



**An exploration of course tutors' reported teaching
practices in a distance learning institution in
Ghana**

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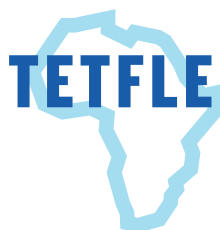
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Abstract

Quality teacher education is contingent upon the pedagogical practices of teacher educators. While various studies have explored these practices, few have situated them in the broader framework of teacher education models. This article leverages tutors' perceived pedagogical approaches and learners' demographic characteristics to interrogate the implementation of transformative pedagogy within Ghana's distance learning setting. Through the analysis of semi-structured interviews with course tutors and senior leaders, rooted in the concept of transformative distance learning (DL) pedagogy drawn from Paulo Freire's work (1970), we highlight the model's effectiveness, emphasising the role of facilitation and dialogue, in the creation of empowering learning experiences. This study provides insights for comprehending, reflecting on, responding to, and learning from the evolving practices of course tutors in a distance learning institution in Ghana. Based on these insights, we propose recommendations to enhance the model's pedagogical potential, which offers valuable implications for advancing teacher education policies and practices in Ghana and other African countries with similar distance learning models.



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Introduction

In recent years, the global education landscape has witnessed a paradigm shift towards more inclusive, flexible, and accessible forms of learning (Cappiali, 2023; Bozkurt & Stracke, 2023; Senyamator et al., 2024; Abdallah & Alriyami, 2022). DL models, facilitated by technological advancements, have emerged as pivotal platforms for delivering education, particularly in regions facing logistical and infrastructural challenges. DL is a planned learning approach encompassing “a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both” (Honeyman & Miller, 1993, p. 68). DL is characterised by a high degree of variation, with its definition constantly evolving (Makoe & Mays, 2022). Such variation includes the types of media or technology used (e.g., print, radio, computer); the nature of the learning (workshop, seminar, degree programme, supplement to traditional classroom, levels of support); institutional settings (universities, community colleges, school districts, non-governmental organisations, ministries of education); levels of interactivity support (face-to-face, online, blended, none); and the degree of interaction (asynchronous, synchronous, and bisynchronous) (Burns, 2023).

DL has consistently been used for the professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers across both developing and developed nations (Khonou, 2021; Du Plessis, 2023). Within the African educational landscape, teacher education facilitated through DL has witnessed a remarkable surge over the past decade (Moon & Villett, 2017). With its diverse and dispersed population, Ghana has increasingly adopted DL models to overcome geographical barriers and enhance teacher education. DL addresses the need for inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices to address the needs of the diversity of students. In Ghana, the DL model can outweigh the face-to-face model regarding student numbers involved in teacher education, making DL sustainable for meeting the need for new teachers (e.g., Zhang et al., 2021). However, disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes remain, particularly in remote and underserved areas (Mereku, 2014) and contexts where digital skills among pre-service teachers continue to be a concern (Kwaah et al., 2022). Nevertheless, distance learning has been identified as a strategic approach to bridge these gaps and offer scalable and flexible solutions for teacher education.

A successful DL model must embody new conceptualisations of teaching, the

“transformation in didactic” (Branchetti et al., 2021, p. 33), and the move to distance learning infers both the transformation of existing pedagogies and the possibility of these new DL pedagogies transforming learning and teaching, especially in contexts in Africa with their emphasis on oral pedagogy (Assié-Lumumba, 2021). This transformative pedagogy is dialogic, the pedagogy of engagement, where students “participate in the deliberation and critical and dialogical engagement” (Pietersen, 2022, p. 5), where the pedagogy focuses its practice “on community and collaboration” (Becirovic, 2023, p. 7) and where the distance education should incorporate a wide range of students’ linguistic resources enabling, for example, via students’ multilingualism, to engage “actively in knowledge production” (Charamba, 2022, p.17).

Literature from both Western and non-Western contexts suggests that DL has the potential to provide quality education, especially to marginalised and post-traditional learners (Iloh, 2019; Pietersen, 2022), widening access and participation while responding to broader educational challenges (Lephalala & Makoe, 2012). This partly depends on the pedagogical approaches used in DL institutions. On the other hand, little is known about these approaches used by tutors in distance learning institutions (Dri et al., 2024). This gap in the literature informs this study, which seeks to contribute to understanding the pedagogical approaches of tutors in distance learning institutions in Africa, specifically learning from course tutors’ perceptions of the pedagogical approaches they apply in their distance learning setting in Ghana.

