Pedagogical Relations in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Developing Nations: The Class-Size Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the challenges associated with pedagogical relations exacerbated by large-sized classes in higher education institutions (HEIs) found in developing nations. Using the University of the Free State (UFS) in South Africa as a case study, the perspectives of the undergraduate students and their lecturers were examined. The study was conducted at the Bloemfontein Campus, QwaQwa Campus, and South Campus of the institution. 79 students and 37 faculty members from seven faculties were interviewed for this research. The Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP) conducted the interviews electronically using semi-structured interviews. Given the present changes brought on by the pandemic, this research shows that a relational pedagogical orientation is crucial for successful teaching and learning. It permits the development of students' self-assurance, enhances class engagement, assists students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and decreases the dropout rate and underperformance. The finding also reveals that the interviewed lecturers were apprehensively divided in their responses regarding the possibility of actualising pedagogical relations due to large-sized classes, and the difficulty of drawing the line between leniency, familiarity, contempt, and fairness also presents a challenge. The research indicates that lecturers should pay close attention to the usage of technical jargon and the language difficulties encountered by most new students. It also suggests that small class sizes should be encouraged, initiatives to make lecturers more approachable should be strengthened, students' names should be used frequently in class, faculty and staff should have a caring culture and assist students, and lecturers should maintain a "humane" professionalism.

Keywords: Student welfare; Education development; Teaching and learning; Higher education; Caring culture; Student-lecturer relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Relational pedagogies refer to the (social) relationships between lecturers and students (Kang, 2022). Although lecturers are often thought to have control over any process that enhances effective interaction between students and lecturers, some lecturers do not believe its plausibility, others are indifferent in their teaching philosophy, and the students also have a significant (often neglected) role in developing such relationships. Teaching and learning have become e-learning intensive in the post-pandemic era, and given the relational gap generated by e-learning, relational pedagogy has become a need for institutions in developing countries (Mukherjee & Hasan, 2022). Due to class sizes, most higher education institutions (HEIs) and their students grapple with maintaining pedagogical relationships.

Recently, the abrupt shift to mainstream e-learning and the changes that came with the post-pandemic outcome have skyrocketed the need for relational pedagogy drive. The question is whether pedagogical relations will ever be actualized in HEIs in developing nations. The purpose of the study is to empirically examine the current use of relational pedagogies by lecturers, students' perception of how their relationships with their lecturers enhance teaching and learning, and how the teaching philosophies in HEIs could be enhanced to engender pedagogical relations in higher education (HE) setup. This qualitative research was conducted at the University of the Free State (UFS) in South Africa to examine the viewpoints of undergraduate students and their lecturers. The study asks the critical question: how can the student-lecturer relationship be improved to enhance teaching and learning processes in HEIs of developing nations? To guarantee that the fundamental research issue is adequately addressed, the following sub-research questions have been developed:

1. What are the perceptions of lecturers and students regarding relational pedagogies?
2. How can pedagogical relationships improve philosophy teaching and learning in HEIs?

This research contributes to the current literature on pedagogical interactions in developing country higher education institutions. The study outcome is also expected to contribute to the inquiry regarding how to improve pedagogical relations in HEIs from the students' point of view since the general impression had been that the lecturers should take the lead in driving pedagogical relations in the HE setup.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Relational pedagogy

Relational pedagogy, or pedagogical relations, involves establishing and maintaining a classroom climate and culture of trust, care, and autonomy (Hollweck, Reimer & Bouchard, 2019). This description emphasises the importance of placing the student-lecturer relationship at the centre of the learning process to build a climate and culture of care, interaction, and trust 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 a shift from teaching an entire class to individualised teaching, as could be found in the Swedish context (Aspelin, 2014).

