

Character formation as a Catalyst for Leadership Effectiveness in Theological Education

Patricia Tamunoibi Miller¹, Becky Misom Kibie²

¹Baptist College of Theology, Obinze-Owerri, Nigeria

²Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary, Ndu of the Cameroon Baptist Convention

Received: 02 July 2026 | Accepted: 12 September 2026 | Published: 26 September 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22981961>

Abstract

This study explores character formation as a Catalyst for Leadership Effectiveness in Theological Education. Theological Education is concerned with the transmission of theological knowledge aimed at forming individuals so that they can serve God effectively. Today, leadership effectiveness in theological education is sometimes measured by institutional growth, academic credentials, the ability to preach and teach excellently, ministerial success, and accreditation. At the same time, the leader lacks integrity, self-control, humility, accountability, honesty, and empathy. Theological Education Institutions has been forming persons intellectually, spiritually, physically, and morally, but the moral aspect has not been very deliberate, which is what this paper seeks to address. As important as theological knowledge is, without intentional formation of character, there is no ministry success. The study employs a qualitative approach and conducted a semi-structured interview from 35 participants. It was conducted with 15 Student pastors, 9 pastors, 9 staff, and 11 leaders of three Theological institutions in Cameroon. The Baptist, the Presbyterian, and the Apostolic denominations. They were selected purposively for their experience and knowledge of the subject under investigation, and the study was conducted both online and face-to-face. The interview question focused on moral misconduct by leaders in theological education institutions and strategies to improve leaders' character. The study found that some leaders have integrity issues around money, sex, and alcohol. Also, some leaders are quick to anger and very judgmental, prideful, and negative in their criticism of students. Also, some leaders are greedy using their positions to create relationships with partners in the name of the school for personal benefits. Some are unforgiving thereby hindering anyone who opposed them from promotion. Finally, some are resistance to accountability where by some leaders do what they want and report to nobody. The study concludes that character formation is essential for the leadership effectiveness of leaders in Theological Education. The study recommends that discipleship and mentoring pipelines, seminars on character building and transparency, assistance of a therapist, and to help accountability partners and discipline can serve as strategies to improve leaders' character.

Keywords: Character formation, leadership, effectiveness, theological education

Introduction

Theological Education is concerned with the transmission of theological knowledge aimed at forming individuals so that they can serve God effectively. Today, leadership effectiveness in theological education is sometimes measured by institutional growth, academic credentials, the ability to preach and teach excellently, ministerial success, and accreditation. At the same time, the leader lacks integrity, self-control, humility, accountability, honesty, and empathy. Theological Education Institution has been forming persons intellectually, spiritually, physically, and morally, but the moral aspect has not been very deliberate, which is what this paper seeks to address. As important as theological knowledge is, without intentional formation of character, there is no ministry success. Leadership Effectiveness is intertwined with the character of the leaders. Consequently, the formation of leaders' character in Theological Education is significant for effective Leadership.

Effective Leadership is evident when leaders in a Theological Institution foster the right character, which is fundamental to the ministry. If leaders must make suitable decisions, live morally responsibly, and portray compassion, they are required to be spiritually and morally mature (Kretschmar, 2020). The thesis this paper addresses is that intentional Character building is important in theological education because it fosters leadership effectiveness within the institution and the community. Understanding how character formation can foster leadership effectiveness in Theological Education is critical. Therefore, this paper explores character formation as a Catalyst for Leadership Effectiveness in Theological Education, underscoring its importance and how developing leaders' character can lead to effective Leadership.

Conceptual View of Character Formation

Character formation is assimilating and responding positively to one's environment. A very fundamental view of character formation is that of Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which holds that character is formed through the repetition of virtuous habits and actions (Aristotle, 2009). According to him, consistent practice of one's behavior is character formation. Willard (2002) describes character formation as the transformation of the inner life to resemble that of Christ, which is reflected in one's attitudes, intentions, thoughts, and actions. Willard's definition is contextual and reflects the intent of this paper. According to him, a regenerated life should result in positive change of attitudes, thoughts, intentions, and actions. Greenleaf (1977) in *Servant Leadership* advocates that character formation produces leaders who uphold service rather than self-interest and power. This claim is true when leaders see ministry as service and place priority on serving the institution. Character formation, therefore, is the deliberate effort of a born-again child of God to portray the right virtues that are upright in the eyes of God and are universally agreed upon in society.

