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Factors Influencing Public University's Role in Community Transformation

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Paucity of knowledge exists on the factors that influence the capacity of universities to transform communities, particularly in the Ugandan context. This study examined the internal factors that influence the capacity of Gulu University to contribute to community transformation in Gulu City in Northern Uganda. A cross-sectional study design was used while employing self-administered questionnaire to sample 390 households. Logistic regression model was used to evaluate the influence of internal factors on Gulu University's role in transforming the surrounding communities. Findings revealed that scholarships by the university ($p=.000$), enterprises developed within the community through Gulu University's engagement ($p=.007$), religious meetings for spiritual transformation ($p=.036$), and the teaching done at the university ($p=.045$) had a statistically significant influence on the university's role in transforming the surrounding community in Gulu city. The study concludes that universities, the central government, and other stakeholders need to focus more on scholarships for further education, enterprise development, supporting the church, and teaching in the university to realise multiplied transformation of the surrounding communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Several internal and external factors have been deduced to play an influential role in enhancing the capacity of universities to transform communities (Fumasoli et al., 2019). Much as Stensaker and Vabø (2013) reported that external stakeholders' support was not a significant factor in enhancing the role of universities in transforming society in Europe, Rukarwa et al. (2018), Sempebwa (2024) and Aleu et al. (2024) assert that African universities are influenced more by what is happening in the wider developmental space which includes environmental forces such as policy frameworks, pressures of the competitive market, macro-economic conditions of the population, and programmes implemented by the non-governmental organisations whose actions impact the efficacy of the university's interventions. Besides, the role of internal factors within the university has also severally been reported to play a role in determining the capacity of universities in transforming communities and these internal factors include but not limited to the role of leadership and decision making, communication and cooperation with academics, and supportive financial climate (Stensaker & Vabø 2013; Fumasoli et al., 2017; Stensaker & Vabø, 2013). To this end, it has also long been recognised that researchers have looked into the results of strategic positioning and seen how colleges place themselves in the academic sector according to their educational research output, portfolio, technological transfer, and regional growth (Bonaccorsi & Daraio, 2008).

This study used the Activity Theory by Engestrom (2001) and Roth (2004) which explains the transformation of individuals and their power to transform their communities to examine households' perceptions on factors that influence Gulu University's capacity to transform communities. Meanwhile, Mascarenhas et al. (2024) assert that the motivation of new

knowledge generation and transfer for the benefit of the community occurs when there is teamwork between the university, industry and the community. This means that the important factor here is teamwork between the university and the other parties. However, Marozau and Guerrero (2016) reported that it is the creativity and innovation capacity of university leaders and authorities that determines the contribution of the university to the knowledge-based economic transformation of the community.

Additionally, Urbano and Guerrero (2013) undertook an exploration of literature paying attention to the entrepreneurial ability of the university as a driver for economic growth and social change. They reported that it is entrepreneurial orientation across university units and departments that builds the momentum and culture that can bring economic growth and societal change. The key conviction here is that an entrepreneurial approach is important to the realisation of community transformation by universities. Conversely, Brown and Baker (2019) identified the following as key factors that determine the transformation of the community: community empowerment, engagement, trust, cohesion, and leadership. They recognise disenfranchisement and social isolation as major variables in causing social stagnation, while engaging citizens and empowering people are important tactics in fostering successful, sustained social and community-level transformation. They showed that there is a need for local capacity in skills and leadership development within the local community along with trust for one another with a shared purpose for collective empowerment to occur (Walzer et al., 2020). They concluded that when collective empowerment occurs in the community, then transformation can be realised through active, constructive and cohesive engagement and revitalisation.

Furthermore, Hudson (2013) investigated a federal comprehensive community initiative, the

Promise Neighbourhood Programme in the United States of America, to understand higher education community engagement in an embedded context. She discovered that higher education institutions committed to partnerships through mission-related practices always achieve more transformation of communities. According to Fleming (1999), universities have a responsibility to respond to the call for partnership with local communities to help solve mutual problems that face universities and communities. He indicated that providing scholarships to community members remains a distinguishing factor for the university community outreach partnership and needs to become a regular part of life of the university. This thereby supports the framework of the Activity theory where the interaction of the university and the community is an active point of the activity system and a reflection of collaborative and network engagement. Furthermore, Chatterton (1999) carried out a study on the cultural role of Bristol University in the U.K. and revealed a number of factors that affected Bristol University's contribution to community transformation. These factors include the university's age, location, population size and the population mix around the university.

