

Exploring the Effectiveness of an Online Tutor Training Programme in a South African University: A Case Study

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Declaration

I, Mueletshedzi Ndwambi, hereby declare that this is my own unaided work except where citations and acknowledgements indicate otherwise. This research report is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Education (in the field of Educational Technology) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination in any other university.

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Abstract

In the landscape of higher education, peer tutoring has emerged as a vital component for academic support, particularly with the prevalence of online learning. Tutors play a pivotal role in fostering social, participatory, and collaborative learning experiences. Yet, many tutors often lack the requisite preparation and skills, which can hinder meaningful student engagement and academic achievement. Addressing this gap between expected and actual proficiency requires comprehensive training and professional development for online tutors.

In response to this challenge and in alignment with national initiatives to support early career academics, the Tutor Professional Learning Programme (TPLP) was implemented at a research-intensive South African university. The TPLP aims to equip tutors with practical strategies for facilitating student-centered online learning. Despite its multifaceted approach, the TPLP's effectiveness in strengthening tutors' facilitation skills remains a subject of debate. This study, therefore, investigated the effectiveness of the TPLP in enhancing tutors' proficiency for online facilitation, focusing on understanding the interactions among its components and identifying areas for improvement to enhance the quality of online tutor training at the university.

Embracing an interpretivist paradigm and employing a qualitative case-study approach, the study explored online tutor training within the university's real-life context. Rich data was gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with a tutor, a lecturer, and a tutor trainer via the MS Teams platform. Participants were purposively sampled to represent diverse roles and experiences within the TPLP. The study adopted Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as the theoretical framework, chosen for its holistic approach to unravelling inherently complex systems such as the TPLP.

The findings, analyzed through the lens of CHAT, revealed multifaceted interactions within the TPLP. Notably, tensions and contradictions emerged, particularly concerning collaboration between tutor trainers and faculty tutor coordinators. While ongoing dialogue and collaborative efforts are deemed crucial to the effectiveness of the TPLP, territorial aspects within faculties sometimes impeded tutor trainers from evaluating tutoring sessions in real, unscripted scenarios. This missed opportunity to

provide constructive feedback affected tutors' success in facilitating online tutorials, adding nuance to the understanding of the TPLP.

Recommendations for the TPLP include broadening participation in community of practice meetings, fostering a culture of openness and trust within the TPLP and broader academic community, instituting regular forums for sharing best practices, feedback and discussion, establishing mechanisms for ongoing support, integrating structured practical elements into training, adopting a spaced learning approach with extended learning opportunities to approach enable tutors to develop expertise at a comfortable pace, and securing institutional endorsement for the TPLP, recognizing its pivotal role in enhancing student success. Therefore, this study contributes not only to the ongoing development and long-term sustainability of the TPLP, but also to the broader discourse on effective online tutor training in South African Higher Education.

Key words: Tutor training; Facilitation skills; Tutor Professional Learning Programme (TPLP); Programme effectiveness; Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT); Activity Theory (AT).

Acronyms and Abbreviations

HE – Higher Education

TPLP – Tutor Professional Learning Programme

DHET – Department of Higher Education

UCDP – University Capacity Development Programme

CoP – Community of Practice

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

RQ – Research Question

LMS – Learning Management System

CHAT – Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

AT – Activity Theory

M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation

Definition of Key Terms

The following list clarifies the terms used in this study, offering readers a clear understanding of their meanings and how they are interpreted within this context:

Peer tutoring – A teaching strategy where more experienced and knowledgeable peer tutors support students in collaborative learning environments, often facilitated through digital platforms in the context of online learning.

Online tutoring – A form of academic support and guidance provided by tutors through digital platforms, enabling remote interaction with students. Also referred to as e-tutoring, virtual tutoring, remote tutoring, or online peer tutoring.

Tutor training – The process of preparing tutors to provide effective academic support, which can be conducted online or in-person, focusing on enhancing the skills and knowledge they require to support student learning.

Tutor Professional Learning Programme (TPLP) – A centralized online tutor training programme at a South African university designed to enhance tutors' proficiency in facilitating online learning during tutorials.

Programme effectiveness – The degree to which a programme achieves its intended outcomes. In this study, it refers to how well the TPLP successfully prepares tutors for online tutorial facilitation and its impact on their post-training performance.

Programme sustainability – The capacity of a programme to maintain its effectiveness and relevance over time while ensuring continuous improvement and long-term success. In this study, it refers to the TPLP's capacity to provide ongoing quality training and support to tutors, ultimately contributing to improved university teaching.

Theoretical framework – The guiding structure for data collection and interpretation in research. In this study, the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was adopted as the theoretical framework.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) – A theoretical framework that aims to understand human practices by focusing on the complex interactions within an activity system, including the relationships between individuals, communities, and the tools they use. In this study, CHAT is used to analyze the complex relationships among the TPLP components, and its effectiveness in nurturing tutors' online facilitation skills.

Activity – The basic unit for studying human practices in CHAT. In this study, activity refers to the structured and purposeful actions tutors undertake within the TPLP to enhance their online learning facilitation skills.

Activity system – A network of rules, tools, and community that collectively shape and influence human activities. In the context of this study, the activity system includes the TPLP, its components and their resulting interactions.

TPLP components – The various parts of the TPLP that interact to help tutors become effective facilitators of online learning. These include, training materials, pedagogical approaches used/modelled in training, distribution of responsibility among stakeholders, and continuous university support.

Component interactions – The interrelations between different components of an activity system that either contribute to or impede its effectiveness. In this study, this refers to the relationships and tensions between the TPLP components that either contribute to or impede the programme's effectiveness in enhancing the quality of online tutoring at the university.

Constructivist learning – A learning theory which posits that learners construct knowledge through their own experiences and interactions with the world, rather than just absorbing information passively. In the context of this study, constructivist learning emphasizes active tutor participation in training, which allows them to construct their understanding of online facilitation through direct experience and reflection.

Social constructivist learning – A learning theory that builds on the principles of constructivism, but emphasizes the role of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process, i.e., knowledge construction. In this study, social constructivism encourages collaborative activities in TPLP training, where tutors work together, share insights, and co-construct knowledge. This active participation and engagement mirrors the collaborative nature of online learning environments and prepares tutors to facilitate such interactions with their students effectively.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Study Background

This chapter introduces the study titled '*Exploring the Effectiveness of an Online Tutor Training Programme in a South African University: A Case Study.*' The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of a centralized online tutor training programme at a research-intensive South African university in enhancing tutors' learning facilitation skills. This section presents the context of the study, research problem, aim and objectives, significance and potential contributions to teaching and learning, assumptions and limitations of the study, and research questions.

1.1. Background and Context of the Study

Peer tutoring is widely acknowledged as an important practice in academic support within higher education (HE) institutions, whether in online and traditional settings (Lagunes, Torres & Judikis, 2015; Faroa, 2017; Clarence, 2018; Carnow, Steenkamp & Ekron, 2020). However, despite its recognized value in fostering students' academic success, research indicates that peer tutors (typically senior undergraduate and postgraduate students) are often inadequately trained to facilitate tutorials that promote student learning (Joubert & Snyman, 2017; Clarence, 2018; Sithole & Gumede, 2022). Previous studies have demonstrated that peer tutoring activities are less effective when conducted without prior tutor training (De Smet, Van Keer, De Wever & Valcke, 2010; Hassan, 2013; Clarence, 2016; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022), regardless of tutors' subject matter knowledge (Faroa, 2017).

Recognizing the pivotal role of preparation in ensuring tutors' effectiveness in supporting student learning, several studies underscore the necessity of tutor training (Underhill & McDonald, 2010; Clarence, 2018; Crouse-Machcinski, 2019; Motaung & Makombe, 2021) to create learning environments conducive to active student participation and interaction (Clarence, 2018; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022). In response to these concerns, a Tutor Professional Learning Programme (TPLP) was developed at a research-intensive South African university. Aligned with national initiatives such as the Department of Higher Education (DHET) and University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP), which aim to support, strengthen, and enhance tutors' learning facilitation skills as early career academics, the TPLP caters to a diverse audience, including tutors, teaching assistants, demonstrators, sessional lecturers, postdoctoral fellows, and postgraduate students actively involved in tutoring activities.

The TPLP employs a multifaceted approach encompassing training workshops, community of practice (CoP) sessions, and a tutor short course. Designed to provide practical strategies for facilitating student-centered learning in the digital age in South Africa, the TPLP aims to enhance tutors' abilities to recognize and embrace student diversity, while fostering reflection on tutoring practices. However, debates persist regarding the TPLP's effectiveness in equipping tutors with requisite facilitation skills, owing to variations in programme design and contextual implementation (Gilbert, 2017; Motaung & Makombe, 2021; Okoro, Takawira & Baur, 2021).

1.2. Research Problem

Effective online learning hinges on active social interactions, shared experiences, and exchange of ideas between participants, with tutors playing a crucial role in facilitating this process (Motaung & Makombe, 2021). This means tutors' ability to manage the online learning process and create engaging, participatory, social, and collaborative, environments are paramount for students' academic success (Lagunes *et al.*, 2015; Joubert & Snyman, 2017; Clarence, 2018; Motaung & Makombe, 2021; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022). However, many tutors lack adequate preparation and requisite skills to effectively facilitate student learning in online tutorials, resulting in diminished levels of meaningful student engagement and academic achievement (Matoane & Mashile, 2013; Crouse-Machcinski, 2019; Motaung & Makombe, 2021). Scholars have underscored the need for training to prepare tutors for their facilitative roles (Clarence, 2016; Okoro *et al.*, 2021; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022), bridging the gap between the tutors' expected and actual proficiency.

Unstructured and ineffective training minimize tutors' potential contributions towards their role and severely limits their ability to effectively facilitate student learning in the online space (Underhill & McDonald, 2010; Clarence, 2018; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022). Consequently, evaluating the effectiveness of online tutor training programmes is crucial (Hassan, 2013; Clarence, 2016; Joubert & Snyman, 2017; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022) to ascertain whether programme objectives are met, identify areas for improvement, and ensure sustainability and success (Roman, Kelsey & Lin, 2010). Effectiveness, in this study, refers to the extent to which the TPLP achieves its objectives and prepares tutors to facilitate online tutorials successfully.

While studies of online tutor training often rely on tutors' perspectives and experiences as indicators of programme effectiveness (Roman *et al.*, 2010; Underhill & McDonald, 2010; Matoane & Mashile, 2013; Bowden, 2019; Motaung & Makombe, 2021; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022), particularly regarding information and communication technology (ICT) integration (Chen & Liu, 2011; Lagunes *et al.*, 2015; Crouse-Machcinski, 2019; Motaung & Makombe, 2021; Okoro *et al.*, 2021), much of this research overlooks the interplay among components of tutor training programmes crucial for effective facilitation of online learning, such as ICT integration, training materials, pedagogical approaches, distribution of responsibility among stakeholders, rules of engagement, and university support. Hassan (2013), Gilbert (2017), and Sithole and Gumede (2022) agree that existing studies understate these relationships, limiting our understanding of their overall effectiveness and impact on tutors' ability to facilitate online learning. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by exploring the effectiveness of an online tutor training programme, considering the interactions among its components and their impact on developing tutors' online facilitation skills, ultimately improving the quality of online tutoring and students' online learning experiences.

1.3. Research Aim

The aim of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of the TPLP – a centralized online tutor training programme at a South African university – in enhancing tutors' proficiency in facilitating online learning during tutorials. The specific focus is on identifying areas for enhancement and devising strategies to improve the quality of online tutor training across the university. This will be achieved by developing a nuanced understanding of the interrelations among various components of the TPLP, ultimately improving the standard of online tutoring endeavours at the university.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- Explore the experiences and perspectives of tutors participating in the TPLP.
- Develop a thorough comprehension of the interactions and interdependencies among the various TPLP components, and their impact on its effectiveness.
- Identify areas for improvement in TPLP and devise strategies to improve the quality of online tutor training at the university.

1.5. Research Questions (RQs)

Towards achieving the research objectives previously outlined, this study addressed the following research questions:

- What are the key components that contribute to the effectiveness of the TPLP?
- How do the various components of the TPLP interact with each other to influence the effectiveness of the programme?
- How can the TPLP be improved to better prepare tutors to facilitate successful online tutorials that promote student engagement and learning?

1.6. Significance and Potential Contributions of the Study

This study investigates the effectiveness of an online tutor training programme in a research-intensive South African university, delving into how this training enhances tutors' proficiency in facilitating online learning during tutorials. By honing on these facts, the research offers a holistic and nuanced understanding of the university's online tutor training programme, a critical aspect in the current era of increasingly ubiquitous online learning. The detailed methodology, including the emphasis on trustworthiness and authenticity checks, not only ensures methodological rigor, but also sets as a potential model for future studies in this domain.

Beyond its immediate scope, this research has the potential to contribute to scholarly discourse on online education, tutor training, and application of theoretical frameworks in understanding educational practices. Such contributions extend the boundaries of academic dialogue and enrich the growing body of knowledge in the field.

The focus on the South African HE is noteworthy as it acknowledges the unique challenges and prospects inherent in this setting. The insights garnered from this context may be directly applicable and relevant to South African academic institutions. Consequently, the significance and potential contributions of the study lie in its ability to address critical knowledge gaps related to online tutor training programmes in the South African HE context. Ultimately, the findings of this research can contribute to improved quality of online tutor training, thereby fostering enhanced student engagement, learning, and academic success.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines both local and global studies surrounding online tutor training in HE, aiming to identify concepts central to the study while laying the groundwork for further exploration. It comprises in-depth exploration of existing literature relevant to the effectiveness of training programmes, navigating through challenges faced by online tutors, theoretical frameworks and strategies underpinning training design, ICT integration, tutor experiences, and factors contributing to programme sustainability. Moreover, it discerns gaps, engages in debates, and sets the stage for the study.

2.1. Online Tutoring and Tutor Training in HE

Online tutoring – also known as e-tutoring (Matoane & Mashile, 2013; Joubert & Snyman, 2017), virtual tutoring, remote tutoring, digital tutoring, or online peer tutoring (De Smet *et al.*, 2010; Crouse-Machcinski, 2019) – is a form of online learning wherein tutors provide academic support and guidance to students through digital platforms or electronic means (Bowden, 2019; Okoro *et al.*, 2021), especially where face-to-face contact is difficult (Joubert & Snyman, 2017). According to Sithole and Gumede (2022), it is “teaching, support, management, and assessment of students on programmes of study that involves significant use of online technologies” (p.228). Based on the work of De Smet *et al.* (2010) and Matoane and Mashile (2013), online tutoring can also involve peer tutoring, where more capable and knowledgeable peer tutors support students in computer-supported collaborative learning environments. The process includes organising educational content, facilitating online engagement (Faroa, 2017), providing feedback, answering questions, and guiding students through course assignments in asynchronous or synchronous modalities (Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022).

2.1.1. Challenges Faced by Online Tutors

Lagunes *et al.* (2015) highlights that online tutors face challenges such as mastery of disciplinary knowledge, creating conducive learning environments, knowledge of administrative processes, and the use of ICT. Of particular interest in this study is the challenge of fostering a conducive learning environment, essential for effective learning facilitation. The same is highlighted by Matoane and Mashile (2013) and Joubert and Snyman (2017), who identify that facilitation of meaningful student

learning is a key role of the online tutor. Okoro *et al.* (2021) emphasize the need for tutor training to prepare tutors for this role, especially given the popularity of online learning in recent years. With a rise in the demand for online learning, inadequate and ineffective training of tutors in facilitating online tutorials remains a concern in HE institutions around the world (Clarence, 2016; Faroa, 2017; Clarence, 2018; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022). In this regard, Underhill and McDonald (2010) note that unstructured tutor training minimizes tutors' contribution towards their role and severely limits their ability to facilitate any type of learning in the online space, regardless of their subject matter knowledge (Clarence, 2016; Faroa, 2017). Thus, research on online tutor training programmes has increased in recent years as universities respond to the need for effective online learning facilitation and student support (Crouse-Machcinski, 2019; Motaung & Makombe, 2021; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022).

2.1.2. Theories/Strategies for Designing & Delivering Online Tutor Training

Using constructivist learning theory in training to build on tutors' prior and current knowledge and experiences

In their study, Pitsoane and Lethole (2022) recommend that online tutor training programmes should be informed by, amongst others, the constructivist learning theory, which asserts that learning is an active, constructive process where tutors build on their prior knowledge and experiences to develop new understanding. More specifically, they argue that online tutor training should put tutors at the centre of the learning process, allowing them to construct knowledge through experiential learning, where they learning by doing, reflecting, and applying concepts learned in training to real-world tutoring scenarios. This suggests that tutoring knowledge comes from tutors themselves – the trainer simply consolidates and extends tutors' tacit knowledge – the implicit, experience-based knowledge tutors have acquired over time, which is the foundation on which new knowledge is constructed (Clarence, 2018). Clarence (2018) submits that effective training programmes build on tutors' existing knowledge and experiences, and use it as a basis for reflection and ongoing learning to enhance their effectiveness in online tutorial facilitation. Accordingly, Matoane and Mashile (2013) and Pitsoane and Lethole (2022) state that effective training programmes embrace social constructivism to develop tutors' knowledge and skills on facilitating learning online. This emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning, wherein tutors construct

knowledge through social interaction and peer engagement, helping them to successfully develop skills required in facilitating online learning.

Using participatory, inclusive learning to prepare tutors for a facilitative role

According to Clarence (2018), tutor training programmes should not simply present information/theory and assume that tutors possess the skills needed to work with students. Rather, training should be participatory to enable tutors to develop their facilitation skills through learning activities that allow tutors to develop facilitation skills in a practical, hands-on manner (Underhill & MacDonald, 2010). This involves creating inclusive learning spaces where all tutors are extended a sense of belonging, regardless of their backgrounds (Clarence, 2018). Furthermore, Clarence (2018) argues that peer tutors “learn how to tutor more effectively by participating in *tutor-centred* workshop-style engagements that mimic a desirable tutoring environment” (p.62). By participating in these types of activities, tutors learn how to apply these facilitation skills in real-life tutoring situations (Clarence, 2018), ultimately helping students become more confident, capable learners. These strategies ensure that tutors are not just passive recipients of knowledge, but active participants in their own learning, which is crucial for their success in facilitating online learning.

However, the role of explicit instruction in tutor training highlighted by De Smet *et al.* (2010) and Chen and Liu (2011) is also recognized, who propose that direct instruction on tutoring principles and expectations for facilitation can help tutors develop the skills and competencies needed to effectively support students, thereby improving the nature and quality of online tutoring. According to De Smet *et al.* (2010), this includes “*giving* tutors all-round instructions about their future online tutoring task and role so that they *can* master a relevant mix of organisational, (meta)cognitive, and social tutoring skills” (p.1170). However, relying solely on explicit instruction is not a viable approach as it does not fully address the complex nature of online tutoring. Thus, it is important to combine explicit instruction with opportunities for reflection, feedback, and ongoing support to develop tutors’ competencies for online tutoring more effectively (Clarence, 2018). As noted by Clarence (2018), training should model participatory and inclusive practices in order to prepare tutors to create participatory and inclusive online tutorial environments that enable independent and student-led learning.

Using collaborative and active learning to foster tutors' meaningful learning

According to Underhill and McDonald (2010), tutors are guided towards thinking of learning and tutoring in more facilitative ways rather than didactic ones through collaborative participation and experience rather than words (i.e., show rather than tell). Kirkwood and Price (2014) agree that online tutor training can be redesigned to provide active and meaningful learning opportunities for participants by including activities that build on and expand participants' knowledge. Such collaborative, knowledge-building initiatives that develop active learning behaviors in tutors are in line with the kind of transformative practices argued for by Underhill and McDonald (2010). As Pitsoane and Lethole (2022) observed, collaborative activities that provide a shared workspace for active, multiple-user interaction increase participant interest, motivation and participation, and support social constructivist approaches to learning.

2.1.3. ICT Integration in Online Tutor Training

In assessing the effectiveness of an online training programme, Matoane and Mashile (2013) place emphasis on the use of appropriate technology to create an environment that allows participants to achieve learning outcomes. Similarly, Crouse-Machcinski's (2019) study of the benefits of utilising learning management systems (LMS) to enhance the effectiveness of tutor training implies that programme improvement would primarily be technologically-based. By primarily focusing on the technical role of online tutors, studies such as these often neglect other factors that contribute to programme effectiveness and impact on tutor performance post-training, such as the quality of training materials, continuous support provided to tutors by other stakeholders, and alignment of tutoring practices with students learning needs. Motaung and Makombe (2021) note that while it is important for online tutors to possess technological skills, tutor training is more effective when it enables tutors to use ICT to interact with students and facilitate their learning in the online environment. In this regard, Motaung and Makombe (2021) consider effectiveness of an online tutor training programme as one that focuses on developing tutors' technical, procedural, and strategic knowledge.

