İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY
C E R R A H P A Ş A

HAYEF: Journal of Education

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reinventing Student–Teacher Relationship in Higher Education Institutions of Developing Nations: Lessons From the University of the Free State

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Abstract

This quantitative study shows the students' perception and expectations regarding the lecturer's role in maintaining pedagogical relations at the higher institution level of developing nations. The roles were framed within four major themes namely students' academic development, social relationships, respect and trust and ethics of care. The study was motivated given (1) the recent expansion and emphasis on e-learning due to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic; (2) the impression that students often abandon their role and shift the onus to the lecturer in terms of sustaining and maintaining pedagogical relations; and (3) the fact that some lecturers are likely to prioritize (or choose) professionalism as a replacement for pedagogical relations given reasons such as class size, fear of contempt, and impartiality. The finding confirms that students relegate the responsibility (or the obligation) of driving the pedagogical relations to the lecturers. Students also expect the lecturer to always be approachable and attentive to students' morals, students' academic goals, teaching and learning, and student's personal development and well-being. The study recommends that the students should be respectful, teachable, and disciplined, whilst the pedagogical teaching and learning training for the lecturers should incorporate themes on maintaining student–teacher relationships to help the lecturers to develop good teaching skills and philosophy. It further recommends that large-size classes (which often constitute economic modules for schools in developing nations) be reduced, whilst the culture of caring be encouraged amongst staff, as well as mainstreaming teaching philosophies that are based on "humane" professionalism. The study concludes that efforts should be concerted to encourage students to play their part in maintaining and promoting good pedagogical relations at institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: Caring culture, education and development, higher education, student–teacher well-being, teaching and learning

Introduction

The term relational pedagogy implies a wide range of social roles that influence the personal and social features of the lecturer and students in educational settings. Although this does not happen without challenges, the lecturers are often thought to have control of any process that enhances effective interaction between students and lecturers such that the students' role in developing such relationships is often taken for granted. Some lecturers do not believe in the plausibility and feasibility of practicing proper student–teacher relationship in developing nations due to large-size classes and other reasons. In most cases, lecturers are indifferent about the concept when it comes to their teaching philosophy for reasons relating to fear of contempt from the student, unprofessionalism, and unfairness. Also, going forward into the post-pandemic, teaching and learning has become e-learning intense and unprecedented, thereby engendering the intensification of pedagogical relation against possible relational gap that can be caused by e-learning.

Consequently, the researcher of this study perceived mainstreaming of relational pedagogy drive as a sinequanon for higher education institution (HEI) development in developing nations going forward into the post-pandemic. The study inquires on how best the pedagogical relations can be actualized in HEI given the challenges such as large-size classes. The purpose of the study is to empirically examine the students' perception regarding the lecturer's role in maintaining relational

pedagogy in HEI. Hence, the students' perception of how student–teacher relationships should be enhanced to boost students' personal development, academics, and teaching and learning. Precisely put, how teaching philosophies would be best practiced in HEI to enhance pedagogical relations in terms of how the students want to be treated. The study responded to the question of *how the student–teacher relationship would be improved to enhance teaching and learning processes from the students' perspective.* The University of the Free State is a multi-campus university known for its richness in terms of cultural diversity and inclusivity. In terms of the study's significance, the study is expected to contribute toward the existing literature on pedagogical relations. Also, the study sheds light on how HEI students want to be cared for by their lecturers. This study outcome is expected to contribute to the inquiry regarding how pedagogical relations can be improved in HEIs from the students' perspective. The general impression had been that the lecturers should take the lead in driving pedagogical relations in the higher education (HE) setup (Vandeyar, 2020).

Literature Review

The Concept of Pedagogical Relations

Relational pedagogy or pedagogical relations involves a process of establishing and maintaining the climate and culture of trust, care, and autonomy in the classroom (Hollweck et al., 2019). This description emphasizes the importance of placing the student–teacher relationship

Cite this article as: Okoye, F. (2023). Reinventing student–teacher relationship in higher education institutions of developing nations: Lessons from the university of the free state. *HAYEF: Journal of Education*, 20(2), 119-127.

at the center of the learning process to build a climate and culture of care, interaction, and trust needed in the classroom. The relationship between lecturers and students is developed organically through social interaction and instructional methods (Crownover & Jones, 2018). The evidence from other countries revealed that there is a shift from teaching an entire class to individualized teaching as could be found in Sweden's context (Aspelin, 2014). Similarly, in Denmark, research has shown that the continuous use of the supportive student–teacher relationship enhances teaching and learning processes (Aspelin & Jonsson, 2019). The concept of pedagogical relations hinges on love, obedience, and authority, although it is closely aligned with the powers of the institution that gives authority to the instructors (Friesen, 2017). There is a question previously asked about the *vulnerability of liability* that emerges when pedagogical relations are being discussed, implemented, or executed (Aspelin & Jonsson, 2019). Thus, the question proliferates, as well as the vulnerability when the institution(s) has a history of racial divide, large class sizes, top-down policy setup, and language of learning issues. For instance, Vandeyar (2020) argued that although most South African universities have established policies and structures to address issues related to equity transformation and change, the epistemological traditions even though this transformation, for some reasons, have not been actualized. Given the intricacies of the matter, pedagogical relations often receive very shabby (or inadequate) attention of the institutions' policymakers irrespective of its significance *vis-à-vis* teaching philosophy. Particularly, some pedagogical relationships are fraught with inconsistency, alienation, and non-self-transparency (Friesen, 2017). There is also a question relating to how to deal with issues of leniency and issues of familiarity that leads to the occurrence of contempt and could detract from the expected professional practices, which need to be addressed (Kang, 2022).

