

Adopting a Relational Approach towards Quality Academic Performance among International Students: The Nigerian (Ogbomosho, Nigeria) Baptist Theological Seminary's Model

Esther O Ayandokun, Ph. D
Baptist College of Theology
Lagos, Nigeria

Abstract

This research investigates how higher institutions can adopt a relational approach towards quality academic performance among international students. A relational approach involves extending needed assistance to students by creating an environment in which people care for one another, thereby fostering excellent teaching and learning. The goal of this is for the institution to provide platforms for quality theological and educational training by improving the school's environment, using orientations, strengthening the library services, providing individual and group counseling, providing health care facilities and fostering excellent teaching and learning through a relational approach towards students' overall academic performances. The work adopted the use of case study. 30 participants were in the focus group to authenticate the research assertion. The analysis revealed NBTS uses a relational approach model. The work recommends that Christian higher institutions globally embrace a relational approach in teaching-learning processes.

Keywords: Relational, platforms, teaching, learning, improvement, academic success

1.1 Introduction

The 21st century institutions have more student enrolment than what was obtained in past centuries. Many parents today also have a good understanding of the value of education (Ilori, 2014). While most advanced nations have gone ahead in providing Christian higher education, developing nations face daily the challenge of meeting international standards. Part of the strategies Nigerian Christian higher institutions adopt include bringing professors from overseas institutions to help in teaching some courses at all levels. The students' exchange programme in the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho, (NBTS) Nigeria has also been very helpful.

There is also a faculty exchange programme in overseas institutions which this researcher benefitted from in 2011. The scheme was initiated by Solomon Ademola Ishola when he served as the overall head of the Nigerian Baptist Convention from 2001-2011 and Joseph Abiodun Ilori when he served as the president of NBTS. The arrangement is still on-going with full financial sponsorship by the Nigerian Baptist Convention to date under the administration of Supo Ayokunle who assumed office as the head of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 2011. At present, two faculty members from NBTS are in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

As a graduate of NBTS, Ogbomosho and with the privilege of teaching in Baptist College of Theology, Lagos (an Affiliate of NBTS, Ogbomosho) for over 15 years now, the researcher observed the impact of cordial and intimate relationships between students and their lecturers. This is quite opposite the trend where some students find it difficult to relate and approach their lecturers hindering students from becoming achievers. Understanding the relationship that exist among teaching faculty and students has been attested to be helpful and rewarding (Ellis & Moore, 2006).

Having served as Director of Academic Affairs of the Baptist College of Theology, Lagos from 2007 – 2014, the experience exposed this researcher to the relationship tussle among students and their lecturers. Some lecturers are approachable and friendly while some are not.

Many others are doing very well and are vigorously involved in seeing their students succeed by their methods of teaching (Utaka, 2014). This researcher has come in contact with professors who have spent their time, energy and expertise to see their students succeed. Notable is Samuel Folorunso Ogundare, a professor of Social education at Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun State, Nigeria who also serves as an adjunct lecturer in

NBTS. He has touched the lives of many students who passed through him and is very active in a relational approach till date. NBTS, Ogbomoso has a number of such faculty members; this does not however mean there are no faculty members that are unapproachable. This background informs the research which has the goal of encouraging institutions to adopt more of a relational approach towards quality academic performance among all their students.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In recent times, students in Christian higher institutions face the challenge where some of their lecturers are not friendly and do not have interest in their students' overall academic success. Some Christian higher institutions are losing the Christian touch in the education they provide. While quality standards should not be compromised, it is evident that interpersonal relationships between the faculty and the student are diminishing and should be restored in Christian higher institutions. This research intends to present NBTS as a model in the use of a relational approach.

1.3 Research Question

In what ways can the Seminary improve its attraction to Nigerian and international students? The researcher suggests that a *Relational Approach* is capable of solving this issue and therefore investigates the topic, "Adopting a Relational Approach towards Quality Academic Performance among International Students: The Nigerian (Ogbomoso, Nigeria) Baptist Theological Seminary's Model."