Similarly, in Denmark, research has shown that the continuous use of the supportive student-lecturer relationship enhances teaching and learning processes

(Aspelin and Jonsson, 2019). The concept of pedagogical relations hinges on love, obedience, and authority, although it is closely aligned with the institution's powers that give authority to the instructors (Friesen, 2017). A question has been previously asked about the *vulnerability of liability* that emerges when pedagogical relations are being discussed, implemented, or executed (Aspelin & Jonsson, 2019). As a result, the question spreads, as does the vulnerability, when the institution(s) has a history of racial divide, large class sizes, top-down policy implementation, and language of learning issues. For instance, Vandeyar (2020) argued that although most South African universities have established policies and structures to address equity transformation and change issues, the epistemological traditions still hold even though this transformation has yet to happen for some shady reasons. Given the intricacies of the matter, pedagogical relations often receive very shabby (or inadequate) attention from the institutions' policymakers, irrespective of their significance *vis-à-vis* teaching philosophy.

Teachers' Pedagogical Beliefs and Teaching Philosophy
Brownlee and Berthelsen (2008) argue that the social and learning context includes the epistemological beliefs of lecturers that are socially constructed. This implies that HEIs require a conscious and deliberate process to develop the relational competencies of the lecturers. Similarly, Aspelin (2014) argues that pedagogical attitudes can be explained through three types of student-teacher relationships. There are three types of asymmetric relationships:
1. An asymmetric intersubjective relationship,
2. An asymmetric subject-object relationship,
3. An asymmetric object-subject relationship.

According to Aspelin (2014), 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. Thus, since the teaching practise is expected to be interactive, it should involve a process of observing students' existing conceptions and sensitivity. The implications of this for the role of the teacher include facilitating students' learning; identifying diverse students' needs; and identifying students' learning needs when planning a course and orchestrating classroom teaching (Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne & Nevgi, 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 considers the teacher and learner collaborative (Aspelin and Jonsson, 2019). In other words, the student must be seen as both a student (who must be taught and receive directives) and a collaborator.

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 institution must consider relational pedagogical drive very important (Hollweck, Reimer & Bouchard, 2019). These elements can become the "optical illusion" in a teacher's pedagogical beliefs and philosophy (or lecturer's), thereby continuing to detract from the dividend of a functional teaching and learning environment. Hence, there must be an intended motive to care and exhibit relationship competencies towards the student, which constituted part of the lecturers'

training. In the African context, these factors are prone to exist in HEIs irrespective of the large-sized classes that form the economic module of most HEIs.

Ethics of Care and Emotions

In HEIs, the development of rapt relationships between the student and lecturer includes student-student relationships, student-content relationships, and students' adjustment to the learning environment (Aspelin, 2014). Thus, focusing on the concepts of care and connectedness, Owusu-Ansah & 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. The institutional and academic cultures 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 teacher-student relationship are crucial. In relation to the HEIs in developing nations, the question that emerges is whether institutional culture, as well as academic culture, can influence effective teacher-student relationships given the large-sized class phenomenon that forms the economic module in these institutions.

Lecturer-Student Relationship

The teacher-student relationship has been described as a dynamic process dependent on the active roles of lecturers and students in HEIs (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019). Thus, any strong pedagogical relationship is dependent on the context, i.e., climate and culture (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2008), and the commitment of lecturers and students. Hagenauer and Volet (2014) expanded on the story of the pedagogical relationship between lecturers and students by identifying three major domains: antecedents, quality, and consequences. The antecedent is that the relationship between lecturers and students is influenced by the quality and frequency of teacher-student interaction. In relation to the *quality* of the interaction, the affective and support dimensions are essential to enhance the relationship between lecturers and students. Regardless of the *consequences,* the teacher-student relationship remains the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom environment. In the end, the importance of a solid pedagogical relationship directly correlates to student success. Student motivation, student engagement, and student performance (Parnes, Suárez-Orozco, Osei-Twumasi, and Schwartz, 2020).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted a social constructivist theory to examine the pedagogical relationships at an HEI level. The social constructivist theory explains the link between internal relations in the teaching and learning setting and external influences (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2008). The internal relations explain the associations between new information to be learned and the previous knowledge and beliefs. In comparison, the external influences describe the associations between the self, others, and the learning environment where they negotiate learning and share knowledge. The theory followed by Brownlee (2004) conceptualised relational pedagogies through three main elements: mutual respect among lecturers and students; situating learning in students' experience; and enabling a constructivist perspective of knowing and learning. The social

