Adult female learners' perceptions of and experiences with distance education at University of Ghana

Ama Adu-Marfo, Isaac Biney & Moses Kumi Asamoah

Published online: 15 Dec 2023.

Submit your article to this journal ⬈

Article views: 223

View related articles ⬈

View Crossmark data ⬈

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Adult female learners' perceptions of and experiences with distance education at University of Ghana

Ama Adu-Marfo[1], Isaac Biney[1] and Moses Kumi Asamoah[1]*

Abstract: This paper highlights adult female learners' perception and experiences with blended distance education (DE) program in the University of Ghana. It specifically investigates female students' experiences with male and female tutors' tutoring styles, learner support services, the use of educational technology as well as the extent of the gender-inclusive environment created. It throws light on the positive stories regarding the DE program, potential barriers, and panacea from female lens. The study is guided by feminist theory and Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt goals of DE. A qualitative case study and narrative designs were adopted. Data were conveniently collected from 15 female students enrolled on the DE program at the Accra Learning Center. In-depth face-to-face interviews were employed for data collection. Data were analyzed using interpretivist-evaluative narrative approaches. Findings show that gender gaps still exist in using educational technologies for learning; implying that additional technological and tutoring support need to be provided to female students. The paper recommends increasing integration of ICT teaching and learning tools into the curriculum of DE to help in building adult females' digital skills and confidence to enhance their full participation in DE.

1. Introduction

Distance education (DE) has a long history. It was originally designated a correspondence school, to provide learning opportunities to adult learners who were unable to access the campus-based mode of teaching and learning due to distance, time and their multiple roles comprising spouse, parent, worker, student, church, and community engagements roles (Choi & Park, 2018; Damalie et al., 2023; Muller, 2008). The introduction of DE, along with its online approach to learning has paved the way for adult females for further studies to improve their career and employment

opportunities (Andoh et al., 2020; Biney & Inusah, 2023; Depover & Orivel, 2013; Owusu-Agyemang, 2019).

With the influx of educational technologies, learner-centered approaches to teaching, preference for self-directed learning, internationalization of higher education as well as the agenda of UNESCO's SDG Goal 4 (to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), adults are returning to formal learning to address gaps in education or to update areas of knowledge needed for their working life (Asamoah et al., 2021; Archer & Garrison, 2010; Lembani et al., 2020).

It is worth noting that studies have shown that the home experience of the adult female learner has impact on their online learning (Choi & Park, 2018; Damalie et al., 2023; Pillay et al., 2021; Somuah et al., 2019). Also, receiving appropriate training, and free internet provision and electronic devices such as phones and laptops can enhance adult female learners' success in online education. Additionally, during the last twenty years, the internet and the world-wide-web have fundamentally transformed the practice of distance teaching and learning (Anderson & Elloumi, 2004; Archer & Garrison, 2010; Dykman & Davis, 2008). But it is important to note that many adult females have no access to the internet infrastructure (UN Women Africa, 2021), and for that matter the digital gap still exists (Stanistreet, 2021). Poverty and inadequate educational access, especially for the female adult learners, pose additional challenge to adult female learners; yet the digital gap assertion is opposed to the findings by Ayite et al. (2022).

Findings from a UNESCO (2022) report on "making lifelong learning a reality", buttress the assertion that developing ICT skills, including digital literacy, enable learners take full advantage of digital devices, the internet, and online resources for learning opportunities, such as obtaining tertiary qualifications. In addition, Owusu-Agyemang (2019) asserted that learning with technology via the DE mode, impacts not only employability, but also the learner's health and family life. Previous studies have also shown that females in Africa continue to make tremendous contributions not only to their local economies, but to the entire society due to the opportunity of learning by distance (Kwapong, 2021; Biney & Inusah, 2023).

Generally, numerous studies have revealed barriers faced by adult female learners during e-learning by DE mode (Adewoyin, 2019; Duby et al., 2022; Kamisli & Akinlar, 2022; Kara et al., 2019; Li & Che, 2022; Ouma & Nkuyubwatsi, 2019; Pozdnyakova & Pozdnyakov, 2017; Segbenya & Anokye, 2023; Stanistreet, 2021; UN Women Africa, 2021). However, in Africa, and particularly in Ghana, very few studies have been conducted on the challenges that adult females face in DE programs (Kwapong, 2008; Forster & Offei-Ansah, 2012; Biney, 2017), thus warranting the current study.

More so, the multiple roles of the adult learner have significant impact on their online learning abilities and styles. The quality of tutoring and tutoring styles by male and female tutors also has substantial effect on adult females' learning styles. Fortunately, increased attention has been given to e-tutoring by researchers as a result of its heightened use in online studies; and its efficiency and effectiveness has been largely recognized in previous studies (Chae & Shin, 2016; Peacock et al., 2020; Maré & Mutezo, 2021; Motaung & Makombe, 2021; Sutcliffe & Noble, 2022; Kwapong, 2023). The managerial and social aspects of online teaching and learning are therefore essential for ensuring success of online students, whilst effective planning, preparation and enhanced interaction need to be considered by designers of online teaching (Baran & Jones, 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020). Namagero (2021) concludes that institutions should develop strategic approaches and creative ways to deal with the issues identified and to help distance learners feel valued and maximize their learning experiences.

Consequently, ascertaining tutoring styles of both male and female tutors in Africa matter since that could impact the quality of tutoring. Female students will not be able to attend tutorials when they do not have anyone to take care of their children, and lack support of partners. Hence,

ascertaining students' perspectives on DE mode of learning will provide insights to inform how to run DE program.

1.1. DE program: Accra learning center

Accra Learning Center was established in 2007. It started using textbooks called "modules", then transitioned to blended learning mode aided by the use of SAKAI Learning Management System (LMS) platform in 2014. The Center is the biggest of the 11 Learning Centers of the School of Continuing and Distance Education (SCDE), constituting about 80% of all the DE students. The availability of e-learning infrastructure and effective learner support services help adult learners to learn with satisfaction. They attend face-to-face tutorials over the week-ends, and spend some time learning online via the SAKAI (LMS) platform. The DE program focuses on BA, BSc. Administration, BSc. Nursing, BSc. Information Technology, Diploma in Public Administration, Diploma in Youth Development Work, Diploma in Adult Education and Diploma in Library studies. Relevant courses approved by Ghana Tertiary Education Commission are run under each pro-gramme. The Diploma program is 2 years while the first degree is four years. It takes between 120–140 credits to complete the first-degree program, and 48 credits for the diploma. The target group for the DE program is adults, 25 years and above, who want to upgrade themselves through distance learning mode because most of them are married, working, and perform other family roles that would not allow them to join the regular program taking place on the University campus.

Although online learning has become a permanent fixture on college campuses, the use of technology has implications for adult female learners. It is believed that adult females are less likely to become involved with computers than adult males (Kwapong, 2010; Naaj et al., 2012). Even with blended learning, Naaj et al. (2012) observes that in face-to-face classes, female students have more interaction and discussion with instructors, but in blended learning classes some female students do not ask questions because the male students are listening, or because the instructor is not in the same room to motivate them, and that in turn, affects the female students' satisfaction level.

However, increased adult female' participation in the DE mode of learning is one more avenue for building sustained human capital base of Ghana. To be successful today in pursuing DE program requires knowing how to communicate and interact in varied online learning environments, irrespective of adult female learners' background and previous experiences.

Flores (2017) observes that "even as training for teachers increases, academic and technological based support for the adult learner must increase in order to maintain the learning dynamic at a distance" (p. 43). Thus, mastering the use of technology, according to Carlsen et al., is a necessity, and a lack of knowledge would constitute a barrier to adult learners. The Accra Learning Center uses blended learning and e-assessment. This makes it imperative for adult females to learn, and become digitally literate. Except for some works carried out by Kwapong (2008, 2010), and Forster and Offei-Ansah (2012) on women, ICT and DE, little is known about experiences of adult females learning with technology by DE mode in Ghana. This study sought to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the learning perceptions and experiences of female students, especially on the DE mode of learning in the University of Ghana.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the experiences of female students leveraging educational technologies in pursuing the DE degree program in Ghana. Based on the purpose of the study, the following research questions have been posed:

(a) How do you perceive the male and female tutors?
(b) What power relations exist between female students, and male and female tutors?

