



Teacher-Student Relationship in African Theological Education: A Comparative Evaluation of Jesus' Discipleship Model

Danjuma Umaru Anzaku, PhD

Ecwa Theological Seminary Karu-Abuja, Nigeria

Department of Christian Education

danjumaanzaku10@gmail.com

08088832226

ABSTRACT

This study examines teacher-student relationship in African theological education through a qualitative, literature-based approach, evaluated in the light of Jesus' discipleship model. Recent scholarship highlights the growing tension between academic formalization and relational formation within theological education in Africa. Drawing on contemporary literature (2020-2026) in educational theory, African theological education, and biblical studies, the study identifies key challenges, including hierarchical relationships, weak mentorship structures, and limited integration of spiritual formation. These patterns are critically analyzed against Jesus' pedagogical model, which emphasizes relational proximity, servant leadership, experiential learning, and holistic transformation. The study argues that current practices often fall short of this model, thereby undermining the effectiveness of ministerial formation. It proposes a re-envisioning of theological education that integrates academic rigor with intentional mentorship and relational engagement. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on contextualizing theological education and enhancing its transformative impact in African contexts.

Keywords: Teacher-student relationship; Theological education; Discipleship model; Mentorship; African context

Introduction

The nature and quality of teacher-student relationships remain a critical factor in shaping educational outcomes across disciplines, including theological education. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the relational dynamics between educators and learners, particularly in higher education contexts where mentorship, engagement, and personal formation are essential components of learning. Empirical studies have demonstrated that positive teacher-student relationship significantly enhance student engagement, motivation, and academic success, underscoring the centrality of relational pedagogy in effective education (Apeh & Nteh, 2024).

However, despite this growing recognition, concerns persist regarding the depth and quality of such relationships within theological institutions, especially in African contexts where theological education is expected to integrate intellectual rigor with spiritual and moral formation.

Theological education in Africa has undergone substantial transformation in the twenty-first century, marked by rapid institutional expansion, diversification of programs, and increasing



engagement with global academic standards. Recent scholarship highlights that theological institutions in Africa serve not only as centers of academic inquiry but also as formative spaces for developing spiritual leaders capable of addressing complex societal and ecclesial challenges (Adeiza et al., 2025). At the same time, there is a growing consensus that theological education must remain contextually responsive, aligning its curriculum and pedagogical approaches with the socio-cultural realities and developmental aspirations of African societies (Naidoo & Kgatla, 2024). These dual demands for academic excellence and contextual relevance have intensified the need to reassess the relational dimensions of theological training.

One of the most significant challenges identified in recent literature is the tension between institutional formalization and relational formation. As theological institutions adopt structured curricula, accreditation requirements, and standardized pedagogical models, there is a tendency for teacher–student relationships to become increasingly formalized and less personal. This shift is further compounded by factors such as large class sizes, administrative demands, and the integration of digital technologies in education, all of which can inadvertently distance lecturers from students (Theodorio et al., 2024). While such developments may enhance efficiency and accessibility, they also raise critical questions about the extent to which theological education continues to embody its formative and relational ethos.

Recent studies within African Christian higher education contexts emphasize the importance of mentorship and relational engagement in fostering holistic formation. For instance, Koske (2024) demonstrates that faculty–student mentorship plays a significant role in facilitating faith–learning integration, particularly in environments where intentional relational structures are prioritized.

Similarly, broader educational research indicates that participatory and relational teaching styles are associated with stronger teacher–student connections and improved learning outcomes (Zakariya & Adegoke, 2024). These findings suggest that relational proximity is not merely an optional aspect of theological education but a foundational component of effective teaching and learning, especially in contexts that emphasize character and spiritual development.

Within theological education, the issue of relational formation is further amplified by its intrinsic connection to ministerial identity and character development. Theological training is not limited to the acquisition of knowledge but extends to the cultivation of virtues, spiritual disciplines, and leadership capacities necessary for Christian ministry. Recent scholarship on theological education underscores the importance of character formation and role modeling as integral to the educational process, highlighting the need for educators to function not only as instructors but also as mentors and exemplars (Magezi, 2023; Pike et al., 2021). This perspective aligns with the broader understanding that theological education is inherently formational, requiring intentional relational engagement between teachers and students.

