value, the highest-rated indicators concerned alignment with curriculum standards, clear communication of assessment results, routine formative assessment, fairness and transparency, use of formative data, and lecturer training.

Table 1. Highest-rated indicators of principals' assessment roles

Indicator	Mean	SD
Principal ensures that assessments are aligned with curriculum standards	4.42	0.58
Principal oversees the clear communication of assessment results to students	4.39	0.51
Principal ensures that formative assessment is a regular part of instruction	4.37	0.55
Principal oversees fairness and transparency in assessment	4.37	0.54
Overall principal assessment-role index	4.37	0.53
Principal ensures that formative-assessment data guide classroom decisions	4.37	0.62
Overall assessment-for-learning index	4.35	0.61
Principal supports lecturers through training in formative assessment	4.34	0.61

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. SD = standard deviation.



Note. Means are based on lecturers' responses on a five-point scale.

Figure 1. Highest-rated principal roles in assessment

5.3 Principals' accounts of assessment leadership

5.3.1 Time constraints reduce the depth of supervision

Principal P1: "You may not get me involved 100 per cent because of time constraints ... I go round a lot ... and stay there till they finish packing to ensure that everything is done well."

Principal P2: "We are not always present because of our managerial workload and surprise calls to duty."

The principals described supervisory presence as frequent but compressed. Workload and unplanned managerial demands reduced opportunities for structured classroom observation, detailed feedback, and rubric calibration. Consequently, supervision often took the form of brief walk-throughs rather than scheduled instructional-leadership cycles.

5.3.2 Assessment culture is recognised but unevenly enacted

Principals recognised the importance of formative, summative, and self-assessment but reported variability in lecturers' assessment literacy and follow-through. The qualitative evidence therefore qualified the strong lecturer ratings: leadership intent was widely perceived, but the depth and consistency of classroom enactment varied across staff and settings.

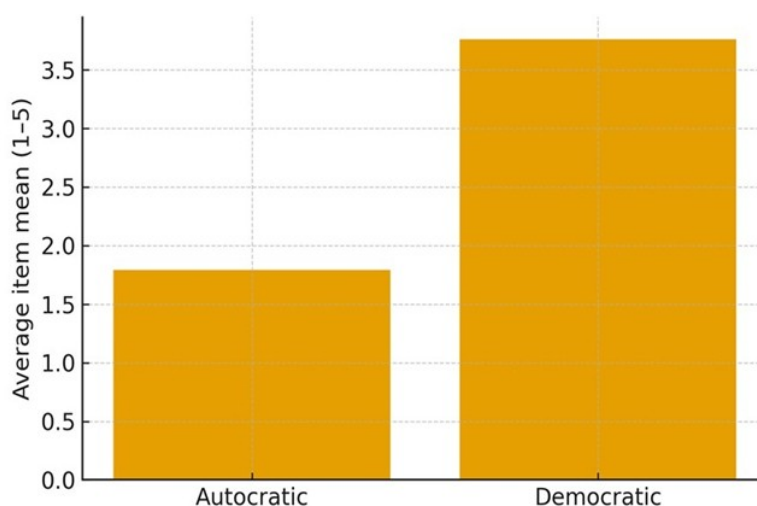
5.4 Leadership styles and constraints

Lecturers reported stronger endorsement of democratic leadership than autocratic leadership. Participative indicators, including involvement in decision-making, frequent communication, guidance without undue pressure, and support for staff development, received the highest ratings. Laissez-faire indicators were comparatively weaker.

Table 2. Selected leadership-style indicators

Indicator	Mean	SD
Believes staff want to participate in decision-making	4.45	0.61
Believes staff want frequent communication with management	4.42	0.53
Overall democratic leadership index	4.41	0.56
Believes every staff member is competent	4.40	0.56
Guides without undue pressure	4.38	0.61
Supports staff to identify and develop their strengths	4.38	0.50
Believes staff can solve complex problems independently	3.03	0.27
Overall laissez-faire leadership index	3.00	1.25

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. SD = standard deviation.



Note. Higher values indicate stronger endorsement on a five-point scale.

Figure 2. Average endorsement of autocratic and democratic leadership

The structural analysis indicated positive relationships between democratic leadership and assessment of learning and assessment as learning. Autocratic leadership was negatively associated with assessment for learning. These patterns were consistent with the stronger descriptive endorsement of participative leadership practices.

The constraint profile showed that time, financial resources, and reliance on standardised tests were more salient than limited principal knowledge of assessment-data analysis or inadequate lecturer collaboration. The two least-endorsed constraints are reported in Table 3, and the broader constraint profile is displayed in Figure 3.

Table 3. Least-endorsed constraints to assessment quality

Constraint	Mean	SD
Principal's limited knowledge of assessment-data analysis	1.69	0.67
Inadequate collaboration among lecturers	1.68	0.69

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Higher values indicate stronger agreement that the constraint is present. SD = standard deviation.



Note. The figure displays the relative mean scores of the eight constraint indicators.

