The Benefits of the University of Health and Allied Sciences to its Host Communities

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Abstract

In the last four decades, universities have been under increasing pressure to prove their relevance towards the development of their host communities. This study, from this background generally builds on existing research by assessing the benefits of UHAS to its host community. The study specifically examined the benefits of the university on indigenes and other community members and further assessed the factors that determine the impact of the university on its host community. The study adopted the qualitative research paradigm. In all, the study utilized a sample of 20 respondents comprising 5 university staff, 10 indigenes, and 5 people from operating businesses close to the university. Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling strategy. Interviews were used as the instrument of data collection. Results of the study reveal that the university's host communities have benefited from the establishment and operation of the university in the form of increased access to education, employment creation, boosting of the local economy, and access to other community services. The study culminates by proffering policy implications. Among other measures, it is recommended that the University creates a strategic community engagement plan, create incentive structures that promote faculty community engagement, and aligns its programs with local economy needs.

Keywords: Universities; community engagement; host communities, employment creation

Introduction

Universities across the globe in the 21st century modern times have come under pressure to take vital interest in the development of their host communities. These pressures have arisen due to factors such as the acquisition of lands for establishing universities and the relocation of local residents which all impact on their economic lives. A related explanation but more broad in nature is that universities are funded at the taxpayers' expense and for that matter they should always justify their relevance. Administrators in these universities must therefore strive to demonstrate their social value and relevance (Starke, Shenouda, & Smith-Howell, 2017). This is not to say that universities in the past were not under pressure to share an interest in the development of their host communities. The difference is that the 21st century has witnessed a growing interest. As Cantor and Englot (2014) contend, universities have historically been a vital resource to their host

communities Duhart (2002) argues that the benefits of universities for host communities can be transmitted through such means as operating supplies and expenses, spending by the students who attend the institutions; and spending by the institutions for capital projects. Sanchez (2010) on his part argues that universities have historically directly benefited local communities including the creation of employment and an increase in local expenditures. But there is also the claim that there were times in the past that higher educational institutions especially in the USA in particular attached more importance to knowledge creation over a solution to problems facing society (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, & Swanson, 2012).Factors such as the classification of service to society as non-core function and emphasis on academic work explained this trend (Fitzgerakld et al., 2012) This development led to the questioning of the relevance of universities with discourses coming from university presidents, faculty members, and students (Fitzgerald et al., 2012).

Critics observed that such a development strained university-community relations. Cantor, Englot, and Higgins (2013) report that most universities often expanded by buying up real estate contiguous to their campuses and displacing local, often low-income, residents (Cantor, Englot, & Higgins, 2013) which led to negative public reaction. As a result, Cantor et al. (2013) report that some universities began to mitigate these impacts by reaching out to communities in which they are located in. It is said that in the early years of university engagements with communities, there were no central planning as each department took their own initiatives and programmes (Cantor et al, 2013). Besides their primary education function, universities are expected to also take measures to improve the economic live of their host communities (Cantor et al., 2013)). Ambargis, McComb, and Robbin (2011) capture this notion by arguing that higher education institutions have a widening economic effect that transcends the primary function to educate people and to provide them with opportunities to earn higher wages and live longer. Interest in this impact of universities has burgeoned in the last century. This has resulted in many research streams including universities' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), campus sustainability and university-community engagements (Chile and Black, 2015).

Although there are existing studies on universities' impact on host communities, our review of existing research affirms that no study has been done in the case of University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS). Though this is unsurprising given that it is a relatively new university that was recently established, we still consider it important from a practical viewpoint to assess its impact on its host community. Agyeman, Tamanaja, and Bingab (2021) in their study examined various aspects of university governance and community relations in Ghana focusing on selected universities in Ghana. The findings of this study reveal agitations from their host communities who actually call for greater social responsibility and engagement. In a related study, Abukari and Corner (2010) focusing on the University of Development Studies and employing qualitative in-depth interviews examined quality aspects of the university's community engagement process. The findings of this study demonstrate the need for additional measures to reflect the needs and

realities of host communities of the universities. In a further inquiry, Agyeman, Tamanaja, and Bingab (2020) employed stakeholder theory and in-depth interviews to assess the levels and forms of engagement between universities in Ghana and traditional authority. This study sampled public universities in Ghana and their proximate communities. Findings of the study reveal that most universities recognize the need to revise their community engagement models to make their positive impact on communities more noticeable. Taken together, the results of these studies in the Ghanaian context affirm poor community engagement which may not lead to the full realization. Whilst these studies also provide useful insights into universities' impact on host communities in general, they fail to fully account for how universities benefit host communities and the critical factors that ensure this in specific university and local community settings and hence the need for this study.

