

Tutors' Leadership Experiences in Public Colleges of Education Using Tengey's (2018) Virtue-Based Leadership Concept

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Abstract

This study explored the leadership experiences of tutors in public Colleges of Education (CoEs) using Tengey's (2018) leadership concept. Utilizing the interpretivist paradigm, this study employed a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design to collect data from 40 eligible participants using purposive, maximum variation, and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide. The analysis concentrated on identifying themes. Tutors viewed leadership as a holistic, value-driven process rooted in personal virtues, ethical responsibilities, and strategic foresight, extending beyond formal roles to encompass relational and future-oriented influence. The leadership experiences of tutors in public CoEs reflect Tengey's (2018) concept of inclusive, value-driven leadership that extends beyond formal roles. These attributes include responsibility and accountability, moral discipline, courage and confidence, creativity and innovation, collaboration and influence, and future-oriented thinking. Systemic barriers to implementing Tengey's (2018) value-based leadership include limited forward thinking, dependence on formal authority, inadequate ethical discipline, and disregard for informal leadership contributions. The findings demonstrate a need for leadership development that enhances ethical awareness, promotes collaboration, and fosters innovation, while accounting for institutional and cultural constraints. Among other things, public CoEs in Ghana should establish systems to identify and foster leadership at all levels, extending beyond administrative roles.

KEYWORDS: Tutors' leadership, lived experiences, public colleges of education, Tengey's leadership concept

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Leadership has a significant influence on school performance, teacher morale, and student learning outcomes (Sahito et al., 2025; Plaku & Leka, 2025; Leithwood et al., 2020), making it essential to the advancement of education. Historically, educational leadership has focused on official positions, such as principals, emphasizing authority and hierarchical decision-making (Hallinger, 2018). Recent studies advocate for acknowledging the distributed character of leadership and appreciating the contributions of non-positional leaders, such as teachers and students (Spillane, 2006; Harris & Jones, 2020). Hence, the changing requirements of the twenty-first century necessitate a re-evaluation of educational institutions to equally emphasize the development of ethical, moral, and social character alongside intellectual competencies (Ghamrawi, 2023; Çetin & Karsantık, 2022).

Leadership is essential in educational institutions, particularly in developing countries such as Ghana, as it contributes to a favourable school climate, enhances instructional quality, and fosters community involvement (Abakah, 2025; Dare et al., 2024; Salifu et al., 2025). Ghamrawi (2023) asserts that school leadership is indispensable for enhancing education in accordance with SDG 4 of the UNESCO 2030 Agenda. Focusing exclusively on headteachers neglects the leadership roles played by other individuals within schools. Teachers frequently engage in mentoring peers, innovating instructional methods, and providing support to students, which corresponds with contemporary perspectives on distributed or teacher leadership (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Teney (2018, p. 40) provides a unique definition that corresponds with this transition: Leadership is a distinctive trait exhibited by individuals across various roles and contexts. It encompasses virtues such as responsibility, accountability, moral discipline, courage, confidence, creativity, the capacity to collaborate and influence others, and a focus on future-oriented and long-term goals. This value-based conceptualization critiques position-centric and authority-driven paradigms by highlighting leadership as a virtue-led, inclusive, and situational phenomenon. This perspective is consistent with contemporary leadership theories, which assert that effective leadership extends beyond positional authority and is grounded in values and ethical behavior (Abay et al., 2023; Liden et al., 2025).

The growing complexity of educational environments necessitates flexible, ethical leadership strategies, suggesting that this comprehensive perspective could be beneficial for primary schools in Ghana. Nonetheless, there is a paucity of research regarding the interpretation and application of this concept by grassroots educators. This study seeks to address the gap by examining the experiences and practices of leadership among headteachers and teachers in public schools, with Teney's (2018) value-based leadership concept as the basis.

1.2 The Problem

Despite reforms aimed at enhancing leadership (Esia-Donkoh & Baffoe, 2018; Asare & Nti, 2014), Ghana's educational institutions continue to encounter persistent challenges, including inadequate supervision, low teacher motivation, and limited collaboration. These problems are connected to a top-down leadership style that puts institutional heads in charge of making changes and marginalizes tutors and non-administrative staff (Annan, 2020; Heyden, 2016; Oduro, 2004). This type of exclusion hinders the development of collaborative and innovative ideas. Additionally, leadership policies in public CoEs often prioritize compliance over ethics and co-operation, making it difficult for people to be included and to act in accordance with ethical principles (Ghana Tertiary Education Commission [GTEC], 2023; Transforming Teacher Education and Learning [T-TEL], 2015).

Researchers emphasize that effective leadership is crucial for an organization's long-term success (Bush, 2008; Northouse, 2021). Studies on leadership in CoEs predominantly focus on formal leadership roles, frequently neglecting the informal contributions of tutors (Oduro & MacBeath, 2003; Asare & Nti, 2014). The literature examines transformational and distributed leadership models (Bush & Glover, 2014; Spillane, 2006); however, African-centered perspectives remain inadequately investigated. Tengey's (2018) value-based framework offers a culturally informed model, describing leadership as a moral imperative grounded in courage, collaboration, and accountability. While international research emphasizes instructional, transformational, and distributed approaches, limited studies have evaluated their contextual applicability (Mifsud, 2023; Wenner & Campbell, 2017), especially in CoEs in Ghana. Tengey (2018) suggested that leadership should be based on ethics and values, but this idea remains relatively uncommon.

