

# The Construction of a Learner-centered Evaluation Framework Model for Community Education



## Quality in China

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**Abstract:** The quality evaluation of community education needs an appropriate framework and toolkit to improve and monitor the quality in the field of community education. On the basis of clarifying the relevant theories of the quality of community education, this paper proposes a reference model with learner-centered perspective and a framework implementation of the proposed model, hoping to improve the quality evaluation drastically in the near future.

**Keywords:** evaluation framework, community education, quality, learner-centered model

### 1. Introduction

In the context of China's educational modernization, community education (CE) has emerged as a critical component of lifelong learning systems. "China's Education Modernization 2035" explicitly proposes "building an education system that serves the whole people for lifelong learning" (The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council of China, 2019). As an integral element of this lifelong learning framework, the quality of CE directly impacts the overall effectiveness of lifelong learning initiatives and significantly influences China's broader strategy of developing a learning society and learning nation. To achieve high-quality development in CE, further theoretical research and practical exploration are essential.

Setting appropriate educational quality standards aligned with the characteristics of different education types is crucial for educational modernization. However, CE represents an open form of education primarily centred on non-formal

learning approaches, making it unsuitable for evaluation using traditional school education standards. While a CE quality evaluation model would ideally provide a mathematical framework for quantifying educational quality and revealing relationships between various quality attributes, current research in this area remains limited. Existing studies predominantly examine CE from the perspective of administrative supervision and regulations, and mature learner-centered evaluation tools have yet to emerge.

This study aims to address this gap by analysing the current theories of CE quality and constructing a comprehensive evaluation framework. Following established research paradigms in educational evaluation, the approach proposes a learner-centred CE evaluation model. The purpose is twofold: to deepen theoretical understanding of CE quality and to provide practical guidance for evaluating and improving CE initiatives. By developing this model, we seek to offer a vigorous framework that can serve as a reference for assessing and enhancing the quality of CE in China.

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## 2. Theoretical Frameworks for the Model

CE evaluation frameworks are multifaceted, drawing on diverse theoretical traditions across management, psychology, economics, and social justice.

The first dimension, alignment of educational objectives, is grounded in Drucker's (1954) Goal-Oriented Theory, which emphasizes establishing clear objectives to guide organizational activities. This management approach has been adapted to educational contexts where explicit outcomes must align with broader societal goals, be appropriate to community needs, offer measurable indicators, and demonstrate consistency with regional development strategies (Drucker, 1954). Complementing this perspective, UNESCO's learner-centered framework advocates for educational objectives that reflect the interests and needs of diverse community members rather than solely institutional priorities (UNESCO, 2015). Together, these approaches emphasize the importance of a dual focus on organizational efficiency and learner-centered design in CE planning.

The effectiveness of the educational process dimension draws primarily on constructivist learning theory, which conceptualizes learning as an active process where individuals construct knowledge through experience and social interaction rather than passive reception (Vygotsky, 1978). This theoretical approach supports the implementation of participatory and project-based teaching strategies and emphasizes the importance of collaborative learning communities. Additionally, Stufflebeam's (2007) Process Dimension within the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) Evaluation Model provides a structured framework for assessing implementation quality, emphasizing the need for established standards, consistent attendance, active engagement, and collaborative learning environments. These theoretical perspectives highlight that effective CE depends not only on what is taught but how teaching

and learning processes unfold.

Regarding educational resource adequacy, Hanushek's (1986) Education Input–Output Model offers critical insights by examining how various inputs, such as teachers, facilities, materials, influence educational outcomes. This model emphasizes the importance of strategic resource allocation rather than simply increasing funding. Complementing this economic perspective, Becker's (1993) Human Capital Theory positions education as an investment in human potential that yields both individual and social returns. Together, these theories underscore the importance of teacher professionalism, stable funding mechanisms, quality facilities, learning materials, and equitable resource access for various demographic groups in CE contexts.

The sustainability dimension of CE draws on Rawls's (1971) theory of social justice, which emphasizes fairness in the distribution of social goods, including educational opportunities. This theoretical framework supports the evaluation of non-discriminatory admissions policies and accessible educational pathways for all community members. Similarly, the Equal Educational Opportunities Perspective advanced by the OECD (2018) emphasizes the systematic elimination of barriers that prevent marginalized groups from accessing quality education. These frameworks justify attention to cultural inclusivity through multilingual offerings, targeted programming for vulnerable populations, and flexible learning options that accommodate diverse life circumstances and learning preferences.