Consistent with the goal of the paper, the following two research questions that seek answers to pedagogical practices that tutors in the distance learning institution in Ghana reported guide the paper:

1. What pedagogical approaches are used by course tutors for distance learners in a University in Ghana?
2. What factors do tutors perceive as limitations to their pedagogical approach in the distance learning institution?

The authors draw on the findings to argue for the potential of learner-centred pedagogy grounded in dialogue and facilitation to foster transformative pedagogy and transform learning for a diverse group of students in a distance learning setting. The findings are significant as learner-centred pedagogical approaches are key mechanisms or anchors of transformative DL pedagogy.



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Context

The field site for this study is a large national university, a provider of distance teacher education currently with 86 study centres across Ghana, and where since 2011 the number of students studying part-time at a distance outnumbers the full-time face-to-face student population on campus. DL teacher education in Ghana typically involves studying part-time in addition to maintaining a professional role—for example, tutorials on a Saturday or Sunday in dispersed study centres or weekend upgrade courses on campus with Friday and Monday for travelling purposes—but there is increasing recognition, for example, in the Ministry of Education, of the importance of technology in mitigating this concern. Ministry of Education agencies such as the Centre for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling (CENDLOS) are promoting the increased use of technology. Typically, face-to-face tutorials are held on pre-stated Saturdays and/or Sundays in designated study centres nationwide. Depending on where they stay, most learners start the journey to their study centres on Friday to be at the learning centres on time for learning to begin on Saturday. Thus, depending on the time, the sessions start on Saturday and end on Sunday, and students dedicate Friday and Monday to travel (Salifu, et al., 2023; Sampong, 2009).

Most students are teachers in full-time teaching-related roles in the country's public and private primary and senior secondary schools. However, fewer students pursuing distance learning programmes are unemployed or not in teaching-related roles. For these individuals, distance learning teacher education is used to gain teaching qualifications to move into teaching (Yirenkyi, et al., 2023). The students are typically mature learners.

The materials used by the tutors and students for engaging the DL are modules put together and validated by course experts who double as chief examiners for their designated courses. The chief examiners or course coordinators lead the design of courses, choice of faculty and lead assessment practices. The course modules contain the course description, content, illustrations, activities and tasks, and assessments and notes for further reading. The modules are printed and bounded hardcopies that inform the learners more about the course before their face-to-face sessions consolidate what has been learnt individually (Biney, 2023). The typical schedule for a course is every fortnight and delivered in a face-to-face lecture style. Within the delivery processes, there is an inbuilt mechanism for quality assurance of design, delivery, and graduation

of service provision with a dedicated unit to oversee that mandate (Mensah, 2018).

As of 2017, over 3,000 students were enrolled in educational psychology or basic education programmes, taught by about 120 facilitators at the first centre in the Central region, Cape Coast. At the second centre in the Western regional capital, Takoradi, there were 140 students, with 17 tutors facilitating learning for these students. Students lack onsite library and internet access but have access to essential facilities like canteens and washrooms during face-to-face engagements on weekends. The study notes a significant increase in the number of learners undertaking educational programmes from 2017 to 2024.

Literature review

Distance learning has evolved from mail-based correspondence to interactive online models. Dron and Anderson (2023) describe the initial “postal system” model as one-to-many communication with minimal social presence, underpinned by cognitive behaviourist pedagogies focused on transmission-like training. The next generation, social-constructivist pedagogy, emphasises two-way communication and the social nature of knowledge, with the teacher as a guide and facilitator. The third generation, connectivism, views learning as finding and applying knowledge through continuous network access, characterised by participation and production. However, this can lead to unclear outcomes due to learner autonomy and collaborative teaching (Dron & Anderson, 2023).