More still, Honoré (2016) studied integrated learning at the Christian Bilingual University of Congo and found out that integrated learning is a holistic form of education that involves the mind, heart, soul, and body and consequently contributes to the welfare of the country and the wider community. On the other hand, Openjuru and Ikoja (2012) reported that internal organisational factors influence the university's

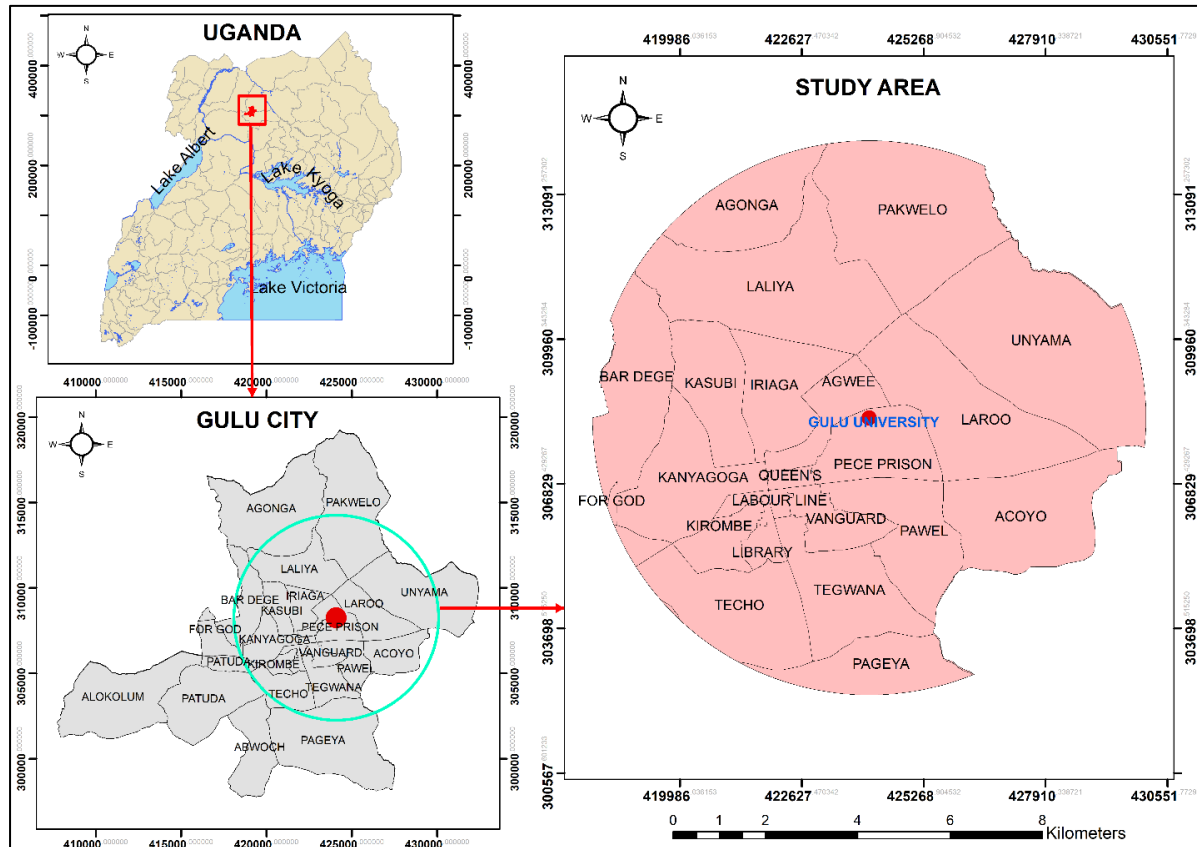
role in the transformation of communities, including funding to support community engagement activities and the availability of clear institutional policies and guidelines. Additionally, Adebua et al. (2024) revealed that Gulu University has greatly contributed to the transformation of the surrounding community in Gulu City through the economic, political, physical and spiritual dimensions. A synthesis of the aforementioned literature reveals the paucity of understanding of factors influencing public university's role in transforming communities in northern Uganda. Thus, this study aimed to examine the internal factors that influence the role of Gulu University in transforming communities in northern Uganda. The paper is structured in four sections, and the proceeding sections provide materials and methods used, the study findings and discussion, and the conclusion.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