Understanding Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness is a critical aspect of organizational success. Leadership effectiveness incorporates a leader's ability to achieve desired outcomes, influence others, and promote a positive organizational culture (Agazu & Lemi, 2024). This implies that it is a leader's ability to influence and guide individuals or team members toward achieving institutional goals, hence maintaining a positive culture. By doing so, it helps create an environment that fosters motivation, satisfaction,

and overall success while maintaining trust, relationships, and integrity. Dubrin (2008) avows leadership effectiveness as achieving directed outcomes regarding productivity, quality, and satisfaction in a given situation. It reflects that effective Leadership is a basic requirement for facilitating and improving seminary outcome connoting performance. From the above viewpoints, leadership effectiveness is all the components put and implemented by the leader to achieve the organizational goal. By understanding and implementing the key components of effective Leadership, leaders in theological institutions can create a positive work environment, consequently, foster moral and ethical values for all in the seminary. In this work, theological education will also be seen as theological institutions and seminaries, while character will be seen as behavior, moral attitudes, and moral ethics.

Theological Education

Theological education is a religious institutions aim at shaping men and women in theological training. Atanda (2025) posits that theological education is “education of education” since it articulates and shapes values that underpin other disciplines, thereby situating learners’ learning within the broader context of divine purpose. This connotes education whose primary aim is to educate ideologies that have to do with God.

Scriptural Base for Character Formation

The Bible presents character formation as an essential aspect of Christian Discipleship and Leadership. This paper focuses on the New Testament view of character formation. Jesus called His disciples not only to acquire knowledge but also to follow Him and become like Him. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus says, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (NIV). This assertion indicates that Discipleship does not only involves the transformation of life but been able to participate in ministry. Paul also stresses character in Leadership from 1 Timothy 3:1-3 and Titus 1:5-9, highlighting the qualifications for church leaders, focusing on personal character especially. Qualities such as being above reproach, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, faithful, and not greedy are emphasized in these texts. This proves that biblical Leadership places considerable importance on who the leader is, not simply on what the leader does. Furthermore, Galatians 5:22-23 highlights the fruit of the Spirit, which includes “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” These qualities identified offer an important biblical basis for Christian character formation. In addition, Romans 12:2 calls on believers to transform themselves by renewing their minds and the renewed person is fundamental in the Christian ministry.

Also, Philippians 2:5-8 presents Christ’s humility and selflessness as an example for Christian believers. Character formation postulates Jesus Christ as its model. Thus, theological education should intentionally help students develop Christ-like character rather than merely prepare them for professional ministry void of sound character.

Character Formation and Leadership Effectiveness in Theological Education

Character formation and Leadership effectiveness are inseparable. Character formation contributes significantly to leadership effectiveness because Leadership is fundamentally relational. Leaders influence others through their attitudes, decisions, relationships, and conduct. For leaders in theological institutions to be effective in Leadership, they need to inculcate good moral virtues.

Character formation is crucial in a theological institution for effective Leadership in the following ways:

Character development is the basis to effective Leadership. Theological education whose Leadership deliberately nurtures Christ-like character, such as integrity, humility, justice, honesty, and service, produces future leaders who are more trustworthy in their dealings in the ministry. Magezi & Madimutsa (2023) argue that leadership failure is mostly associated with poor character rather than with technical know-how. This argument is true because, in contemporary Leadership, some leaders fail as a result of poor moral integrity. Hence, leaders in theological education are challenged to possess and implement Christ-like attributes as it fosters leadership effectiveness.

Character builds trust: Trust is vital for leadership effectiveness. Leaders who demonstrate consistency, trustworthiness, transparency, and integrity gain the confidence of their followers more easily. Kouzes and Posner (2017) pinpoint credibility as a central foundation of Leadership because people are more willing to follow leaders whom they consider trustworthy. This is very important in theological education, particularly when leaders handle spiritual, financial, relational, and organizational responsibilities. A leader whose character is in doubt can undermine the reliability of both the leader and the institution. Banks (1999) argues for an approach to theological education that links theological learning with the life and practice of the leader. This means that theological institutions should not simply accommodate leaders to occupy leadership positions and power but should train and accommodate leaders who can exemplify theological beliefs and practices. Therefore, character builds trust and, in turn, leads to leadership effectiveness in theological education.

Character fosters moral judgment and ethical decision-making.