2.1.4. Tutors' Experiences/Perspectives of Online Tutor Training

While some studies do not specifically study or define the effectiveness of an online training programme based on tutors' experiences, their findings allude to it. These studies spotlight tutors' experiences to gauge training effectiveness and thus inform improvements to the training. For example, Bowden (2019) explores the experiences of online tutors and their perception of professional identity in virtual learning environments, suggesting that an effective programme should focus on developing tutors' professional identity by providing opportunities for reflection on practice. Joubert and Snyman's (2017) study of the challenges experienced by online tutors suggests that the effectiveness of a training programme lies in its ability to create a sense of community among tutors that encourages collaboration and sharing of best practices. Similarly, De Smet *et al.* (2010) and Roman *et al.* (2010) examine programme effectiveness by considering tutors' satisfaction with course content and technical aspects of training. However, it is essential to move beyond 'satisfaction surveys,' i.e., what tutors like and dislike, when assessing the effectiveness of a training programme (Hassan, 2013).

According to Hassan (2013), researchers must view the tutor training programme as an entire system which comprises the tutors, members of the community involved in online tutoring (tutor-training coordinators, lecturers, etc.), the technologies used, how responsibility is distributed among stakeholders (members of the community), policies for tutor training and selection criteria for tutors, and organizational-level outcomes. Likewise, Gilbert (2017) notes that "tutors' experiences of training and development must be viewed in the context of university policy and cultural norms, the faculty and teaching environments, and the means by which support is provided" (p.59). This highlights the importance of considering the interactions between the different components to develop a more nuanced understanding of how they affect programme effectiveness, and consequently, how the programme can be improved to enhance the quality of online tutoring. Comparably, Sithole and Gumede (2022) found that studying the interrelations between system components in detail leads to a more effective programme that produces "qualified and well-trained tutors" (p.231).

2.1.5. Ensuring Programme Sustainability

In assessing the effectiveness of discipline-specific tutor training, Underhill and McDonald (2010) maintain that continuous collaboration between tutor coordinators, tutors, lecturers, and any other stakeholders is crucial for holistic tutor development and programme sustainability. Several scholars also recommend that organizations should provide ongoing training and support to tutors (see De Smet *et al.*, 2010; Roman *et al.*, 2010; Chen & Liu, 2011; Clarence, 2016; Faroa, 2017; Gilbert, 2017; Clarence, 2018; Motaung & Makombe, 2021; Okoro *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, Sithole and Gumede (2022) note that “*online* tutorship programme components are interrelated and work towards an overall objective” (p.234) and should therefore be considered together as part a system to ensure their sustainability.

2.1.6. Conclusion

Although numerous studies have provided valuable insights into aspects of online tutor training, an in-depth understanding of their effectiveness and impact on tutor’s facilitation of collaborative, participatory, participant-centred learning is lacking (Hassan, 2013; Gilbert, 2017). There remains a lack of consensus on what constitutes effective training, and how that effectiveness can be assessed as these studies focus on specific programme components in isolation. Therefore, despite the growing body of literature on online tutor training programmes, their effectiveness in developing tutors’ online facilitation skills remains a matter of debate. To gain a comprehensive understanding of how these programmes work to develop tutor’s online facilitation skills, Hassan (2013), Gilbert (2017) and Sithole and Gumede (2022) contend that it is crucial to also consider the relationships and tensions among the various components that work together to help tutors become effective facilitators of online learning.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines and describes the Theoretical Framework guiding the conduct of this study. It describes the rationale for adopting the chosen framework, highlights its key concepts, and elaborates on how it informed data collection and interpretation.

3.1. Rationale for the Choice of Theoretical Framework, i.e., Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Engeström's (2001) Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was adopted for this study to gain a better understanding of the complex relationships among the components of the TPLP, and its effectiveness in nurturing tutors' online facilitation skills. The decision for selecting CHAT stems from recognizing the complexity of evaluating tutor training programmes, which involves understanding the complex, systemic interactions between different elements of the programme. As noted by Hassan (2013) and Hassan (2014), assessing the effectiveness of a tutor training programme is a complex task requiring a theoretical frame of reference to guide data collection and interpretation, optimizing resource utilization (Sithole & Gumede, 2022).

Furthermore, the complex nature of online tutoring programmes such as the TPLP necessitates evaluation of the entire system rather than isolated fragments (Hassan, 2013). CHAT offers a holistic approach to understanding complex systems and their interrelationships, aligning seamlessly with the nuanced nature of the TPLP (Hardman, 2005; Hassan, 2013; Hassan, 2014; Gilbert, 2017). Notably, scholars like Hashim and Jones (2007) emphasize CHAT's holistic and contextual nature, deeming it supportive for qualitative and interpretative research. Fletcher (2021) underscores CHAT's suitability for investigating purposeful, object-driven activities, making it an appropriate and insightful theoretical foundation for this study.

Moreover, CHAT emerges as a strategic choice in light of the literature review, which underscores the significance of examining the relationships and tensions within tutor training programmes to understand their collective impact on tutors' online facilitation skills (Hassan, 2013; Gilbert, 2017; Sithole & Gumede, 2022). CHAT's emphasis on activities as interconnected systems uniquely positions it to systematically unravel and illuminate the relationships between the various elements of the TPLP. This comprehensive view aids in identifying tensions that either contribute to or impede the

effectiveness of the TPLP, making it an invaluable tool. By leveraging CHAT, this research endeavours to uncover complexities within the TPLP – identifying its key components (RQ1), exploring their interactions (RQ2) and, importantly, determining ways in which the programme can be enhanced to improve tutors' proficiency in facilitating online tutorials (RQ3). In essence, the adoption of CHAT aligns seamlessly with the overarching goal of comprehensively understanding the dynamics of the TPLP, where individual actions are deeply intertwined with broader institutional and social structures.

3.2. Overview of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

Activity Theory (AT), rooted in Vygotsky's theory of cultural mediation, examines how humans (subjects) interact with the world (object) through culturally developed artefacts to achieve specific outcomes. According to Mwanza (2001), this framework uses 'activity' as the basic unit for studying human practices, where “activity or what people do is reflected through actions as people interact with their environment”. Grimalt-Álvaro and Ametller (2021) further note the framework's emphasis on the dynamic relationships among the subject, object, and artefacts, and how they collectively determine the activity that will transform an aspect of the world. This initial model, i.e., the first-generation of AT, is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

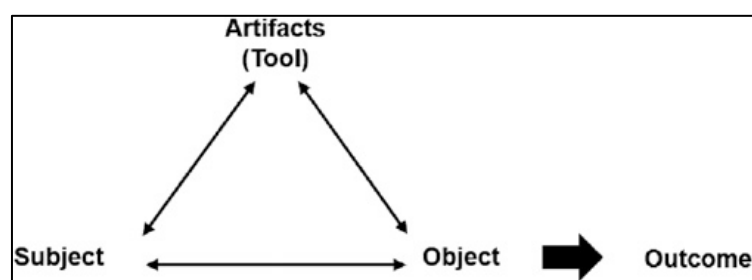


Figure 1: 1st generation AT – Vygotsky's triangular model of mediated acts (Grimalt-Álvaro & Ametller, 2021, p.2)

However, Engeström (2001) recognized a limitation of the first-generation of AT, specifically that the unit of analysis remained focused on the individual's interaction with mediating artefacts. That is, first-generation AT does not account for the complexities arising in team settings, where there are “complex interrelations between the individual subject and his or her community (Engeström, 2001; Gilbert, 2017). This

prompted the development of a second generation of AT by Alesksei Leont'ev to incorporate social and cultural aspects of human activity, referred to as CHAT (Mwanza, 2001). This iteration notes the collective nature of activity and emphasizes the role of social groups, rules, community, and division of labor (Grimalt-Álvaro & Ametller, 2021). This network of relationships, rules, tools, and community that collectively shape and influence human activities constitutes the **activity system** (Fletcher, 2021; Grimalt-Álvaro & Ametller, 2021). Furthermore, Ekundayo (2012) notes that this evolved model conceptualizes human activity systems as object-oriented, artefact-mediated, and socially constructed. Therefore, CHAT incorporates the foundational principles of AT, but extends the framework to consider not just individual activities, but the collective, systemic nature of activities within a broader social and historical context. Figure 2 illustrates the components of CHAT, the 2nd generation of AT, which are discussed below:

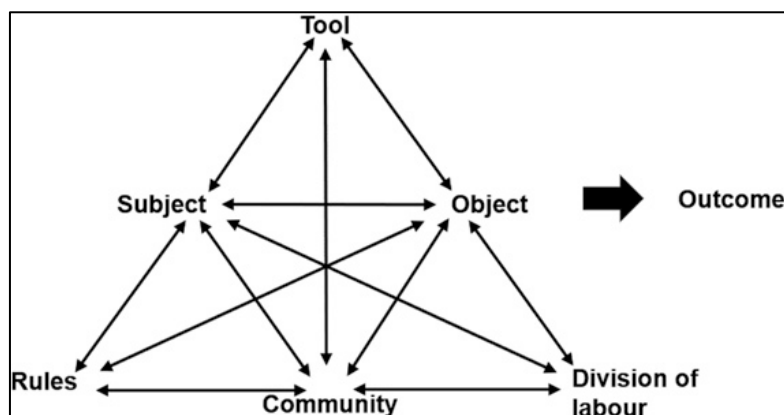


Figure 2: 2nd generation AT – structure of the human activity system (Grimalt-Álvaro & Ametller, 2021, p.2)

3.3. Components of Cultural Historical Activity Theory

The following components, drawn from the 2nd generation of AT, guide the investigation of TPLP effectiveness. These components provide a structured lens through which the RQs outlined for this study are systematically addressed:

Object or objective – This represents the focal entity and/or desired outcome of the intended activity (Hashim & Jones, 2007; Fletcher, 2021). In the context of the TPLP, this translates to the overarching goal that the programme aims to achieve, i.e., to enhance tutors' proficiency of facilitating online tutorials that promote student

engagement and learning. According to Mwanza (2001) and Hassan (2014), the object not only defines what the activity is, but highlights the motivational or purposeful nature of human activity. Therefore, making the underlying object of the TPLP explicit sheds light on its current effectiveness, and provides a foundation for proposing improvements to better equip tutors for successful online tutorials (RQ3).

Subject – This refers to the humans from whose perspective the activity is explored (Hashim & Jones, 2007; Ekundayo, 2012). Hassan (2014) notes that the subject refers to persons or groups engaged in the activity. Identifying the individuals involved in the TPLP is vital to gain insights into their experiences, challenges, and perceptions, and for understanding how the programme affects different individuals and groups. Additionally, it ensures that the exploration is grounded in the reality of individuals participating in the TPLP, contributing to a holistic understanding of its effectiveness.

Mediating tools – These are resources people use to carry out the activity (Hassan, 2014; Fletcher, 2021). In the context of the TPLP, mediating tools represent the diverse collection of resources that subjects use to engage in the online tutor training activity. As highlighted by (Ekundayo, 2012), these resources may include both ICT and non-ICT tools. Identifying the mediating tools used in the TPLP is not merely a technological inventory, but a holistic exploration of how these tools mediate interactions, shape the learning environment, and contribute to training effectiveness (RQ2). Additionally, an analysis of mediating tools allows for the identification of areas where improvements can be made, which could involve exploring additional resources or considering alternative technologies that might enhance the TPLP's effectiveness.

Rules – These are any formal and informal regulations enforced or followed to meet the object of the activity (Fletcher, 2021). These rules, encompassing both formal and informal guidelines within the TPLP, are pivotal in shaping the programme's dynamics. As highlighted by Hashim and Jones (2007), rules are instrumental in determining how and why individuals may act, significantly influencing the means by which the TPLP is carried out (Mwanza, 2001). Understanding the rules governing the TPLP is integral to addressing the RQs. For instance, investigating the TPLP rules provides insights into the structured guidelines that define its operations and contribute to its

effectiveness. This also helps in identifying areas where adjustments can be made, and offering suggestions for improvements that align with the programme's objectives.

Community – This encompasses individuals involved in the activity who share the subject's interest in a common object (Hassan, 2013; Hassan, 2014). It includes social groups invested in the outcomes of the activity (Fletcher, 2021), providing the social and cultural context within which the subject operates, or the activity unfolds (Mwanza, 2001). In this study, the community encompasses the social groups interested in the TPLP's outcomes. Investigating this aspect helps address RQ1 and RQ2 by considering how collective interests shape the programme's effectiveness.

Division of labour – These are specific responsibilities of the subject and their community to meet the object (Mwanza, 2001; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Fletcher, 2021), i.e., what each community member is responsible for doing when acting on the object (Hassan, 2013; Hassan, 2014). In the TPLP, this concept is significantly relevant as it provides insights into how specific responsibilities among community members contribute to the overall effectiveness (RQ1). Additionally, it illuminates the dynamic relationships and interactions among community members, and how potential tensions influence the TPLP's effectiveness (RQ2). Moreover, examining the division of labour can inform recommendations to improve the programme (RQ3).

According to Hardman (2005) and Hassan (2014), this division of labour describes a horizontal division among community members and also highlights a vertical division of power and status. Understanding how power and status are distributed among community members within the TPLP is essential for answering RQ1 and RQ3 by recognizing how power structures may impact effectiveness and where adjustments are needed for improvement. In addition, investigating the horizontal distribution among community members directly contributes to answering RQ1 as it allows for an assessment of whether responsibilities are adequately distributed, ensuring that each community member contributes meaningfully to the programme's objectives.

Understanding the components of the 2nd generation AT offers a nuanced perspective on the structure of human activity systems. Therefore, the sections following explore how this theoretical lens will be practically applied in the context of this study on online

tutor training. By leveraging the components of the 2nd generation AT, we can construct a detailed model of the TPLP activity system. However, before delving into the practical application of CHAT in the context of the TPLP, it is crucial to explore the foundational principles that underpin this framework.

3.4. Principles of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

Engeström (2001) outlines five key principles that neatly summarize the essence of CHAT. These principles not only shape our understanding of activity systems, but also hold particular relevance to the investigation of the TPLP's effectiveness in preparing tutors to successfully facilitate online tutorials. Importantly, recent literature by Gilbert (2017) reaffirms the enduring significance of these principles, grounding this exploration in ongoing scholarly discourse surrounding CHAT.

Engeström's (2001) five principles, as reaffirmed by Gilbert (2017), are as follows:

- *Principle one:* The first principle asserts that the activity system is the fundamental unit of analysis. This means that all goal-directed individual and group actions are only understood in the context of the entire activity system.
- *Principle two:* According to the second principle, each activity system is a unique collection of multiple perspectives, backgrounds, traditions, and interests, which contributes to the complexity of the activity system.
- *Principle three:* The third principle underscores that each participant and community within an activity system has their own historical context. This means that any analysis of an activity system should be viewed in relation to the historical factors that have shaped the activity.
- *Principle four:* The fourth principle asserts that interactions between components of an activity system give rise to contradictions and tensions that are fundamental to driving change and development (improvements) within the system. Because each activity system inevitably has underlying contradictions and tensions capable of providing a deeper understanding of the system, this principle will be discussed further in the subsections following.
- *Principle five:* The fifth principle highlights that activity systems have the potential for development or 'expansive transformations'. This occurs as

contradictions become more visible and are resolved through the reconceptualization of activities.

3.4.1. The Principle of Contradiction

CHAT is used both descriptively and analytically to identify and understand the relationships between various elements, and expose contradictions within the activity system (Hassan, 2013; Hassan, 2014). As highlighted by Fletcher (2021), each element and its associated interrelationships can enhance and/or restrict what is possible in an activity system. According to Hassan (2013), “contradictions are not the same as problems or conflicts but rather historically accumulating structural tensions” (p.203) which can be a driving force for change and innovation (Engeström, 2001; Gilbert, 2017; Fletcher, 2021). Additionally, Hassan (2013) demonstrates that the identification of contradictions and difficulties within a tutor training programme can help illuminate what is ineffective about the programme. In this study, this can assist in identifying strategies to effect improvement within the TPLP, i.e., addressing RQ3.

Hassan (2013) and Hassan (2014) highlight that contradictions can manifest at different levels within and between activity systems:

1. *Primary contradictions*: These occur within a single component of the activity system due to conflicting values guiding participation in the activity.
2. *Secondary contradictions*: These emerge between different components in the activity, often due to the addition of new elements to the existing activity.
3. *Tertiary contradictions*: These arise when participants must adopt newer, more advanced methods to achieve the object or objective of the activity.
4. *Quaternary contradictions*: These surface when an activity undergoes changes that become contradictory to another neighbouring activity system.

According to Hassan (2014), contradictions/tensions within activity systems can become inherent, leading people to develop strategies to work around them, making the tensions less apparent and almost invisible. However, this study takes a deliberate approach by making the contradictions within the TPLP explicit. This intentional exploration serves to address RQ2 (by understanding how the various components of the TPLP interact with each other to influence its effectiveness) and RQ3 (by identifying

areas for improvement within the TPLP to better prepare tutors to facilitate successful online tutorials that promote student engagement and learning).

3.5. Using Cultural-Historical Activity Theory to Understand Online Tutor Training Programmes

This research adopted CHAT, the 2nd generation of AT, as the guiding framework to comprehensively study the TPLP as a holistic activity system. However, this necessitates a preliminary step – modelling the system.

3.5.1. *Modelling the TPLP Activity System*

In this study, CHAT was applied to model the complex TPLP activity system, which was developed to enhance tutors' proficiency of online facilitation (**objective**). This objective defines the purpose and motivational aspect of human activity within the TPLP [the effectiveness of the activity is measured by tutors' proficiency in facilitating online tutorials that promote active student engagement and learning]. The **subjects** of the activity are the peer tutors, tutor coordinators (lecturers) and tutor trainer (TPLP coordinator) with experience in the TPLP. **Mediating tools** are the resources available for training which are employed to develop tutors' online facilitation during the activity, including relevant technologies or online platforms used for training, training content, instructional materials, knowledge, and skills. The **rules** governing this collective training activity are multifaceted. They include tutor-selection criteria, guidelines outlining tutors' responsibilities in facilitating student learning, training attendance requirements, employment agreements, programme-specific rules and etiquette, and institutional frameworks (informed by DHET and UCDP initiatives) which emphasize the support and training tutors require to excel in their roles. The TPLP **community** involved comprises peer tutors, lecturers, and tutor trainers united by the shared goal of enhancing tutors' online facilitation skills. Within this community, the **division of labour** describes specific responsibilities for each member during the training activity. Responsibilities within the community are distributed as follows: the **tutor trainer** develops workshop/training content and activities, guides tutors in facilitation of collaborative and student-centered learning, and builds or boosts tutor confidence; **lecturers** organize slots for tutors to participate in the TPLP, conduct (or organize) discipline-specific training for tutors, and offer ongoing support for tutors post-training;

tutors actively engage in training sessions using available infrastructure. The desired **outcome** of the TPLP is the transformation of online tutorial learning into a collaborative and student-centered experience.

Table 1: Cultural-historical activity theory representation for the TPLP activity system

Category	Definition in this study
Subject	Explored from the perspective of peer tutors, lecturers (faculty tutor coordinators), and tutor trainers (TPLP coordinators) with TPLP experience.
Object (objective)	Tutor support, enhancement of tutors' online facilitation skills, and fostering engagement in tutor training activities.
Tools	Relevant technologies or online platforms, training content, instructional materials, knowledge, and skills utilized for developing online facilitation.
Rules	Tutor-selection criteria, guidelines for tutor responsibilities, training attendance requirements, employment agreements, TPLP rules & etiquette, and institutional frameworks informed by DHET and UCDP initiatives.
Community	Peer tutors, lecturers, and tutor trainers united in the shared goal of enhancing tutors' online facilitation skills.
Division of labour	The <i>tutor trainer</i> develops workshop/training content, guides tutors in facilitating online learning, and builds tutor confidence. <i>Lecturers</i> organize training slots, conduct discipline-specific training, and offer support beyond TPLP training. <i>Tutors</i> actively participate and engage with peers in training and facilitate collaborative and student-centered online tutorials.
Outcome	Transformation of online tutorial learning into a collaborative and student-centered experience.

The CHAT representation of the TPLP activity system detailed in Table 1 is depicted in Figure 3 following, setting the stage for in-depth exploration of its complex nature.

