



Sociological Factors and Intergenerational Interactions in Academic Workplaces: Evidence from the University of Benin

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Abstract. This study explored how power dynamics and social capital shape intergenerational interactions among academic staff at the University of Benin. It addressed a clear gap in the literature, given the limited research on intergenerational relations in Nigerian universities, even as academic workplaces continue to bring together staff from multiple generations. The study adopted a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, combining quantitative data from 500 full-time academic staff, gathered through structured questionnaires, with qualitative data from 20 purposively selected participants through in-depth interviews. It analysed the quantitative data using descriptive statistics and examined the qualitative data through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that seniority plays a major role in workplace interactions, with 59% of respondents stating that it significantly shapes how colleagues from different generations relate to one another. The study also found that more than 73% of respondents relied, at least sometimes, on colleagues from their own generation to manage workplace challenges. At the same time, 79.2% identified trust and interpersonal relationships as important for effective collaboration across generations. Overall, the study showed that while hierarchy influences authority in the academic workplace, social capital creates the conditions for cooperation. Thus, it recommended structured mentoring, more inclusive committee systems, and deliberate trust-building efforts to strengthen collaboration across generations.

Keywords: Intergenerational, academic work place, interactions, University of Benin

1. Introduction

Contemporary workplaces frequently consist of personnel from many generations, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Universities are distinctive environments where academic personnel from diverse generations participate in teaching, research, and administration. Research demonstrates that disparities in communication methods, technological utilisation, and conceptions of authority between generations may result in tensions, shown as confrontations between Generation X academics and Generation Y students (Beytekin & Dogan, 2019). These dynamics presumably influence staff relationships, impacting mentorship and institutional transformation. The University of Benin, established in 1970, is a prominent federal institution in Nigeria, featuring a diversified academic community across its two campuses and fifteen faculties. The institution's extensive history and substantial faculty render it an appropriate environment to investigate the impact of age disparities on workplace dynamics and collaboration among academic personnel.

The presence of diverse generations, ranging from Baby Boomers to Generation Z, in modern workplaces fosters a climate that is both collaborative and conflict-prone. Every generation is influenced by distinct socio-historical circumstances, leading to varied values, work ethics, and communication preferences (Sudborough & Herberholz, 2025; Knowledge City, 2023). This diversity can stimulate creativity and innovation, and sometimes intergenerational conflicts if not managed well. Research indicates that such disagreements frequently stem from disparities in perspectives, communication styles, and expectations, which may result in diminished performance and

efficiency (Urick et al., 2016). Nevertheless, when addressed through tactics such as collaboration and mentorship, these disparities can provide favourable results, including increased innovation and workplace efficiency.

Urick et al. (2016) classify intergenerational tensions into three categories: values-based, behavior-based, and identity-based. Values-based tensions arise from conflicting priorities, such as the focus on work-life balance vs organisational allegiance. Behavioural tensions arise from differing work methodologies, encompassing preferences for technology and communication styles. Identity-based tensions pertain to individuals' self-perception and their perception of others within generational contexts. These tensions may show as trivial disputes or substantial confrontations, affecting workplace peace and productivity. Efficient management of these conflicts is essential for cultivating a unified work atmosphere.

Academic institutions, as reflections of wider societal trends, are especially vulnerable to intergenerational dynamics because of their varied workforce. Universities engage academic personnel from several generations, each offering distinct viewpoints in teaching, research, and administration. A study conducted by Beytekin and Dogan (2019) examined intergenerational conflicts in higher education, revealing that disparities in communication styles, technological proficiency, and attitudes towards authority between Generation X academicians and Generation Y postgraduate students resulted in tensions that influenced motivation and academic performance (Beytekin & Dogan, 2019). These findings indicate that analogous tensions may arise among academic personnel, impacting collaboration, mentorship, and institutional efficacy.

This study examined the academic personnel at the University of Benin, and investigated the characteristics of intergenerational interactions. The research employs a sociological viewpoint to analyse subjects including value systems, societal transformation, and power dynamics. The results are anticipated to improve comprehension of how to cultivate a cohesive and efficient academic atmosphere that utilises the strengths of all generations. Furthermore, findings from this study may guide initiatives to enhance communication, fortify mentorship programs, and formulate inclusive institutional policies, ultimately benefiting both staff and students.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Workplaces comprising multiple generations frequently encounter difficulties and chances for collaboration stemming from differing values and communication styles. In universities, where faculty participate in teaching, research, and administration, these dynamics can profoundly influence workplace harmony and productivity. Research indicates that generational disparities may stimulate innovation when well managed (Urick et al., 2016). The University of Benin presumably utilises academic personnel from many generations. Nonetheless, there is a paucity of study regarding the impact of these generational differences on employees' interactions, mentorship, or institutional transformations. Research on Nigerian universities frequently emphasises overarching tensions, such as leadership challenges, although seldom examines intergenerational dimensions (Igbinoba, Salau, Atolagbe & Joel, 2022).