(c) What kinds of support do male and female tutors offer female students?

(d) How do the tutoring styles exhibited by both male and female tutors influence the learning styles of female students?

(e) What are the challenges faced by females in the distance education program?

2. Theoretical and related literature review

This section covers the reviews on the feminist theory as well as literature review on adult females learning by DE mode, the concept of distance education (DE) and online learning; self-directed learning; student support services, and tutorial, and adult learning styles.

2.1. Feminist theory

This study is framed by the feminist pedagogy discussed by Fasokun et al. (2005), Chilisa and Preece (2005), and Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt's (2006) goals of DE from three different perspectives: democratization, liberal education, and instructional quality. Feminist pedagogy theorizes about teaching, learning institutions and knowledge as a democratic concept (Herron, 2019). In Africa, feminist pedagogy emerged from feminist theories; and female adults learning by DE mode are becoming empowered to address their learning needs. As people learn to become empowered, they work to change the power dynamics, resist oppression and effect a change (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). Similarly, feminist pedagogy sought to encourage female adults to gain their voice and present their own stories, especially female adults learning in African context. As adult females learn by DE mode, they can regain their voice to undertake leadership roles in communities, workplaces, and the society (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). Feminist pedagogy emphasizes consciousness-raising, and provides voice to the marginalized people to create their own knowledge (Chilisa & Preece, 2005).

DE mode of learning in Africa seeks to promote social justice (Archer and Garrison (2010); however, Kwapong (2010), and Forster and Offei-Ansah (2012) are of the view that gender-specific research shows that female adults often have less access to technology, less control over ICT in their homes and places of work, and subsequently, less confidence and competency in using these technologies. Yet, messages on learning via DE mode seek not to divide against men and women, but work inclusively to provide shared solutions, unite both male and female adult learners to learn with technology and to improve their lot. Hence, feminist pedagogy aims to remove gender-based discrimination in teaching-learning situations (Herron, 2019). This opens up possibilities of seeing and knowing things differently and acting in the interests of gender justice and change (Clover, 2021).

Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) goals of learning via DE mode are relevant because democratization, liberal education, and instructional quality are goals and guiding principles in the rhetoric of educational institutions and agencies that support online initiatives. Democratization in this context means increasing access to higher education for populations that would otherwise be excluded, or increasing the range of people who might be served by elite institutions. Liberal education is education necessary to the making of a free human being, and is often contrasted with training for a particular profession. It generally attempts to shape a person's critical and analytical competencies with respect to disciplinary knowledge. This suggests that the DE program being practiced in Ghana, as it is done in other parts of the world, promotes a liberal kind of education.

Inferring from various definitions, the DE program seems to support a progressive approach or a more learner-focused approach. Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) examined the goals of education in terms of its quality. Quality can be considered in terms of three major dimensions referred to as product, service, and outcomes. The delivery media for instructional content is unlikely to dramatically impact the learning outcomes, whereas content, teaching methods,

communication, and learner support are important for student satisfaction (Markova et al., 2017). The product could be looked at in terms of the course content.

According to Burke (2001), the design of learning experiences can greatly influence the success of DE programs. By articulating what is to be taught, thus, the content, and the mode of delivery to students (pedagogy and technologies), educators should design learning experiences with school's expectations to take advantage of the various modalities that best fit with learning objectives, and student learning styles. For individual learning situations, the instructors must ensure that inter-action opportunities are available to students. The quality of service rendered could also be examined in terms of the role played by the school's faculty in ensuring effective creation and delivery of instruction, evaluation of instructional effectiveness and student achievement, innovation in instructional processes, consistency with schools' expectation and students demand (Burke, 2001).

2.2. The concept of distance education and online learning

Online education carries with it the connotations that all the learning may be web-based, requiring students to use a connected device in order to access any of the learning (QAA, 2020). As the popularity of the internet grows, so does the potential for online learning; hence Power and Gould-Morven (2011) assert that online learning is becoming widely accessible and is viewed as cutting-edge. Similarly, e-learning platforms allow students to interact with each other in synchronous and asynchronous ways, and can constitute a good method to support collaborative learning activities (cited in Carroll, 2013). Thus e-learning provides useful tools not only to deliver an enhanced learning experience, but also to push the boundaries of learning and teaching through creative use of technology (Allen & Seaman, 2017; Johnson et al., 2009; Kramarae, 2001). Kwapong (2007) writing on adult education, ICTs and women's empowerment emphasized the need for adult educators to use information technologies to make adult education programs accessible to the deprived and unreached in society. The digital divide must not be allowed to become a learning divide. To address this, attention should be placed on female students who are part of the marginalized or disadvantaged group in our society.

Student support services e-learning is becoming a dominant factor in the delivery of teaching and learning in higher education (Core et al., 2003), hence provision of student support services is critical to enhance student learning. Student support services comprise everything that could help a student to increase and sustain their learning motivation, and support them in their learning process (Paniagua & Simpson, 2018). To be successful in the lifelong learning drive, students who increasingly depend on online learning will need support services to address their learning needs, be it social, psychological or organizational.

Student support services include libraries, IT, administrative, registry and student services, administrative services, developmental' and "problem solving" support (Core et al., 2003; Simpson, 2015; Carlsen et al., 2016). Adult learners, particularly females, with multiplicities of responsibilities can be motivated to learn and achieve lifelong learning dreams when provided with support services regularly to address psychological, social and educational needs or cognitive, emotional and organizational skills. Communication between administrators, tutors/lecturers and student-to-student is key to latter's success in academic work. Simpson (2015) listed the qualities and skills needed by adult learners as intellectual ability, motivation to learn, ability to deal with stress, self-confidence as a learner, sense of humor, good time management, and good "learning" skills. These qualities are critical to succeed in distance learning because most students who fail in DE courses have poor emotional skills (Simpson, 2015).

2.3. Tutorials and adult learning styles

Tutorial approach to learning is employed in DE in the learning centers in Ghana. It is employed in all the eleven Learning Centers. Tutors' roles include sustaining, initiating and maintaining contact with students (O'Rourke, 2003). They help students to build up their scholarship in the course

content through tutorials, aid students to persist with their studies, grade and comment on students' work (Biney, 2020b; Hawkridge & Wheeler, 2009). Tutorials are generally meant to help students to gain a deep understanding of the subject in their discipline. Tutoring comprises supervision, group and practical approaches to learning. Assignments are given after students have familiarized themselves with the learning materials. Group tutoring is offered in statistically inclined subjects, and practical training is provided at the computer laboratories (Biney, 2020a).

Video-conferencing and smart classrooms are employed in adult learners' facilitation. Learning materials are accessed from the SAKAI (LMS) platform by adult learners, such that they can learn at their own pace, anytime and anywhere. The nature of self-directed learning on its own enables students to develop critical thinking abilities which enhance the liberal approach to DE. It helps students' gain deeper understanding of the subject-matter taught them. Discussions in tutorials equally help students appreciate the implications of knowledge, and how they can apply knowledge acquired in new contexts (Biney, 2021).