Effective leaders often face tough decisions. Character provides an internal moral framework that helps leaders determine right from wrong and make sound decisions. Northouse (2022) recognizes ethics as an important dimension of Leadership because leaders have significant influence over others. Ethical Leadership portrays potentials such as honesty, justice, respect, service, and responsibility; hence, in theological education, leaders need to develop the moral capacity to make reasonable, consistent decisions grounded in biblical principles. Also, character formation procedures accurate moral judgement and right decision-making as theological institutions deliberately integrates spiritual and moral formation programs such as focused based Discipleship, mentorship, and 4ounseling programs for leaders to develop a deeper moral sensitive, qualities and the nexus between practices and belief. This will help them strengthen effective Leadership even in very difficult leadership contexts. Kretzschmar (2002) states that moral and spiritual formation characterized by justice and integrity leads to good Leadership. Consequently, character fosters ethical decision-making and promotes effective Leadership in theological education.

Character improves servant Leadership.

Servant Leadership places the needs and growth of others at the center of Leadership. Greenleaf (1977) claimed that an effective leader begins with a desire to serve others. This perspective strongly corresponds with Jesus' teaching in Mark 10:43-45, where eminence is connected with service. Qualities such as humility, compassion, empathy, patience, and selflessness are critical for servant Leadership. Leaders in theological education can develop these qualities by deliberately

serving the institution and the community rather than merely occupying positions of authority to suppress and abuse students. As Palmer (1998) underscores, leaders teach not only through what they say but also through who they are. This assertion is true since some leaders teach without implementing what they teach. There is a call for leaders to balance what they teach with their lived experiences to be effective in Leadership. The moral live of the leader in theological education is like a mirror through which others read and learn. Consequently, leaders are expected to serve as important role models of character for students and the community. If their Leadership must be effective, character formation plays a significant role in enhancing servant leadership, which, when applied, improves leadership effectiveness in theological education.

Character reinforces relational Leadership.

Ministry is profoundly relational. Leaders in the seminary interact with students, church members, diverse families, colleagues, church and community leaders, and others in society. Poor character can create conflict, quarrels, mistrust, and division, whereas qualities such as patience, kindness, empathy, forgiveness, taking responsibility for one's actions, reconciliation, and humility contribute to healthy relationships. Goleman (1998) emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence in Leadership, thereby pinpointing self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills that enable leaders to relate well with others. These qualities complement spiritual character formation by helping leaders in theological institutions understand and manage their emotions healthily while relating properly with others. Similarly, Foster (1998) underlines the importance of spiritual disciplines in developing Christian character in theological education emphasizing practices such as prayer, meditation, fasting, worship, confession, and service that can help transform leaders' attitudes and behavior. These spiritual disciplines are essential in seminaries as they help leaders become more and more like Christ in character and relationships. In theological institutions, character formation can take place through spiritual disciplines, chapel worship, mentoring and discipleship programs, and the lived examples set by leaders.

Character fosters resilience

Leadership often involves negative criticism, conflict, disappointment, and personal pressure; consequently, character formation helps leaders cultivate perseverance and emotional stability. Bass and Riggio (2006) elucidate that transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers toward greater levels of commitment and performance. Nonetheless, transformational influence necessitates leaders whose behavior provides a trustworthy example. Character enables leaders in theological education to remain faithful to their values even in challenging conditions, thereby fostering leadership effectiveness.

Strategies for Reinforcing Character Formation in Theological Institutions

Today, the need to strengthen character formation in theological education is critical, especially amidst the immoral happenings that plague Theological Education. Theological institutions can strengthen character formation through several practical ways.

Practicing Intentional Mentoring

Mentoring provides a platform through which leaders can learn from mature Christian leaders. Mentors can provide guidance, encouragement, accountability, and personal example. Kram (1985)

ascertains career and psychosocial functions as important dimensions of mentoring; likewise, Christian mentoring can support leaders' spiritual and character development.

Spiritual formation programs

Institutions can create planned programs including prayer, Scripture meditation, worship, spiritual retreats, and discipleship and prayer partners. These activities can boost leaders' spiritual lives.

Accountability

Character development entails programs that encourage leaders to be accountable for their behavior. This may include pastoral supervision, peer accountability groups, institutional codes of conduct, and disciplinary procedures. Leaders should frequently reflect on their attitudes, relationship manner, strengths and weaknesses, and ministry experiences. Reflective practices help leaders identify areas that require personal growth and share with their accountability partners for help.

Findings and Discussion

The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with 35 participants. It was conducted with 15 Student pastors, 9 pastors, 9 staff, and 11 leaders of three Theological institutions in Cameroon. They were selected purposively for their experience and knowledge of the subject under investigation, and the study was conducted both online and face-to-face. The interview focused on moral misconduct by leaders in theological education institutions and strategies to improve leaders' character.