Investigating intergenerational relations is essential for improving communication, fortifying mentorship, and formulating inclusive policy. Cultural elements, such as the veneration of elders in Nigeria, may affect intergenerational interactions, necessitating context-specific studies. This research seeks to address this deficiency by analysing these dynamics at the University of Benin. In modern organisations, the coexistence of many generations, each possessing unique beliefs, work methodologies, and communication styles, presents potential for both collaboration and discord (Urick et al., 2016). These dynamics are especially pertinent in academic environments, where teachers from many generations engage in teaching, research, and administration functions. Such interactions can affect workplace relationships, mentorship initiatives, and institutional policies; nevertheless, research on intergenerational interactions and collaboration within academic settings, particularly in Nigerian universities, is still scarce. Due to its extensive history and varied professors, the University of Benin offered an optimal environment to examine how intergenerational interactions influence workplace relations. The precise nature and effects of intergenerational interactions among academic personnel remain largely unexamined, indicating a significant gap in the knowledge.

Cultural values in Nigeria, such as reverence for authority and elders, may distinctly influence intergenerational interactions, thereby affecting the expression and resolution of conflicts (Igbinoba et al., 2022). Younger professors may yield to senior colleagues due to cultural conventions, potentially

stifling open conflict while fostering underlying tensions that impede collaboration. Conversely, these standards could cultivate mentorship possibilities if utilised appropriately. In the absence of specific research, these dynamics remain conjectural, highlighting the necessity for a study concentrated on the University of Benin.

The absence of research on intergenerational dynamics in Nigerian academic settings is a critical gap with practical ramifications. Comprehending these relationships can guide initiatives to improve communication and collaboration among teachers, fortify mentorship programs for knowledge transfer, and formulate inclusive institutional policies that capitalise on generational diversity. These enhancements could promote workplace cohesion, increase academic output, and elevate the university's standing as a premier institution.

1.2 Research Questions

Which sociological elements, including power dynamics and social capital, influence intergenerational exchanges among academic personnel?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the nature of the linkage between generational differential and collaboration in academic workplaces involving the University of Benin academic staff. However, the specific objective is to:

- To examine the sociological aspects, including power dynamics and social capital, that influence intergenerational exchanges among academic personnel.

2. Literature Review

2.1 An Overview of Intergenerational Interactions

Contemporary workplaces now bring together employees from several generational cohorts, most commonly identified as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. This demographic mix has made intergenerational interaction a significant concern in organizational research. Scholars generally use the term intergenerational interactions to describe the patterns of communication, cooperation, conflict, mentoring, and relationship-building that develop among workers from different age groups. Early studies often assumed that these cohorts differed in meaningful and consistent ways, particularly in their

work values, communication styles, attitudes toward authority, and use of technology. Costanza et al. (2012), for example, found some generational variation in work-related attitudes, although the differences they reported remained relatively modest. More recent scholarship has taken a more critical position. Rudolph et al. (2021) and Costanza et al. (2023) argued that many claims about generations rest on weak conceptual foundations and often blur the distinction between generational effects, age effects, career-stage differences, and broader historical influences. Taken together, these studies show that intergenerational interaction matters in the workplace, but fixed generational stereotypes do not adequately explain it.

The literature further shows that even when measurable generational differences appear limited, workers' perceptions of those differences still shape workplace relationships in important ways. Urick et al. (2017) found that intergenerational tensions often arise around values, behaviour, and identity, especially when employees interpret differences in communication style, work pace, or expectations through a generational lens. At the same time, their study also showed that organizations can manage such tensions through clearer communication, mutual adjustment, and deliberate cooperation. Other studies point in the same direction by showing the value of positive cross-age relationships. Fasbender and Drury (2022), for instance, demonstrated that age-diverse workplace friendships can strengthen job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions by creating a stronger sense of connection across age groups. Overall, the literature presents intergenerational interactions as a dynamic social process shaped less by rigid cohort characteristics and more by organizational context, social identity, trust, and the quality of relationships that develop across age groups.

2.2 The Social Factors Affect Intergenerational Exchanges among Academic Personnel

Intergenerational relationships among academic staff encompass exchanges between academics from varying generational cohorts, influenced by sociological elements such as power dynamics and social capital. Power dynamics, based on seniority and institutional responsibilities, affect decision-making and collaboration, whereas social capital, which includes trust and networks, promotes mentorship and knowledge transfer (Urick et al., 2017). These elements are essential in academic environments, where varied academics engage in teaching, research, and administration. This study consolidates current empirical studies to analyse the influence of power dynamics and social capital on

intergenerational exchanges among academic professionals, emphasising their effects and cultural subtleties.

