A Situational Approach to Change Management: Practices and Challenges of Principals in Ghanaian Colleges of Education

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Abstract
This study aimed to identify the practices of principals in Ghanaian Colleges of Education (CoEs) who managed change using a situational management style, as well as the challenges they faced in implementing change. The study utilised an interpretivist paradigm, and a phenomenological qualitative study design was chosen to understand and explain the change management practices of fifteen public CoEs principals, who were selected based on their years of experience (minimum 3 years). Moreover, the study applied semi-structured interviews as a research instrument and thematically analysed the data. The article found that situational factors such as collaboration, adherence to national policies, and culture influenced principals' change management practices. The principals responded to the need for change by internalising the policies in a structured manner, using techniques such as flexible planning, leadership, instructional support, and evaluation and feedback on the process. Nevertheless, the change management process encountered problems, including inadequate resources, staff resistance, policy contradictions, unclear procedures, and the need to reconcile top-down and collegial control. The study concluded that contextual factors shaped change management in CoEs and that effective leadership was required to achieve positive outcomes. It is recommended, among others, that principals adopt a situational leadership approach to address staff resistance and leverage resources to implement changes efficiently.

Keywords: Challenges, Change management, Practices, Principals, Situational approach

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Change frequently occurs in higher education as it adopts reforms, new technologies, and standards tailored to regional needs. CoEs must continually update their practices in response to legislative, technological, pedagogical, and social trends in their environment (Fullan, 2020). Such transitions from teacher-training to higher education are intended to improve the quality of education and basic education in Ghana due to the need to prepare teachers to meet the requirements of the National Teachers' Standards (NTS) and Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (NTECF) and transform CoEs into elite ones (GTEC, 2022; 2023; National Teachers Standards for Ghana, 2024). At the same time, their implementation faces numerous difficulties related to administration, infrastructure, staffing, unclear roles, increased workload, teacher adaptation, and standards issues, and remains questionable (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2025). Moreover, reforms often fail because of a lack of effective institutional management (Dorgbetor & Nordzi, 2025; GTEC, 2023; Koh et al., 2023).

A situational approach to change management is crucial in CoEs due to the variety of challenges that require customised, context-specific solutions. This method avoids short-term fixes and focuses on long-term, tailored strategies (Hersey et al., 2019). Higher education administrators recognise the limitations of traditional change management approaches, making them more likely to implement a situational change management model to tackle new issues and challenges. The extent to which leaders can implement change agendas is determined by factors such as leadership, organisational culture, readiness level, available resources, and policies (GTEC, 2023). While CoEs in Ghana are undergoing major transformations and adaptations, their preparedness to implement these changes may vary across contexts. A situational approach to change management is likely to improve CoE performance, enabling them to design the most effective strategy (Ezzeddine et al., 2023).

1.1. Problem Statement

A major reform in teacher education, governed by GTEC under the Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023), involves transforming CoEs in Ghana into higher learning institutions. This seeks to improve the standards, effectiveness, and capability of teacher training. Reforms such as the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) focus on research, excellence, and institutional oversight, leading to the reorganisation of CoEs into higher education institutions (GTEC, 2023; Nyadzi et al., 2024). Colleges must now meet higher requirements for governance, leadership, curriculum, and quality. Despite these reforms, many CoEs in Ghana still face poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, staffing shortages, resistance to change, and cultural incompatibilities with higher education standards, creating a disconnect between policy and outcomes (Abudetse & Ayetor, 2025; Abudetse et al., 2025). These reforms are generally implemented similarly, regardless of the college's context, with varying impacts (Abudetse & Ayetor, 2025; GTEC, 2023).

Change management is a major area of focus in leadership literature. However, Ghanaian literature has focused mostly on transformational and transactional approaches (Donkor et al., 2021; Owusu-Agyeman, 2021) and, thus, ignored the emerging and contextualised nature of change in CoEs. Situational responsiveness is a rarely investigated aspect of leadership (Hersey et al., 2013; Fullan,

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2020). Studies on leaders' management of change across many settings are limited, creating a significant knowledge gap regarding how to increase efficiency and effectiveness (Guerra-López & Dallal, 2021; GTEC, 2022). This study considers a situational approach to improving the quality of education at Ghanaian CoEs, considering their current statutory tertiary mandate.

1.2 Significance

This study examined change management in Ghanaian CoEs using a situational approach under the new tertiary mandate and provided pedagogical implications for the higher education sector. This study offered change management strategies to CoE administrators to improve staff stability, motivation, and performance and, by extension, the quality of teaching in Ghanaian tertiary education institutions. The findings will contribute to the literature on change management and provide administrators with a situational analysis to support informed decision-making. This study will also contribute to the discourse on change management in the higher education sector by providing information to help policymakers implement reforms and shape leadership, planning, and quality assurance.

1.1 Research Questions

1. How do principals perceive and experience the situational factors shaping change management in Ghanaian CoEs following their transition to tertiary status?
2. How do principals enact situational approaches to change management to lead and sustain educational change within the new tertiary mandate of Ghanaian CoEs?
3. What challenges do principals encounter in managing and sustaining educational change within the new tertiary mandate of Ghanaian CoEs?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Consideration

Change management in education is extremely challenging, given the varying levels of preparedness among individuals involved (Kotter, 2014). Classic models (e.g., Lewin's and Kotter's) are useful yet limited by changing contexts (Burnes, 2017). Colleges need versatile, situationally appropriate approaches across socio-cultural and political settings (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2022; Sun, 2026; Twabu, 2025). This study is rooted in the situational approach, which focuses on leadership adjustability and fitness in response to specific change processes (Hersey et al., 2013). According to Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory, effective leadership entails assessing the situation and selecting the appropriate leadership style (Northouse, 2019; 2022). Yet, consistent efforts usually fail to address the wide range of stakeholders' abilities, motivations, and opinions (Kotter, 2014).