To fill this void, this study examines how tutors perceive and practice leadership through Tengey's inclusive, virtue-based perspective. This study's uniqueness and originality stem from its use of Tengey's (2018) leadership concept, which frames leadership as virtues and actions accessible to all, rather than as roles aligned with formal positions. By focusing on qualities such as moral discipline and relational influence, it presents a collective, distributed view of leadership. This approach provides new insights into how tutors lead and drive change, filling gaps in traditional leadership research that often emphasizes hierarchical authority. The study's results will offer comprehensive insights with considerable implications for policy, college practices, and future research (Addai-Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023; Patton, 2015).

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do tutors in public CoEs affiliated with UEW understand leadership in their college settings?
2. In what ways do tutors' lived experiences in public CoEs affiliated with UEW reflect Tengey's (2018) leadership concept?

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3. In what ways do tutors' lived experiences in public CoEs affiliated with UEW differ from Tengey's (2018) leadership concept?

1.4 Literature Review

The investigation of tutors' leadership experiences in educational settings has received considerable academic attention, particularly through qualitative research. Tengey (2018) asserted that leadership comprises various qualities such as responsibility, accountability, and the capacity to influence others, which individuals in diverse educational roles and hierarchical levels can exhibit. This literature review synthesizes theoretical and conceptual frameworks with empirical research to offer a thorough understanding of the complex nature of leadership in relation to tutors' experiences. The theoretical frameworks examined are virtue-based leadership and transformational leadership theories.

1.4.1 *Virtue-Based Leadership Theory*

The theory examines the role of moral character and ethical behaviour in effective leadership practices, prioritizing moral character and essential virtues such as humility, integrity, compassion, and courage (Cameron, 2011). Tengey (2018) characterized leadership as a process informed by virtues and moral excellence, prioritizing ethical conduct over official titles. Moral discipline, accountability, and collaboration exemplify essential virtues of this theory. His non-positional perspective holds that ethical behaviour enables anyone to assume a leadership role. His definition's future-oriented focus aligns with the objectives of virtue-based leadership, which aims to foster institutional and societal growth, success, and long-term sustainability.

1.4.2 *Transformational Leadership Theory*

Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring and empowering followers by developing a compelling vision, motivating them toward common objectives, and facilitating both personal and professional growth (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Tengey (2018) defines leadership in a manner that closely aligns with this model, emphasizing creativity, confidence, influence, future orientation, and long-term thinking. His perspective emphasizes leadership as a process that involves inspiring others, fostering a shared purpose, and facilitating significant change. The qualities reflect the fundamental elements of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, establishing Tengey's model as a culturally relevant interpretation of transformational leadership principles.

Tengey's (2018) virtue-based leadership concept becomes a culturally applicable explanation of transformational leadership by establishing transformational behaviours in the moral values and communal ethics that are central to Ghanaian leadership traditions. While transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring followers, articulating vision, and fostering change, Tengey's (2018) leadership perspective roots these behaviours in virtues such as responsibility, accountability, moral discipline, courage, confidence, creativity, integrity, humility, and service to

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the community. With this, Tengey (2018) positions transformational influence not merely as a set of behaviours but as an extension of culturally valued moral character. This integration reflects the Ghanaian expectation that credible leaders must embody strong ethical virtues before they can motivate others or guide institutional change. Thus, Tengey's (2018) virtue-based leadership concept situates transformational leadership within a moral and cultural framework, making it more meaningful and locally resonant while still aligned with its core principles of vision, inspiration, and positive change.

1.4.3 Understanding Leadership in Educational Context

Traditionally, educational leadership has been associated with formal positions, such as principals and department heads. It has transformed into a more participatory, distributed, and value-oriented process (Bush, 2008; Northouse, 2016). Leadership in Colleges of Education, such as those in Ghana, is manifested through mentoring, curriculum innovation, institutional development, and ethical influence (Lumby, 2012). This perspective highlights the significant leadership roles that tutors, regardless of their formal titles, assume in shaping educational practices and fostering institutional development. Leithwood et al. (2020) observed that leadership affects student outcomes via instructional and transformational methods. Researchers (Spillane, 2006; Dampson, 2018) support the concept of distributed leadership; however, Ghana's centralized system restricts teacher innovation (Salifu, 2023; Hallgarten et al., 2016). Studies indicate that empowering teachers improves student success and motivation (Shuxin, 2023; Wahyuti & Boussanlègue, 2025). This research utilizes Tengey's (2018) virtue-based leadership framework, conceptualizing leadership as virtue-driven and arising from any role.

Tengey (2018) characterized leadership as a value-oriented, inclusive, and ethical practice grounded in responsibility, accountability, moral discipline, and collaboration, rather than hierarchical authority. In public CoEs in Ghana, tutors exemplify this framework by taking on leadership roles beyond teaching, such as mentoring, role modeling, and directing institutional practices, even though they do not have official titles. Tengey's (2018) virtue-based leadership concept offers a culturally relevant, non-hierarchical perspective on leadership, making it particularly effective for examining tutors' experiences within Ghana's semi-autonomous public CoEs.

1.4.4 Rationale for Using Tengey's (2018) Leadership Concept

Tengey's (2018) virtue-based leadership framework offers a culturally informed, ethically oriented framework for analyzing leadership in Ghana's public CoEs. His framework contrasts with conventional hierarchical concepts by portraying leadership as a virtue-based characteristic available to everyone, rooted in attributes such as accountability, responsibility, moral discipline, courage, collaboration, and progressive thinking. In real life, CoE tutors demonstrate these values by helping students, supporting their coworkers, generating new ideas, modifying the curriculum, coordinating Supported Teaching in School (STS), and planning academic events, all without holding any official power. These actions demonstrate non-positional leadership, which aligns with

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Teney's idea that leadership stems from character and behaviour, not titles. The framework emphasizes the moral and ethical aspects of leadership, offering a context-sensitive perspective that aligns with Ghanaian cultural values and more accurately reflects tutors' real-life leadership experiences in colleges.