Statement of the Problem: Despite these insights, there remains a noticeable gap in contemporary scholarship regarding a sustained and integrative analysis of teacher–student relationship in African theological education from a distinctly biblical-theological perspective. While existing studies have explored issues of curriculum development, contextualization, and institutional challenges, relatively little attention has been given to evaluating these relationships in light of the



pedagogical model exemplified by Jesus Christ. This gap is particularly significant given that Christian theological education is fundamentally rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus, whose approach to discipleship provides a paradigmatic framework for relational and transformative learning.

The New Testament portrays Jesus as a teacher whose pedagogical method was deeply relational, incarnational, and transformative. His engagement with His disciples was characterized by close personal interaction, shared life experiences, and intentional mentoring aimed at holistic transformation. Rather than operating within a detached or purely formal instructional framework, Jesus cultivated a community of learners who were formed through participation, observation, and relational proximity. This model of discipleship emphasizes not only the transmission of knowledge but also the formation of character and identity, thereby offering a compelling paradigm for theological education.

In contemporary theological discourse, there is an increasing call to recover and recontextualize this model in order to address the challenges facing theological education today. Scholars argue that a return to relational and formational approaches rooted in the example of Jesus can provide a corrective to overly institutionalized and cognitively oriented models of education (Adeiza et al., 2025). Such a reorientation is particularly relevant in African contexts, where communal values, relationality, and holistic development are deeply embedded in cultural frameworks.

This study responds to this gap by undertaking a qualitative, literature-based analysis of teacher–student relationships in theological education in Africa, examined through the lens of Jesus’ discipleship model. By synthesizing and critically engaging recent scholarship in theological education, educational theory, and biblical studies, the study seeks to identify key patterns, tensions, and opportunities for renewal. The analysis is both descriptive and normative: descriptive in its examination of existing literature, and normative in its evaluation of contemporary practices against the relational and pedagogical framework exemplified by Jesus.

Key Issue Under Study: The central argument of this article is that while theological education in Africa has made significant progress in terms of institutional development and academic advancement, it often falls short in embodying the relational and transformative dimensions that are essential to its mission. This gap has profound implications for ministerial formation, as the absence of meaningful teacher–student relationship can hinder the development of spiritual maturity, character, and leadership capacity. By critically engaging this issue, the study proposes a re-envisioning of theological education that integrates academic excellence with intentional relational formation.

Objectives of the Study: The objectives of the study are threefold. First, it seeks to analyze the prevailing patterns of teacher–student relationships as reflected in recent literature on African theological education. Second, it aims to explore the key features of Jesus’ model of discipleship as a framework for understanding relational pedagogy. Third, it endeavors to evaluate contemporary practices in African theological institutions in light of this model and to propose constructive insights for enhancing relational and formational dimensions.



Significance of the Study: This study is significant for several reasons. Academically, it contributes to the growing body of scholarship on theological education in Africa by foregrounding the relational dimension of pedagogy, an area that remains underexplored. Theologically, it offers a constructive retrieval of Jesus' discipleship model as a normative framework for educational practice. Practically, it provides insights that may inform institutional policies, faculty development, and curriculum design in theological seminaries and related institutions.

The Structure of the Study: The article is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the next section reviews relevant literature on teacher–student relationship, theological education in Africa, and contemporary pedagogical challenges. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework and methodological approach adopted in the study. The subsequent sections present a thematic analysis of the literature, a theological evaluation in light of Jesus' model, and a set of constructive recommendations for enhancing relational formation in theological education. The article concludes by summarizing the key findings and suggesting directions for future research.

Literature Review

Teacher–Student Relationships in Higher Education: Recent scholarship in higher education has increasingly emphasized the centrality of teacher–student relationship in shaping academic engagement, learning outcomes, and holistic development. Across diverse educational contexts, relational pedagogy has emerged as a critical framework for understanding how meaningful interactions between educators and students enhance both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. Studies conducted in African higher education contexts indicate that affective teacher–student relationship is significantly influential for students' motivation, engagement, and persistence (Apeh & Nteh, 2024). These findings reinforce the argument that education is not merely a transactional process of knowledge transfer but a relational enterprise that fosters personal and intellectual growth.