Explicit instructions combined with encouraging behaviours support engagement, reduce resistance, and ease transitions (Burnes, 2017). This is especially important in Ghana's CoEs, where reforms such as ICT integration require digital skills and attitudes that vary widely (Adu-Gyamfi & Otami, 2020). Leaders who value strategic planning and precise directives tend to be more successful (Alnamlah & Nalband, 2024; Mensah et al., 2022). Advanced performance, resource conservation, and efficiency are achieved when circumstances are reassessed, and

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appropriate change strategies are implemented. Challenges can either support or hinder the linkage between change management and performance standards. The study connects institutional contexts with changes in approach. According to the situational approach, outcomes depend on specific contexts, affording a flexible structure for optimising educational efficiency and effectiveness.

2.2 The Concept of Change Management and Educational Change Management

Change management prepares individuals and organisations for innovative practices while avoiding problems during transitions (Yidana & Aboagye, 2018). In Ghana's CoEs, it guides tutors and student teachers through reforms such as curriculum revisions, assessment improvements, digitization, governance changes, and staff development. This process helps stakeholders understand, adopt, and enforce policies by communicating with leadership, engaging with tutors, and developing, monitoring, and providing feedback on the reform's implementation (Mensah et al., 2022). Strategies were essential to overcoming resistance and convincing staff to adopt new models for tertiary institutions, governance, shared decision-making processes, and procedures at Ghana's CoEs. Mensah et al. (2022) emphasise proactive leadership as key to successfully reforming and improving student outcomes.

The Ghanaian CoEs have been transformed into higher education institutions, with their curricula restructured and a focus on technological innovation (Mensah et al., 2022). This overhaul required changes in structures, practices, and staff competencies amid limited resources, preparation, and support (Addai-Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023; Amegah et al., 2024). Effective change depends on policies, staff training, and capacity-building initiatives. Nonetheless, Essel (2025) argues that this reform has increased staff responsibilities and exposed weaknesses in the college's leadership, finances, and professional development. Edumadze (2015) states that integrating ICT depends in part on context and requires tutors to be digitally adept, hold a positive attitude, and have access to infrastructure. Challenges in tutors' digital skills and capacity are evident in the disparities (Chama & Subaveerapandiyan, 2023; Lee et al., 2025). Therefore, change leaders need targeted support, such as training, to reduce resistance (Zoogah, 2023). Generally, change managers should develop a flexible and cooperative leadership approach that addresses the college's experience, demands, and desires to meet sustainability needs.

2.3 Situational Factors and Change Management in Colleges of Education

Factors influencing change management in colleges of excellence and innovation stem from internal and external environments and shape ideas, views, and the implementation of change interventions. These issues require leaders to rethink their approaches to managing change (Abudetse & Ayetor, 2025; Philips & Kelin, 2023). Institutional culture, personnel preparedness, resources, policies, the economy, and technological advancements are among the factors that determine the success of change management in higher education institutions (Ezzeddine et al., 2023; Jinga & Hassen, 2025). Therefore, College principals must review these aspects when implementing change interventions, as effective leadership requires considering these factors before initiating any organizational changes (Ezzeddine et al., 2023; Philips & Kelin, 2023). Besides, external factors such as policies and finances may impede educational progress by

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disrupting regular processes, outcomes, effectiveness, and resources (Aremu et al., 2025; Zoogah, 2023).

The success of most educational reforms depends on staff confidence, knowledge, and attitudes (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2025; Hersey et al., 2013; Razza & Sikandar, 2018). Many tutors in various Ghanaian CoEs appear to prefer traditional, teacher-centered lecturing and avoid implementing competency-based or student-centered strategies. Additionally, lecturers have negative perceptions of digital tools, technological resources, and updated assessment policies, which limit their use in skills-based education despite the training they have received (Ajayi, 2012; Furxhi, 2021). In addition to knowledge, successful training requires proper funding, sufficient staff recruitment, and modern infrastructure. Although the number of students enrolled in the B.Ed. program, resulting in the expansion of this study in Ghana, many Colleges of Education remain understaffed and underdeveloped (Akyeampong, 2017; Awotwe et al., 2020; Mensah et al., 2022).

Frequent policy shifts and inconsistent guidelines hinder adaptation. Upgrading the Colleges of Education to the tertiary level introduced new requirements in Ghana, but reforms have been hindered by elections, funding, and guideline issues (Zottor et al., 2022; Steinebach et al., 2025). Circulars destroy trust and coherence between principals (Taayeli, 2025). Moreover, existing systems, frameworks, and conventions limit innovation. Furthermore, seniority-based and departmental promotion promotes harmony over innovation (Abudetse & Ayetor, 2025; Ezzeddine et al., 2023). Moreover, social resistance hinders digital reforms; despite training and education for educators, a return to paper-based tests and records stifles innovation (Furxhi, 2021).

External factors, such as technology adoption and emergencies and pandemics like COVID-19, are paramount in colleges' adaptation process. Colleges with strong technological connectivity and experienced leadership experience less operational disruption than those with minimal connectivity, which contributes to an education crisis (Ezzeddine et al., 2023; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). To achieve desired outcomes, digital training and change management strategies should support the institution's technological capacity. Moreover, inclusive communication and engaged stakeholder participation help achieve improved overall results (Aremu et al., 2025). Therefore, college leaders who continuously review and update their strategies, communication, and implementation pace can increase the success of reform efforts.

2.4 Practices of a Situational Approach to Change Management in Colleges of Education

A situational approach to change management in CoEs tailors strategies to specific contexts by diagnosing the change, evaluating readiness, and assessing available resources to develop tailored leadership and implementation plans (Abudetse & Ayetor, 2025; Philips & Kelin, 2023). As CoEs mature into tertiary entities, they require more complex reforms throughout varied environments (Akyeampong, 2017; Mensah et al., 2022). This method highlights the importance of context-aware planning and phased, capacity-driven implementation (Addai Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023). Such strategies reduce resistance and improve success, as context-specific interventions achieve higher success rates (Ezzeddine et al., 2023; Raza & Sikandar, 2018).