2.0 METHODS

2.1 Research Philosophy and Design

The study utilized an interpretivist paradigm to examine tutors' experiential leadership narratives and their subjective interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on Teney's virtue-based leadership framework, a phenomenological design (Pham, 2018) helped to investigate tutors' individual interpretations of leadership. Phenomenological research explores and interprets how people experience a particular event by moving beyond surface descriptions to uncover the essence of their lived experiences. Rather than aiming for generalization, phenomenological studies capture the richness and authenticity of human experience. This involves engaging a small group with shared experiences, conducting in-depth interviews or observations, and analyzing their narratives to reveal common themes and meaningful insights.

The use of phenomenology is justified because it provides a valuable avenue for uncovering emotional, social, and contextual dimensions that are often missed by quantitative approaches. Hence, it enables the researcher to access participants' lived realities and discover shared patterns across their narratives, enabling tutors to express varied, context-specific views (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018) that demonstrated how the colleges align with Teney's framework.

2.2 Participants

The study involved 40 full-time tutors from eight public CoEs affiliated with UEW, chosen using purposive, maximum variation, and snowball sampling techniques (Dlamini et al., 2024; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Eligibility of participants was based on at least 2 years of teaching experience at the present college. Purposive sampling was used to select tutors with direct leadership experience, as outlined by Teney (2018), to ensure relevant insights. To broaden perspectives, maximum variation sampling was applied by involving tutors from different public CoEs, ranks, departments, years of service, and leadership roles. After forming the initial group, the snowball sampling was used to reach additional eligible tutors through participant referrals. This combined sampling approach helped in assembling a diverse, information-rich group of 40 tutors, whose varied viewpoints, including those in informal leadership roles, provided meaningful insights into their leadership experiences. The sample size was suitable for phenomenological research (Fraenkel et al., 2018; Stahl & King, 2020).

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process included semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ruslin et al., 2022). The semi-structured interview guide was developed by reviewing Tengey's (2018) leadership concept and related literature to identify key themes for open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview guide was refined for clarity and relevance, with qualitative research experts providing helpful feedback. After finalization, convenient interview sessions were scheduled, the study was explained, consent was obtained, and face-to-face, recorded interviews with permission were conducted, using probes and field notes to ensure consistent, rich, and authentic accounts of tutors' leadership experiences. Saturation was reached after 31 interviews, with an additional nine interviews enhancing depth (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Squire et al., 2024).

The study adhered to strict ethical protocols to protect participants and maintain research integrity, including obtaining informed consent, explaining the study's purpose, and assuring participants' right to withdraw. Confidentiality was preserved by anonymizing participants and securely storing data. Trustworthiness was ensured by adhering to Stahl and King's (2020) four criteria: credibility through prolonged engagement and participant validation; dependability through systematic documentation; transferability through rich, detailed contextual descriptions; and confirmability through reflexive journaling and audit trails. This comprehensive approach ensured that the findings were authentic, rigorously derived, and ethically sound, accurately reflecting participants' experiences.

2.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to interpret the data systematically. Transcripts were first read repeatedly to familiarize with tutors' narratives, after which significant statements and patterns were coded. These codes were grouped into themes, reviewed, and refined to accurately reflect the data. Each theme was defined and aligned with Tengey's (2018) virtue-based leadership. Findings were then compiled into a coherent report, supported by excerpts from participants, ensuring a transparent and meaningful interpretation of tutors' leadership experiences.

3.0 RESULTS

This research employed Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis to examine tutors' conceptualizations and understandings of leadership in public CoEs in Ghana. Seven primary themes were identified from the data, illustrating tutors' perceptions of leadership as grounded in accountability, moral discipline, courage, confidence, creativity, collaboration, and a forward-thinking perspective. The following analysis addresses these themes, incorporating direct quotes from participants and pertinent academic viewpoints.

3.1 Tutors' Understanding of Leadership in CoEs Setting

Exploring tutors' perceptions of leadership in public CoEs is crucial for understanding how leadership is practiced and experienced. Their views influence interactions, behaviors, and guidance of colleagues and students, offering insights into the values, principles, and practices shaping leadership, and highlighting both alignment and divergence with established leadership theories.

Leadership as a Responsibility

The analysis revealed that leadership transcends mere authority; it encompasses a profound responsibility to influence, guide, and serve others for collective benefit. Leadership in Centers of Excellence encompasses the demonstration of ethical behavior, the promotion of collaboration, the facilitation of professional growth, and the execution of decisions that advance institutional development and enhance student success. Tutors have come to recognize that effective leadership requires accountability, responsiveness, and a commitment to fostering the potential of both staff and students. Statements from tutors to support their ideas include:

Leadership involves accountability for advancing others. It extends beyond instruction to encompass the inspiration and support of both colleagues and students in significant ways [TP11, Field Interview 2024].

Leadership in our college requires accountability for the department's welfare and performance. This duty emphasizes commitment, selflessness, and the obligation to address challenges for the shared benefit [TP4, Field Interview 2024].

Leadership comprises more than merely directing others. It requires exhibiting honesty, making tough decisions, and promoting a work environment where all staff feel supported, empowered, and vital to the solution [TP6, Field Interview 2024].

