# Effect of Romantic Relationship on Undergraduate Students' Academic Performance: A Case Study of Islamic University in Uganda

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**Abstract**
*This study was conducted to discover the effect of involvement in a romantic relationship amongst Undergraduate students at University academic performance and. The variables looked at are Romantic relationship status (single or involved), years of involvement in the relationship (more than or less than a year) and grade point average (GPA) change between two semesters in the academic year. Sixty-five (65) of the students across the different faculties studying in undergraduate degrees at Islamic University in Uganda were surveyed. Approximately 48 students (73.8 percent) of those surveyed were involved in a relationship. Overall, students engaged in romantic relationships were more likely to attend at least 70% of the classes. However, students engage in romantic relationships experienced a decrease in their GPA for the academic year under consideration. It is therefore recommended, that students engaged in RR must be counselled on how to read hard so that their GPA can increase. This could be done by forming discussion class presentation.*

**Keywords**: Academic Performance, Romantic Relationships, Attendance, GPA.

## Introduction
Academic achievement is a concept that is affected by several different factors of the individual and the environment. There has been a vast amount of research published on discovering what factors motivate a student to achieve success in their educational setting. Also, there have been studies focusing on the reasons behind why some students struggle throughout school. Schwinger, Wertheim, Lemmer, and Steinmayr (2014) studied, the explanation of self-handicapping, a frequently used strategy for regulating the threat of self-esteem elicited by the fear of failing in academic achievement settings. One of the results of their experiment was that younger students show higher relations between self-handicapping and performance (Schwinger et al., 2014). One potential factor that has been largely overlooked thus far in the academic achievement literature is the potential role of romantic relationships, with Giordano, Phelps, Manning, and Longmore (2008) claiming that "despite the ubiquity and general importance of dating, the role of romantic partners on academic achievement has not been systematically investigated" (p. 38).Most of the research on the link between social factors and academic achievement are concerned with parental and peer relationships and their association with the academic achievement of adolescents; far fewer studies have analyzed romantic relationships and college students. To address this gap in the literature, this study investigates the relationship between romantic relationships and academic achievement among students at private university (Islamic University in Uganda – Kampala Campus).

Globally, education is accorded as a weapon which can be used to eradicate the illiteracy raise the social status of human beings as well as building a nation (Ajegbomogun & Salami, 2011).Education should be made as easy as possible in order to realize the mass literacy advocated by the Government of Uganda, and to actualize the objectives of the National Policy on Education. After the school activities, students retire to study on their own. For that personal education to be meaningful, the students require the skills that would help them to regulate their education. It therefore becomes necessary for teachers to teach the students' metacognitive skills which have been found to aid students in the regulation of their learning. Metacognition is thinking about thinking (Maduabuchi, C. H., & Angela, I. O. I. (2016).

## Literature review on Romantic Relationships and Academic Achievement
Many people have defined the term "romantic relationship" differently based on their perspectives, experiences and preferences. According to Matsumoto (2011), "When you have a romantic

relationship with someone, you share attitudes, visions, dreams, strengths and vulnerabilities with that person, and there is also some kind of mutual support." However, a " romantic relationship" is not necessarily an intimate relationship in which partners are truly themselves, completely open and honest. Rather, those involved in a romantic relationship may overpower each other, which can create instability, hence demanding both partners to respect each other to build a healthy one (Romantic Relationships, n.d.). Based on Sutter Health's (n.d.) definition, " a romantic relationship is viewed as a part of an intimate relationship in which you can truly be yourself with someone who you respect and are respected by in return." Therefore, on the top of that, a romantic relationship is widely known as love and affection which is one of the most profound emotions of human beings.

Humans, particularly adolescents get involve in romantic relationships with variety of reasons. According to Aristotle, humans are social animals which made them long to form an intimate relationship in which love can be given and received freely which the psychologists called the " need to belong" (Myers, 2010). Raman (2010) stated that being in romantic relationship involves physical contact which causes chemical arousal to the persons involved and at the same time gain love and confidence in which they are longing for. Koob and Bloom (as cited in Bernales & Colonia, 2011) also explained this by stating that the individuals who are in love release several chemicals within the brain such as oxytocin, vasopressin and endorphins which cause " short-term" joy and pleasure.