From this backdrop, this study aimed to examine the impact of the establishment of the University of Health and Allied Sciences in Ho in the Volta region of Ghana. UHAS was founded by an Act of Parliament (Act 828 in December 2011) and envisioned to become pre-eminent research and practically oriented health educational institution dedicated to community service. Its main campus is in Ho with another campus in a neighbouring town Hohoe. It also represents the first public university established in the Volta region of Ghana. Currently, the student population comprises 7,965 (7,856 undergraduates and 109 postgraduates) and the number of staff is 808.The outcome of the current study will be useful for various stakeholders including universities, the government, donor bodies, traditional authorities, and the general public. For these stakeholders, the results emerging from the study will suggest areas of governance that require modification or will altogether call for the need to introduce additional governance mechanisms and community engagement strategies that will promote the greater positive impact of the university on its host communities.

Literature review
Theoretical discussions of the impact of universities on host communities often centre on the channels through which the impact of universities is felt and on models of universities' engagement with host communities. The channels of impact describe how universities can influence the lives of their host communities whereas the models of engagement focus on the diverse approaches' universities may employ to provide value to their public. Valero and Van Reenen (2019) posit that the impact of universities occurs along four main channels namely, the production and supply of human capital, innovation, support for democratic values, and demand effects. The human capital channel emphasises that universities train and supply skilled workers who are more productive than unskilled workers in the communities they operate. As already stated, universities also impact on their host communities through innovation. Reenen (2019) also asserts that this effect could be transmitted indirectly through the supply of human capital. Thus, the argument is that university graduates' overtime may introduce innovations either at the individual entrepreneurial level or firm level that can benefit communities and society in general. However, innovation from universities can also be indirect in situations where researchers of universities come out with

innovations often through collaboration with local businesses. In this way, it is evident that universities enhance the innovative capacity of local firms. The support for democratic institutions and values channel highlights that universities can generally engender pro-growth institutions (Glaeser, LaPorta, Lopez-de-Silanes, & Shleifer, 2004**).** Universities do this by providing direct platforms for democratic dialogue and the sharing of ideas through events, publications or reports to policymakers (Glaeser et al., 2004). LaPorta, Lopez-de-Silanes, & Shleifer, 2004). The demand effects channel draws attention to the fact that universities increase demand for goods and services in their host communities. This demand can be from the students, university staff, or the university as a whole through their purchase of local goods.

With regards to the models of the university-community engagement research stream, the existing literature identifies one model as Community Engagement Paradigm (Butin & Seider, 2012). Though this paradigm highlights community partnerships, it has been documented that in the early years, offices responsible for community engagement often assessed outcomes of community engagement efforts by using the desired objectives of universities. Examples of these include the number and quality of scholarly products produce and student learning outcomes like retention and completion rates (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013). Over time, universities had a rethinking of these ways to have strategies of community engagements that benefit their diverse community stakeholders. Out of these efforts emerged another model of engagement known as the Anchor Institution Paradigm (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013). Under this model, universities are described as anchor organizations by virtue of the fact that they are rooted in the communities they are located, and they need to establish formal policies and structures for community engagement (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013). A third paradigm is the collective impact paradigm. This model was put forward by was introduced by Kania and Kramer (2011) who conceptualized it as the commitment of a group of salient actors from diverse sectors with a common goal of solving a given problem in society. A fundamental assumption of this paradigm is that efforts embarked on by individual organizations and isolated programmes are unable to address complex social problems (Kania & Kramer, 2011). The paradigm advocates the efforts and cooperation of all in order for universities to have a positive impact on their communities.

