

Enhancing Quality Assurance in Non-Formal Education: A Case Study of the Complementary Education Agency of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates quality assurance in Ghana's Complementary Education Agency (CEA), responsible for non-formal education. Guided by systems theory, it explores administrative and academic quality assurance, implementation challenges, and effects on educational equity and national development. Using a qualitative approach, data from CEA regional directors were collected through interviews, augmented by document analysis. Findings revealed gaps in consistency, resources, and recognition but highlight promising practices in curriculum development, staff recruitment, induction, training, and development. Also, collaboration and community engagement scaled CEA's strategies of maximising relevant outcomes. Key administrative practices include staff recruitment, records keeping and data management, while academic quality assurance focuses on assessment, curriculum development, and management. These practices support the CEA's mandate to provide quality non-formal education. Challenges include limited resources, accessibility, and inadequate monitoring. Recommendations include policy alignment, sustainable funding, professional development, and culturally responsive frameworks. Strengthening these is vital to support Ghana's quest for equitable education outcomes and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Further research is advised on district-level supervisors and community perspectives to develop a better community-based approach to CEA across Ghana's 260 districts.

Keywords: Ghana, Complementary Education Agency, complementary education, non-formal education, quality assurance, equity

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Education is pivotal to realizing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education for all. In the context of Ghana, complementary education, also referred to as Non-Formal Education (NFE), has emerged as an equity-based strategy and a handy vehicle for extending learning opportunities to marginalized populations, especially those who missed out or dropped out of the formal education system (Owusu-Agyeman & Aryeh-Adjei, 2023). Ghana's NFE has a long history, dating back to the 1940s, of employing learner-centred approaches and flexible learning methods to cater to the diverse needs of adult learners (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2015).

The policy implementation of non-formal education in Ghana is governed by various policies, including the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), the Complementary Basic Education (CBE) program and the Literacy and Skills Development for Adults (LSDA) program. These programmes aim to champion the acquisition of literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills among out-of-school children as well as adults who drop out or miss out on formal education (Yinkorah & Agyekum, 2024). For example, programs like the Accelerated Learning Programs and the Complementary Basic Education programme offer flexible pathways for many school dropouts to re-enter formal education or access higher levels of learning (World Education Development, 2017).

Recent education reforms in Ghana established the Complementary Education Agency (CEA) under an Act of Parliament, Act 1055 of 2020, as the agency responsible for coordinating and delivering NFE initiatives. The

CEA has tailored Ghana's non-formal education sector quality assurance practices to facilitate the delivery of effective and reliable educational programmes, training and services which is accessible, acceptable and relevant to modern learning and skill development needs (Adelakun et al., 2022). The CEA uses accreditation and recognition, setting up standards and benchmarks as crucial QA tools to ensure that the non-formal education programs adhere to quality, verifiable and acceptable etiquettes (Adelakun et al., 2022; Asabre-Ameyaw & Andrade, 2019). Curriculum creation, teaching and learning approaches, assessment techniques, and students' support services in the NFE sector are all guided by CEA's key QA standards. Monitoring and evaluation are also essential components to ensure that the NFE institutions adhere to standards that enhance transparency and accountability. The CEA also undertakes self-assessment to identify weaknesses that need improvement (Ministry of Education, 2024).

Despite the successes of expanded access to education through NFE, challenges persist in ensuring quality outcomes, raising questions about the effectiveness of current administrative and academic quality assurance (QA) practices of the quality assurance agency of the delivery of alternative education in Ghana. Existing studies, including Jegede (2019) and Adelakun et al. (2022), point to significant gaps in QA practices, including paucity of human resources and monitoring systems, inconsistent standards, and a yawning policy translation gap between the national, regional and district levels. Yet, there is limited empirical research examining QA within the CEA, particularly from the perspective of regional directors who connect the national to the districts, which this study seeks to address. There remains a significant gap in the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms to drive the realization of Ghana's NFE aspirations (Arslan, 2021). This gap raises concerns about the alignment of Ghana's non-formal education system with both national educational objectives and global quality standards.

