

**SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING LECTURER-STUDENT
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA,
NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined socio-cultural factors influencing lecturer-student romantic relationships at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. It was guided by two research questions and one hypothesis. The study adopted quantitative research design. The target population of this research work was 34,000 students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The sample size for the study was 203 respondents determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Multistage sampling technique was used for sample selection. The study utilized a questionnaire to gather quantitative data. The questionnaire was self-administered face-to-face by the researchers with two trained student assistants from Nnamdi Azikiwe University. This study used quantitative data from questionnaires, which was analyzed with descriptive statistics like simple percentages and presented in frequency tables. Each table was interpreted, and hypotheses were tested using chi-square (X^2) inferential statistics. It was found that peer pressure and academic pressure significantly contribute to lecturer-student romantic relationships in the university. Also, patriarchal cultural norms play a role in fostering such relationships, while cultural beliefs do not exert significant influence. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that the university administration should develop and enforce clear policies that prohibit lecturer-student romantic relationships. Furthermore, confidential reporting systems should be put in place to discourage peer-influenced behaviors. Academic support services, such as counseling and mentorship programmes, should be strengthened to help students cope with academic pressure without resorting to inappropriate relationships.

Keywords: Socio-Cultural Factors, Lecturer-Student Romantic Relationships, Peer Pressure, Academic Pressure

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of a university is fundamentally anchored on the pursuit of knowledge creation, dissemination, and community service within a structured and ethically guided environment. Universities are designed to cultivate intellectual development, critical inquiry, innovation, and character formation among students while promoting professional integrity among academic staff (Liu, 2023). Through teaching, research, and mentorship, universities shape human capital necessary for national development and global competitiveness (Okokoyo and Nwaham, 2024). However, the attainment of these ideals may be undermined by ethical challenges within the academic community, including lecturer-student romantic relationships. Lecturer-student romantic relationships refer to consensual or non-consensual intimate or

emotional involvements between academic staff and students within the same institution where formal authority exists (Mutongoza and Hendricks, 2024). Such relationships are characterized by inherent power imbalances that may compromise objectivity in teaching, supervision, grading, and mentorship. Consequently, they often generate allegations of favoritism, coercion, sexual harassment, and exploitation. These dynamics weaken professional boundaries, distort academic merit, and create hostile learning environments that threaten institutional integrity and students' academic freedom.

The consequences of lecturer-student romantic relationships extend beyond individual actors to institutional reputation and governance. Empirical reports in Nigerian universities indicate rising complaints of sexual misconduct, with some institutions recording dozens of formal petitions annually before regulatory interventions. Publicized cases have resulted in dismissals, litigations, and reputational damage that affect student enrolment and stakeholder confidence (Mutongoza and Hendricks, 2024). Such outcomes erode trust in assessment processes and academic credibility, thereby undermining university standards, and Nnamdi Azikiwe University is not an exception.

In response to these concerns, Nnamdi Azikiwe University has instituted measures such as strengthened codes of conduct, sexual harassment policies, disciplinary committees, and awareness campaigns aimed at promoting professional boundaries. These initiatives seek to reinforce ethical compliance and protect students from exploitation. Nevertheless, enforcement challenges persist due to entrenched socio-cultural norms that may normalize gendered power relations and discourage reporting (Ejeh and Destiny, 2023). Consequently, institutional policies alone may be insufficient without addressing underlying socio-cultural influences shaping behavior.

Socio-cultural factors such as patriarchal value systems, economic vulnerability, material aspirations, peer influence, and societal tolerance of transactional relationships significantly shape lecturer-student romantic engagements. These factors interact with institutional hierarchies to sustain patterns of silence, stigma, and unequal power negotiation within universities. Understanding these contextual drivers is therefore essential for designing effective preventive strategies and safeguarding academic integrity. Hence, this study seeks to investigate socio-cultural factors influencing lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided this study.

1. What is the relationship between social factors and lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
2. What is the influence of cultural factors on lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Threats to Ideal Role of Universities in Society

Universities are ideally expected to uphold professional boundaries, ethical standards, and merit-based academic interactions that foster intellectual growth and mutual respect among lecturers and students. Within such an environment, relationships are structured to promote fairness, objectivity, and academic integrity. However, increasing concerns about lecturer-student romantic relationships suggest a deviation from these ideals, particularly where socio-cultural norms subtly normalize power-imbalanced intimacy. These dynamics may lead to

favoritism, compromised assessment standards, emotional distress, and institutional reputational damage. If left unexamined, such patterns could erode stakeholder confidence and weaken governance structures.