Applying flexible leadership styles that correspond with staff readiness is key in CoEs. Situational leaders use directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating techniques to manage staff based on

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the situation, employees' abilities, and confidence levels (Buabeng & Amo Darko, 2025; Razza & Sikandar, 2018). For instance, they coach and delegate responsibilities to new lecturers while motivating experienced teachers to guide their juniors, improving leadership capability and meeting the organization's objectives (Abudetse & Ayetor, 2025). At the same time, a situational leader will involve stakeholders in decision-making, for instance, by consulting with tutors, department heads, and students to address issues and develop the best solution (Steinebach et al., 2025; Taayeli, 2025). This approach minimises the risks of change while also ensuring that changes are not easily reversed if implementation is flawed, as happens when a leader does not involve stakeholders in the process (Ajayi, 2012; Aremu et al., 2025; Furxhi, 2021).

Resource-aligned design is very critical to change management processes and requires organizational leaders and managers to consider financial, infrastructural, and human resource constraints when implementing change initiatives (Zottor et al., 2022). Resource allocation is a key factor in change processes at institutions like the CoEs. In most cases, limited budgets and capacities lead to limited yet highly intensive change processes. For example, a review of tertiary education reforms in Ghana found that limited funding and capacity hampered infrastructure and ICT development and adoption (Taayeli, 2025). Targeted communication and training strategies that are responsive to the audience's needs are effective ways to initiate change and sustain it in the long run (Aremu et al., 2025; Buabeng & Amo Darko, 2025; Ezzeddine et al., 2023).

Regular monitoring, combined with a willingness to adapt and make changes, is a key element of a situational approach to change as a continuous process, which implies reviews, observations, and surveys to assess teaching practices. Principals implement feedback, gather data, and refine strategies (Hersey et al., 2013; Razza & Sikandar, 2018). In this case, CoEs involve reviews, observations, and surveys of pedagogical practices. By responding to the lack of ICT proficiency and addressing issues such as large class sizes, the principal can allocate more time, provide additional resources, and take other steps to address the problem. Research suggests that a combined approach, based on flexible measures and targeted interventions, is more effective at sustaining progress (Raza & Sikandar, 2018; Steinebach et al., 2025). The situational approach to change encompasses flexible planning, leadership, stakeholder involvement, resource allocation, tailored communication strategies, and ongoing evaluation of outcomes (Abudetse & Ayetor, 2025; Aremu et al., 2025; Ezzeddine et al., 2023; Philips & Kelin, 2023). As a result, resistance to change decreases, and the teacher's readiness to engage in the improvement process increases, benefiting both educators and students in higher education settings.

2.5 Challenges Encountered in Implementing Change in Colleges of Education

Under their new tertiary mandate, Ghana's post-secondary colleges graduate students as tertiary institutions, requiring reorganization of their administrative, staff, infrastructural, and quality-assurance structures (Akyeampong, 2017; Mensah et al., 2022). Therefore, many of these colleges face challenges that highlight a gap between their mandated objectives and the methods they use to achieve them. This transformation creates significant governance, departmental, and supervisory challenges, and adapting to the new guidelines requires overhauling procedures such as practicums, assessment, and staff management, which can cause confusion when old practices are still fresh in people's minds. The change in monthly practicums to a formalised structure has caused chaos, indicating the difficulty of altering established practices.

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Institutional restructuring is associated with resource inadequacy, as Zottor et al. (2022) argue. The rising demand for higher education necessitates expansion, including the construction of new buildings, hostels, lecture theatres, laboratories, and ICT resources. Nevertheless, expansion without adequate resources and infrastructure has led to overcrowded lecture halls, a shortage of hostels, and insufficient laboratory equipment and learning resources, thereby lowering the quality of education. Key obstacles to restructuring in tertiary education include lecturers' limited skills and resistance to change. Transitioning to higher education requires lecturers to develop new courses and adopt research-led pedagogies to deliver quality education. However, lecturers lack the appropriate skills to teach these courses (Ajayi, 2012; Furxhi, 2021). In addition, government-initiated reforms face public backlash due to a lack of consultation (Taayeli, 2025). For example, lecturers at CoEs who resist adopting new methods and technologies impede institutional reform.

Policy instability and funding limitations constrain policy implementation (Steinebach et al., 2025). Because transitioning to higher education requires stringent accreditation and adequate funding, the latter leads to project delays, insufficient information and communication technology (ICT), and poor staff training. Higher education reforms, funding, and capacity issues in Ghana delay the transition, new admission policies, and the shift toward virtual learning (Awotwe et al., 2020). This is a major challenge encountered in implementing higher education reforms. Similarly, B.Ed. programmes enhance teacher training but also require additional resources. The colleges of education report insufficient resources for classrooms, staff, ICT, and supervision, as these were designed for lower education levels. As a result, the transition to higher education and the need for more labs and hostels exacerbate resource shortages, impeding the transition process and the quality of training. Globally, higher education reforms face delays due to low levels of implementation at the institutional level (Wit et al., 2025).

Research indicates the need to consider the relationship between reforms, readiness, resources, and stakeholders in change management cases (Twabu, 2025). The tertiary education sector in Ghana faces infrastructural, funding, and staff-related challenges that demand partnership-based approaches (Awotwe et al., 2020; Taayeli, 2025). CoEs need to plan effectively to manage change, build capacity, and use resources well. Change management is a complex process that demands an in-depth understanding of issues such as leadership, capacity building, readiness, and stakeholder involvement. While there are conventional approaches to managing change, contemporary strategies such as those emphasising stakeholder-centered change management, capacity building, and strategic management approaches have been emphasized in the Ghanaian context. This is because these strategies address issues such as resource constraints, resistance to change, and the need to embrace digital innovations. The study seeks to clarify the situational change management and reform process in CoEs to address reforms under conditions of limited resources, resistance to change, and the need to embrace digital innovations. The significance of this study cannot be overstated since, despite the numerous challenges associated with change processes in the Ghanaian tertiary education system, there is a need for further research to reveal additional ways through which such occurrences as limited resources, resistance to change, and the need to embrace digital innovations can be addressed. This study examined how situational change management can support educational reforms in Ghanaian CoEs.