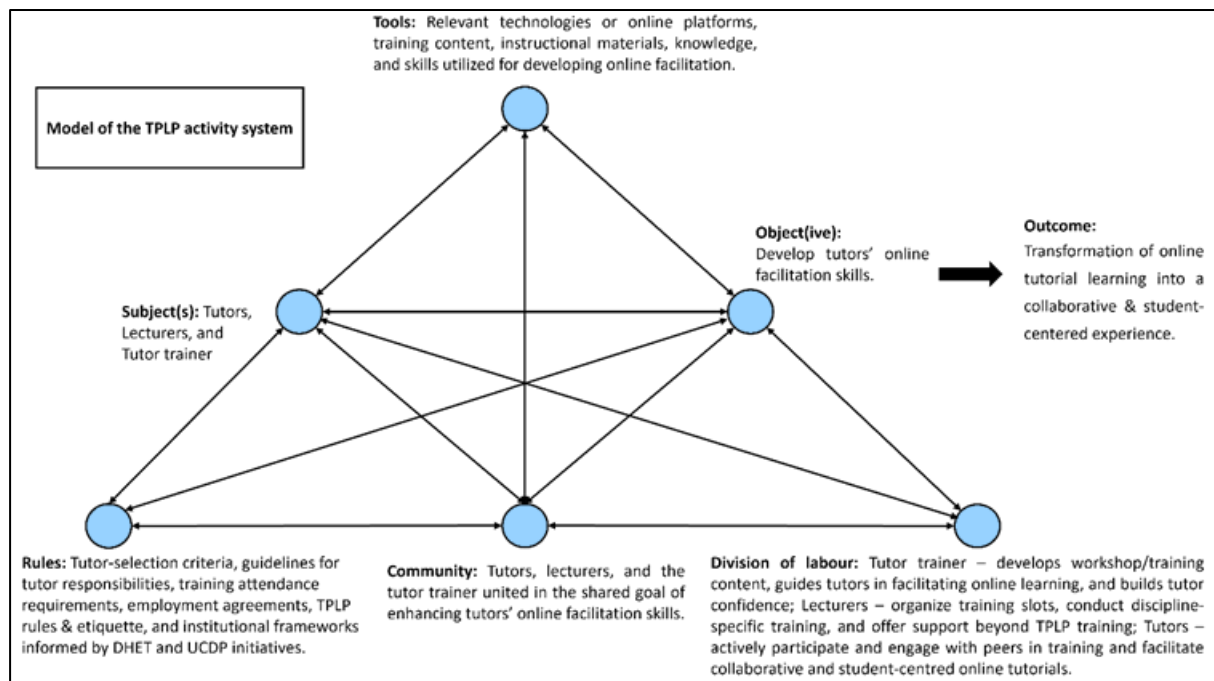


Figure 3: Model of the TPLP activity system

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological aspects of the study, encompassing the research design, description of the data collection methods and research instruments, data analysis methods, review of the study's trustworthiness and authenticity, concluding with a discussion on ethical practices adopted throughout the study.

4.1. Research Paradigm

A research paradigm, as defined by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), is the lens through which a researcher perceives and engages with the world, shaping their approach to research inquiry. In this study, the researcher sought to understand and describe the subjective experiences and viewpoints of tutors, lecturers, and tutor trainers regarding the effectiveness of the TPLP in preparing tutors for online tutorial facilitation. This endeavour necessitated attaining a thorough grasp of the TPLP's components and their interconnectedness. These philosophical assumptions of a subjective and socially-constructed reality, wherein knowledge is acquired through interpretation and comprehension of contextual human experiences, resonate with the interpretivist paradigm (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This paradigm emphasizes context and sense-making, allows for rich data collection, and affords flexibility in research design, and thus guided this study's methodological approach.

4.2. Research Method

A research method refers to the specific procedures or techniques employed to identify, select, process, and analyze information about a topic to answer a research question or explore a phenomenon. This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, commonly associated with qualitative methodologies, a stance supported by various scholars (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Adom, Yeboah & Ankrah, 2016; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Qualitative research methods, renowned for their exploratory nature, seek to elucidate the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences of a phenomenon (Adom *et al.*, 2016). Consistent with literature on online tutoring and tutor training (see Underhill & McDonald, 2010; Joubert & Snyman, 2017; Clarence, 2018; Bowden, 2019; Carnow *et al.*, 2020; Motaung & Makombe, 2021; Pitsoane & Lethole, 2022), this study is situated within the qualitative domain.

4.3. Research Design

A research design constitutes a plan or strategy for investigating a research problem or conducting a research study in order to answer the research questions. Among qualitative research methodologies, the case study stands out, offering an intricate lens to examine a specific instance of a phenomenon by closely analyzing the experiences and perceptions of those involved (Mabry, 2008). According to Mabry (2008), case study research is particularly adept at addressing complex issues, such as evaluating the effectiveness of a programme. Therefore, in line with the interpretivist paradigm and the exploratory ethos of qualitative research, this study embraced a qualitative case-study approach, focusing on gaining a holistic understanding of the TPLP as the singular case. This allowed for exploration of the complex dynamics of online tutor training within the institution's authentic context.

This research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the TPLP and how well it equips tutors with the requisite skills for facilitating online learning. In order to answer the research questions previously outlined (Section 1.5), semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method (see Section 4.6 below). These interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives within the TPLP activity system.

Participants for the interviews, selected through purposive sampling, comprised one (1) tutor, one (1) lecturer (faculty tutor coordinator), and one (1) tutor trainer (TPLP coordinator) who gave informed narratives of their experience relating to the TPLP's implementation and its perceived effectiveness in equipping tutors with online facilitation skills. The interviews were conducted on MS Teams, recorded, and transcribed for later analysis. Field notes, capturing key points and summaries during the interviews, added depth to the analysis.

Thematic content analysis (as discussed in Section 4.6.1 and illustrated in Appendix 5) guided data analysis, drawing on both reviewed literature and elements of cultural-historical activity theory as shown in Figure 3. Data was coded, grouped together, and categorized to help answer the research questions (see Section 4.6.1 and Appendix 5). To maintain participants anonymity, pseudonyms were used in reporting findings

(Section 5) – the pseudonym ‘P1’ was designated for the tutor trainer, ‘P2’ represented the lecturer, and the tutor was referred to as ‘P3’.

In ensuring trustworthiness and authenticity within the interpretivist paradigm, this study followed four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was maintained through transparent data collection methods, inclusive participant selection, and triangulation by data source (expounded in Section 4.7.1), contributing to a nuanced understanding of the TPLP. Dependability was strengthened by aligning interview questions with research goals and conducting consistency checks (see Section 4.7.2). The study enhanced confirmability through a systematic and transparent data analysis process, incorporating verbatim quotes and grounding findings in existing literature (refer to Section 4.7.3 for more details). Transferability was addressed by providing rich contextual descriptions and comparative insights, allowing readers to relate the findings to similar settings and aligning the study with the broader educational context (see Section 4.7.4).

4.4. Population and Sampling Strategy

Qualitative research often employs a small, non-random, and purposeful sample of participants who are willing to participate in the research and can offer rich insights into the phenomenon being studied (Mabry, 2008; Merriam, 2009). In this study, purposive sampling was utilized to select participants with direct experience in the TPLP, ensuring that their perspectives would contribute meaningfully to the research objectives. Due to practical constraints, the intended sample size of six (6) participants was not fully achieved. Despite efforts to contact potential participants via email, non-response impacted the final participant count. Therefore the sample for this study consisted of three (3) participants who were purposively selected to provide valuable insights: one tutor, one lecturer, and one tutor trainer. This aligned with the original intent to gather diverse perspectives from relevant groups involved in the TPLP. The selection criteria, which considered participants’ availability, willingness to participate, and accessibility, remained consistent, focusing on participants who could articulate their experiences within the TPLP to enrich the depth of qualitative data collected.

4.5. Data Collection Methods

Qualitative research commonly employs observation, interviews, and document analysis to gather data (Mabry, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Cln, 2013; Alshenqeeti, 2014; Adom *et al.*, 2016; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

According to Cln (2013), observation in a scientific context involves careful and attentive watching of social interactions, non-verbal communication, planned and unplanned activities and interactions. According to Mabry (2008) and Adom *et al.* (2016), directly observing participants in their natural setting assists the researcher in constructing meanings of the phenomenon being studied. Initially, the study planned semi-structured observation of one (1) training session to understand how pedagogical strategies, training materials and ICT integration within the TPLP contribute to its effectiveness. However, the planned observation of a live training session could not be carried out due to the delayed receipt of ethics approval and subsequent logistical issues, which resulted in a time gap where no live sessions were available for observation. Attempting to observe recorded sessions raised ethical concerns, including participants' consent for secondary use of recorded data and issues related to data ownership, and was therefore excluded.

Given the limitations, the research approach was adjusted, placing more emphasis on in-depth interviews to compensate for the absence of observational data. This adjustment, while deviating from the original plan, was necessary to adapt to real-time challenges and ensure meaningful insights were gathered from the available data sources. Interviews became the primary method for gathering comprehensive information on the pedagogical strategies, training materials, and ICT integration within the TPLP, amongst others.

Interviews are a research tool in which the interviewer/researcher “asks questions or presents other stimuli in order to elicit information from the person being interviewed” (Cln, 2013, p.43). In line with the flexibility inherent in qualitative research, this study used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, inspired by methodologies discussed by Alshenqeeti (2014) and Adom *et al.* (2016). This approach enabled participants to construct narratives around their experiences with the TPLP, contributing to a deeper understanding of the TPLP's components and their influence on its effectiveness. Three (3) semi-structured interviews were conducted to

gain a more detailed understanding of participant views and individual perceptions of how various components of the TPLP interact with each other to influence programme effectiveness. The interviews were conducted online using MS Teams for convenience and accessibility, and recorded for subsequent analysis.

While the original plan targeted six (6) interviews, adjusting in the number of interviews was necessitated by non-response to participation requests, yet this did not compromise the study's objective to gain a detailed understanding of participant perspectives. Following a methodology similar to Hardman (2005), interview questions explored various aspects such as participants' experiences as online tutors and involvement in the TPLP, perspectives on technology use in training, how the TPLP positively influenced their ability to facilitate online tutorials, reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the TPLP, and their views of the TPLP's effectiveness in preparing them for online tutorial facilitation. This methodological choice was pivotal in capturing nuanced insights into the complexities of online tutor training.

4.6. Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis is a critical component of the research process which is employed to extract meaningful insights from collected data. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative data analysis involves preparing and organizing data, reducing it into themes through coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the findings in figures, tables, or discussions. In this study, thematic content analysis, a common qualitative method involving the identification of recurring themes, was applied. This method is often used on interview transcripts and allows for the systematic identification of patterns and themes within the data. However, before exploring the approach used in this study, it is essential to define some key terms:

Coding is a systematic process of breaking down qualitative data, such as transcripts, into discrete units to identify patterns, themes, or categories. As Elliott (2018) put it, “coding is the process of analyzing qualitative data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way” (p.2850).

Themes represent the overarching patterns or concepts that emerge during data analysis in relation to research questions. They are formed by aggregating codes that form a common idea, providing a higher-level interpretation of the data. In literature,

themes are sometimes referred to as categories, which are broad units of information are formed from analysis of codes rather than raw data (Elliott, 2018).

Qualitative data analysis involves two fundamental approaches: deductive and inductive. The deductive approach utilizes a predefined framework or structure imposed by the researcher on the data, using established theories or structures for analysis (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008, p.421). In contrast, the inductive approach analyses data with minimal or no predetermined theory, structure, or framework, instead allowing the structure of analysis to emerge directly from the data itself Burnard *et al.* (2008). The data analysis approach in this study closely aligns with the deductive method, which involved using a predetermined theory to guide the data structuring. Similar to Hassan's (2014) approach, the interview data underwent systematic coding linked to reviewed literature and well-defined categories of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory. However, rather than exclude themes deviating from the established framework, the researcher in this study acknowledged the inherent flexibility in qualitative data analysis. Employing a hybrid approach, the study aimed to strike a balance between the structured nature of deductive analysis and the exploratory characteristics of inductive analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This balance approach facilitated the recognition of emergent patterns and unanticipated themes, thereby fostering a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the data.

4.6.1. Thematic Content Analysis in this Study

Preceding data analysis, interviews were transcribed, and key points were summarized, providing an overview of the data and focusing the analysis.

Data Reduction and Coding

Transforming raw data into meaningful patterns necessitates data reduction and coding, as described by Creswell and Poth (2016). In qualitative research, particularly interview-based studies like this one, data volume can be substantial (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Male, 2016). This is especially true for interview-generated text data, as noted by Elliott (2018), due to their inherent density. Coding, therefore, becomes instrumental in synthesizing this dense textual data systematically, facilitating the interpretation and organization of data relevant to the study's research questions.

Simply put, this process is a way of tagging data relevant to specific points, allowing for targeted identification within interviews rather than chronological exploration.

From Codes to Themes

Moving from codes to themes involves synthesis, wherein initial codes are reviewed and organized into broader, more abstract categories (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Elliott, 2018). After establishing a set of codes, the researcher identifies relationships and commonalities among them, grouping related codes under overarching themes/categories. This process allows for a narrative to emerge from the data, balancing structure and flexibility. While analysis is guided by predefined categories, it remains open to new and unexpected themes that may arise (Elliott, 2018). The transition from codes to themes requires the researcher to review codes systematically and constantly, seeking patterns, shared characteristics, connections, and variations. As themes emerge, they are refined and defined to accurately capture the data nuances. The themes serve as the foundation for interpreting and discussing findings, presenting the key insights in a clear and organized manner (Ekundayo, 2012).

Following a methodology similar to Elliott's (2018) approach, interview text data were initially coded into 42 codes, which were subsequently refined to 27 through analysis to identify overlaps and redundancies. This reduction process mirrors Creswell and Poth's (2016) approach, ensuring a focused set of codes that capture the essence of data – see Appendix 5 for a sample data trail which shows how a snippet of a transcript was analyzed, with the relevant codes highlighted. These codes were grouped into categories, and as the analysis progressed, the categories were further collapsed and integrated into three (3) overarching themes – see Figure 6 in Appendix 5. This systematic reduction and coding process ensured that the final analysis was both manageable and rich in meaningful insights, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the interview-generated text data in the context of the study's research questions.

The overall path of analysis followed in this study is illustrated in Figure 4 following:

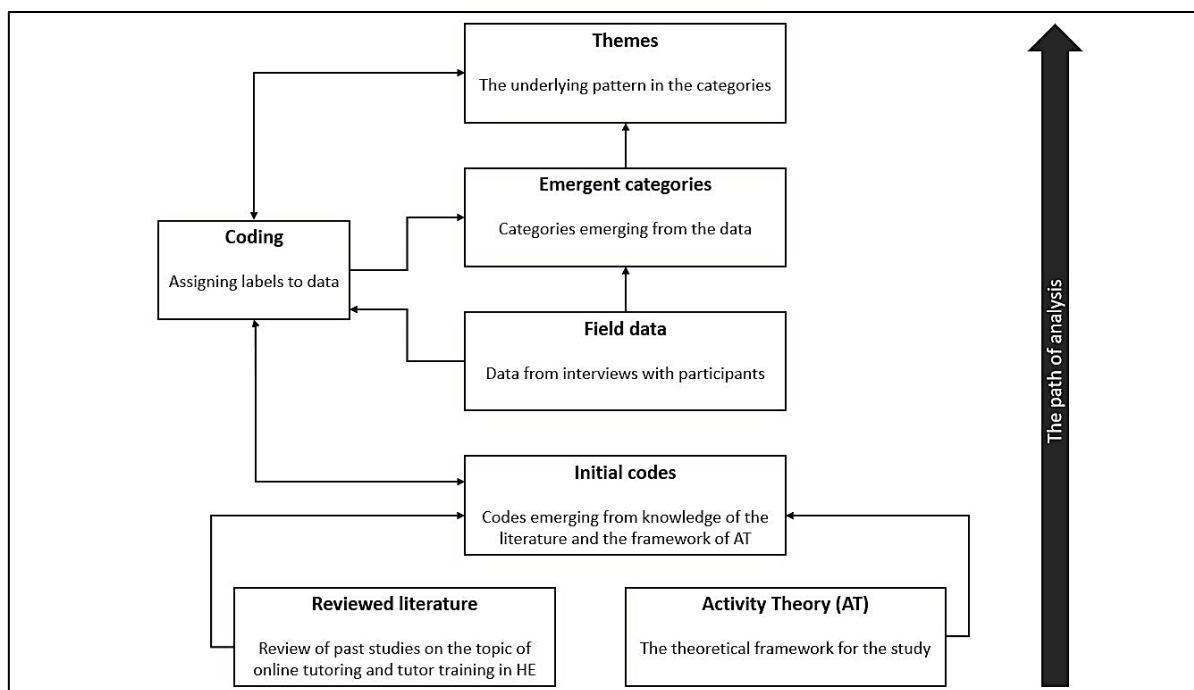


Figure 4: Path of analysis followed in this study – adapted from Ekundayo (2012)

4.7. Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Ensuring the trustworthiness and authenticity of research is crucial to instil confidence in the results and conclusions drawn from the study. This validation process is essential to ascertain that the research accurately captures the intended phenomena (Ekundayo, 2012). Within the interpretivist paradigm, which prioritizes context and meaning-making (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), validation is particularly significant to ensure that the researcher's interpretations and insights are well-grounded, accurately representing participants' perspectives (Ekundayo, 2012). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) propose four criteria for validating research within the interpretivist paradigm: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

4.7.1. The Criterion of Credibility

Credibility refers to “the extent to which data and data analysis are believable, trustworthy or authentic” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p.34). According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), credibility hinges on the alignment of findings with the constructed realities of both the researcher and participants. This study maintained transparency in data collection by providing a detailed account of the methods employed (Section 4.6).

Detailed descriptions of the interview process, including the use of semi-structured interviews and the online platform MS Teams, provided clarity on how data was elicited from participants. By including participants from diverse groups involved in the TPLP (tutors, lecturers, and trainers), the study inherently introduced a form of triangulation known as 'triangulation by data source.' According to Mabry (2008), triangulation by data source involves collecting data from different persons and checking how each source confirms, elaborates, and disconfirms information from other sources. This strategic approach facilitated data collection from individuals representing distinct roles within the TPLP, enriching the understanding of the programme's dynamics and bolstering credibility by validating findings across varied participant groups.

The integration of verbatim quotes from participants into the findings (Section 5) served to immerse readers in the lived experiences and unique perspectives of those intimately involved in the study. Not only did this approach add depth to the narrative, but it also enhanced the authenticity and believability of the conclusions of the study. Additionally, the study embraced reflexivity, with the researcher acknowledging their role and potential biases. This reflective practice contributes to transparent reporting of the limitations of the study and potential influences on data collection, enhancing the credibility of the study. By recognizing the researcher's role as the primary instrument for data collection, the study aimed to minimize biases and ensure that the findings reflected participants' experiences and perspectives.

4.7.2. The Criterion of Dependability

Dependability, as defined by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), is the ability to consistently observe the same outcomes or findings under similar circumstances. Unlike positivist methodologies where replication of outcomes is feasible, interpretative research acknowledges the variability, contextuality, and subjectivity inherent in human experiences. Consequently, achieving exact replication is impractical. However, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) emphasize the importance of reflexivity, i.e., acknowledging one's own biases and subjectivity, in maintaining dependability within interpretative research. By explicitly stating their role in constructing meanings, the researcher enables the reader to contextualize the interpretations presented, contributing to the overall dependability of the study.

In addition to reflexivity, the systematic examination of interview questions is crucial in ensuring the dependability of findings. By aligning interview questions (Appendix 4) with specific RQs, the researcher ensures that the data collected is relevant and contributes to addressing the aim of the study. This process mirrors the concept of consistency checks, where periodic reviews of the study's progress are conducted to ensure that interpretations remain consistent with the RQs. Through these iterative processes of data review and analysis, the study maintains its dependability by continually assessing the alignment of findings with research objectives.

4.7.3. The Criterion of Confirmability

Confirmability underscores the need for findings to be verifiable by others in the field (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The primary goal of this criterion is to mitigate potential researcher bias from influencing the outcomes of the analyzed data. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) note that to fulfil the criterion of confirmability, steps must be taken to help ensure that findings authentically reflect participants' experiences and perspectives.

To meet this criterion, the study followed a systematic and transparent data analysis process. As detailed in Section 4.6, the coding and thematic analysis procedures were meticulously outlined, providing a roadmap for data processing and interpretation. By extensively incorporating verbatim participant quotes in the findings, the study not only anchored its conclusions in participants' own words, but also enhanced the credibility of the research. Furthermore, the study contextualized its findings within existing literature, drawing comparative insights to underscore the relevance of the research within the realm of online tutor training. This triangulation of data sources and alignment with established scholarship enhances the confirmability of the findings.

4.7.4. The Criterion of Transferability

Transferability refers to “the researcher’s efforts to ensure that they provide enough contextual data about their research so that readers of their findings can relate those findings to their own contexts” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p.34). In this study, clear contextual descriptions of the study setting, participants, and research methods were provided, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the research context. Further,

clear connections to the broader educational context, including the online tutor training programme, the university's context, and the South African Higher Education landscape, were elucidated. By contextualizing the findings within this broader framework, readers are better equipped to extrapolate the implications of the research to similar settings, thus enhancing transferability. Moreover, the current study drew comparative insights by examining similar studies in the field, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how the findings align with or diverge from existing research.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

In any research study, ethical considerations are paramount to designing and conducting the research in an ethical and responsible manner that respects and protects the rights of participants. At the university where this study was conducted, adherence to ethical standards is overseen by a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), which governs all research activities. To meet ethical requirements, the researcher underwent ethics training sessions, which provided essential insights into ethical principles and guidelines. This training equipped the researcher with the knowledge and skills necessary to recognize and address any ethical issues that arose during the study. Additionally, ethical clearance was obtained by submitting the research proposal, participant information sheets (Appendix 2), and consent forms (Appendix 3) to the ethics committee for review.

