

Leadership Styles and Instructional Supervision for Quality Classroom Assessment in Ghana's Colleges of Education

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1026EDU0573>

Received: 03 September 2026; Accepted: 08 September 2026; Published: 19 September 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines how principals' leadership styles shape instructional supervision and the quality of classroom assessment in Ghana's Colleges of Education. An interpretive phenomenological design was used with fifteen participants comprising four principals, two vice principals, and nine tutors from four public Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, institutional document analysis, and non-participant observation and were analysed thematically with support from NVivo 14. The findings indicate that assessment quality was strengthened where principals combined transformational, participatory, instructional, and ethical leadership behaviours. In such settings, supervision was experienced less as inspection and more as professional dialogue involving mentorship, peer moderation, collaborative assessment planning, and reflective feedback. At the same time, administrative workload, centralised reporting demands, limited financial autonomy, and uneven opportunities for assessment-related professional development reduced the time and institutional space available for sustained instructional supervision.

A critical distinction therefore emerged between procedural compliance and deeper professional engagement with assessment for learning. The study argues that leadership style should not be treated as an isolated personal attribute because its practical effects are conditioned by institutional structures, professional relationships, and the wider policy environment. Sustainable assessment improvement requires leadership development that integrates assessment literacy, instructional supervision, distributed decision-making, ethical practice, and context-sensitive organisational support. The study contributes Ghana-specific evidence to educational leadership scholarship by showing how principals negotiate the tension between external accountability and professional agency within a reforming teacher education system.

Keywords: Assessment leadership, Ghanaian Colleges of Education, instructional supervision, leadership styles, classroom assessment quality

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a central organisational condition through which educational institutions translate policy expectations into everyday teaching and learning practice. In teacher education, this relationship is particularly consequential because the practices modelled and reinforced within Colleges of Education can influence the professional dispositions that student teachers subsequently carry into schools. Leadership consequently matters not only for administration but also for teaching quality, supervision, assessment, and professional learning. Contemporary educational leadership scholarship has moved beyond a narrow concern with managerial efficiency towards instructional influence, professional capacity, collaboration, and organisational learning (Leithwood et al., 2019; Mifsud, 2023).

Within Ghana's Colleges of Education, this shift has become more important following reforms associated with the Bachelor of Education curriculum and the Transforming Teaching, Education and Learning initiative. These reforms have increased expectations concerning institutional quality assurance, assessment integrity, curriculum implementation, and tutor professionalism. Principals therefore occupy a complex position in which administrative coordination must coexist with pedagogical leadership. Asante (2024) indicates that principals in the Ashanti Region undertake instructional supervision as part of their responsibility for strengthening classroom assessment. The critical issue is not simply whether supervision occurs, but how the leadership orientation through which it is enacted shapes tutors' professional responses to assessment expectations.

Leadership style provides a useful lens because different approaches distribute authority, communicate expectations, construct professional relationships, and respond to performance in different ways. Transformational leadership emphasises shared purpose, intellectual stimulation, motivation, and professional empowerment. Transactional leadership places greater emphasis on explicit expectations, monitoring, and performance-based exchange.

Distributed and participatory perspectives shift attention from the principal as an individual authority towards leadership as a process involving multiple institutional actors (Bush & Glover, 2014; Mifsud, 2023; Ni et al., 2017). These approaches should not be treated as mutually exclusive. Principals may combine behaviours from several approaches in response to institutional demands, professional expectations, and regulatory pressures.

The relationship becomes clearer when classroom assessment is considered as more than the production and grading of tests. Quality assessment involves alignment with learning outcomes, appropriate task design, fair and consistent judgement, moderation, useful feedback, and the use of evidence to improve teaching and learning. Research on authentic assessment in higher education highlights the importance of assessment practices that support meaningful learning and broader capabilities (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2024).

Such practices require professional dialogue and assessment literacy rather than compliance alone. Instructional supervision can provide the organisational mechanism through which these practices are supported, but its value depends partly on whether leaders frame supervision as developmental learning or bureaucratic inspection (Deniz & Erdener, 2020; Legede et al., 2025).

The Ghanaian context introduces additional complexity. Colleges of Education operate within a regulated tertiary environment while retaining institutional traditions and professional structures that influence how reforms are interpreted and implemented. Research suggests that principals may adopt hybrid leadership patterns while negotiating institutional expectations, limited autonomy, hierarchical structures, and external accountability requirements (Esia Donkoh & Quansah, 2021).

Wider Ghanaian evidence also indicates that administrative responsibilities can compete with opportunities for direct instructional engagement (Dare et al., 2025). The resulting tension raises a critical question: when principals must assure compliance, support tutors, manage institutional demands, and improve assessment, which leadership practices allow supervision to remain pedagogically meaningful?