In teacher education, Lu and Dzikria (2023) note that distance education often resembles the cognitive-behaviourist model, with limited student-tutor interaction and materials developed without feedback mechanisms, as seen in Africa (Sampong, 2009). Onuka (2015) highlights using well-prepared, self-instructing materials, a practice observed in other contexts (Gravani, 2018). Despite the importance of practical teaching experience, its inclusion remains limited (Du Plessis, 2023). While the learner-centred approach is perceived as helpful in creating empowering learning experiences for DL students, the literature reports on several challenges associated with tutors’ use/desire to use this approach. These include resource constraints, lack of professional development/support, lack of student engagement, and the nature of assessment or examination (Vavrus et al., 2011). These make the role of teacher education through DL in fostering transformative learning and pedagogy limited. This study contributes to the literature on



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the constraints to applying learner-centred pedagogy in distance education.

Community of Inquiry in Transformative Pedagogy

Transformative pedagogy is a pedagogical approach that goes beyond traditional approaches to teaching and learning. The aim is to foster critical thinking and reflexivity and drive professional and personal change among learners. The concept draws from transformative learning theory and emphasises a shift in perspectives and beliefs. In the literature, transformative pedagogy is often associated with fostering social justice, equity, and learner agency (Wei, 2024).

Mezirow's (1991) seminal work in transformative learning theory, proposes that transformative learning occurs when learners critically examine and question their assumptions, leading to a shift in their perspectives. Mezirow's work informs the understanding of transformative pedagogy. It highlights the importance of creating DL models that can challenge learners to re-examine their beliefs and assumptions critically. Other scholars like Freire (1970) have explored critical pedagogy and its potential to inform transformative pedagogical practices. Freire, through his work, advocates for an education that creates spaces for learners to analyse critically and challenge practices that perpetuate social injustice. Freire's emphasis on dialogue, active engagement, and critical reflection aligns with the principles of transformative pedagogy and is well-referenced in the space (Scocuglia, 2024).

According to Isbell (2024), *cognitive presence* within the Community of Inquiry framework refers to constructing meaning through sustained communication and critical discourse. In the context of Ghana's distance learning model, this involves creating spaces that encourage learners to engage in meaningful dialogue with their peers and educators. These interactive learning spaces allow learners to reflect critically and share their learning experiences with others. Isbell's Community of Inquiry highlights the significance of intellectual interaction across diverse levels in the learning space and the implications these interactions can have on the development of positive learning outcomes, both of which are essential components of transformative learning experiences.

Establishing interactive learning spaces in distance learning environments is vital for fostering community and shared purpose. This social connectedness is crucial in transformative pedagogy, as it facilitates open communication, mutual support, and the

exchange of diverse perspectives. Garrison's (2011) emphasis on *social presence* aligns with the transformative pedagogical goal of creating inclusive and collaborative learning communities in Ghana's DL model. This is emphasised in recent studies of Ghana DL models where, for example, staff-student relationships, the quality of facilitation and the fostering of critical thinking are key to student perspectives of quality DL (Andoh et al., 2020).

The third element, *teaching presence*, encapsulates the role of the educator in navigating the learning process. In the context of transformative pedagogy in Ghana's DL model, pedagogical approaches extend beyond traditional teaching and learning to encompass opportunities for critical reflection and discourse. Given the context and limited resources, educators' ability to use methods that can fit into the available resources in the context whilst responding to the learning conditions and circumstances of the distant learners is critical to engendering teaching presence. Course tutors are central in shaping transformative pedagogy by designing engaging activities, providing meaningful feedback, and fostering a learning space that encourages learners to critically engage in the learning process.

Isbell (2024) argues that the interaction of these three elements in teaching and learning processes can foster meaningful interactions and collaboration, opening spaces for educators to facilitate transformative distance learning models that are inclusive and responsive to diverse learners' needs. This results in enriched engagement with learners, fostering personalised learning experiences and equitable educational outcomes.