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3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used an interpretive paradigm focused on perceptions (Creswell, 2019). The qualitative study was performed to understand and explain phenomena that occurred in a particular environment (Brooks & Normore, 2015). The paper aimed to collect information on the principal's leadership in change management practices in CoEs. The phenomenological study design was chosen to explore the principal's lived experience, their perspectives on change management, and how they cope with change using situational leadership in CoEs. The study included principals of public CoEs in Ghana. Participants had over 3 years of experience in change management and leadership and sufficient knowledge to apply it. Convenience sampling was used to recruit 15 participants until data saturation was reached (Phillips & Klein, 2023).

In this study, I conducted interviews with respondents, either face-to-face or virtually. I recorded and transcribed each session, capturing both verbal and nonverbal communication. I obtained consent from each participant to publish their information and field notes. I performed a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. After transcription, I identified meaningful units, grouped them into categories, and developed themes. I started with initial coding and created a coding scheme for analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, I used strategies including securing college approval, member checking, peer debriefing, protecting participants' rights, maintaining confidentiality, and obtaining informed consent. Again, participants could withdraw at any time, and pseudonyms were used instead of real names. I ensured that recordings and transcripts were kept securely for academic purposes only, and that participants were not harmed during the research process.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Situational Factors Influencing Change Management Practices of Colleges of Education Principals in Ghana

The principals in the Colleges of Education (CoEs) perceive change management practices as a response to the transition from diploma to degree programmes based on the interacting forces of regulatory, institutional, and cultural contexts, which determine the sustainability of their leadership and reforms. They are inclined to utilise situational leadership to respond to the changing demands and operate within the influencing factors by taking advantage of emerging issues. The study indicates that the principals focus primarily on issues amenable to improvement to actualise change management practices.

4.1.1.1 Theme 1: Regulation and Policy

The transition of CoEs to tertiary education was initiated through regulation and policy frameworks provided by the Ministry of Education and GTEC. In most cases, the principals view the regulation as providing guidance and direction, promoting standardised practices, easing decision-making, and empowering the colleges by giving them legitimacy. The regulation is provided as policy, guidelines, and directives to achieve specific goals while remaining mindful of contextual variables. The principals reported using the guidance principles as a framework for establishing internal policies as a way of legitimising their leadership and reform. For instance:

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> *The national policy on the reform of teacher education serves as our guideline; a directive from GTEC allows us to educate our staff on the new curriculum without making us look incompetent [PCoE 5].*
>
> *The framework of the new B.Ed., the four-year programme by the Ministry of Education, gives the tutors a sense of urgency in upgrading their qualifications [PCoE 11].*
> *Our internal policies align with the National Teachers' Standards to establish a shared understanding of the quality assurance framework for transitioning from a diploma to a tertiary institution [PCoE 8].*

The responses reveal that the legitimisation of the College's activities comes from external sources. The state plays a significant role in Ghanaian education and has created a system in which state institutions carry out change management for CoEs. To legitimise the leadership role during the transition process, the principals tend to rely more on external authorities such as GTEC or the Ministry of Education. This creates a sense of "external anchoring" as a strategy to cushion institutional stakeholders against any failure in the reform process led by the college administration. "External anchoring" justifies the new policies based on external requirements, such as teacher registration, which principals must use when designing the reform process.

4.1.1.2 Theme 2: Collegiality and Inclusiveness

The CoE principals understand that collegiality and stakeholder buy-in play a critical role in the college's change management and leadership practices. Despite the top-down approach, the best strategy for successful institutional change has been to engage stakeholders within a consultative framework. Principals utilise committees, department heads, and councils to empower the stakeholders, which ultimately promotes ownership of the issue. In addition to ownership, inclusion promotes accountability, which facilitates decision-making and policy implementation and provides a conducive environment for change leadership. The following are the views of several principals:

> *The involvement of our staff union leadership, CETAG, in the change management process is critical. The union leadership's involvement from the onset of the reform process reduces the resistance to change because the union leadership will be inclined to support the reform and will be able to sell it to the stakeholders [PCoE 14].*
>
> *The Academic Board's inclusiveness in driving change processes ensures that department heads' input is considered in policies such as the research framework [PCoE 3].*
>
> *Creating inclusive committees by giving junior and senior staff equal representation helps promote joint ownership of the change, which is vital to digital transformation and college reform [PCoE 1].*

The statements show that the principals understand that effective change management strategies rely on creating a sense of ownership of the issues among the stakeholders. Although most CoEs have promoted hierarchical decision-making, the principals acknowledge the need to reduce institutional levels to enable change. The statement about CETAG illustrates the power of staff

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unions to influence, promote, and accelerate change management strategies. The inclusion of CETAG is based on the understanding that the union represents staff and is therefore the best way to ensure staff buy-in for any reform process.