Therefore, this present study investigates QA practices within Ghana's CEA, focusing on administrative and academic dimensions, regional implementation, and systemic challenges. By applying Systems Theory, the study highlights the interdependence of inputs, processes, and outputs in delivering sustainable and impactful NFE. The study contributes to the strategies of enhancing the efficacy and impact of the non-formal education sector in Ghana of achieving the educational equity and quality aspirations as envisioned in both Ghanaian policy and global SDGs. The study does so by exploring the research questions as follows: 1) What quality assurance practices do CEA implement in the provision of non-formal education? And what challenges do CEA face in the implementation of its quality assurance practices?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, non-formal education (NFE) has been recognised as a handy tool in mass education, lifelong learning, community development, and poverty reduction (UNESCO, 2015). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), goals one (1), five (5), and eight (8) also recognize the critical role of non-formal education in achieving the goals of reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and enhancing economic growth. Goal 4 of the SDGs emphasizes the value of non-formal education in giving underprivileged groups—such as women, young people, and people with disabilities—opportunities (SDGs, 2015). In Ghana, studies by Owusu-Agyeman & Aryeh-Adjei (2023) and Yinkorah & Agyekum (2024) suggest that non-formal education offers an alternative and flexible pathway to empower the historically marginalized, contribute to poverty reduction.

In the context of developing countries, NFE often addresses gaps left by formal schooling, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Hence, it is mostly defined as structured learning activities outside the formal academic system, encompassing a wide range of activities, such as vocational training, community-based learning, adult literacy programmes and life skills training (Knowles et al. 2014; Owusu-Agyeman & Aryeh-Adjei, 2023). NFE serves as an alternative or complementary form of learning to formal schooling and provides opportunities for individuals to acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes that enhance their personal and professional development (UNESCO, 2012; Yinkorah & Agyekum, 2024). Therefore, non-formal education encompasses a wide range of activities, including community-based learning, adult education, vocational and technical training, distance learning, informal apprenticeships, and community service programs (Johnson, 2017).

The efficacy of non-formal education (NFE) programs is contingent upon robust quality assurance (QA) mechanisms (Harvey & Green, 1993). Adelakun et al. (2022) observed an escalating focus on QA in NFE owing to a rising global demand. Similarly, Onwuadi et al. (2020) identified an augmented emphasis on QA within adult education in South-East Nigeria, aimed at ensuring program quality and acceptance. Bakare (2011) underscored the indistinct boundaries between formal and non-formal education QA practices within the emerging global knowledge economy.

Quality assurance in education originated from the manufacturing industry; hence, it lacks a universal definition. Generally, QA involves all the processes and mechanisms set out to achieve defined quality standards (El-Khawas, 2013). Friend-Pereira, Lutz, and Heerens (2002) view QA as upholding and improving educational standards. Vlasceanu et al. (2007) emphasize continuous review and enhancement of educational quality. Duff (2000) states that QA focuses on consistent teaching and service excellence. Allais (2009) and Ahasan Raqib (2023) see QA as a systematic approach of ensuring that all operations follow scientific methods. Anderson (2019) includes curriculum, strategies, evaluations, and administration in quality assurance processes. According to Munda (2024), quality assurance in education can be either internal or external or both and it encompasses an array of practices aimed at systematically monitoring and improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning, accountability for learning outcomes, learning outcomes or relevance to individual and community needs (Harvey, 2002; Harvey & Green, 1993). Quality assurance practices continue to evolve and adapt to the changing global, national and organizational landscapes. With advancements in technology and increased globalization, organizations are facing new challenges in ensuring quality. The rise in digitalization has led to the development of new quality assurance methodologies, including automated testing, data analytics and artificial intelligence-powered quality control systems (Dale, 2017).

Quality assurance within the non-formal education sector encompasses systematic processes designed to ensure both effectiveness and relevance (Mbanga, et al, 2025; Smith, 2019). The deployment of monitoring mechanisms to assess the impact of programmes is crucial, as is the continual process of evaluation and improvement (Doe, 2002; Mwila, 2025). This reinforces the argument that the maintenance of standards and accountability in non-formal education necessitates quality assurance (Jones et al, 2018). Brown and Miller (2001) emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement in the quality assurance process and the necessity of collaboration for achieving long-term outcomes. These methodologies assist non-formal education in addressing a spectrum of learning needs over the long term and enhance its credibility (Johnson, 2017).