constructivist theory enables the researcher to examine social and learning context perceptions, participants' experiences, and approaches to maintaining relational pedagogy. Other theories have been used in different studies on pedagogical relations, such as Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, Nel Noddings' care philosophy, and Thomas Scheff's social psychological theory (Aspelin 2014; 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative method to ensure that the research question was adequately answered. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit participants. Whilst purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide desired views and experiences, the recruitment of participants through snowball sampling was done through referrals from participants (Creswell & Poth, 1998). The study was conducted on the Bloemfontein Campus, QwaQwa Campus, and the South Campus of the university campuses. Triangulation, the practise of collecting data via individual interviews and focus group discussions, was utilised in research to collect and compare findings from diverse datasets. Regarding sampling, 79 students and 37 teaching staff participated across seven faculties and three university campuses. The interviews were conducted electronically using semi-structured interviews. Ethical clearance was sought and obtained before any fieldwork or data collection and was strictly adhered to throughout the study. Three researchers from the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP) conducted the interviews. Pseudo-names were applied to ensure anonymity.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented according to the sub-questions they address. The letters "S" and "F" represent responses by the students and lecturers, respectively.

Question One: What are the perceptions of lecturers and students regarding relational pedagogies?

STUDENTS RESPONSES:
1. **Developing Social Relationships is Important**
The majority of participants indicated that the social relationships between lecturers and students are important to the learning processes as Participant S4 explained:

> The social relationship between lecturers and students is important...because it allows me to speak to someone who is much more mature and can explain things to me as well as guide me in my study. In my case, my mom cannot provide that much guidance since she is far away from me. However, having someone like Dr.... (Lecturer) who is right here in the agricultural building is good because can go and talk to her. She always informs us to contact her if we need to talk to her.... on any issues concerning the change ofcourse or if we need assistance with something (Personal Interview).

Concerning the importance of social relationships to lecturers and learners, participant S14, who is from the faculty of Agriculture and Natural Sciences (NAS), explained why he felt that social relationships are important to the learning processes in class:

I think if we have a good relationship with our lecturers, it would be very easy to study because you cannot study a module that is taught by a lecturer you do not have a good relationship with you. You would always be arguing…. Yes, would always be arguing. About what…or what she is saying (Personal Interview).

Participant S37 hence added that:

We (students) learn better when the teaching is personalised through a good socialrelationship between lecturers and students… students who join the university from rural and less developed settings often need support to adjust to the university environment…. (Personal Interview).

2.   Building Student Confidence

One of the importance of quality social relationships between students and lecturers is that it helps to build the confidence of students, especially in class, as Participant S64 expressed:

I feel like I perform better in class if I know that a lecturer knows me and understands my problems concerning schoolwork or other external problems. This is because when they assist me, it would go along way to help me develop an interest in the course and also follow what they tell me to do. Compared to a lecturer that does not know me or the problems that I am going through, I think thatI would not be able to put in much and I may end up failing due to such problems… (Personal Interview).

Developing a social relationship is significant considering the ongoing fundamental teaching and learning changes at the HEIs given COVID-19 induced outcomes. Consequently, the drive for pedagogical relations is increasingly emerging as being obligatory for efficient teaching and learning to ensue.

LECTURER RESPONSES

The UFS lecturers have the following views:

3.   Teacher is Many Things to the Learner Which Makes Pedagogical Relations Intrinsically Obligatory

The teacher has multiple roles to play toward the students' development. This gives credence to the importance of continuous pedagogical relationship drive for effective teaching and learning. Participants F14 indicated that:

I believe in the exchange of ideas with my students and by so doing, I learn and also get additional knowledge from the interaction I have with my students…then that is how socially I think we should be… (Personal Interview).