4.1.1.3 Theme 3: Institutional Culture and Legacy

The CoEs principals utilise institutional culture and legacy to promote organisational change processes by appealing to the tutors' sense of history and values. They use the institution's strengths, history, and achievements as a platform to develop and implement changes stakeholders can easily adopt. The statements below are by the principals of various CoEs:

> *Our discipline's institutional culture has played a significant role in shaping the change management process, as we appeal to tutors' sense of excellence in transitioning to a tertiary education institution [PCoE 5].*
>
> *The institution's religious culture promotes change processes because tutors view change management as a national service [PCoE 2].*
> *The legacy of the college helps the tutors understand the change processes because we have a strong alumni network and community support that can be mobilised to support the acquisition of new equipment [PCoE 7].*

The responses above indicate that principals use institutional culture and legacy to create a sense of belonging and attachment to the changes, grounded in a sense of origin. The principals have identified institutional strengths that can be used to promote organisational change. They appeal to the tutors' values and utilise the resources available based on the culture of their respective institutions. The college's legacy reassures staff of the benefits of change, for instance, by providing support through the alumni network and community resources. Additionally, the response about religious culture shows the principals' understanding that organisational change requires a shift in perception, as demonstrated by the tutors viewing the organisational change as a way of promoting national service. This indicates the importance of the institutional context in change management practices.

4.1.2 Practices of Situational Approach to Change Management in Colleges of Education

A situational approach to change management does not utilise the same approaches to all institutions based on the readiness of the stakeholders, leadership strategies used, and other emerging issues. The principals of CoEs utilise this strategy to promote change management based on the readiness of the tutors, resource availability, and academic programme strengths. This approach has enabled them to utilise resources, increase staff involvement, and develop efficient planning strategies. The themes below describe the strategies principals used to create a conducive environment for change processes.

4.1.2.1 Theme 1: Adaptive Leadership Practice for Increased Efficiency and Effective Use of Time and Resources

This theme explains how the principals apply adaptive leadership to manage change within the CoEs, taking into account various situational factors. Adaptive leadership helps principals use time and resources efficiently by aligning with the complexity of the issue at hand, the goals to be

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achieved, and the stakeholders' readiness to accommodate the change. In this case, readiness depends on tutors' skill in implementing the change, as shown by their capacity to adopt a new practice such as Learner-Centered Pedagogy (LCP). The principals use adaptive leadership to guide stakeholders based on the situation, reducing stress and resistance and increasing efficiency by eliminating unnecessary procedures. Adaptive leadership is critical for promoting efficient use of resources such as time and money. This is achieved by determining the best ways to utilise the available resources based on the needs of the stakeholders to be served or the goals to be achieved. It can be described as working smarter and not harder. Some comments by the principals are as follows:

> *I provide different levels of assistance depending on the tutors' preparedness to increase the rate and scope of reform while reducing the workload [PCoE 3].*
>
> *I utilise a flexible leadership style by delegating responsibilities to staff to promote efficiency while focusing on issues such as clarity, time, and resources to reduce constraints faced in implementing the change [PCoE 9].*
>
> *I assess the readiness of the staff to implement the change and utilise the results to determine who gets direct help and who supports the change process [PCoE 6].*

From the principals' statements, it is evident that situational approaches require assessing each stakeholder's readiness, providing appropriate levels of assistance to support the change, and promoting the best use of existing resources. The first statement indicates that the principals acknowledge the need to utilise a situational approach to change leadership based on the skills of the tutors. The principals can assess staff readiness through direct interaction and decide the level of support to provide. The comments by the other two principals confirm their understanding of how to utilise adaptive leadership to promote efficiency by reducing time wastage, such as by providing clarity. The principals also acknowledge the need to utilise the strengths of the stakeholders to achieve the best results.

4.1.2.2 Theme 2: Providing Differentiated Support for Effective Teaching and Operations

The theme focuses on how principals provide differentiated support to stakeholders to promote effective teaching and operations in the CoEs. The support is based on the stakeholders' readiness and skill level to implement the change successfully. The principals utilise strategies such as coaching, mentoring, peer review, and training to empower the tutors to increase the rate and scope of reform. Support is provided to both experienced and inexperienced tutors based on the identified needs. The following are the views of the principals:

> *We provide differentiated support to tutors based on their needs, helping them deliver their lessons effectively [PCoE 12].*
>
> *Our training is needs-based to ensure tutors get exactly what they need to improve their performance [PCoE 4].*
>
> *We support stakeholders in different ways to ensure they play their part in the teaching and learning process [PCoE 15].*

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From the comments above, the principals understand that they can provide differentiated support to tutors based on their skills, needs, and readiness. They utilise this approach to promote effective teaching and efficient use of resources based on the strengths of the stakeholders. The first principal underscores the need for differentiated support by noting that he provides it based on students' needs. The second principal confirms this, stating that training is tailored to the tutors' exact needs. A principal elaborates, asserting that differentiated support is necessary to ensure each stakeholder plays his part.

4.1.2.3 Theme 3: Flexible Planning and Implementation

The principals acknowledge the importance of flexible planning and implementation in their change management strategies. They utilise the strategy to promote collaboration and cooperation, which leads to efficient utilisation of human and material resources to achieve the desired outcomes. This flexibility helps principals adjust original plans to fit the context, making them more relevant. The strategy encourages clear communication among stakeholders, supporting better decision-making. The principals view flexible planning as a strategy that promotes responsiveness, collaboration, and efficiency in planning and implementing change. The statements made by the principals are as follows:

> *We develop plans that allow us to respond to emerging issues without changing our goals [PCoE 1].*
>
> *Our implementation strategy gives departments room to adopt different approaches that meet our objectives [PCoE 6].*
>
> *We utilise flexible planning to promote coordination of activities, which has improved our operations in the college [PCoE 13].*

The comments above show that the principals understand that flexible planning and implementation are critical for change leadership. The strategy facilitates collaboration by allowing departments to adopt different approaches as long as they do not deviate from the set objectives. Flexibility also allows principals to adjust initial plans based on context and stakeholder needs. This approach increases the chances for success because it allows the stakeholders to take ownership of the issue. The statements also indicate that flexible planning promotes effective communication by allowing stakeholders to make decisions in their context, fostering ownership and collaboration.