Academic Performance has also been viewed differently**.** According to Steinmayr, Meibner, Weiddinger and Wirthwein (2014), that academic achievement represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university. School systems mostly define cognitive goals that either apply across multiple subject areas such as critical thinking or include the acquisition of knowledge and understanding in a specific intellectual domain such as numeracy, literacy, science, history. Steinmayr, Meibner, Weiddinger and Wirthwein (2014), also added that, academic achievement should be a multifaceted construct that comprises different domains of learning. Because the field of academic achievement is very wide-ranging and covers a broad variety of educational outcomes, the definition of academic achievement depends on the indicators used to measure it. Among the many criteria that indicate academic achievement, there are very general indicators such as procedural and declarative knowledge acquired in an educational system, more curricular-based criteria such as grades or performance on an educational achievement test, and cumulative indicators of academic achievement such as educational degrees and certificates. All criteria have in common that they represent intellectual endeavours and thus mirror the intellectual capacity of a person. In developed societies, academic achievement plays an important role in every person's life.

**Positive effects of teenage romantic relationships on academic performance**
A study conducted by Campble, Olivier and Sedikides (1994) found that romantic relationships provide significant positive impacts on academic achievement. They can bring companionship, feelings of happiness, feelings of being loved or loving another, intimacy, self-growth and self-understanding and more positive esteem. Romantic relationships therefore are said to be the cause of motivation for teenagers in pursuing their studies. Additionally, a research paper studied by Giordano, Kenyatta D. Phelps, Manning, and Longmore (2008) had discovered that a romantic relationship has a positive link in adolescent academic achievement. They argued that adolescent romantic relationships contribute to a personal development prior to the student being successful in their studies. For instance, teens who have romantic partners with higher grades are themselves more likely to earn higher grades (Giordano *et al.*, 2008). Significantly, the level of motivation has played a key role in determining the academic achievements of students. It is believed that students who seem to be passionate about learning needed inspiration and encouragement in order to accomplish any task. In this regard, by having a romantic relationship, it makes teenagers feel affection, care and love, which make them motivated. Hence, a sense of motivation to students who are involved in love affairs made them perform better in their studies (Bernales and Colonia, 2011). Additionally, the Phnom Penh Post

(2010) interviewed radio personalities whose programs deal with the topic of love to share their ideas on how Cambodian youth can find a place for love in their busy lives and enjoy the benefits of romance without getting hurt in the process.

In this light, it is believed the result is possible to be a great student and be in a healthy romantic relationship when they encourage each other to study hard; therefore, they will have better results in their studies. Similarly, Chhy Rotha (2010) also shared the same belief that romantic relationships will urge people to study harder when they get involved with a romantic partner who is a high-performing person. Despite these advantages, Heng- Sokchannaroth (2010) claimed that " It depends on our partner. If our partner encourages us to study hard, it is good. He believes that an honest partner is the one who takes care of us and thinks about us all the time, but also motivates us to study and work hard. A caring lover would never ask us to go out with him or her if we didn' t want to or had unfinished work. But if our partner doesn' t like studying and instead likes going out, we will bump into failure. So, the weight is in our partner. If we have a good partner, we will be more likely to be good" (The Phnom Penh Post, 2010).

**Negative effects of teenage romantic relationships on academic performance**
Although some people believe that having a relationship while studying can be beneficial, opponents of this idea would argue that teenage relationships can cause problems on academic performance in some ways. Based on a study at the University of the Philippines by Bernales and Colonia (2011), when teenagers are involved in romantic relationships, they tend to pay less attention to their academic work. The study reveals that students who engage in relationships are unable to manage their time well and mostly spend only 1 to 4 hours per week for their studies. As love grows fonder, along with the desire to keep the relationship going, more time is allotted to various dating activities, leaving only a small amount of time for learning (Newman, n.d.). This tendency then has connection with course attendance; it was reported that students are likely to be absent for at least three times in a semester (Schmidt & Lockwood, 2015).