In contemporary pedagogical discourse, relational teaching is often associated with student-centered approaches that prioritize dialogue, participation, and mutual respect. Zakariya and Adegoke (2024) observe that instructional practices characterized by cooperation and responsiveness tend to strengthen teacher–student connections, thereby improving learning outcomes. This perspective aligns with constructivist theories of education, which emphasize the co-construction of knowledge through interaction and shared experience. Within this framework, the teacher is not simply an authority figure but a facilitator of learning who engages students in meaningful ways.

However, despite the recognized importance of relational engagement, several studies highlight the persistence of hierarchical and formalized teacher–student relationship in many higher education institutions. Institutional structures, large class sizes, and increasing administrative demands often limit opportunities for personalized interaction (Theodorio et al., 2024). In such contexts, the teacher's role is frequently reduced to content delivery, while the relational dimension of education is marginalized. This trend raises concerns about the capacity of higher education systems to support holistic student development, particularly in disciplines such as theology where formation is integral to the educational process.



Furthermore, the integration of digital technologies in post-pandemic education has introduced both opportunities and challenges for teacher–student relationship. While online platforms can enhance accessibility and flexibility, they may also contribute to relational distance and reduced interpersonal engagement if not intentionally designed to foster interaction (Theodorio et al., 2024). These dual dynamic underscores the need for intentional strategies to sustain relational depth in evolving educational environments.

Theological Education in Africa: Context and Challenges. Theological education in Africa has experienced significant growth and transformation in recent decades, reflecting broader socio-cultural, ecclesial, and educational developments. Contemporary scholarship highlights the increasing diversification of theological institutions, including seminaries, Bible colleges, and university-based theology programs, which collectively contribute to the training of church leaders and theologians (Adeiza et al., 2025). This expansion has enhanced access to theological education but has also introduced complex challenges related to quality, relevance, and formation.

One of the most pressing issues identified in recent literature is the tension between academic formalization and contextual relevance. As African theological institutions align with global academic standards, there is a tendency to adopt Western pedagogical models that may not fully resonate with local cultural and ecclesial realities (Naidoo & Kgatla, 2024). This has led to concerns about the contextual adequacy of theological education, particularly in relation to African communal values, relational worldviews, and holistic approaches to learning.

In response, scholars have called for a reimagining of theological education that is both contextually grounded and globally informed. Adeiza et al. (2025) argue that theological institutions must move beyond purely cognitive approaches to embrace models that integrate intellectual, spiritual, and practical dimensions of formation. This holistic perspective is essential for preparing leaders who can effectively engage the complex challenges facing African churches and societies.

A related concern is the perceived gap between academic training and ministerial formation. While theological education is intended to shape not only knowledge but also character and spiritual maturity, recent studies suggest that this integrative goal is not always achieved in practice. Magezi (2023) highlights that both educators and students recognize the importance of character formation but often experience a disconnect between institutional structures and formational outcomes. This disconnect is partly attributed to the limited emphasis on mentoring and relational engagement within formal educational settings.

Moreover, the hierarchical nature of many African educational contexts can further complicate teacher–student relationship. Cultural norms that emphasize respect for authority may inadvertently reinforce distance between lecturers and students, limiting opportunities for open dialogue and mutual engagement. While such hierarchies can contribute to order and discipline, they may also hinder the development of relational trust and mentorship that are essential for effective theological formation.



Mentorship and Formation in Theological Education: Mentorship has emerged as a key theme in recent discussions on theological education, particularly in relation to the formation of ministerial identity and character. Within Christian higher education, mentorship is often understood as a relational process through which experienced leaders guide and support the development of students in both academic and spiritual dimensions. Koske (2024) demonstrates that faculty–student mentorship significantly enhances faith–learning integration, suggesting that relational engagement is crucial for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical ministry.