2.1 NBTS: History, Mission, Vision and Practice of a Relational Approach

The beginning of theological education in Nigeria is associated with the coming of the missionaries who came to the African soil to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. The different missionary agencies were involved in training indigenes to support them in the work of evangelism. Such earliest denominations were the Roman Catholics, the Wesleyan Methodist Mission, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Baptist Missions, Quakers, Lutherans and others (Kafang, 2009). "The early missionaries considered education not only as a source of enlightenment to their parishioners but also as a veritable tool for evangelism" (Anie, 2006). The quote above speaks to the reason for the establishment of schools and theological institutions which started as bible schools until such became full-fledged theological institutions over time.

One such outstanding theological institution in Africa is the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso which was established on May 3rd, 1898 by the efforts of Revd C.E Smith, a missionary of the Foreign Missions Board of Southern Baptist Convention, United States of America with "a Preachers' Training Class" in Ogbomoso. There have been changes in the face of the institutions in the areas of leadership and programmes for the past 117 years of theological education in Africa (Programme of Inaugural Ceremonies of Dr. Imasogie, 1979). The main aim of theological education was to train men and women who will go out to teach people the way of the Lord.

The beginning of theological education emphasized the teachings of the rudiments of Christian faith. Today, the scope of the curriculum in theological institutions is wide with varieties that support Christian witness, growth and world evangelization while the administration of Christian higher education is advancing daily in Nigeria, though not without some challenges (Asonibare, 2014). These institutions train pastors and para-church workers who serve in churches, schools and other places where there are opportunities for ministry (Kafang, 2009).

Nihinlola, the incumbent president of NBTS, Ogbomoso is working tirelessly to make the Seminary "be a world-class theological institution to train God-called men and women who will contribute to the transformation of the society, open to all irrespective of ethnic, linguistic, social, education & economic differences, build effective leader for church & society both nationally & internationally and equip people to fulfill the total mission of God for the world today" (www.nbts.edu.ng). In order to achieve these, the "students in the seminary are given opportunities for fellowship and good interpersonal relationship through varied religious, recreational, social and student – government activities. NBTS is a campus community of intellectually curious people who value the life of the mind, strong character and authenticity" (www.nbts.edu.ng).

NBTS Ogbomoso is gradually becoming a postgraduate theological institution as undergraduate programmes are now reduced. Their programmes attract people who are not Baptist members and international students, but the proportion is still small. The population of the seminary students as at 2015/ 2016 academic session is 986 including the international students who are fifteen which is still small compared to the total population of NBTS

(Ogundipe, NBTS Registry, 2015). The library services are outstanding and improved to help the overall performances of the students. "The library houses over 34,163 volumes of textbooks and 191 journal titles of which approximately seventy percent go to Religion and Theology. It also stocked 5,000 e-books of various theological disciplines..." ("About NBTS Library" @ <http://nbts.edu.ng/library.php...>).

NBTS, Ogbomoso has other Baptist Colleges in Nigeria affiliated with it; their programmes are monitored to ensure quality theological education towards outstanding ministerial performance. In line with this is the effort put into 2015 NBC theological institutions consultation forum held to discuss matters relating to providing quality theological education (2015 NBC Theological Institutions Consultation).

2.2 Concept of the Relational Approach

The understanding of the term "relational concept" depends on the relationships in the situation. To understand relational concepts, one must understand the "other" and the relationship between them" ("Concept teaching" @ <http://www.slideshare...>). Relational approach as a concept suggests an avenue of relationship, understanding, accommodation, and friendliness. It suggests further connection, openness, communication and the elimination of fears as well as the challenges and how the interest of others are considered ("Defining Communication Theories" @ <http://mhhe.com/mayfield...>). To be relational is to be helpful to others, guiding them to become achievers and never attempting to obstruct their progress. Being relational is not an excuse for being lazy or avoiding responsibility and changes when there is need or a call for it ("On Relational Theory: Questioning the Dogma" @ <http://www.agileda...>).