Teachers' Pedagogical Beliefs and Teaching Philosophy

Brownlee and Berthelsen (2008) argue that the social and learning context including the epistemological beliefs of lecturers are socially constructed. In some instances, some lecturers believe that professional work ethic remains an alternative or replacement for pedagogical relations thereby neglecting the concept in their practice (Kang, 2022). This gives credence to the significance of why conscious and deliberate processes are required by HEIs to develop the relational competencies of the lecturers. Similarly, Aspelin (2014) argues that pedagogical attitude can be explained by way of three types of student–teacher relationships. These include (1) an asymmetric intersubjective relationship; (2) an asymmetric subject–object relationship; and (3) an asymmetric object–subject relationship. In intersubjective relational pedagogy, "*a teacher who adopts a relational attitude achieves an essential bond with the student(s), s/he approaches the student as a unique subject and responds as a pedagogical subject*" (Aspelin, 2014, p. 237). Thus, since the teaching practice is expected to be interactive, it should involve a process of observing students' existing conceptions and sensitivity. The implication of this to the role of the teacher includes facilitating students' learning, identifying diverse students' needs, and identifying students' learning needs when planning a course and orchestrating classroom teaching (Postareff et al., 2007), which would not happen without a well-established relational interaction between the subjects. The subject–object or object–subject relationship detracts from the teaching philosophy that conceives the teacher and learner as collaborators (Aspelin & Jonsson, 2019). In other words, the student must be seen not only as a student (who must be taught and receiver of directives) but also as a collaborative. The institutions' decision-making authorities should ensure that the teaching philosophy of the institution incorporates the drive for "humane professionalism," and a relational sense of community for better teaching and learning to ensue. In situations where racism, religious or political bigots, neglect of students' voices, and what may be described as "over professionalism" are possible, the relational pedagogical drive must be considered

very important by the institution (Hollweck et al., 2019). These elements of factors can become the "optical illusion" in the pedagogical belief and philosophy of a teacher (or lecturer) thereby continuing to detract from the dividend of functional teaching and learning environment. Hence, there must be an intended motive to care and exhibit relation competencies toward the student, which constituted part of the lecturers' training. In an African context, these factors are prone to exist in HEIs irrespective of the large-size classes that form the economic module of most HEIs.

Ethics of Care and Emotions

In HE, the development of rapt relationships between the student and lecturer include the student–student relationship, student–content relationship, and students' adjustment to the learning environment (Aspelin, 2014). Thus, focusing on the concepts of care and connectedness, Owusu-Ansah and Kyei-Blankson (2016) argued that while there is a need for academics to obtain relevant pedagogical knowledge, competencies, and/or skills, the students must be able to anticipate that they are being respected, appreciated, and cared for by their lecturers and staff. In other words, the students must feel that they are being respected to build the needed trust for effective teaching and learning to ensue. The institutional culture and academic culture define the context of the ethics of care in every institution. The study by Hagenauer and Volet (2014) shows that the institutional context and culture of the student–teacher relationship are very important. With the HEIs in developing nations, the question that would emerge is whether the institutional culture, as well as academic culture, can influence effective student–teacher relationships given the large-size class phenomenon that forms the economic module in these institutions.

Lecturer–Student Relationship

The student–teacher relationship has been described as a dynamic process that is dependent on the active roles of lecturers and students in HEIs (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019; Kang, 2022). Thus, any strong pedagogical relationship is dependent on the context, hence climate and culture (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2008), and the commitment of lecturers and students. Hagenauer and Volet (2014) extended the narrative on the pedagogical relationship between lecturers and students by identifying three main domains which include *antecedents, quality* and *consequences*. The antecedent is that the relationship between lecturers and students is influenced by the quality and frequency of student–teacher interaction. With the *quality* of the interaction, the affective and support dimensions are essential to enhance the relationship between lecturers and students. Whilst in terms of the *consequences,* the student–teacher relationship remains the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom environment. In the end, the importance of a strong pedagogical relationship has a direct correlation to student success student motivation, student engagement, and student performance (Parnes et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted a social constructivist theory. The social constructivist theory explains the link between internal relations in the teaching and learning setting and external influences (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2008). Internal relations refer to the associations that emerge between new information to be learned, the previous knowledge, and beliefs. Whilst external influences describe the associations between the self, others, and the learning environment where education participants negotiate learning and share knowledge. The theory followed Brownlee's (2004) conceptualization of relational pedagogy in which three main elements necessitate social relationship between the parties. These elements include mutual respect among lecturers and students, situating learning in students' experience, and the enabling environment that nurture a constructivist perspective of knowing and learning (Brownlee, 2004). The theory suggests that successful

teaching and learning is heavily dependent on interpersonal interaction and student–teacher relationships with a primary focus on the student's understanding (Brownlee, 2004; Powell & Kalina, 2009). Other theories have been used in different studies on pedagogical relations such as Martin Buber's philosophy of dialog, Nel Noddings' care philosophy, Thomas Scheff's social psychological theory (Aspelin, 2014, 2017), and others. In this study, the social constructivist theory enables the researcher to examine students' perception and experiences vis-à-vis the learning context and approaches to maintaining relational pedagogy. Also, it allows the researcher to establish the link between knowledge sharing is constructed through interaction, human development, and relations (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Methodologyolog