The importance of mentorship is further reinforced by studies that highlight the role of educators as exemplars of character and spiritual maturity. Pike et al. (2021) argue that effective theological education requires educators to embody the values and practices they seek to impart, thereby serving as role models for students. This perspective underscores the inherently relational nature of formation, which cannot be achieved solely through classroom instruction.

Despite its recognized importance, mentorship remains underdeveloped in many theological institutions. Structural constraints, including heavy teaching loads and administrative responsibilities, often limit the capacity of faculty to engage in sustained mentoring relationships. Additionally, the absence of formal mentoring frameworks can result in inconsistent and informal approaches that vary widely across institutions.

Recent scholarship suggests that intentional institutional strategies are needed to strengthen mentorship within theological education. These may include the development of structured mentoring programs, faculty training in relational pedagogy, and the integration of formational objectives into curriculum design. Such initiatives can help to create environments that support meaningful teacher–student relationships and holistic formation.

Jesus’ Discipleship Model as a Pedagogical Paradigm: The pedagogical model of Jesus has increasingly attracted scholarly attention as a framework for understanding relational and transformative education. Contemporary studies emphasize that Jesus’ approach to teaching was fundamentally relational, characterized by close interaction, shared experiences, and intentional mentoring. Unlike formalized educational systems, Jesus’ method involved living in community with His disciples, thereby creating a context for holistic formation.

Recent theological scholarship highlights several key features of Jesus’ pedagogical model. First, relational proximity is central, as Jesus intentionally cultivated close relationships with His disciples. Second, His teaching was experiential, involving participation in ministry activities that reinforced learning through practice. Third, His leadership was marked by servanthood, challenging conventional notions of authority and power. Fourth, His goal was transformative, focusing on the formation of character and identity rather than mere knowledge acquisition (Adeiza et al., 2025).

This model aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize experiential learning and relational engagement. However, it also presents a distinctively theological vision that



integrates spiritual formation with pedagogical practice. As such, it offers a valuable framework for evaluating and reimagining teacher–student relationship in theological education.

Despite its relevance, the application of Jesus’ model to contemporary educational contexts remains a subject of ongoing debate. Some scholars caution against simplistic or uncritical appropriation, noting that differences in historical and cultural contexts must be taken into account. Others argue that the underlying principles of relationality, mentorship, and transformation are universally applicable, albeit requiring contextual adaptation.

Identified Gap in the Literature: A critical review of recent scholarship reveals a significant gap in the integrative analysis of teacher-student relationship in African theological education through a biblical-theological lens. While existing studies have examined relational pedagogy, mentorship, and contextual challenges, these themes are often treated in isolation. There is a lack of comprehensive studies that bring together educational theory, African theological contexts, and the pedagogical model of Jesus in a coherent analytical framework.

Furthermore, much of the literature on teacher–student relationship is situated within general higher education contexts, with limited attention to the unique formational goals of theological education. Similarly, studies on African theological education often focus on curriculum and institutional issues without adequately addressing the relational dynamics that underpin effective formation.

This study addresses this gap by synthesizing these strands of literature and evaluating them in light of Jesus’ discipleship model. By doing so, it contributes to a more holistic understanding of theological education that integrates relational, pedagogical, and theological dimensions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that brings into dialogue relational pedagogy, mentorship theory, and a biblical-theological model derived from Jesus’ discipleship practice. The combination of these perspectives provides a robust lens for analyzing teacher–student relationship within theological Education in African context.

Relational Pedagogy: Relational pedagogy provides a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics of teacher–student interactions in educational settings. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that learning is not merely a cognitive activity but a relational process shaped by trust, engagement, and mutual respect. Within this perspective, effective teaching involves the intentional cultivation of meaningful relationships that facilitate both academic and personal development (Apeh & Nteh, 2024).

Recent studies highlight that relational teaching practices such as responsiveness, empathy, and dialogical engagement enhance students’ motivation and participation (Zakariya & Adegoke, 2024). These findings align with constructivist learning theories, which posit that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and shared experience. In this sense, the teacher is not simply a transmitter of knowledge but a facilitator who creates an environment conducive to learning and growth.