2.3 Power Dynamics in Intergenerational Interactions

Power dynamics in academia frequently correlate with seniority and academic rank, as older faculty has greater authority over curriculum, tenure, and resource distribution. Urick et al. (2017) performed qualitative interviews with 56 professionals (28 younger, mean age 29; 28 older, mean age 71), revealing that older workers, similar to senior faculty, possess greater authority due to their hierarchical roles, with 60% of younger participants indicating restricted decision-making power (Urick et al., 2017). In academia, this may result in senior professors monopolising departmental decisions, hence potentially marginalising junior colleagues. Dere and Başibüyük (2024) conducted focus groups (N=19) to investigate intergenerational conflicts, highlighting that Generation Y's inclination towards participatory decision-making conflicts with the Baby Boomers' hierarchical approach, resulting in tensions in 55% of contacts (Dere & Başibüyük, 2024).

Technological expertise can alter these dynamics. Culp-Roche et al. (2020) conducted a study of 1,200 academic personnel, revealing that Millennials and Generation Z exhibit a greater proficiency with digital tools (78% adoption rate compared to 42% for Baby Boomers), hence enhancing their role in curriculum development and contesting established hierarchies (Culp-Roche et al., 2020). This indicates that although seniority bestows authority, the competencies of younger academics can shift dynamics, promoting collaboration while also inciting disputes when values diverge.

2.4 Social Capital in Intergenerational Transactions

Social capital, characterised by networks, norms, and trust that promote collaboration, is essential for permitting intergenerational exchanges. A study conducted by Niehaus and O'Meara (2015) surveyed 300 faculty members at U.S. universities, revealing that robust departmental networks enhance knowledge sharing by 40%, especially when intergenerational trust is elevated (Niehaus & O'Meara, 2015). Junior faculty frequently utilise digital networks, whereas senior faculty favour in-person connections; nonetheless, both enhance social capital when effectively integrated.

Mentorship is a crucial conduit for the transfer of social capital. Robison (2023) examined mentoring programs, indicating that 70% of junior faculty with robust mentorship connections experienced increased job satisfaction and research productivity, facilitated by access to senior faculty networks (Robison, 2023). Academic Leader (2021) emphasised that intergenerational mentorship programs cultivate trust, hence diminishing conflicts by 50% in pilot initiatives (Academic Leader, 2021). Nonetheless, disparate access to networks may impede junior academics, with 45% indicating exclusion from pivotal circles (Urick et al., 2017).

2.5 Cultural Influences and Contextual Factors

Cultural norms profoundly influence intergenerational interactions, especially in non-Western settings. In societies like Nigeria, reverence for elders may cause younger professors to defer to seniors, perhaps limiting creativity but encouraging unity. Dere and Başibüyük (2024) observed that cultural values of respect mitigated disputes in 30% of the situations examined. Nevertheless, targeted study on Nigerian universities, particularly the University of Benin, is limited, revealing a deficiency. Organisational culture is significant; collaborative institutions enhance social capital, whereas hierarchical ones perpetuate power disparities (Niehaus & O'Meara, 2015).

Challenges encompass power disparities that inhibit the contributions of junior professors and unequal access to social capital, potentially intensifying tensions. Some contend that generational differences are exaggerated, with individual characteristics such as personality having a more significant impact (Costanza et al., 2020). The scarcity of research in non-Western academic settings constrains generalisability, requiring additional investigation.

Power dynamics and social capital significantly affect intergenerational interactions among academic staff. Seniority frequently determines authority, although the technological proficiency of younger professors can alter dynamics, resulting in both opportunities and difficulties. Social capital, via trust and mentorship, enhances collaboration and knowledge transfer; yet, discrepancies in access provide problems. Cultural norms, such as reverence for elders, significantly influence these processes, especially in heterogeneous environments. Comprehending these social dimensions is essential for cultivating effective academic settings; nevertheless, further investigation is required in non-Western contexts to bridge current disparities.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study investigates the relationship between intergenerational disputes and collaboration among academic staff. The theoretical framework is based on Social Exchange Theory, offering a thorough perspective for examining how reciprocal contacts influence generational differences, conflicts, collaboration, institutional change, sociological dynamics, and conflict resolution methods. This singular theory corresponds with the study's overarching aim of investigating intergenerational connections and its six specific objectives, providing a unified framework to comprehend the dynamics among academic personnel at the University of Benin.

Social Exchange Theory, formulated by Homans (1958) and Blau (1964), asserts that social interactions are motivated by a cost-benefit analysis, wherein individuals pursue relationships to optimise rewards (e.g., support, knowledge, recognition) and minimise costs (e.g., conflict, effort) (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). In the academic environment, teacher relationships among generational cohorts, Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012), are regarded as exchanges shaped by perceived advantages and disadvantages. This theory offers a comprehensive framework to fulfil the specific aim of the study by conceptualising intergenerational dynamics as reciprocal interactions influenced by mutual benefits, power dynamics, and social capital.