The study utilized a quantitative approach to ensure that the research question is adequately answered. The probability sampling technique was adopted for recruiting students to participate in the survey. The probability sampling technique is employed to generate a formal or statistically representative sample (Creswell, 2013). Hence, the researchers who use probability sampling techniques are aiming to identify a representative sample from which to collect data (Creswell, 2013). The study was conducted at the three campuses of the university namely the Bloemfontein Campus, QwaQwa Campus, and the South Campus. The sample was based on undergraduate contact students. These students were contacted through the university website communication channels and the total number of students contacted was 30,741 from various faculties, campuses, and undergraduate academic levels. Each contacted student received both the consent form and questionnaire online. The total number of questionnaires completed and returned was 1091, which represents 3.54% of the total population of students who were contacted. Ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the University's research ethics council before data collection. Strict adherence to human science research ethics policy was observed throughout the study. The study was sponsored by the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP). Pseudo-names were applied to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the study participants as stipulated in the consent form. The data were collected and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and Evasys. This is to ensure that inferential and explanatory processes of gathering standardized information, as well as to enable the researcher to make proper inferences and conclusions.

Meanwhile, the study's limitation is having a low number of participants who completed and returned the questionnaire. This was engendered by the COVID-19-induced effects. However, the number of questionnaires returned does not translate into the sample size being considered wanting or "small" in this study context. In some cases, the "insufficiency" of sample size can be considered threatening to the validity and generalizability of a study's results, but not in every case (Allen, 2017; Bhandari, 2022). On one side, the "insufficient" sample size is irrelevant in situations where the probability sampling technique allows the quantitative researcher to choose a sample size that serves as a representation of the overall population being studied (Creswell, 2013). On the other hand, the excessively large number of questionnaires can only be effective in a situation where all the questions are constructed to measure the same concept, but not appropriate for tests which measure different constructs (Chakrabartty, 2013). In this study context, different concepts were measured in the questionnaire. These concepts include student academic development support, student–teacher social relationship, respect and trust, and the ethics of care. During the conceptualization of the study, the researchers agreed that any sample size above 3% of the sampled population would be sufficient to make valid inferences

and generalizable conclusions. The sampling is tabulated for a concise and precise presentation.

Sampling Table

Quantitative	Number of Students Contacted and Survey Distributed	Number of Survey Completed and Returned	No. of Spoiled	Total
Undergraduate students	30,741	1091	Nil	1091 (3.54% of distributed survey)

Validity and Reliability of the Study

In quantitative studies, the rigor, integrity, or accuracy is determined through an evaluation of the validity and reliability of the questionnaire or instrument (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Validity explains the extent to which a test conducted accurately measures a concept (Heale & Twycross, 2015). To strengthen the accuracy of the measures that were used in the study, different categories of validity namely construct, criterion, and content validity were implemented to ensure that the different constructs measured the concepts that the researcher intended them to measure (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Content validity was applied to check whether the survey instrument adequately measures the concepts that were described in the study (Allen, 2017). Hence, the survey went through a highly qualified team of research specialists for scrutiny which include the supervisor, researchers, and research assessment team that constitutes members of the DIRAP academics. Construct validity was sought to strengthen the accuracy of the measures by drawing inferences about the study results. Criterion validity was applied to check how a measure is related to the outcome of the study as the preliminary administration of the questionnaire was conducted to identify issues and concerns to design the most appropriate questionnaire.

Reliability refers to the consistency of the study result (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Consistency refers to the reliability, stability, and repeatability of study results (Bhandari, 2022). The study result or outcome is considered reliable if consistent results have been obtained in identical situations in different circumstances (Allen, 2017). There is internal and external consistency (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Reliability testing is to establish equivalence, stability over time, and internal consistency among the different constructs (Bhandari, 2022). In this study, the survey was administered to the university's undergraduate students across various disciplines, campuses, ages, and study levels which accounts for the internal consistency measure of the study (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Whereas external consistency happens when this study is replicated in a similar context which would make test–retest reliability possible (Chakrabartty, 2013). It is important to reiterate that this study is conducted in a university in a developing country that shares similar attributes and challenges with other universities in the country and beyond. In the context of the concepts under study, the study's result is generalizable although generalizability by its definition is not always relevant to the goal and methodology of most studies (Bhandari, 2022). Hence, the conclusions and findings of the study are transferable to other contexts.