What is some moral misconduct practiced by leaders in theological education institutions? It was reported that some leaders have integrity issues around money, sex, and alcohol. Also, some leaders are quick to anger and very judgmental, prideful, and negative in their criticism of students. When leaders engage in such moral misconduct, it leads to leadership failure, as Magezi and Madimutsa (2023) argue that leadership failure is mostly associated with poor character rather than technical know-how. This argument is true because, in contemporary Leadership, some leaders fail due to a lack of moral integrity. Hence, leaders in theological education are challenged to possess and implement Christ-like attributes, as it fosters leadership effectiveness.

Suggested Strategies to improve leaders' character

Results indicated that some strategies to improve leaders' character include Discipleship and mentoring pipelines that shape and develop leaders in theological education. Also, there is a need to organize seminars on character building for leaders to help them become better versions of themselves. Further, some need the assistance of a therapist to help them manage their emotions in a healthier way. Lastly, leaders should have accountability partners and discipline.

Conclusion

Character formation is a key component that defines an individual's disposition in every theological education because it reveals an individual's personality. Character formation is essential for effective Leadership in theological education. Theological education should not merely equip students who turn into leaders with theological knowledge and ministerial skills but also cultivate Christ-like character. Biblical leadership qualifications demonstrate that personal character is central to effective ministry leadership.

Character qualities such as integrity, humility, self-control, compassion, faithfulness, wisdom, and love enable leaders to build trust, make ethical decisions, manage relationships, serve others, and remain faithful under pressure. Consequently, theological institutions should intentionally organize mentoring, spiritual formation, accountability partners, and self-assessment programs.

Copyright © 2026, Authors retain copyright. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> (CC BY 4.0 deed)

References

- Adejuwon, E. A. (2024). Ethics of leadership. In S. A. Ishola & R. M. Oyeniyi (Eds.), *Theological education textbook series*. Kingdom Impact Publishing and Media Ltd.
- Agazu, B., & Lemi, D. K. (2024). Leadership effectiveness: A systematic literature review. *Library Leadership & Management*, 38(2). <https://doi.org/10.5860/llm.v38i2.7611>
- Ajibade, E. A. (2018). Bringing theological education into the melting point: A case for dynamic public ministry in Africa. *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*, 23(1), 47–63.
- Ajedokun, F. O. (2016). Re-awakening moral values for sustainable development in Nigeria through religious instructions. In P. R. Awoniyi & G. O. Olaniyan (Eds.), *Theological educators*. Hirise Celebrity Publishers.
- Akintola, S. O., & Sunday, B. A. (2024). Visionary leadership in Acts 6:1–7 as an antidote for the challenges of maladministration in the twenty-first-century church. *Journal of Biblical Leadership*, 2(1), 22–38.
- Aristotle. (2009). *The Nicomachean ethics* (W. D. Ross, Trans.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published ca. 350 BCE)
- Atanda. (2025). Theological education and human development: Historical foundations and contemporary implications. *GAS Journal of Religious Studies (GASJRS)*, 2(2), 10.
- Banks, R. (1999). *Reenvisioning theological education: Exploring a missional alternative to current models*. Eerdmans.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Psychology Press.
- Dariya, A. D. (2024). Relational nature of leadership. In S. A. Ishola & R. M. Oyeniyi (Eds.), *Theological education textbook series*. Kingdom Impact Publishing and Media Ltd.

- DuBrin, A. J. (2008). *Leadership: Research findings, practice, and skills*. Dreamtech Press.
- Foster, R. J. (1998). *Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth*. HarperSanFrancisco.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. Bantam Books.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist Press.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2017). *The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations* (6th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Kram, K. E. (1985). *Mentoring at work: Developmental relationships in organizational life*. Scott, Foresman.
- Kretzschmar, L. (2002). Integrity and consensus: A Christian perspective on ethical management and education in South Africa. *Koers—Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 67(4), 365–386. <https://doi.org/10.4102/koers.v67i4.XXX>
- Magezi, V., & Madimutsa, W. (2023). Character formation and leadership development: A symbiotic bond for the practice of theological education. *Theologia Viatorum*, 47(1), Article a206. <https://doi.org/10.4102/tv.v47i1.206>
- Northouse, P. G. (2022). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. Jossey-Bass.
- Willard, D. (2002). *Renovation of the heart: Putting on the character of Christ*. NavPress.