Being relational is not only required in the field of education but is also accepted in almost all professions today (Hultman, Claes M. and Eleanor Shaw, 2003). For instance, "Relational psychoanalysis is a school of psychoanalysis in the United States that emphasizes the role of real and imagined relationships with others in mental disorder and psychotherapy." Relational psychoanalysis is a relatively new and evolving school of psychoanalytic thought considered by its founders to represent a "paradigm shift" in psychoanalysis" ("Relational psychoanalysis" @ <https://en.wikipedia...>). In relationships, there is support that motivates people to do what they could not ordinarily do or achieve.

Authors who wrote about developing a relational approach have varying views on relational approaches but the essence of the subject of relationships cannot be ignored in all their works as these affect all aspects of life (Brandell, 2010). Asonibare (2014) asserts that developing the total man in Christian higher education is a God-given duty of Christian teachers and this researcher affirms that this can be better achieved through a relational approach.

Human beings are relational and survive as they interact with each other. Isolation is destructive and unhealthy for human survival. With positive relationships among persons, many personal problems needing psychological and medical intervention are often taken care of. A relational mode helps in providing support for each other towards achieving success especially with the use of educational counseling (Ayandokun, 2010). Today, school psychologists and counselors most often are involved in preventive and curative measures with the goal of helping students go through difficulties which eventually bring about positive change (Bradley- Johnson & Dean, Ysseldyke et al, 1997 & 2000 cited in Marlene. L Koch, 2001).

The 21st century students are faced with myriads of problems "created by political, economic and social force according to the times" (Koch, 18). Providing needed help for students in all institutions of learning is not to be neglected. Economic hardship is becoming a perennial issue among students who sometimes struggle without succeeding (Ishola-Esan, 2012). Unfortunately, these students try to explain their situation to faculty members who often do not care about their plight; some lecturers do not see the need to either listen or attend to the students' complaints because the lecturer assumes that the student should have planned for their finances and responsibilities before coming to the seminary.

There is a need for professors to respond to issues facing the students they teach; responding is a mark of being a considerable teacher, lecturer or course facilitator. It calls for not just teaching but giving consideration to what students are going through that can hinder their overall performance.

It is about the personal touch and helping the students achieve success. This is a call for change and for closing the wide gap that often characterizes student/teacher relationships. Change usually is not easy to achieve. The need for collaboration for academic success which invariably is expected to lead to ministerial and professional

success cannot be underestimated as teachers draw their students closer to the goal to help them succeed. Training the students to know their limit, however, is very important in using this approach (Bliuc, Ana-Maria, Robert A Ellis et.al, 2011; Ishola-Esan, 2012).

A call for training in skills to promote learning is needed in Christian higher institutions because students in the schools come from different backgrounds (Smith, 1988). Students go through a variety of difficulties; the institution can assist them with great innovative ideas to turn their challenges into opportunities that will lead to positive change. Restructuring the education system will make things work better when teachers become closer to their students and make the teaching and learning process pragmatic and fulfilling (Huebner, 1993 in Koch, 2001). The institution should plan to identify students' needs and problems and how the school can be of help in alleviating the challenges.

Lecturers are not to just do the teaching without becoming involved in the lives of the students they teach but, at least to a certain extent, should provide interventions that could be of immense assistance to aid quality academic performance among students (Ishola-Esan, 2012). Lecturers can be equipped to provide counselling opportunities, crisis intervention and teacher consultation. Providing an environment that leads to cordial relationship is needed and helpful in all institutions of learning (Aladejana, Francisca and Olujemisi Aderibigbe, 2007; Sung, Minjung and Sung-Un Yang, 2009).

The 21st century world is polluted with myriads of problems that staff and students face (Ayandokun, 2010: 19-29). The school must intentionally plan to be responsive and proactive to address the multiple problems students' face that can hinder quality academic performances (Sheri Deon & Gutkur, 2000 cited in Koch, 2001). Amirali Minbashian Gailf Huona, Ndk Evind Bird 2004 assert that motivation which as a part of the attribute of a relational approach can assist students in quality academic performance. Robert A. Ellis & Roger R. Moore (2006) added that the use of ICT (Information Communication Technology) can assist teachers and students and the overall improvement of the teaching and learning system through reflection for quality performance.