Social Exchange Theory elucidates generational differences in beliefs, work attitudes, and professional expectations by emphasising faculty perceptions of incentives and costs associated with their roles. For example, Baby Boomers may prioritise job security and hierarchical acknowledgement, viewing these as rewards, whereas Millennials emphasise work-life balance and purpose, seeking flexibility as an advantage. Generation Z, being digital natives, may anticipate prompt response and technological integration, perceiving delays as liabilities. Divergent expectations influence interactions, as professors participate in exchanges that correspond with their values. The theory positions these differences as the foundation for possible disputes or collaborative prospects, contingent upon the negotiation of rewards.

Social Exchange Theory examines sociological factors, such as power dynamics and social capital, that affect intergenerational exchanges. Power dynamics emerge when senior faculty, with elevated ranks, govern resources such as funds or promotions, resulting in an imbalance in interactions where junior

faculty sense increased costs (e.g., less influence). Social capital, established via trust and networks, enhances exchanges by augmenting benefits such as collaborative opportunities. Robust departmental networks facilitate mentorship, enabling teachers to exchange expertise for mutual advantage. The theory posits that fair exchanges, bolstered by social capital, alleviate power disparities and promote constructive interactions.

3. Research Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies to offer a thorough knowledge of intergenerational disputes and collaboration. A sequential explanatory approach is employed, wherein quantitative data from surveys are initially collected and analysed, subsequently followed by qualitative data from in-depth interviews to elucidate and enhance the findings. The population of this study consisted of all full-time academic personnel at the University of Benin, Nigeria, across its two campuses and fifteen faculties/schools/colleges/institutes. This encompasses lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors, and professors involved in teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities.

The sample comprises 500 academic workers for the quantitative phase (questionnaire) and 20 academic staff for the qualitative phase (in-depth interviews). The research utilises a stratified purposive sampling method. The population was categorised by faculty (e.g., Arts, Engineering, Social Sciences) to guarantee representation across fields. Purposive sampling within each stratum picks individuals according to generational cohorts (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z) to obtain varied opinions. In the qualitative phase, 20 participants were intentionally chosen among questionnaire responders who expressed a willingness to engage, guaranteeing a diverse representation of generations and ranks.

Two instruments were employed: a structured questionnaire and a comprehensive interview guide. The questionnaire enables quantitative assessment of generational dynamics within a broader sample, hence facilitating statistical analysis (Babbie, 2020). The interview guide offered comprehensive qualitative data to elucidate quantitative results, encapsulating intricate experiences (Kvale, 2007). Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires was examined utilising descriptive statistics. Qualitative data obtained from interviews underwent thematic analysis, which included coding, categorisation, and the identification of themes consistent with research objective.

4. Results

The quantitative and qualitative data collected for this study are presented here, analysed and discussed.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Source: Researcher Fieldwork, 2025.

Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 500)	Percentage (100%)
Gender	Male	280	56.0%
	Female	220	44.0%
Age Group	18–28 years (Gen Z)	80	16.0%
	29–44 years (Millennials)	200	40.0%
	45–60 years (Gen X)	170	34.0%
	61 years and above (Baby Boomers)	50	10.0%
Academic Rank	Lecturer II	110	22.0%
	Lecturer I	120	24.0%
	Senior Lecturer	140	28.0%
	Associate Professor	80	16.0%
	Professor	50	10.0%
Years of Service	Less than 5 years	130	26.0%
	5–10 years	150	30.0%
	11–20 years	130	26.0%
	More than 20 years	90	18.0%
Faculty/Department	Arts	40	8.0%
	Education	60	12.0%
	Engineering	50	10.0%
	Law	30	6.0%
	Life Sciences	60	12.0%
	Management Sciences	70	14.0%
	Physical Sciences	50	10.0%
	Social Sciences	90	18.0%
	Other	50	10.0%

The gender distribution of responders indicates that 56% were male and 44% were female. This suggests a little male predominance among the academic personnel at the University of Benin, maybe mirroring wider trends in gender representation within academia. Most respondents (40%) were from the Millennial group (ages 29–44), while Generation X (ages 45–60) comprised 34%. Generation Z (ages 18–28) constituted 16%, and Baby Boomers (ages 61 and older) comprised under 10%. This distribution indicates a predominantly youthful to mid-career workforce, with Millennials and Generation X constituting the primary demographic of academic personnel. The existence of all generational cohorts underscores the importance of examining intergenerational relations. Senior Lecturers constituted the highest percentage of responses at 28%, followed by Lecturer I at 24% and Lecturer II at 22%. Associate Professors constituted 16% and Professors 10%, indicating a hierarchical pyramid structure within academia. This distribution may affect views of authority, mentorship, and conflict or collaboration among different ranks. The largest group of respondents consisted of individuals with 5–10 years of service, accounting for 30%, while those with fewer than 5 years and those with 11–20 years were evenly divided at 26% apiece. Merely 18% possessed over 20 years of service. This trend indicates a predominantly youthful to mid-career service staff, potentially impacting institutional memory, mentoring capabilities, and willingness to collaborate. The largest proportion of responses originated from Social Sciences (18%), succeeded by Management Sciences (14%) and Life Sciences (12%). Disciplines such as Law (6%) and Arts (8%) were under-represented. This distribution suggests a varied disciplinary sample and demonstrates that intergenerational challenges may be perceived differently among faculties based on departmental culture, workload, and collaboration standards.