Fasokun et al. (2005) examined models used to describe ways adult learners prefer to learn; emphasizing on the information processing patterns, perceptual modes, and personality models used in African context based on empirical studies. Their work emphasized Kolb's adult learning styles, which have been developed and modified over the years and have become widely used. The "Learning Style Inventory" (LSI) is a kind of self-report inventory that makes people indicate their own preferred learning styles, and classifies learners as active, reflective, experimental and theorizing (Online Tutoring e-Book 1, 2002). Active learners prefer to learn through concrete experience by trial and error (Fasokun et al., 2005), and are impatient, [but desirous] learners. Reflective learners learn through reflective observation, and think about things before doing them. Experimental learners learn through active experimentation, and seek better ways of doing things rather than repeating familiar patterns. Theorizing learners learn through abstract conceptualization, question assumptions and make general rules from different experiences. Adult learners' experiences have to be valued and used in teaching and learning, and facilitators must be aware of the position of adult learners to determine the level of importance of adult learners' participation in learning endeavors.

3. Methodology

This section addresses the research approach, research design, sampling techniques and sample size used, data gathering activities, the process followed in analyzing the interview data, issues pertaining to data credibility, as well as ethical considerations. This qualitative case study focused on adult female learners' pursuing degree programs via DE mode at the Accra Learning Center of the University of Ghana. The qualitative design was chosen by the researcher to collect in-depth data to gain new and deeper insights on adult female learners' experiences by learning via the DE mode. Narrative design approach was also used in the sense that the female adult learners were given the opportunity to tell their own stories, learning via the DE mode. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 415) stated that: "Experience is the stories people live. People live stories and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones."

Thus, for narrative inquirers, experiences are the stories that people live and tell over time, in different places, and in diverse and unfolding relationships (Clandinin et al., 2019). Regarding description, the study sought to provide a detailed account of the phenomenon under study. This approach is useful in presenting fundamental information about areas of adult education where little research has been conducted in Ghana.

Merriam and Grenier (2019), and Creswell and Poth (2018) looking at a case study stressed on a detailed study of single phenomena or units of analysis with the aim of making a holistic description of those particular phenomena. Creswell and Poth (2018) looked at a case study from descriptive and interpretive research dimensions. The researchers' intentions were to capture the detailed inner world of the participants as far as their experiences in DE mode of learning were

concerned. The insightful ideas, worldviews, and meaningful nuances expressed by the participants themselves afforded the researchers the empathetic understanding of the female students' experiences in the DE. The study was conducted at Accra Learning Center.

Purposive judgemental sampling of 15 female students, of which 6 of the participants were from rural communities, was undertaken. This sample selected is supposed to enable the researchers comprehend the technological needs, learning styles and experience of adult female students on DE program from both rural and urban centers and make recommendations to inform policy, especially, on "Affirmative Action". This, to a large extent, would enable the Government of Ghana to focus attention on female students' education in order to have an overall impact on Ghana's development.

It was further based on the account that internet facility is hardly available at the rural communities to aid online learning, as compared to the urban centers in Ghana. The participants do not have laptops to work with, and even have difficulties paying their school fees on time (Biney, 2021). As qualitative researchers, we kept field notes of participants' experiences to aid the analysis of results. We listened effectively to the participants' stories, and acknowledged mutual construction of the narratives between the researchers and the participants. We also ensured that the stories created by the participants were recreated, and negotiated. Thus, both the participants and researchers were co-creators and interpreters of the narratives to make the experiences of participants meaningful.

An interview guide was used in soliciting views from female students through open-ended questions (six in all). It allowed an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences as they engaged in learning through the DE mode face-to-face, and online, using the SAKAI (LMS) platform. Researchers engaged in personal interactions with the participants at the Accra Learning Center. The researchers reached a point of saturation when they realized that the trend and pattern of information-rich data collected to address issues raised appeared similar (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Saunders et al., 2017). The interviews which lasted between 40 to 50 minutes were audio recorded, and the taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. The field notes and diaries were regularly reviewed. The responses from the in-depth interview guides were checked for accuracy and completeness.

Data was carefully edited for consistency. The analysis was done following a number of steps. The new ideas and insightful findings gathered were used as anecdotal evidence to triangulate responses gathered from the in-depth interview guides. As researchers, we took a cue from qualitative researchers, including Creswell and Poth (2018) and Clandinin et al. (2019) steps in analyzing the qualitative data gathered. The first step was to read thoroughly the raw data to identify initial themes that emerged from the data. The second step involved the building of a thematic framework made up of themes and sub-themes after identifying general patterns at the first stage. At the next stage, the themes that were identified were indexed by assigning same numbers to themes that had similar interpretations that allowed for proper categorization of thematic charts to synthesize the data.

The researchers further developed the data into broader categories and themes to form a fuller picture of participants' experiences. Interpretations and meanings were given to the data gathered. The use of "voice" has been employed in this study through the use of quotations. This step is followed by an interpretivist analysis of the themes where elements were properly refined by inspecting each column of the thematic chart across all cases to identify the content and dimensions of each case. This ensured a better refinement of the various categories that were identified. The next stage searched for patterns and links between sets of phenomena and between the different individual assertions or views expressed. The final stage involved a discussion of the findings of the study in the context of existing literature. In-depth scrutiny of the data was undertaken by the researchers to arrive at the final themes and sub-themes. All quotations are presented verbatim to present a true reflection of the voices of the participants.

In terms of credibility and dependability of results, the researchers tried to ensure trustworthiness of the study. The trustworthiness of the results, to Merriam and Grenier (2019), is the extent to which a study can be replicated in another context. In this study, the participants were adequately engaged as a way of ensuring the credibility of the study. Adequate contextual information about the fieldwork site and participants were provided in the study to ensure transferability. In terms of dependability and conformity of the study, the research method used was clearly explained as well as the research questions undergirding the study.

The participants were informed in writing of the objectives of the study, the time and the meeting place, and what was expected of them during the interview. They were assured of strict confidentiality of information that they give and their right to opt out of the interview without any repercussion since their participation was purely voluntary. The participants' consent was sought before interviewing them. The participants were further informed that the interviews will be tape-recorded and the data will be kept for a period of six months after the study and will be destroyed afterward.

4. Results

We constructed five themes from the data based on the research objectives related to the current study. They were categorized as: (a) female students' perception of tutors; (b) power relations between female students and tutors; (c) support female students received from tutors; (d) tutoring styles by male and female tutors, and (e) female students' challenges. The narratives or quotes of research participants in relation to each theme were interpreted by the researchers and some of them were supported with relevant literature.

4.1. Female students' perception of tutors

Regarding how students perceived their tutors, the participants generally expressed divergent views. The participants admitted that their tutors lived up to expectations by providing the needed assistance, yet some of the participants felt that some tutors were less supportive and inconsiderate of their needs. The participants perceived that their male and female tutors were generally good; however, the participants particularly felt that the male tutors were more accommodating and supportive than their female tutors. Buttressing this point, a female student shared her views about her male tutors:

> The male tutors have been great, maybe because I'm a woman. I'd say they've been helpful to the extent that, if you don't understand something after tutorial session, they're there to help you. You can also speak to the course representatives if you have any issue, and some of them would direct the questions to them, and it would be answered. (Participant # 2)

A female participant described her tutor as understanding; adding that this could possibly be because the tutor understood that there were mothers amongst them, and appreciated their context better in terms of time available for studies. This observation supports Herron's (2019) call for an inclusive learning environment. Again, female students are seen as marginalized and disadvantaged group of people based on multiple roles and responsibilities they bear. They should be supported by their tutors to learn to gain their voices and become empowered.

This should be the case because a tutor should be empathetic to students (O'Rourke, 2003; Biney, 2020b; Carlsen et al., 2016), and be acting as a resource person, guiding students to successful completion of programs (O'Rourke, 2003). Studies indicate that female adult learners face challenges when learning Ushadevi (2000), Stalker (2001), Cragg et al. (2005); Gouthro (2005, 2007); Kwapong (2008); Forster and Offei-Ansah (2012), Stone and O'Shea (2013), and Vaskovics (2015) have all identified challenges in adult learning.