Findings

The finding has sections (A & B). Section A contains the biographical information of the participants which was stored and analyzed separately from the rest of the data. Section B was analyzed under four major themes: academic development support for the learners; social relationships; respect and trust; and ethics of care.
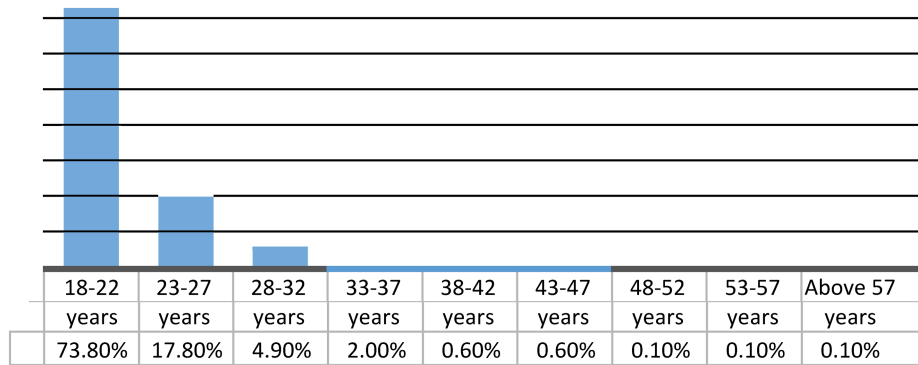
	18-22 years	23-27 years	28-32 years	33-37 years	38-42 years	43-47 years	48-52 years	53-57 years	Above 57 years
	73.80%	17.80%	4.90%	2.00%	0.60%	0.60%	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%

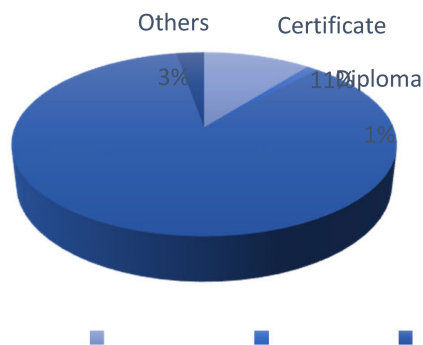Figure 1.
Age Distribution of Contact Students.

Programme category

Figure 2.
Program Category.

Section A

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of contact students who participated in the study. Participants who were aged between 18 and 22 years constituted 73.80%, while the least category of students who

participated in the study was those who were above age 57 representing 1.10% of the total participants. The distribution of participants by the campus of the study was as follows: Bloemfontein (58.8%), QwaQwa (27.6%), and South Campus (13.6%).

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the contact students according to their level of education. Students who were studying for degree qualifications represented the highest number of participants with 85.0%, while students who were studying other programs other than Diploma were 3.0% of the total participants. The race distribution of participants is as follows: African (89.6%), Indian (0.4%), Colored (3.4%), White (5.9%), foreign national—African (0.6%), and foreign national—Other (0.1%). The biographical data required students to provide information regarding their faculty. The data revealed that students who were studying for various degree programs in the Natural and Agricultural Sciences were 17.9%, Humanities (23.6%), Education (29.8%), Economic and Management Sciences (21.0%), Health Science (1.5%), Law (4.1%), and Theology (2.2%).

Figure 3 shows the distribution of contact students by language. The majority of students indicated that Sesotho was their home language (25.5%), while students who noted that IsiNdebele was their home
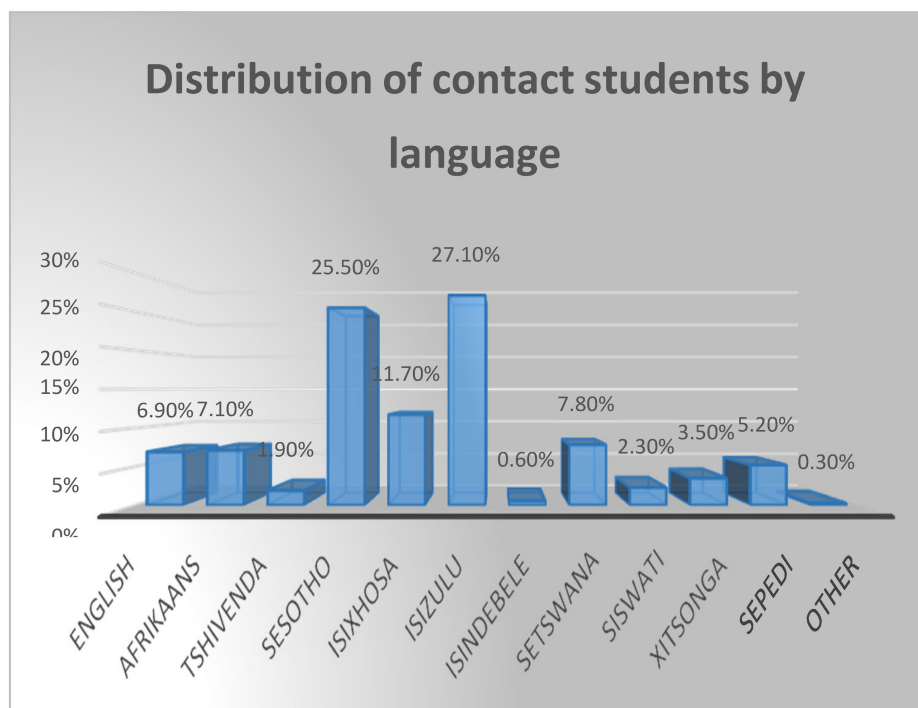