Although leadership and supervision have received growing attention, the specific interaction between leadership enactment and classroom assessment within Ghanaian Colleges of Education remains insufficiently examined. Much Ghanaian research has concentrated on basic and secondary education or on general leadership outcomes, while fewer studies have investigated how principals and tutors experience the day-to-day interaction between leadership, instructional supervision, and assessment quality in teacher education (Acquah, 2020; Ansaah et al., 2024; Dare et al., 2025). The gap is therefore not simply a shortage of research on leadership styles. It concerns limited understanding of how leadership orientations become visible through supervision and how those practices shape tutors' professional agency and assessment work.

This study addresses that gap by exploring the lived experiences of principals, vice principals, and tutors concerning leadership style, instructional supervision, and classroom assessment in four public Colleges of

Education in Ghana's Ashanti Region. Rather than assuming that one leadership style automatically produces better assessment, the study examines the conditions under which particular leadership behaviours support or constrain assessment quality. It asks how participants experience principals' leadership styles in relation to supervision, how supervisory practices shape assessment processes, and what institutional and policy conditions enable or constrain effective assessment leadership. The study therefore seeks to provide a context-sensitive account of leadership in Ghanaian teacher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership Styles and Teacher Education

Leadership style refers to the pattern through which leaders influence people, allocate responsibility, communicate expectations, make decisions, and respond to organisational problems. In education, however, leadership cannot be reduced to fixed categories. Leadership models overlap in practice, and their effects depend on organisational context, staff relationships, and the purposes for which leadership is exercised (Bush & Glover, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2019). This is especially relevant in teacher education, where tutors possess specialised professional knowledge and may respond more constructively to leadership that recognises professional judgement.

Transformational leadership is relevant because it emphasises shared vision, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and staff development. Such behaviours can create conditions for tutors to question established assessment practices, collaborate with colleagues, and experiment with formative approaches. Evidence from African higher education suggests that transformational leadership can strengthen motivation and engagement when it is accompanied by instructional attention rather than inspirational language alone (Andriadi & Sulistiyo, 2024; Kiplangat, 2024). Its limitation is that vision does not automatically improve classroom practice. Transformational intentions require assessment competence, organisational support, resources, and sustained follow-through.

Transactional leadership can provide clarity about standards, responsibilities, reporting requirements, and consequences for non-compliance. These functions are relevant where assessment integrity requires consistency. The difficulty arises when transactional control becomes dominant and professional activity is reduced to rule following. Hoque and Raya (2023) and Yue (2023) indicate that leadership style is associated with staff behaviour and organisational commitment, but procedural compliance should not be equated with instructional improvement. An institution can therefore achieve administrative regularity without necessarily improving assessment design, feedback, or learning.

Distributed and participatory leadership offer a complementary perspective by recognising that instructional knowledge and decision-making are shared across organisational actors. Mifsud (2023) identifies distributed leadership as a field concerned with how leadership is shared, while Ni et al. (2017) show that principals' influence interacts with the decision-making influence of other stakeholders. In Colleges of Education, heads of departments, assessment committees, senior tutors, and tutors possess practical knowledge that principals cannot exercise alone. Participation can therefore improve the legitimacy and quality of assessment decisions when it is substantive rather than symbolic.

Ghanaian evidence supports a contextual interpretation. Esia Donkoh and Quansah (2021) found variation in leadership styles among principals of Ghanaian Colleges of Education. Atakora (2019) linked principals' leadership practices with tutors' job satisfaction, while Acquah (2020) provides wider evidence concerning leadership style and faculty performance. Together, these studies suggest that leadership is best understood as enacted practice in which authority, support, accountability, and professional autonomy must be balanced.

Instructional Supervision and Assessment Quality

Instructional supervision is the organised process through which teaching and learning are observed, discussed, supported, evaluated, and improved. It can include classroom observation, review of lesson plans and assessment instruments, moderation of students' work, feedback to tutors, professional development,

and follow-up. Deniz and Erdener (2020) demonstrate the importance of teachers' perceptions of administrators' supervision behaviours. Formal supervision therefore does not guarantee effective supervision because the quality of the interaction surrounding the procedure is equally important. A developmental conception of supervision is especially relevant to assessment. Tutors need to interpret learning outcomes, construct valid tasks, apply criteria consistently, provide useful feedback, and use assessment evidence to improve instruction. Legede et al. (2025) position supervision as a mechanism for improving quality, while Vlachopoulos and Makri (2024) highlight the design and policy dimensions of authentic assessment. Supervision should therefore create opportunities for professional learning rather than merely verify whether prescribed documents have been completed.

The distinction between formative and compliance-oriented supervision is analytically important. Compliance-oriented supervision prioritises procedures, documents, and deadlines. These functions are necessary for accountability but become insufficient when they dominate. Formative supervision uses observation, dialogue, moderation, and feedback to identify problems and develop professional capacity. Effective leadership can combine accountability with developmental support, but the balance determines whether assessment becomes a routine administrative requirement or a meaningful part of teaching and learning.

