HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: EXTRICATING VALUE-ADDITION WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO STUDENT INTERNSHIP

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Abstract. *The paper discusses higher education-community partnerships, such as students' internships and research that are often intended to promote quality, relevance, skills' enrichment and socio-economic development. The paper assesses the management and value addition of students' internships and higher education-community research partnerships. It critiques; the planning, organization, implementation, monitoring and assessment of students' internship activities. The functionality and levels of participation in higher education-community research is also analysed. Horkheimer (1982)'s Critical Theory was adopted to explain the relationship between higher education institutions (HEIs) and the community in which they reside. It is concluded that the power relations between the community and HEIs are lopsided. It is recommended that HEIs engage the community in a more meaningful and equitable fashion.*

Introduction

Higher Education-Community Partnerships have for long been premised to promote quality and relevance of higher education, through solid skills' development of the present and future generations through students' internship. Further, through higher education-community research, it is hoped that socio-economic development can be achieved and sustained (Adams, Miller-Korth & Brown, 2004; Cantor, 2012; Preece & Biao, 2011). However, literature has shown that their functionality has remained fuzzy, and their value addition has not been documented. Yet, the purpose of higher education-community partnerships is the engagement of HEIs with their local communities with the purpose of strengthening quality, relevance and development (Preece, 2011b). There are numerous partnerships, which manifest in a variety of ways, and are of different value and benefits to the communities and institutions participating in them. These include staff and student exchange programs; exchange of skills and knowledge; and the sharing of facilities (Amuwo & Jenkins, 2001). It is argued that as long as there are campuses located in communities, there must be attention to the impact each has on the other – for good and for bad, constructive and destructive, accidental and intentional, real and imagined (Baum, 2000). Fortunately, the last decade has opened an era of new, more purposeful efforts to create constructive, mutually-beneficial and enduring interactions through formal partnerships between communities and their academic residents (Kasozi, 2006). However, it seems quite urgent and compelling, that the nature of economic, cultural, social and political conditions for both sectors have evolved to a point where, we cannot ignore or deny, the need to learn to work together. Disappointingly however, there has not been much accountability for numerous efforts and initiatives engaged in by both staff and students (Barifaijo et al, 2015)

Concept of Partnership

Partnerships have a long history. They were already in use in medieval times in Europe and in the Middle East in the 15th century (Dugery & Knowles (2003). These partnerships were intended to mutually strengthen each other in a number of activities, which practice was not only anticipated to save time and money; but also constituted a first step toward partnership and unity among the community members. This capacity to join forces in reciprocal services became a distinctive feature, and a long lasting success factor of team spirit (Coispeau, Olivier; Luo, Stephane, 2015). According to Coispeau et al. (2015), a partnership is an arrangement where parties, known as partners, agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests. The partners in

a partnership may be individuals, businesses, interest-based organizations, schools, governments or combinations (Barifaijo & Namara, 2013). Institutions may partner together to increase the likelihood of each, achieving their mission and to amplify their reach (Freeman, 2003). According to Escrigas, Sanchez, Hall & Tandon (2014), a partnership may result in issuing and holding equity, a contract or exist by mutual agreement. They elucidate that partnership agreements can be formed in business, politics, knowledge and among individuals. Partnerships present the parties involved with complex negotiation and special challenges that must be navigated into agreements (Hall, 2010). Attributes like overarching goals, compromise, areas of responsibility, lines of authority and succession, evaluation of success and distribution of outputs and outcomes should be negotiated at the initial stage of developing a partnership (Barifaijo & Namara, 2013). It should be noted that trust and pragmatism are very critical as it cannot be expected that everything can be written in the initial partnership agreement. Trust and clear communication are critical success factors in partnerships (Grégoire & Ying Yee, 2007). Moreover, many a time, members of the community may not be in position to read, understand or even interpret the partnership agreements (Barifaijo & Namara, 2013).

In their analysis of higher education-community partnerships, Plowfield, Wheeler and Raymond (2005), provide a distinction between business partnerships and education partnerships. They explain that whereas the key attributes in business are profit, trust and growth, the key partnership aspects in education are time, tact, talent, quality and trust. Hence, universities are inherently presumed an important potential institutional base for helping community-based development in general, and civically engaged development through activities like research and students' engagement.