4.1.2.4 Theme 4: Consultative Approach to Decision-making and Stakeholder Engagement

The principals understand that effective change management requires engaging stakeholders at various levels, depending on the issues at hand, to obtain their support and involvement in the change process. They tend to take a consultative approach to institutional policies, based on available resources, which facilitate stakeholder support and increase the likelihood of success for any proposed change. Engagement varies depending on stakeholders' level of influence and interest. The most important stakeholders, such as the union, are engaged in all matters affecting the institution, while others, such as the councils, are engaged in specific issues. The principals take this approach because they know that no matter how effective the proposed change is, it will

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not be supported unless the right stakeholders are engaged. The following are some comments made by the principals:

> *We always hold forums to air the views of tutors and students on curriculum changes, ensuring their involvement in the decision-making process [PCoE 15].*
>
> *The councils and partners are always engaged in developing the strategies for the reform process, as we focus on their input to make the change process more responsive to their needs [PCoE 10].*
>
> *Engaging stakeholders based on available resources ensures we secure the support needed to facilitate successful reform [PCoE 9].*

From the principals' statements, it is evident that they recognize the importance of engaging stakeholders in consultation. Consultation promotes project ownership and stakeholder support, as engagement can take the form of forums, meetings, discussions, and even informal talks. Stakeholders' views are considered on matters affecting the institution, such as the development of a new curriculum. The consultation ensures that the issues addressed affect them most and that their suggestions are considered; as a result, they are willing to support the initiatives and play their part in promoting change.

4.1.2.5 Theme 5: Use of External Policy and Regulatory Guidance

The principals view external policy and regulatory guidance as an integral part of their change management strategy because it builds legitimacy and facilitates institutional change. However, the CoEs principals tend to utilise the guidance in a flexible manner based on the availability of resources and readiness of the stakeholders to implement them. They utilize the regulations, guidelines, and directives from external agencies such as MoE, GTEC, and T-TEL to promote institutional legitimacy and encourage stakeholder compliance. The following are the views of some of the principals:

> *We utilise the GTEC guidelines in our strategic planning to meet their requirements, which helps us access the funds we need to support our transition to a tertiary institution [PCoE 2].*
>
> *We use the guidelines provided by T-TEL flexibly to facilitate reform in line with existing leadership structures [PCoE 4].*
>
> *The external guidelines serve as a framework for changes to our governance framework, enabling us to obtain support from the councils without overburdening staff [PCoE 11].*

The comments above show that the principals can utilise the external guidelines and regulatory framework flexibly based on the needs of the institution. They acknowledge the need to consider external guidance when initiating change, given its potential to build legitimacy. This flexibility helps them implement reforms in line with the context and available resources, thereby supporting institutional sustainability. The external guidelines are used as a framework for institutional reform, and their utilisation helps the principals to maintain a positive relationship with the MoE, GTEC, and T-TEL as well as the councils.

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4.1.2.6 Theme 6: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustments in Response to Feedback

The principals focus more on monitoring and evaluation to ensure they make the most effective changes based on the feedback they receive. They are always ready to adjust their approaches based on the information they gather from the stakeholders. In most cases, monitoring and evaluation identify overlooked resource needs and address emerging issues by providing stakeholders with the necessary support. Feedback can also be used to adjust staff training in response to tutors' specific needs. The feedback helps them remain responsive to stakeholders' needs and make the most effective change possible. The following are the views of some principals:

> *We always monitor the results of our teaching to ensure we make necessary adjustments to training and resource use to address emerging issues [PCoE 1].*
>
> *We consult our staff regularly to ensure that the changes we make are appropriate given our financial constraints [PCoE 5].*
>
> *Feedback from classroom observations helps us consider adjustments that make our operations more efficient [PCoE 6].*

The statements illustrate the principals' understanding of monitoring and evaluation as a means of making continuous adjustments to institutional practices based on information gathered from stakeholders. It allows principals to identify stakeholders' needs and make the necessary changes to practices in response to those requirements. Regular staff performance assessments, for instance through observation, provide feedback to identify skills that need improvement and to address issues by providing training to tutors. The feedback can also be used to revise policies based on stakeholders' recommendations.

4.1.2.7 Theme 7: Institutional Culture and Legacy as Resources to Promote Change

The principals acknowledge the importance of institutional history and culture in facilitating change management in the CoEs by appealing to stakeholders' values. These values relate to past strengths and achievements that have contributed to the institution's development. The principals utilise institutional history and culture in change management as it helps them to develop a sense of belongingness and attachment to the new change based on their origin. It also promotes stakeholder ownership of the change, which is required for successful implementation. The statements made by the principals are as follows:

> *Our approach to teacher training creates conditions for the successful implementation of technological reforms by appealing to our institutional strengths [PCoE 15].*
>
> *We utilise our history of collaboration in the development of a new governance policy to promote the autonomy of our tutors [PCoE 13].*
>
> *Institutional values support change, as past accomplishments motivate us to achieve more [PCoE 11].*

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The principals' statements show that they understand the value of institutional culture and history as resources for change management. Institutional culture helps them appeal to stakeholders' values by aligning with the issue's origin. This understanding helps them develop change leadership strategies grounded in the institution's values and strengths. The comments also show their awareness of the need to create ownership of the proposed change, which is crucial for promoting stakeholder support. This awareness allows the principals to use institutional history and culture as tools for change management.

4.1.3 Challenges Principals Face in Managing Change Through Situational Approaches

The principals in Ghanaian CoEs face several challenges in managing change using resource-based and stakeholder-based situational approaches. When they use specific approaches to address different issues, principals face a wide range of resistance from tutors who are not directly involved. In addition, the councils do not support the change management process because it disrupts their operations. Financial constraints limit the ability to provide resources to support the change process, delaying development. The principals can address these issues by focusing on resource allocation through resource-conscious discussions that promote stakeholder ownership and reduce institutional friction.