Lecturer-Student Romantic Relationships

Lecturer-student romantic relationships are defined as intimate or emotional involvements between a lecturer and a student within the same institution where academic authority exists (Leonard, Omotoyosi, Olumide and Emmanuel, 2024). This definition emphasizes the inherent power differential that shapes consent, evaluation, and supervision. Similarly, Odutayo, Jacob, Opesemowo and Adewuyi (2024) conceptualizes such relationships as affective or sexual associations formed within formal educational hierarchies that may influence academic decisions. This perspective highlights how institutional roles blur professional boundaries, thereby creating ethical dilemmas, conflicts of interest, and compromised academic objectivity within universities.

Socio-Cultural Contexts of Lecturer- Student Romantic Relationships

These relationships do not occur in isolation but are embedded within broader socio-cultural contexts that shape attitudes and behaviours. In many African societies, patriarchal norms legitimize male authority and female submissiveness, thereby normalizing unequal power relations within educational institutions. Consequently, students may perceive romantic advances from lecturers as culturally sanctioned rather than professionally inappropriate. Additionally, materialistic values and social pressures that equate success with financial security may indirectly encourage transactional dynamics within academic spaces, thereby reinforcing vulnerability and silence.

Beyond patriarchy and materialism, communal silence and stigma surrounding sexual discourse further complicate the issue. Cultural taboos often discourage open discussion of intimacy, thereby limiting students' willingness to report inappropriate relationships or coercion (Nixon and Scullion, 2022). This culture of silence is reinforced by fear of victim-blaming and reputational damage within tightly knit communities. Moreover, peer influence and media portrayals that romanticize power-imbalanced relationships subtly legitimize such conduct, thus sustaining patterns that undermine professional ethics and institutional accountability in universities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Social Exchange Theory. It was propounded by George Homans in 1958, and posits that social interactions are guided by cost-benefit analyses in which individuals seek to maximize rewards and minimize losses (Homans, 1958). The theory suggests that relationships persist when perceived benefits outweigh associated risks. Critics argue that the theory overemphasizes rational calculation while underestimating emotional and structural constraints. Nevertheless, it is relevant for explaining how socio-cultural rewards and pressures sustain lecturer-student romantic relationships.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive survey research design. This research design allows for the use of structured questionnaire to gather data on students' perceptions of the socio-cultural factors influencing lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

The area of the study was Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, fondly called UNIZIK. It is a federal university in Nigeria. The university has multiple campuses in Anambra State with the main campus at Awka (the capital of Anambra State). Other campuses of Nnamdi Azikiwe University include Nnewi, Agulu, Mbaukwu and Ifite-Ogwuari.

The population of the study included all registered graduate and undergraduate students, as well as teaching and non-teaching staff at the Awka campus of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. There population was estimated to about 34,000 persons. However, the sample size for the study was 203 students. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, which ensures a proper representation of the study population.

To draw the sample, the faculties of Nnamdi Azikiwe University were grouped into three categories Sciences (A), Social Sciences (B), and Arts (C). A multistage sampling technique involving simple random sampling was adopted. The categories were numbered, shuffled, and two were selected without replacement; Categories B and C emerged. From each selected category, one faculty was randomly chosen, making a total of three faculties. Subsequently, one department was randomly selected from each faculty, resulting in three departments. Respondents (students, lecturers and non teaching staff) were drawn from the three departments using convenience of availability approach.

The study utilized a questionnaire as the sole tool to gather quantitative data. It contained questions aligned with the study's specific objectives and were divided into two sections. Section "A" focused on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age, sex, and religious affiliation, while Sections B addressed the core issues of the study.

The questionnaire was self-administered by the researchers and two student assistants who received one-day orientation/training on proper distribution and completion procedures. All co-researchers and assistants jointly administered the questionnaire to respondents.

This study generated quantitative data from questionnaire, which was analyzed with descriptive statistics like simple percentages and presented in frequency tables. Each table was interpreted, and hypotheses were tested using chi-square (X^2) inferential statistics. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25 to ensure accurate statistical evaluation of the data.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Table 4: Demographic Data of the Respondents

Distribution of respondents		Variables	Frequency	Percent
Distribution of respondents by gender		Male	71	35.5
		Female	129	64.5
		Total	200	100.0
1	Distribution of respondents by Educational Status	Undergraduate	70	35.0
		Postgraduate	29	14.5
		Lecturer	60	30
		Administrative Staff	31	15.5
		Total	200	100.0
3	Distribution of respondents by Faculty	Social Sciences	61	30.5
		Education	24	12
		Management Sciences	43	21.5
		Arts	37	18.5
		Law	35	17.5
		Total	200	100.0
4	Distribution of respondents by Years in the University	1 – 2 years	67	33.5
		3 – 4 years	91	45.5
		5 – 6 years	15	7.5
		Total	200	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, indicating that a greater proportion (64.5%) were female, whereas 35.5% were male. The results further reveal that the majority of the participants were undergraduates (35%), while administrative staff constituted the smallest proportion (15.5%). Additionally, most respondents belonged to the Social Sciences discipline, and a large number of the students were in their third and fourth years of study.