Table 2: Agreement on the role of power dynamics (e.g., seniority) in intergenerational interactions

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>To what extent do you agree that power dynamics (e.g., seniority) between generations affect your interactions with colleagues?</i>		
Strongly Agree	126	25.2
Agree	169	33.8
Neutral	95	19.0
Disagree	65	13.0
Strongly Disagree	45	9.0
Total	500	100

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork, 2025.

A total of 59% of respondents (Strongly agree and Agree) recognise that generational power dynamics, especially seniority, substantially affect their professional relationships. Only 22% (Disagree and Strongly Disagree) refuted this view, while 19% maintained a neutral stance. The findings indicate that age and tenure-based hierarchical power structures persist in influencing intergenerational staff interactions. This has ramifications for communication dynamics, mentorship connections, and participation in decision-making processes. Power imbalances can result in dominance, marginalisation, or diminished collaboration among junior personnel.

Table 3: Frequency of reliance on generational versus cross-generational social networks

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>How often do you rely on social networks within your generation to navigate workplace challenges compared to cross-generational networks?</i>		
Always	82	16.4
Often	138	27.6
Sometimes	145	29.0
Rarely	83	16.6
Never	52	10.4
Total	500	100

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork, 2025.

Over 73% of respondents (Always – Sometimes) indicated that they predominantly depend on colleagues from their own generation when confronting job issues. The largest percentage (29.0%) indicated Sometimes, implying a moderate yet significant generational alignment in social support networks. Only 10.4% said that they never engage in such behaviour. This pattern emphasises a preference for intra-generational support systems in addressing work-related challenges. Such tendencies can foster connection and solidarity, yet may also perpetuate social silos, obstructing intergenerational integration and collaborative problem-solving.

Table 4: Perceived significance of social capital in cross-generational collaboration

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>How significant is social capital (e.g., trust and relationships) in facilitating collaboration across different generations in your department?</i>		
Very Significant	113	22.6
Significant	159	31.8
Moderately Significant	124	24.8
Slightly Significant	66	13.2
Not Significant	38	7.6
Total	500	100

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork, 2025.

Seventy-nine-point two percent of respondents consider social capital to be at least fairly important for facilitating cross-generational collaboration, with 22.6% indicating it is very significant and 31.8% deeming it substantial. Merely 7.6% underestimated its significance. This significant acknowledgement of social capital underscores the essential significance of trust, mutual respect, and interpersonal ties in facilitating joint efforts across generations. Consequently, academic organisations cannot depend exclusively on formal structures; they must also cultivate relational cohesion.

To complete the quantitative in this section, a set of qualitative data was collected based on the question: Can you describe how sociological factors, such as power dynamics (e.g., seniority) or social capital (e.g., trust, relationships), influence your interactions with colleagues from different generations, and provide a specific example? The following are the responses from the in-depth interviewees.

In the Faculty of Arts, power dynamics profoundly influence intergenerational exchanges. As a junior lecturer, I frequently experience the pressure of seniority while engaging with professors, who have considerable authority over departmental choices. During a curriculum review meeting, a top professor rejected my proposal to integrate digital humanities, emphasising the significance of traditional methodologies. Nonetheless, social capital, especially trust established via informal encounters such as departmental seminars, facilitated the bridging of this divide. Gradually, I cultivated a rapport with the professor through informal discussions about literature, resulting in his endorsement of my plan in a later encounter. This trust alleviated the initial power disparity. Power dynamics may obstruct collaboration when senior colleagues monopolise talks; nevertheless, social capital, such as mutual regard, enhances collaboration by fostering an environment conducive to open dialogue. Indeed, the cultural imperative of honoring elders is pronounced in our culture. It occasionally inhibits junior workers from contesting senior colleagues, however it also promotes mentorship when seniors are accessible (Interviewee 1/ Female / 38 / Lecturer I / Arts / June 20, 2025).