Leadership as Accountability

Tutors viewed leadership as encompassing both personal and professional responsibilities, with accountability deemed essential for promoting trust, transparency, and institutional integrity. Tutors typically observed leadership as an obligation to be accountable for one's actions and decisions. This perspective emphasizes that leadership transcends mere authority, requiring both ownership and transparency. The following comments pertain to leadership and accountability:

Leadership involves taking responsibility for failures rather than assigning blame to others. It denotes accountability to both subordinates and superiors, characterized by sincerity and honesty. Accountability entails

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justifying the allocation of resources and time [TP3; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership entails assuming complete responsibility for both successes and failures within the college, indicating that leaders are accountable to their team and higher authorities with integrity [TP8; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership entails assuming accountability for responsibilities. It demonstrates transparency by interpreting actions for the constituents it serves. Being transparent about decisions is essential, as concealment undermines trust [TP1; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership as a Moral Discipline

Tutors regarded moral values as fundamental to effective leadership. Tutors consistently linked effective leadership to ethical conduct, integrity, and the consistent maintenance of moral standards, emphasizing that leadership must demonstrate these qualities along with discipline.

Leadership involves exemplifying desired behaviours. A tutor cannot instruct students or colleagues to exhibit punctuality or discipline if they do not model these behaviours themselves. A leader in our context is defined as an individual who influences others through exemplary character rather than solely by virtue of their title [TP15; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership encompasses moral values, including honesty, fairness, and truthfulness, while refraining from compromising ethics to gain others' approval. Therefore, leadership must emphasize moral integrity rather than expedient solutions [TP12; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership is inherently linked to discipline, suggesting that leaders must embody the values they advocate. Ethical leadership involves making principled decisions, particularly in the absence of oversight [TP20; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership entails exemplifying positive behaviours in domains such as instruction, timeliness, and self-discipline. Students and junior staff observe and learn from our actions, which exemplify leadership in practice. Leadership occurs when tutors exemplify integrity, diligence, and professionalism [TP17; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership as a Manifestation of Courage

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Tutors identified courage as a crucial trait of effective leadership, especially in confronting institutional challenges and implementing reform. Tutors expressed leadership as the ability to confront complex issues and make difficult decisions, emphasizing that courage is a critical trait for facilitating institutional reform and overcoming resistance.

Leadership often requires making difficult choices, even if they are unpopular. Making changes to our conventional structure requires considerable courage. It takes courage to address problems such as delays or poor performance. Leadership, therefore, refers to standing up for what is right, rather than what is convenient [TP5; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership calls for the ability to challenge the status quo. Without courage, leadership is ineffective in initiating change. It is essential to remember that making changes to our established framework requires considerable courage [TP9; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership as a Display of Confidence

Confidence is recognized as an essential leadership quality, indicating a leader's trust in their abilities and their capacity to make decisive choices. Self-assured leaders are more effective at providing direction, motivating teams, and pursuing strategic goals, according to tutors. Confidence was perceived as both the capacity to take initiative and the belief in one's leadership potential, along with the assertiveness to make and uphold decisions.

Leadership starts with the belief that one possesses valuable contributions and the ability to instill confidence in others [TP4; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership is the belief in one's capacity to contribute, thereby fostering confidence in others. A leader lacking self-confidence is unable to influence or motivate effectively [TP2; Field Interview 2024].

Decisiveness and confidence in action are essential elements of effective leadership, enabling a leader to take initiative in achieving college objectives. Leadership entails having confidence in one's direction and avoiding constant guessing [TP8; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership as a Form of Creativity

Tutors identified creativity as a key leadership characteristic that facilitates innovation and problem-solving in dynamic educational contexts. Tutors posited that innovative thinking in problem-solving and the promotion of innovation constitute essential aspects of leadership. Creativity is a vital attribute of leadership, particularly in addressing institutional challenges and promoting innovation in teaching and learning. Participants provided the following comments:

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Leadership involves identifying innovative solutions to challenges. A leader lacking inspiration will struggle to address contemporary challenges effectively. Creativity in leadership involves facilitating others' resourceful skills [TP22; Field Interview 2024].

Creativity in leadership involves fostering others' inventive capacities by promoting unconventional thinking and encouraging innovative approaches. At my college, leadership that introduces innovative ideas to enhance teaching and learning is consistently valued and encouraged [TP7; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership involves encouraging others to think critically to address challenges and achieve established objectives [TP3; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership as the Capacity to Collaborate

Tutors regarded collaboration and interpersonal engagement as fundamental elements of effective leadership. Tutors characterized leadership as a relational process based on mutual respect, team building, and inclusivity. Tutors perceived leadership as a collaborative endeavor that necessitates engaging colleagues, considering diverse perspectives, and promoting team cohesion. Some comments made are as follows:

Leadership involves collaborating with all stakeholders, and in this context, it is most effective when tutors are included in decision-making. The focus is on uniting individuals, exchanging ideas, and fostering others' growth [TP2; Field Interview 2024].

A prevalent adage suggests that effective leadership involves engaging others rather than exercising authority from a position of power. This means that effective leadership recognizes and successfully employs the strengths of others. Collaboration involves collective efforts to address challenges and achieve objectives in task completion [TP5; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership encompasses the processes of listening, engaging, and supporting individuals to achieve established objectives. Effective leadership is characterized by respect and empowerment of others, facilitating collaboration through mutual respect and shared responsibility [TP6; Field Interview 2024].