The comprehensive benefits dimension integrates multiple evaluation approaches beginning with Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) four-level training evaluation model, which assesses reactions, learning, behavior change, and ultimately organizational results. Phillips (2003) extends this framework with a fifth level focused specifically on return on investment (ROI), providing a

methodology for quantifying the financial benefits of educational interventions relative to their costs. Educational economics further contributes cost-benefit analysis frameworks (Levin, 1983) that systematically compare the financial and social value of educational programs against their costs. These theoretical approaches collectively inform the evaluation of CE's multidimensional impact through indicators ranging from course acceptance and sustainability to learner retention, lifelong learning motivation, learning transfer effectiveness, and community cohesion enhancement.

### 3. CE Evaluation Framework and Indicators

CE programs require systematic evaluation to ensure they meet both individual needs and broader social objectives. The following framework presents an integrated approach to assessing CE effectiveness through five primary dimensions, each grounded in established theoretical foundations.

The Alignment of Educational Objectives dimension, rooted in Drucker's Goal-Oriented Theory (1954) and UNESCO's Learner-Centered Framework, examines how well programs establish and pursue appropriate goals. This dimension encompasses four critical sub-dimensions.

*Clarity of Objectives* ensures that CE documents explicitly outline expected outcomes and align with governmental strategies and policies, providing clear direction for all stakeholders.

*Appropriateness of Objectives* evaluates how effectively these goals address actual community needs, preventing misalignment between offerings and requirements.

*Measurability of Objectives* assesses whether quantifiable indicators and interim milestones have been established, enabling evidence-based program adjustments.

Finally, *Consistency of Objectives* examines alignment with regional development and national lifelong education strategies, creating coherence

across different governmental levels.

The second dimension, Effectiveness of the Educational Process, draws from Constructivist Learning Theory and Stufflebeam's CIPP Evaluation Model (2007) to assess how learning experiences are designed and implemented.

*Alignment of Teaching Methods* evaluates the flexible application of participatory, project-based, and other teaching strategies, ensuring methodological diversity and scientific rigor in approaches like active and cooperative learning.

*Implementation Standards* measures compliance with established course delivery processes and scheduling requirements, maintaining consistency across programs.

*Learner Engagement* tracks attendance rates and teaching interaction indices, providing quantitative indicators of program appeal and participant involvement.

*Quality of Interaction and Collaboration* assesses the vitality of learning communities and peer support mechanisms, recognizing the social dimension of effective learning.

Adequacy of Educational Resources, the third dimension, builds on Hanushek's Education Input-Output Model and Becker's Human Capital Theory (1993) to evaluate resource allocation and utilization.

*Teacher Professionalism* examines instructor qualifications and continuing education, recognizing that educator quality directly impacts outcomes.

*Funding Security* assesses the diversity and sustainability of financial resources, along with transparency and efficiency in fund usage.

*Facilities and Technical Support* evaluates physical infrastructure and technological capabilities through metrics like facility area, equipment integrity, and network bandwidth.

*Quality of Learning Materials* measures the proportion of open educational resources, frequency of textbook updates, and self-compiled materials.

*Equity in Resource Access* ensures teachers and facilities are accessible to all community members regardless of background or circumstances.

The fourth dimension, Sustainability of Educational Services, is grounded in Rawls's Social Justice Theory (1971) and the OECD's Equal Educational Opportunities Perspective (2018).

*Degree of Educational Opportunity Equality* evaluates non-discriminatory admissions and accessible pathways to education.

*Cultural Inclusivity* measures multilingual and multicultural course offerings, acknowledging community diversity.

*Coverage of Vulnerable Groups* tracks participation rates among low-income individuals, the elderly, and other potentially marginalized populations.

*Learning Flexibility* assesses the availability of blended online and offline learning, flexible study hours, and micro-certificate systems that accommodate diverse learner circumstances.

The final dimension, Comprehensive Benefits of Community Courses, integrates Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model, educational economics' cost-benefit analysis, and Phillips' Five-Level ROI Model.

*Course Acceptance Rate* reflects alignment between offerings and community needs through enrollment percentages.

*Course Sustainability Ratio* measures program stability by comparing actual to planned course offerings over three years.

*Learner Retention* tracks completion rates, indicating content quality and support effectiveness.

*Lifelong Learning Motivation* assesses re-enrollment rates and self-efficacy scores, revealing success in cultivating ongoing educational engagement.

*Learning Outcome Transfer Effectiveness* evaluates real-world application of acquired knowledge, corresponding to Kirkpatrick's third and

fourth evaluation levels.

*Community Cohesion Enhancement* measures broader social impacts through indicators like neighborhood mutual aid, volunteer service participation, and community governance involvement.