Leadership, Supervision, and Assessment Quality

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework linking leadership behaviours, instructional supervision, contextual conditions, and classroom assessment quality in Ghana's Colleges of Education. The relationship between leadership style and assessment quality is better understood as a chain of influence than as a simple direct effect. Leadership establishes expectations and allocates authority; supervision translates those expectations into interaction with tutors; tutors interpret and enact assessment practices; and institutional structures enable or constrain the process. This framing avoids the assumption that a principal's personal style alone determines assessment outcomes. Transformational leadership may strengthen assessment by creating shared commitment to improvement and space for professional learning. Participatory leadership may strengthen quality by involving tutors in assessment planning, moderation, and institutional decisions. Instructional leadership adds technical attention to teaching and assessment, while ethical leadership provides the normative basis for fairness, transparency, integrity, and responsible judgement (Ampomah, 2021; Davidson & Hughes, 2020). The most defensible interpretation is therefore integrative: effective assessment leadership may require different behaviours at different moments.

The Ghanaian evidence points towards such a hybrid approach. Esia Donkoh and Quansah (2021) identify variation in leadership styles, while Asante (2024) documents principals' instructional role in relation to classroom assessment. GTEC (2022) places institutional leadership within wider quality assurance expectations. Yet when external accountability becomes the dominant driver, principals may spend more time documenting compliance and less time supporting tutors. Conversely, decentralisation without clear professional autonomy and structured support standards can produce inconsistency.

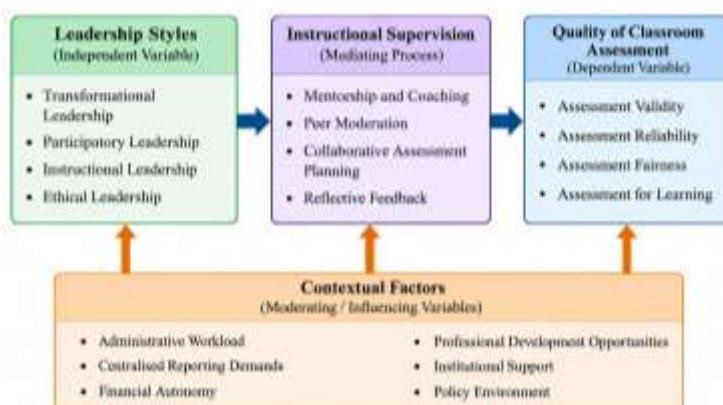


Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking leadership behaviours, instructional supervision, contextual conditions, and classroom assessment quality in Ghana's Colleges of Education.

Contextual Constraints and Research Gap

Leadership practice is shaped by organisational context. Evidence from Ghana and comparable African settings identifies administrative workload, limited resources, hierarchical structures, and uneven leadership capacity as factors that can constrain instructional leadership (Dare et al., 2025; Gomiole et al., 2024). Barasa and Omariba (2024) similarly identify administrative and institutional constraints in public service, although their Kenyan context should be treated as a comparison rather than direct evidence about Ghanaian Colleges of Education.

The reform environment further intensifies this challenge. The T TELL initiative has supported changes in teacher education and placed greater emphasis on teaching quality and institutional improvement (Transforming Teaching, Education and Learning, 2025). Reform sustainability depends on how policy expectations are translated into local routines. If reform is interpreted mainly as an audit requirement, tutors may prioritise documentation. If principals create opportunities for professional interpretation and joint problem-solving, reform is more likely to become embedded in practice.

Three gaps therefore emerge. First, Ghanaian leadership research has more often examined basic and secondary education than Colleges of Education (Dare et al., 2025). Second, studies of supervision do not always examine the leadership behaviours that give supervision meaning. Third, leadership, supervision, and assessment quality are often discussed as general relationships rather than as lived institutional processes. This study responds by treating leadership and assessment as socially experienced practices and examining how trust, participation, feedback, accountability, time, and authority shape the relationship.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

Figure 2 illustrates the methodological flowchart of the study. The study adopted an interpretive qualitative design informed by a phenomenological orientation. The study adopted a qualitative interpretive design grounded in phenomenological inquiry. The interpretive orientation was appropriate because the study sought to understand how principals and tutors make sense of leadership, supervision, and assessment within their institutional settings rather than to estimate statistical relationships between predefined variables. Interpretivist inquiry recognises that organisational realities are experienced and interpreted through social interaction and professional practice (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Phenomenology provided a basis for foregrounding participants' experiences and meanings.