The study received unconditional approval from the HREC, as evidenced by the ethical clearance certificate provided in Appendix 1. Throughout the research process, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, and their informed consent was obtained both orally and in writing. Participants were also explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. No incentives were offered for participation, ensuring that involvement was voluntary and not influenced by external factors.

Data collected was accessible only to the researcher, and participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study to safeguard their privacy. Ethical considerations guided the decision not to utilize recorded sessions as an alternative to live observation. While participants agreed to live observation, they did

not provide explicit consent for the use of recorded data for research purposes. To ensure ethical integrity, the researcher needed to obtain explicit consent for such secondary uses. Furthermore, the researcher respected participants' rights and ensured that their contributions were used in accordance with their expectations and institutional guidelines. Since training sessions are conducted under the ownership of the university, this necessitated the researcher to establish appropriate agreements to use the recordings for research.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter systematically presents and analyzes the findings derived from the semi-structured interviews conducted to address the research questions. Findings are presented in relation to each research question, substantiated by pertinent quotations from interview transcripts to anchor the insights in participants' authentic voices. The guiding RQs are as follows:

- What are the key components that contribute to the effectiveness of the TPLP?
- How do the various components of the TPLP interact with each other to influence the effectiveness of the programme?
- How can the TPLP be improved to better prepare tutors to facilitate successful online tutorials that promote student engagement and learning?

To explore these inquiries, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three (3) participants using the MS Teams platform. The interviewees included one (1) tutor, one (1) lecturer, and one (1) tutor trainer. The interview questions, detailed in Appendix 4, guided the discussions. In adherence to ethical standard, and to protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in presenting findings: **P1** for the tutor trainer (TPLP coordinator), **P2** for the lecturer (faculty tutor coordinator), and **P3** for the tutor.

The following are the categories that emanated strongly from research participants: Key components contributing to the effectiveness of the TPLP; Exploring interactions and contradictions within the TPLP; Enhancing the TPLP to transform online tutoring. These categories are thoroughly described, substantiated by transcript excerpts.

5.1. Key Components Contributing to the Effectiveness of the TPLP

5.1.1. Roles and Responsibilities in the TPLP

Online tutor training programmes are integral to HE, providing a structured framework for the continuous development and enhancement of tutors' skills, knowledge, and teaching methodologies. These programmes aim to equip tutors with the necessary tools and competencies to effectively engage with students and deliver high-quality online learning experiences. Within the TPLP, various roles contribute to this endeavour, including tutor trainers, lecturers, and tutors engaged in the programme.

The tutor trainer (TPLP coordinator) is responsible for designing and implementing a comprehensive curriculum tailored to tutors' specific needs. This includes developing relevant content aligned with the institution's objectives, staying abreast of emerging pedagogical trends, incorporating innovative teaching techniques in training sessions, and fostering an inclusive learning environment. **P1** concurs, stating,

As a TPLP coordinator, my primary responsibility is to develop tutor training content, ensuring tutors possess the essential tools and competencies for effective student engagement and high-quality education delivery ... I have to make sure that I've got relevant content that is necessary for the tutors to enhance their skills, knowledge, and pedagogical approaches. That means that I'm also expected to do a lot of research about the tutoring space ... I have to understand, actually, who the tutor is and what kind of skills the tutor needs.

In their capacity as the TPLP coordinator, **P1**'s primary duty is developing content for tutor training. This vital role is highlighted by **P2** – a lecturer engaged in the TPLP, stating, *“The TPLP coordinator plays a vital role in providing structure in the training”*. However, **P1**'s responsibilities extend beyond mere content creation; **P1** must ensure that training materials are relevant, meet the immediate needs of tutors enrolled in the TPLP, and align with the broader goals of the programme. To accomplish this, **P1** engages in extensive research within the tutoring domain, exploring topics such as the overarching role of tutoring, specific tutor responsibilities, and a comprehensive understanding of the diverse skills tutors need. **P1**'s commitment to *“do a lot of research about the tutoring space”* demonstrates their dedication to staying abreast of advancements in HE and online learning. This commitment reflects a learner-centric philosophy, evident in the emphasis on understanding *“who the tutor is and what kind of skills the tutor needs,”* thereby recognizing the individuality of tutors and the diverse skills essential for effective online tutoring. Moreover, the phrase *“ensuring tutors possess the essential tools and competencies”* signifies **P1**'s dedication to both theoretical understanding and practical, actionable skills that tutors can leverage in real-time educational settings. Ultimately, **P1**'s role integrates research, pedagogical insight, and a holistic understanding of individual tutor needs, collectively contributing to the effectiveness of the TPLP.

While tutor trainers play a crucial role in tutor training, their impact is significantly enhanced through collaborative efforts. Collaborating closely with tutor coordinators across various faculties, they serve as a vital link between the academic requirements of specific faculties and the practicalities of online tutoring. This collaborative relationship ensures that tutors are well-equipped to engage students effectively in the online learning environment. **P2**, a lecturer and faculty tutor coordinator, echoed this collaborative narrative and highlighted the responsibilities of faculty tutor coordinators, including strategic collaboration with the TPLP coordinator to align training content with the diverse disciplinary requirements. Reflecting on their role, **P2** stated,

I am actively involved in the coordination and scheduling of training sessions for tutors in my course. So, I liaise with the TPLP coordinator to organize and book sessions for my tutors so that they receive the necessary guidance to excel in their role ... I provide details about the number of tutors I need to be trained ... I provide tutor contact information so the tutors can be invited to the right online sessions. Before training, we sit down with the TPLP team to discuss our tutors' needs so that training content can be aligned with the requirements of the course/department and the specific duties assigned to the tutors.

P2's role entails scheduling training sessions for tutors within their designated course. Working in tandem with the TPLP coordinator, **P2** actively contributes to the planning of training sessions tailored to meet tutors' unique needs according to the disciplinary requirements. Collaboration is central to **P2**'s duties, as evidenced in their statement, *"I liaise with the TPLP coordinator to organize and book sessions for my tutors"*. The complexity of **P2**'s role unfolds further as they elaborate on the various tasks involved, including streamlining logistical aspects such as determining the number of tutors in need of training and providing trainers with tutors' contact information for session invitations. Furthermore, **P2** engages in pre-training discussions with the TPLP team to delve into the specific needs of the tutors associated with the course. As noted by **P2**, *"before training, we sit down with the TPLP team to discuss our tutors' needs so that training content can be aligned with the requirements of the course/department"*. This proactive approach signifies **P2**'s dedication to ensuring that training addresses the unique challenges and nuances within the discipline, rather than adopting a generic, one-size-fits-all approach.

This collaborative approach, characterized by shared responsibility for the relevance of training, serves as a strategic initiative to provide tutors with the requisite guidance and support needed to excel in their roles. **P1** echoed similar sentiments, stating,

I have to connect with the tutor coordinators in the faculties. They also help, especially with regard to content ... I also need to make sure that they approve some of the content we are offering.

This statement underscores the importance of a collaborative ecosystem for the effective implementation of the TPLP. This collaboration ensures that training content not only meets the standards set by the institution, but is also endorsed by the individuals well-acquainted with the diverse needs of tutors across different disciplines.

While the support structure provided by tutor trainers and coordinators is essential, the success of TPLP ultimately rests on the active involvement and commitment of the tutors themselves. As the primary beneficiaries of the programme, tutors are responsible for translating training insights into tangible, student-centered practices that foster engagement in online learning environments. Specialized training equips tutors with the necessary skills and strategies tailored to the nuances of online tutoring, empowering them to create interactive learning experiences. Moreover, beyond skill acquisition, the TPLP cultivates a culture of reflection among tutors, encouraging them to critically assess their teaching methods and embrace a commitment to ongoing professional improvement.

P3, a tutor engaged in the TPLP, highlighted the key responsibilities of tutors enrolled in the programme, ensuring that they acquire essential skills and evolve as dynamic educators. These responsibilities include actively participating in the programme, engaging in reflective practices, and incorporating innovative teaching methodologies into their practices. Reflecting on this transformative process, **P3** stated,

I heard about the TPLP from our school; they said they organized like a tutor training for tutors so that we can get to learn how to tutor ... Prior to training, I would just get into the tutorial class and solve questions, even if students did not participate. But after attending the training, I learnt that as a tutor, I am there to encourage independent learning ... When I started implementing the strategies I learnt,

students' participation also improved. I would work through the question with the students rather than just giving them the solution without them understanding ... I would ask them prompting questions to help them think on their own. I would arrange them in groups and facilitate discussions where they could share their ideas of how to solve a tutorial problem and engage in collaborative learning.

P3's transformative journey within the TPLP exemplifies the impact of active participation in training activities on subsequent implementation of acquired skills in tutorial sessions. Initially rooted in a traditional solution-oriented model, **P3** would *"just get into the tutorial class and solve questions, even if students did not participate"*. This observation highlights a prevalent pedagogical tendency among tutors that prioritizes providing answers over fostering student participation, and underscores the TPLP's imperative to address and reshape tutors' pre-existing practices toward more student-centered methodologies.

Active participation in training led to a fundamental shift in **P3's** perspective as evidenced by this statement: *"After attending the training, I learnt that as a tutor, I am there to encourage independent learning"*. This conscious shift from solution-centric teaching to encouraging independent thought processes is reflected in **P3's** adoption of new strategies. Notably, **P3** began implementing collaborative problem-solving techniques, prompting questions to stimulate critical thinking, and facilitating group discussions to encourage peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing and learning. This shifts demonstrate the TPLP's effectiveness in equipping tutors with practical tools for active learning and student engagement. These shifts illustrate a commitment to deeper student comprehension, moving beyond mere problem-solving to foster deeper comprehension. **P2** further corroborates the TPLP's impact, stating, *"I've personally observed tutors use the active learning techniques covered in training; one strategy they make use of is prompting questions ... instead of simply providing answers, they guide students by prompting discussion and encouraging them to articulate their thoughts on how to approach different tutorial questions"*. This synchronicity between **P2's** observations and **P3's** experiences highlights the tangible impact of the TPLP on reshaping tutoring practice and fostering engaging learning environments.

Moreover, **P3**'s remarks demonstrate reflective practices, a dynamic responsibility within the TPLP that enables tutors to critically assess their teaching strategies and make informed adjustments to optimize student learning: *"When I started implementing the strategies I learnt, students' participation also improved"*. **P3**'s awareness of improved student participation after implementing new strategies indicates active translation of insights gained from training into tangible student-centered practices. It also showcases **P3**'s conscious awareness of the shift in their approach and its positive impact on student participation – a clear manifestation of reflective practice. In essence, **P3**'s journey symbolizes a commitment to self-evaluation and continuous improvement, actively adapting teaching methods from passive, didactic lecturing to an engaging and collaborative style. The alignment between training practices and those **P3** applied reinforces the TPLP's effectiveness in shaping tutors into facilitators of dynamic and participatory learning environments.

To gain deeper insight into the TPLP, it is imperative to delve into the day-to-day experiences of its key TPLP stakeholders, particularly the tutors engaged in the programme. This investigation of tutor experiences encompasses the array of challenges and uncertainties they encounter before, during, or after TPLP training. By understanding these intricacies, we can better evaluate the TPLP's direct impact (transformative influence and effectiveness) on its primary beneficiaries – the tutors.

5.1.2. The Tutor Experience in the TPLP

Online tutoring presents a myriad of challenges and uncertainties for tutors, ranging from fears of public speaking to uncertainties regarding pedagogical competence and fostering student engagement in online environments. These challenges are particularly prevalent among tutors with limited teaching experience or those new to the role. Overcoming these hurdles is essential for effective tutoring, as they can impact tutors' confidence and their ability to create engaging learning environments. The TPLP addresses these challenges by focusing on effective communication, student engagement techniques, and active learning strategies, equipping tutors with the necessary tools and fostering confidence and competence.

P1, the tutor trainer, emphasizes the pivotal role of tutor training programmes in alleviating anxieties and nurturing confidence, empowering tutors to overcome their initial apprehensions and develop pedagogical competence. **P1** highlights that for tutors with limited teaching experience, the TPLP is transformative, providing a supportive framework instrumental in building tutors' confidence and enabling them to embrace their responsibilities. These were **P1**'s remarks:

Most of our tutors are senior undergraduate students. But we also have postgraduate students, who are doing their honors or masters ... involved in some sort of tutoring. So in terms of experience, most of them will tell you that I've never taught anything in my whole life. I don't even know where to start. Some of them will even tell you that I'm struggling with my social skills. I'm an introvert, so I don't even know how I'm going to interact with my students. So, training for them is very much helpful ... that is where then you give them that hope that 'you'll make it.' You don't have to worry.

Reflecting on tutors' diverse experiences within the TPLP, **P1** underscores the significance of training for tutors with limited pedagogical backgrounds. This diversity is evident in the varied levels of expertise, with some tutors expressing anxiety about a lack of prior teaching experience: *"I've never taught anything in my whole life. I don't even know where to start."* Others, particularly introverts, worry about engaging effectively with students: *"I'm struggling with my social skills. I'm an introvert, so I don't even know how I'm going to interact with my students."* Therefore, **P1**'s insights illuminate the tutor trainer's role beyond technical training, encompassing a supportive presence that instils confidence in novice tutors: *"You give them that hope that 'you'll make it'. You don't have to worry."* **P1**'s commitment is apparent in empowering tutors to succeed in their role, recognizing their potential as future university educators.

P1's narrative also highlights the TPLP's alignment with broader national initiatives, such as the DHET and UCDP, which aim to support, strengthen, and enhance tutors in their role as early career academics. This alignment underscores a collective effort to nurture resilient and confident tutors within the expansive landscape of HE professional development, with the TPLP playing a role in this ecosystem. This was supported by **P3**'s remarks,

I never thought I would be able to teach because I'm quite introverted, and the idea of standing in front of a class, like, terrified me. The TPLP provided me with the tools and support to overcome my anxieties. The training sections focusing on effective communication and student engagement really helped me build the confidence to interact with students ... That's one thing that I actually gained from the programme. It was a boost on my confidence ... of knowing what to do as a tutor ... not feeling as if you are inadequate or less prepared.

P3's comments vividly illustrate the transformative impact of the TPLP, particularly in empowering introverted tutors to embrace a facilitator's role. Initially paralyzed by the daunting prospect of speaking in front of an audience and plagued with fears of inadequate preparation and ineffective communication, **P3**'s candid admission captures the essence of this initial struggle: *"I never thought I would be able to teach because I'm quite introverted, and the idea of standing in front of a class, like, terrified me"*. However, the TPLP emerges as a vital pillar of support, offering a way to overcome fears and bolster confidence – a narrative likely resonating with a broader audience of tutors who share similar apprehensions. Furthermore, **P3** credits the TPLP with providing *"the tools and support to overcome my anxieties"*, indicating a nuanced and tailored approach that addresses both practical and emotional needs of introverted tutors. By strategically integrating training content, particularly emphasizing on *"effective communication and student engagement"*, the TPLP equips tutors with practical strategies to manage tutorial interactions with newfound confidence.

The impact of targeted training is twofold: **P3** acknowledges that these skills *"helped me build the confidence to interact with students"*, while also fostering a sense of pedagogical competence. The phrase *"knowing what to do as a tutor"* replaces **P3**'s initial feelings of inadequacy with a profound sense of preparedness, empowerment, and assured capability, showcasing the TPLP's transformative nature. By providing a safe and supportive learning environment, the TPLP empowers hesitant tutors to confront their anxieties and discover their potential as educators.

In the broader context of tutor experiences within the TPLP, **P2** echoes the sentiments expressed by **P1** and **P3** regarding the transformative impact of the programme:

Training and ongoing support from the TPLP coordinator positively impact tutors. Tutors seem more confident at facilitating tutorials. When coordinators actively engage with tutors and provide continuous feedback, it enhances the overall quality of online tutorials.

P2's viewpoint underscores the importance of continuous engagement in fostering tutors' resilience when navigating the challenges of facilitating online tutorials. This insight reinforces the notion that the TPLP not only equips tutors with practical skills, but also builds the self-assurance necessary to implement these strategies in real tutorial scenarios. Essentially, **P2's** perspective highlights how ongoing support contributes to enhancing the overall quality of online learning experiences.

The TPLP's transformative impact is twofold: it nurtures technical expertise while fostering the self-belief needed to wield it effectively; anxieties evolve into confidence, uncertainties into competence, and introverted tutors into empowered educators. Beyond personal development, the TPLP serves as a model for inclusive learning practices, offering a blueprint that tutors can readily implement in their own tutorials. As articulated by **P2**,

After training, tutors better handled challenging situations in online tutorials ... they demonstrated strategies learned in the programme, showcasing the practical applicability of the TPLP's focus on inclusive learning environments.

The exploration of tutor experiences within the TPLP reveals that these experiences unfold within diverse dynamics shaped by the unique contexts of different faculties and class sizes. To maximize its transformative potential and ensure consistent value across the university, the TPLP must tailor its approach to the unique dynamics of various faculties and class sizes, acknowledging their influence on tutor experiences. Since the TPLP serves tutors from different faculties, each with distinct pedagogical needs and student demographics, collaborative efforts are essential for effective tutor training. **P1** underscores this need and underscores the importance of engaging with faculty tutor coordinators to align TPLP training with discipline-specific needs, stating:

In tutor training we need all the stakeholders because the faculties are not the same. For example, you find that the faculty of Science is not the same as Humanities in terms of how they do their tutoring.

P1 emphasizes that collaborating with valued partners such as lecturers and tutor coordinators is crucial for understanding the distinct tutoring methods in different faculties and tailoring training accordingly. This collaborative approach is key given that faculty-specific dynamics significantly influence training needs and the overall effectiveness of the TPLP across diverse academic settings. **P3** agrees that certain faculties have particular characteristics, stating:

Some courses or faculties ... don't really have, for example, calculations .. more on literature-type of writing ... If training is generic, a person who does not understand the mathematical part is unlikely to give effective solutions for how you can approach that tutorial ... how you can go about a calculation-based question.

P3 provides insight into the influence of faculty dynamics on tutor experiences, suggesting that generic training may not adequately address the varied needs of tutors across different disciplines. For example, tutors in the humanities often struggle with facilitating discussions and critical thinking, while their counterparts in the sciences may struggle with hands-on demonstrations and problem-solving. Without knowledge of faculty-specific approaches, tutor trainers may struggle to provide effective solutions. Given these dynamics, the TPLP must customize training to meet the unique needs of each discipline, enhancing tutor effectiveness in diverse academic settings.

Beyond faculty dynamics, the size of tutorial groups emerges as another critical factor influencing tutors' experiences. Challenges in large classes differ significantly from those in smaller, more intimate groups. While smaller groups often allow for more personalized engagement with students, larger classes force tutors to grapple with managing diverse student needs, fostering engagement, and providing effective feedback on a larger scale. As articulated by **P3**,

A smaller group is much more manageable ... you are able to at least work with each student on a somewhat one-on-one basis ... if it's a large group, then it becomes quite challenging ... some students may

not participate at all ... With the large group, I think you would have to use a different approach.

Understanding the impact of class size on tutoring dynamics, as highlighted by **P1**, is essential to providing comprehensive support. Smaller groups encourage more personalized interaction, while larger classes present challenges such as limited student participation. Successfully navigating this diversity requires flexibility and adaptation, pushing tutors to tailor their strategies to the specific dynamics of the group they encounter. Consequently, the TPLP actively prepares tutors to effectively manage both small and large groups by utilizing a variety of student engagement techniques suited to the unique characteristics of each class.

Furthermore, **P1** emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the diversity within institutions and the broader South African context, highlighting the complexity of tutoring dynamics. **P1** commented:

It is also important for me to understand that the tutoring is happening from the South African context ... I also have to consider the institution where the tutoring is going to be done ... Who are our students? Where do they come from? Their economic and social backgrounds, the schools that they have attended.

P1 emphasizes that tutoring is not an isolated or uniform experience. **P1** not only addresses the different faculties with their specific pedagogical requirements, but also recognizes the importance of context, both within and beyond the university walls. This demonstrates **P1**'s commitment to preparing tutors for the different contexts in South African HE by tailoring training strategies to the specific economic, social, and educational backgrounds of both tutors and students. This holistic approach demonstrates the TPLP's commitment to culturally responsive tutor training and to instilling contextual awareness in tutors, necessary for fostering a truly inclusive and transformative online learning environment. In line with this nuanced understanding, it is clear that the TPLP does not adhere to a one-size-fits-all model, but functions as a flexible framework. This flexibility allows the programme to tailor its support to the diverse needs of tutors across the university and empowers tutors to navigate the unique demands of their respective contexts.

5.1.3. Resources Shaping the TPLP

The increasing demand for online learning underscores the need for tailored training programmes that equip tutors with the essential skills and resources vital for success in the virtual classroom. In response to this evolving landscape, the TPLP strategically integrates various resources to comprehensively prepare tutors for the nuances of online instruction. While traditional methods have their merits, effective training programmes for online tutors must carefully combine resources, spanning from online platforms to workshop content to instructional materials, to facilitate knowledge-building and skill development among tutors. Additionally, these resources serve to cultivate the expertise and confidence tutors require to navigate their complex roles. An in-depth exploration of the specific resources utilized in the TPLP is essential to illuminate the programme's effectiveness and pinpoint areas for improvement.