Another participant commented:

> The lecturer understands us; she knows that we are distance students. She knows that as distance students, we're workers and we wouldn't have ample time to study so she makes sure that the teaching assistants (TAs) she assigns to us are good. (Participant # 4)

A participant thought otherwise regarding some of her tutors, and expected the tutors to empathize with them as mature students juggling family and job demands to learning. The reactions from her tutors seem unsympathetic, and presented it in this way:

> Sometimes the tutors' interactions with us appear a bit different. They kept stressing that they have been where we are before so they understand our concerns. The tutors want us to know that they went through similar experiences and survived so it is not a big deal. I like to be pushed to do better than what I'm doing now, but sometimes when I'm pushed too much, I get so down. They should show us some consideration. (Participant # 5)

Another participant described the unfriendly nature of her tutor, stating that, at the end of the semester, she performed poorly because of her inability to secure help from tutor's work. This led to her dropping the course in the successive year.

> I didn't have a nice experience with a tutor in Level 100. I found her quite difficult and not approachable. I didn't get the concepts well. When my grades came, I had D, and became disappointed. I dropped Psychology, although I loved it, but for the experience I had. (Participant # 1)

This shouldn't be the case in learning via DE mode. O'Rourke (2003) avers that tutors should not only be approachable to students, but aid students to familiarize themselves with their programs to excel. A participant gave her impressions about a tutor in another apt way:

> For a tutor in Information Studies, I knew what she was expecting from us. She gave us clear-cut information on what was expected of us. She provided learning materials to us to learn. But with some other courses, the tutors don't tell us anything. We just prepare with the little slides we have. (Participant # 13)

Yet, some participants described some tutors as inept since they didn't seem to know what they were doing. Due to a tutor's inability to carry out tutorials effectively, the class size dropped from about 400 to 15 students during face-to-face tutorial sessions. This brings to sharp focus the fact that tutors on DE program should be regularly trained to live up to expectation. However, some participants felt the tutors were good but often rushed them through the topics due to the limited time on their hands. This is an apt way a participant expressed it:

> The tutors are good and they helped us to understand the syllabus and course outline, but we usually don't complete them. Hence, they often rush us through the course. They do this to cover the limited time they have. (Participant # 9)

Rushing to complete the syllabus without students gaining is superfluous.

4.2. Power relations between female students and tutors

On relationships female students maintained with tutors, they indicated that they had cordial relationship. However, students mostly defined their relationships based on the assistance and support they received from their tutors. Some students related better with their tutors as they felt they were more willing to listen to their challenges and had "listening ears". A participant described her relationships with a tutor as one of a mentor/mentee relationship:

> Personally, there's one tutor that I am comfortable with. He's one that opens up more to me outside the lecture hall, if something new comes up. I'd say the relationship is good, and I can share with him things that are preventing me from progressing. The piece of advice he offers me makes me feel okay. (Participant # 8)

Another participant described her relationship with her tutors as easy going, and non- authoritarian, as she was not afraid reaching out to them. She communicates with them at any time.

> I have an easy-going relationship with most of my tutors. I asked for explanations whenever there's the need during tutorials, and they addressed them. I negotiate with some of the tutors on assignments due dates, and they were largely responsive. They have open door policy so I can walk up to them during and after tutorials. (Participant # 9)

A participant, however, indicated that she didn't have much relationship with her tutors, and expressed it in this way.

> The tutors hardly engaged us after lectures, and hardly left their contact details so we could follow up. In my view, it is the course representatives who have more interactions and relationships with tutors. Most of the tutors come and go. The course representatives present our concerns on our behalf. (Participant # 3)

The contrasting responses from the participants are interesting; however, to succeed in DE mode of learning, the tutors must be supportive to the cause of students. As revealed by the students, the relationship they had with their tutors was one based on assistance and mentor- mentee relationship type, devoid of tension. Under such learning environment, if the tutors continue to open up to the students, and encourage them, they would learn.

4.3. Support female students received from tutors

On support received from tutors, participants alluded to academic assistance provided by their tutors. Tutors gave students the opportunity to seek help during and after tutorials. For instance, a sociology tutor always ensured that she gave students a lot more insight into the topics they had treated by providing them with questions that they could work through. This tutor helped students answer questions by preparing them adequately enough for their exams. These supports were expressed as follows:

> One of the Sociology tutors after every tutorial session gives us a question to answer. She shows you how to answer the question. Sometimes you'd have the idea but how to present it is the issue. After every topic she conducts a quiz. Other tutors also come up with questions and teach you how to answer them. (Participant # 5)

A student talked about coaching support provided by some of their tutors:

> I think tutors provide us some guidance. They make me understand why I am here and what I should be doing. Sometimes I get advice from some of the tutors. There is this tutor who finds out how I'm getting on and advises me on how to handle challenges I come across. She follows up on how we're doing. (Participant # 10)

Another participant shared her experience on the kind of support she received from a tutor.

> In Adult Education, we had this tutor who was really helpful. It got to a time I had family issues prior to exams. I had already finished my work and was left with the submission, but struggled to submit. I could not submit it due to network challenges. I thought I was in a big trouble for failing to submit my work at the required time. I called and informed him, and he allowed me to work. (Participant # 13)

On the contrary, other participants indicated that they did not receive any form of support from their tutors; adding tutors hardly responded to their emails, and were not available for interactions.

> We do not have the email numbers of all the tutors. A few tutors' emails that we have. Some would give you their emails, but when you send them mails, they will not reply because they do not know you. Others too are not forthcoming with student support services. (Participant # 6)

Simpson (2015, 2012) asserts that provision of student support services, including cognitive, organizing and emotional supports are crucial in adult learners' lifelong learning drive.

Paniagua and Simpson (2018) add that student support services include everything that could help a student to increase and sustain their learning motivation in their learning process. These supports are to be provided by tutors to students on DE program to sustain them on their lifelong learning drive.

4.4. Tutoring styles by tutors

When asked about tutoring styles, students described tutors' tutoring approaches differently. They remarked that the various tutors had their individual styles, some of which were favorable to their modes of learning, and others felt tutors did not facilitate their learning styles.

According to participants, whereas some tutors were more detailed in their approach to helping them understand lessons taught them, other tutors were ordinary, and restricted in their tutoring styles. Participants said some tutoring styles were not as interactive as they expected, and attributed this to their own inability to read their slides ahead of time. Students felt that some tutors only reproduced what was on their slides, and these were ways they expressed them: "My Psychology tutor most of the time comes to class and reads out the slides to us. He does it thinking we already know what he was teaching us." (Participants # 11)

> Some tutors want tutorials to be interactive but expect us to read before we come. However, most of us are workers and can't read before we come for tutorial sessions. When tutors realize tutorials are not interactive as expected, they ask a lot of questions, and before they realize it, the two hours are gone and they've not covered much. Sometimes, at the end of the semester, we've covered just 3 or 5 out of 13 sessions, and have to do the rest ourselves. (Participants # 7)

> My Sociology tutor teaches and ensures you understand. He goes beyond the slides we have and presents us more information, and solicits our views on whether we have understood the session. (Participant # 3)

Participants said that tutoring styles, including tutors reading their slides back to them influenced their mode of learning. They described a process whereby they were made to take a lot more responsibility (independent work) for themselves. They felt they had to join groups, and discuss more for better insight. For students who learnt better on their own, they had to adjust to soliciting more information from other colleagues, and from other sources, to enable them understand the subject matter well. The point is that some of the students are workers and need support to succeed in the DE mode of learning. Similarly, Carlsen et al. (2016) assert that many DE students' work alongside their studies. Students, therefore, have to foster self-directed and group learning so as to succeed in DE.

Soliciting participants' views on tutoring approaches of assistant lecturers, they indicated that some of them had a good mix of approaches. Some constantly used quizzes as a means of reinforcing the subject matter and that aided in recall of subject matter. Other approaches used by some tutors included practical examples that enabled participants relate to the course well.

Again, some tutors/lecturers were considerate about the burden of work and stress associated with the DE, and thus resorted to the use of comic relief and story-telling to facilitate tutorial sessions and make them lively.