The design also fits the research problem because leadership style becomes visible through how principals communicate expectations, respond to disagreement, conduct supervision, delegate responsibility, provide feedback, and handle assessment problems. The approach is interpretive rather than causal. The findings therefore describe perceived and observed patterns and should not be read as statistical proof that one leadership style causes a particular assessment outcome.

Study Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in four public Colleges of Education in Ghana's Ashanti Region. The institutions were purposively selected to provide variation in institutional history, size, and administrative context while maintaining a common public teacher education setting. The focus on public Colleges of Education also provides a coherent policy context for examining leadership and quality assurance. Fifteen participants took part, comprising four principals, two vice principals, and nine tutors. Participants were purposively selected because they had direct experience of institutional leadership, instructional supervision, or classroom assessment. The inclusion of senior leaders and tutors enabled comparison between intended leadership practice and how academic staff experienced it. The study was conducted across four public Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region, selected to provide variation in institutional history, size, and administrative context within a common public teacher education setting. Gender, years of professional experience, and academic qualifications were not systematically recorded in the study materials available for

this revision. They are therefore not reconstructed or inferred retrospectively, because doing so would introduce unsupported participant characteristics. This limitation is now made explicit, and the sampling strategy is interpreted as seeking information-rich accounts rather than statistical representativeness (Kyei Nuamah & Peng, 2023).

Data Generation and Triangulation

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, institutional document analysis, and non-participant observation. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted in English. They enabled participants to describe leadership practices, supervisory encounters, assessment expectations, professional relationships, and institutional constraints while allowing the researcher to probe issues that emerged during discussion.

Document analysis covered quality assurance manuals, internal moderation reports, and minutes of academic board meetings. These sources were treated as documentary evidence of formal expectations and institutional activity rather than as substitutes for participants' accounts. The quality assurance manuals were examined for stated expectations concerning assessment governance and quality assurance; internal moderation reports were examined for records of assessment review and moderation activity; and academic board minutes were used to identify formal institutional consideration of academic and quality assurance matters. The documentary material was compared with interview accounts and observations to identify convergence, complementarity, and tension between prescribed processes and enacted practice. Because the study materials did not preserve verbatim documentary extracts suitable for publication, the revised manuscript does not invent quotations or attribute specific wording to institutional records. Non-participant observation of staff meetings, workshops, and moderation activities provided additional evidence of enacted leadership, communication, participation, decision-making, and supervisory behaviour. This triangulation reduced reliance on self-reported accounts and strengthened interpretive credibility.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed thematically using NVivo 14 as an organisational aid. The analysis followed the principles of reflexive thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2019). The researcher first became familiar with the interview, documentary, and observational material, then generated initial codes, examined relationships among codes, developed candidate themes, reviewed the themes against the underlying material, refined their boundaries, and synthesised the final interpretation. Coding focused on leadership behaviours, supervision, assessment processes, professional responses, and contextual constraints. The analysis was iterative rather than a mechanical sequence, with movement between individual accounts, documentary evidence, observations, and developing interpretations. No inferential or descriptive statistical tests were undertaken because the study was designed as qualitative phenomenological inquiry; NVivo was used for data organisation and coding rather than statistical estimation.

The analysis combined inductive attention to participants' accounts with deductive sensitivity to transformational, instructional, participatory, and ethical leadership concepts. These concepts were used as sensitising ideas rather than rigid categories. Four interconnected themes were developed: transformational mentorship and professional motivation; participatory supervision and collaborative accountability; bureaucratic constraints and leadership limitations; and professional accountability and ethical leadership. Negative and divergent evidence was retained during theme review. In particular, accounts of administrative pressure, limited autonomy, and uneven professional development were examined alongside positive accounts of mentorship and participation. This comparison showed that supportive leadership behaviours did not operate uniformly across institutional conditions. The final interpretation therefore treats the four themes as mutually conditioning dimensions of assessment leadership rather than as isolated findings.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Trustworthiness was addressed using credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was strengthened through triangulation and participant checking. Dependability

was supported through an audit trail of coding and analytical decisions. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling and attention to researcher assumptions. Transferability was supported through contextual description so readers can judge relevance to other teacher education settings.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Education, Winneba Ethics Committee, and participants provided written informed consent. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and care was taken to avoid linking sensitive comments to identifiable individuals. These procedures were consistent with institutional requirements for ethical clearance (University of Education, Winneba, 2025).