Similarly, F19 from the Faculty of Health Sciences added that:

I think it is important that students feel comfortable approaching you as the lecturer and that there is an environment where both the student and lecturercan communicate not just about academic issues, but also about other issuesstudents might need support with…. I believe that when we teach studentswe do not just teach them content, we also play a very important role in their development. So, we need to have the opportunity to see the

student as a whole person with all the things that make up a whole person.... (Personal Interview).

Many students from the Faculty of Science lamented over hazing bureaucratic and administrative processes, as well as the general attitude with which the Faculty treat them.

4. Students perform better when they feel welcomed

The views of F19 further reveal that lecturers expect students to feel comfortable when they enterthe learning environment, but without a good relationship, this would never happen as F13 reported:

> I think relational pedagogies provide an opportunity for lecturers to get to know their students better and for the students to open up about some of the challenges they may be experiencing in their academics (Personal Interview).

Similarly, F7 affirms that:

> if you want to get the best results from your students, you should maintain a good pedagogical relationship with them. This should include having frequent interaction with thestudents, developing cordial relationships with students and allowing the students to contribute without any feeling of intimidation or fear (Personal Interview).

The lecturers make their work easier and more enjoyable for the students while developing (or building) social relationships with them (students) in the learning environment.

5. Optimising Participation and Involvement

Participant F14 from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences expressed that she maintains a good social relationship with the students as a way to optimise students' involvement in activities and classroom participation:

> I have a social relationship with my students because if I create a social distance between me and my students, the students cannot share their views in class.... Again, they may be scared to ask questions simply because they cannot tell what answers they would receive. See, I have given my WhatsApp number to my students and I tell them to call me anytime they have issues with their academics (Personal Interview).

The goal of relational pedagogies should be seen as a collective goal which gears toward students' optimum achievement and development, as well as to expand engagement. Some students could shy away from class discussion simply because of the way they feel.

6. Apprehensiveness Over the Successful Implementation of Pedagogical Relations Due to Class Size

Conversely, other participants begged to differ in their argument that developing a pedagogical relationship with students does not matter and may not be feasible after all.

> F12—I do not think that itis important for lecturers to develop pedagogical relationships with students in the current teaching conditions. I teach a first-year module with a total class size of about one thousand students. It is not possible for me to answer students' calls and respond to their emails." She further explained that, "I think it is the lecturer to student ratio that is the

problem…. However, if you break them into smaller groups it means that we have to repeat sometimes the same class…. (Personal Interview).

Participant F17 highlighted the challenges lecturers face especially when they are required to develop social relationships with students in large classes.

what prevents me from developing a good social relationship with students in large classes is about the size – the number of students. There is also no opportunity for such relationships to be developed. If we had smaller groups, then as a lecturer, you get to know your students (Personal Interview).

The comment by F12 revealed that some faculty and academic discipline lecturers have a minimal opinion or are indifferent regarding the importance of lecturers building or maintaining a good relationship with the students for efficient teaching and learning.

7.   Difficult to draw a line between leniency, familiarity and fairness

The lecturer participants who were apprehensive regarding pedagogical relations justified their stance with the following rationalization:

…well it all depends…I once had a student I tried to be close enough to understand her predicament. The student never did the work after many postponements….not until I became 'mean' and bring in force, that was when I received the work…. (Personal Interview).

F22 also added that:

The students can take advantage of you as a lecturer because of your leniency, others can maybe think you are not being serious, and then consider your kindness as being weak…pedagogical relations must be pursued with caution as the case may be….although in most cases you find out that it's one out of ten who try to take advantage…. (Personal Interview).

Many other lecturer participants highlighted scenarios where their close relationship with a student ended up discouraging the student not to be hands-on or do what was required thereby not finalizing their academic work. Thus, this point exposes the complexities surrounding pedagogical relations and therefore gives credence to the importance of capacity building on the topic.

Question 2. How can pedagogical relations enhance teaching and learning philosophy?