Transformative potential of facilitation

Facilitation redefines the educator's role from a knowledge transmitter to a guide who empowers students in their learning journey. Rooted in constructivist theories, this approach views learning as an active, constructive process where learners build new knowledge upon their existing understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). It emphasizes creating a learner-centred environment where students engage critically with content, collaborate with peers, and take responsibility for their learning, fostering higher-order thinking skills, self-directed learning, and reflective practice (Isbell, 2024). In distance learning, facilitators play a crucial role in building a sense of community by fostering interactions, encouraging collaboration, and providing emotional support, aligning with the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework. Activities like reflective journals,



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discussion prompts, and peer feedback are instrumental in this process (Brookfield, 2017). This shift from teacher-led instruction to student-led exploration is essential for developing lifelong learning skills and preparing students for real-world challenges.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) framed as a case study of providing distance teacher education from one university provider in Ghana. This design allowed us to take a ‘pragmatic rather than a principled approach’ in this study (Biesta, 2023).

The field site for this study is a large national university that provides distance teacher education in Ghana, consistent with Addae-Kyeremeh et al. (2019). A purposive and convenient sampling technique was employed to select the study’s respondents. In purposive sampling, cases are chosen because they are information-rich and illuminative, as they both offer valuable manifestations of the points of interest and are relevant to the research questions. The selection of study centres was also driven by convenience because they were accessible and in close geographical proximity, making it a more straightforward process to recruit the participant numbers. The sample size covers three study centres (urban, semi-rural, rural).

Three groups of educators were interviewed for the study. These are the course tutors (eight), curriculum developers (three), and senior leaders (two) in the university. The data of the tutors and the senior leaders are drawn upon in this paper due to their relevance to the focus of this paper. All but one of the tutors were male. They were all experienced in distance education teaching, with a range of experience across the eight tutors of between four and fourteen years. A range of courses were taught by the tutors we interviewed. Most courses were focused on the Diploma in Basic Education, that is, for teaching in the primary and lower secondary age range. However, some courses were for mixed classes, for example, a course on resources and management being taught as an occasional compulsory course for a class studying a wide range of qualifications, from the Diploma in Basic Education to the Post Graduate Diploma in Education. The subject specialisms across the eight interviewees included mathematics, statistics, physics, social studies, geography, general education, and English.

The questions that guided the interviews with the tutors included questions about their background, role, the tuition model, and the affordances and constraints of the

tuition model. We carefully selected twelve questions to address this concern, ensuring they comprehensively cover the necessary aspects. The questions for the senior leaders were about how they ensure tutors across these centres provide a consistent learning experience for the students and the extent to which distance learning meets the demands of teacher training. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes. The questions that guided the interviews with the tutors included questions about their background, role, the tuition model, and the affordances and constraints of the tuition model. Additionally, questions about learner demographics were included to understand how these factors influenced tutors' pedagogical approaches in the context of distance learning. The questions were constructed by three of the authors and the interviews were also conducted by these three authors. A professional transcriber transcribed it in Ghana.

Ethical approval was obtained from the first author's institution and distance learning institutions. Participants were informed about the research aims and objectives before providing written consent. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis. Responses were qualitatively analysed using an iterative thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2023) and coded with NVIVO software. An inductive approach generated codes from the data, focusing on tutors' perceptions of their pedagogical approaches. Themes included pedagogical approaches (learner-centred approach and teacher-centred approach) and constraints (learner demographics and preparedness).

Limitations of the study

While we would have wanted to capture the voices of distance learners in this paper to hear their perspectives on the subject matter, in this instance, the project was solely focused on understanding the perspectives and practices of course tutors. A further study to capture the experiences and perspectives of learners in Ghana's distance education model is recommended to further enhance our understanding of the holistic impact and effectiveness of distance learning practices, particularly the approach taken by course tutors to situate their pedagogical practices within the learners' contexts and circumstances and how these practices are contributing to the learners' overall learning outcomes.



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Findings

The pedagogical practices reported by tutors in a distance learning institution in Ghana have been reported in this section. This is followed by the factors that tutors perceive as limitations to their pedagogical approaches within the distance learning context. The findings provide insights into the instructional strategies and challenges educators face in this setting.

Pedagogical Approaches - Learner-centred approach

The tutors described their approach to teaching as learner-centred, which focused on the use of group discussion. One of the tutors mentioned that:

So, I give them a project. Do this project and then bring the results to our next meeting. So, we do the discussion, all of us together. Yes, also it's participatory. We all share ideas until we get to a conclusion (Tutor 7).