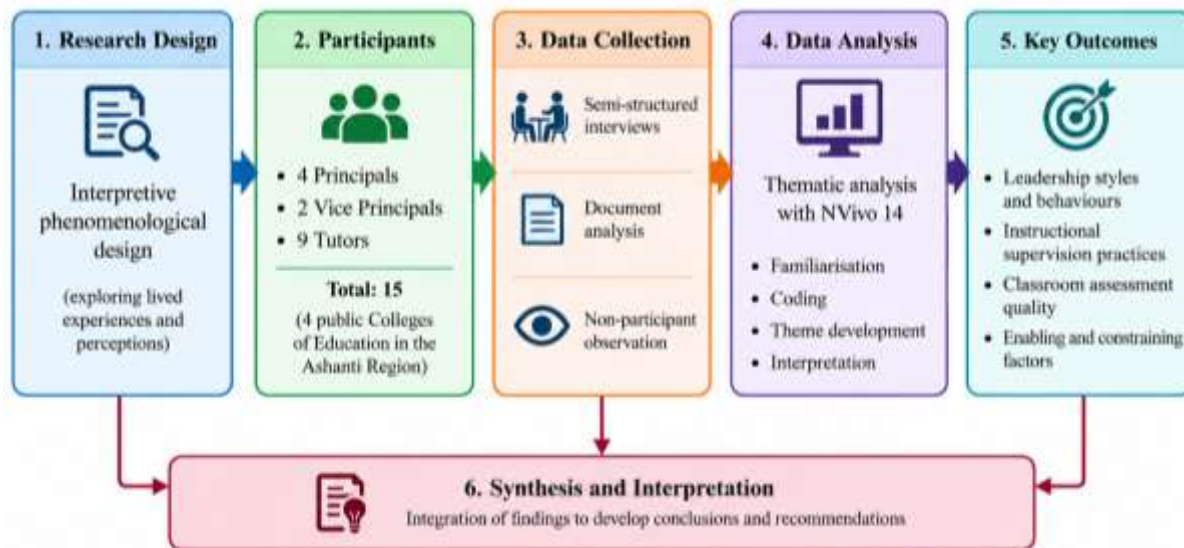


Figure 2. Methodological flow chart of the study

FINDINGS

Transformational Mentorship and Professional Motivation

Participants described stronger assessment environments when principals combined mentorship, encouragement, shared purpose, and professional dialogue with formal supervision. Supervision was then experienced as an opportunity to reflect on assessment practice rather than simply to verify procedural completion. This pattern connects directly with Theme 2 because mentoring created relational conditions in which tutors could participate in assessment planning and moderation. It also intersects with Theme 4 because professional dialogue depended on trust, fairness, and responsible judgement. At the same time, Theme 3 qualified this positive pattern: administrative workload and reporting demands could reduce the time available for sustained mentoring. The evidence therefore supports an interpretation of transformational behaviour as a condition that can enable professional agency, not as an independent cause of improved assessment quality (Leithwood et al., 2019; Asante, 2024).

The evidence also contained an important qualification. Supportive leadership was not experienced as consistently available, and participants described circumstances in which managerial demands displaced developmental supervision. Thus, the value of transformational behaviour depended on whether institutional conditions allowed principals to sustain the relationships and follow-through required for professional learning. This qualification prevents a universal claim that transformational leadership is inherently superior and is consistent with the contextual interpretation advanced in the literature (Leithwood et al., 2019; Asante, 2024).

Participatory Supervision and Collaborative Accountability

Participants identified departmental meetings, assessment review processes, peer moderation, and collaborative planning as important mechanisms for interpreting and improving assessment expectations.

Where participation was regular and substantive, tutors reported stronger shared responsibility for assessment quality. Theme 2 therefore provides the principal organisational bridge between leadership intention and supervisory practice. It also reinforces Theme 1 because participation was more productive where principals had already established trust and motivation through mentorship. However, Theme 3 showed that participation was vulnerable to time pressure and competing administrative demands, while Theme 4 indicated that meaningful participation required fairness and ethical handling of disagreement. Participation was consequently most useful when principals retained responsibility for standards while allowing tutors meaningful influence over implementation (Ni et al., 2017; Mifsud, 2023; Yuan & Zhang, 2016).

The finding supports collective and distributed leadership perspectives, but the evidence does not justify treating participation as automatically effective. Its contribution depended on clear roles, facilitation, sufficient time, and the possibility of genuine professional disagreement. This distinction is important because consultation that merely communicates decisions already made may reproduce compliance rather than build professional agency. The study therefore interprets collaborative accountability as a process that can strengthen assessment quality when participation is substantive and connected to supervisory follow-through (Ni et al., 2017; Mifsud, 2023).

Bureaucratic Constraints and Leadership Limitations

Participants described administrative workload, meetings, reporting requirements, and external accountability expectations that reduced the time available for sustained instructional engagement. These accounts qualified the positive patterns in Themes 1 and 2 by showing that mentorship and participation require organisational time and attention. The constraint was not necessarily a lack of leadership commitment; rather, principals had to divide attention between managerial and pedagogical responsibilities. The finding therefore shifts the interpretation from individual leadership effectiveness towards the conditions in which leadership is enacted. This is consistent with evidence that organisational context shapes instructional leadership capacity (Dare et al., 2025; Gomiole et al., 2024).