Analysis of Research Questions

The researchers asked two questions to guide this work. These questions were stated and analyzed accordingly.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between social factors and lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

First, the respondents were asked to state whether peer pressure is related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships. The responses are shown in Table and Figure 1, respectively.

Table 2: Respondents' views on whether peer pressure is related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	49	24.5
Agree	69	34.5
Disagree	53	26.5
Strongly Disagree	29	14.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 2 shows that most (34.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that peer pressure is related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships while the least (14.5%) have very low familiarity with child support policies. This result implies that peer pressure is a factor that leads to lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Figure 1: Academic pressure can lead students to seek romantic relationships with lecturers.

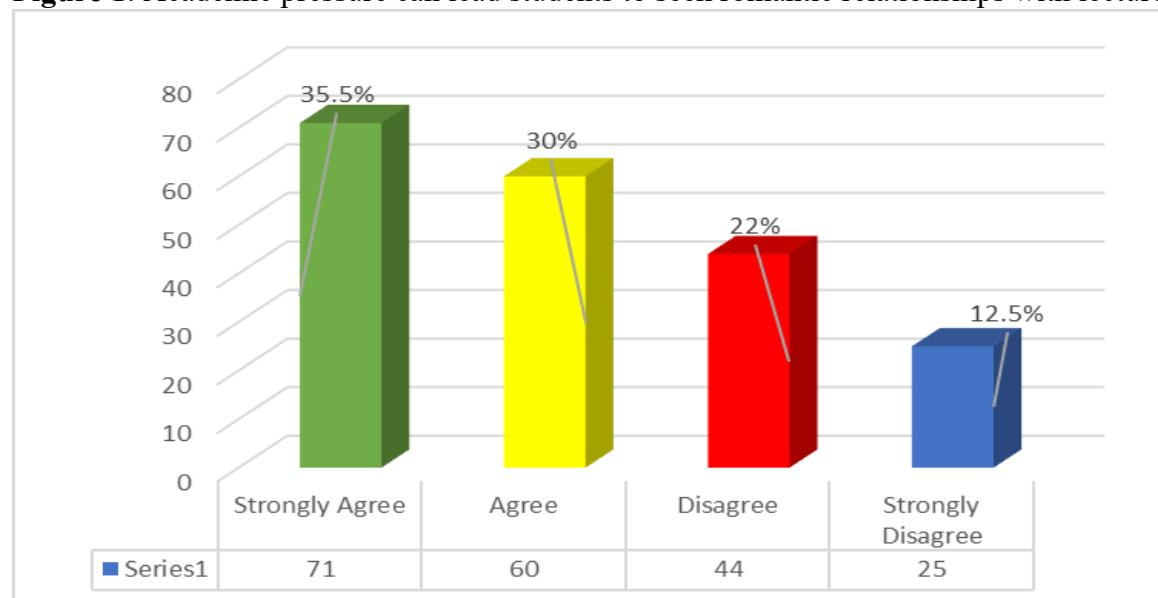


Figure 1 shows that most 35.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that academic pressure is related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships, while the least (12.5%) strongly disagreed that academic pressure is related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships. This result implies that academic pressure is a factor that leads to lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of cultural factors on lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

First, the respondents were asked to state whether patriarchal cultural norms is related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships. The responses are shown in Table 3 and Figure 2, respectively.

Table 3: Respondents' views on whether patriarchal cultural norms are related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	59	29.21
Agree	72	35.64
Disagree	54	27.72
Strongly Disagree	15	7.43
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 3 shows that most 35.64% of the respondents strongly agreed that patriarchal cultural norms are related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships, while the least (7.43%) strongly disagreed that patriarchal cultural norms are related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships. This result implies that patriarchal cultural norms are some of the factors that leads to lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Figure 2: Cultural beliefs on authority encourage lecturer–student romantic relationships.