4.1.3.1 Theme 1: Inadequate Resources and Facilities

The principals face the challenge of limited financial support and facilities to facilitate the change management process as described by the statements below:

> *Our lecture halls are shared among three departments, and tutorials are held in the open due to inadequate facilities [PCoE 2].*
>
> *To utilise the situational approach in change management, the tutors need laptops and internet access, but there are only a few functioning computers that serve twenty lecturers [PCoE 7].*
>
> *The hostel facilities are so inadequate that students often arrive late to school or do not come at all; how can we implement online learning when their welfare is not in our hands? [PCoE 9]*

The principals acknowledge the importance of addressing poor facilities to ensure the change management process is successful. However, resources are limited, making it difficult to use a situational approach to meet every department's needs. Principals are forced to use a uniform strategy to address insufficient classrooms and open tutorials. This causes them to use time inefficiently, slowing the process and potentially leading to a loss of interest.

4.1.3.2. Theme 2: Staff Resistance and Low Readiness

The principals identified staff resistance and low readiness as impediments to implementing reforms such as new curricula, learner-centered strategies, new technologies, and assessments. New practices require tutors' readiness, but staff members have varying abilities and willingness to learn new competencies. Similarly, apprehension, additional workload, and discomfort can lead to staff resistance to change. Some tutors dismiss proposed strategies as unnecessary or lack the skills to implement them, making change management challenging, as leaders must design

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approaches to meet the expectations of such staff. Readiness is also undermined by insufficient professional skills, limited exposure, and varying levels of proficiency, making it difficult to implement uniform strategies and leading tutors to experience challenges, setbacks, and inconsistencies. This is captured by the following statements:

> *Some senior tutors argue, 'I have been teaching this way for twenty years; why should I change now?' Even after attending workshops, they continue to use the same approaches [PCoE 12].*
>
> *While contextual considerations are vital in change management, tutors often argue that the new assessment model remains unsuitable for the current environment, despite training in ICT assessments [PCoE 6].*
>
> *Leadership needs to adjust according to the situation and the readiness of the methods employed. However, because almost half of our tutors have not used learning management systems, excessive flexibility could hinder progress [PCoE 3].*

The comments show that CoE heads are situational, adjusting their approaches based on tutors' readiness, but they face resistance from those uncomfortable with innovations such as competency-based or learner-centered pedagogy or automated assessments because they feel unfamiliar or lack proficiency. Professional complacency and imposed changes reduce enthusiasm and motivation. In addition, when leadership objectives are detached from coaching or delegated authority, strategies become less effective, resulting in tutors presenting with divergent readiness levels. This obliges principals to spend more time on consultations and reassurance, slowing the process and requiring greater effort.

4.1.3.3. Theme 3: Policy Instability and Unclear Guidelines

Principals in this study linked the lack of stability and clarity in change management guidelines to inconsistent, ambiguous, and unpredictable reforms. Frequent changes and/or repeals of policies, regulations, and rules before implementation hindered principals' ability to develop and apply appropriate change management strategies with confidence. The constant introduction and/or repeal of new policies, regulations, and rules before their effective implementation hindered the principality's capacity to confidently formulate and apply appropriate change management strategies. Moreover, changes in financial provisions and policy expectations slowed the pace of reform, while inconsistent policies and regulations prevented the principality from developing a cohesive change management strategy. The CoE principals are eager to improve their responsiveness to change management but cannot eliminate the instability and ambiguity caused by policies and regulations. This issue is evident in the following quotes:

> *Occasionally, when implementing a plan, new policy guidelines arise, requiring adjustments to schedules, staffing, and training. This adds complexity to change management [PCoE 14].*
>
> *Some directives we receive are ambiguous and require interpretation in our context. While this allows flexibility, it can also slow down the process [PCoE 13].*
>
> *The uncertain policy environment complicates our timelines and coordination efforts [PCoE 5].*

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The comments highlight that policy instability, and unclear guidelines create difficulties for change management in the CoEs. The policies undermine the principals' assessment and planning activities and their efforts to build trust with stakeholders, causing the change process to oscillate between compliance and improvisation and, consequently, to encounter more resistance and delays. The major issue in change management was not the principals' acceptance of the need for situational approaches, but the policies that interfered with effective change management.

4.1.3.4. Theme 4: Balancing Centralised Control with Local Autonomy

The principals were concerned with balancing central and local management to build change management competence. While directives provide clear instructions, they can cause confusion and impede decision-making. The principals are aware that centralized management can adversely affect organizational responsiveness, reduce initiative, and minimise flexibility in managing matters at the local level. Responses from some of the principals are as follows:

> *While the need for flexibility and responsiveness is welcome, the principals are still required to operate under the same assessment models and timelines, despite differences in their contexts (PCoE 4).*
>
> *I cannot alter the approach across different departments, as I would need to persuade the inspectorate that we are properly following the required directives (PCoE 5).*
>
> *Being responsive and adaptable to the situation involves consulting various stakeholders; however, the system also demands consistent results and discourages local innovation (PCoE 7).*

The responses suggest that principals support a situational approach, but central direction prevents them from being truly flexible and responsive to the local context. While they acknowledge the need to be flexible, centralised and uniform directives prevent them from doing so, thus discouraging autonomy, participation, and the adoption of alternative strategies to meet the requirements. As a result, the principals use standardized procedures rather than local strategies to avoid sanctions, thus reducing flexibility, participation, and the effectiveness of situational change management in addressing their needs.

4.2 DISCUSSION

The transition of Ghanaian CoEs to tertiary institutions has redefined principals' roles from routine administrators to change leaders engaged in a wide range of activities, including curricular reforms, governance, quality assurance, and accountability. The situational change management approach is appropriate because it focuses on context, followers' readiness levels, and the nature of the task, rather than a uniform leadership approach (Hersey et al., 2013; Philips & Kelin, 2023). The findings indicate that principals consider situational factors when managing change in their colleges. The tertiary mandate introduces new governance systems, expectations, and regulatory frameworks that require principals to balance stability with system requirements. Effective change management requires them to interpret the context's dynamics and distinctions, including their capacity and that of the tutors, to determine the most appropriate implementation strategies (Northouse, 2022).