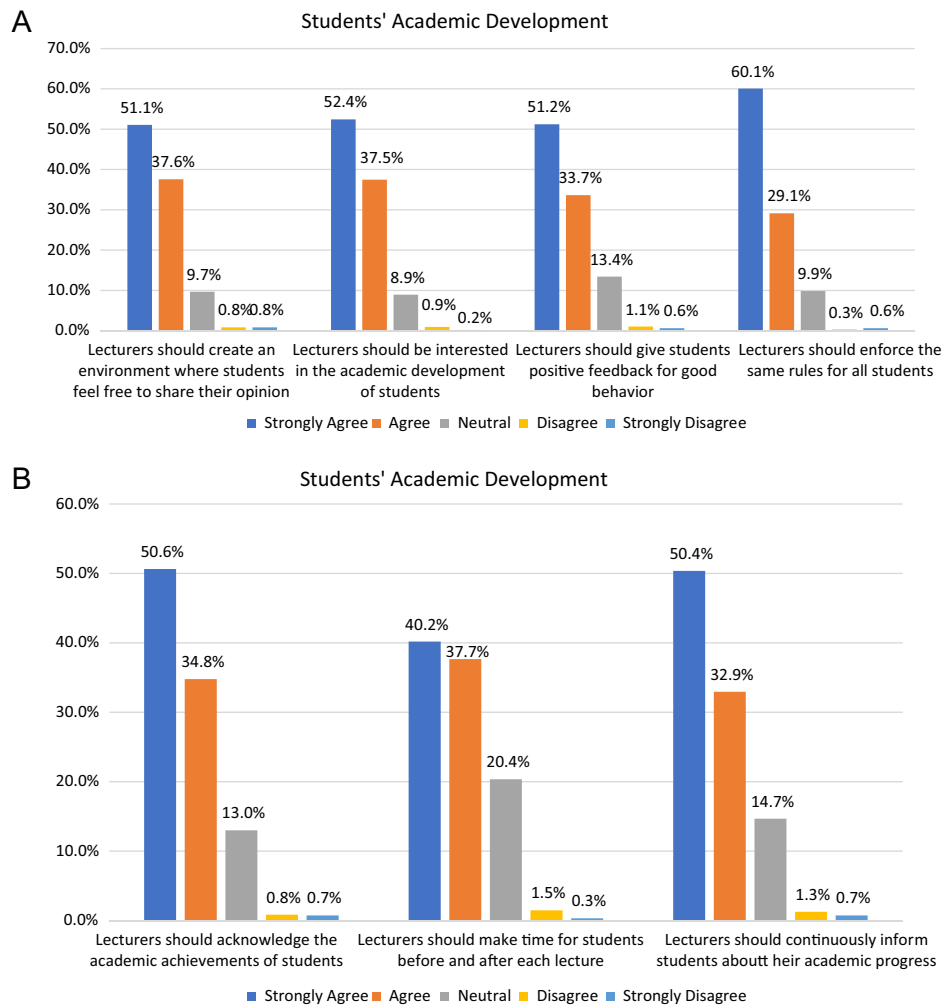Figure 3.
Distribution of Contact Students by Language.

Figure 4.
Student's Academic Development Support.

language represented 0.6%. IsiZulu and English represent 27.10% and 6.90%, respectively. The variety of language used in this paper implies diversity and cultural differences. In this study, an effort was made to ensure that representation reflects diversity as found in the University.

Section B

Figure 4A shows the commitment of lecturers to students' academic development. The commitment of lecturers to the academic development of students is important in the development of effective pedagogical relationships between learners and lecturers. The finding (ss indicated in Figure 4A revealed high agreement percentages under the following themes: (1) lecturers should create an environment where students feel free to share their opinion (51.1%) as strongly agree and (37%) as agreed; (2) Lecturers should be interested in the academic development of students (52.4%) and (37%) strongly agree and agree respectively; (3) lecturers should give students positive feedback for good behavior (51.2% and 33.7%) as strongly agree and agree respectively; and (4) lecturers should enforce the same rules for all students (60.1%). This indicates that students' (irrespective of their backgrounds, language, and cultural diversity) held in highest extreme lecturer fairness across the board. Participants agreed with (50.4%) and (32.9%). Lecturers going the extra mile to fulfill these student-held expectations would (without doubt) boost pedagogical relations.

Figure 4B shows the commitment of the lecturer as a mentor, evaluator, motivator, and primary academic counselor, of course from the students' perspective. The finding on students' academic development further revealed a high percentage of agreement on

lecturers' acknowledgement of students' achievements (50.6%), as well as engagement with the students regarding their academic progress (50.4%). Less than (1%) of the students, on each category of the questions, strongly disagreed, or have no expectations toward the lecturers regarding expected academic development responsibilities. This implies that lecturers going out of their way, as well as beyond the classroom in caring for the student's academic development would create a sense of safety and fulfillment in the students, thereby intensifying pedagogical relations.

Figure 5 shows that students were divided regarding whether or not the lecturer paid attention in terms of what happened outside the classroom. The student participants were however unanimous regarding the approachability of the lecturer for a sustainable student–teacher relationship to ensue. As such, 61.6% of the student participants strongly agreed that lecturers should be more approachable. Thirty-one percent of participants were neutral regarding whether or not the lecturers wanted to take interest in what the students do outside their class. Whilst a very minimal percentage number of participants disagree that lecturers should take the enumerated social relationship-building responsibilities seriously. This finding presents the complexity of the matter; the students want social relationships but with certain boundaries. This points to the significance of strengthening the pedagogical relationship competencies of the lecturers as part of the ongoing teaching and learning capacity building.