In the dynamic landscape of online education, the foundation is laid through the integration of relevant technologies and platforms. Identifying platforms that resonate with the target audience and offer functionalities for interactive sessions, collaborative activities, and real-time feedback is crucial for success. The TPLP strategically utilizes MS Teams to host synchronous training workshops and foster real-time interaction between tutors and trainers. This deliberate choice ensures that tutors have a consistent and familiar environment for their learning journey, as they are likely to use the same platform to deliver their tutorials. As **P1** explained,

When we get the list from the tutor coordinator, we send invitations to the tutors with a MS Teams link. Because, actually, that is the platform we are using across the institution. Some of them, they've been using it to attend lectures, and will use it for their own tutorials ... they can see some ways in which we use it and also try it with their students.

P1's comments underscore the critical role of platform selection within the TPLP. The deliberate choice of the institution's preferred video conferencing tool for synchronous training reflects several important considerations. First, its widespread usage across the institution ensures a seamless transition for tutors from training to tutor-student interactions, thereby minimizing technological hurdles. Additionally, **P1's** observation that *"they can see some ways in which we use it and also try it with their students"*

illustrates that the deliberate use of MS Teams in workshops encourages tutors to explore and experiment with strategies for real-time tutorial interactions, empowering them to confidently apply their facilitation skills in virtual classrooms.

In addition to the strategic selection of platforms, the TPLP integrates structured pedagogical strategies into training workshops which not only serve as guideposts for effective classroom interaction, but also provide best practices for managing student engagement. However, the TPLP is not solely rooted in generic pedagogical principles; it extends to specific online teaching strategies, including sections that teach tutors how to use online tools to promote engagement, facilitate dynamic asynchronous discussions, and build rapport in a virtual setting. As **P2** astutely noted,

The emphasis on pedagogical strategies and interactive learning within the TPLP stands out ... emphasis on meaningful learning is evident in how tutors apply diverse pedagogical approaches in their tutorials ... Tutors who have undergone training often excel in creating engaging online environments ... they utilize various online tools and activities to encourage student participation and foster a sense of community in the virtual space, making learning more engaging.

P2's insights further illuminate the TPLP's emphasis on interactive learning, with a focus on tailored strategies for the online teaching environment that make the learning experience more captivating. This underscores the TPLP's commitment to going beyond conventional pedagogical principles by equipping tutors with strategies to leverage online tools to enhance student engagement, foster a meaningful learning experience, and build rapport in online tutorials. **P2** observes that tutors trained in the TPLP move beyond generic methods, instead skilfully utilizing online tools and activities to encourage participation, build community, and ultimately, create engaging learning environments. By prioritizing interactive learning and equipping tutors with a diverse pedagogical toolkit, the TPLP empowers them to confidently handle the diverse challenges of online tutorials, transforming them into vibrant spaces for meaningful engagement and collaboration.

P2's emphasis on interactive learning within the TPLP materializes through the strategic integration of tools such as Mentimeter, showcasing the programme's commitment to engaging and empowering tutors in their learning journey. Leveraging

the interactive affordances of Mentimeter as noted by **P3**, enhances tutors' learning experiences by transcending passive observation and encouraging active participation in co-creation and collaborative brainstorming:

We used Mentimeter for some activities. I hadn't used it before, but they showed us how to use it. Like one activity in the beginning was around, like, tutor roles and responsibilities. Just trying to get a sense of our understanding so that we could collaborate ... we all discussed and got to understand different ways of thinking about our role ... it was very motivating and fun actually, yeah.

P3's insights echo the transformative impact highlighted by **P1** and **P2**, underscoring the purposeful selection of online platforms for fostering interactive learning within the TPLP. **P3's** narrative highlights the dynamic role of Mentimeter as a tool that actively engages tutors in their learning through activities that stimulate engagement and meaningful discussion among tutors. Despite initial unfamiliarity with Mentimeter, **P3** highlights its effective integration into training, providing a platform for collective exploration and creating a "*motivating and fun*" environment for tutors. **P3's** experience reflects the collaborative nature of the Mentimeter platform, where tutors build understanding through active dialogue and diverse insights. Although not explicitly framed as a tool for practicing online facilitation skills, Mentimeter offers an interactive platform for tutors to experiment with various online engagement strategies. This hands-on approach reinforces learning, providing valuable insights into online facilitation while demonstrating a practical application of the theory covered in training. By fostering collaboration, exploration, and practical application, Mentimeter plays a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of the TPLP, reinforcing tutors' agency in skills development and preparing them for success in the virtual classroom.

The TPLP harnesses dynamic engagement through interactive tools while strategically integrating asynchronous platforms to cater to varied learning preferences. Beyond real-time collaboration, the institutional LMS's asynchronous features provide spaces for ongoing discussions and reflection activities. **P1** emphasizes the significance of the asynchronous tutor short course, highlighting its adaptability to diverse schedules. This setup allows tutors to engage with instructional materials at their own pace, fostering a deeper understanding of the content:

We have a short learning programme that is asynchronous ... we record the voiceover PowerPoints to be as short as possible ... we use another interactive tool to add interactive questions in between ... then that way then it becomes engaging, even though it's asynchronous ... If tutors have not paid attention to particular content, then there will be a question that will make them to go back ... read that content again so that they can be able to answer those questions.

P1 underscores the purposeful design of the tutor short course in asynchronous format to deepen engagement and understanding. Emphasizing the careful construction of voiceover PowerPoints, **P1** highlights the infusion of interactive content questions within the presentations, transforming asynchronous learning into an active and participatory process. As articulated by **P1**, this deliberate strategy maintains engagement and functions as a self-assessment tool, compelling tutors to revisit content for a more comprehensive grasp. The intentional blend of asynchronous learning with interactive components exemplifies a nuanced approach to online education, where the chosen platform is not only a conduit for information delivery, but a dynamic tool shaping tutor competency. In essence, the short course design enables tutors to engage with instructional materials at their own pace, ensuring active participation even in an asynchronous setting. This highlights the TPLP's commitment to creating a versatile learning environment tailored to the unique needs of tutors.

However, tutor **P3** offers a contrasting perspective regarding the value of the short course. While **P1** commends the thoughtful design of the tutor short course, **P3**'s reservations prompt questions about its alignment with tutors' expectations:

I'm trying to recall what the short course was on ... Honestly, I don't think it was that much helpful. Because I feel like, you know, it's just a bunch of questions ... that you just had to answer ... I didn't really see how they were helping. It just felt like it was something that you just had to do, you know ... But it's not really that helpful.

P3's reflection on the tutor short course is marked by scepticism (*"Honestly, I don't think it was that much helpful"*), as they express doubts about its direct relevance in developing online tutoring skills. The disconnect **P3** experiences between the course content and its real-world application in online tutorials raises concerns about its

perceived relevance, as stated here: *“it’s just a bunch of questions ... that you just had to answer”*. **P3**’s perspective suggests that, for some tutors, the short course might be viewed as an obligatory hurdle rather than a meaningful learning experience.

This perceived lack of relevance highlights a potential misalignment between the content of the course and the practical tutoring skills needed for effective tutoring. **P3**’s feedback signals the need for further investigation and potential adjustments to the course to ensure genuine engagement. It also underscores the importance of diversifying resources to accommodate different needs within the TPLP. These insights serve as a reminder that a one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable for all tutors. While some tutors may thrive on question-based approaches, others like **P3** may require more active, hands-on activities to feel engaged and motivated. This suggests that the TPLP could benefit from exploring alternative formats to cater to a broader range of individual preferences to maximize the benefit for all participants.

To maintain its status as a thriving hub for online learning and tutor professional development, the TPLP must prioritize the creation and maintenance of a strong community. Exploring the complex dynamics that contribute to or hinder the development of this community sheds light on its effectiveness.

5.1.4. Cultivating Community in the TPLP

Recognizing the pivotal role of community in fostering knowledge sharing, peer support, and sustained engagement, the TPLP prioritizes cultivating a vibrant learning ecosystem. This initiative instils a profound sense of belonging and shared purpose among tutors, empowering them to navigate the unique challenges of online facilitation. Exploration of community dynamics within the TPLP offers valuable insights into its effectiveness, encompassing interactions within dedicated online forums, collaborative resource repositories, and social events aimed at fostering connections and camaraderie. By prioritizing these initiatives, the TPLP transitions from individual learning journeys to collaborative endeavours where tutors learn from each other, support one another's growth, and contribute to a collective vision of excellence in online education. However, despite these efforts, challenges such as feelings of isolation and lack of recognition within faculties persist among some tutors. As expressed by **P1**,

Most of the time the tutors are neglected in the faculty. They are the teaching support staff, but ... they are not even in the teaching and learning community meetings. In our TLC meetings ... we hardly speak about tutors. So you can see that they are the most neglected. No one cares. So the training, that is where they get to see that at least somebody cares, somebody looks after me ...

P1 vividly depicts tutors' consistent feelings of neglect and undervaluation within their faculties, positioning them as marginalized entities in academic discourse despite their crucial role in enhancing students' academic success. **P1** underscores how tutors, despite serving as integral teaching support staff, often find themselves excluded from Teaching and Learning meetings. The resolute assertion that "*no one cares*" highlights the emotional toll of this neglect on tutors, contrasted by the relief expressed when receiving training "*where they get to see that at least somebody cares, somebody looks after me.*" **P1**'s remarks therefore underscore the critical role of the TPLP in fostering a sense of recognition, belonging, appreciation, and care to a group often overlooked in their broader academic context. Additionally, **P1** emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and recognizing tutors' efforts in community building. Beyond boosting morale, this recognition communicates the value of tutors' work and cultivates a profound sense of belonging, as articulated by **P3**:

In a way, I feel like as a tutor, you also help to increase the pass rates. But sometimes, I feel like I am irrelevant ... like my work is not even recognized, although I am doing positive stuff. The lecturers are the ones who are always getting the credits when the courses do well.

P3 delves into the psychological nuances of community-building, revealing a deep-seated sense of irrelevance. Tutor **P3**, feeling undervalued, states, "... *I feel like I am irrelevant ... like my work is not even recognized.*" The stark contrast, "*The lecturers are the ones who are always getting the credits,*" highlights a perceived disparity in acknowledgment for contributions to successful courses. This underscores tutors' invisibility within the broader academic community, signalling a critical need for the institution to address issues of recognition and belonging among tutors. This perspective highlights a fundamental aspect that the TPLP aims to address – not merely imparting pedagogical skills, but also serving as a platform for tutors to feel

acknowledged and integral within the educational community. By recognizing their valuable contributions, the TPLP empowers tutors, unlocking their full potential to contribute to a thriving online learning ecosystem.

The TPLP implements various initiatives to foster community, one of which includes quarterly Community of Practice (CoP) sessions. According to **P1**, these sessions are a vital platform for ongoing engagement and dialogue, enabling tutors to openly share experiences and discuss challenges. **P1** elaborates, stating,

The quarterly CoP's that we do, which are the community of practice, where we call tutors back maybe after three months just to find out what is happening ... just to find out how they are finding the tutoring. Are there specific things that still need to be sorted ... it's more of a conversation; we just talk to them rather than presenting content.

According to **P1**, CoP sessions play a crucial role in facilitating knowledge exchange and fortifying tutors' sense of community. This regular engagement demonstrates the TPLP's commitment to tutors beyond initial training. The conversational approach taken in CoP's indicates a shift from a formal, content-driven interaction to an open dialogue: "*we just talk to them rather than presenting content*," aligning with the ethos of a true community of practice that extends beyond training. **P2** reinforces the vital role of continuous engagement, stating,

Collaboration and continuous engagement are so important. Not just the initial training that is offered to tutors, but creating a community of practice that extends beyond the training sessions.

P2 echoes **P1**'s sentiments, highlighting a shared understanding within the TPLP that effective community building necessitates more than one-time events or workshops, i.e., ongoing engagement is necessary to sustain the community. **P2**'s remarks emphasize a holistic approach and signify a commitment to fostering an enduring community where tutors engage in an ongoing exchange of ideas and experiences. **P2** recognizes that the effectiveness of the TPLP is intrinsically linked to the continual collaboration and engagement of its participants over an extended period. To ensure this continuous engagement and ongoing support beyond the formal training sessions, **P2** took a proactive step, stating "*We have a space on the course site, a group*

discussion board, where tutors can collaborate, ask questions, and share resources”.

P2’s commitment to collaborative learning is evident in using the LMS to create a dedicated course site where tutors can ask questions, engage in meaningful discussions, and share resources, promoting peer-to-peer interactions. This dynamic space facilitates tutor connectivity, collaboration, and the sharing of challenges, advice, and best practices. **P2** therefore shows their commitment to fostering a culture of collaboration and knowledge exchange among tutors. In addition to the training content provided by the tutor trainer, tutors can access curated resources and contribute to the repository of teaching tools and best practices. This reflects a holistic approach to tutors’ development, integrating ongoing support, collaborative learning, and community building within the TPLP. This approach acknowledges and addresses the diverse needs of tutors, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the programme.

Fostering a robust community within the TPLP extends beyond tutor-tutor interactions; it involves cultivating ongoing engagement and collaborative partnerships between tutor trainers and faculty tutor coordinators. **P1** highlights the pivotal role of such collaboration in tailoring training to meet unique disciplinary needs, emphasizing:

It is very important that you bring all the expertise ... making sure that you involve all of them in your training .. at least you'll have that variety in your training, rather than just having just one way of doing things ... So collaboration is key in whatever we are doing in this space.

P1’s insights reflect a keen awareness that for the TPLP to remain effective, it must move beyond a one-size-fits-all model, adapting to the distinctive requirements of various disciplines. This highlights the imperative for a collaborative ethos, where the collective expertise of tutor trainers and faculty coordinators offers a tailored learning journey for tutors in diverse disciplines. The phrase “*collaboration is key in whatever we are doing in this space*” denotes a strategic approach to ensure that the TPLP remains dynamic, adaptive, and effective across the institution. However, despite the recognized importance of collaboration in aligning the TPLP with the institutional goals, significant navigational challenges exist. As **P1** points out,

... some of the tutor coordinators and the faculties, they give you information late and they neglect the programme. They don't take the

programme seriously ... you find that some of the tutor coordinators, they don't look after their tutors very well.

P1 sheds light on navigational challenges in the collaborative journey to foster community within the TPLP, citing delays and neglect from some tutor coordinators. This suggests a potential disconnect between stakeholders, with some faculty tutor coordinators seemingly undervaluing the TPLP and neglecting their responsibility towards tutors. Despite commendable initiatives by the TPLP, fostering a thriving community requires commitment from all stakeholders. The lack of support from certain stakeholders becomes a hurdle in aligning the TPLP with institutional goals, emphasizing the complexity of community-building within the programme. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts beyond individual lecturers, and will enable the TPLP to strengthen its community and ensure its sustained effectiveness.

Beyond the dynamics of community-building, delving into the interconnectedness of TPLP components, and examining their interactions and contradictions, unveils further complexities that shape its effectiveness.

5.2. Exploring Interactions and Contradictions Within the TPLP

Online tutor training programmes, like the TPLP, create a dynamic environment characterized by a multitude of interactions and contradictions. While these programmes foster a sense of belonging, collaboration and knowledge exchange within CoP's, they also present challenges that require thorough investigation. Understanding these interactions and contradictions is paramount for comprehending the intricacies of tutor training. Therefore, this subsection explores the complex web of interactions and contradictions inherent in the TPLP, shedding light on factors that either facilitate or hinder its effectiveness.

5.2.1. Interactions Between Tutor Trainers and Faculty Tutor Coordinators

Navigating the intricate collaboration between TPLP tutor trainers and faculty tutor coordinators reveals both its critical importance and inherent challenges. **P1** emphasized the complexities of tailoring training to specific disciplines, stating,

It's very difficult to work with people ... to work with particular modules in the faculty ... But I think we really need to try to get to know exactly what is happening there, because they also need support.

P1's candid reflections unveil a nuanced interaction between tutor trainers and faculty tutor coordinators in the TPLP. The difficulties highlighted could stem from communication gaps or differing priorities, potentially impeding efforts to tailor training content and cater to diverse tutors' needs. Exploring these challenges from both tutor trainer and faculty coordinator perspectives is essential for deeper understanding.

Despite acknowledging the complexities of working across diverse faculties, **P1** also underscores the potential benefits of collaboration. **P1** underscores the delicate balance required to successfully navigate this collaboration to enhance the TPLP's effectiveness. The phrase, *"they also need support"* emphasizes the reciprocal nature of this relationship – tutor trainers gain insights into specific disciplinary needs, while faculties leverage the TPLP's expertise to enhance tutor support. The statement, *"we really need to try to get to know exactly what is actually happening there"* also suggests signals a commitment to bridge the gap and facilitate a more effective partnership. Even amidst challenges, **P1** recognizes the vital role of ongoing dialogue with tutor coordinators to assess tutor preparedness and provide continuous support, stating:

... the tutor coordinators, they will tell you that the tutors have told them that they really enjoy the training, that some of even indicate that they should have done the training even before they start tutoring.

P1's comments highlight a positive aspect of the TPLP, indicating its potential impact on tutors' readiness and effectiveness in facilitating online tutorials. According to **P1**, tutor coordinators serve as a vital communication channel, responsible for relaying tutor feedback and suggesting improvements to address faculty-specific needs. However, it is important to acknowledge that **P1**'s remarks don't imply sole reliance on a single communication channel for gathering feedback. Adding to this understanding, **P3** notes that tutor trainers employ evaluation forms to capture tutors' perceptions of the TPLP training. **P3** states,

We were given evaluation forms to complete after the training and share our feedback ... so the team could find out our true perception of the training itself ... the content and delivery of everything.

This multi-channel approach to feedback collection ensures a thorough understanding of tutors' perspectives, facilitating ongoing improvements to the TPLP. Recognizing both the challenges and potential of the interaction between trainers and coordinators is essential for optimizing the TPLP's impact. By prioritizing open communication, leveraging multiple feedback channels, and exploring diverse perspectives, the TPLP builds stronger partnerships with faculty and effectively supports tutors across all disciplines. However, the success of the TPLP hinges not only on communication between tutor trainers and faculty coordinators, but also on addressing the nuanced needs of all stakeholders. Therefore, exploring the broader network of interactions within the TPLP is essential to uncover the challenges and opportunities embedded in its collaborative structure.

The TPLP operates as a complex network of interconnected stakeholders, each contributing significantly to the delivery of comprehensive tutor training. However, challenges arise when attempting to tailor training to diverse faculties within this structure. This intricate interplay is apparent in the approach discussed by **P1**, where training is customized based on specific subjects and tutors, facilitating a more effective transfer of knowledge and skills to varied tutoring contexts. P1's observations highlight the necessity of understanding the unique contexts of each faculty:

For example, in the faculty of Science, they do a lot of practical work ... most of their tutors facilitate practical work ... the Engineering faculty is totally different because it's more technical in nature it is important that you understand how tutoring can be done in that space.

Adapting training to diverse faculty contexts necessitates recognizing the specific demands of various disciplines, such as the emphasis of “*practical work*” in science, and the “*technical nature*” in engineering. This highlights the challenge of reconciling standardized training with the need for faculty-specific adaptations to meet varied pedagogical requirements. While tailoring training content across faculties aims to bridge this gap, it also introduces tension between maintaining programme structure

and addressing faculty-specific needs. **P1** describes the need to “*understand how tutoring can be done in that space*”, indicating an ongoing effort to strike a balance between specialized training and programme feasibility. However, **P1** notes a tension in trainer-coordinator collaboration, particularly the challenge of striking a balance between comprehensive training and ensuring content remains manageable for tutors, i.e., avoiding information overload:

They will want to put everything there ... they forget that tutors are also students. If we make the programme content-heavy, then it will be difficult for the tutors to finish ... So you just have to choose what you think is important ... because they will want to put everything.

P1's comments, “*You just have to choose what you think is important ... because they will want to put everything*”, unveil a key tension in tailoring TPLP training – balancing comprehensiveness with tutor workload. While faculty coordinators aim to equip tutors with thorough knowledge, they might push for expansive content. **P1** raises concerns about information overload, emphasizing that training content should not overwhelm tutors, reflecting competing priorities between the two groups. **P1**, understanding the limitations of tutor time and capacity, advocates for strategic selection of essential information. This delicate balance, as articulated by **P1**, underscores the ongoing challenge of maintaining the integrity of training content while ensuring that training remains accessible, achievable, and effective in preparing tutors for diverse and dynamic tutoring environments. **P2** agrees with this perspective, acknowledging the challenge of balancing input from different stakeholders and prioritizing specific content, ensuring that all perspectives are duly considered.

When you work with different people who bring different expertise to the space ... you must expect that you won't agree on everything.

Addressing this tension requires open communication between all stakeholders. By acknowledging the needs of both faculty and tutors, the TPLP can develop tailored training that is informative yet manageable, empowering tutors without creating undue burden. This collaborative approach is essential to ensure that the TPLP remains effective and sustainable, meeting the diverse needs of all involved stakeholders.