A study from the University of Denver found that teenagers who are engaged in romantic relationships are likely to experience emotional problems such as anxiety and depression (Scott, 2015). They tend to feel worried if they look good enough, if their partner loves them or even how to impress them. They can feel even more distracted when that person is in the same class with them (Mwaura, 2012). Regarding the distractions, Laflamme claimed that when people are in love, they simply cannot concentrate on anything but only thinking about their lovers (Lannarone, 2014). Rather than paying attention to their teachers, some teenagers turned out to be texting their partners during class time, and their level of anxiety even increased when they had conflicts with their partner (Baleros,2017). A study conducted by Kopfler (2003) also pointed out that " students who were involved in romantic relationships would not perform well in undergraduate course works." He argued that students involved in relationship are forced to manage their time by facing higher stress levels than who are not in a romantic relationship (Kopfler, 2003).

**Methodology**

**Data:** Data gathering is crucial in research, as the data is meant to contribute to a better understanding of a theoretical framework (Bernard 2002). The purpose of the current study is to estimate the effects of romantic relationships on the academic performance of University students in Uganda. In this study we collected data from the finalists in the different faculties of Islamic university in Uganda at Kampala Campus. Finalist according to this study are students in their final year of study either in the bachelor's degree or diploma course.

**Sample and Sampling:** The study uses Random sampling technique. The method is used to cull a smaller sample size (65 students) from a larger population (university student) and use it to research and generalize about the larger group. The method was preferred and used in order to avoid sample

bias its ease of use and its accurate representation of the larger population.

**Dependent Variables:** The effect of romantic relationships is estimated for two different dependent variables representing academic performance. The first outcome measure represent the change in grade point average (GPA) across the two semesters. It is constructed by asking respondents to specify whether the change in their GPA for both the first and second semesters was an increase or decrease. We used this proxy since most students were not willing to specifically mention their GPA but found it increase to tell us about the increase or decrease generally. The second outcome measure represents poor class attendance over the course of the academic year. Two survey items asked respondents to describe how often they were absent from each of their classes during both the semesters. We then constructed a dichotomous measure of poor attendance that represents students who were absent for 70 percent their courses on average. The Islamic University in Uganda has a policy of 70 percent attendance rate that is compulsory to students and is a requirement for writing the final exam. Those who attended either exactly 70 or above 70 percent were considered as having good attendance and those who had below 70 percent were considered to have had poor class attendance.

**Independent Variable:** In this paper, the romantic relationship (RR) is operationalized where students were asked whether or not they were involved in any romantic relationships in the previous academic year of study. In the questionnaires, Romantic relationship was defined for respondents as one in which two partners commit to being exclusively dating as well as being intimate together and spending more and more time together as the relationship progresses (Shelly, 2017).

**Control Variables.** Several variables are included as controls in the study based on their observed links with academic performance in universities. In this study we included length of the RR and engagement in other co-curricular activities plus demographic characteristics (gender, age bracket, marital status, region of origin).

**Empirical Model**
The logistic model is used in this study because of the nature of the dependent variable. The logistic model is used to model the probability of that a student attend at least 70 % or not. The model takes a value of 1 if the student attended 70 or above 70 % and 0 if the attendance was below 70%. The model also investigates the probability that a student's GPA increased or decreased in between the two semesters. The model is expressed as below:

$$ln\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 RR_i + \beta_2 LengthRR_i + \beta_3 Z_i + \mu_i \tag{1}$$

$$P(Y = 1) = \left(\frac{\exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 RR_i + \beta_2 LengthRR_i + \beta_3 Z_i + \mu_i)}{1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 RR_i + \beta_2 LengthRR_i + \beta_3 Z_i + \mu_i)}\right) \tag{2}$$

Where: P is the probability that a student attends at least 70 percent or GPA increase (probability of success) and 1-P otherwise. RR is a dichotomous variable with 1 if the students is engaged in a RR and 0 otherwise. LengthRR is the length of the RR. The length was discrete with either less than a year (0) or more than a year (1). Z is a vector of the background characteristics of the students and it includes age, marital status and region and $\mu_i$ is the stochastic error term.