This multi-dimensional framework provides a holistic approach to CE evaluation, balancing process quality with outcome effectiveness while recognizing both individual learning goals and collective social benefits. By systematically assessing these interconnected dimensions, CE providers can ensure their programs remain relevant, accessible, and impactful for the diverse communities they serve.

## 4. A Framework for Implementation

### 4.1 Context-sensitivity in evaluation

Implementation of CE quality evaluation requires thoughtful adaptation to local contexts while preserving core structural integrity. CE varies significantly across regions, reflecting diverse demographic, economic, cultural, and historical factors. Rather than rigid application, practitioners should consider which elements are most relevant to their specific community and adapt accordingly while maintaining balance across theoretical dimensions. In economically developing areas, sustainability educational services indicators may warrant greater attention, while communities with aging populations might emphasize accessibility of courses. This adaptation should be deliberate and documented to prevent arbitrary selection reflecting evaluator bias rather than community needs. It's equally important to avoid overreliance on standardized metrics that fail to capture local distinctiveness, using the framework as a guiding structure rather than an inflexible template (Chen & Rossi, 2020).

### 4.2 Engaging diverse stakeholders

Quality evaluation must be fundamentally participatory, engaging a full spectrum of

stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. This includes administrators, providers, learners, community leaders, local businesses, and social service agencies. When involving stakeholders, evaluators should move beyond token consultation to substantive engagement in defining quality in their community context through accessible participation pathways. Particular attention should focus on including marginalized communities whose perspectives may differ from dominant groups. Common missteps include limiting participation to data collection rather than involving community members throughout the evaluation process and privileging perspectives of vocal or powerful stakeholders. Evaluators should implement specific strategies to counteract these tendencies, such as targeted outreach to underrepresented groups and disaggregated feedback analysis (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2022).

#### **4.3 Balancing methodological approaches**

CE quality demands methodological pluralism combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative metrics provide valuable data on measurable aspects like participation rates and satisfaction scores, while qualitative methods offer deeper insights into lived experiences. Practitioners should resist prioritizing easily measured indicators over those more challenging to assess, as transformative learning impacts and community relevance often require more nuanced evaluation methods. The most robust evaluations maintain balance between approaches, recognizing complementary strengths and limitations of each. Evaluators should also be cautious about data collection burdens that divert resources from educational provision. Efficient evaluation incorporates existing data sources where possible, uses appropriate sampling strategies, and focuses collection on the most informative indicators (Bamberger et al., 2021).

#### **4.4 Maintaining developmental orientation**

Quality evaluation's primary purpose should be improvement rather than judgment. Practitioners should emphasize the developmental function—helping providers understand strengths and challenges while guiding strategic improvement. This orientation fosters an environment where findings are welcomed as learning opportunities rather than feared as criticism. Implementation requires creating feedback loops connecting findings directly to planning cycles, presenting results in accessible formats, and facilitating structured reflection. A common error is overemphasizing summative evaluation at the expense of formative feedback. While comprehensive evaluations serve accountability functions, ongoing formative evaluation provides timely information for immediate adjustments. Evaluators should avoid creating a compliance mentality where meeting predetermined indicators becomes an end itself rather than a means to educational improvement (Cousins & Chouinard, 2019; Scriven, 2017).

#### **4.5 Recognizing system interconnections**

CE functions within broader educational, social, and economic systems. Implementation should acknowledge these interconnections, examining how CE influences and is influenced by other system elements. When examining these connections, evaluators should resist artificial boundaries, consider how quality in one dimension affects others, and avoid assuming all indicators are equally important in all contexts. The framework itself should undergo ongoing refinement based on implementation experience and emerging research. Practitioners should maintain critical reflection about underlying assumptions and potential biases while resisting the temptation to view the framework as a finished product rather than an evolving tool that must adapt to changing social needs, technological possibilities, and policy priorities (Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2020).

## 5. Conclusion

This comprehensive study has articulated a robust theoretical and practical framework for evaluating CE quality in the Chinese context. Building upon this theoretical foundation, the study developed a multidimensional categorization of quality indicators that integrates theoretical perspectives with learner-centered considerations. This matrix approach recognizes that quality manifests differently across the educational lifecycle from inputs through outcomes, while maintaining conceptual coherence through alignment with the five core dimensions. The resulting framework provides both conceptual depth and practical utility, offering a comprehensive structure for quality evaluation while remaining adaptable to diverse community contexts. And the study bridges theory and practice through detailed implementation guidance, helping practitioners translate conceptual understanding into meaningful evaluation activities.

## Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest to this work.

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