There are other theoretical viewpoints which highlight the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in enhancing university-community relations. Conceptually, CSR describes the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organisations at a given point in time (Carroll & Buchholtz 2003,). Leitão and Silva (2007) as cited in Mehta (2011) show the UN declaration on Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) presents an opportunity for higher education institutions to promote training and awareness for a more sustainable future. The authors similarly cite the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992) declaration towards "Promoting Education, Public Awareness and Training" in social responsibility provides avenues through which universities can enhance their relations with communities. Agyeman,

Tamanja, and Bingab (2020) in a study in Ghana assessed the levels and forms of engagement between universities in Ghana and traditional authority. This study focused on five public universities and their neighboring communities and found that there is a growing awareness among public universities in Ghana of the need to engage the traditional authority of their immediate surrounding communities to enhance university–community relations. The existing literature also highlights on the barriers to the use of CSR in enhancing university-community relations. Wright (2010) in his study involving university presidents and vice-presidents in Canadian universities reported that the challenges facing the use of CSR include financial predicament, lack of understanding and awareness of sustainability issues, and a resistance to change. A related study by Pollock, Horn, Costanza and Sayre (2009) report complex and ineffective governance, traditional disciplinary boundaries and the lack of a shared vision at academic institutions as impediments to the use of CSR in improving relations with host communities of universities.

Research Methodology
The study adopted the qualitative research approach. Bengtsson (2016) describes the qualitative research method as the study of a phenomenon from the perspectives and opinions of respondents. Due to the qualitative nature of the research problem, the qualitative research paradigm is appropriate to utilize. The study in essence examines the benefits of a university on its host community including autochthones and migrant residents, and business owners. Therefore, it is important to explore the views of the targeted people on the nature of benefits they have enjoyed as a result of the university's establishment and how these benefits have been made possible. The target population of the study comprised the university staff, natives of neighbouring communities, and the business owners. However, a sample of the targeted respondents was used in the study since it was not possible to sample all individuals. Specifically, we sampled a total of 20 respondents, 5 from the university staff, 10 local residents and other community members, and 5 business owners. Beuscher and Grando (2009) report that in most qualitative studies, samples used range from 7 to 28. Barreiro and Albandoz (2007) also contend that qualitative studies do not aim at achieving statistical representativeness but uses small samples to achieve a thorough understanding of a research phenomenon. Hence, the sample of 20 used in our study is adequate. The sample of 20 was also informed by the saturation point during which the researchers realised that same themes emerged in the responses of participants subsequently interviewed. In order to generate accurate responses, the researchers utilized a purposive sampling strategy also known as the purposive sampling technique. Etikan, Nusa, and Alkassim (2016) describe the purposive sampling technique as the selection of respondents based on their knowledge of a research phenomenon. In the context of our study, it ensured that respondents selected possessed the requisite knowledge and information on the research subject matter. In the study of this nature, we aimed to interview indigenes and other residents around the university's neighbouring communities who actually possess information about the universities' benefits to them. Most respondents especially indigenes and the other community members were intercepted in public places

where the interviews took place. The participants were drawn from people who operated businesses in and around the university campus.

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in the study. The primary data was taken from the targeted respondents in the study whereas secondary data were taken from the university's reports and documents on its community engagements. The secondary data sources also included analysis of the new postings on how the universities engage their neighbouring communities. By combining both data sources, we achieved what Olsen (2004) describes as data triangulation which helps to validate research findings. With regards to the instrument of data collection, we utilized interviews which afforded respondents greater flexibility in expressing their views. To further improve methodological rigour of the study, we ensured credibility and dependability based on the standards suggested by Thomas and Magilvy (2011). These include credibility and dependability. Specifically, we ensured credibility through reflexivity, prolonged time spent with participants, and quoting participants' words during analysis. Dependability on the other hand was ensured through accurate description of the research methods including how participants were selected and how data was collected to the reader.

To analyse data in the study, we utilized qualitative data analytical techniques. This entails the search for similarity in responses and emerging themes. We also employed logical inferences by inferring latent responses from manifest responses. Schwandt (2001) observes that data analysis in qualitative research does not follow a linear fashion as it is in quantitative research. Rather, qualitative data to be meaningful requires the use of logical inferences from the data collected.

Results and Discussions

The objectives of the paper were three-fold namely to assess the benefits indigenes and other community members derive from the establishment of UHAS, to examine the benefits of the university to business owners on the business community, and to explore the factors that influence the realization of these benefits. As already specified, we address our research questions by drawing on qualitative data from the study participants and a review of the documents, reports, and news postings regarding the university's community engagement activities.