A report by the European Youth Forum (2013), supported by Mbanga, et al. (2025) had it that quality assurance ensures that the design and delivery of non-formal education programs align with the identified needs of the learners and programs' intended outcomes. The processes like needs assessment, curriculum development and evaluation are aligned with learners' needs to bridge the gap between what is taught and what is learnt. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2013), such a quality assurance mechanism fosters accountability for learning outcomes. The evaluation mechanisms and feedback loop help to identify areas for improvement and ensure programs remain relevant and effective over time. In essence, quality assurances in non-formal education serve to bridge the gap between intention and impact. They ensure that programs deliver on their promises, equip learners with valuable knowledge and skills, and ultimately contribute to the positive development of individuals and society (Mwila, 2025).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The study was scaffolded by Systems Theory a significant theoretical framework for assessing and informing the improvement of the quality assurance practices within Ghana's NFE sector. Systems Theory, credited to the work of Von Bertalanffy (1968), views organizations as interconnected systems where inputs, processes, and outputs interact to achieve objectives. As argued by Lalande & Baumeister (2015), a system is constituted of a whole made up of interacting components; consequently, systems in both the natural and social sciences examine the interaction between parts to better comprehend the intricacies of reality. Therefore, a system is a collection of interconnected pieces that work together to accomplish a common goal.

Von Bertalanffy first proposed the concept of general system theory in the 1930s as a framework for examining phenomena holistically. System theory is an interdisciplinary theory transcending all systems in nature, society,

and other scientific fields (Capra, 2010). Systems theory provides a holistic framework for understanding the interconnectedness and interdependence of various components within a system.

Applied to this study's CEA organizational context, this framework emphasises how staff recruitment, curriculum design, assessment, and records management contribute collectively to educational outcomes. A systems perspective underscores the need for alignment across components and highlights the risks posed by resource constraints, policy translation gaps, and fragmented practices. Therefore, the study proceeds on the hunch that in organizations processes function as interconnected systems with interdependent parts requiring harmony, support, participation, and collaboration to achieve a collective goal worth sharing (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). In the case of Ghana's Complementary Education Agency (CEA), quality safeguards for non-formal education it highlights the importance of holistically examining all the components that contribute to learning outcomes. These components include Input (learner, facilitators, curriculum, and resources), Processes (pedagogy, learner engagement activities, assessment strategies), Outputs (certification, knowledge, skills, attitudes gained by learners) Environment (community context, funding structures, cultural factors). Within this system, each component interacts and influences the others. For instance, motivated learners (input) can enhance the learning environment (environment) for others, while well-designed curriculum materials (input) can lead to effective learning activities (process) and ultimately, improved learning outcomes (output).

Elevating. Ghana's Complementary Education Agency (CEA) QA on non-formal education as a system, enables quality assurance practices to be designed in such ways that address the interrelationships among all stakeholders, including regulating agencies, providers and consumers of education. For instance, understanding the needs and goals of learners through monitoring and supervision informs the design of curriculum and programs to ensure relevance and effectiveness (Jegade, 2007). It also focuses on the interconnectedness of learners, facilitators, curriculum, resources, certification, assessment, and the environment. Educators can design and implement practices that ensure all components work together effectively to achieve desired learning outcomes. It also entails evaluating program effectiveness by looking beyond isolated components and analysing how the entire system functions to enhance learning experiences.

Based on the principals espoused above and as shown in Figure 1, the systems theory is adapted to this study to conceptualizes Ghana's Complementary Education Agency (CEA) as an organization that takes inputs from its surroundings, transforms them, and then releases the outcomes (output) to its stakeholders in particular, and the outside world in general, in the form of services, skills and knowledge. Therefore, the Complementary Education Agency's efforts to ensure the quality of its educational offering (input, processes, and outputs) in relation to learner learning are referred to as quality assurance practices, which are organizational-wide tasks (Kahsay, 2012). It includes the structures, methods, rules, processes, and resources required to guarantee quality.