However, the application of relational pedagogy in higher education is often constrained by institutional factors, including large class sizes, administrative demands, and the increasing reliance on digital technologies. These factors can contribute to a depersonalized learning environment in which relational engagement is minimized (Theodorio et al., 2024). Within theological education, such limitations are particularly problematic, given the discipline's emphasis on holistic formation.

Mentorship Theory and Formational Education: Mentorship theory further deepens the analysis by emphasizing the developmental and transformative dimensions of teacher–student relationships. Mentorship is understood as a relational process through which a more experienced individual guides the growth and formation of a less experienced person. In theological education, mentorship extends beyond academic guidance to include spiritual formation, character development, and vocational discernment.

Recent scholarship underscores the significance of mentorship in facilitating faith–learning integration and ministerial formation. Koske (2024) demonstrates that structured faculty–student mentorship enhances students' ability to integrate theological knowledge with personal faith and practice. Similarly, Magezi (2023) argues that character formation is a central goal of theological education and requires intentional relational engagement between educators and students.

Mentorship theory also highlights the importance of role modeling, whereby educators embody the values and practices they seek to impart. Pike et al. (2021) contend that character formation in higher education is most effective when educators serve as exemplars of integrity, humility, and ethical leadership. This perspective reinforces the idea that formation is inherently relational and cannot be achieved through formal instruction alone.

Despite its importance, mentorship in theological education is often underdeveloped due to structural and institutional constraints. The absence of formal mentoring frameworks, coupled with heavy faculty workloads, limits opportunities for sustained relational engagement. This gap underscores the need for a renewed emphasis on mentorship as a core component of theological education.

Jesus' Discipleship Model as a Normative Framework: The biblical-theological dimension of this study is grounded in the discipleship model of Jesus, which serves as a normative framework for evaluating teacher–student relationship in theological education. Contemporary theological scholarship increasingly recognizes the pedagogical significance of Jesus' approach to teaching, which integrates relational, experiential, and transformative elements (Adeiza et al., 2025).

Jesus' model of discipleship is characterized by several key features. First, it emphasizes relational proximity, as Jesus intentionally lived and interacted closely with His disciples. This relational closeness created a context for holistic formation, encompassing intellectual, spiritual, and moral development. Second, His teaching was experiential, involving active participation in ministry activities that reinforced learning through practice. Third, His leadership was marked by servanthood, challenging hierarchical models of authority and redefining leadership in terms of



humility and service. Fourth, His pedagogical goal was transformation, focusing on the formation of character and identity rather than mere knowledge acquisition.

These features align with contemporary educational theories while also providing a distinctly theological vision of pedagogy. Importantly, Jesus' model transcends purely cognitive approaches to education by integrating knowledge, practice, and relational formation. This holistic approach is particularly relevant for theological education, which seeks to prepare individuals for ministry and leadership within the church.

At the same time, the application of Jesus' model requires careful contextualization. While the underlying principles of relationality and transformation are broadly applicable, differences in historical and cultural contexts necessitate thoughtful adaptation. This study therefore employs Jesus' model not as a rigid template but as a normative framework that informs critical evaluation and constructive reimagining.

Integrative Framework: By integrating relational pedagogy, mentorship theory, and Jesus' discipleship model, this study develops a comprehensive framework for analyzing teacher–student relationship in Nigerian theological education. Relational pedagogy provides insight into the dynamics of interaction, mentorship theory highlights the formative dimension, and Jesus' model offers a theological norm for evaluation.

This integrative framework enables a multidimensional analysis that is both descriptive and normative. It allows for the identification of existing patterns and challenges while also providing a basis for proposing a more holistic and transformative approach to theological education.

Research Methodology

Research Design: This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based research design, employing an integrative review of relevant scholarly literature alongside biblical-theological analysis. Rather than relying on primary empirical data, the research synthesizes existing studies in theological education, educational theory, and biblical scholarship to examine teacher–student relationship in Nigerian theological seminaries.