> A tutor's tutoring styles made me major in a course she facilitates. She uses everyday life experiences to help you understand the course. After every three sessions, there is a quiz organized, to enable us to understand whatever she's been facilitating. Her tutoring style enables me to explain to the layman what inflation is all about. (Participant # 9)

> Some lecturers make us laugh during online learning. They pass funny comments in the chat room. It releases stress. I work for 12 hours so by the time I get to the lecture hall, I'm tired. These conversations make me feel more relieved. (Participant # 11)

Some participants indicated that this kind of approach influenced their learning positively. Their interests for the course were heightened, and were eager to learn. This propelled them to study ahead of time for tutorial sessions, and asked questions for explanations: "When I get home, I want to learn more. I always want to read, and get attached to the program. I ask thought provoking questions because I want to understand". (Participant # 12)

Students learning were affected by tutors whose tutoring approaches were quite restrictive.

> I find it difficult when a lecturer reads his course because it is not fun. If the lecturer gets us involved in the learning activities, the lecturer is active and his facilitation is fun to follow. You know that when you attend tutorials the lecturer will ask you a question and require you to answer. So I read more in anticipation of what he would ask me in class. But it is not so with this lecturer. (Participant # 4)

From the results, it appears that the participants prefer facilitations imbued with fun and interaction. They buy into active learning, meaning, they want to become self-directed learners. Students on DE mode of learning sought for dialogue, story-telling, and discussions in tutorials, and such facilitation styles match the students' quest for independent learning, and empower them to progress toward self-direction.

4.5. Female students' challenges and DE solutions

Students mainly spoke about personal and academic issues. Personal challenges relating to lack of time, juggling of work with learning, family and studies, administrative issues coupled with online learning came up. The students admitted having responsibility of carrying out home chores and managing their studies. Some participants indicated that family and school activities were challenging. A married and working mother shared her experience as follows;

> As a student, I combined work, family and school activities, and it wasn't easy. Since I've decided to upgrade myself, I have to bear with that, but the distance covered to campus, and the time we close from tutorials is an issue for me. I stay at Akropong in the Eastern Region, and move to campus whenever tutorials are held. (Participant # 5)

When asked how the DE program addressed their challenges, some students intimated that the DE program has flexible schedules that enabled them manage their family and personal activities, and also attend to their studies. A participant expressed her opinion:

> I'd say that DE is flexible, and there's no pressure as compared to the regular mode of learning. You attend tutorials on week-ends, as and when you have it. Monday to Friday is for work, and weekends are for tutorials. I attend tutorials and learn to use the Sakai LMS platform to do assignments. It's flexible to learn, and I prefer DE to regular mode of learning. (Participant # 1)

Both married and single female adults shared similar sentiments on challenges with the allotted time for tutorial sessions and submission of assignments. Some participants on DE complained about the short durations for assignments which were to be submitted online. Many students missed some of the assignments due to short time for posting answers online. Some participants talked about the scheduled time for meeting students virtually, which were unfavorable to them.

> With the online tutoring, sometimes a lecturer would schedule a meeting time that does not favor you. Meetings are mostly scheduled at 4.00 pm, and as a mother, I have to feed my children before I can join the session. And when I attempt to join the session, I will not get a good internet service to connect to the Sakai LMS. (Participant # 14)

Other sentiments raised by female students included challenges with the internet connection and their own inadequacies in the use of technology to learn. Some of the participants admitted that they had some challenges using digital devices in online learning. They had to get assistance from some friends before they could get connected. They intimated that a number of their colleagues were struggling with the online learning, and hardly visited the Sakai LMS platform to learn. This is a way a participant expressed it.

> Sometimes when I encounter challenges, I contact friends to assist me. I can't type fast so whatever points I have, I write them down right from start. When I meet a colleague who can type faster than I do, I seek for help to type my work and send it. As for Sakai LMS platform, it has always been worrying me. (Participant # 10)

When asked about how the DE program helped address their challenges as students, a participant felt that the DE program helped her build her digital literacy competencies, and improved her usage of the computer.

> The DE program has helped me digitally, because there were some things I didn't know about computer usage, right now I'm learning them. It's like online learning, if I'm to remain competent digitally, I have to adapt. (Participant # 5)

Regarding how DE addressed their challenges, some participants indicated that the DE program had not resolved their difficulties completely, though useful. They had reservations about the Sakai LMS being used for the DE program; claiming that it did not offer them the opportunity for continuous interaction and discussions with their lecturers.

> The Sakai LMS is like a question-and-answer platform. The lecturer puts the question there, the students answer. Sometimes, I don't answer the questions because I don't understand it. When I have time, I go to the Balme Library with friends to have a discussion. On Saturdays, when I go for tutorials, I look for online videos that are related to my course, review them and learn. (Participant # 15)

Other participants talked about administrative challenges they faced, especially the frequent changing of lecture times. Other participants averred that the face-to-face scheduled meetings were always a challenge for them as they had to seek permission from work to be physically present during tutorial sessions and examinations. Their supervisors at work did not understand why they always had to meet face-to-face when the program was supposed to be a blended learning type. Student support services are crucial, and should be provided to students on the DE mode of learning. These support help in engendering students' success on the DE mode of learning.

5. Discussions

This section reiterates the focus of the study, why the current researchers see the study important, and the discussion of the key results listed in the results section, in line with the extant literature and theories. The study explored female adult learners' perception and experiences in learning via DE mode in Ghana, and we considered the study important, because the participants involved generally expressed divergent views regarding the interview questions posed to them.

The participants agreed that their tutors lived up to expectations and provided the needed assistance to them; demonstrating that tutors on the DE program were doing well. Yet, some participants felt that some tutors were less supportive and inconsiderate of their needs. These observations support feminist theory and thinking. Feminist theory emphasizes on consciousness-raising, thus, provides voice to the marginalized people, such as female adult learners, to create their own knowledge.

In this study, even as some participants saw their tutors as good, others perceived them as inconsiderate; demonstrating that the participants are empowered to gain their voice, share their own stories and experiences in learning via DE mode. The tutors' goals are to motivate adult learners by providing supportive and inviting learning environments to make adult learners learn. The tutors also serve as resource persons providing students support services to address their cognitive, emotional and organizational needs as Simpson (2015), and Paniagua and Simpson (2018) indicated. This makes adult learners stay focused in their learning endeavors, in spite of academic and social challenges, and stays committed to learning via DE mode. The empathetic goal of tutors goes a long way to put adult learners on track in their learning endeavors. Tutors do this by demonstrating love, valuing learners, and developing "listening ears" to the concerns of adult learners, and responding to adult learners on DE learning needs. Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) goals of DE from three different perspectives; comprising democratization, liberal education, and instructional quality which partly undergirded the study got examined. Herron (2019) argued that democratization of education is one good strategy in developing human capital for LMICs; including Ghana. After all, the DE mode of learning in Africa seeks to promote social justice (Archer & Garrison, 2010). Thus, the DE offers the marginalized people in the society, including female adult learners, the opportunity to access higher education and learn.

In all this, however, the participants found the male tutors more helpful than the female tutors/lecturers. Regular training of tutors/lecturers and adult learners could serve as key to solving issues of quality in effective tutoring and learning by DE mode. O'Rourke (2003) avers that the ideal tutor is a paragon, and should show genuine interest in motivating adult learners to feel welcome and comfortable. Tutors should serve as "facilitators of learning", thus becoming a source to be tapped as required by adult learners (Goddu, 2012).

On tutoring styles of tutors/lecturers, the participants remarked that tutors had their individual styles, some of which were favorable to participants modes of learning, and others felt they did not facilitate their learning styles; indicating that some tutors were more detailed in their approach to helping them understand lessons, but other tutors were restricted in their tutoring styles. Regular training to tutors/lectures could aid them to adapt varied tutoring styles to facilitate the adult learner's learning. Adapting varied and integrated facilitation styles seem appropriate in both face-to-face tutorials and online learning. This skill of facilitation, however, requires that tutors are regularly trained to ensure that students succeed in their lifelong learning drive.