Context

Higher education institutions have a vested interest in building strong relationships with their communities. While corporations, businesses, and residents often flee from economically depressed neighbourhoods, higher education institutions usually have to remain. Where foundations that help establish community-based projects and research are unable to continue with ongoing involvement over long periods of time for example, HEIs play an important role. The challenge with universities in Africa in general and Uganda in particular, has been a complexity of how to match global demands for higher education as a commodity for knowledge production whilst preserving indigenous qualities of pedagogy, identity and relevance to regional and local needs. The community service function of HEIs provides the space to address such a challenge in a way that can refocus research and teaching towards addressing local socio-economic needs through numerous initiatives. Yet, the community service mandate of HEIs has for long been treated as peripheral, with emphasis being put on teaching and research (Barifaijo, et al., 2015). Hence, it is difficult to link research conducted jointly by universities and communities to the development of localities – thereby rendering this initiative irrelevant.

Although there is a belief of strong linkage between what students learn in universities and what they do in the world of work, there has been no documented evidence of significant contribution to their communities (Barifaijo et al., 2015). This is especially the case with regard to the humanities and arts as there seems to be no standardized practice of accountability to measure the contribution for the time spent by students on internship in the communities. Even literature does not seem to be clear on the contribution of internship function to the intended beneficiaries other than in the natural and physical sciences' fields. As such, some universities have not been keen on engaging in these partnerships, and if they do, it has basically been left to those individual who are interested rather than pursued as a core value. Although many interns have been engaged in different activities during their internship, therefore, not much has been gained (Freeman, 2003). This has discouraged HEIs from sending students for internships. Organisations in the communities have also become more reluctant to accept interns. Such scenarios have left questions on how to tap the potential of university community partnership in a gainful manner. This study was conducted to attempt to respond to some of these questions.

Methodology

The paper utilized a qualitative approach, and more specifically an interpretive process. This

focused on experience sharing and observations and desk research. Literature search, observation and lived experience helped to corroborate what the literature has already documented. The discussions centred on the current trends in higher education-community partnerships, their functionality, and possibility of reconstructing the function to become more meaningful. HEIs was limited to only degree awarding institutions. Documentary reviews included published research papers as well as policy and partnership documents. The review aimed at identifying the elements of community service and their strategies for achieving their objectives; and how internships are planned, organized, implemented and assessed. Research reports were accessed and the composition of the research teams analysed. Using interpretative and content analysis, data was documented, organized and interpreted.

Theoretical Underpinning

The discussion was guided by Critical Theory advanced by Horkheimer (1982). Horkheimer argues that in order for Critical Theory to achieve its goal of "human emancipation" it has to meet the following three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative. Traditional theory therefore, is oriented only to understanding or explaining society; Critical theory, in contrast, is social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole. A Critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997).

This echoes Marx's in claim "Theses on Feuerbach" that; "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways, the point is to change it." Therefore, the Critical theory draws much inspiration from Marxism as it is also a theory that critiques the immanent tensions of the bourgeois society and its rise to economic and hence political dominance with the help of capitalism and industrial mass production. "The instrument by means of which the bourgeoisie came to power, the liberation of forces, universal freedom, self-determination, in short, the Enlightenment, itself turned against the bourgeoisie once, as a system of domination, it had recourse to suppression (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1997: 93). According to Herbert Marcuse (1964)

capitalism has managed to shape the needs of the consumers, stifle their critical thinking and ultimately turn them into one-dimensional beings. Hence, Critical Theory should be always questioning and self-reflective.

This theory focuses on the way the "haves" and the "have not" and how power relations can equitably transpire in partnerships. In relation to the theory therefore, the author argues that more often than not, researchers from HEIs, rhetorically engage the community who lack awareness, why, what is done is being done; what will happen with the outcome, and how the community will benefit from the research. Most importantly, the sharing part which would be more beneficial to the members of the community that never happens when the research is concluded.