A literature-based approach is particularly appropriate for this study because it enables a comprehensive and critical engagement with existing knowledge, facilitating the identification of patterns, gaps, and emerging themes across diverse sources. This approach also allows for the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives, which is essential for addressing the complex nature of theological education (Snyder, 2020).

Data Sources and Selection Criteria: The data for this study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and theological texts published between 2020 and 2026. Sources were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- i. Relevance to teacher-student relationships, theological education, or discipleship
- ii. Scholarly credibility, including peer-reviewed publications
- iii. Decency, ensuring engagement with current debates and developments
- iv. Contextual applicability, with preference for African and Global South perspectives



Databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ATLA Religion Database, and institutional repositories were consulted to identify relevant literature.

Analytical Approach: The study employs thematic and critical analysis as its primary analytical methods. Thematic analysis involves the identification and organization of recurring patterns and concepts within the literature, while critical analysis examines underlying assumptions, tensions, and implications. The analysis proceeds in three stages:

- i. Descriptive Analysis: Synthesizing key themes related to teacher–student relationships, mentorship, and theological education
- ii. Comparative Analysis: Evaluating these themes in relation to the pedagogical model of Jesus
- iii. Normative Analysis: Proposing constructive insights for enhancing relational and formational dimensions in theological education

This multi-layered approach ensures that the study moves beyond mere description to offer critical and constructive contributions.

Biblical-Theological Analysis: In addition to the review of contemporary literature, the study incorporates a biblical-theological analysis of Jesus’ discipleship model. This involves examining relevant Gospel texts to identify key pedagogical and relational principles. The analysis is informed by recent biblical scholarship and is integrated with the broader literature to provide a normative framework for evaluation.

Validity and Limitations: The credibility of this study is enhanced through the use of multiple sources, interdisciplinary perspectives, and rigorous analytical procedures. By synthesizing a wide range of scholarly works, the study achieves a high level of conceptual depth and theoretical integration.

However, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, which may not fully capture the lived experiences of teachers and students in specific institutional contexts. Additionally, the focus on published literature may exclude informal or unpublished insights that could enrich the analysis. Despite these limitations, the study provides a valuable foundation for understanding and reimagining teacher–student relationship in theological education.

Findings and Thematic Analysis

This section presents the findings derived from a thematic analysis of recent literature on teacher–student relationship, theological education in Africa, and mentorship practices. The analysis identifies four major themes that characterize the current state of teacher–student relationships in theological education in African contexts.

Predominance of Formal and Hierarchical Relationships: A recurring theme in the literature is the predominance of formal and hierarchical teacher–student relationships within higher education, including theological institutions. While such structures are often shaped by institutional policies and cultural expectations, they tend to create relational distance between



lecturers and students. Apeh and Nteh (2024) note that although respect for authority remains an important cultural value, excessive formality can limit open communication and reduce student engagement.

In African contexts, hierarchical dynamics are further reinforced by socio-cultural norms that emphasize deference to elders and authority figures. While these norms contribute to order and discipline, they may also inhibit the development of dialogical and participatory learning environments. As a result, teacher–student relationships often remain transactional, focused primarily on the delivery and assessment of academic content.

This pattern presents a significant challenge for theological education, which requires deeper relational engagement for effective formation. The persistence of hierarchical relationships suggests a need to critically re-evaluate how authority is exercised within theological institutions.

Weak Integration of Mentorship in Institutional Practice: A second major theme is the limited integration of structured mentorship within theological education. Although mentorship is widely recognized as essential for ministerial formation, it is often underdeveloped or inconsistently implemented in practice. Koske (2024) highlights that mentorship significantly enhances faith–learning integration, yet many institutions lack formal frameworks to support sustained mentoring relationships.

The absence of structured mentorship programs means that relational formation is frequently left to individual initiative rather than institutional design. This results in uneven experiences among students, with some benefiting from close mentorship while others experience minimal relational engagement.

Furthermore, faculty members often face constraints such as heavy workloads and administrative responsibilities, which limit their capacity to invest in mentoring relationships. Magezi (2023) observes that while both educators and students value character formation, institutional structures do not adequately support this goal.