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Future-Focused Leadership Orientation

Tutors perceived leadership as the ability to envision and strategize for the long-term sustainability of the institution. They explained leadership as the ability to visualize and strategize for a sustainable future in colleges. This involved formulating long-term objectives and establishing frameworks that promote continuity and stability. Tutors advocate for leadership that clearly communicates a vision and employs strategies to facilitate ongoing growth. Participants provided the following statements:

Leadership involves establishing long-term objectives for the college. This involves examining the impact of current actions on future outcomes and applying continuity plans [TP30; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership encompasses establishing long-term objectives and formulating strategies to ensure continuity and stability. A college lacking future-oriented leadership may struggle to sustain its infrastructure investment [TP23; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership as a Behavioural Construct

Study participants highlighted that leadership is more effectively understood through actions and daily behaviour than through formal titles or verbal declarations. Leadership encompasses initiating actions, making informed decisions, and exemplifying responsible behaviour as a role model. Effective leaders are perceived as individuals whose actions foster trust, accountability, and mutual respect among colleagues and students. This perspective underscores the importance of behavioural integrity for acquiring influence and promoting a constructive educational atmosphere. Participants express this idea through their statements as follows:

Leadership encompasses an individual's conduct, capacity to take initiative, and decisions. A competent leader exemplifies behaviour through actions rather than solely through verbal communication [TP23; Field Interview 2024].

Effective leadership consistently engages in behaviours that promote respect and confidence among students and peers, establishing such behaviour as important for influence and respect [TP19; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership manifests in our daily actions, including dependability, honesty, and interpersonal action, rather than in the titles we possess and value [TP28; Field Interview 2024].

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Educators' actions convey a more significant message than their words, indicating that leadership involves establishing the behavioural standards necessary to achieve objectives [TP13; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership as a Relational Ability

Participants asserted that leadership is not a formal authority but rather a relationship skill based on mutual respect, trust, and meaningful collaboration. Tutors emphasized that developing close relationships with others, encouraging teamwork, and motivating group effort are ways in which leadership manifests. To accomplish institutional goals, it entails having the capacity to mobilize and influence people through open communication, common knowledge, and cooperative problem-solving. Among the participants' responses are:

Connecting with coworkers and collaborating with them to accomplish goals via mutual respect, trust, and co-operation is what leadership is all about, not status [TP30; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership is not so much about titles or duties. It is about one's ability to bring subordinates together through initiatives, problem-solving, clear communication, and promoting change [TP6; Field Interview 2024].

Vision-Driven Leadership Influence

This theme reflects tutors' understanding of leadership as the capacity to inspire and motivate individuals through a compelling, collective vision. Participants highlighted that leadership extends beyond formal authority or position and is fundamentally based on the ability to influence peers, students, and the wider college community. Effective leadership entails articulating a vision that fosters collective action and transformation. The focus is on directing individuals toward institutional objectives by cultivating belief, commitment, and voluntary engagement rather than coercive measures. Tutors emphasized the importance of visionary thinking in driving change, fostering growth, and enabling individuals to reach their full potential. The subsequent remarks support their arguments.

Leadership involves the ability to influence others and encourage them to embrace a shared vision willingly. Leadership can be demonstrated through the positive influence of peers, regardless of formal titles [TP1; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership is a process of having a vision that extends beyond the individual, involving the entire department or college to facilitate significant changes aimed at achieving institutional objectives [TP10; Field Interview 2024].

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Leadership fundamentally involves initiating positive influence through a collectively embraced vision that others willingly adopt. The process entails inspiring and motivating individuals, including students and staff, to achieve their full potential through support and encouragement, rather than relying on authority [TP7; Field Interview, 2024].

3.2 Tutors' Leadership Experiences that Reflect Tengey's (2018) Concept

Tutors in public CoEs articulated diverse yet interrelated perspectives on leadership, consistent with Tengey's (2018) virtue-based definition that prioritizes character over position. Leadership is conceptualized as the embodiment of responsibility, accountability, moral discipline, courage, confidence, creativity, collaboration, and a focus on future-oriented strategies. Tutors perceive leadership not as a formal position but as a daily influence and contribution to advancing the institution. The discussion examines these perspectives in relation to their lived experiences.

Responsibility and Accountability

Tutors' reflections on leadership emphasize responsibility and accountability, suggesting that leadership extends beyond formal roles and titles. Their lived experiences underscore that leadership requires a personal commitment to the institution's well-being and operations, particularly in relation to students and departmental responsibilities. This supports the notion that leadership is based on proactive behaviour and ownership, independent of formal title. Participants articulated their perspectives through the subsequent statements:

Although I do not hold a formal leadership role, I regularly shoulder full responsibility for my actions in my department. [TP37; Field Interview 2024].

One does not need a formal title to be accountable. In instances of student supervision difficulties, I intervene due to the shared responsibility and impact on all stakeholders [TP31; Field Interview 2024].

Creativity and Innovation

Tutors' understanding of leadership is grounded in creativity and innovation, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Tutors demonstrated their flexibility by devising creative teaching methods, such as utilizing WhatsApp or establishing informal mentoring systems. These practices show that leadership is more than just following rules; it is about taking the initiative. Tutors improve the effectiveness of teaching and institutional practices by using improvisation and creative thinking. This demonstrates the importance of leadership in fostering problem-solving, adaptability, and school improvement. Some statements made are as follows:

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In the absence of functioning ICT tools, I utilize WhatsApp and voice notes as alternatives to maintain student engagement. The minor action is perceived as a show of leadership [TP14; Field Interview 2024].

Occasionally, it is essential to develop creative and innovative approaches to complete tasks. I developed a peer-mentoring framework for novice tutors. While not formalized, it proved to be effective [TP18; Field Interview 2024].

Collaborative Influence

This theme emphasizes tutors' perception of leadership as the ability to engage, support, and positively influence others. Based on experiences, tutors expressed that leadership goes beyond authority and titles. With this, leadership is often experienced through collaboration, mentorship, and inclusive practices. Tutors show leadership by fostering relationships and influence through supporting colleagues and involving students in planning, rather than relying on command-and-control approaches. The following comments support the views of the participants:

I consistently allocate time to assist colleagues, particularly new ones. Individuals frequently seek my guidance, which I interpret as a testament to my leadership [TP27; Field Interview 2024].