Figure 6 shows that among the important features of relational pedagogies is the mutual respect and trust that exist between the lecturers
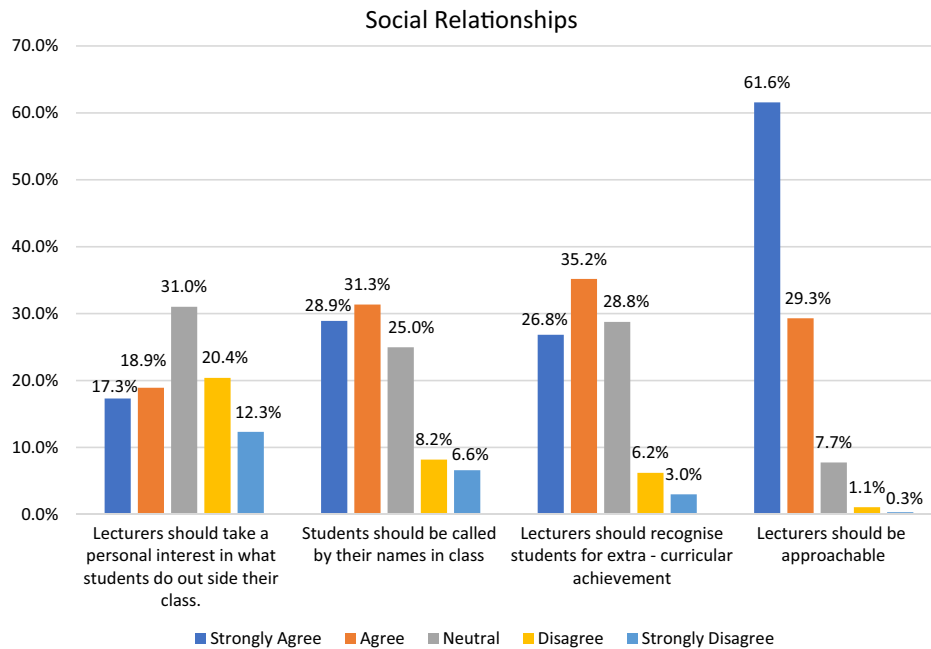
Figure 5.
Student-teacher social relationship.

and students in the classroom setting. The question that produced the graph in Figure 6 sought the opinion of participants regarding how to maintain respect and trust in the learning environment, between lecturers and between students and lecturers. The finding, however, revealed high agreement percentages among students regarding how respect and trust could be built within the teaching and learning environment. It is important to mention that a very insignificant percentage number of participants disagreed with the respect and trust (or social relationship) building traits as experimented with or presented in Figure 6. Thus, this points to the significance of professionalism in whatsoever the lecturers do. Most students or participants agreed that the lecturer should greet the students in the class (49.3%), maintain eye contact (43.3%), and show interest in students' viewpoints (45.6%). It then buoys down to the lecturer being dedicated or committed to ensuring that students feel safe, accepted, and respected. These responses show that students put a lot of expectations on the lecturers while failing to retrospect on students' roles in maintaining good pedagogical relations.

Figure 7 reveals students' perspectives regarding the lecturer's role in the ethics of care. This finding as presented in Figure 7 showed that a little over (50%) of participants agreed with the statement that lecturers should care about the non-academic matters of students. It also revealed that more than (50%) of participants believed that lecturers should care about students' social skills. Whilst (42%) of participants who responded to the particular question agreed that the lecturers should care about the moral development of the student