Tension Between Academic Rigor and Spiritual Formation: The literature also reveals a persistent tension between academic rigor and spiritual formation in theological education. As institutions strive to meet global academic standards, there is a tendency to prioritize cognitive and intellectual development, sometimes at the expense of relational and spiritual dimensions.

Naidoo and Kgatla (2024) argue that theological education in Africa must balance academic excellence with contextual and formational relevance. However, this balance is not always achieved in practice. The emphasis on examinations, coursework, and accreditation requirements can overshadow the relational processes necessary for spiritual growth and character formation. This tension reflects a broader challenge within higher education, where measurable academic outcomes often take precedence over less tangible aspects of formation. In theological contexts, however, such an imbalance undermines the very purpose of ministerial training.



Impact of Technological and Institutional Changes: Recent developments in educational technology and institutional structures have further shaped teacher–student relationship. The integration of digital platforms, particularly in the post-pandemic era, has transformed modes of interaction, offering both opportunities and challenges.

Theodorio et al. (2024), note that while technology can enhance accessibility and flexibility, it may also contribute to relational distance if not accompanied by intentional engagement strategies. Online learning environments can limit informal interactions and reduce opportunities for mentorship, thereby weakening relational bonds.

At the same time, increasing institutionalization and administrative demands have contributed to a more bureaucratic educational environment. These changes can further constrain relational engagement, reinforcing the formalization of teacher–student relationships.

Theological Evaluation in the Light of Jesus’ Model

This section evaluates the identified themes in light of Jesus’ discipleship model, providing a normative theological framework for assessing contemporary teacher–student relationship.

From Hierarchy to Servant Leadership: The hierarchical nature of many teacher–student relationships stand in contrast to Jesus’ model of leadership, which is characterized by humility and service. Jesus redefined authority not as domination but as servanthood, emphasizing that true leadership involves serving others.

This perspective challenges the prevailing hierarchical structures in theological education, calling for a reorientation toward relational leadership. While authority remains necessary, it must be exercised in ways that foster trust, accessibility, and mutual respect.

From Informal Mentorship to Intentional Discipleship: The weak integration of mentorship in contemporary theological education contrasts sharply with the intentional nature of Jesus’ discipleship. Jesus deliberately invested in a small group of disciples, engaging them in sustained relational formation.

This model underscores the importance of intentionality in mentorship. Rather than relying on informal or incidental relationships, theological institutions must develop structured approaches to mentoring that prioritize consistent and meaningful engagement.

From Cognitive Emphasis to Holistic Formation: The tension between academic rigor and spiritual formation reflects a divergence from Jesus’ holistic approach to teaching. Jesus’ pedagogy integrated knowledge, practice, and character formation, addressing the whole person.

This holistic vision challenges theological institutions to move beyond fragmented approaches to education. Academic excellence must be integrated with spiritual formation, ensuring that students are equipped not only intellectually but also morally and spiritually.

From Relational Distance to Proximity and Presence: The relational distance created by technological and institutional factors contrasts with the relational proximity that characterized



Jesus' ministry. Jesus taught within the context of shared life, creating opportunities for observation, participation, and transformation.

While contemporary contexts differ significantly, the principle of relational presence remains relevant. Educators must find ways to cultivate meaningful connections with students, even within technologically mediated environments.

Conclusion

This study has examined teacher–student relationship in African theological education through a qualitative, literature-based approach, engaging recent scholarship in education and theology. The findings reveal a pattern of formal and hierarchical relationship, limited mentorship structure, tension between academic and spiritual formation, and the impact of technological and institutional changes. When evaluated in light of Jesus' discipleship model, these patterns highlight significant gaps between contemporary practice and the relational, holistic, and transformative approaches exemplified by Jesus. This gap has important implication for the effectiveness of theological education, particularly in relation to ministerial formation and leadership development. The study argues that addressing these challenges requires a re-envisioning of teacher–student relationship that integrate relational pedagogy, intentional mentorship, and theological reflection. Such an approach aligns with the broader goal of theological education as a process of holistic formation. Therefore, this study proposes the following recommendations as a workable strategy for enhancing teacher–student relationship in theological education in Africa through the lens of Jesus' discipleship training model;