Leadership involves guiding and influencing others effectively. I regularly involve students in lesson planning, which improves their responsibility and confidence [TP20; Field Interview, 2024].

Future-Oriented Thinking

This theme reflects tutors' perception of leadership as a practical or hands-on activity. Their reflections indicate a dedication to actions and decisions that prioritize long-term institutional growth, sustainability, and continuity. For tutors, leadership includes not only addressing current challenges but also influencing the college's future direction beyond their formal roles. The subsequent statements substantiate the perspectives of the participants:

Leadership involves creating lasting value. As such, I consistently reflect on the need for my actions today to yield benefits for the college in the not-too-distant future [TP18; Field Interview 2024].

When performing routine tasks, I consider the long-term implications for subsequent groups of students and tutors [TP5; Field Interview, 2024].

3.3 Tutors' Leadership Experiences that Differ from Tengey's (2018) Concept

Although numerous tutors' interpretations of leadership aligned with Tengey's (2018) virtue-based definition, specific lived experiences yielded varying viewpoints. The tutors examined the accessibility of leadership for individuals across various roles and levels. Concerns were raised about leadership defined by formal authority, the neglect of informal leadership, weak ethical discipline among leaders, and a limited future-oriented vision. This analysis explores key themes, highlighting the gap between theoretical principles of leadership and the practical realities within public CoEs.

Leadership as Position and Authority

In contrast to Tengey's (2018) claim that leadership can be exhibited by individuals in various roles or contexts, some tutors indicated that leadership in public CoEs is frequently associated with formal authority. The absence of a designated title or administrative role led to the frequent oversight of their contributions and initiatives. This notion of positional dependency is evident in the subsequent verbatim statements:

In this college, individuals without formal titles are often overlooked, suggesting that leadership is primarily determined by position [TP27; Field Interview 2024].

Efforts to initiate tutoring activities often go unacknowledged in the absence of authority. The situation is frustrating [TP13; Field Interview 2024].

Overlooking Informal Leadership

Tengey (2018) defined leadership as a quality exhibited by individuals at any level and in any circumstance; however, some tutors believe that leadership in their colleges is recognized solely in relation to formal administrative roles. Their contributions, including mentoring colleagues and supporting departmental functions, are frequently overlooked, even though they reflect essential leadership values. The subsequent statements illustrate this perception:

I provide support to colleagues and mentor new staff. However, management does not recognize this as a form of leadership. Participation in the administration of the college is a prerequisite for it to be considered valid [TP6; Field Interview 2024].

At my college, one can exhibit all the appropriate leadership values, but without a formal appointment, such efforts remain unrecognized [TP8; Field Interview 2024].

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Moral Lapses in Leadership

Tenney (2018) identified moral discipline as a defining characteristic of virtue-based leadership. Nevertheless, some tutors in public CoEs expressed disappointment regarding the ethical conduct of their institutional leaders. Some of the tutors noted a discrepancy between the stated principles of leaders and their actual conduct, highlighting concerns about favouritism, insufficient transparency, and inconsistent enforcement of values. The subsequent quotes exemplify this issue:

Confident leaders often advocate for their values yet fail to embody them in their practice. In my college, issues of partiality and transparency are widespread [TP11; Field Interview 2024].

Following individuals who do not live up to their stated principles is challenging. The absence of ethical discipline is evident in top leadership [TP18; Field Interview 2024].

Weak Future-Oriented Leadership

Tutors consistently expressed concern about the lack of visionary, future-oriented leadership in their college environments. Tenney (2018) highlighted leadership as a forward-looking and long-term developmental approach; however, some tutors perceived that decisions within their institutions were more reactive and lacked strategic direction. The following statements illustrate this sentiment:

Decisions are primarily influenced by immediate needs rather than long-term growth considerations. A clear vision is absent or not well communicated [TP21; Field Interview 2024].

We persist in reusing outdated strategies without considering the college's future positioning [TP21; Field Interview 2024].

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 Tutors' Understanding of Leadership in CoEs Setting

Leadership, as explained by tutors at CoEs, is regarded as a crucial obligation entrenched in accountability, service, and ethical influence. It involves a devotion to the improvement and well-being of others, surpassing instructions to offer inspiration and support. This aligns with Northouse's (2022) perspective that effective leadership empowers individuals to achieve shared objectives. The tutors perceived leadership as a shared responsibility that entails obligation and ethical accountability, supporting Kouzes and Posner's (2017) claim that exemplary leaders set acceptable standards and assume full responsibility. Grounded in trust and inclusiveness,

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leadership exemplifies Greenleaf's (2002) servant model, stressing service, community development, and nurturing environments.

The tutors' perspectives on leadership as accountability indicate that leaders are expected to exemplify responsibility and transparency, especially in decision-making and in resource management. The findings indicate that tutors anticipate leaders to assume responsibility for outcomes and maintain transparency in their decision-making processes. This finding is consistent with Tengey's (2018) virtue-based leadership concept, which emphasizes the importance of responsibility and openness as essential values in leadership. The statements on leadership as a moral discipline emphasize the importance of making equitable, principled decisions and prioritizing integrity even in challenging situations. Hence, leadership underscores the obligation to the institution and its constituents. These perspectives support the idea that leadership in public CoEs must be grounded in ethical conduct, which is crucial for upholding professional standards, credibility, and institutional trust, particularly in educational contexts (Northouse, 2021).