Other tutors added:

Well, for me here, as always, I always want to start from points where they know. Rather than using the lecture method, I believe in discussion. You start the discussion; they bring their views; where they fall short, you supply the information they need to bring them up (Tutor 1)

...and sometimes, you see some of them coming to sit in your lesson; and they have forms they fill. Sometimes, they dialogue with you that "...I looked at your lesson; look at the things I wrote. See if you agree. If you don't agree, you discuss where you don't agree (Tutor 5)

Learner-centred pedagogy is the approach that the senior leaders mentioned management expects the tutors to use

Yeah, well, the designated approach is supposed to be facilitation... So every course tutor is supposed to master the content and just, you know, facilitate in the interaction of the students [and] promote – you know – effective interaction. Facilitation, the way we use it here, it's like, you have foreknowledge of the contents. You know the meaning of the concepts [and] you know the questions that you have to raise. It is purely a discussion session directed by the course tutor. It is a discussion session but [a] discussion that is guided so that it doesn't go out of hand; it is structured, a structured discussion based upon the topic and the issues at hand (Senior leader 1).

It marks a departure from the transmission model, prevalent in most higher education

institutions, including teacher education in Africa, where greater recognition is for academic and theoretical approaches to teaching compared to practical and engaging approaches to teaching and learning (Dembele & Miaro-Ii, 2013). Five of the tutors also acknowledged this to be their role and elaborated on how they facilitate the learning of the students.

The role of the teacher in learning, the teacher should be a facilitator, yes, not giving out knowledge because students know. It is only when you prompt them or give them the opportunity to contribute to the lesson that they will understand that they know. And therefore, we need to facilitate learning for them to also be part and parcel of the learning process” (Tutor 3)

Also, the tutors highlighted some of the benefits of the learner-centred approach that they draw on to facilitate the learning of the students. Tutor 7 mentioned that “in terms of the contributions that they are able to provide when we enter into general discussion, it gives me the impression that they understand the concept very well”. He continued that:

Okay, it, for me, I believe that that approach enables students to grasp the concept very well ...and that usually shows in their ability to be successful in writing their examinations and other things (Tutor 7)

So, you put them into groups, and then they read, and they come out with their understanding of whatever they have read. And then, when you do discussions with [them], it creates an opportunity for you to share ideas. We say, “Knowledge is not in the head of one person (Tutor 3)

The excerpts above highlight the importance of effective interaction for enhanced distance learning delivery. Interaction, which can occur among students, between students and their course tutors, and between students and course content, is rapidly becoming a crucial focus in research and scholarship on learner satisfaction and engagement in distance learning courses (Muzammil et al., 2020). In the context of transformative pedagogy, this approach emphasises the development of each student’s unique potential and capabilities. By focusing on these attributes, educators can create learning environments that empower students to take charge of their learning progress, engage deeply with their experiences, and cultivate their creative abilities.



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Teacher-centred approach

While facilitation, within the learner-centred approach, was found to be generally helpful among the course tutors, it emerged from the data that this pedagogical approach is unsuitable for some courses, especially mathematics and science. In these courses, a combination of student and teacher-centred approaches is used. Examples of these include demonstrations and teacher-led activities. A tutor in mathematics, for example, highlighted the difficulty he encounters in relying solely on the facilitation method:

You see, from the training or the in-service training that was given to us, we are supposed to facilitate it, but in Mathematics, it's difficult to facilitate... So, the students find it very difficult to study at home. So, when we come to the face-to-face [sessions], we ...teach rather than to facilitate (Tutor 4).

The challenge outlined by the mathematics tutor is representative of the difficulties encountered in teaching mathematics remotely via distance learning, as reflected in both recent and older literature (Cassibba et al., 2020; Lowrie & Jorgensen, 2012). This tends to push tutors to go back to the transmissive mode of teaching. Given this, the university has put in place structures such as the appointment of coordinators to monitor teachers' practices and ensure that they adhere to the institution's pedagogical expectations. However, one of the senior leaders mentioned that due to inadequate resources, monitoring does not occur as regularly as intended. Some tutors recalled the visits of coordinators who sat in their classes to monitor their teaching. For example, one of the tutors stated:

Then someone also from ...also comes and sometimes... I remember very well that..., on several occasions, have come to sit in my class. Someone came to sit in my class to assess my teaching, after which one-on-one discussions ensued. There have also been situations where they have given students appraisal forms to appraise me. They also make sure that you start the class, and then when you finish, you go and sign as you are finished with class (Tutor 6)

Constraints to learner-centred pedagogy – learner demographics and preparedness

This section delves into how the backgrounds and preparedness of students influence their pedagogical choices and the potential for enacting transformative practices. The

findings of this study show that besides the subjects being taught, the demographic profile of the learners and, most importantly, their preparedness for their study impacts the pedagogical choices of course tutors and their potential to enact transformative practices. Concerning the occupational backgrounds of the students, discussions with the course tutors revealed that the distance learning programme included a diverse group of learners such as teachers, teacher trainers, teaching assistants, head teachers, and a student teacher. Additionally, the course tutors noted that most learners on the distance learning programme identify as professional educators. The interviews further revealed that many learners are burdened with other family and social commitments besides work. In addition, most of them are adult learners re-engaging with academic work after a long absence from higher education. These constrain their independent engagement with their studies and the time they spend on their research, leading to their unpreparedness for their classes. For example, one of the tutors stated: *“and we also know that these are mature students; some are working professionals. Okay? And therefore, the time for studies would be much reduced”* (Tutor 3). Other tutors added:

But those who have stayed in the house for quite too long and are taking advantage of the distance learning, they have the problems. Because it's like they're starting learning anew and the basic things that you expect them to know, they lack that. So, in teaching them, you need to go back to the basics, in order to build on it. That makes the work a bit difficult. (Tutor 1)

The students' unpreparedness alters the facilitative pedagogy that teachers prefer to use. Two of the participants' excerpts on this are presented below.

Students are supposed to read the material before coming. That is the ideal situation; that is what is expected from them. But truthfully many students don't do that [making the workload] of the course lecturer become more complex. So, instead of facilitating, that is, you know, open discussion, [and] hammering on the problematic aspects, it becomes a teaching session. Facilitation is the ideal thing. [With over-talk] That is what we expected them to do, but now, they combine lecturing with facilitation, and that explains why some of them are not able to cover what they are supposed to cover within the weekend” (Senior Leader 1)

But then, sometimes, too, you realise that students have virtually no idea about certain things you are teaching. So therefore, it demands that you give a little bit of lecturette for them to understand the concept that you are trying to teach with them; then they will understand, and then, from then on, you'll proceed with the discussion or the group work or the questions and answer [session] (Tutor 2)



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The understanding of the demographic profile of the learners, especially their readiness for studies, and the challenges they face due to work, family, or other commitments, including their socio-economic conditions, age, gender, and other contextual factors, aligns with studies of Rizvi et al. (2019), who highlight how learners' demographic characteristics can have a significant impact on their academic success as learners progress through a course. Therefore, course tutors must find ways to integrate pedagogical practices that can suit learner dynamics, needs, and context (Bizami et al., 2023; Anlimachie et al., 2023).

Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the pedagogical approaches employed by course tutors in a distance learning institution in Ghana. Many tutors adopt a learner-centred approach, emphasising facilitation and interactive learning (Dron & Anderson, 2023; Isbell, 2024). This aligns with the second generation of distance learning models, which focuses on two-way communication and the social nature of knowledge. Tutors facilitate group discussions, projects, and participatory activities, enhancing students' understanding and fostering critical thinking and collaborative skills (Muzammil et al., 2020; Rajaram & Rajaram, 2021). However, the learner-centred approach is not always applicable across all subjects. In subjects like mathematics and science, tutors often find it challenging to rely solely on facilitation (Cassibba et al., 2020; Lowrie & Jorgensen, 2012). These subjects require a more structured approach, combining teacher- and learner-centred methods, including demonstrations and direct instruction, to ensure students grasp complex concepts (Dembele & Miaro-Ii, 2013). This underscores the need for flexibility in pedagogical approaches, adapting to the specific requirements of different subjects and learners (Rizvi et al., 2019).