A relational approach has transformative potentials, helps to reduce effect of stress and tension, emphasizes justice, fairness and equity, reduces frustration, encourages confidence as others share in our frustration, fosters care and concern to assist students achieve success, opens room for quality performance, encourages or promotes collaboration, encourages intimate knowledge of others and their capacities, helps in building others, involves the use of interactive models, contributes to effective teaching and learning processes, and assists students in quality academic and ministerial performance (Schaps, 2003; Sun, Li-un, Samuel Aryee and Kenneth S. Law, 2007; Ayandokun, 2013). The values of a relational approach and the contribution to the teaching-learning processes are evident in NBTS.

Some of the relational attributes available in NBTS include: creating an environment where basic psychological needs are met, showing concern for emotional and physical safety of the students, being known for supportive relationships, implementing efforts to facilitate student success, and providing an environment where students know they belong. By using the relational model to contribute to a student's competence, NBTS sees students as capable people who can learn to succeed. NBTS is known for its relationship with people in a community that cares while developing in students' habits that help students concentrate in their studies (Rooney, 2003).

In spite of the values of a relational approach to teaching and learning, experience and observations have shown many teachers do not adopt this approach but rather they concentrate only on immediate academic achievement and they are less concerned about touching the lives of the students. Non-relational approaches have an adverse effect on students, the lecturers, and the institution. The understanding of these ideas motivated this researcher to examine the relative advantage of a relational approach to overall student's learning in the Seminary, particularly among international students.

Putting the relational approach into use can be enhanced by *setting goal for self-actualization*. Referring to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, every person most often has a strong desire to realize his or her full potential to reach the level of self-actualization. Borrowing from Herbert Alexander Simon, students should be guided in identifying all alternatives, considering the consequences of these alternatives and comparing the accuracy and efficiency of each of the consequences.

The values that students have will eventually influence their decisions and actions towards succeeding. The institution is to guide all students enrolled to set goals for succeeding (Odetoyinbo, 2015).

The world of communication has made it possible for the world of knowledge to be in the hands of almost all persons who care to know (Bloland, 1995). Today, facilitators of learning can guide learners to become more knowledgeable by adopting means of a relational approach as they are guided in gaining information and knowledge. Learners today come to our institutions with different values and presumably different expectations. Today's Christian higher education should assist students to fit into the society having gone through our schools (Ayandokun, 2013: 37-54). In addition, teachers in 21st century should be bold, dynamic, creative, flexible, and meet up with the dramatic technological revolution. Teachers who have made learning interesting can count on their student's continuous learning as they create groups for learning and discussion; this is because relationships cut across teachers/learners and continue among the learners themselves. Creating learning groups is important among students because this step can help in sharing, discussing, reading and providing guidelines for each other (Mitchel et al, 2004: 13-16; Apena, 2015).

2.3 Purpose of the Study and Method

Having identified its importance in overall academic and ministerial performances, the researcher proposes more use of the relational approach in the procedure of education in Christian higher institutions. The research design was case study using NBTS, Ogbomoso as the subject. The data collection procedures included a focus group composed of national and international students who discussed and rated the surveys. The programmes studied cut across diploma, degree, masters and doctoral levels. Both genders responded to statements raised on the relational approach as it is operated in NBTS and as they were affected. The President's representatives, Administrators, Consultants, Chaplain, Librarian, Faculty members, and students (national and international) with a few Non-Academic Staff were members of the focus group used for the study. A total of thirty persons participated in the study. The discussion guide was designed in such a way to ease rating. To analyze the data, a numerical value was given to each response. The response that favored the relational concept received the highest value. Levels of ratings were based on the options below for different surveys as follows. The numerical value for tabulation purposes are in brackets after each response. The points were multiplied by the number of responses:

- A. Very Often (VO) [5 points each], Often (Oft) [4 points each], Sometimes (S) [3 points each], Rare (R) [2 points each], Very Rare (VR) [1 point each], Not all (NA) [0 points each] used for Tables I, II, and IV.
- B. Very high (VH) [6 points each], High (H) [5 points each], Average (Av) [4 points each], Moderate (M) [3 points each], Poor (P) [2 points each], Very Poor (VP) [1 point each], Not at all (NA) [0 points each] used for Table V.
- C. Excellent (Ex) [6 points each], Very Good (VG) [5 points each], Good (Gd) [4 points each], Fair (Fr) [3 points each], Bad (Bd) [2 points each], Very Bad (VB) [1 point each], Not all (NA) [0 points each] used for Table III.