Tutors emphasized that leadership, as a display of courage, requires the courage to make complex, sometimes unpopular decisions, particularly when addressing challenges such as delays or poor performance. This idea from the tutors implies that authentic leadership involves prioritizing what is right over what is convenient. The tutors further emphasized that effective leadership requires the ability to challenge the status quo, as without courage, leaders cannot drive meaningful organizational change. This view aligns with the argument that adaptive leadership requires challenging resistance, with courage being vital to challenging processes and achieving transformation (Heifetz et al., 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Courage is therefore essential for initiating change and sustaining discipline. In this context, the tutors' responses indicate that leadership in the CoEs setting includes not only process management but also resilience in challenging situations.

This finding on leadership as a demonstration of confidence aligns with the idea that confident leadership enhances followers' motivation and trust, particularly in educational reform contexts. Therefore, decisiveness and confidence in actions are essential elements of effective leadership. This perspective emphasizes the connection between self-confidence and leader effectiveness, aligning with research linking confidence to transformational and motivational leadership styles (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Again, the findings on leadership as a form of creativity indicate that tutors appreciated leaders who both presented innovative concepts and fostered creativity within the staff. Tutors are esteemed leaders who have generated innovative ideas and encouraged creative thinking among staff, exemplifying a dynamic and participatory leadership approach. This is consistent with modern leadership theories that emphasize adaptability and innovation in meeting institutional requirements (Yukl, 2013).

The perspectives on leadership as the capacity to collaborate with others underscore the importance of mutual respect, shared leadership, and participatory governance, particularly in educational institutions, where collegial relationships and transformational leadership principles contribute to

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success (Bush, 2008). Tutors' statements on leadership as orientation for future and long-term direction suggest that leadership in public CoEs is inherently future-focused, necessitating the establishment of long-term goals and the formulation of continuity plans to align current actions with future objectives. The absence of visionary leadership could jeopardize the sustainability of college investments and structures. This forward-thinking approach aligns with visionary leadership, emphasizing sustainability, strategic planning, and long-term institutional development (Kotter, 2012).

Tutors' comments on leadership as a behavioural construct underscore that daily choices and actions demonstrate authentic leadership, thereby emphasizing the importance of leading by example to establish trust and credibility. The responses from participants indicate that leadership is fundamentally demonstrated through consistent, value-oriented behaviour in daily actions, with initiative, integrity, and respect forming the basis for influence, role modeling, and the attainment of institutional objectives (Northouse, 2021; Bush, 2008; Tengey, 2018). From the statements on leadership as a relational ability, tutors view leadership as a relational skill centered on co-operation, communication, and group advancement, all of which are essential components of transformational and distributed leadership methodologies. This perspective is consistent with theories of relational leadership, which view leadership as a social process grounded in the quality of interpersonal relationships (Northouse, 2021).

The statements on leadership as an influence through vision highlight leadership as either an inherent or cultivated skill that functions independently of formal positions, characterized by its capacity to motivate others and grounded in support and inspiration rather than hierarchical structures. This is consistent with virtue-based and transformational leadership frameworks, wherein a shared vision and collective goals facilitate influence (Northouse, 2021; Tengey, 2018). The tutors' perspectives underscore the beneficial ripple effect of such influence and the significance of informal leadership roles as essential factors in institutional development (Bush, 2008). Promoting participation and cultivating a collaborative culture through a shared vision is deemed crucial for enhancing leadership capacity across all levels of the organization.

4.2 Leadership Experiences of Tutors Aligned with Tengey's (2018) Concept

These statements by tutors on responsibility and accountability align with Tengey's (2018) assertion that leadership is a value-driven practice demonstrated by individuals at all levels, rather than limited to formal positions. Tutors who display resourcefulness and accept responsibility foster a culture of shared leadership, aligning with Bush's (2008) emphasis on collective engagement. This approach nurtures trust and collaboration within CoEs. Leadership progress must recognize and enable non-positional leadership as indispensable for institutional success (Northouse, 2021; Spillane, 2006). Regarding creativity and innovation, the tutors' statements align with Tengey's (2018) definition of leadership as a value-driven, situational practice, emphasizing creativity as a critical virtue of leadership. Encouraging tutors to innovate enables them to make significant contributions to institutional development, even in the absence of formal

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leadership positions (Northouse, 2021). Leadership development initiatives in public CoEs should cultivate innovation and create platforms for sharing grassroots strategies. Similarly, recognizing and supporting informal leadership can promote a culture of distributed leadership and continuous improvement (Bush, 2008).

These narratives from the tutors about working with others affirm Tengey's (2018) conceptualization of leadership as a relational and virtue-based practice, exhibited at all levels. Tutors' experiences confirm Northouse's (2021) position that influence and teamwork are critical elements of leadership in educational contexts. Hence, CoEs need to foster work environments that support peer mentorship, collaboration, and shared leadership. As suggested by Bush (2008), acknowledging informal leadership roles fosters the establishment of participatory and supportive professional cultures in educational organisations, including CoEs. The tutors' reflections on future-oriented thinking underscore a forward-looking understanding of leadership, emphasizing the creation of lasting value within the college. The tutors' perspectives align with contemporary leadership theories that emphasize sustainability, foresight, and the long-term consequences of leadership decisions (Northouse, 2021). Collectively, the tutors' accounts suggest that leadership in public CoEs is not merely transactional but involves strategic thinking and consideration for enduring institutional growth.