Benefits of UHAS to the host communities

With regards to the benefits indigenes and other community members enjoy from the establishment of the University, the data collected reflected a lot of themes including ease of access to education, boosting economic activities, employment creation, the attraction of donors and provision of community services. Pertaining to the benefits of education, most respondents conceded that the establishment of the University has provided greater opportunities for indigenes and other people in the surrounding communities to access tertiary education. Other views expressed also indicated that the establishment of the University has enabled the local community residents to appreciate the importance of education. We also found that the establishment of the University led to the creation of The UHAS Basic School (UBS) for children of staff. Indigenes and other community members claim that this created the opportunity for the youth to acquire teaching jobs in the school.

On the boosting of economic activities, indigenes and business owners claim that the establishment of the University has led to the creation of several businesses in and around campuses of the university which boost economic activities in the particular buying and selling of goods and services. A related benefit of this has been the creation of employment due to the establishment of businesses. This has created the opportunity for local residents and other community members to acquire jobs that enhance their economic lives. Based on our field observations, we found that these businesses include restaurants, mechanic shops, stationery book shops, provisions, recharge credit cards shops among others. We again find the presence of transport-related activities such as *"pragia", "okada", "Coda" and "taxi"* business as a result of the establishment of the University. The business owners also spoke of renting from landlords to students and staff which supplements their income and, also report that students and staff increase the consumption of goods and services. Further, the data suggests that due to the establishment of the university, the community has earned international recognition and attention which in some cases has led to donations from the donor community. University in staff corroborated this claim as they reported that donor agencies have in the past donated materials of various kinds to both the school and surrounding communities. Again, we found that the University has led to the provision of community services that generally enhance the welfare of indigenes.

Our review of the university news posting for instance found that the Medical Students Association (MSA) as part of its hall week celebration on 23 February 2018 organized a health screening and education exercise in the Ho Township. A similar exercise was carried out by a team of facilitators from the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, School of Allied Health Sciences, UHAS who trained about 50 hospitality staff of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) through a series of capacity building modules in Food Safety and Hygiene. The Department also in 2019 organized a one-day training workshop for food vendors in the local communities which all go to benefit local residents. The Institute of Health Research and Adaklu Health Directorate also occasionally share the results of its adolescent study with stakeholders in the local communities for informed decision making.

Theoretically, the findings of the current study confirm some of the channels through which universities impact their host communities as identified by Valero and Van Reenen (2019) including the production and supply of human capital, innovation, support for democratic values, and demand effects. Our findings show no evidence of collaboration of the University with industry in terms of boosting the innovative capacity of firms' particular firms that are into the production of goods. This based on the data collected from management is explained by two reasons. First, since the university was recently established, it is possible that it is still in its nascent stage and will develop such collaboration over time. An alternative explanation is that since the university specializes in health sciences, its degree of collaboration with industry may be limited.

Factors determining the realisation of the benefits of universities on host communities

The data collected revealed a plethora of factors including national policy frameworks, the presence of a vibrant local economy, the presence of a strategic community engagement plan, and the lack of incentives for faculty staff towards community engagement. On the issue of national policy frameworks, most University staff echoed that the government through national policies can drive the University to prioritize community engagement for positive outcomes. Three University staff interviewed suggest that when central resource allocations for tertiary institutions for example include a community engagement portion, the university is more likely to have a positive impact on its host community. On the presence of a vibrant local economy, respondents averred that even when the University produces human capital, its long-term effect on the local economy will be dependent on how the local economy absorbs the graduates. It is for this reason that most University staff and local residents call for the development and growth of the local communities by national governments. This finding reflects the tenet of the collective impact paradigm as espoused by Kania and Kramer (2011) which sees university-community engagement as the efforts of diverse actors including the government and ancillary bodies. With regards to the presence of a strategic community engagement plan, both university staff and business owners intimate that when a university has a formal and deliberate policy for host community engagement, they can meaningfully drive the development of their host communities. University staff and business owners further argue that when there is a lack of this, community engagement activities are not given the needed attention. In terms of the lack of incentive plans, we found out that universities need to have an incentive plan including assigning greater weight to community engagement by faculty staff in their promotions and advancements.