Summary of Findings

The survey targeted the students and explored the students' perception of pedagogical relations within four major themes namely: (1) students' academic development (2) social relationships; (3) respect and trust; and (4) ethics of care. Interestingly, the question "lecturers should be approachable" recorded the highest student agreement level of (61.6%) which, of course, raises an eyebrow (see details in the data presentation section). The result reveals high expectations from
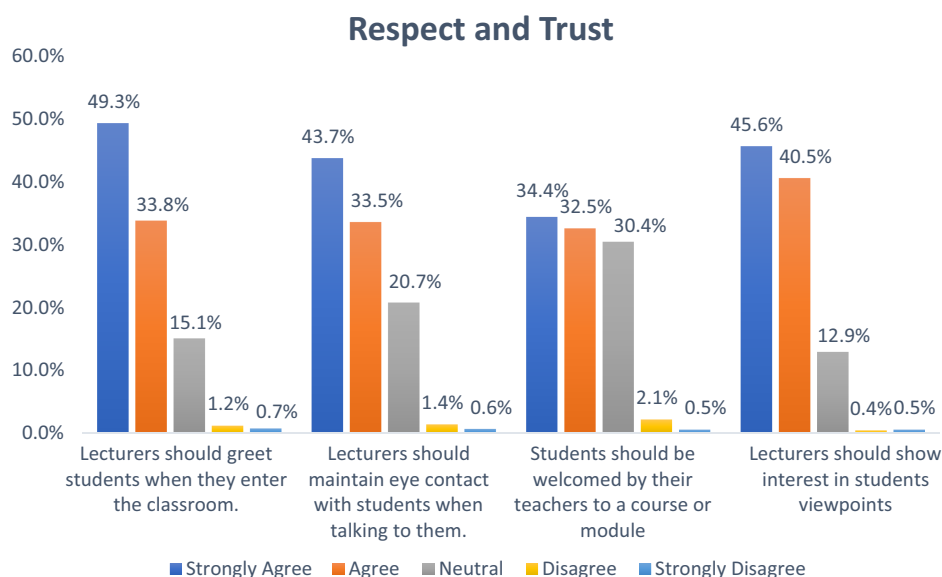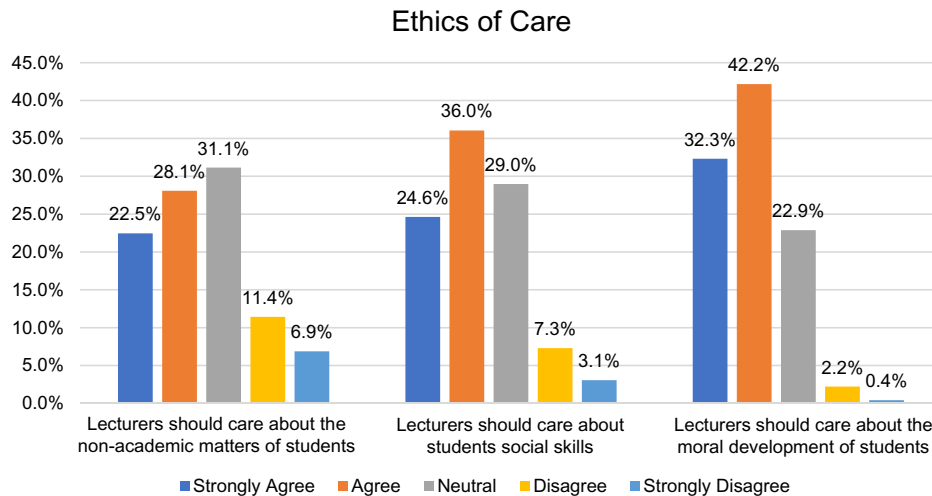

Figure 6.
Respect and trust.

Figure 7.
Ethics of care.

students regarding the lecturer's role in pedagogical relations. The finding thus gives a general impression, as well as reveals that the majority of the students hold social relationship expectations over the lecturers. Hence, the lecturer, in the students' opinion, has more responsibility (or obligation) to drive social relationships in a higher institution for good reasons. The reasons associated with overall teaching and learning progressive goals, students' personal development goals, student satisfaction drive, and the building of the university's image. This also implies that any motivation or support from the HEIs to facilitate pedagogical relations is considered a bonus.

Discussion

The social relationship between lecturers and students is driven by effective communication and interaction within and outside the school environment (Cishe, 2014; Cox, 2019). Emerging discourse in HE has revealed the importance of transferring information or knowledge sharing between lecturers and students (Suciu, 2014). The social distance between the teacher and the learner could only result in estrangements that eventually constrain effective teaching and learning (Parnes et al., 2020). A good pedagogical relationship depends on a situation where a strong combination of a conducive environment and mutual respect thrives (Aspin, 2017). This study's findings revealed that participants agreed with the statements that lecturers should be approachable and recognize students for their extracurricular achievements. Students are divided as to whether the lecturers should take a personal interest in what students do outside their classrooms. Although less than 40% of the students sanctioned this fact, it also affirms the fact that teaching and learning is a community affair (Champion, 2017). Community prioritizes relationship (Parnes et al., 2020). This implies that a teacher or lecturer who failed in his/her relationship with the student has failed in his/her duty as a teacher.

However, the finding reveals that HEI students felt that social relationships between students and their lecturers are important to the learning processes. The students believed that when lecturers develop good social relationships with students, it not only enhances students' participation in teaching and learning processes but also helps students to develop an interest in various themes being studied. Hence, the process eventually translates into students' strong commitment to passing their examinations (Parnes et al., 2020). As the students indicated their interest in learning content, they also indicated that effective student–teacher engagement is essentially important to them. The students further highlighted the importance of social relationships for students who are from rural areas and low socioeconomic backgrounds

to be supported. The students shared their negative experiences where some lecturers chose to develop social relationships with students of a particular race (Champion, 2017). Thus, a situation where staff show more interest or pay more attention to the academic development of a particular student compared to their counterparts from other races. Concerning the open question on the survey, students lamented against tendencies where some lecturers create social distance between themselves and/or their students by (1) not replying to students' emails; (2) not showing up in the office during student consultation sessions; and (3) creating poor communication in the name of "professionalism." Another important finding is the revelation that students are motivated to participate in classroom discussions when lecturers identify them by their names. The important feature of relational pedagogies is the mutual respect and trust that exist among lecturers and students (Parnes et al., 2020). The finding showed high agreement percentages among students who believe the lecturers should show interest in students' viewpoints, greet students when they enter the classroom, and persistently pay attention to the student's general well-being (not just academics).