Participants also identified limited financial autonomy and uneven professional development opportunities. Where resources and structured assessment capacity building were limited, principals had fewer practical options for moving beyond routine monitoring. Under these conditions, quality assurance could become compliance-oriented. This pattern also qualifies Theme 4 because ethical commitments to fairness and transparency may be difficult to translate into sustained improvement when institutional capacity is constrained. The Kenyan evidence reported by Barasa and Omariba (2024) is used only as contextual comparison, not as direct evidence about Ghanaian Colleges of Education.

Professional Accountability and Ethical Leadership

Professional accountability emerged as more than compliance with institutional rules. Participants associated quality assessment with fairness, transparency, consistency, and responsible professional judgement. Open moderation, inclusive discussion of assessment problems, and attention to marking and grading were understood as expressions of ethical leadership and quality assurance. Theme 4 therefore provides the normative dimension linking the relational practices in Themes 1 and 2 with the institutional constraints in Theme 3. Where trust and ethical conduct were present, supervision was more readily understood as legitimate professional support; where procedural demands dominated, the same quality assurance structures risked being experienced primarily as compliance mechanisms. This interpretation aligns with Ampomah (2021) and Davidson and Hughes (2020).

The evidence did not suggest that ethical leadership operated independently of other behaviours. Fairness and transparency were enacted through moderation, discussion, feedback, and responsible decision-making, which depended on the supervisory and participatory processes described in Themes 1 and 2. The findings therefore position ethical leadership as an integrating condition for assessment integrity rather than as a separate leadership category. This interpretation is particularly relevant because assessment decisions affect progression and confidence in institutional standards (Ampomah, 2021; Davidson & Hughes, 2020).

Integrative Interpretation

Across the four themes, leadership appeared to influence assessment practice through interacting relational, instructional, and organisational mechanisms. Theme 1 showed how mentorship and professional motivation can create readiness for improvement. Theme 2 showed how participation translates that readiness into collaborative supervision and shared accountability. Theme 3 demonstrated that administrative workload, limited autonomy, and uneven development opportunities can restrict both processes. Theme 4 showed that fairness, transparency, and ethical judgement provide the trust and legitimacy needed for supervision and assessment governance. The integrative interpretation is therefore conditional rather than causal: assessment quality was more strongly supported where principals combined accountability with mentorship, participation, instructional attention, and ethical conduct within enabling institutional conditions. The qualitative design does not establish that any individual leadership behaviour caused higher assessment performance.

DISCUSSION

From Leadership Style to Leadership Enactment

The findings indicate that leadership style is better understood as enacted practice than as a fixed personal characteristic. Principals may use transformational behaviour to motivate tutors, participatory behaviour to develop assessment processes, instructional behaviour to review practice, and transactional behaviour to enforce essential standards. The four themes show why these behaviours cannot be interpreted separately. Motivation without participation may remain aspirational; participation without clear standards may create inconsistency; and accountability without trust may reduce supervision to procedural compliance. This integrative interpretation is compatible with Bush and Glover (2014) and with evidence of variation in leadership practice across Ghanaian Colleges of Education (Esia Donkoh & Quansah, 2021).

The theoretical contribution therefore lies less in identifying a superior leadership category than in explaining how leadership behaviours interact with supervision, professional relationships, and organisational conditions. Transformational leadership may support motivation, but its instructional value depends on assessment expertise and organisational support. Participatory leadership may strengthen ownership, but it requires clear standards and meaningful decision influence. Instructional and ethical behaviours help connect these relational processes to assessment quality. The framework added to the revised manuscript represents this relationship as an integrative process rather than a linear causal model.

The compliance Paradox

A central finding is the tension between accountability and pedagogical improvement. External monitoring can protect minimum standards through documentation, moderation, and reporting, yet the same mechanisms may become counterproductive when demonstrating compliance takes precedence over professional learning. Theme 3 explains the organisational conditions that intensify this tension, while Themes 1, 2, and 4 identify practices that can moderate it through mentorship, participation, and ethical professional dialogue. The implication is that accountability and development should not be treated as competing objectives; the problem arises when administrative accountability displaces instructional purpose.

Quality assurance procedures should therefore be judged partly by what institutions learn from assessment evidence and how that learning changes practice. This interpretation is consistent with Deniz and Erdener (2020), who emphasise how supervision is experienced, and Vlachopoulos and Makri (2024), who highlight the importance of assessment design and policy conditions. The study does not claim that the presence of quality assurance documentation demonstrates assessment quality. Rather, documentary procedures become educationally valuable when they support corrective action, professional learning, and improved assessment decisions.