5.2.2. Contradictions: Practical Training vs Resource Constraints

Investigating tutor perceptions of the TPLP reveals both positive affirmations and constructive suggestions. Dawn to the TPLP through their school's recommendation, **P3**'s reflection on their experience encapsulates a notable satisfaction with the programme, surpassing initial expectations:

That's something that I wanted to learn: like how best can we get students to take part in whatever discussion that's happening? ... to involve them in the process without feeling as if you, the tutor, are just presenting information all the time? ... it's a bit daunting when you have students, and you see is just names on the screen.... But my expectation was met as I was able to, like, get students to engage.

P3's comments suggest a crucial aspiration among tutors – mastering techniques to foster student engagement. Their affirming statement, “my expectation was met as I was able to, like, get students to engage,” hints at the TPLP's potential in addressing this need by equipping tutors with the skills to create interactive and participatory online learning environments. However, it is paramount to recognize that **P3**'s experience may not be universally shared, necessitating exploration of varied perspectives among TPLP for a more comprehensive understanding.

While tutors value the theoretical knowledge gained through the TPLP, a common desire surfaces – the need to translate this theoretical foundation into practical skills before encountering real-world tutoring situations. Addressing this need for practical application emerges as a potential avenue to enhance the perceived effectiveness of TPLP training. **P3** echoes this sentiment, stating,

They are quite detailed in getting you to understand the role of a tutor and what you're supposed to do. But I kind of feel like they are rushed ... there's just a lot of information that you're given, and it's done in a short period of time ... most of the time information was just being relayed, but not really being shown. Hence I mentioned that if they would have a workshop where there's more time ... But because of the time constraint, it's just like, you know ... So perhaps if it's possible, to elongate the duration and actually get onto the practical part of it, not just being given information.

The concern expressed by **P3**, *“I kind of feel like they are rushed ... there's just a lot of information that you're given, and it's done in a short period of time”*, echoes **P1**'s earlier concerns about information overload. It suggests that while tutors value the comprehensive theoretical foundation provided in training, they seek opportunities to bridge the gap and translate this knowledge into tangible skills. Addressing this perceived disconnect between theory and practice is crucial for enhancing the TPLP's effectiveness. **P3**'s emphasis on the need to *“get onto the practical part of it, not just being given information”* underscores the potential benefits of incorporating formats such as role-playing, case studies, or even peer-to-peer practice sessions in the TPLP. These experiential elements could substantially deepen learning and empower tutors to confidently apply their knowledge.

However, extending the training duration, as suggested by **P3**, poses potential challenges such as time constraints. Striking a balance between knowledge acquisition and practical application, while respecting time constraints, is key. This highlights the need for creative solutions beyond simply extending training duration, which might not be feasible for all tutors. Therefore, exploring strategies like workshops focused on specific practical skills could offer flexibility. Additionally, integrating practical elements within the existing timeframe through activities like mini-simulations could be explored. Through a flexible and responsive approach, the TPLP can empower tutors with both theoretical grounding and practical skills, preparing them for confident and effective facilitation in their role. This need for practical application is further underscored by **P2**, the lecturer, who notes a similar gap in hands-on training. **P2** asserts,

... the practical aspect of training is limited ... the hands-on application of the knowledge gained during the training. Obviously, the trainers tried to engage tutors in discussions, drawing on their experiences ... but if there were opportunities for tutors to practice facilitating some discussions and getting feedback, it would've helped ... it's not just about understanding concepts theoretically, but having the hands-on experience before you are thrown into it.

Echoing **P3**'s concerns, **P2** highlights the perceived limited practical aspect of TPLP training. **P2**'s critique, *“having the hands-on experience before you are thrown into it”*,

emphasizes the need for bridging the theory-practice gap. **P2** acknowledges the value of discussions and sharing experiences, but stresses the crucial role of “*practice*” and “*getting feedback*” for cultivating practical skills. This viewpoint, resonating among both tutors and lecturers, accentuates the urgency of exploring alternatives to complement theoretical knowledge, empowering tutors for complex real-world online tutoring.

Recognizing the significant void in the TPLP training process, **P1**, the tutor trainer, underscores the absence of practical training exercises and the challenges in implementing them due to resource constraints, stating:

One thing that is actually missing ... the actual practice where the tutors get an actual time to practice how to tutor, which we call micro-teaching – most of the time we don't do it because it is time consuming ... most of them feel like maybe after they've learnt the content, it is important that we give them a chance, maybe five minutes to come and present something ... And then get feedback on how they present their lesson. So the practical part, I think it is the one that is still lacking.

P1 sheds light on a significant gap within the TPLP: the absence of dedicated tutor practice sessions. **P1** highlights the importance of “*micro-teaching*”, where tutors can “*practice how to tutor*”, but acknowledges that this aspect is often neglected due to time and manpower constraints. This poses a challenge, as tutors express the desire for “*a chance, maybe five minutes to come and present something ... and then get feedback.*” **P1**'s remarks underscore the need to address this gap to enhance the effective transfer of theoretical knowledge into real-world skills. **P3** echoes the sentiments expressed by **P1**, emphasizing the need for practical evaluation:

I might be able to know that this is how a tutor is supposed to be, or work, during the tutoring sessions. But then I feel like a practical session ... sort of like an evaluation, where you are evaluated and corrected, would be much more effective ... cause like you'll be able to see where you can improve practically.

P3 delves deeper into the perceived value of practical evaluation within TPLP training. While acknowledging the programme's theoretical grounding, **P3** emphasizes the need for “*a practical session ... sort of like an evaluation, where you are evaluated*

and corrected". This suggests that learning about effective online tutoring practices is not enough; tutors seek opportunities to actively apply and receive feedback in a simulated environment. The ability to "*see where you can improve practically*" is crucial for developing tutors' real-world competence, highlighting the disparity between understanding good tutoring principles and confidently implementing them in diverse tutoring situations – a challenge many tutors may grapple with.

While **P3** suggests that "*an evaluation ... would be much more effective*", they do not elaborate on the logistics or resource implications of implementing such sessions. For instance, evaluations might raise anxieties for some tutors despite the TPLP's efforts to foster safe and supportive learning environment. Additionally, concerns emerge regarding the logistical hurdles and feasibility of such a feat, as noted by **P1**:

The problem with that is we don't have human resources. We don't have manpower to be able to do that ... working with a lot of tutors, it just becomes difficult to do the practical sessions.

P1's remarks underscore a critical barrier in implementing practical training sessions within the TPLP: limited human resources. They also raise concerns about the scalability issue associated with traditional, resource-intensive approaches like individual "*micro-teaching*" sessions. However, it is important to note that while **P1** highlights considerable resource constraints, their remarks do not necessarily imply an insurmountable obstacle, but rather present an opportunity for innovation. Exploring resource-efficient alternatives and technology-mediated solutions, such as online simulations or peer-to-peer practice platforms, could offer scalability and flexibility, mitigating the limitations posed by human resources. Ultimately, **P1**'s remarks highlight the need for creativity and innovation to empower tutors with the practical skills they need to succeed, even in contexts with limited human resources.

The ongoing challenge of integrating practical training sessions due to resource constraints is compounded by the imperative to sustain effective collaboration within the TPLP. **P1**'s concerns about territoriality and collaboration at the faculty level, echoed by other participants, reveal the intricate dynamics that influence the TPLP's overall effectiveness. These challenges, deeply rooted in organizational structures and interpersonal relationships, demand a thorough exploration to enhance collaboration and overcome territorial barriers within the TPLP.

5.2.3. Challenges in Sustaining Collaboration – Issues of Territoriality

Online tutor training programmes like the TPLP hold immense potential for fostering community-building among diverse stakeholders supporting tutors to develop proficiency in learning facilitation. However, acknowledging the potential for challenges is crucial. For instance, tutors such as **P3** have highlighted the potential value of having a tutor trainer evaluate their tutoring sessions, stating:

I feel like it's more effective if you've got an evaluator in one of your tutorials ... you can get constructive feedback because now you are with real students, where we've got problems which are not fabricated.

Nevertheless, instances of territoriality indicate siloed approaches that hinder collaboration and limit the TPLP's efficacy in preparing tutors for successfully facilitation of student learning in online environments. **P1** underscores that territorial issues within faculties introduce unique contradictions within the TPLP. Specifically, restricted access to observe tutors in action after training impedes the ability to provide immediate feedback and support, thereby constraining a thorough understanding of how the training translates into practice:

We can't get into the classroom and see what tutors are doing ... because then you are getting into somebody's territory. Most lecturers are territorial with the module they are teaching. Unless in high impact modules, that is where maybe you can have access ... maybe they will involve you more. But other lecturers don't want anyone to come into their space, especially if you are not from the faculty.

P1 highlights a significant challenge in directly observing tutors' practices: lecturer territoriality. The statement “*you are getting into somebody's territory*” highlights the potential resistance from faculty members who perceive the TPLP as encroaching on their domain. Additionally, **P1** notes that external support is limited to “*high impact modules*”, further indicating potential barriers to the TPLP's effectiveness. Without direct classroom observation, it is difficult to assess the practical application of training and provide targeted feedback. The statement, “*We can't get into the classroom and see what tutors are doing,*” underscores the limitations of relying solely on tutors' self-reported experiences or indirect data from lecturers or faculty coordinators. Moreover,

P1 mentions lecturers feeling protective of their courses, suggesting concerns about external interference (*“other lecturers don’t want anyone to come into their space, especially if you are not from the faculty”*). Addressing these concerns through open communication, respectful dialogue, and creative solutions is vital. For instance, utilizing peer observation models, where trained tutors observe and provide feedback to their peers, could offer a less intrusive approach.

However, issues of territoriality extend tutor trainers and lecturers. Tensions between tutors and lecturers also underscore the need for proactive strategies to sustain collaboration and prevent fragmentation within the TPLP community. **P1** notes that in faculties, tutors must navigate a space that can be territorial and competitive, stating:

Some lecturers don't even involve their tutors in their module ... maybe they are afraid that tutors will take their jobs. But it's a space that is really very territorial ... For lecturers it is territorial because it's like someone is trying to do my job, that kind of competition between the tutor and lecturer ... Most of the time with the lecturers, they want to have the authority. to be the ones who are doing everything ... they believe that when they teach, that is the only way the students are actually getting information.

P1 vividly illuminates territorial tensions between tutors and lecturers, citing two potential motives: lecturer fear of job displacement and a desire for sole authority. This tension is compounded by some lecturers' perception that classroom delivery is the sole source of student learning (*“they believe that when they teach, that is the only way the students are actually getting information”*), which breeds resistance to collaboration. These perceived threats create barriers to tutor-lecturer collaboration, impeding the effectiveness of the TPLP. Additionally, the lack of open communication results in underutilization of tutors' valuable skills and insights, affecting the quality of student support. However, rather than assigning blame, it is essential to understand the underlying concerns of both tutors and lecturers. Addressing fears of job displacement can be achieved through clear communication, role definition, and fostering trust. Simultaneously, nurturing a culture of collaboration, where both parties contribute to student success, can alleviate concerns about competition.

P2 offers a refreshing counterpoint, emphasizing the positive impact of the TPLP on collaboration between lecturers and tutors. According to **P2**,

Working with tutors who have completed training has generally been a positive experience ... it's like collaborating with educators who have a solid foundation, a solid understanding of the facilitation principles emphasized in the TPLP ... that theoretical knowledge translates into effective online facilitation. It's evident that the programme has equipped them well.

P2's comments underscore the valuable contributions tutors bring to the learning environment, attributing this positive experience to the TPLP's efficacy in equipping tutors with a “*solid foundation*” of key online facilitation principles. While **P1** outlines challenges related to territoriality and resistance in tutor-lecturer relationships, **P2**'s experience highlights the critical role tutors can play in complementing and enhancing the lecturer's role, rather than posing a threat. Although **P2**'s perspective may not be universally shared, this divergence in views underscores the complexity of interactions within the TPLP, where individual experiences and perceptions play a crucial role. Therefore, amplifying such positive experiences is essential to counter the narrative of territoriality and promote wider collaboration moving forward. Ultimately, fostering community within the TPLP necessitates addressing both its strengths and potential pitfalls to cultivate a thriving community that empowers tutors, strengthens pedagogy, and benefits all stakeholders involved.

The interconnections and tensions within the TPLP present both challenges and opportunities for enhancing the programme's effectiveness. Drawing on insights from participant interviews, the subsequent sections focus on identifying key areas for improvement and proposing actionable strategies to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the TPLP.

5.3. Enhancing the TPLP to Transform Online Tutoring

5.3.1. Identifying Gaps and Strategies of Improvement

P3 emphasizes the necessity of practical exercises and personalized feedback to bridge the gap between theory and practice within the TPLP, stating,

The practical side is missing a little bit. I wish the trainers could at least give me some pointers after watching me interact with students in a tutorial. Or maybe even in the workshops, doing a role play of sorts ... and giving me constructive feedback.

P3 highlights a perceived “missing” element in the TPLP: practical exercise and personalized feedback based on actual tutoring experiences. **P2** concurs, stating, “Some tutors face challenges in applying what they learned, perhaps due to lack of immediate feedback in a training setting”, suggesting that **P3**, and other tutors alike, could benefit from experiential learning to complement theoretical knowledge.

P2 acknowledges the TPLP's strong theoretical foundation, but echoes **P3**'s concerns about the need for a stronger emphasis on practical, hands-on application, stating,

The TPLP excels in theoretical grounding, but there could be a stronger emphasis on practical, real-time scenarios. We're missing a crucial element of practical, hands-on training ... The lack of practical sessions ... is quite the drawback ... it makes it challenging for tutors to gauge their progress effectively ... I think incorporating more hands-on practical sessions could enhance tutors' application of theoretical knowledge ... It would be useful to give tutors opportunities to practice the strategies taught before they commence with their duties.

P2 emphasizes the limited practical aspect of training as a key area for improvement, and advocates for “incorporating more hands-on practical sessions” to bridge the gap between theory and application. This gap is highlighted as a “drawback” that hinders tutors' ability to “gauge their progress effectively,” emphasizing the need for practical experience before tutors engage in actual facilitation. The call for more hands-on practical sessions by **P2** and **P3** underscores the collective recognition of the theory-practice gap within the TPLP. To address this, **P1** suggests pragmatic solutions, emphasizing the potential role of collaboration with faculty coordinators. **P1** mentions,

If maybe we had, for example, full time tutor coordinators in the faculties, we can use them for that. They can accompany tutors to classes and see how they are doing and just observe how they are doing things and then give them some feedback on their tutoring so

that they can improve. Because when you talk about teaching and tutoring is the same thing, it's more of a reflective practice.

P1 proposes leveraging the expertise of faculty tutor coordinators to facilitate in-class observations and structured feedback sessions (*“full time tutor coordinators in the faculties ... can accompany tutors to classes ... and just observe ... then give them some feedback”*). However, **P2** also notes the scarcity of human resources within faculties to support tutors post-training, stating,

I occasionally observe tutoring sessions to provide firsthand feedback and identify areas for improvement, but I can't do that all the time.

P2's statement highlights the resource constraints within faculties which hinder the provision of consistent *“firsthand feedback”* to tutors, thereby jeopardizing the long-term effectiveness of the TPLP. To address this challenge, alternative solutions such as peer-to-peer observation models or technology-mediated feedback systems could be explored. Providing tutors with opportunities to directly apply theoretical knowledge in controlled settings can foster effective learning. This is supported by **P2**, who states,

... I think incorporating more opportunities for tutors to engage in simulated tutoring would give them a chance to directly apply what they've learned in a controlled setting – it could bridge the gap between theory and application. Hands-on experience is vital for effective learning ...

P2 suggests another approach to enhance the TPLP's effectiveness: workshops tailored to specific topics. **P2** acknowledges that while the TPLP covers a comprehensive overview of various pedagogical concepts related to tutoring, tutors may not have sufficient time to develop expertise in a single workshop, stating,

The TPLP covers a lot of pedagogical concepts related to tutoring, and ensures that tutors have a strong foundation. But it feels like tutors don't really get enough time to gain expertise in that one workshop ... So maybe more sessions could be arranged, having workshops with more time for certain topics could be beneficial, allowing tutors to absorb information at a comfortable pace.

P2's observation suggests that the current workshop duration may not be adequate for tutors to fully grasp and internalize the covered material and effectively apply it to online facilitation. **P2**'s suggestion, *"more sessions could be arranged, having workshops with more time for certain topics could be beneficial"* indicates their belief that extended learning opportunities would allow tutors to *"absorb information at a comfortable pace"*, addressing concerns about knowledge retention and skill development. This is in line with **P3** who stated that, *"... there's just a lot of information ... in a short period of time"*, suggesting that deeper engagement with theoretical concepts is crucial before transitioning to real-world practice. Furthermore, **P2**'s suggestion resonates with **P1**'s earlier remarks about creating opportunities for personalized feedback. Exploring alternative workshop formats with extended durations or spaced learning strategies could enhance the TPLP's effectiveness in equipping tutors with a solid foundation for successful online facilitation.

Recognizing the importance of addressing gaps in the TPLP to ensure its long-term effectiveness, the discussion now shifts towards strategies for sustaining the programme's impact in the dynamic landscape of online tutoring in HE.

5.3.2. Ensuring Long-Term Effectiveness and Sustainability

Recognizing the pivotal role tutors play in fostering student success, **P1** emphasizes that tutoring within HE institutions must be prioritized:

I'm trying to say that higher education institutions, they really need to consider the main stakeholders, which are the students ... it means that you have to consider the people that students interact with every day, and most of them are the tutors ... They really need to take tutoring serious at the university, especially if we want to improve university teaching ... tutors are making a difference there.

Institutional recognition of tutoring is vital for ensuring the sustainability of the TPLP. This recognition acknowledges the impact tutors have on student learning, ensuring that tutoring is valued within the academic community. Such recognition can take various forms, including increased resource allocation for training material, staffing, technology infrastructure, and opportunities for professional development. By elevating the status of tutoring within academia, a culture is cultivated where tutoring

is valued and esteemed, thereby motivating tutors to actively engage in programmes like the TPLP. Moreover, institutional recognition typically involves implementing quality assurance mechanisms to monitor and enhance the quality of tutor training programmes. These mechanisms, which may include standards, assessment criteria, and evaluation processes are invaluable for guiding the practices of the TPLP and facilitating continuous improvement based on feedback and evaluation.

P1 further emphasizes the essential role tutors play in shaping student interactions, learning experiences, and ultimately, their success. As **P1** aptly states, *“you have to consider the people that students interact with every day, and most of them are the tutors”*. This underscores the need for institutions to take tutoring seriously to improve overall teaching quality, aligning with a broader narrative advocating for institutional commitment to tutoring as a pivotal element in improving university teaching. **P1**'s call for attention to the individuals deeply engaged with students echoes the importance of fostering a supportive environment for tutors, positioning them as catalysts for positive change within universities. Moreover, **P1** further stresses the necessity of ongoing collaboration with faculty coordinators, alongside continuous engagement, training, and feedback to fortify the TPLP's effectiveness. **P1** states,

After we have done the training, we leave tutors to the lecturers ... after that nothing is happening. We don't go to their classes to see how they are tutoring. So I think more collaboration with the lecturers who are teaching those particular modules is important ... so that we can improve the programme ... for me that is a missing link.

P1 highlights a crucial *“missing link”* in the TPLP: limited ongoing collaboration with faculty coordinators, underscoring a disconnect between training and real-world application. **P1** emphasizes the need for *“more collaboration with the lecturers”*. This suggests potential benefits of ongoing engagement, feedback, and joint training with faculty coordinators to bridge the theory-practice gap – a perspective that aligns with a forward-thinking approach to programme sustainability.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

This chapter delves into the interpretation of the research findings within the context of existing literature and the chosen theoretical framework, providing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the TPLP and its implications. Guided by the following RQs, the study sought to lay the foundation for inquiry and analysis:

- What are the key components that contribute to the effectiveness of the TPLP?
- How do the various components of the TPLP interact with each other to influence the effectiveness of the programme?
- How can the TPLP be improved to better prepare tutors to facilitate successful online tutorials that promote student engagement and learning?

Qualitative methods were employed to explore the effectiveness of the TPLP through a rigorous process of thematic content analysis. This analysis began by systematically coding the interview transcripts, identifying recurring patterns, and clustering patterns into meaningful categories. Through iterative data immersion and interpretation, categories were refined, identifying broader themes that captured the essence of participants' experiences within the TPLP. Three main themes emerged from this process (illustrated in Figure 5), shedding light on critical aspects of the TPLP:

Theme 1: Cultivating Community Within the TPLP

This theme explores the dynamics of community-building within the TPLP and its implications for programme effectiveness. It amalgamates categories focusing on fostering a sense of community within the TPLP, encompassing the roles and experiences of individuals engaged in the programme, as well as efforts aimed at community-building. Emphasis is placed on collaboration, shared purpose, and peer support in fostering a conducive learning environment for tutors.

Theme 2: Challenges in Sustaining Collaboration Within the TPLP

Effective collaboration is essential for the success of any educational programme, including the TPLP. This theme underscores complexities and obstacles associated with sustaining collaboration within the TPLP, and their implications for programme effectiveness. It consolidates categories exploring interactions between various

stakeholders, contradictions stemming from the need for practical training and apparent resource constraints, and challenges related to sustaining collaboration within the TPLP, notably, issues of territoriality.