The study was conducted in Gulu City in northern Uganda (Figure 1). Gulu City consists of two divisions (i.e., Pece-Laroo, and Bar Dege-Layibi), and Gulu University is located in Pece-Laroo Division. The justification for the choice of Gulu City is that it forms the immediate surrounding community of Gulu University. Additionally, the area was chosen based on its location in an area that suffered conflict from 1986 to 2006, characterised by a low level of socio-economic development (Gulu University Strategic Plan, 2004/05-2008/09). The study was conducted within a radius of 6 km from Gulu University (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Location of Gulu University in Gulu City in northern Uganda



Source: Self-developed using UBOS shape files (2020)

Sample Size Determination

The sample size was computed from the household population above 18 years of age based on the procedure used by Israel (1992) (Table 1).

Table 1: Sample size determination

Study area	Sub Counties	Parishes	Population of persons above 18 years	Sample size @ 5% margin of error
Gulu City	Laro-Pece	Pece-Prison	3060	97
		Agwee	3571	107
	Bardege-Layibi	Labour line	1530	47
		Kanyagoga	4628	128
Total Population/ sample			12713	390

Sampling Technique and Procedure

Multi-stage sampling (Bennett & Iyanagec, 1988) was used to select representative sample sizes. This was based on its cost-effectiveness, flexibility and more than two sampling stages used. In this study, the first stage involved stratified sampling of two divisions, i.e., Laro-Pece and Bardege-Layibi in Gulu City. The second stage involved sampling two parishes from each division. These divisions consist of 21 parishes. However, only four parishes were

sampled, i.e., Pece-Prison and Agwee in Laro-Pece Division, and Kanyagoga and Labour line parishes in Bardege-Layibi Division. These four parishes were purposively selected based on their proximity to the university. Finally, households were randomly selected from the chosen parishes.

Study Design

A cross-sectional research design was used to capture data on the factors that enhance the role of Gulu University in transforming communities.

The target population was the community surrounding Gulu University within a radius of approximately 6 km. While the unit of analysis was the household.

The study sample was 390 households drawn from a total population of 12713 from Laro-Pece and Bardege-Layibi Divisions of Gulu City. The sample size was computed from the household population above 18 years based on the procedure used by Israel (1992).

In terms of data collection, self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data. This consisted of mainly closed-ended questions administered to respondents at their homes after seeking their consent. Closed-ended questions were majorly used because they offer a quick tool for data collection, coding, interpretation and quantification of outcomes (Jones & Tanner, 2015).

The questionnaire data was analysed using a multivariate logistic regression model to examine the potential internal factors that influence the role of Gulu University in transforming the surrounding community. The choice of the regression model stems from the fact that the dependent variable was a categorical variable. In the logistic regression model, it is well known that the independent variables can either be categorical, continuous or both. However, in this study, all the independent variables were categorical in nature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings revealed that the following internal factors had a significant influence on the contribution of Gulu University to community transformation (*Table 2*): Gulu University's support to community members to pursue further studies ($p=.000$), enterprises developed within the community through Gulu University's engagement ($p=.007$), religious meetings organised to bring spiritual change ($p=.038$), and the teaching done at the university ($p=.045$). However, other factors did not have a significant influence on community transformation and, some of which included research activities geared

towards community social change, skill training workshops geared towards community moral change, technologies being imparted to the community, new and better ways of farming through Gulu University's engagements, partnership projects between the university and the community, donations the university has made to benefit the community, and health care education services from the university.