In my faculty, power dynamics frequently affect interactions, as senior professors govern critical choices such as resource allocation. I suggested the integration of e-learning platforms; however, a senior colleague initially opposed this, invoking his authority as the department head. Establishing social capital through consistent engagement at faculty gatherings proved beneficial. I invited him to co-present a session on e-learning, fostering trust and resulting in his

subsequent endorsement of the effort. This relationship mitigated the power disparity and promoted collaboration. Seniority may impede collaboration by suppressing junior perspectives, but social capital derived from shared activities promotes mutual comprehension and cooperation. Respect for elders is a cultural norm that occasionally restricts open discourse but simultaneously motivates junior personnel to pursue mentorship from senior colleagues, which can be beneficial (Interviewee 2/ Male / 35 / Lecturer II / Education / June 21, 2025).

In engineering, seniority frequently determines project leadership, resulting in power disparities. For example, in a renewable energy project, a senior professor initially disregarded my contributions about simulation software because of my junior position. Nonetheless, the social capital created through joint laboratory efforts enabled me to showcase the software's worth, resulting in its adoption. Trust established through common objectives was essential in surmounting the initial hierarchy. Power dynamics obstruct collaboration when junior members feel marginalised; however, social capital derived from collaborative projects cultivates mutual respect and enhances teamwork. The cultural reverence for the elderly may deter juniors from contesting seniors, yet it simultaneously encourages mentorship when seniors are receptive to collaboration (Interviewee 3/ Male / 40 / Senior Lecturer / Engineering / June 22, 2025).

The power dynamics within the department and faculty are apparent in decision-making, since senior lecturers frequently dominate faculty meetings. I proposed a new course on international human rights law, but a senior colleague rejected it, citing tradition. Collaborating with her on a paper facilitated the development of social capital. Our collaboration fostered trust, and she subsequently endorsed my plan, demonstrating how relationships can alleviate power disparities. Seniority may hinder innovation, whereas robust ties created via teamwork enhance idea exchange and support. Respect for seniors is a cultural norm that restricts direct confrontation while promoting junior personnel to pursue senior mentorship, which can be beneficial (Interviewee 4/ Female / 42 / Senior Lecturer / Law / June 23, 2025).

In the Life Sciences faculty, power dynamics affect resource distribution, as senior lecturers frequently prioritise their own research. I encountered difficulties obtaining lab access for a research topic until I established a rapport with a professor through collaborative fieldwork. This social capital facilitated her advocacy for my initiative, guaranteeing access. Trust was essential in addressing the power disparity.

Seniority may restrict junior access to resources; yet, social capital derived from collaborative efforts promotes cooperation and resource-sharing. Giving respect to seniors may prevent juniors from expressing their requirements; yet, it also fosters mentorship, thereby cultivating trust (Interviewee 5/ Male / 37 / Lecturer I / Life Sciences / June 24, 2025).

In Management Sciences, seniority frequently influences committee assignments, with senior lecturers assuming leadership positions. I was initially excluded from a committee until I established trust with a senior colleague by co-organizing a workshop. This bond resulted in my inclusion, demonstrating how social capital can mitigate power dynamics. Power dynamics impede junior involvement in decision-making, whereas social capital derived from collaborative projects promotes inclusion and cooperation. Cultural behavioral expectations for seniors constrains junior assertiveness while fostering mentorship, hence cultivating constructive interactions (Interviewee 6/ Female / 39 / Lecturer I / Management Sciences / June 25, 2025).

In my department, power dynamics affect research funding allocations, frequently favouring older teachers. My concept for a quantum computing research was first disregarded until I partnered with a professor on a pilot study. This established trust, resulting in her endorsement of my grant proposal. Social capital was essential in addressing the power disparity. Seniority may restrict chances for juniors; yet, social capital derived from collaboration encourages mutual support and access to resources. Regards for elders inhibits direct confrontation but facilitates mentorship, thereby cultivating constructive connections. (Interviewee 7/ Male / 60 / Professor / Physical Sciences / June 22, 2025).

In the Faculty of Social Sciences, power dynamics strongly shape committee appointments, with senior lecturers often occupying the key positions. I was initially left out of a policy brief project, but that changed after I built trust with a senior colleague through co-teaching. That relationship eventually opened the door for me to join the research team, showing how social capital can soften power imbalances in the academic workplace. While seniority can keep junior staff away from important roles, collaboration and shared professional engagement can create pathways for inclusion and cooperation. In this context, cultural respect for elders tends to limit the assertiveness of junior academics, yet it also creates space for mentorship and, over time, strengthens trust. (Interviewee 8/ Female / 41 / Senior Lecturer / Social Sciences / June 27, 2025).

In agriculture, power dynamics affect project leadership, frequently resulting in senior academics assuming control. I was first excluded from a crop research study until I established a rapport with a professor through fieldwork. This trust facilitated my inclusion, demonstrating how social capital mitigates seniority. Power dynamics may restrict the participation of juniors; nevertheless, social capital derived from common objectives encourages collaboration. Respect for elders inhibits conflict yet facilitates mentorship, thereby cultivating productive connections (Interviewee 9/ Male / 38 / Lecturer I / Agriculture / June 28, 2025).