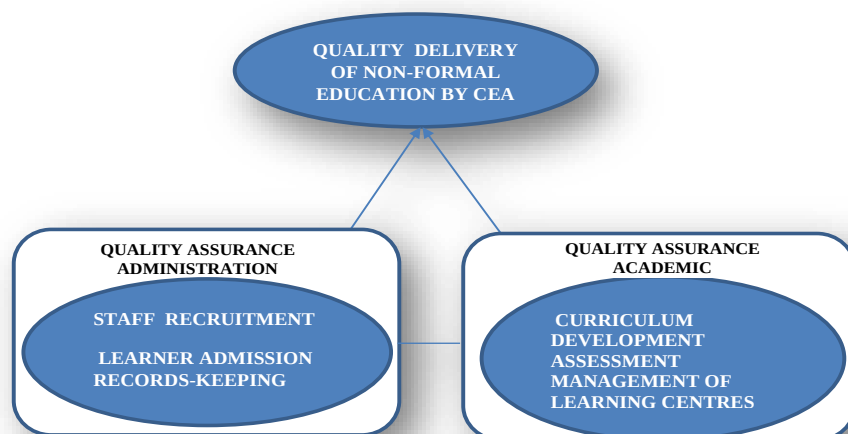


Figure 1: Conceptuasing Quality Assurance within System Theory in Non-Formal Education Provision

Source: Researcher's own construct 2024

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was rooted in the interpretivists and social constructivists' philosophical traditions. The guiding assumption in this study posits that social reality is subjective, manifold and a product of individual and group constructions (Willis, 2007). This research views the perspectives held by the participating regional directors regarding the quality assurance practices in CEA as subjective, diverse, and shaped by their socialization and personal experiences. Therefore, the study argues that knowledge is socially constructed and that researchers can gain insights into social phenomena by interpreting the perspective of those involved in it, but through the researcher's reflexive and reflective positionally (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

The philosophical foundation, therefore, positioned the study as a qualitative approach seeking to project the voices and lived work experiences of the study participants. The study is designed as a single case study, aimed at micro-focusing to gain an in-depth, comprehensive understanding of quality assurance practices in Ghana's Complementary Education Agency [CEA] (Creswell & Gattermann, 2021). The data for this study were sourced from the 16 regional directors of CEA overseeing non-formal education. The participants were purposively selected as they were seen as the most information-rich participants owing to their role as the overall head of the CEA at the regional level, plus their crucial mesos position in the policy translation hierarchy of linking the national to the grassroots. Semi-structured individual interviews were used to elicit data from the participants, augmented by national and regional level documents, including policy documents and reports relating to QA in non-formal education (Patton, 2022).

Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis guided by the systems theory framework was used to identify patterns in administrative and academic QA practices, challenges, and opportunities. The study leveraged Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process in qualitative analysis, including familiarization, preliminary coding, theme generation and review, theme definition and naming, and writing up. The documents were also analyzed using PQRS, thus Preview, Question, Review and Summary. As part of the preview, the documents were skimmed through to get a general sense of their content. Key sections were then identified in connection with the study's research questions. Relevant information that provided answers to the research questions was identified. Summative-write up was used to highlight the key points and underline. Next, labels were assigned to the different sections for organization. Emergent Key findings condense from the main points of the document were summarized to answer the research questions.

In analysing the interview data, the researcher immersed herself in the material by listening and transcribing the audio recordings from the interviews into systematized texts. The transcripts were read multiple times for familiarization, tracking key words, phrases, and sentences that encapsulated important ideas that aligned with emerging themes in the data (Creswell & Gattermann, 2021). Manual coding using a thematic approach, organized and categorized similar codes into elaborate themes. Patterns and connections across the data were further identified and grouped into concepts. The grounded approach to coding further allowed sensitizing concepts to emerge from the data to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' professional roles. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation and member-checking. Ethics approval was obtained from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology's Humanities and Social Research Ethics Committee. Additionally, an introductory letter from KNUST's Department of Teacher Education was acquired to substantiate the validity of this study. Along with participant consent forms requesting permission to invite participants who fall within the study area to participate in the study. A convenient time and date for the interviews were negotiated based on participant preferences. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. The data collected were password-protected files on my laptop that contained the data collected from the participants using pseudonyms to guarantee participants' anonymity.

The rigorous scientific methods, including credible research strategy and design, time-tested research instruments, as well as the deployment of techniques like triangulation, replication, logic audit trails, instil confidence and enhance the dependability of the study results (Guba, 1981). Also, the variety of data sources offered collaborative accounts to increase the study's credibility. Additionally, the study used several techniques to guarantee that research bias was kept to a minimum to ensure confirmability. All statements are supported by references, as are the interpretations of the study's findings. Finally, field notes, transcripts, institutional records, and audio recordings are safely kept for any audit that may be required.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study investigated the opinions of regional directors of the Complementary Education Agency (CEA) regarding the use of quality assurance in providing non-formal education. The focus was on academic and administrative quality assurance procedures and how they affect CEA's operations and quality and equitable outcomes. The results are detailed as follows.