Nevertheless, in terms of the ethics of care, the relational proficiencies of the lecturers are strengthened and developed through interaction with students in a learning environment (Ljungblad, 2021). For instance, the lecturer may have a cognitive idea of what is expected but in reality, every set of students is different, and the environment may change for one reason or another. Hence, without proper relational pedagogy in place, teaching and learning become a difficult or herculean task for education participants. Crownover and Jones (2018) noted that good social relationship with students creates an atmosphere of trust, commitment, and disposition that enable them to participate in class discussions. It also helps the lecturers to identify the learning needs of students and create opportunities for lecturers to know their students better (Crownover & Jones, 2018). The study's findings showed students' strong conviction that lecturers should focus on their professional obligations which include pedagogical relations. The concept of Ethics of caring consists of two pedagogic structures (1) the active development and preservation of pedagogical relationships and (2) the importance of trust, acceptance, and individual attentiveness on the part of lecturers and students (Walker & Gleaves, 2016). The majority of student participants believed that lecturers should care about the non-academic matters of students, care about students' social skills, and their moral development.

Moreover, there is a question of what constitutes the students' responsibility in building pedagogical relations (Aspelin, 2014). Traditionally,

this study finding indicates that students still expect more responsibility, obligation, and leadership to come from the lecturer(s). Such conventional perception or frame of reference made it quite unclear as to whether the students take seriously their side of responsibility in maintaining, nurturing, and facilitating pedagogical relations. So long as the emphasis and onus are on the lecturers to maintain pedagogical relations, both the students and institutions may be lacking in playing their role since the relationship is a two-way thing (Kang, 2022). Thus, the student's responsibilities include (but are not limited to) being respectful and disciplined (Aspelin, 2017). The lack of respect on the part of the lecturers is intimidating as students emphasized, as well as hinders the quality of student–teacher relationships, teaching and learning engagement. The process that of course detracts from the student satisfaction index. Hence, the relationship between lecturers and students is built on mutual respect and trust, not one that is based on "familiarity." According to this study's participants, developing such mutual respect must involve a collaborative process that helps lecturers to identify the learning needs of students and address them, as well as imbibe the concept or philosophy of "humane professionalism."

Furthermore, the Ethics of care is very important not just in maintaining student satisfaction, building trust, boosting student confidence and promoting good pedagogical relations. The study conducted by Okoye and Pillay (2022) showed that without ethics of care, HE, as well as its practitioners would not have survived the COVID-19 pandemic (Okoye & Pillay, 2022). Thus, the pandemic was indeed cathartic but through the concentrated support amongst HEI practitioners, the world was able to navigate the pandemic crises. Okoye (2022) cautioned restraint in disregarding the systematic caring for the students or the ethics of care in the post-pandemic HE environment (Okoye & Mensah, 2021). To minimize student unrest, optimize student performance, improve student satisfaction and fulfillment, and drive inclusion and retention, the need to improve pedagogical relations in HEIs should be given the attention it deserves. Hence, the study made the following recommendations:

Recommendations

- As part of the institutional strategy to promote effective teaching and learning especially through relational pedagogies, lecturers and students must be continually sensitized through news flash on the university's websites and information channels. This should serve as a constant reminder to educate education participants on the importance of maintaining respect and trust, ethics of care amongst themselves, and social relationship that is based on mutual trust.
- There is a need for an institutional strategy that aims at equipping lecturers with the requisite skills for ensuring sustained ethics of care as an integral part of the student–teacher engagement. This could be done through annual training programs and workshops that allow the lecturers to learn best practices from their colleagues.
- Ensure that courses or modules that have many registered students are split into "controllable" small-size classes that can enhance effective teaching and learning.
- Caring culture amongst the staff and students should be encouraged and made an integral part of teaching philosophy by the HEIs in developing nations.
- Students must be respectful and teachable for an effective pedagogical relation to ensue in HEIs of developing nations.
- Future studies need to articulate the students' responsibility in maintaining effective pedagogical relationships and how these roles can be encouraged and/or improved in HEIs of developing nations.

Conclusion

The current study concludes that it is important to internally develop strategies that would aid the promotion of good pedagogical relationships in HEIs found in developing nations. This drive to maintain good pedagogical relations should be integrated as part of the teaching or teacher philosophy of HEIs. Thus, this should form part of the attempt to shift from the old frames of reference and perspective where some lecturers consider building social relationships with the students as contravening the ethics of professionalism. There is an increasing need to encourage teaching philosophies that are based on constructs one may describe as "humane professionalism." especially in contexts where. In terms of articulating and reconstructing the students' role in maintaining pedagogical relations, the lecturer's perception of the concept should not be considered absolute. The student's perception of how they expect to be treated by the lecturer would help to reverse the existing lacuna in sustaining good pedagogical relations in HEIs of developing countries. Experiences and shreds of evidence from racial diversity contexts such as the USA, South Africa, Canada, and others have shown that good relational pedagogies have taken teaching and learning beyond the borders of professionalism. In Africa and beyond, most students and lecturers still struggling with the trauma from COVID-19 effects; good pedagogical relations can go a long way in driving healing and recovery in the post-pandemic. The effects of large-size classes in the HEIs of developing nations poses a challenge to the possibility of actualizing good pedagogical relationship. As part of the post-pandemic "new-normal," many HEIs in developing nations are mainstreaming e-learning and digitalization; the possible relational lacuna that the use of technology in teaching and learning can create remains a concern. These situations hence call for pedagogical mainstreaming at the HE level in developing nations. The effects of good social relations between education participants—that are based on mutual respect—cannot be overemphasized.

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