8.   It Allows More Support for Students from Disadvantaged Background

Participant S11 shared expressed the need for an enhanced social relationship as boost to support received by students from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds:

S11—some students are from a disadvantaged background so it would be important for lecturers to develop a good social relationship with such students…. (Personal Interview).

Good social ties between lecturers and students should increase the learning experiences of students, according to the participants.

9.   Reduce Failure, Dropout and Underperformance

Using his practical experience, participant S2explained the effects of building a tenuous relationship with students in HE:

> I would use a practical example that we experienced. I think this was our firstyear as well. Fortunate enough for me, I am quite an outspoken person. Andnow I had fellow classmates who were not really outspoken, and we are first-entry students. We had a lecturer who was really hostile but that implied that I am not someone that you can come to me at any given time to ask for assistance and about marks and so forth. There was a time when I wentto enquire about my marks, and when I got to the office door, there were about five other students outside there. They were all scared to knock on the door just to get in and enquire about their marks. They literally stood there;I think they stood for like about ten minutes too scared to knock. I asked, why aren't you going in? Then one of them said, you go in first.... I am scared. They were all scared. So, imagine now I have an issue with my marks, I need to know whether I passed, or I need to enquire if I can get extra work to get an extra per cent, or I need my work remarked or something like that.... But I'm so scared to approach my lecturer that I even end up giving up which could lead me to fail. So, that is the kind of response (Personal Interview).

Participant S2 further explained how the social distance between lecturers and students could affect students' learning and academic performance. There are lecturers who literary believe, for some reasons, that pedagogical relations does not matter:

> If lecturers become so hostile or just portray this anger, then, I do not know how to put it. What this means is that they take a position that sought of indicate or suggest that "I do not care.... I am not approachable, do not approach me. This becomes an issue for students to approach them. But on the positive side that I have experienced lecturers who are approachable, and who are willing to assist. I have had issues in terms of registrations and issues with my marks...because some lecturers always have their doors open to us as students, is has made it easier. Even now in my faculty, there are final year students who have issues but cannot send a simple email to their lecturers to inform them that, I cannot write my test because of this reason and can I have an alternative arrangement. They are even scared to e-mail their lecturer (Personal Interview).

10.   Small-Size Classes Help to Improve Communication or Interaction

Participants in the *Natural Science* and *Faculty of Health Sciences* felt that the number of students in the various lecturer hall did not affect the student-lecturer relationship. While some participants from the Faculties of Education and Humanities begged to differ. For instance, participant S5, a student at the faculty of education added:

> I mean if the class is small we are much more comfortable speaking, however, if the class is large there are more eyes looking at you and so you feel a little bit shy but I think people should just feel comfortable speaking...I don't think that should be the reason why people shouldn'tcommunicate because then you are just. To answer your question, I think that one of the factors would be a small class size.... the small class sizes of cause positively influence the student-lecturer relationship in the classroom (Personal Interview).

Similarly, participant S63 reiterated that:

I think that when lecturers create small groups in class…I mean if you are small groups then the lecturer can always go to one group and ask if they have a problem and can then go to the next so that in itself makes communication much easier (Personal Interview).

Participant S82 thus added that:

We never got a chance to fully utilise them for the intended purposes that they werebuilt for…. And from the research that I did, from 2008 up until 2019, the overcrowding of classrooms has been a problem on the QwaQwa campus, like youtouched on, the lecturer cannot move within the setting of the classroom. The biggest lecture halls we've had on campus, lecture hall 5 and the geographical auditorium, as big as they are, cannot accommodate an aspect of one module. I have been attending class in lecture hall 5 on the QwaQwa campus and you'd find that the class is overcrowded to a point whereby now people have to sit on the steps,people have to sit on the floor where the lecturer is supposed to be moving. And asmuch as the class is crowded, as a student sitting at the back, it's not really a good setting. You cannot really concentrate on what the lecturer is saying. So, the issue of overcrowding on the QwaQwa campus is also a dominating factor in terms of the teaching setting on the campus (Personal Interview).