The significant influence of the support given to community members to pursue education in bringing transformation is likely to be a result of those members supported gaining higher qualifications after the pursuit of their education, which in turn may lead to promotion in their respective offices and consequently earning higher incomes. This income could, on many occasions, be used in furthering household education, re-investing in business ventures, and asset acquisition. This has been seen by the community members to be bringing a higher multiplier effect on community transformation. This study finding relates to that of Hudson (2013) who investigated a federal comprehensive community initiative known as the Promise Neighbourhood Program in the United States of America and discovered that giving scholarships to students in schools in the community brought transformation.

Additionally, enterprises developed within the community through Gulu University's engagement have a significant effect on transformation because these enterprises employ several community members, e.g., some projects such as the tamarind production project between the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment and the community, where several youths are employed and are earning income to support the livelihoods of their households. Besides, there is also the Takataka project of recycling plastic bottle waste originated by a former student of Gulu University from the surrounding community. This finding corroborates a report by Tung et al. (2020), who found that university-based entrepreneurial education in Vietnam and the Philippines led to the growth of multiple

community-based enterprises and consequently led to community transformation.

Furthermore, religious meetings organised by the several religious denominations that are allowed to operate in the university have a significant effect on community transformation. This is likely to be because these meetings have managed to teach love and respect for one another, faithfulness, endurance, integrity, and peace in this formally war-torn region, all of which could have created harmony in the community and a favourable environment for investments and, consequently, community transformation. This study finding is in line with the assertion by

Hausmann et al. (2024) and Getu (2002), who indicated the importance of spiritual aspects in community transformation.

More still, the teaching done at the university had a significant effect on community transformation. This is probably because the teaching gives students knowledge, skills, and traits and when they leave the university, they apply these to transform their respective communities. This study's finding conforms with the assertion by Prilleltensky (2014) that university education has so much translated to the transformation of communities the world over.

Table 2: Internal factors influencing Gulu University's contribution to community transformation

Internal factors	B	S.E.	Sig.	Odd Ratio (OR)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
					Lower	Upper
Research activities geared towards community social change	.403	.814	.621	1.496	.303	7.374
Skill training workshops geared towards community moral change	-1.111	.904	.219	.329	.056	1.939
Religious meetings geared towards spiritual change	1.119	.532	.036	3.062	1.079	8.693
Technologies being imparted to the community	-.736	.529	.164	.479	.170	1.352
Universities programs on community primary health care service	.067	.514	.897	1.069	.391	2.925
New and better way of farming through Gulu University engagements	.548	.562	.329	1.730	.575	5.200
New and better ways of doing business through Gulu University outreach services	-.487	.539	.365	.614	.214	1.765
Crime reduction	.118	.421	.780	1.125	.493	2.565
Enterprises developed within the community through Gulu University engagements	1.295	.482	.007	3.652	1.420	9.392
Businesses developed with guidance of university staff/students in the community	.592	.529	.263	1.808	.641	5.101
Partnership projects between the university and the community	-.292	.552	.597	.747	.253	2.203
Donations the university has made to benefit the community	.099	.616	.872	1.105	.330	3.696
Gulu University support to community members to pursue education	1.924	.471	.000	6.850	2.720	17.251
Healthcare education services from the university	-.147	.482	.761	.864	.336	2.221
University population size	.381	.488	.436	1.464	.562	3.812
University leadership	.527	.497	.288	1.694	.640	4.485
Teaching done at the university	.907	.453	.045	2.476	1.019	6.016
Constant	-.740	.374	.048	.477		
Negelkerke R square	.390					

CONCLUSION

According to the study findings, Gulu University's scholarships to community members, the enterprises developed through Gulu University's community engagement, religious meetings organised by Gulu University to bring spiritual change, and the teaching done at the university are the major factors that influence the University capacity to transform the community. The study concludes that universities, the central government, and other stakeholders need to focus more on scholarships to further the education of the population, promote enterprise development, support the church in its activities of spiritual transformation, and teach in the university by increasing financial support to realise the multiplied transformation of communities.

This study focused on the internal factors that influence the capacity of Gulu University to contribute to community transformation; however, more research can be undertaken to determine the influence of external factors that could be influencing the role of Ugandan private and public universities in influencing the transformation of communities.

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