Related Literature

There is a substantial and growing body of literature geared toward colleges and universities involved in service-learning, community-based participatory research and community-campus partnerships (Inman & Schuetze, 2010) although Kone & Sullivan (2000) found a dearth of literature that speaks from a perspective of communities and community organizations that partner with higher educational institutions in these activities. Many of the difficulties that arise in community-higher education relationships pertain to the power differential between community and academic partners. Scholars (e.g. Lall, 2011; Luescher & Mamashela, 2015; Mcllrath, 2014) have found that this power differential is only reinforced by academic partners' greater access to information. However, these authors have argued that this can gloss over community partner experiences and limit both academic and community partners from learning from such perspectives. Most of the literature has been found to fall under general resources for community partners; policies and guidelines; structuring community-higher educational institution engagement; benefits to community; challenges with funding; and conflicts in partnerships. There is, therefore, a missing link between such partnerships and their value addition. This gap forms the object of the present discussion.

Although the community service function of HEIs in Africa has had a long history and some universities have taken initiatives to build

it, it has not been well developed (Mcllrath, 2014). Scholars have documented elements of community service from different perspectives. Examples include Bringle and Hatcher (2007) on service learning; Hall (2010) on community engagement in South Africa; Ntseane (2010) in relation to developing a learning city in Botswana; and efforts to revive the university's community service mission in Tanzania (Mwaikokesya, 2010); and Barifaijo and Namara (2013) power relations in joint ventures in Uganda. The notion of partnership between HEIs and communities is evolving to the realization that community service promotes mutual learning gains (Preece 2011a; 2011b). Consequently, community engagement is seen as a means of contributing to the knowledge society, whereby theoretical knowledge is adapted to specific local contexts such as the development of indigenous knowledge systems in Africa (Oyewole, 2010). Although scholars have extensively written about community engagement, they do not highlight issues that confront internships. Yet, it is internship that links what is taught in the university and the world of work. This linkage is critical because the industries, schools and other work places are part of the community. Thus, there is need to establish the significance of these internships.

The importance of an internship experience cannot be overstated. Today, employers favour prospective employees who have done not only one internship but multiple internships (Bringle and Hatcher (2007). For example, a college education will serve to propel a graduate into a profession by conferring a degree, which demonstrates an academic proficiency in various theoretical and practical aspects of a field. An internship, on the other hand, should make the classroom's abstract theories and learned examples concrete by placing the student in real life situations that the job encompasses (Baum, 2000). Internships present an experience in which higher education meets employment. It should allow students to gain experience in working in an organization while still studying.

In some fields (such as medicine, nursing and education) which require access to hospitals and schools, industry placements are standard and are organized by HEIs (Escrigas, Sanchez, Hall & Tandon, 2014). In other programmes, such as those in the arts, approaches vary across institutions and may or may not include internship. This places the onus of gaining the practical dimension of training largely on the student. Research by Barifaijo et al (2015) found that most undergraduate programmes contain an internship component. Even in those programmes which do not emphasize internship, students may take on internships through their own efforts. The question, however, relates to how these endeavours are adding value to the students, HEIs and communities.

Scholars (e.g. Plowfield, Wheeler & Raymond, 2005) have encouraged HEIs to embrace internship with a justification that, as the global economy becomes more competitive, competition for opportunities is increasingly cutthroat and internship gives those who take it up a competitive advantage. It is important to participate in an internship because such experiences complement the students' learning that take place in lecture rooms (Roldan, Strage, & David, 2004), through hands-on experience. In a similar manner, Plowfield et al. (2005) explain that internships allow students to beef up their portfolio and make valuable industry contacts that can be essential to landing the ideal job upon graduation. In today's competitive job market, it's what you know and how well you can do it, then, who you know that count. Reiterating the importance of internships to HE students, Preece (2011a) explains how networking and gaining new resources cannot be understated. Building a network of *"who you know"* through internships can pay great dividends upon graduation and beyond. Hence, through giving students hands-on experience and a range of contacts in the world of work, internships are a great way to address produce graduates who are suited to the needs of the contemporary labour market.

Related literature mainly focuses on explaining the importance of internship, in terms of future prospects and job placement. Not much has been devoted to the planning, organization and assessment, which the author partly believes leads to failure to realize value addition of these initiatives. Such effort for example would provide information on whether such initiatives added value at all, and what can be done to make things better.

Discussion

The way to go in HEIs today is to develop students' skills through internships.