11.   Lecturers Should See Themselves as Mentors

The majority of participants noted that when lecturers also serve as mentors in the learning environment, this reality could positively influence student-lecturer relationships if the lecturers would all see themselves in that light. S87 who is a student in the faculty of education emphasised:

I also want to touch on what my colleague said about lecturers becoming some sort of mentors to us students. Because some of us see ourselves in the same profession [teachers] that they are in so it would be nice to have someone not only that you can look up to, but also that could guide you as well. I feel that lecturers should be the ones who reach out to students as well as remind them of what they need including providing them with the necessary support. Because sometimes you can go to an academic advisor or an academic something for advice, and you might find there's huge traffic of students there before you and you have to wait for like daysor weeks, whereas you can just e-mail your lecturer and they could sort of like explain something better to you and then your issues are all sorted out (Personal Interview).

Other participants also argued that effective interaction between lecturers and students could positively influence the student-lecturer relationships in the classroom.

12.   Lecturer Disrespectfulness

The view of S85 was also shared by participant S29 from the faculty of health sciences, who indicated that lack of respect on the part of lecturers for students and intimidation hinder the quality of the student-teacher relationship. Excerpts below reveal the views of S29:

The first thing that comes to mind is disrespect. You know, if there are about 200 or 150 students in a class and I ask questions only for a lecturer to make me feel that I am not good enough to be in the class, then that would

certainly put me off. Also, when a lecturer disrespects a student, that student would not want to get close to the lecturer let alone share his or her problem. The lastone that I would add is that lecturers who intimidate students are not liked bystudents (Personal Interview).

The lack of good teaching skills was highlighted by participant S33 as one of the features that could hinder the effective relationship between lecturers and students, "I think that sometimes lecturers who are not very good when it comes to what they teach tend to be very straight forward with students and avoid interacting with students…….we see these a lot in class" (Personal Interview).

13. Encouraged Quality Interaction and Lecturer Approachability

Participants agreed that the use of e-learning has resulted in lecturers opening up several avenues to improved communication and interaction. Hence, widen the engagement with the students:

> S57—Interaction …. I mean quality interaction between lecturers and students could enhance the relationship between lecturers and students. Before the COVID-19 pandemic that was a bit difficult [interaction] but I think with the current use of online learning, we are able to interact well with our lecturers (Personal Interview).

In addition, S25 expressed that:

> …I think that our lecturers should communicate well with us as students, theyshould be punctual to class, and they should give us prompt feedback, mustbe open to us as students and should look presentable. I also think that lecturers should be passionate about what they are teaching. Since our course involves more practical sessions, I expect them to include more demonstrations rather than referring us to textbooks. When lecturers provide us with examples in class, we tend to focus more on what is been taught (Personal Interview).

14. Use of the Student's Names

Participant S3 highlighted the importance of lecturers identifying students by names. She noted that students confidently get involved in the learning process especially when they are being identified by their names by the lecturers:

> There is this doctor in our faculty who takes her time to study the names of all the students in the class. Although we are quite many and rotate the sessions with her, she makes sure that she recognizes all the names of her students. Aside from our names, she also asks us about our background….where we are from etc. What happened is that I gave in much effort in that modulebecause I felt that she was really interested in my academic development (Personal Interview).

DISCUSSION

The existence of fear or reluctance on the part of pupils to express their difficulties indicates a significant issue. If the students worry about the response they will receive when seeking support, then, there is a severe problem with relational pedagogy. Effective communication within and outside the school environment drives the relationship between teachers and students. Emerging discourse in higher education has emphasised

the importance of transmitting information and knowledge between lecturers and students in the learning process (Suciu, 2014).