**Results and Discussions**
The study starts by giving a summary of the background characteristics of the respondents of the study. This presents their gender distribution, marital status, region of origin, age groups. This information was required to ensure that the sample that participated had characteristic distribution like that of the population it was drawn from. This determines accuracy, prediction reliability, and representativeness of the information drawn from the sample to the entire population. The results are summarized in Table 1.

The questionnaires were randomly given out to students who were writing their final exam and advised to fill it after the exams for about 15-20m minutes. The survey instrument included several items that asked respondents to describe their demographic characteristics, engagement in a RR, Length of a RR, extracurricular activities engaged in while at the university, academic achievement in terms of class attendance and change in GPA among others. Sixty-five (65) undergraduate students completed and returned the survey.

**Table 1: Background characteristics of the respondents**

| Characteristics | Category | Frequency | Percentag e |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 27 | 41.5 |
| | Female | 38 | 58.5 |
| Age bracket | Below 25 years | 53 | 81.5 |
| | 25-35 years | 11 | 16.9 |
| | Above 36 | 1 | 1.5 |
| Region of origin | Eastern | 16 | 24.6 |
| | Northern | 2 | 3.1 |
| | Central | 34 | 52.3 |
| | Western | 13 | 20 |
| Marital status | Married | 5 | 7.7 |
| | Not married | 60 | 92.3 |

**Source: Authors (2019)**

**Distribution of respondents by Gender:** Most of the respondents were Female (38) compared to males (27) which shows exactly the gender bias. The Female dominance in the university can contribute to lack of ability to perform as expected of them and leading to poor performance which tend to be more associated with Female employees.

**Distribution of respondents by Age group:** This table indicates that most (53) of the respondents were below 25-45 (81.5 percent) while 11 (16.9 percent) were in the age bracket of 25- 35 years. Only 1 respondent (1.5 percent) was above 26 years of age. This showed that most of the students are still youth and perhaps engage in Romantic relationship.

**Region of origin:** This is the region in which the student originates. Results in table above shows that most of the respondents, that is 34 (52.3percent) are coming from the Central Region. This could have been true since the university itself is also located in Buganda, Central region. This was seconded by Eastern region which produced about 16 (24.6percent) of the respondents. About 13 (20 percent) were originating from the Western region. The minority represented region was the Northern part of Uganda, with only 2 (3.1) and this could perhaps be since the university has a branch in Arua, Northern Uganda. Students feel convenient studying from there rather than commuting to Kampala.

**Respondents' Marital status:** Marital status is any of several distinct options that describe a person's relationship with a significant other. In this study, marital status was classified into two, that is married and not married. From the study, we found out that majority of the respondents, that is 60 accounting for 92.3 percent were not married. Only 5 respondents (7.7 percent) were married.

**Engagement in any romantic relationship**
Having found out that majority of the students were not married, we asked them whether there were engaged in any romantic relationship as seen in Figure 1.
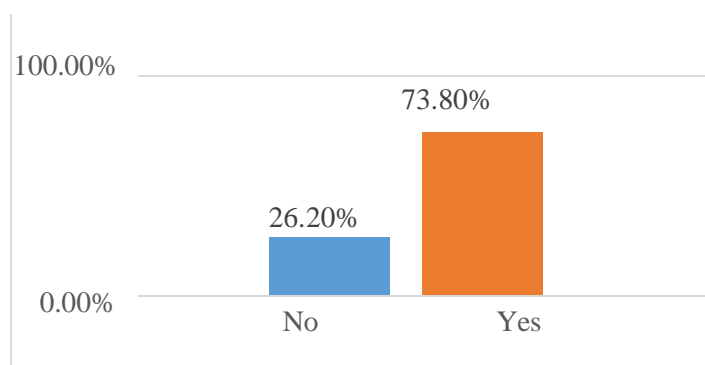
**Figure 1:** **Romantic relationship status**

Figure 1 indicates that majority of the students, that is 48 (73.80%) were engage in RR. Only 17students (26.2%) were not engaged. University students are usually happy to have a partner, because their relationship gives joy and happiness. Many of them look for a partner that gives them joy and contentment. Sometimes they gain better self-esteem or self-confidence (Meredith,2014). The 48 who had been in a RR were further asked how long they had been in the RR and results are in Figure 2.