Administrative Quality Assurance

Attracting people with requisite skills through the staff recruitment process emerged as a key QA factor of CEA in its non-formal education delivery. It starts with needs identification to tailor recruitment to the organization's skill needs. From the participants, it was established that needs assessment is carried out to identify skills needs based on their operational requirements and strategic plans. A participant asserted that *"Recruitment is done based on the skill needs of the pathways and programmes [they were] running"*. As argued by Noe et al., (2019), needs identification is a critical step in the recruitment process. It allows specific requirements, skills and qualities necessary for a particular role or position within an organization to be identified and sourced. By understanding these needs, organizations can attract and hire the right talent to achieve their strategic goals. However, this requires a credible recruitment process devoid of favouritism, nepotism and marginalisation. Therefore, another participant highlighted how the Complementary Education Agency (CEA) of Ghana recruit its personnel, thus, *"... most of our vacant positions are advertised...rigorous interviews are conducted to attract the best candidate with the right skill set for a particular vacancy"*. Also Induction and training also emerged as another key sub-theme under staff recruitment. The interviews with the participants generally revealed that the agency has a rigorous induction and training programme for the newly recruited staff. Participants asserted that CEAs:

induction programme helps newly recruited staff to familiarize themselves with the CEA's mandates and practices...provides specific training for the newly recruited to enhance their skills and knowledge on their job roles"

Therefore, the CEA recruitment and induction practices resonate with Bratton and Gold (2021) view that a robust, credible recruitment and induction process ensures that the organizations attract and equips the best people with the requisite skills, knowledge and competencies to contribute effectively to the organization's goals. Well-structured recruitment and induction processes employ a variety of techniques, including evaluations, interviews, and background checks to identify the most suitable individuals who align with the organization's culture and values, and further immerse them in the organization's culture and values to advance the organization's objectives (Mondy et al., 2023).

Record keeping or data management also emerged as another key theme in the CEA's QA mechanisms. Participants revealed that the Agency maintains effective record keeping such as learners' records, staff records, programme records, financial records and general administrative records in a methodological and safe manner. CEA's record keeping and database facilitated effective and timely decision making, efficient resource allocation and compliance with regulatory requirements, and in line with best international practices. Participants revealed that data security, data privacy, regular updates and archiving were key and regular features of their data management practices. Participants asserted that the CEA,

Manages... records by using both manual and digital means...paper-based forms and physical filing cabinets are used to store paper documents... [other data records are] managed using software for

learners, staff and programmes information...most of the data are stored securely on servers or cloud-based platforms.

These effective record-keeping practices of CEA ensure the safety, integrity, confidentiality and accessibility of data/ information by learners, staff and partners to facilitate informed and timely decision-making, accountability and programme improvement, resonating with Tomlinson & McTighe (2006). The integration of manual and digital record-keeping, including data synchronisation, document scanning and data validation, provided a buffer and safety for record-keeping

Academic Quality Assurance

CEA's Quality assurance practices also focus on curriculum development. Participants unravelled some of the practices CEA undertake in the development of their curriculum. As an agency, they undertake needs assessment, collaborate with other institutions to ensure effective curriculum development, teaching and learning materials, curriculum design, pilot testing and reviews are undertaken in the development of the curriculum (Document Analysis).

Needs Assessment was identified as the first QA etiquette of the CEA's curriculum enactment. Participants identified the processes of targeting the right learners, learning needs and socio-economic and cultural factors of their learners' background as significant influences on the development of the curriculum. Participants expressed these views

The curriculum unit undertakes a needs assessment to determine the needs and characteristics of the target population before we start the development of our curriculum.

We conduct surveys and interviews with stakeholders to identify the skills and knowledge gaps of our target learners. This helps us to develop relevant curriculum.... We consider the age, literacy level and cultural background of our target population.

From the ensuing data, CEA needs assessment facilitated the prioritization of CEA non-formal-education content and training based on their relevance to learners' needs and programme objectives. As argued by Arends (2013) such needs assessment ensures that the curriculum focuses on essential knowledge and skills to maximise learners' engagement and achievement.