It must be added that no matter how independent or self-directed an adult learner may be, tutors/lecturers inclusive facilitation styles have crucial impact on adult learners' approach to learning, and their sense of value as learners. This support feminist theory that as we work together, we engender positive change in everything we do. Hence, to succeed in DE mode of learning, female adult learners have to balance their multiple responsibilities against the demands of learning; meaning that facilitators adapt facilitation style(s) that combine different elements, and learning styles to cater for the needs of all learners.

On power relations with tutors/lecturers, the participants generally agreed that they were in good relations with their tutors/lecturers. No confrontations occurred between participants and tutors/lecturers; however, they indicated that many interactions with tutors/lecturers were channelled through their course representatives. As to the support students received from tutors, participants provided mixed responses. Whilst some tutors and lecturers were not empathetic to adult female learners in terms of their learning needs, many others were generally supportive to their learning needs. Many of the participants indicated that they received support from both male and female tutors/lecturers. They opened up to them, and accommodated them. Some of the tutors provided their contact numbers to participants to reach out to them whenever they had academic and social issues that required their support.

Provision of student support services is particularly important in DE because Simpson (2008, 2015) opines that students who fail in DE courses have poor emotional skills; hence provision of student support services in a form of counselling service is critical in adult learners' lifelong learning drive. Carlsen et al. (2016) opine that continuous support for DE students constitute a great opportunity for lifelong learning. To ensure its effectiveness, tutors/lecturers need to be ready to enter into empathetic dialogue with students (Carlsen et al., 2016). This means that tutors/lecturers are to be provided regular training to offer support to students; and such support to students should go beyond cognitive aspects, organization of studies, and technological matters to include "developmental" and "problem solving" support (Simpson, 2015).

The participants generally agreed that tutors created a gender inclusive environment to promote learning, however, a few isolated cases of female students' non-involvement in discussions, especially in online learning, came to the fore. Tutors must increasingly involve female adult learners in learning because Kwapong (2010) observe that it is hard to succeed in the digital age without the foundational skills of technology use, self- discipline, time management, organization, confidence and exploration. Hence tutors' encouragement to students on the use of computers and online learning would help everyone overcome their anxiety (O'Rourke, 2003). Naaj et al. (2012) assert that female adults are less likely to become involved with computers than men, and became visible as a participant admitted that she was slow in typing, and always sought the services of friends before she could type her work online and submit. This demonstrates that tutors/lecturers in both face-to- face tutorials and online facilitation with students must encourage the female students in particular, to engage and discuss more with tutors, and also use technology regularly in their learning endeavors as said earlier.

Regarding challenges participants faced, issues on personal organization and academics came up. Personal challenges relating to lack of time, juggling of work with learning, family and studies, administrative difficulties coupled with online learning were indicated. The female students admitted undertaking multiple responsibilities, including carrying out home chores, workplace commitments and learning; thus, signaling that capacities of students support services in the Learning Centers should be regularly built to make female adult learners more focused on their studies. This is important because Stone and O'Shea (2013), Vaskovics (2015) and many more have identified challenges including time constraints, multiple roles of female adults, issues of finance, issues of misogyny, lack of support and access to technology as some challenges that female adult learners face in DE programs in higher education institutions.

On that account, flexible schedules in learning by DE mode were requested by participants, and must be adhered to at the Learning Centers to engender adult learning. This is important because Kramarae (2001) opines that DE provides excellent opportunities for female adults who have children, heavy work responsibilities, disabilities, or tight schedules, or who reside in geographically isolated areas to learn.

Again, as people age, individual differences increase, therefore adult education must make optimal provision for differences in learning style, time, and pace of learning (Lenoue et al., 2011). After all, the purpose of DE is to make higher education more accessible and flexible for adult learners to continue their education (Patterson, 2010). In addition, the female adult learners could not manage their time well following multiple challenges they faced as lifelong learners. Adams (2012) argues that time management is key to learning via DE mode, yet it requires discipline from adult learners to gain knowledge in one's field of human endeavor. However, time and change managements are skills and students on DE must be regularly trained to acquire these important skills. Similarly, learning by DE mode is suitable for female adult students in Africa, since it creates an alternative route to acquire higher academic qualifications. Nonetheless, the lack of self-directed learning skills and self- confidence amongst adult learners remains a problem.

6. Implications for adult education policy and practice

Supporting female adult learners in this digital age is critical because studies show that the female adult learner is disadvantaged in adapting technology to learn. The participants in this study were all female adults whose responses suggest that they had little activity using computers, especially female adult learners from rural communities, when it comes to online learning. Such adult learners', who voluntarily participated in the study, need some support in terms of training on the use of the Sakai (LMS) to facilitate their online learning. This is important because a primary interrogation in feminist pedagogy has been the fundamental patriarchal nature and bias in the practices and theory of adult education and learning, as well as society (e.g. Clover, 2015). Clover adds that whether the context was literacy, computer skills upgrading, or poverty and social marginalization, patriarchal assumptions overlooked and excluded female adults' differing experiences, needs, and knowledge. Some feminist educators suggest part of the problem can be resolved by partially integrating learning technologies into the curriculum as this will aid in the development of female adult's digital literacy skill building and confidence. After all, feminist pedagogy involves the infusion of feminist analysis into the content, process and methods of teaching, learning and educative-activism (Clover, 2015).

As discussed by the students, the structure, content and the tutoring styles could be further improved. Students have very useful information which Management could use to determine the effectiveness of the course content, the quality of tutoring, and the structure of academic work. Most of the students' complaints centered on the unstructured nature of things; yet, noted the benefits and advantages that the SAKAI (LMS) provided. A thorough analysis of the issues would enable the institution revisit its goals and objectives and develop a more coherent strategy or policy to improve upon female adults' learning online.

Adult Education can also be a tool used to understand the present state of learning via the SAKAI (LMS) platform, from the perspective of the students, through regular orientations. Alongside Management, the school can work out modes of improving the quality of service rendered to the students. The role of Adult Education is to develop individuals to gain knowledge that leads to positive changes in behavior. It is obvious that students' attitudes towards e-learning needs to go through some level of transformation, and Adult Education can be used to conscientise the students through programs such as seminars, workshops, and orientations on the need to adopt positive attitudes towards e-learning.

There are also implications for adult educators in the sphere of adult learning. The styles to tutoring adult learners in the University of Ghana DE program needs to be reviewed. Students called for participatory, dialogical, story-telling, open and free styled, but detailed approaches in tutoring. There is the need to understand the adult learners and the approach that best suits their learning styles. There are also implications for communication in Adult Education because the students observed that there was a disconnect between what some tutors and lecturers taught. Some students claimed that whatever they were taught, were different from what lecturers examined them on. Communication is key to successful collaboration in educational environments. As adult educators, there is the need to close the gaps in communication between Faculty, Management, and Students. Effective communication enables parties to gain fuller understanding of each party's needs and concerns. Effective communication management can produce useful information such as new and innovative ideas for enhancing an organization's performance. Communication should always be top-down, and bottom-up, and a network of decision making. Faculty and Management should be able to communicate with students and make changes and adjustments based on issues communicated.

7. Conclusions, and contributions of the study to theories, literature and practice

This study sought to comprehend experiences of female students on the ICT-driven DE mode of learning. It focused on female students' perception of tutors; power relations between them and tutors; support received from tutors; tutoring styles adopted; gender-inclusive environments created; and their learning difficulties and DE solutions. The experiences shared, both positives and

negatives, call for a paradigm shift in several areas including tutoring styles, online learning, coupled with provision of student support services. The findings provide insights into students' engagement with learning platforms and experiences with tutoring styles, and insights into what is expected of tutors, faculty, and management.