Figure 3. Profile of perceived constraints to assessment quality

5.5 Resource, space, and monitoring constraints

5.5.1 Resource and space constraints narrow assessment modalities

Principal P2: "Assessment of practical works requires a lot of money ... sometimes you will need the students themselves to cut their materials to practise ... funds are a problem ..."

Principal P3: "Space is one of the biggest problems ... sometimes we use half-finished structures ... lecturers must have offices and feel settled."

Principal P1: "Workshops are too small ... equipment is in rooms ... that affects our assessment."

The interviews showed that limited budgets, inadequate space, and insufficient equipment restricted the use of authentic assessment in practice-intensive programmes. In some cases, assessment tasks were adapted to available resources rather than designed solely around the competencies to be demonstrated.

5.5.2 Leadership style acts as an assessment catalyst

The integrated findings suggested that participative leadership supported assessment committees, moderation calendars, communication, and shared responsibility for assessment quality. By contrast, directive and autocratic practices were less compatible with lecturer ownership of formative assessment and student-centred feedback.

5.5.3 Monitoring intent is not always translated into structured routines

Principal P3: "Principals need to visit classrooms and examination halls often ... but we have quite enough on our plates ... so we do not usually visit."

Although principals expressed a strong intention to monitor teaching and assessment, observation cycles and moderation checkpoints were not always formally scheduled or consistently tracked. This contributed to uneven supervisory coverage across departments and assessment periods.

6. Discussion

The findings show that lecturers generally perceived strong principal attention to assessment alignment, fairness, transparent communication, and formative-assessment support. These features correspond with established conceptions of quality classroom assessment, which emphasise clear criteria, valid evidence, actionable feedback, and the use of assessment information to improve learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2009; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008; Carless & Boud, 2018). The results also support the view that principals influence learning indirectly by organising the routines through which lecturers design, moderate, communicate, and use assessment (Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2020).

At the same time, the qualitative evidence demonstrates that positive perceptions of leadership do not necessarily indicate uniformly deep implementation. Workload and unplanned managerial responsibilities compressed supervision into brief visits, and variation in assessment literacy limited the consistency with which feedback, self-assessment, and rubric-based practices were enacted. This distinction between leadership intention and classroom enactment is important because formative assessment is effective only when feedback cycles are sustained, and students are enabled to use the information they receive (Wiliam, 2011; Carless & Boud, 2018).

The stronger endorsement of democratic leadership and its positive relationships with assessment of learning and assessment as learning are consistent with distributed instructional leadership. Assessment routines become collective work when staff participate in decisions, communicate regularly, and share responsibility through committees and moderation processes (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2008; Bonsu et al., 2022). Conversely, the negative relationship between autocratic leadership and assessment for learning suggests that directive control may weaken lecturer ownership of formative practice and reduce opportunities for dialogue and professional judgement (Robinson et al., 2008).

Finally, the principals' accounts show that leadership operates within material constraints. Limited time, funding, space, equipment, and consumables narrowed the range of assessment modalities and weakened the authenticity of performance-based tasks. These conditions help explain why strong leadership signals can coexist with uneven implementation. Quality assurance therefore requires not only standards and monitoring but also the organisational resources that enable valid, reliable, and fair assessment (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Maki, 2010; Moss & Brookhart, 2019).

7. Implications

7.1 Policy implications

Assessment leadership should be incorporated into principal performance agreements through clear expectations for classroom observation, moderation audits, and feedback turnaround. Recurring funding should be provided for assessment-literacy development, including task design, rubric calibration, and feedback practices that students can use (Akoto et al., 2026). Dedicated budgets for workshops, laboratories, equipment, and consumables are also required to protect the validity and fairness of practice-based assessment.

7.2 Institutional practice

Colleges should establish termly moderation and calibration schedules, standardise expectations for feedback turnaround and rubric quality, and adopt standing assessment committees with clearly defined responsibilities. Observation and moderation time should be protected in institutional calendars, and assessment artefacts should be reviewed periodically to identify gaps in alignment, fairness, and feedback quality. These measures would translate distributed leadership from an informal expectation into a routine institutional practice.

8. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The qualitative evidence is limited to one region, and the quantitative measures are based on self-reports. Future research should triangulate perceptions with structured classroom observations, moderation records, and scored assessment artefacts. Multi-region studies would strengthen generalisability, and experimental or quasi-experimental studies could evaluate the effect of assessment-literacy professional development. Further mixed-methods research could also examine whether protected calendars for observation and moderation improve classroom assessment outcomes.

9. Conclusion

Lecturers broadly perceived strong principal attention to classroom assessment, particularly in relation to curriculum alignment, fairness, communication, and formative practice. Democratic and distributed leadership appeared to support the translation of this orientation into institutional routines, whereas workload, time, funding, space, and equipment constrained implementation. System-level quality assurance can strengthen classroom assessment by linking principal performance expectations with protected instructional-leadership time and targeted resources for authentic assessment.

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