4.3 Tutors' Leadership Experiences that Contest Tengey's (2018) Concept

The statements on leadership as contingent on position and authority contest the idea that leadership is present at all levels, highlighting an institutional culture in which leadership is associated with formal authority. This perception can hinder initiative, reduce staff engagement, and stifle innovation. Equating leadership exclusively with position diminishes the significance of distributed, virtue-based leadership (Spillane, 2006; Northouse, 2021). Institutional reforms are essential for cultivating inclusive leadership cultures, recognizing informal leadership, and enhancing shared leadership opportunities at all levels (Bush, 2008; Tengey, 2018).

Considering insufficient recognition of informal leadership, the tutors' statements reveal a disparity between virtue-based leadership and institutional recognition, prompting studies to assess the value of informal leadership accurately. The absence of recognition for informal leadership may lead to decreased staff motivation and hinder initiative and peer collaboration. Narrow definitions of leadership that focus on position rather than practice can lead to the neglect of valuable contributions from non-administrative staff (Spillane, 2006). This compromises the essential distributed and participatory leadership cultures in education (Bush, 2008). This calls for institutions to expand leadership frameworks to accommodate informal leadership (Tengey, 2018; Northouse, 2021).

The findings on lack of moral discipline in leadership indicate a discrepancy between leadership rhetoric and ethical practice in public CoEs, questioning the assumption that leadership is uniformly value-driven. The absence of moral discipline and transparency diminishes trust, fosters

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suspicion, and deteriorates institutional culture and collegiality (Northouse, 2021; Bush, 2008). The findings highlight the significance of ethical leadership development programmes that prioritize integrity, fairness, consistency, and accountability (Fullan, 2023; Tengey, 2018; T-TEL, 2016).

Regarding inadequate future-oriented thinking in leadership practice, the findings reveal issues of inactive and reactive leadership in CoEs, challenging the notion that leadership is fundamentally future-oriented and strategic. Insufficient long-term planning and innovation can impede institutional advancement and alignment with national objectives (Kotter, 2012; Yukl, 2013). This perspective underscores the importance of leadership development programs that prioritize strategic foresight, innovation, and change management to foster resilient and progressive colleges (Northouse, 2021; Tengey, 2018). Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL) (2016) highlighted the need for CoEs to undertake effective planning in line with seven leadership and management quality indicators, thereby improving educational quality.

4.4 Recommendations

1. There is a need to restructure leadership development in CoEs. In view of this, GTEC should offer training for leaders and tutors that include ethics, interpersonal skills, strategic thinking, and creativity. Principals should also recognize and reward informal leadership to support a distributed leadership approach that aligns with Ghana's educational goals.
2. Principals of CoEs should encourage virtue-based leadership by implementing programmes that teach ethics, virtues, creativity, and teamwork. Following Tengey's (2018) virtue-driven approach to building strong, creative, and moral institutions, the Governing Council of CoEs, in collaboration with college management, should design policies, procedures, and rules that enable tutors to take initiative, mentor peers, and participate in decision-making.
3. Principals of CoEs should ensure a shift from title-based to inclusive leadership, empowering everyone at all levels, recognizing informal leadership, and promoting transparency and ethical decision-making. As such, principals should provide more opportunities for tutors to be trained and mentored, allowing them to explore new ideas and support a culture of distributed leadership, as Tengey (2018) suggests.

4.5 Limitations

One limitation of this study is its reliance on tutors' self-reported experiences within a specific set of CoEs, which may affect the generalization of the findings beyond similar contexts. Additionally, focusing exclusively on tutors' perspectives may overlook broader institutional or systemic factors that also influence leadership practices. Finally, the use of Tengey's (2018) virtue-based leadership concept, while innovative, might overlap with or differ from other established theories, potentially making it difficult to distinguish its unique contributions.

4.6 Conclusions

The results show that tutors in public CoEs see leadership as a holistic, value-based, and multifaceted process. Tutors do not just see leadership as a job title; they also see it as moral discipline, accountability, courage, creativity, collaboration, and visionary thinking. Their understanding characterizes leadership as moral, relational, and future-oriented, highlighting interpersonal skills, ethical responsibility, and strategic foresight. This viewpoint emphasizes the necessity for leadership development programmes in CoEs that foster ethics, collaboration, innovation, and strategic capacity to facilitate Ghana's educational transformation. Tengey's (2018) inclusive model of virtue-based leadership, which says that leadership goes beyond titles or authority, is very similar to what tutors have experienced in their own lives.

Tutors demonstrate leadership by mentoring peers, guiding peers, initiating innovations, and influencing practices without formal recognition, illustrating that leadership is attainable at all institutional levels. This highlights the importance of recognizing and cultivating informal leadership potential to promote collaborative, sustainable educational development. However, the findings also reveal conflicts between Tengey's ideals and the actual situation. Some of the problems are weak future-oriented thinking, reliance on hierarchical authority, poor moral discipline, and inadequate recognition of informal leaders. To encourage more ethical, inclusive, and empowering leadership in CoEs, it is essential to address these systemic and cultural barriers through targeted leadership initiatives.

The study highlights the need to reorient leadership development in Ghana's CoEs to align with tutors' perceptions of leadership as value-driven, relational, and future-focused, and to extend beyond formal positions. Leadership training should therefore involve all teaching staff and shift from rigid, hierarchical models to inclusive, participatory, and ethics-centered approaches that emphasize character, collaboration, innovation, and strategic vision. Many tutors already practice informal, virtue-based leadership, but these efforts often go unrecognized due to strict institutional structures. There is thus a need for GTEC and CoE management to implement frameworks that promote ethical leadership at every level, eliminate positional biases, and foster supportive, collaborative cultures aligned with national teacher education reform goals.

DECLARATION

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest associated with this study.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: Ethical clearance and approval for the study was obtained from the management of the colleges. Informed consent was sought and obtained from all participants prior to the administration of the data collection instrument.

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