The findings including lack of varied tutoring styles employed, poor time management, lack of computers to work with, and lack of digital skills of some female adults make it imperative for technological support to be provided to female students to enhance their learning abilities. It emphasizes the need for faculty to adopt varied tutoring styles to meet adult learners' learning needs. Thus, a combination of tutoring styles could aid adult learners benefit from tutorials. It is proposed by the researchers that one laptop each is provided to all adult learners to aid, and promote self-directed learning, group discussions and dialogues. Interactive learning styles could be encouraged among adult learners, meaning that more integrated tutoring styles toward online learning are fostered by tutors to encourage learning, especially among female adult learners. Though some participants had issues with the tutoring styles of some tutors, they stressed the benefits of the DE mode of learning. Adult learners should manage their time for studies to become successful in their academic work. They have to be supported and encouraged more by the Learning Centers to build their self-confidence up and learn. More training programs on online learning, as a matter of policy, should be provided to adult learners.

The study contributes to theories, literature and practice. In terms of theory and practice, this study which emanates from Adult Education can be used as a tool for creating awareness within the student populace, the faculty fraternity, and the School's Management. More seminars and workshops should be organized for faculty and students to improve upon digital learning devices usage amidst the fast-paced changes taking place in ICT teaching and learning. Similarly, feminist pedagogy and Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt goals for DE demonstrate that DE serves as a solution to female adult learners' learning needs. This is because DE is a democratization and social justice tool to attract marginalized groups to access higher education. Increased used of ICT teaching and learning tools and integration of facilitation styles could benefit students in their lifelong learning drive. More dialogue, storytelling, discussions and role plays are to be employed by tutors/lecturers in their facilitation.

On contribution to literature, the study illuminates the fact that studies on female adult learners on the DE programs require the application of integration of concepts including adult learning styles, self-directed learning, online learning, and students support services among female adults based on the multiplicity of responsibilities of female adults in the African context.

Based on this, the researchers propose further research works to be conducted, including lecturers' experiences with DE mode of facilitation and learning, interrogating perspectives on students' learning, engagement with students online and the learning processes. An opinion survey could also be conducted on fostering self-directed learning among DE students in Ghana.

Author details
Ama Adu-Marfo[1]
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9974-4231
Isaac Biney[1]
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3994-5039
Moses Kumi Asamoah[1]
E-mail: mkasamoah@ug.edu.gh
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6698-7528
[1] School of Continuing and Distance Education, University of Ghana, Legon, Africa.

References
Adams, O. U. O. (2012). Distance learners' time management and learning effectiveness. In T. Stoilov (Ed.), *Time management* (pp. 77–88).
Adewoyin, A. D. (2019). Female learners' expectations and experiences in open and distance learning: Case

of the University of Lagos. *KIU Journal of Humanities*, 4(4), 373–380.

Allen, E., & Seaman, J. (2017). *Digital learning compass: Distance education enrollment report 2017*. Babson Survey Research Group.

Anderson, T., & Elloumi, F. (Eds.). (2004). *Theory and practice of online learning*. Athabasca University Press.

Andoh, R. P. K., Appiah, R., & Agyei, P. M. (2020). Postgraduate distance education in university of cape coast, Ghana: Students' perspectives. *International Review of Research in Open & Distributed Learning*, 21(2), 118–135. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v21i2.4589

Archer, W., & Garrison, D. R. (2010). Distance education in the age of the internet. In C. E. Kasworm, A. D. Rose, & J. M. Ross-Gordon (Eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp. 317–326). Sage.

Asamoah, M. K. (2021). ICT officials' opinion on deploying open-source learning management system for teaching and learning in universities in a developing society. *E-Learning & Digital Media*, 18(1), 18–38.

Ayite, D. M. K., Aheto, S. P. K., & Nyagorme, P. (2022). Gender dimensions of emerging technologies for learning in a university. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), 2071389. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2071389

Baran, M. L., & Jones, J. E. (2020). Online teaching and learning in higher education settings: Focus on team effectiveness. *Enriching Collaboration and Communication in Online Learning Communities*, 137–158. https://doi.org/10.4018/978/15225.98145.ch008

Biney, I. K. (2020a). Engendering innovation in distance education tutoring: Challenges and strategies. In Y. Oheneba-Sakyi, M. A. Tagoe, & I. Salifu (Eds.), *Contemporary issues in human resource studies* (pp. 155–179). Woeli Publishing Services.

Biney, I. K. (2020b). Experiences of adult learners using SAKAI learning management system in learning in Ghana. *Journal of Adult & Continuing Education*, 26(2), 262–282. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971419864372

Biney, I. K. (2021). McClusky's theory of margin and its implications on adult learners in higher education institutions. *Journal of Adult & Continuing Education*, 28(3), 98–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971421989337

Biney, I. K., & Inusah, S. (2023). Opportunities for adult learners in Ghana's higher education institutions: Limiting factors and strategies. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2023.2178664

Burke, C. (2001). Women, guilt and home computers. *Cyber Psychology & Behaviour*, 4(5), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1089/109493101753235205

Carroll, N. (2013). E-learning: The McDonaldization of education. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2013.833405

Chae, S. E., & Shin, J. H. (2016). Tutoring styles that encourage learner satisfaction, academic engagement, and achievement in an online environment. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 24(6), 1371–1385. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2015.1009472

Chilisa, B., & Preece, J. (2005). *Research methods for adult educators in Africa*. Pearson Education South Africa.

Choi, H. J., & Park, J. H. (2018). Testing a path-analytic model of adult dropout in online degree programs. *Computers & Education*, 116(1), 130–138. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2017.09.005

Clandinin, D. J., Caine, V., & Jackson, M. (2019). *Narrative Research in Education*. Retrieved February 10, 2021: https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756810/obo-9780199756810-0175.xml.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 423–427). Sage Publications.

Clover, D. E. (2015). Feminist and gender theories in adult education. *LLineE Journal*, 5. Retrieved August 15, 2019 http://www.lline.fi/en/article/research/512015/feminist-and-gender-theories-in-adult-education

Clover, D. E. (2021). Feminist adult education and a feminist exhibition: The case of disobedient women. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 53(2), 146–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/026608302021.1893061

Core, J., Rothery, A., & Walton, G. (2003). *E-learning series # 5: A guide for support staff*. LTSN Generic Centre.

Cragg, C. B., Andrusyszyn, M. A., & Fraser, J. (2005). Sources of support for women taking professional programs by distance education. *International Journal of E- Learning & Distance Education*, 20(1), 21–39.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Damalie, I. F., Agbanu, P., Fiadzomor, P., & Wilson, G. (2023). Knowing demographic challenges of adult learners: A vital tool for administrators in managing adult learning programs in the public technical universities of Ghana. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(4), 441–454. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.114031

Depover, C., & Orivel, F. (2013). *Developing countries in the e-learning era: Planning fundamentals of educational planning-96*. UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning.

Duby, Z., Jonas, K., Bunce, B., Bergh, K., Maruping, K., Fowler, C., Reddy, T., Govindasamy, D., & Mathews, C. (2022). Navigating education in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures: Challenges and resilience among adolescent girls and young women in South Africa. *Frontiers in Education*, 7, 856610. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.856610

Dykman, C. A., & Davis, C. K. (2008). Part one-the shift toward online education. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 19(1), 11–16.

Fasokun, T., Katahoire, A., & Oduaran, A. (2005). *The psychology of adult learning in Africa*. Pearson Education.

Flores, A. (2017). Distance learning: Preparation and practice for the adult learner. *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*, 13(1), 43–50.

Forster, P., & Offei-Ansah, C. (2012). Family roles and coping strategies of female students in Ghanaian public universities. *The International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences*, 2(5), 191–205.