Members of the focus group were asked to indicate in front of each statement their choice from any of the categories.

2.4 Reports and Implications

Education is dynamic. The 21st century experience is such that education is constantly going through changes that affect all facets of the school life. Definitely the changes in the society have impact on the type of education that is been offered. These changes put lecturers and students on their toes (Tate, 2006). Societal educational changes provide motivation and opportunities to identify strategies which can help the teaching and learning processes. Twenty-first century teachers, lecturers, and facilitators of learning are not just to be interested in teaching; they must create an environment that makes teaching-learning take place (Sung, Minjung and Sung-Un Yang, 2009). They should be trained to be effective in helping their student succeed. Therefore, the overall purpose of this section is to report the relational approach as it is been practiced in NBTS as well as presenting students' views and other members of the community regarding the gains from the approach. Data report and assessment of what is happening at NBTS are in the tables attached at the end of this document.

Table I reveals that all the items listed as the essence of a relational approach are accepted to be true as follows: rating No 4, the concept that relational approaches nurture care and concern to assist students in achieving success, as first; No 5, the requirement of an intimate knowledge and the abilities of others in relationships, as second; and No 2, the potential for transformation through relationship, as third. The ratings revealed that a relational approach is accepted to be helpful to all.

The responses in Table II are highly encouraging, affirming the researcher's thesis. Nos 6, 7, and 8, which survey programmes within NBTS take the highest ratings. Nos 9 and 10, which describe the perception of NBTS's

relational approach, were rated lower but are still in the range of acceptability. This might be as a result of a few lecturers that are not relational enough. More so, members of the focus group were asked to be highly objective. It suggests those not relational should embrace the concept in order to make more impact.

Table III reveals NBTS faculty members are conscious of the relational approach and are making good use of it. No 11 is ranked first; No 12 is second and No 14 is third, showing that NBTS faculty is aware and utilizes relational teaching practices that promote learning in the classroom environment. Efforts should be made by NBTS faculty to work on No 13 and 15 which are related to individual relationships rather than the class as a whole; these factors are germane to making relational approach effective.

Results displayed in Table IV also revealed that students have roles to play in enhancing a relational approach. The ratings showed No 18 as first, No 20 as second and No 19 as third; all of these survey items relate to meeting personal needs. The ratings for Nos 16 and 17, items relating to commitment to the institution, show that these areas could be better improved. In order to satisfy the requirements of a relational approach, students at NBTS should take note of these commitments.

Gains of a relational approach as used in NBTS are revealed in the Table V. No 23 is rated highest, No 25 is rated second while No 24 is rated third. The results are interesting and encouraging. The use of a relational approach at NBTS could, therefore, be presented to others to embrace and emulate. The implications of a relational approach for theological education in general is based on the understanding that teaching and learning is first of all relational while the work of the ministry is also highly relational because people are involved at all levels. A relational approach touches the cognitive, affective, skills, psychological, social domains and assists in solving personal problems, controlling emotions and instilling confidence to be in the College towards actualizing future goals through self-actualization and becoming self-fulfilling (Ogundare, 2015).

2.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of the use of a relational approach at NBTS as a means to attract national and international students. The analysis of the data revealed that this approach is in place at NBTS. It also revealed that some improvements could strengthen the results. The seminary could improve its attraction to international as well as Nigerian students by identifying students' needs and problems in a caring atmosphere. All faculty members should develop a personal relationship with their students; this is part of spiritual formation and being obedient to Christ's command to "make disciples" and to "teach them to obey Him" (Matthew 28: 18-20). Faculty should assist students as they work through their difficult circumstances. Such relationships emulate Christ's relationship with us; by modeling His love for each other, faculty members are training their students to become more Christ-like and to approach their circumstances in a biblical manner. This will promote the perception that NBTS is a caring community.