For brevity, Table 1 summarises some of the direct responses from all categories of respondents including the sample composition:

Category of respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Responses
University staff	5	25	*"The university has on several occasions shared research findings with many stakeholders in the surrounding communities. The results of these studies help them to plan their outreach programs with the communities"*
			"There is a health unit at Adaklu that occasionally conduct research into various social and health issues and publish and circulate findings to many stakeholders in the community"
			"The students sometimes undertake educational programmes that raise the

awareness of the public on most important issues"

"For the university to have an improved benefits on host communities, it must have a strategic plan on how it will engage its publics including the local communities"

"I think that university-community relations should be given priority at the highest level of governance. There is the need for deliberate plan that spell out policy direction. This will ensure that university community relations have the commitment of top level of school management"

"I am of the view that promotions can be tied to faculty initiatives on community engagements. This will motivate them enough to undertake projects that benefit host communities".

Indigenes and other community members	10	50	*"The establishment of the university has enabled a lot of people living around to access education. Due to the proximity to the people, a lot of the local residents consider it being cheap to school here than to school elsewhere"*
			"The establishment of the university has enabled people in the community to set up businesses which empower them economically"
			"The setting up of the university has created a lot of businesses and this gives a lot of employment opportunities"
			"When I walk around the university campuses, I see a lot of businesses including transportation like pragia and taxis which give employment to people"
			"With the establishment of the university, now a lot of local people access many health services including covid-19 testing for free"

			"I have also been a beneficiary of many educational and awareness programmes. The Medical Students Association of the University recently embarked on outreach programmes to many of the communities"
			"Demand for goods and services has also increased due to the students' population. A lot of land owners also acquire income by renting built hostels to students"
Business owners	5	25	*"The university has opened up many business opportunities like printing businesses, food vendors, and hostels for rent"*
			"The presence of students boost local demand for goods and services"
			"I think that when the university comes out with a formal plan that tacitly gives certain concessions to local business owners, its benefits to local communities will be more felt. For example, it can have a policy of giving supplies of certain goods to local businesses"

Source: Field Data, February, 2022

Conclusions
We set out to assess the benefits of the establishment of UHAS on its host community. Based on findings emerging, we conclude that the establishment of UHAS has led to some benefits accruing to the people interviewed in the host communities in the form employment creation, access to education, boosting the local economy, and other community services. Also, we conclude that the potential effect of a University on the host community is not spontaneous but contingent on a variety of factors including institutional level variables and national policy frameworks. These factors should be seen as complementary as their interactions facilitate the positive impact of the University on its host community. Host community as used in this context refers to the university surrounding communities including communities whose land were acquired for purposes of establishing the university.

Recommendations for policy and practice
Based on the findings, we suggest that there should be in place national-level policies that create incentives for universities to engage their host communities for a meaningful impact. This for instance can be in the form of allocating funding for universities to fund for activities that benefit its host communities. Also, governments should ensure that it creates employment opportunities in university

host communities so that the human capital produced by universities in the form of graduates can be tapped at the local level for a better impact of universities on host communities. We infer from our findings that the extent to which a university can impact meaningfully on host communities is partly contingent on the capacity of the local labour market to absorb graduates. Thus, if the labour market is not able to absorb the human capital produced by universities, graduates will migrate to other regions and thus deny the local community any benefit. Implicit in this is that there are other complementary factors including a vibrant local labour market in order to realize the impact of universities on local communities. To improve this, it is better recommended that there should be an alignment of university programs with the needs of the local or regional economy. This in the long run can lead to the absorption of graduates into the local economy so as to tap their human capital for development. Moreover, we recommend that the University should collaborate with local firms to enhance their innovation capacity. This could be done by researching into the needs of local enterprises and embarking on programs that address these needs. Further, the University should create a deliberate institutional policy that clearly outlines a road map for host community engagement and for improving the development of the local economy. This suggestion is in line with the anchor institution paradigm which suggests the creation of special institutional structures for community engagement. We further recommend that the University designs proper incentive structures that promote faculty engagement with the local community. This can be done by attaching greater importance to faculty community engagement and tying it to promotions and advancements. Finally, we recommend greater public education and awareness of community services provided by the universities. Without education, local people may not be aware of the community services they can access from the University.

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