Theme 3: Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in the TPLP

Monitoring and evaluation are integral components of educational programmes like the TPLP, offering crucial insights into their effectiveness and avenues for enhancement. This theme examines mechanisms utilized for M&E within the TPLP, encompassing the assessment of tutor performance, programme outcomes, and overall effectiveness. It merges various categories related to monitoring, evaluation, and improvement within the TPLP, including resource allocation, efforts to transform online tutoring, gap identification, and strategies for ensuring sustainability.

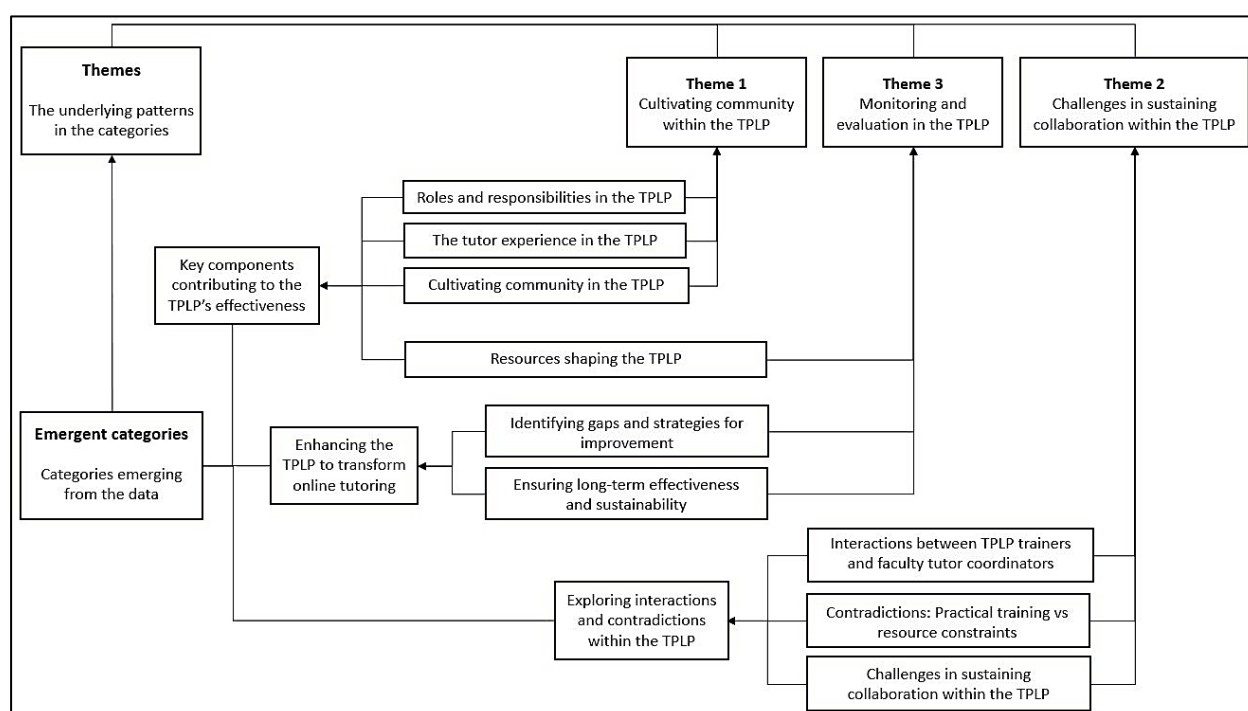


Figure 5: Thematic content analysis in this study

6.1. Theme 1: Cultivating Community Within the TPLP

Cultivating a sense of community within the TPLP is crucial for fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective problem-solving among tutors. According to Joubert and Snyman (2017), effective training programmes should prioritize the creation of a community that encourages collaboration, sharing of best practices, and sustained

engagement. Building a thriving community is an ongoing process that demands consistent effort over time to empower tutors to navigate their professional development journey with confidence. The TPLP recognizes this importance, aiming to create a “... *community of practice that extends beyond the training sessions.*”

Within this community, tutors must feel that their contributions matter, as highlighted by Clarence (2016) and Motaung and Makombe (2021). Tutor trainers play a crucial role in fostering this sense of ownership, belonging, and shared purpose among tutors (Clarence, 2018). In line with studies conducted by Underhill and McDonald (2010), Kirkwood and Price (2014), Clarence (2016), and Motaung and Makombe (2021), TPLP trainers encourage tutors to share their own knowledge and experiences, thereby enhancing collaboration and enriching the learning environment. This aligns with Clarence’s (2018) assertion that tutors should be engaged in a community of practice (CoP) where collaborative learning is nurtured authentically.

Quarterly CoP meetings in the TPLP serve as vital platforms for ongoing dialogue and collaboration among tutors, building on their existing knowledge and experiences. The TPLP’s foundation in constructivist ideas supports these discussions among tutors as they collaboratively construct tutoring knowledge. Underhill and McDonald (2010) affirm the importance of such collaborative learning strategies, providing opportunities for tutors to practice working together in groups and promoting a culture of interdependence. Scholars such as Matoane and Mashile (2013), Clarence (2016), and Pitsoane and Lethole (2022) also advocate for a constructivist learning approach in training to enhance tutors’ proficiency of facilitating online learning. These experiences resonate with the ethos of a true CoP, enriching tutors’ overall learning experience and readiness for facilitating online tutorials (Clarence, 2018).

However, it is crucial to consider the composition the CoP. Currently, the TPLP’s quarterly CoP meetings primarily involve tutors and tutor trainers, potentially excluding valuable perspectives from lecturers and faculty tutor coordinators. Clarence (2018) advocates that for effective tutor development, the CoP should comprise individuals possessing the expertise and insight necessary for tutors to learn from. Moreover, Clarence (2016) underscores the importance of maintaining professional learning communities that include both lecturers and tutors to foster collaboration and mutual learning, and address issues of territoriality and perceived competition between the

two groups. This aligns with Joubert and Snyman's (2017) emphasis on building trust between lecturers and tutors to ensure the success of any educational programme.

Therefore, to enhance the effectiveness of the TPLP, it is recommended to broaden participation in CoP meetings to include lecturers and faculty tutor coordinators. This expansion would not only provide tutors with valuable insights and support from experienced educators, but also foster a culture of collaboration and trust within the programme. Additionally, creating opportunities for lecturers and tutors to engage in joint professional development activities can further strengthen the sense of community and promote shared learning goals. By implementing these recommendations, the TPLP can cultivate a thriving community of practice, empowering tutors for successful online facilitation of engaging learning experiences.

6.2. Theme 2: Challenges in Sustaining Collaboration Within the TPLP

The TPLP aims to cultivate a sense of community among diverse stakeholders, including tutor trainers, faculty tutor coordinators, and tutors themselves. Central to its effectiveness is the sustained collaboration between tutor trainers and faculty coordinators or lecturers. As the tutor trainer emphasized, *"collaboration is key in whatever we are doing in this space."* This collaboration serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it bridges the gap between theoretical training and real-world application by tailoring training content to meet tutors' diverse needs, enhancing their ability to apply theoretical knowledge practically. Tutors attest to the TPLP's impact in translating theoretical knowledge into practice, noting improvements in student participation. Secondly, collaborative efforts foster shared ownership for tutor development by leveraging diverse perspectives and expertise, promoting commitment and proactive involvement in TPLP enhancement. Thirdly, ongoing dialogue and information sharing enables the TPLP to adapt to evolving needs, with faculty feedback informing necessary revisions and tutor experiences pinpointing areas for improvement.

Despite the positive outcomes associated with sustained collaboration, territoriality and resistance among stakeholders present significant challenges, weakening the collaborative ecosystem and limiting the TPLP's reach. Clarence (2018) emphasizes the importance of partnerships between lecturers and academic development practitioners. Territoriality creates a barrier to these partnerships, undermining the

collaborative spirit crucial for successful tutor development (Clarence, 2016). Territorial behavior from lecturers impedes access to observe tutors post-training, restricting the provision of immediate feedback and support. As expressed by the tutor trainer, *"We can't get into the classroom and see exactly what tutors are doing ... they [lecturers] are territorial ... they don't want anyone to come in ... especially if you are not from the faculty."* Such attitudes hinder collaboration efforts, leading to fragmented approaches to tutor training and support, ultimately hindering the TPLP's effectiveness in preparing tutors for successful online facilitation.

Furthermore, the tension between comprehensive training content and a manageable tutor workload creates challenges for both tutor trainers and faculty tutor coordinators as they endeavour to tailor content to tutors in diverse disciplines. Balancing input from different stakeholders and prioritizing specific content can be daunting, especially when managing the diversity of expertise introduced by collaborative efforts. Underhill and McDonald (2010) advocate for openness and continuous collaboration between various stakeholders, emphasizing its importance for holistic tutor development and programme sustainability. This necessitates establishing a delicate equilibrium, ensuring that all perspectives are duly considered, as illustrated by the tutor trainer's remark, *"They [faculty coordinators] just want to put everything there... You just have to choose what you think is important in terms of the content."* Additionally, navigational challenges such as communication delays and undervaluation of the TPLP impede effective collaboration, thereby hindering its long-term effectiveness.

Effective, sustainable collaboration is crucial for TPLP effectiveness. Without it, the TPLP may struggle to adapt and evolve in response to changing needs and contexts, potentially compromising the quality of online tutoring. Therefore, addressing issues of territoriality, content management, and navigational hurdles is crucial to unlocking the TPLP's full potential. To enhance the effectiveness of the TPLP, strategies should be implemented to address territorial behaviour, such as fostering a culture of openness, trust, transparency, mutual respect, and constructive engagement.

While some of these strategies have been partially implemented in the TPLP, intensifying efforts in these areas is warranted. For instance, regular meetings or forums where tutor trainers and faculty coordinators can openly discuss challenges, share best practices, and provide feedback can be instituted. Furthermore, fostering

a culture of shared ownership, open communication, and mutual respect among stakeholders is paramount in harnessing the transformative power of collaboration in tutor development. Overcoming challenges like communication delays and faculty engagement necessitates collaborative efforts beyond individual lecturers. By fostering a collaborative environment and emphasizing the importance of shared ownership for tutor development, the TPLP can strengthen its community and ensure sustained effectiveness. In essence, implementing these recommendations will enable the TPLP to overcome challenges related to sustaining collaboration, and enhance its effectiveness in preparing tutors for successful online facilitation.

6.3. Theme 3: Monitoring and Evaluation in the TPLP

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices are vital for achieving the TPLP's goal of bridging the theory-practice gap in online tutoring. However, the current lack of practical training results in a significant gap between acquired knowledge and its real-world application, affecting tutor confidence and skills. One tutor emphasized the importance of practical exercises and personalized feedback to address this gap: *"The practical side is missing a little bit. I wish the trainers could at least give me some pointers after watching me interact with students in a tutorial."* Integrating structured practical, hands-on elements such as role-playing exercises and simulated tutoring sessions can significantly enhance tutors' online facilitation skills and foster a more participant-centered learning environment. These findings align with previous studies by Underhill and McDonald (2010), Kirkwood and Price (2014), Joubert and Snyman (2017) and Clarence (2018), who emphasize the effectiveness of interactive and hands-on training in facilitating meaningful learning experiences for tutors.

Moreover, practical training plays a pivotal role in facilitating effective M&E processes by offering real-time insights into tutors' strengths and weaknesses in real-time, informing feedback, guiding ongoing support initiatives, and contributing to overall evaluation of the TPLP. Several scholars (De Smet et al., 2010; Roman et al., 2010; Chen & Liu, 2011; Clarence, 2016; Faroa, 2017; Gilbert, 2017; Clarence, 2018; Motaung & Makombe, 2021; Okoro et al., 2021) underscore the importance of providing ongoing feedback and support to tutors for long-term programme success. However, implementing these practices within the TPLP faces several challenges. Issues like territoriality, faculty resistance to perceived external interference, and

restricted access to observe tutors in action post-training hinder programme effectiveness. These challenges are compounded by a scarcity of resources constraints within the TPLP, making it challenging to conduct practical training sessions, as noted by the tutor trainer: “... *we don't have manpower to be able to do that ... working with a lot of tutors, it just becomes difficult to do the actual practical sessions.*” Additionally, faculty tutor coordinators struggle to provide consistent feedback to tutors post-training due to resource constraints in faculties, inhibiting tutors' ability to gauge their progress and address areas for improvement in their tutoring practice Joubert and Snyman (2017).

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving open communication, trust-building, and innovative solutions. Incorporating experiential learning opportunities, such as simulated scenarios, technology-mediated feedback systems, or peer-to-peer practice can supplement traditional training methods and provide tutors with opportunities to directly apply theoretical knowledge in controlled settings (De Smet *et al.*, 2010; Clarence, 2018). Classroom visits also emerge as a valuable M&E tool, as suggested by Underhill and MacDonald (2010), who note that these visits inform both trainers and tutors through dialogue and shared learning, enable trainers to identify strengths and weaknesses in tutoring practice and offer targeted feedback, and provide tutors with opportunities for reflection on their practice (Clarence, 2018; Bowden, 2019). These recommendations present promising avenues for enhancing practical skill development within the existing TPLP framework, ensuring that tutors are well-equipped for the demands of online tutoring.

Strategies such as a multi-channel approach to feedback, including evaluation forms and input from tutor coordinators, have been instrumental in monitoring, and enhancing, the TPLP's impact on tutors' online learning facilitation and providing valuable insights for programme enhancement. However, these channels led to the identification of another gap in TPLP: the current workshop duration is not adequate for tutors to fully grasp and internalize covered material and adeptly translate them to successful online facilitation. Therefore, to improve TPLP effectiveness in equipping tutors with a solid foundation for successful online facilitation, workshops could be tailored for specific sections, adopting a spaced learning approach to allow for deeper engagement with theoretical concepts before transitioning to real-world practice, as affirmed by Clarence (2018) and Motaung and Makombe (2021). Extended learning

opportunities would also allow tutors to “*absorb information at a comfortable pace.*” Exploring alternative workshop formats with extended durations or incorporating spaced learning strategies could enhance the TPLP's effectiveness in equipping tutors with a solid foundation for successful online facilitation. By embracing these innovative approaches and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, the TPLP can address persistent M&E challenges and enhance its overall effectiveness.

6.4. The Role of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory in this Study

CHAT served as a pivotal framework, offering both descriptive and analytic lenses to understand the intricacies of the TPLP. By scrutinizing the relationships among the various components within the TPLP, CHAT illuminated contradictions within the activity system, shedding light on tensions that impact its effectiveness. These contradictions include **primary contradictions** (occurring within a single component of the activity system due to conflicting values guiding participation in the activity) **secondary contradictions** (emerging between different components in the activity system, often due to the addition of new elements to the existing activity) **tertiary contradictions** (arising when participants must adopt more advanced methods to achieve the objective of the activity), and **quaternary contradictions** (surfacing when changes to the activity become contradictory to neighbouring activity systems).

Applying CHAT to research findings revealed the TPLP as a complex activity system comprising various stakeholders in the community, rules, and mediating tools. Within this system, subjects (tutors, tutor trainers, and faculty tutor coordinators) assume distinct roles (division of labour), contributing to the overarching goal (object) of enhancing online tutoring effectiveness. Analyzing the division of labour, rules, and mediating tools revealed a non-exhaustive list of inherent contradictions impacting community-building efforts within the TPLP community:

- Primary contradiction manifesting as an internal dilemma where tutors' perceived lack of practical training contradicts their expected role as facilitators of collaborative and student-centred learning. Consequently, this disconnect between theoretical knowledge and real-world application hinders tutor confidence and skills development.

- Secondary contradiction arising due to the need for collaboration between community members, such as tutor trainers and faculty tutor coordinators, and the necessity to tailor training content to various disciplines.
- Tertiary contradiction stemming from issues like faculty neglect and lack of institutional recognition for tutors' contributions to student success, undermining effective community-building efforts within the TPLP.
- Tertiary contradiction emerging from conflicts between faculty territoriality and ongoing collaboration within the community. Power dynamics lead to the reluctance of faculty tutor coordinators to engage fully in collaborative efforts, impeding the community-building process within the TPLP.

These tensions create structural barriers to effective collaboration and hinder the TPLP's ability to foster a sense of community among stakeholders. To address these contradictions, various strategies such as fostering trust and transparency, promoting knowledge sharing, and creating a sense of community within the TPLP, were proposed to enhance its effectiveness.

Utilizing CHAT also provided valuable insights into the dynamics of collaboration within the TPLP and the barriers to its sustainability. Examination of interactions between stakeholders, tools, and rules governing collaboration revealed a non-exhaustive list of contradictions hindering effective collaboration:

- Primary contradiction related to competing priorities among community members, such as the tension between the desire to include comprehensive training content and the need to ensure a manageable workload for tutors. This contradiction leads to challenges in aligning the objectives of different stakeholders within the TPLP.
- Secondary contradiction manifesting between mediating tools, such as training workshop content and power dynamics – particularly faculty territoriality – resulting from the division of labour. This contradiction restricts the TPLP's ability to adapt and evolve, especially when new elements are added to the existing activity system, exacerbating these tensions and making collaboration more challenging.

- Quaternary contradiction stemming from territorial and competitive environments between TPLP-trained tutors and lecturers, leading to fragmented approaches to tutor training and support across the institution.

These tensions restrict the TPLP's ability to adapt and evolve, impeding its effectiveness in preparing tutors for successful online facilitation. To address these contradictions, interventions such as fostering effective collaboration, enhancing communication channels, and promoting a shared understanding of the TPLP's objectives among stakeholders were proposed.

Moreover, CHAT facilitated understanding of the complexities of M&E within the TPLP and identification of areas for improvement. Analysis of interactions exposed a non-exhaustive list of contradictions and inefficiencies hindering effective M&E practices:

- Secondary contradiction arising from the absence of consistent feedback mechanisms for tutors due to resource constraints and faculty resistance to external tutor evaluation. This lack of feedback inhibits tutors' ability to gauge their progress and address areas for improvement. Moreover, it impedes effective M&E within the TPLP, underscoring the need for improved communication channels and feedback mechanisms.
- Tertiary contradiction resulting from restrictions on observing tutors post-training impede effective M&E within the TPLP. This limitation hampers the community's ability to assess the impact of training and provide targeted support to tutors.

These contradictions hinder the TPLP's capacity to provide meaningful feedback and support for tutors, ultimately undermining its effectiveness in promoting student engagement and learning. Addressing these contradictions requires innovative solutions and systemic changes to optimize M&E practices within the TPLP, thereby enhancing its impact on online tutoring and supporting student learning effectively.

6.5. How Findings Answer Research Questions

The following is how the findings answered each research question:

1. What are the key components that contribute to the effectiveness of the TPLP?

The study sought to identify the core elements contributing to the effectiveness of the TPLP. Participant interviews provided insights into factors instrumental in nurturing tutors' proficiency in facilitating online tutorials.

Findings indicate that key components include cultivating a sense of community among tutors, sustaining collaboration between stakeholders, and implementing robust M&E practices. Literature supports this, highlighting that effective training programmes prioritize community-building, collaboration, and ongoing evaluation.

2. How do the various components of the TPLP interact with each other to influence the effectiveness of the programme?

Exploring the interplay between TPLP components was crucial for understanding how it functions as a cohesive system. This inquiry provided insights into how different components influence each other, collectively contributing to its effectiveness.

Findings revealed that interactions between subjects involved in the TPLP, mediating tools, community, division of labour, and M&E processes are crucial for the TPLP's effectiveness. Identified contradictions, such as territoriality and resource constraints, hinder effective collaboration and programme effectiveness. Lack of adequate practical training and the disconnect between theoretical knowledge and real-world application affects tutor readiness. Also, faculty neglect and lack of institutional recognition for tutors' contributions to student success hinder TPLP effectiveness.

3. How can the TPLP be improved to better prepare tutors to facilitate successful online tutorials that promote student engagement and learning?

This question aimed to uncover areas for improving the TPLP to enhance tutor preparation for facilitating online tutorials. Through participant feedback, the study identified gaps and potential strategies to enhance the TPLP's efficacy.

Several critical gaps were identified, including limited involvement of lecturers and faculty tutor coordinators in CoP meetings, issues of territoriality, challenges in streamlining content, and the lack of adequate practical training and feedback mechanisms. To tackle these challenges and enhance the TPLP's effectiveness in

preparing tutors for online facilitation, a series of recommendations were proposed. These recommendations include broadening participation in CoP meetings, fostering a culture of openness and trust within the TPLP and broader academic community, instituting regular forums for sharing best practices, feedback and discussion, integrating structured practical elements into training, and adopting a spaced learning approach with extended learning opportunities. Such measures, supported by literature, aim to enable tutors to fully grasp and internalize covered material, thus developing expertise at a comfortable pace.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter discusses key themes that emerged from data analysis, contextualising research findings within existing literature and the chosen theoretical framework. Through qualitative inquiry guided by RQs, the study explored three main themes: cultivating community, challenges in sustaining collaboration, and the role of M&E in the TPLP. The first theme emphasizes nurturing a sense of community and shared purpose in fostering a conducive learning environment for tutors. The second theme reveals obstacles to sustained collaboration, such as territoriality and competitive attitudes. The third theme explores M&E practices in bridging the theory-practice gap, identifying challenges such as limited practical training, resource constraints, and inadequate feedback mechanisms. Applying CHAT to the findings revealed inherent contradictions, which can be addressed by broadening participation in CoP meetings, fostering a culture of openness and trust, and integrating practical elements into training. Overall, this chapter addresses the RQs by identifying key components contributing to TPLP effectiveness, exploring the interactions among them, and proposing actionable strategies for improvement, thereby contributing to the ongoing evolution of the TPLP and enhancing its impact on student engagement and learning in online education.