The conclusion is that the *Relational Approach* model at NBTS could serve as an example for other seminaries. Such an approach could easily be implemented by other Christian higher education institutions. The culture of a seminary reflects the same relationships among individuals regardless of whether the students are national or international; we are all part of the kingdom of Christ and are striving to become one in Him.

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TABLES AS INDICATED IN THE RESEARCH WORK

TABLE I: Essence of a Relational Approach

Nos	STATEMENTS	VO	Oft	S	Rare	VR	NA		
S/N		5	4	3	2	1	0	Total	Position
1	Relational approach is gaining ground in almost all fields of life.	50	52	12	2	1	-	117	
2	Relational approach has transformative potentials.	70	56	6	-	-	-	132	3 rd
3	Relational approach encourages confidence as others share in our frustrations.	65	56	9	-	-	-	130	
4	Relational approach fosters care and concern to assist students achieve success.	80	48	6	-	-	-	134	1 st
5	Relational approach encourages intimate knowledge of others and their capacities.	75	52	6	-	-	-	133	2 nd

TABLE II: Extent of the operation of relational approach in NBTS

Nos	STATEMENTS	VO	Oft	S	Rare	VR	NA	Total	Position
S/N		5	4	3	2	1	0		
6	NBTS has platforms for quality theological and educational training.	95	32	6	2	-	-	135	1 st
7	NBTS continues in strengthening the library services.	85	40	9	-	-	-	134	2 nd
8	NBTS is providing individual and group counseling	65	52	9	2	-	-	128	3 rd
9	NBTS is known for relationship with people in a community that cares.	40	72	9	-	1	-	122	
10	NBTS is fostering excellent teaching and learning through a relational approach towards students' overall academic performances.	55	56	3	6	1	-	121	

TABLE III: Faculty's Role towards a Relational Approach in Christian Higher Institution

Nos	STATEMENTS	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Bad	Very Bad	Not at all	Total	Position
S/N		6	5	4	3	2	1	0		
11	NBTS faculty members are competent in effective instruction and academic skills.	72	45	32	3	-	-	-	152	1 st
12	NBTS faculty members provide opportunity for feedback among the students.	66	25	24	21	2	-	-	138	2 nd
13	NBTS faculty members identify students' needs, problems and how they could be assisted.	24	45	32	24	-	-	0	125	
14	NBTS Faculty members are caring teachers and they monitor students' academic growth.	36	35	40	18	-	1	-	130	3 rd
15	NBTS Faculty members know their students intimately.	6	45	36	24	4	-	0	115	

TABLE IV: Students' Efforts in Enhancing Relational Approach in NBTS

Nos	STATEMENTS	VO	Oft	S	Rare	VR	NA	Total	Position
S/N		5	4	3	2	1	0		
16	Students are committed to schools norms, values and goals.	55	48	21	-	-	-	124	
17	Students are committed to interacting with the lecturers/ course facilitators.	50	48	24	-	-	-	122	
18	Students are given the opportunity to meet with school counsellors.	95	36	6	-	-	-	137	1 st
19	Students receive aids towards quality academic performance from the Seminary library.	60	52	12	2	-	-	126	3 rd
20	Students are trained in Information Communication Technology and provided with tools for efficient performance.	65	48	12	2	-	-	127	2 nd

TABLE V: Gains of using relational approach in NBTS

Nos	STATEMENTS	VH	H	Av	M	P	VP	N	Total	Position
S/N		6	5	4	3	2	1	0		
21	Improving Interpersonal Communication.	30	85	32	-	-	-	-	147	
22	NBTS is known for a respectful classroom climate.	48	65	28	3	2	-	-	146	
23	In NBTS, respect is cherished, relationship is enhanced and love is shared among students and teachers.	72	60	20	3	-	-	-	155	1 st
24	In NBTS, teachers use group-worthy tasks method to promote interdependence and individual accountability.	72	50	24	3	2	-	-	151	3 rd
25	In NBTS, teachers give enough time to guide students in learning activities.	72	55	20	6	-	-	-	153	2 nd