Collaboration with experts also emerged as another key practice of the CEA curriculum enactment process. In exploring the perspective of participants on curriculum development, it was revealed that CEA collaborate with other institutions in the development of their curriculum. Participants had to say;

We work hand in hand with The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) and The Commission for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the development of our curriculum... "We are not an Island; sometimes we ask for support in our curriculum development from our sister agencies. CTNET has been supporting us in our curriculum development in vocational training modules.

The experts from these and other fields bring diverse perspectives and knowledge to the curriculum development process. As Grounlund and Morris (2017) and Amjad & Mahmood (2024) argue, drawing on diverse and collocative expertise ensures a comprehensive and well-rounded curriculum that addresses the multifaceted needs of learners.

Furthermore, programme design, pilot testing and reviews and community engagement were among the key QA mechanisms of the CEA's regulatory mechanism for the non-formal education delivery. The findings revealed that CEA continually develop learning objectives, relevant content and creates tailored learning activities and assessment tools to deliver quality and relevant non-formal learning and training. Participants opined as follows:

We have a curriculum unit at the head office responsible for developing relevant curricula across our training modules in tandem with the curriculum standards set by CTNET. So for all our programmes, the

curriculum unit is responsible for the content; our structured curricula are piloted with our primers or facilitators, adapted to the local environment and resources, using apprenticeship-based and learner-centred approaches before their implementation.

Information gathered from the pilot learners, facilitators and supervisors serves as the basis for a revision process that helps to improve the relevance of the curriculum... the piloting of our curriculum is done in selected learning centres... Our curriculum unit adjusts based on the report we give to them. Pilot testing is important to us since it will help us identify problems we will face in the implementation of our programmes. We also train our primers and facilitators to adapt the curriculum to local needs.

Therefore, curriculum enactment at the CEA is a process that begins with the design stage, followed by piloting, revision and improvement and then the implementation stage, socialising key actors including the developer/designers, the primers and the facilitators as well as intended beneficiaries. This ensures that the curriculum enactment is flexible for teachers to cater to diverse learners and local content to maximize relevant learning outcomes. The CEA curriculum enactment process resonates with Gervedink, Voogt & Pieters (2012) study of curriculum development in Ghana; thus, curriculum objectives are maximised through collaborative efforts or joint participation of policymakers, schools and communities in curriculum decisions to align national education goals with local communities' aspirations.

Also, worth mentioning is the CEA monitoring and evaluation. Participating revealed that the CEA conducts regular monitoring visits to assess the quality of instruction, learners' progress and management of its learning centres across the country. Participants opined that,

Headquarters conducts periodic visits to classes and undertakes regular assessments using a variety of locally relevant tools... We do monitor from the regional offices... The districts supervise the facilitators on the field for the delivery, and we go to supervise what the District Directors have done on the ground.

We have a monitoring team at each district. They supervise and present reports to the regional offices. Similarly, the monitoring team at the regional offices monitor and reports to the national headquarters. As a regional team, we monitor programs at the district level and re-strategise and revitalize our activities.

Therefore, the CEA QA is underpinned by an effective, well-coordinated monitoring and evaluation process that links the national to the regional and the district levels for effective management practices to ensure that the Non-formal Education learning centers provide high-quality training at the community level, while instituting feedback to inform the overall improvement of non-formal education delivery in Ghana.

Additionally, assessment plays a pivotal role in quality assurance within the Complementary Education Agency (CEA) QA etiquettes. Participants stated that as follows.

Our assessment procedures start with an entry assessment, then to a baseline assessment, and it then progresses to the formative assessment phase. These assessments are handled by our facilitators to track the development of the learners from the baseline to the end line to ensure standards are met and learners' needs are also met.

We do post-programme implementation assessment to know whether the programme that has been run has been successful or has achieved its intended purpose and that form of assessment is called summative... We use data collected from the assessment to make adjustments of our programmes and sometimes improve upon our programmes that we are running.

Participants asserted further that,

To ensure standards are being followed, we regularly visit our learning centres to assess that the right things are being carried out... Assessment is factored into our programme delivery so we must make sure quality standards prevail in our delivery to ensure programme success, coordination and synergy.

Assessment provides a systematic way to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes, the learning outcomes of participants and the overall impact of programmes on individuals and communities (UNESCO, 2009). UNESCO further explained that assessment helps to maintain the credibility of programmes and ensures that programmes adhere to established quality standards and best practices.