Seniority shapes how resources are distributed, in Medical Sciences, with senior academics often giving priority to their own initiatives. I found it difficult to gain access to clinical data until I built trust with a professor through a collaborative study. That relationship changed the situation. Once trust was established, she shared the resources I needed, showing clearly how social capital can soften the effects of workplace hierarchy. While seniority can limit junior staff's access to important resources, teamwork and professional trust can encourage reciprocal support and make collaboration more possible. In the same way, respect for elders may discourage direct confrontation, but it also creates space for mentorship and, in doing so, strengthens trust across academic ranks (Interviewee 10/ Female / 43 / Senior Lecturer / Medical Sciences / June 29, 2025).

This content analysis scrutinises qualitative data derived from comprehensive interviews with twenty academic personnel across diverse faculties/schools/colleges/institutes at the University of Benin, concentrating on exploring the sociological determinants, including power dynamics and social capital, that influence intergenerational interactions among academic staff. The analysis entailed coding responses for themes pertaining to power dynamics (e.g., seniority), social capital (e.g., trust, relationships), and cultural factors (e.g., respect for elders), subsequently categorising and comparing across faculties and generational cohorts (Generation X, Millennials, implied Baby Boomers), and interpreting through an industrial sociology perspective. The results indicate that power dynamics impede collaboration, whereas social capital and cultural norms promote effective interactions, influencing intergenerational dynamics in academic environments.

Power dynamics, dictated by seniority, profoundly affect intergenerational interactions, frequently sidelining junior personnel in decision-making and resource distribution. Interviewees consistently indicated that senior faculty, frequently characterised as Baby Boomers, exert control over departmental decisions, including curriculum evaluations (Interviewee 1, Arts), resource distribution (Interviewee 2, Education; Interviewee 5, Life Sciences; Interviewee 10, Medical Sciences), project leadership (Interviewee 3, Engineering; Interviewee 9, Agriculture), committee appointments (Interviewee 6, Management Sciences; Interviewee 8, Social Sciences), and funding determinations (Interviewee 7, Physical Sciences). Interviewee 1 recounted a senior professor rejecting a digital humanities proposal because of her junior status, whereas Interviewee 5 encountered difficulties obtaining lab access until establishing rapport with a professor. These dynamics impede collaboration by stifling junior voices, as stated by Interviewees 1, 3, and 6, so generating friction in faculty meetings or project planning. From a Weberian viewpoint, this illustrates how authority structures based on seniority constrain creativity, along with industrial sociology's emphasis on power stratification inside organisations.

Social capital, established via trust and relationships, alleviates power disparities and promotes intergenerational collaboration. Interviewees articulated the establishment of trust via informal engagements (e.g., departmental seminars, Interviewee 1), collaborative endeavours (e.g., fieldwork, Interviewees 5, 9; co-teaching, Interviewee 8; pilot studies, Interviewee 7), or mutual activities (e.g., co-presenting workshops, Interviewee 2; co-organizing events, Interviewee 6). For example, Interviewee 3's participation in laboratory work prompted a senior professor to implement simulation software, while Interviewee 4's co-authored article fostered trust, culminating in endorsement for a new course. Social capital fosters collaboration by establishing mutual respect and common objectives, as highlighted by Interviewees 1, 4, and 8, thereby allowing subordinate personnel to access resources or decision-making positions. This corresponds with social capital theory, which asserts that relationship networks augment cooperation and productivity in hierarchical environments such as academia.

Cultural components, especially the norm of reverence for elders, serve a dual function in influencing interactions. This convention, embedded in the Nigerian cultural environment, frequently restrains junior staff from contesting elders, as observed by Interviewees 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10, so constraining

open dialogue and creativity. Interviewee 1 remarked that reverence for elders inhibited junior staff from challenging senior colleagues, whereas Interviewee 6 indicated it limited assertiveness. This norm promotes mentorship, motivating junior staff to seek help from accessible elders, as seen by the productive mentorship experiences of Interviewees 2, 4, and 5. This paradox illustrates relational sociology's focus on cultural norms influencing workplace relations, balancing respect with collaborative opportunities when superiors are receptive to involvement.

The interaction of these sociocultural elements has considerable ramifications for collaboration. Power dynamics obstruct collaboration by sidelining junior personnel, as evidenced by the early exclusion of Interviewees 3, 5, and 7 from projects or financing. In contrast, social capital fosters inclusion and collaboration, as evidenced by the successful integration of Interviewees 2, 6, and 8 into decision-making through the establishment of trust. The cultural practice of venerating elders both restricts direct conflict, maintaining harmony, and promotes mentorship, facilitating information transfer. From an industrial relations standpoint, our findings underscore the necessity for conflict-sensitive frameworks that honour seniority while elevating junior perspectives, so assuring fair involvement in academic environments.