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Staff members' readiness to participate in or support change efforts varies, as illustrated by the following statements: Some tutors embrace the change rapidly, while others are uncertain or resistant [Ezzeddine et al., 2023]. These statements illustrate varying levels of readiness among staff members pursuing change strategies in the CoEs. This supports situational leadership theory, which suggests that the most effective leaders modify their approaches to match followers' competence and commitment levels (Hersey et al., 2013). As such, principals must decide how much to direct, guide, support, or delegate to reduce disruptions and increase ownership of the process (Philips & Kelin, 2023).

The principals use situational approaches by modifying their strategies in response to the situation, including using directive tactics to explain policies and engaging in consultation to promote ownership. This illustrates the situational leadership approach used by the principals, in which tactics are modified to meet the requirements of the task and the tutors' readiness (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2025; Jinga & Hassen, 2025). Effective communication during change management is essential for enabling the heads to inform stakeholders, motivate them, establish expectations, and involve them in the process (Aremu et al., 2025). This approach suits the Ghanaian context because it reduces anxiety and resistance, builds trust and involvement, and addresses both the task and relationship aspects of change management. Involving committees, structures, and forums throughout the process creates a sense of joint accountability and ownership of results, which is particularly important in the context of complex tertiary reform. This reflects situational change management, which allows principals to adapt their tactics rather than relying on authority to enforce compliance.

Despite these coping strategies, principals face several challenges in implementing the changes. For instance, resistance to change is a risk, as some teachers may perceive the processes as intrusive and threatening to their status quo and workload (Furxhi, 2021; Taayeli, 2025). It requires providing support and consultation services rather than control and direction (Northouse, 2022). Availability of resources becomes another challenge. Upgrading is a step up from secondary to tertiary institutions; however, the heads will face a range of financial, infrastructural, and staffing challenges that can impede successful change management. They have to consider whether to pursue selective reforms or a step-by-step approach, as both are appropriate management strategies and do not reflect inadequate leadership.

The reforms are implemented in stages, and the change leadership process is non-linear, requiring the principals to oscillate among directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating to facilitate progress. The tertiary reform agenda in Ghanaian education affects the CoEs, as the process focuses on teacher preparation, governance, quality, and accountability. Principals are expected to lead the change process by using their administrative skills to interpret policy, mobilize stakeholders, and sustain momentum amid transitions. Findings indicate a situational change-management approach, as the principals do not use a uniform tactic to address the multifaceted, complex transition process. They must assess staff readiness, institutional capacity, and policy or stakeholder expectations to adjust their change-management approaches. As such, principals must have diagnostic skills to lead change effectively, as the success of their efforts will depend on their ability to adapt their tactics. Effective leaders must combine firmness and flexibility, and structure and participation, to ensure the process succeeds. As such, CoE principals must balance encouraging innovation and modernization with maintaining cohesion.

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5.0 CONCLUSION

The findings illustrate that the change management process in CoEs in Ghana is influenced by situational factors related to their transition to tertiary institutions. The findings indicate that no single leadership tactic is sufficient to address the complex reform process, which includes curricular, governance, quality, and accountability changes, and that leaders require a combination of strategies. Communication, participation, involvement, and shared governance are key success factors, but significant obstacles remain, including staff readiness and limited resources. Consequently, change management in CoEs is likely to benefit from situational leadership, in which the principal considers the context and followers' readiness and ability and adjusts the leadership style to manage change effectively.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

In practice, the principals of the CoEs should embrace a flexible yet diagnostic approach to managing change so that their responses reflect staff readiness and resource availability. The shift to a tertiary institution depends on the situation. The principal should consider these elements before issuing directions and guidelines or delegating authority. Effective leadership and management of the transition process are more important than day-to-day directions and orders. Improving the shared governance structures, including the committee, will enable principals to foster ownership and reduce resistance to change, particularly regarding externally driven initiatives.

Communicating the objectives and expectations of the process, as well as the importance of stakeholder feedback, is essential, especially in the Ghanaian context, given the anxiety caused by the transition. The process of transition to a tertiary institution may differ under various circumstances. Consequently, the principal should assess these phenomena to issue effective directions, guidelines, or delegations of authority. Indeed, appropriate advice, communication, and decision-making are sometimes more significant than direct and day-to-day supervision. Orientations, mentoring, and training opportunities might foster adaptation, whereas a phased approach allows the leader to set the tempo according to the staff's or the organization's capabilities.

At the policy level, the CoEs need guidelines, support, and capacity-building to pursue the tertiary transition agenda, and policymakers must recognize their varying levels of preparedness and provide the support needed to help them cope successfully with the transition. Strengthening principals' authority and clarifying stakeholder roles will reduce wasted time and unnecessary decision-making. Furthermore, developing policies on criteria, responsibility allocation, accountability, and autonomy for the college of education, and using monitoring systems to support implementation, are vital to ensure compliance and support. Finally, aligning the reform's goals with human resources, infrastructure, and financial needs will help reduce the burden on principals and on change management. In general, the policies should view change management as a facilitating rather than a compliance issue.

The results propose a situational approach to higher education reform and argue for a flexible management style by principals in CoEs, as different leadership styles are not conducive to a

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multifaceted reform process. The principals should adjust their approaches based on the situation and needs, specifically to comply with staff regulations, capacity, and context. The strategy focuses on combining interpersonal and institutional leadership approaches, including policy interpretation, constraints, and stakeholder coordination, with the reform process currently implemented in Ghana. This strategy seems most effective given the transitional nature of the CoEs, where it is vital to ensure institutions are well suited to their new role as tertiary education providers. Principals must stay adaptable and responsive to support effective transformation. The reform of CoEs can only succeed with an interactive approach to policy, leadership, and theory: a diagnostic approach by principals, supportive policies, and contextual adaptations by theory.

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