Chapter 7: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

This final chapter serves as a synthesis of the research journey, offering a concise summary of the study's purpose, key findings, implications, and conclusions. Furthermore, it offers actionable recommendations for enhancing the TPLP. As the culmination of the study, this reflection informs future initiatives and enriches scholarly discourse within the South African HE landscape, contributing to the ongoing evolution of online tutor development practices.

7.1. Conclusion

The aim of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of the TPLP – a centralized online tutor training programme at a South African university – in enhancing tutors' proficiency in facilitating online learning during tutorials, and to identify areas for enhancement. Specifically, the research aimed to develop a nuanced understanding of the interrelations among various components of the TPLP and assess how well it equips tutors with the requisite skills for facilitating online learning, to improve the standard of online tutoring endeavours at the university.

Based on findings, it can be concluded that the TPLP has made significant strides in fostering community, sustained engagement and collaboration, and effective M&E practices. However, identified contradictions and challenges underscore areas for improvement. Territoriality, resource constraints, and communication barriers hinder collaboration and affect the TPLP's effectiveness. Nevertheless, the identified recommendations, supported by research and participant feedback, offer promising avenues for enhancing practical skill development within the existing TPLP framework, ensuring tutor preparedness, effectively supporting online learning, and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the programme. Although the TPLP has achieved some of its intended outcomes, addressing identified contradictions is crucial for maximizing its effectiveness in preparing tutors for successful online facilitation and promoting student engagement and learning.

7.2. Limitations and Recommendations

7.2.1. Limitations of the Study

The small, non-random, purposeful sample of participants selected for this research limited the representativeness and generalizability of findings beyond the specific context. The reduced sample size and time constraints imposed by the timeframe for data collection and analysis limited the researcher's ability to provide exhaustive coverage of all relevant TPLP aspects. While efforts were made to include participants from each relevant group, this limitation underscores the need for caution in extrapolating the findings beyond the specific context. The original plan included the observation of a training session to compliment data collected from interviews. However, due to late receipt of ethical clearance, live observations were not feasible. Although recorded sessions were an alternative, ethical considerations including participants' consent for secondary use of data led to the exclusion of this component from the methodology. This limitation underscores the impact of external factors on the planned research design. Additionally, researcher bias is a concern in qualitative research, as the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. This bias arises from subjective data interpretation, which can be influenced by the researcher's perspectives and preconceptions. Despite efforts to mitigate bias through rigorous adherence to ethical guidelines and reflective practices, the subjective nature of qualitative research remains an inherent challenge.

7.2.2. Recommendations

- The small, non-random, purposeful sample limited the study's generalizability. Future studies should expand the sample size and include institutions from different socioeconomic and cultural contexts. This will enhance the representativeness and generalizability of findings, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of online tutor training programme effectiveness across different environments.
- M&E practices were identified as crucial for TPLP effectiveness, yet inconsistencies in these practices were observed. Recommended that more consistent M&E practices be implemented to ensure that feedback loops within the TPLP are effectively integrated. This will help to identify and address gaps, leading to continuous improvement of the programme.

- Cultivating a sense of community within the TPLP was highlighted as a key component of programme effectiveness. Future research can be broadened to investigate community-building efforts across the broader university community, including students and institutional management.
- Power dynamics, including territoriality and institutional hierarchies, were found to influence TPLP effectiveness. Therefore, a deeper investigation can be conducted to examine how power dynamics within the university setting influence TPLP effectiveness. Understanding these dynamics can inform strategies to mitigate their negative impact on programme outcomes.
- The 'rules' component of the TPLP activity system, which governs subjects' responsibilities and collaboration in the training activity, is as an area of interest. Further research can explore the influence of these 'rules' on the interactions within the TPLP and its effectiveness.
- The study's qualitative approach provided deep insights but lacked broader quantitative validation. Future research can employ a mixed-methods approach to capture diverse reflections based on variables like gender, race, class, and socioeconomic and cultural contexts. This approach can enrich the understanding of how different factors influence the TPLP's effectiveness.
- Further explore contradictions to enrich arguments on the TPLP's effectiveness.
- The TPLP does not exist in isolation but interacts with other university systems, such as discipline-specific training programmes. Future research can investigate how the TPLP interacts with these other systems, exploring opportunities for collaboration and expansive learning. Aligning the TPLP with broader university training efforts could enhance its overall effectiveness and relevance.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Clearance Certificate



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2023ECE42M

PROJECT TITLE

Exploring the Effectiveness of an Online Tutor Training Programme in a South African University – A Case Study

INVESTIGATOR

Mueletshedzi Farai Revival Ndwambi

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

WSOE

DATE CONSIDERED

10 July 2023

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Minimal Risk

EXPIRY DATE

Date of submission of the Research Report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

21 AUGUST 2023

CHAIRPERSON

Dr. Batseba Mofolo-Mbokane

Cc: Dr. Alton Dewa

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

19/September/2023

Date

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)



Good day

My name is Mueletshedzi Ndwambi. I am a Masters student in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisors are Dr. Alton Dewa and Ms. Fatima Makda. I am conducting a research study about the effectiveness of online tutor training programmes in higher education and contribute to the improvement of online tutor training, ultimately benefiting both tutors and students in the online learning environment. The study title is 'Exploring the Effectiveness of an Online Tutor Training Programme in a South African University: A Case Study'.

I am inviting you to participate in an individual interview and an observation of one (1) tutor training session. The interview will also take place online (for about 30min), and with your permission, I would like to audio record the interview for accurate data capture. The observation of the tutor training session will last for about 3 hours (the duration of one session). Please note that you have the option to participate in either the interview or the observation, or both, based on your preference and availability. All data will be stored in a password-protected laptop and deleted after the research project is completed. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

The interview and observation will be confidential in the resulting research report. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can withdraw from the study at any time, and you do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. However, if you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in the interview, we will stop the interview and resume another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at the CCDU.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Mueletshedzi Ndwambi

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Ms. Fatima Makda, Fatima.Makda@wits.ac.za, 011-717-3194

Appendix 3: Consent Forms

Consent Form – for interviews



Title of project 'Exploring the Effectiveness of an Online Tutor Training Programme in a South African University: A Case Study'

Name of researcher Mueletshedzi Ndwambi

I,, agree to participate in this research project. I agree to the following (please circle the relevant options below):

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree to be interviewed for this study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report. However, raw data collected from the interview will not be shared with the supervisor or any other third party.	YES	NO
I agree that my name will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report)	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be passed on	YES	NO

..... (signature)
..... (name of participant)
..... (date)

..... (signature)
Mueletshedzi Ndwambi..... (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
25 June 2023..... (date)

Appendix 4: Interview Schedules

Interview Schedule – Tutors



Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study on your experience of the Tutor Professional Learning Programme (TPLP) and its effectiveness in preparing you to successfully facilitate online tutorials. The purpose of this interview is to gain a comprehensive understanding of your experiences and perspectives as an online tutor, as well as your insights into the effectiveness of the TPLP.

Please note that your participation in this interview is voluntary, and all information provided will be treated confidentially. Your responses will contribute valuable insights to the research findings and help inform recommendations for the enhancement of tutor training programmes in the online learning context.

The interview will be conducted online, and it is expected to take approximately 30 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy during data analysis; any identifying information will be kept confidential. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have before or during the interview. Your honest and thoughtful responses are highly appreciated and will greatly contribute to the success of this study.

Interview Questions - Tutors

1. Can you describe your experience as an online tutor and your involvement in the TPLP?
2. In your experience with the TPLP, what specific elements or aspects have been most influential in preparing you for successful online tutorial facilitation? Can you describe these elements and their role within the program?
3. What are your perceptions of the effectiveness of the TPLP in preparing tutors for online tutorial facilitation that promotes student engagement and meaningful learning?
4. How do you perceive the impact of the TPLP on your ability to effectively engage with students and address their learning needs?
5. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the TPLP in terms of preparing tutors for online tutorial facilitation?
6. How do you perceive the role of the programme coordinator in supporting tutors and facilitating effective training?
7. Can you share any specific examples or instances where the TPLP has positively impacted your ability to facilitate online tutorials?

Thank you very much for your participation and patience. Your contribution is highly appreciated.

Interview Schedule – Tutor Programme Coordinator (Tutor Trainer)



Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study on your experience of the Tutor Professional Learning Programme (TPLP) and its effectiveness in preparing you to successfully facilitate online tutorials. The purpose of this interview is to gain a comprehensive understanding of your experiences and perspectives as an online tutor, as well as your insights into the effectiveness of the TPLP.

Please note that your participation in this interview is voluntary, and all information provided will be treated confidentially. Your responses will contribute valuable insights to the research findings and help inform recommendations for the enhancement of tutor training programmes in the online learning context.

The interview will be conducted online, and it is expected to take approximately 30 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy during data analysis; any identifying information will be kept confidential. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have before or during the interview. Your honest and thoughtful responses are highly appreciated and will greatly contribute to the success of this study.

Interview Questions – Tutor Programme Coordinator (Tutor Trainer)

1. Can you describe your role as the tutor trainer and programme coordinator? What responsibilities do you have in supporting and training tutors for online tutorial facilitation?
2. What specific strategies or methods do you employ to prepare tutors for successful online tutorial facilitation? How do you determine the content and structure of the training sessions?
3. From your experience, what are the key components or elements of the TPLP that contribute to the effectiveness of tutor training? Can you provide examples of how these components are incorporated into the programme?
4. How do you assess the readiness and competency of tutors to facilitate online tutorials? Are there any specific criteria or assessments used to evaluate their progress and performance?
5. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the TPLP in terms of preparing tutors for online tutorial facilitation? Are there any areas that you believe could be further enhanced or improved?
6. How do you collaborate with lecturers and other stakeholders to ensure the alignment of tutor training with the overall goals and objectives of the educational institution? Are there any specific challenges or opportunities you have encountered in this collaboration?
7. Can you share any specific examples or instances where you have witnessed the positive impact of the TPLP on tutors' ability to facilitate online tutorials? How have these instances demonstrated the effectiveness of the program in preparing tutors for their role?

Interview Schedule – Lecturers (or dept. Tutor Coordinators)



Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study on your experience of the Tutor Professional Learning Programme (TPLP) and its effectiveness in preparing your tutors to successfully facilitate online tutorials. The purpose of this interview is to gain a comprehensive understanding of your experiences and perspectives as a lecturer or tutor coordinator working with online tutors, as well as your insights into the effectiveness of the TPLP.

Please note that your participation in this interview is voluntary, and all information provided will be treated confidentially. Your responses will contribute valuable insights to the research findings and help inform recommendations for the enhancement of tutor training programmes in the online learning context.

The interview will be conducted online, and it is expected to take approximately 30 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy during data analysis; any identifying information will be kept confidential. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have before or during the interview. Your honest and thoughtful responses are highly appreciated and will greatly contribute to the success of this study.

Questions – Lecturers (or dept. Tutor Coordinators)

1. Can you describe your involvement in the TPLP? How have you contributed to it? What specific input or expertise do you bring to the TPLP based on your background and experiences?
2. Can you describe your experience working with online tutors who have undergone the TPLP? How do you engage with tutors who have completed the TPLP?
3. From your perspective, what specific elements or aspects of the TPLP have you observed to be most influential in preparing tutors for successful online tutorial facilitation? Can you provide examples and describe their role within the program?
4. What are your perceptions of the effectiveness of the TPLP in preparing tutors for online tutorial facilitation that promotes student engagement and meaningful learning?
5. Are there any specific strategies or approaches you have noticed being applied by the tutors after completing the programme?
6. In what ways do you provide support and feedback to tutors in your faculty or specific course?
7. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the TPLP in terms of preparing tutors for online tutorial facilitation? Are there any areas that you believe could be further developed or enhanced?
8. How do you perceive the role of the programme coordinator in supporting tutors and facilitating effective training? Have their contributions had any noticeable effects on the tutors' performance or the overall quality of online tutorials?
9. Can you share any specific examples or instances where you have witnessed the positive impact of the TPLP on tutors' ability to facilitate online tutorials? How have these instances demonstrated the effectiveness of the program in preparing tutors for their role?

Appendix 5: Sample Data Trail – Participant P1 Transcript Snippet

Below is a snippet from P1's transcript that will be used to illustrate the process of thematic analysis (from codes to themes) followed in this study.

Mueletshedzi Ndwambi 11:26
Okay. So you mentioned that you work with other educational consultants, I think is what you called them, just in terms of preparing the training content, as well as input from the faculty itself.

P1 11:57
Yes, definitely. In tutor training we need all the stakeholders because the faculties are not the same. For example, you find that the [redacted] So it is very much important that you bring all the expertise, or you make sure that you involve all of them in your training. And then that way at least you'll have that variety in your training, rather than just having just one way of doing things. [redacted] So it is important that you also understand how tutoring can be done in that space. So collaboration is key in whatever we are doing in this space. You can't work on your own.

Mueletshedzi Ndwambi 13:50
Can you think of other elements that are very important to making the programme work and how they align with the goals of the university in terms of tutoring?

P1 14:06
I think we need to bring in the faculty coordinators more because I think [redacted] that we are missing. After we have done the training, we leave tutors to the lecturers. And then after that nothing happens. We don't go to their classes to see how they are tutoring. So I think more collaboration with the lecturers who are teaching those particular modules is important, also to see how actually the tutoring is actually done, so that we can improve the programme. Actually, [redacted] We want to work well with the lecturers. [redacted] ongoing training feedback, and support.

The faculty tutor coordinators give us information about the tutors, but in terms of what is actually happening in the classroom, it's hard, because we are not based in the faculties. So ... It's very difficult to work with people, especially at faculty level, to work with particular modules in the faculty, that is very difficult. [redacted]

Handwritten Annotations:

- Stakeholder involvement** (with arrow pointing to "all the stakeholders")
- collaboration, community** (with arrow pointing to "collaboration is key")
- strength in diversity** (with arrow pointing to "faculties are not the same")
- tailoring tutor training** (with arrow pointing to "bring all the expertise")
- roles and responsibilities within TPLP** (with arrow pointing to "involve all of them")
- participatory diversity** (with arrow pointing to "understand how tutoring can be done")
- diverse tutor backgrounds and experiences** (with arrow pointing to "bring all the expertise")
- collaboration among stakeholders** (with arrow pointing to "collaboration is key")
- community within TPLP** (with arrow pointing to "collaboration is key")
- division of labour** (with arrow pointing to "involve all of them")
- tailor tutor training** (with arrow pointing to "bring all the expertise")
- trainer (P1) responsibility** (with arrow pointing to "bring all the expertise")
- differences in faculty tutor practices** (with arrow pointing to "faculties are not the same")
- differences in faculty tutor practices** (with arrow pointing to "bring all the expertise")
- distribution of responsibility** (with arrow pointing to "bring in the faculty coordinators")
- tension between expectation and reality** (with arrow pointing to "it's hard")
- continuous collaboration on** (with arrow pointing to "ongoing training feedback")
- ongoing training feedback, and support** (with arrow pointing to "ongoing training feedback")
- TPLP gap** (with arrow pointing to "ongoing training feedback")
- strategy to enhance TPLP** (with arrow pointing to "ongoing training feedback")
- strategy to enhance TPLP** (with arrow pointing to "ongoing training feedback")
- gaps → space for improvement** (with arrow pointing to "it's hard")
- strategy to enhance TPLP** (with arrow pointing to "it's hard")
- interactions and tension between subjects in the activity system** (with arrow pointing to "it's hard")

because they also need support. I think they need support in that regard.

→ collaboration
→ continued support
→ cultivating community within TPLP

Mueletshedzi Ndwambi 15:40
So what I'm understanding from what you're saying is a certain level you don't really have access to see the tutors conduct tutorials after training. You basically sort of end at the training stage and then you release them into the faculties.

P1 15:59 → gap
→ lack of tutorial observation
→ interactions and tensions
→ lecturer territoriality

Yes... We can't get into the classroom and see what tutors are doing, we can't get in there, because then you are getting into somebody's territory. Most lecturers are territorial with the module they are teaching. Unless in high impact modules, that is where maybe you can have access, because when their modules are not doing well, that is where maybe they will involve you more. But other lecturers don't want anyone to come into their space, especially if you are not from the faculty.

→ tension; territoriality
→ challenges in sustaining collaboration within the community.

Mueletshedzi Ndwambi 16:38
Okay, so then how do you assess the readiness and competency of tutors to facilitate those tutorials? How do you know that you've done justice in equipping them with the right skills or the right knowledge to continue on with the tutorial sessions?

P1 17:06 → monitoring and evaluating to improve training.
→ strategy to enhance TPLP

Most of the time we rely on the feedback that we get because we'll give them evaluation forms to complete after the training. And we try to make the evaluation form more comprehensive, that we can [redacted] as possible just to [redacted] → M&E

And then if maybe it had some sort of mindset and then all that, and then [redacted] strategy that we also use the tutor [redacted] they told me that they really enjoy [redacted]

They really thought that some of them, they will even indicate that I should have done the training even before I start tutoring.

→ M&E → community building → sense of community.

And then also another way is to use the CoP's that we are doing. The quarterly CoP's that we do, which are the community of practice, where we call tutors back maybe after three months just to find out what is happening. Is there anything that we can help you with? Is there any intervention that you want us to help with? ... just to find out how they are finding the tutoring. Are there specific things that still need to be sorted. And then that is another way in which we are able to see what is happening ... it's more of a conversation; we just talk to them rather than presenting content. But besides that, we can't get into the classroom and see exactly what they are doing.

→ tension; territoriality.
→ continued support.

tutor roles and response
tutor experience of training

The following figure illustrates how codes derived from the transcript were synthesized into categories and then into the broader themes that inform the study's findings:

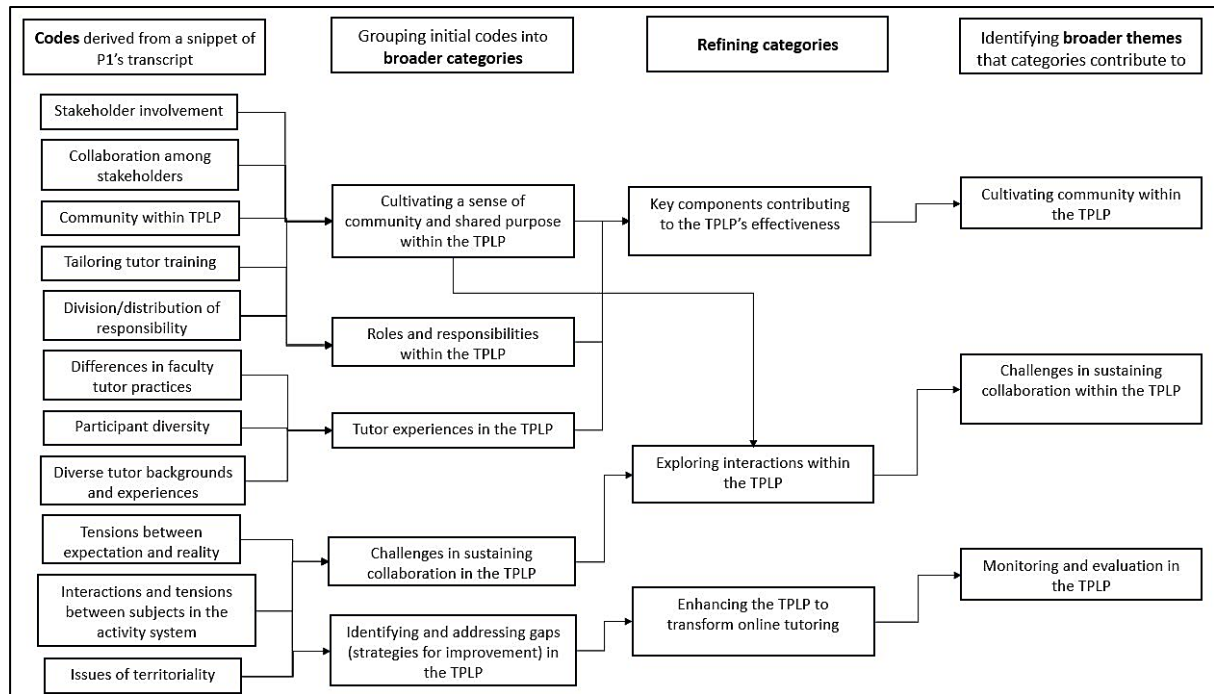


Figure 6: Thematic content analysis illustrated using P1's transcript snippet