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408–1416. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2281

Goddu, K. (2012). Meeting the challenge: Teaching strategies for adult learners. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 48(4), 169–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2012.734004

Gouthro, P. A. (2005). A critical feminist analysis of the homeplace as learning site: Expanding the discourse of lifelong learning to consider adult women learners. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*,

24(1), 5–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/026037042000317310

Gouthro, P. A. (2007). Active and inclusive citizenship for women: Democratic considerations for fostering life-long education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(2), 143–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370701219459

Hawkridge, D., & Wheeler, M. (2009). Tutoring at a distance: Online and tutoring in second life. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*, 395, 1–5.

Herron, B. A. (2019). "Perspectives on feminist approaches to adult education in international education and development settings," *Adult Education Research Conference*. https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2019/papers/17

Johnson, B. D., Parker, D. O., Lunsford, M. W., & Henderson, L. J., Jr. (2009). *Dimensions of learning: Education for life*. Bent Tree Press.

Kamisli, M. U., & Akinlar, A. (2022). Emergency distance education experiences of EFL instructors and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Adult Learning*, 10451595221094075(4), 230–243. https://doi.org/10.1177/10451595221094075

Kara, M., Erdogdu, F., Kokoc, M., & Cagitay, K. (2019). Challenges faced by adult learners in online distance learning. A literature review. *Open Praxis*, 11(1), 5–22. https://doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.11.1.929

Kramarae, C. (2001). *The third shift: Women learning online*. American Association of University Women Educational Foundation.

Kwapong, O. A. T. F. (2007). Adult education, ICTs and women's empowerment – observations from ICAE (1949–2004). *Ghana Journal of Literacy and Adult Education*, 3(2), 26–37.

Kwapong, O. A. T. F. (2008). *Education at the doorsteps of women*. Booksurge Publishing.

Kwapong, O. A. T. F. (2010). *Equitable access: Information and communication technology for open and distance learning*. iUniverse.

Larreamendy-Joerns, J., & Leinhardt, G. (2006). Going the distance with online learning education. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(40), 567–605. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543076004567

Lembani, R., Gunter, A., Breines, M., & Dalu, M. T. B. (2020). The same course, different access: The digital divide between urban and rural distance education students in South Africa. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 44(1), 70–84. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2019.1694876

Lenoue, M., Hall, T., & Eighmy, M. A. (2011). Adult education and the social media revolution. *Adult Learning*, 22(2), 4–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/104515951102200201

Li, J., & Che, W. (2022). Challenges and coping strategies of online learning for college students in the context of COVID-19: A survey of Chinese universities. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 83, 103958. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2022.103958

Maré, S., & Mutezo, A. T. (2021). The effectiveness of e-tutoring in an open and distance e-learning environment: Evidence from the University of South Africa. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*, 36(2), 164–180. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2020.1717941

Markova, T., Glazkova, I., & Zaborova, E. (2017). Quality issues of online distance learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 237, 685–691. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2017.02.043

Merriam, S. B., & Grenier, R. S. (2019). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. Jossey-Bass.

Motaung, L. B., & Makombe, R. (2021). Tutor experiences of online tutoring as a basis for the development of a focused tutor-training programme. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 16(2), 101–117.

Muller, T. (2008). Persistence of women in online degree-completion programs. *The International Review of Research in Open & Distance Learning*, 9(2), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v9i2.455

Naaj, M. A., Nachouki, M., & Ankit, A. (2012). Evaluating student satisfaction with blended learning in a gender segregated environment. *Journal of Technology Education*, 11, 185–200. https://doi.org/10.28945/1692

Namagero, S. T. (2021). Student experiences on distance education programs: A case study of western Uganda. *International Journal on Integrated Education*, 4(5), 401–407.

Online Tutoring e-Book 1. (2002). Learning online: Models and styles. Retrieved March 29, 2020: https://www.otis.scotcit.ac.uk/onlinebook/otisT102.htm.

O'Rourke, J. (2003). *Tutoring in open and distance learning: A handbook for tutors*. Commonwealth of Learning.

Ouma, R., & Nkuyubwatsi, B. (2019). Transforming university learner support in open and distance education: Staff and students perceived challenges and prospects. *Cogent Education*, 6(1), 1658934. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1658934

Owusu-Agyemang, Y. (2019). An analysis of theoretical perspectives that defines adult learners for effective and inclusive adult education policies. *International Review of Education: Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 65(6), 929–953. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-019-09811-3

Paniagua, A. S.-E., & Simpson, O. (2018). Developing student support for open and distance learning: The EMPOWER project. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 1(9), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.470

Patterson, N. (2010). Distance education: A perspective from women studies. *Thirdspace*, 9(1), 1–15.

Peacock, S., Cowan, J., Irvine, L., & Williams, J. (2020). An exploration into the importance of a sense of belonging for online learners. *International Review of Research in Open & Distributed Learning*, 21(2), 18–35. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v20i5.4539

Pillay, A., Khosa, M., & Campbell, B. (2021). African female university students'Experiences of online covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Education*, 84(84), 42–47. https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i84a02

Power, M., & Gould-Morven, A. (2011). Head of gold, feet of clay: The outline learning paradox. *The International Review of Research in Open & Distance Learning*, 12(2), 19–39. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v12i2.916

Pozdnyakova, O., & Pozdnyakov, A. (2017). Adult learners' problems in the distance learning. *Procedia Engineering*, 178, 243–284. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proeng.2017.01.105

QAA. (2020). *Guidance: Building a taxonomy for digital learning*. The Quality Assurance Agency of Higher Education.

Rapanta, C., Botturi, L., Goodyear, P., Guàrdia, L., & Koole, M. (2020). Online university teaching during and after the covid-19 crisis: Refocusing teacher presence and learning activity. *Postdigital Science & Education*, 2(3), 923–945. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00155-y

Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2017). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its

conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & Quantity*, 52(4), 1893–1907. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8

Segbenya, M., & Anokye, F. A. (2023). Challenges and coping strategies among distance education learners: Implication for human resources managers. *Current Psychology*, 42(31), 27694–27708. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03794-5

Simpson, O. (2008). Motivating learners in open and distance learning: Do we need a new theory of learner support? *Open Learning*, 23(3), 159–170. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680510802419979

Simpson, O. (2012). *Supporting students for success in online and distance education*. Routledge.

Simpson, O. (2015). *Student support services for success in open and distance learning*. CEMCA Educational Technology.

Somuah, B. A., Kariuki, S. I., & Itegi, F. M. (2019). Correlation between familial roles and persistence of female students on distance education programmes in Ghana: Through the lens of an administrator. *Open Praxis*, 11(3), 261–273. https://doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.11.3.977

Stalker, J. (2001). Misogyny, women, and obstacles to tertiary education: A vile situation. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 51(4), 288–305. https://doi.org/10.1177/07417130122087304

Stanistreet, P. (2021). The gender divide: Increasing women's participation in digital learning. Retrieved September 30, 2023: https://thelifelonglearningblog.uil.unesco.org/2021/03/08/the-gender-digital-divide-ncreasing-womens-participation-in-digital-learning/

Stone, C., & O'Shea, S. (2013). Time, money, leisure and guilt— the gendered challenges of higher education for mature-age students. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 53(1), 95–116.

Sutcliffe, M., & Noble, K. (2022). Belonging, trust and social isolation: The move on- line during the time of COVID–A longitudinal study. *Heliyon*, 8(9), 10637. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10637

UNESCO. (2022). *Making lifelong learning a reality: A handbook*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

UN Women Africa. (2021). Addressing the digital gender divide in Africa through the African girls can code initiative. Retrieved on 29/10/2023 from:https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/10/feature-addressing-the-digital-gender-divide-in-africa

Ushadevi, M. D. (2000). Learning through the distance mode: Challenges for Canadian women in higher education. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 7(1), 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/097152150000700103

Vaskovics, C. (2015). Women and distance education in developing countries: The challenges. *International Women Online Journal of Distance Education*, 4(2), 1–6.