Therefore, from the interviews, CEA QA assessment provides a systematic way to evaluate the effectiveness of the complementary education programme, the progress of learners and the overall quality of the services provided. The findings also established that regular assessment is carried out to help track learners' progress. Through effective assessment practices, they evaluate their programmes to assess the impact of complementary education interventions on learners' lives, communities and the broader society. Also, participants stated that data collected through the assessment helps to identify areas for improvement in programme design, delivery and resource allocation. Notwithstanding, the CEA QA is faced with some challenges as detailed next.

Challenges to Quality Assurance Practices with the CEA

The issue of limited resources has emerged as a significant challenge to the effective delivery of Quality Assurance (QA) by the CEA. Feedback from participants indicated that insufficient funding, coupled with a lack of essential infrastructure, such as classrooms, learning materials, and technology, poses a substantial impediment to the agency's implementation of both administrative and academic quality assurance practices. Additionally, participants cited difficulties in accessing certain learning centres, highlighting geographical barriers and transportation challenges as obstacles to accessing some CEA centers, particularly in rural areas. Despite these challenges, the CEA has demonstrated commendable resourcefulness in utilizing available resources effectively, employing robust monitoring and evaluation practices, and fostering collaboration and community engagement. These efforts have enabled the mobilization of local resources, contributing to notable progress in providing alternative educational pathways for many Ghanaians, which is worth sharing and promising for further development.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study identified CEA's quality assurance processes as encompassing staff recruitment, record keeping, collaboration and community engagement. For staff recruitment, needs assessments are done to ascertain vacancies, which are then advertised across various platforms, including direct outreach initiatives. The recruitment process involves screening, shortlisting, interviews, and background checks. Selected candidates undergo induction and training. Learner admission is facilitated through outreach and campaigns, with community leaders assisting in enrollment. Record keeping is conducted through both manual and digital methods, ensuring integration, data security, privacy, and archiving. The study revealed that curriculum development is integral to CEA's operations. Participants indicated that factors such as target learners, learning needs, and socio-economic and cultural considerations influence their curriculum development. They collaborate with other agencies, such as NaCCA and CTNET, in curriculum development. Furthermore, the study revealed that CEA pilots the implementation of their curriculum on a small scale to identify challenges or areas for improvement, after which necessary adjustments are made based on evaluation findings. Participants disclosed that in managing their learning centers, CEA collaborates with the community to execute awareness programs to encourage participation and collaboration with stakeholders. CEA provides educational materials, including primers, workbooks, and facilitator guides, to all learning centers to enhance teaching and learning. Participants revealed that CEA regularly conducts staff training workshops to enhance skills and knowledge. Additionally, CEA regularly visits their learning centers to assess facilitation processes, learner progress, and management. Assessment was identified as crucial, with participants noting that regular assessments help track learners' progress. They employ diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to evaluate learners' progress. It was also revealed that assessments are used to evaluate their programs and ensure adherence to quality standards in the delivery of these programs.

The research demonstrated that implementing academic and administrative quality assurance procedures poses certain challenges for the CEA. Upon completing the data analysis, the following issues were identified: insufficient monitoring and oversight, inadequate resources, and the unavailability of accessible learning centers. Based on the research findings, the study concluded that CEA's quality assurance techniques are integrated with

community participation and collaboration. The elicitation of both forward and backward feedback facilitates communication among all stakeholders, which is imperative for ensuring the provision of quality non-formal education. The quality assurance procedures of the CEA are vital in ensuring the high standard of education delivered by Ghana's Complementary Education Agency.

Drawing upon the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed: The Government of Ghana is advised to augment the financial resources allocated to the Complementary Education Agency (CEA). This increase will enable the organization to enhance the services provided to learners and optimize its operational functions, which include systematic monitoring and supervision, procurement of office supplies, and evaluation of primers as well as other pedagogical materials. To attract a larger cohort of learners, CEA is encouraged to intensify its community engagement and program awareness initiatives. Furthermore, it is advocated that CEA establish a comprehensive data management framework and leverage technological solutions to streamline record-keeping activities. It is also suggested that CEA pursue both governmental and international support to establish specialized learning centers within each district, thereby ensuring that learners can access these centers regardless of their geographic location. The Complementary Education Agency is advised to continuously provide professional development opportunities, including workshops, seminars, and conferences, to advance the skills and knowledge of its staff. Additionally, it is recommended that CEA assist facilitators in the creation of high-quality assessment tools that are congruent with educational objectives.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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