Students' demographic profile and preparedness also play a crucial role in shaping pedagogical approaches (Doone et al., 2023). Many students in distance learning programmes are working professionals with significant family and social commitments (Sampong, 2009; Onuka, 2015), limiting their time for independent study and affecting their readiness for classes. Tutors often adjust their teaching methods to accommodate these constraints, sometimes reverting to more traditional, teacher-centred approaches to ensure all students can keep up with the course material (Ampofo & Somuah, 2021). Resource constraints and lack of professional development support further limit

tutors' ability to fully implement learner-centred pedagogies (Ewulley, 2023). The study highlights the need for ongoing training and support for tutors to develop and refine their facilitation skills (Brookfield, 2017). Additionally, better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are needed to ensure tutors adhere to the institution's pedagogical expectations and continuously improve their teaching practices (Andoh et al., 2020).

Effective interaction between students, tutors, and course content is crucial for enhancing learner satisfaction and engagement (Ali & Khoza, 2023). This interaction can take various forms, including group discussions, peer feedback, and interactive online activities (Helula et al., 2024). By fostering a sense of community and collaboration, tutors can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment that promotes deeper learning and critical thinking (Freire, 1970). Consistent with the second generation of the distance learning model described by Dron and Anderson (2023), five course tutors in this study acknowledged their role in facilitating students' learning experiences. They described their learner-centred teaching approach, focusing on group discussions, as a shift from the prevalent transmission model in higher education, which often prioritizes academic and theoretical methods over practical, engaging ones (Dembale & Miaro-li, 2013). The tutors elaborated on how they facilitate student learning and the inherent benefits and uniqueness of this approach.

The excerpts in the findings section highlight the importance of effective interaction for enhanced distance learning delivery. Interaction among students, between students and tutors, and between students and course content is becoming a crucial focus in research on learner satisfaction and engagement in distance learning courses (Ampofo & Somuah, 2021). This transformative pedagogy emphasises developing each student's unique potential and capabilities, creating learning environments that empower students to take charge of their learning, engage deeply with their experiences, and cultivate their creative abilities. This approach, also called humanistic education, helps students become open to new ideas, highly creative, and self-directed (Anlimachie et al., 2023; Ferguson et al., 2017).

While facilitation within the learner-centred approach was generally useful among course tutors, it is not suitable for some courses, especially mathematics and science. In these courses, a combination of student- and teacher-centred approaches, including demonstrations and teacher-led activities, is used. A mathematics tutor highlighted the difficulty in relying solely on the facilitation method, reflecting the challenges in teaching mathematics remotely via distance learning (Cassibba et al., 2020). This



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often pushes tutors back to the transmissive mode of teaching. The distance learning programme includes diverse professional educators, many of whom face family and social commitments, affecting their study time and class preparedness, which in turn impacts the preferred facilitative pedagogy (Ewulley et al., 2023; Ampofo & Somuah, 2021). This finding contributes to existing literature on some constraints, including lack of learner engagement, to learner-centred pedagogy in distance education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that while learner-centred pedagogies hold significant potential for enhancing distance learning, their implementation is often constrained by subject-specific requirements, student demographics, and resource limitations. To address these challenges, distance learning institutions in Ghana should adopt a more flexible and adaptive approach to pedagogy, tailoring teaching methods to the specific needs of different subjects and learners. This approach can improve the quality and impact of distance education, contributing to educational equity and inclusion.

One key recommendation is to provide ongoing professional development and support for tutors. This could include training in facilitation skills, access to resources and tools for interactive teaching, and opportunities for peer learning and collaboration. By equipping tutors with the necessary skills and support, institutions can enhance the quality of teaching and learning in distance education programmes. Additionally, improving monitoring and evaluation mechanisms through regular assessments of teaching practices and student feedback can help identify areas for improvement and ensure adherence to pedagogical standards.

To enhance interaction and engagement in distance learning, institutions should invest in technology and infrastructure that support interactive and collaborative learning. This could include online platforms for group discussions, peer feedback tools, and interactive content delivery resources. By creating a more connected and interactive learning environment, institutions can foster community and support among students, enhancing their overall learning experience. It is also essential to consider the diverse needs and backgrounds of distance learning students by adopting inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices. This could involve providing additional support for students with limited digital skills, offering flexible learning schedules, and creating opportunities for meaningful and relevant engagement with the content.

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