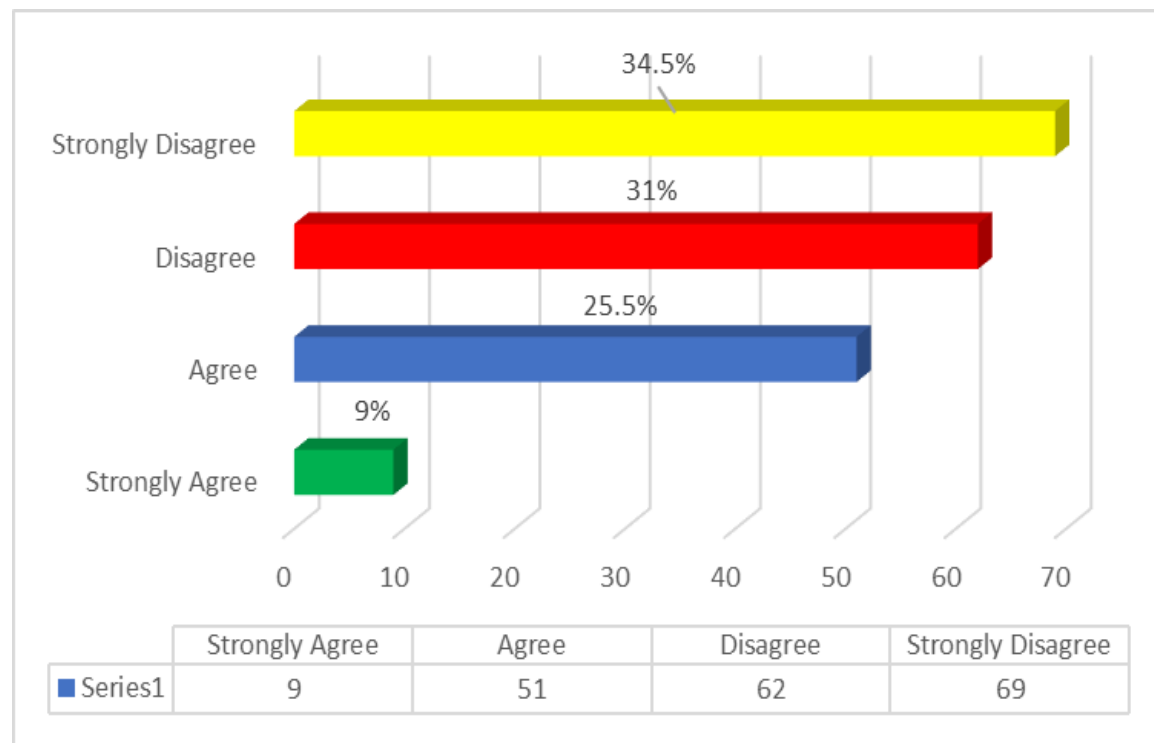


Figure 2 shows that most 34.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that cultural beliefs are not related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships, while the least (18%) strongly agreed that academic pressure is related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships. This result implies that cultural beliefs are not factors that lead to lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

There is significant relationship between social factors and lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Table 4: Test of Hypothesis

The chi-square test analysis showed that $X^2 (12, N = 200) = 383.607$, and the P-value = 0.001 < 0.05 significant level. The null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted and thus, there is significant relationship between social factors and lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

		Academic pressure can lead students to seek romantic relationships with lecturers				Total
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Peer pressure among students is related to the occurrence of lecturer-student romantic relationships	Strongly Agree	49	0	0	0	49
	Agree	22	47	0	0	69
	Disagree	0	13	40	0	53
	Strongly Disagree	0	0	4	25	29
Total		71	60	44	25	200
$X^2 (12, N = 200) = 383.607^a$, P = .001						

DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings indicated that, in relation to research question one, peer pressure and academic pressure were identified as significant factors contributing to lecturer-student romantic relationships in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Conversely, the results of research

question two showed that patriarchal cultural norms also contribute to such relationships, whereas cultural beliefs were not found to be influencing factors in lecturer–student romantic relationships in the university. The findings are consistent with existing literature, which suggests that peer influence and academic stress can shape students’ vulnerability to inappropriate relationships within academic settings, as students may seek academic advantage or social validation (Nixon and Scullion, 2022). Similarly, patriarchal norms have been identified as reinforcing power imbalances that encourage such relationships, whereas general cultural beliefs show weaker influence (Odutayo, et. al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study established that peer pressure and academic pressure significantly contribute to lecturer–student romantic relationships in the university. It further revealed that patriarchal cultural norms also play a role in fostering such relationships, while cultural beliefs do not exert significant influence. These findings highlight the need for institutional policies and awareness strategies to address power dynamics and academic stressors that may encourage such relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The university administration should develop and enforce clear policies that prohibit lecturer–student romantic relationships, while also establishing confidential reporting systems to discourage peer-influenced behaviors.
2. Academic support services, such as counseling and mentorship programmes, should be strengthened to help students cope with academic pressure without resorting to inappropriate relationships.
3. Regular sensitization workshops and seminars should be organized to address patriarchal norms and power imbalances within the university environment.
4. Orientation programmes for both students and lecturers should emphasize professional ethics, boundaries, and the consequences of engaging in unethical relationships within the academic setting.

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