However, any social distance between the teacher and the learner could result in ruptures in the relationship, constraining effective teaching and learning. Hence, any pedagogical relationship between lecturers and learners should depend on solid communication, an open environment, and respect. The finding shows that the name-calling of students by lecturers in class is necessary for building relationships between participants in HEIs teaching and learning. The institutional climate reports of 2019 and 2021 revealed that the UFS was doing well in supporting the social integration of first-year students into the university. The corollary question is whether such support translates into academic integration for these first-year students through social relationships or mainstream pedagogical relations.

Furthermore, the relational proficiencies of lecturers are learned and developed through interaction with students (Ljungblad, 2021) in a learning environment. Most lecturers believe developing a good social relationship with students, including caring for their learning needs, is vital. Participants noted that having a good social relationship with students creates an atmosphere of trust and commitment to contribute to classroom discussions, helps lecturers identify students' learning needs, and creates opportunities for lecturers to get to know their students better. In order to enhance the pedagogical relationships between lecturers and students, some participants thought that lecturers should develop cordial relationships with students and allow the students to contribute without any feeling of intimidation or fear. According to Walker and Gleaves (2016), the concept of caring teaching in practice consists of two pedagogic structures: (1) the active development and preservation of pedagogical relationships; and (2) the importance of trust, acceptance, and individual attentiveness in the part of lecturers and students.

Meanwhile, while this study focuses on how lecturers can build their social relationships with students, there is a question regarding the students' responsibility. The students must respect their lecturers and adhere to the rigid relational rules set by the university or institution to promote effective teaching and learning. Aspelin (2017) asserts that the university or the institution can help to push pedagogical relationships drive-by enacting and implementing cohesion policies against potentially deprivable factors. These factors include racism, intimidation, bigotry, bullying, and underdeveloped feedback and communication channels.

The study outcome gives a general impression and reveals that most UFS student participants hold social-relationship expectations over the lecturers. Hence, in the students' opinion, the lecturer has more responsibility (or obligation) to lead social relationship drive in a higher institutional setting. As such, this conventional perception makes it quite unclear whether these students take their side of responsibility in maintaining, nurturing, and facilitating pedagogical relations seriously. Similarly, the theories by Buber and Noddings suggest a two-dimensional conception of lecturers' relational competence as (1) an immanent phenomenon, implying that the teacher is directly involved in an inter-human relationship with an attitude of natural care; and (2) a transcendent phenomenon, which implies that the teacher manages social relationships with an attitude of ethical care (Aspelin & Jonsson, 2019). The first aspect is existential, an intrinsic part of all authentic encounters. This is not a conventional attitude that a teacher can learn; it is cultivated through pedagogical practice and teacher education. The second aspect of relational competence is socially constructed. As lecturers and teacher

educators, we can work actively and purposely to cultivate such an attitude. The study, therefore, recommends the following.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The lecturers should pay attention to the use of technical language (this came up as a result of language difficulties that the new entrants face as second-language speakers of English).
2. Reducing large-size classes as students indicated that a small-group teaching method works for them. The lecturer and faculty should make an effort to facilitate student support.
3. The university website communication channels should be the drive for students' respect and lecturer approachability (very important).
4. Using students' names when responding to them in email, classroom, etc.
5. A caring culture among the staff should be encouraged by the HEIs found in developing nations.
6. Avoiding factors such as inadequate class preparation, low confidence, excess workload, and communication deficiencies by the lecturers should be seen as primary reinforcement of professionalism.

CONCLUSION

The current study concludes that while the experiences of lecturers and students at the HEIs of developing nations are different, as well as challenging in terms of building pedagogical relations. The large class size is a sensitive issue for the HEIs authorities, given that the economic model is built around class size. It is a difficult issue owing to the decreasing government sponsorship of HEIs in developing nations. These reasons give credence to the significance of pedagogical relationships as a drive for these universities or institutions found in developing nations. It is vital to internally develop strategies to promote good pedagogical relationships in these institutions. This initiative should be included in the teaching or instructor philosophy of contact learning institutions. It should also be seen as an effort by lecturers to change from traditional frames of reference or perspectives that saw creating social relationships with students as contrary to the ethics of professionalism to the "humane professionalism" teaching philosophy.

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