Out of the 48 explained in figure 1, 29 of them (60.5 percent) had been in a RR for more than one year. The rest, that is 39.5 were in a RR for less than a year. When engaged further about what encouraged them to engage in a RR. They students gave a lot of opinions. Majority were motivated by mutual support and feeling of happiness (15, 15) respectively. Others were motivated by the outside environment (6). Entertainment reasons motivated 2 of them and only one mentioned being engaged just for granted. Nine (9) students were engaged due to other reasons such as being part of life, sexual satisfaction, peer pressure, financial benefits.
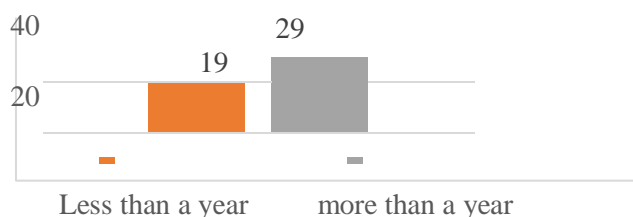


**Figure 2: Length of engagement in a RR**

To investigate further why students are not in support o RR, we asked students whether they take part in extracurricular activities and findings are indicated below.

**Table 2: Participation in extracurricular activities**

|     | Freq | %    |
| --- | ---- | ---- |
| Yes | 54   | 83.1 |
| No  | 11   | 16.9 |

Majority (54) of the students (above 83.1 %) participate in extracurricular activities such as sports and swimming. This perhaps explain why students are not in support of RR since a portion of their time is already allocated in extracurricular activities and therefore are hesitant to get engaged and waste it. This is in line with the finding of Shelly, 2017.  We then investigate the students views on the effect of RR on Academic performance and findings summarized in table 3.

**Table 3: RR and Academic Performance**

| RR and academic performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| RR helps me pay more attention on studying | 27(43) | 16(24.6) | 18(27.7) | 1(1.5) | 2 (3.1) |
| RR motivates me to study hard | 12(18.4) | 22 (33.8) | 13(20) | 13(20) | 5(7.7) |
| RR supports me when i meet difficult lessons | 15(23.1) | 13(20) | 18(27.7) | 15(23.1) | 4(6.2) |
| RR contributes to personal development | 11(16.9) | 11(16.9) | 17 (26.2) | 21(32.3) | 5(7.7) |
| RR makes me perform better | 19(29.3) | 22(33.8) | 14(21.5) | 9 (13.8) | 1(1.5) |
| RR builds self confidence | 8(12.3) | 131(20) | 15(23.1) | 19(29.2) | 10(15.4) |
| RR makes me complete tasks on time | 22(33.8) | 18(27.7) | 11(16.9) | 12(18.5) | 2 (3) |
| RR makes me achieve good grades | 15(24.6) | 19(29.2) | 20(30.8) | 7(10.8) | 3(4.6) |
| RR cannot help me concentrate | 22(33.8) | 6(9.2) | 13(20) | 11(16.9) | 13(20) |
| RR discourages me to learn when we have love arguments | 18((27.7) | 12(18.5) | 12(18.5) | 9 (13.8) | 14(21.5) |

From the table above, generally students are not in support of RR. From these findings, the study asked respondents a simple question of whether we should have RR basing on their experience. The findings still indicated that 32 students (49.2%) were not in support, 28 students (43.1%) were in support. We also noted that 5 of them, that is 7.7% were indifferent. To them it all depends on how couples treat their relationship visa-viz the courses offered. To make further clarification on these findings, we estimate the logistic model stated in equation 1 and findings summarized in table 3:

**Analysis Procedure of the effect of RR on Academic Performance**
We estimate two models. The first model estimates the effect of RR on class attendance using binary logistic regression model while controlling for length of the RR, involvement in extracurricular activities and background characteristics of the students. Attendance was coded as 1 if the student has at least 70% and 0 otherwise. The second model estimates the change in Grade Point Average (GPA), where positive or negative between the two semesters. Since it was difficult to get data on the actual GPA between the two semesters (most students were not willing to answer this part), we relied on the change in GPA. Students were given three options, that is GPA reduced, GPA increased, and GPA remained constant. it is worth noting that no student maintained his or her GPA. This prompted the researchers to zero down the model and use a logistic model again. The model takes a value of 1 if the GPA increased 0 otherwise. The model was estimated while controlling for length of the RR, involvement in extracurricular activities and background characteristics of the students.

**Table 4: Effect of RR on Academic performance (Logistic regression results)**

| Variables | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|---|---|---|
| **Dependent Variable** | **Attendance Rate** | GPA |
| **Independent Variables** | | |
| Romantic Relationship (Engaged in a RR) | 1.383*** (0.092) | 0.801**(0.332) |
| Length of the RR (More than a year) | 1.003**(0.001) | 0.212**(0.09) |
| Extracurricular Activities (Participation) | 0.261(0.091) | 0.517(0.066) |
| Constant | 2.015** (0.753) | 2.574** (1.97) |
| Marital status (Married) | 0.059*(0.027) | 0.123 (0.03) |
| Sex        ( Male) | 0.185**(0.049) | 0.979 **(0.422) |
| Region:        Eastern | 0.804(0.33) | 0.156 (0.026) |
|         Western | 0.508(0.161) | 0.219(0.038) |
|         Northern | 0.002(0.001) | 0.185(0.048) |
| Number of Observations | 65 | 65 |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.0453 | |
| Prob > chi2 | 0.0781 | |

| LR chi2 | 42.46 |
|---------|-------|

The coefficients before the brackets are the Odds Ratio (O.R). OR >1 means that the event (success) is more likely to occur in the first group. ***Significant at 1%, ** Significant at 5%*Significant at 10%. This analysis tested the effects of romantic relationships on academic outcomes to show that being in a romantic relationship while at the University is significantly associated with class attendance and GPA. From model 1, The **intercept** / constant is the expected mean value of academic performance when all independent variables are zero. The results indicate that, other factors constant, students engaged in a RR are more likely to attend at least 70 percent of the classes. However, much as they attend, they are less likely to have an increase in GPA. This is in line with the findings of Crede´ *et al.*, 2010 in their study about class attendance in college a meta-analytic review of the relationship of class attendance with grades and student characteristics. Students engaged in a RR for more than a year were more likely to have at least 70% class attendance compared to their counterparts. Also, those engage for more than a year are less likely to have an increase in GPA. Participation in Extracurricular activities has no significant effect on academic performance, both in terms of class attendance and GPA, just like the students' region of origin. We found out that being married is less likely to result into class attendance of at least 70%. However, the variable was found insignificant in explain student performance in terms of GPA. The likelihood ratio (LR) chi-square of 42.46 with a p-value of 0.0001 tells us that our model fits significantly

## Conclusions

To conclude this study, we were able to identify that the Undergraduate university students involved in a relationship tend to view them differently. It was found out that having a romantic relationship is associated with increase in class attendance and a decrease in GPA. Those engaged in the relationship for more than year were attending more than their counterparts who are less than one year in the relationship. However, despite the attendance, we found out that their GPA kept decreasing.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

(i) Students engaged in RR must be counselled on how to read hard so that their GPA can increase or at least be maintained. This could be done by forming discussion, class presentation, continuous assessment among others.

(ii) Male students should be motivated to attend more of the classes say through awarding the student with the highest attendance at least 70% as the university policy states.

(iii) Devoting greater empirical, educational, and community efforts to romantic development in the stages leading up to adulthood should be considered as necessary actions in promoting the well-being of university students.

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