- i. **Institutionalization of Mentorship Programs:** Theological institutions should develop structured mentorship frameworks that facilitate sustained engagement between faculty and students. These programs should be integrated into institutional policies and supported by adequate resources.
- ii. **Faculty Development in Relational Pedagogy:** Educators should be trained in relational teaching practices that emphasize empathy, dialogue, and student engagement. Professional development programs can enhance faculty capacity to function as both instructors and mentors.
- iii. **Integration of Formation into Curriculum Design:** Curricula should be designed to integrate academic learning with spiritual and character formation. This may include incorporating reflective practices, mentoring sessions, and experiential learning opportunities.
- iv. **Contextual Adaptation of Jesus' Model:** The principles of Jesus' discipleship model should be contextualized within African cultural and institutional settings. This requires a careful balance between biblical fidelity and contextual relevance.
- v. **Leveraging Technology for Relational Engagement:** Educational technologies should be used intentionally to enhance, rather than diminish, relational interaction. Strategies such as virtual mentoring and interactive platforms can support meaningful engagement.

Overall, the quality of teacher–student relationship in African theological education is pivotal for the holistic formation of future church leaders. By situating relational engagement, mentorship,



and spiritual formation within the normative framework of Jesus' discipleship model, this study underscores that effective theological education must transcend mere academic instruction.

Institutions that intentionally cultivate relational proximity, servant leadership, and transformative mentorship will not only enhance students' intellectual growth but also nurture character, faith, and ministerial competence. Ultimately, re-envisioning teacher–student interactions in this light offers a pathway for African theological education to fulfill its dual mandate of academic excellence and transformative formation, equipping leaders who embody both knowledge and Christlike character in service to the church and society.

References

- Adeiza, M. A., Popoola, T. O. E., Ajewole, E. S., & Dada, J. (2025). Reimagining Theological Education for the Modern World: Roles, Challenges, and Prospects. *GAS Journal of Education and Literature*, 2(3), 35–41.
- Apeh, H., & Nteh, K. (2024). Influence of Affective Teacher–Student Relationships on Students' School Engagement in Public Universities in North-Central Nigeria. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 14(1), 128–141.
- Banda, C., & Kgatla, S. T. (2021). Theological Education as Formation: African Perspectives on Curriculum and Pedagogy. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 77(4), 1–9.
- Dames, G. (2021). Mentoring for Ministerial Formation in Theological Education. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 42(1), 1–9.
- Kgatla, S. T., & Naidoo, M. (2024). African Theological Education and Curriculum Responsiveness to Agenda 2063. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 80(4), 1–10.
- Koske, S. K. (2024). Faculty–Student mentorship Effects on Faith–Learning Integration in Christian Universities in Kenya. *Journal of Education*, 4(4), 38–60.
- Magezi, V. (2023). Theological Education and Character Formation: Perceptions of Theological Leaders and Students. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79(1), 1–10.
- Moyo, K. (2022). Decolonizing Theological Education in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities. *Missionalia*, 50(2), 123–138.
- Naidoo, M. (2020). Ministerial Formation and Theological Education in Context: A South African Perspective. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 76(1), 1–8.
- Pike, M. A., Lickona, T., & Narvaez, D. (2021). Character Education in Higher Education: A Framework for Formation. *Journal of Moral Education*, 50(3), 247–262.



- Snyder, H. (2020). Literature review as a research methodology: An Overview and Guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333–339.
- Theodorio, A. O., Waghid, Z., & Wambua, A. (2024). *Technology Integration in Teacher Education: Challenges and Adaptations in the Post-Pandemic Era*. Discover Education.
- White, P., & Brown, G. (2022). Relational Pedagogy in Higher Education: A Critical Review. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 27(6), 845–860.
- Wright, N. T. (2020). *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians*. Zondervan Academic.
- Zakariya, Y. F., & Adegoke, N. A. (2024). Teacher Instructional Practices and Their Relations with Self-Efficacy and Cooperation. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1367076.