Professional Agency and Collaborative Quality Assurance

The participatory findings show that professional agency is a mechanism through which leadership can connect institutional standards with disciplinary and classroom knowledge. Tutors possess practical knowledge needed to judge whether assessment tasks align with learning outcomes and student needs. When moderation and planning include tutors meaningfully, quality assurance can become a shared professional activity rather than an administrative instruction. This interpretation links Theme 2 to Theme 1, because trust and motivation support participation, and to Theme 4, because ethical handling of disagreement is necessary for participation to be credible (Ni et al., 2017; Mifsud, 2023).

Participation is not inherently effective. It requires time, clear roles, leadership facilitation, and a culture in which professional disagreement can be expressed safely. Theme 3 is therefore critical: administrative pressure can convert participation into brief procedural consultation. Principals and heads of department need to distinguish genuine shared decision-making from communication of decisions already taken. Meaningful participation is more likely to build ownership when tutors can see how their expertise contributes to standards and improvement (Yuan & Zhang, 2016).

Ethical Leadership as An Assessment Quality Mechanism

Ethical leadership provides an important integrating condition because assessment depends on trust. Students and staff need confidence that criteria are applied consistently and that decisions can be explained and reviewed. Fairness, transparency, responsibility, and respect therefore connect the supervisory processes in Themes 1 and 2 with the governance conditions in Theme 3. The finding aligns with Ampomah (2021) and Davidson and Hughes (2020), while extending their relevance to assessment governance within Ghanaian Colleges of Education.

Ethical leadership is consequently visible in everyday practices such as moderation, handling disagreement, responding to marking concerns, protecting confidentiality, and applying standards consistently. It is not an abstract value added to quality assurance after the fact. Rather, it helps determine whether supervision is experienced as legitimate professional learning or as surveillance. Leadership development should therefore integrate ethical decision-making with technical supervision and assessment literacy.

Leadership within Ghana's Reform Environment

The findings also require a cautious geographical interpretation. Within Ghana, existing evidence indicates variation in leadership styles and institutional settings among Colleges of Education and across other educational sectors (Esia Donkoh & Quansah, 2021; Dare et al., 2025). The present study cannot establish whether the same configuration would occur in the Northern, Eastern, Western, Central, or other regions because only four public Colleges of Education in the Ashanti Region were examined. Across Africa, the Ethiopian evidence reviewed by Gomiole et al. (2024) similarly indicates that organisational context can shape instructional leadership capacity, while Barasa and Omariba (2024) illustrate administrative constraints in Kenya. These comparisons are useful analytically but should not be treated as direct equivalence because governance structures, institutional autonomy, resource availability, and professional cultures differ. The defensible conclusion is that leadership enactment is context-sensitive and should be interpreted against the governance and resource conditions of each setting.

The policy implication is therefore not to create a uniform leadership personality but to strengthen principals' capacity to combine behaviours according to instructional needs while maintaining stable commitments to assessment quality, professional ethics, and student learning. Principals require sufficient authority to enforce essential standards and sufficient discretion to support contextual improvement. Sustainable reform consequently depends on alignment among leadership expectations, supervision systems, professional agency, and institutional capacity. This interpretation also explains why the framework is integrative rather than linear.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership Development

Leadership preparation should integrate transformational, instructional, participatory, and ethical dimensions rather than treating them as isolated competencies. Development programmes should cover assessment literacy, classroom observation, feedback, moderation, curriculum alignment, data-informed decision-making, conflict management, and professional coaching. The purpose should be to help leaders balance accountability with development according to the instructional problem at hand.

Leadership development should be sustained through peer coaching, professional learning networks, mentoring, and structured reflection on supervision cases. Such approaches would move leadership preparation beyond isolated workshops and towards continuous professional learning, consistent with the emphasis on capacity and organisational learning in Leithwood et al. (2019) and Mifsud (2023).

Internal Supervision and Assessment Systems

Colleges should strengthen internal quality assurance by connecting moderation and review procedures to developmental feedback. Assessment review should not end when a document is approved or a report submitted. Departments should use moderation evidence to identify recurring weaknesses in task construction, marking criteria, feedback, and alignment with learning outcomes. Follow-up supervision should then focus on improvement rather than repeating the same compliance check.

Participatory assessment structures should also be strengthened. Assessment committees, departmental review meetings, peer moderation, and collaborative planning should provide genuine opportunities for tutors to contribute to standards and solutions. Principals and heads of department should clarify responsibilities so that distributed leadership strengthens rather than diffuses accountability (Ni et al., 2017; Yuan & Zhang, 2016).

Policy and Institutional Support

Quality assurance bodies and teacher education stakeholders should recognise that effective instructional supervision requires time and organisational capacity. Monitoring frameworks should distinguish essential accountability requirements from additional reporting with limited instructional value. External quality assurance should encourage institutions to demonstrate how assessment evidence has been used for improvement rather than only demonstrating that procedures exist.