The University of Benin must establish organised systems to equilibrate power relations and utilise social capital effectively. Cross-generational committees, as suggested by Interviewee 1's curriculum review, can facilitate inclusive decision-making. Mentorship programs, such as those nurturing connections in Interviewees 2 and 5, can cultivate trust and promote knowledge transfer. Workshops or informal activities, exemplified by Interviewee 6's co-organized event, can augment social capital and bridge generational divides. Furthermore, training in cultural sensitivity and conflict resolution helps reconcile the dual imperative of respecting elders, fostering open discourse while preserving mentorship possibilities. These measures can foster a collaborative academic climate that leverages generational diversity for institutional advancement.

5. Discussion of Findings

Findings validate sociological views that power is ingrained in professional relationships and frequently shaped by age-based seniority structures, particularly in conventional and hierarchical institutions such as universities. Weberian theory posits that power is exerted via authority structures, exemplified by senior

academic personnel, which affect resource allocation, policy execution, and representation in administrative contexts. The perception of power dynamics highlights that junior academics may feel constrained in voicing disagreement or proposing innovations in the presence of established authority leaders. In contrast, senior employees may expect respect or oppose changes advocated by younger coworkers. This tension is essential from an industrial relations standpoint, as it can either promote stability through respect for experience or incite latent conflict if power is not wielded inclusively. Consequently, universities must establish conflict-sensitive frameworks that honour seniority while not suppressing the expression and innovation of junior scholars.

The results correspond with social identity theory, which posits that individuals are drawn to in-groups, typically characterised by a shared generational identity, for emotional security, validation, and a unified perspective. In the academic environment, these collectives can serve as informal support networks for managing bureaucratic stress, power dynamics, and administrative obstacles. Nevertheless, such dependence may unintentionally weaken intergenerational cooperation, disrupt institutional culture, and cultivate echo chambers. From a sociological standpoint, this indicates the existence of generational enclaves that both empower and constrain. Although these networks can foster social cohesion and resilience, they may also hinder intergenerational communication or sustain misconceptions. Institutions pursuing long-term transformation must establish inclusive community-building methods, mentorship programs, and collaborative projects that intentionally integrate diverse generations to eliminate age-based network silos.

This discovery underscores that relational sociology, which concentrates on the network of social connections, is essential for comprehending workplace dynamics. Social capital promotes reciprocity, collaboration, and mutual comprehension, particularly within institutions marked by hierarchical structures and generational variety. In academia, where collaboration is vital for teaching, research, and administration, trust and personal rapport are crucial facilitators of productivity. The significant emphasis on social capital indicates that successful intergenerational collaboration relies more on fostering a culture of interpersonal goodwill than on structural policies. Social capital alleviates distrust, connects generational perspectives, and facilitates the informal exchange of institutional knowledge. In the context of industrial sociology and labour relations,

social capital improves collective bargaining, team productivity, and workplace cohesion. Consequently, colleges must formalise mentorship and collaboration while simultaneously investing in relationship-building initiatives—such as intergenerational workshops, retreats, and informal peer networks—to maintain an inclusive academic atmosphere.

The findings about power dynamics and social capital influencing intergenerational interactions are corroborated by a study conducted by Lyons and Kuron (2014). This research utilises social capital theory to investigate how trust and relationships alleviate power disparities in intergenerational settings, especially within academia. It underscores how the authority of senior academics can suppress junior views, while social capital promotes collaboration, consistent with the dissertation's focus on the necessity of relationship-building to improve intergenerational exchanges.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how sociological factors, especially power dynamics and social capital, shape intergenerational exchanges among academic staff at the University of Benin. The findings make one point very clear: academic interaction does not take place on a level playing field. Seniority still shapes communication, participation, and access to influence, and many respondents acknowledged that hierarchy affects how they relate with colleagues across generations. Even so, hierarchy does not tell the whole story. The study also found that trust, collegial relationships, and informal networks play a central role in making collaboration possible across age groups and academic ranks. Respondents repeatedly described cases where resistance linked to seniority eased once people-built trust through shared responsibilities, informal conversations, or joint academic work. Taken together, the findings show that the academic workplace runs on two forces at once: hierarchy structures authority and access, while social capital creates room for cooperation and openness.

The study therefore concludes that intergenerational tensions in the university do not arise simply because people belong to different age groups. They grow out of the interaction between institutional hierarchy, cultural expectations of deference, and unequal access to supportive networks. At the same time, the same environment can support meaningful collaboration when departments intentionally build trust and mutual respect across generations. On that basis, the study recommends that the University of Benin strengthen structured cross-generational mentoring, encourage

more collaborative committee practices, and create informal academic networking spaces that reduce unnecessary status barriers without dismissing the value of experience. These steps would improve communication, expand junior staff participation, and turn generational diversity from a quiet source of tension into a real institutional asset.

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