Colleges also require sufficient autonomy and resources to provide assessment-related professional development. The T TELL reform environment provides an opportunity to align leadership development, assessment literacy, and quality assurance rather than treating them as separate initiatives. GTEC's quality assurance role should be complemented by practical support that helps institutions interpret standards and improve practice (GTEC, 2022; Transforming Teaching, Education and Learning, 2025).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study indicates that leadership style is best conceptualised as an enacted and context-dependent practice. Transformational, participatory, instructional, and ethical behaviours can operate simultaneously and may reinforce one another. The practical value of a leadership model therefore lies in explaining how behaviours create conditions for professional learning and assessment integrity rather than in assigning principals to fixed categories.

Leadership development should consequently be evaluated through changes in supervisory practice, professional collaboration, assessment moderation, and feedback quality, not only through knowledge of leadership concepts. Institutions could monitor these indicators alongside staff perceptions and student

assessment experiences to determine whether leadership development is translating into improved assessment practice.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how principals' leadership styles shape instructional supervision and classroom assessment quality in four public Colleges of Education in Ghana's Ashanti Region. The findings indicate that assessment quality was supported where leadership combined transformational mentorship, participatory decision-making, instructional attention, and ethical accountability. These practices created conditions in which tutors could discuss assessment challenges, collaborate on standards, engage in moderation, and experience supervision as professional learning rather than inspection.

The study also demonstrates that leadership cannot be separated from institutional context. Administrative workload, reporting requirements, resource limitations, and restricted professional development opportunities constrained principals' ability to sustain instructional supervision. Assessment reform therefore cannot depend on policy frameworks alone. It requires leadership practices that translate policy into meaningful professional activity and organisational systems that give leaders and tutors sufficient time, capacity, and authority to improve practice.

The study contributes a situated account of leadership in Ghanaian teacher education. Rather than presenting transformational leadership as a universal solution, it shows that effective assessment leadership is a combination of behaviours and conditions. Principals need to maintain clear standards while creating trust, participation, professional agency, and ethical responsibility. The sustainability of assessment reform consequently depends on alignment among leadership, supervision, professional learning, and institutional quality assurance.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES

The study was conducted in four public Colleges of Education within one region of Ghana. The findings therefore provide contextual insight rather than statistical representation of all Colleges of Education. Institutional cultures, leadership structures, governance arrangements, and resources may differ across Ghanaian regions and between public and private institutions. The participant materials available for this revision did not contain systematically recorded gender, years of professional experience, or academic qualification data. These characteristics are therefore not reported through retrospective reconstruction. Future studies should collect and report such characteristics systematically so that readers can assess the social and professional composition of participant groups. Transfer to other settings should be based on contextual similarity rather than assumed universality.

The phenomenological design was appropriate for understanding lived experience but does not permit causal inference or statistical estimation of relationships between leadership behaviours, supervision, and assessment outcomes. No statistical analyses were conducted, and NVivo 14 was used as a data organisation and coding aid. The findings should therefore be interpreted as analytically developed qualitative patterns rather than statistical effects. The study also relied on principals, vice principals, and tutors and did not include students as participants. Student perspectives could have provided direct evidence about how leadership and assessment practices were experienced at the level of learning. Adding student focus groups or interviews after completion of the present study would require a new or amended ethical protocol and new data collection. It was therefore not appropriate to imply that such evidence had been obtained. This omission is now identified explicitly as a limitation and priority for future research.

Interviews may have been affected by social desirability and participants' concerns about discussing institutional leadership. Although document analysis and observation strengthened triangulation, access to some institutional activities was limited. The documentary sources included quality assurance manuals, internal moderation reports, and academic board minutes, but the study materials did not preserve publication-ready verbatim documentary extracts. The revised manuscript therefore reports the documentary evidence at the level of source type, formal expectations, and corroboration rather than fabricating

quotations or unsupported examples. The researcher's interpretation may also have influenced theme development despite reflexive practice, participant checking, and an audit trail. These limitations reinforce the importance of transparent qualitative reporting and make the study's claims deliberately contextual rather than universal.

Future research should extend the inquiry through comparative studies across Ghanaian regions and between public and private Colleges of Education, with systematic collection of participant gender, experience, qualifications, and institutional characteristics. Student focus groups or interviews should be incorporated to examine how leadership and assessment practices affect learning experiences, confidence in assessment, feedback, and perceptions of fairness. Comparative African research should also examine how differences in governance structures, institutional autonomy, professional development provision, and resource conditions shape leadership enactment.

Longitudinal research could examine leadership change as curriculum and quality assurance reforms mature. Mixed methods studies could combine qualitative evidence with measures of tutor engagement, assessment literacy, moderation outcomes, feedback quality, and student assessment experiences. Further work could examine digital supervision, distributed leadership networks, mentorship, and gendered leadership experiences in Ghanaian teacher education.

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