Surprisingly, although institutions have organized internships and even gone ahead to assess the performance at work stations, Inman & Schuetze (2010) found that the tasks and assessments more often are not linked to the disciplines being studied at HEIs. For example, a student of software engineering, engaged in data entry and awarded 85% marks in that project. This kind of engagement clearly may not add value to the learning of students. More disappointing, some supervisors never make any attempt to step foot where their students or interns are posted (Amuwo & Jenkins, 2001). Yet, in order the goal of internship to be achieved, both the work-based supervisor, the college supervisor, together with the student must set targets and agree on assessment modalities. So then, what benchmarks do we use to assess our students?

Although, such arrangements are intended to give an opportunity to the employer to see an intern in action on a day to day basis and ask such questions for example; did the intern show up for "work" on time today? Was the intern interested in the daily operations? Did the intern demonstrate proficiency in what they brought to the workplace and learn various new tasks easily? Did the intern show initiative to go above and beyond the call of duty? Was the intern a positive force in the workplace? Baldwin & Rudisill (2002) find such questions very useful if they can be readily answered on the performance of the intern in his tasks; and could possibly strengthen the partnership and definitely add value to the intern, the institution and the industry (community).

Unfortunately, many a time, students on internship have been found to provide cheap labour for the companies where they are placed. They have performed more of clerical and messenger roles, at worst, performing domestic errands of the officers in charge, instead of tasks that enhance their careers. Yet, if well utilized, internships worldwide, have the potential of yield superior results. For example, an employer should aim at transforming the youngster for tomorrow's leader. On this point, Baldwin & Rudisill (2002) criticizes scholars who give an impression that internships are solely intended for job openings. Although they quickly defend the argument that if an intern demonstrates skill in all of the job's necessary duties and responsibilities, they stand better chances of being retained. Conversely,

Freeman (2003), challenges the notion of "employment based on merit". He reiterates that 'it's not about what you know; it's about who you know'. Therefore, while it is vital to know how to perform the required tasks for a particular job, having a good set of industry contacts behind you can be just as vital in helping you find and secure a job after you graduate. Clearly then, it's more of creating "contacts" rather than skills' enhancement.

Freeman (2003) cautions institutions and students on how they should work hard to excel and not merely making contacts because without leaving a good image through superior performance, even those who know you may not wish to work with you. Hence, most internships will enable you to work closely and develop professional working relationships with a specific manager and team within the organization, as well as meet a range of people in other departments and outside the company.

Arguably, it is important play one's cards right so as to be in the right place at the right time (Grégoire & Ying Yee, 2007). Additionally, these references and referees will be invaluable when you are looking for a full-time job, so always remember to ask (Habermas 1990). Hence, it is important for one to try to remain on good terms with your internship contacts and touch base with them from time-to-time; they will be more likely to keep you in mind for other positions that crop up in the industry and hook you up with those hard-to-come-by opportunities (Hall, 2010). The graduate job market is incredibly competitive, so having a full résumé that includes actual industry experience is sure to be a valuable asset. Therefore, institutional pressures to provide service-learning placements for students might provide less than well-prepared students for a project.

Challenges in Higher Education Community Partnerships

Historically, in a different societal context, higher education reached out to communities in an expert model of knowledge delivery. That connection with communities has transitioned over the years to a more engaged model in which community and university partners co-create solutions (Nyden, et al., 1997). This occurred at local, national, and global levels. Today and in the future, public universities need to build on their experience of higher

education–community relationships and transition to making engagement more central to the core of the institution. Through such progress, higher education can continue to contribute fully to the advancement of a stronger, wealthier, and a more equitable country.

Globally, participants from the higher-education side of the partnership are believed to bring to partnerships three overlapping agendas: individual, professional, and institutional (Nyden, et al., 1997; Stoecker, 1999). For example, individual faculty or students are expected to bring personal and professional agendas to the table. Many faculty and students engage in community-based research out of political or ideological commitment to empowering communities or to social justice agendas. They have also been driven to partner with communities by intellectual interest, hunger for research data and subjects, pedagogical goals, and the need for placement sites for students in service/experiential learning and internship arrangements (Bailey, DeVinny, Gordon, & Schadewald, 2000; Hill & Dougherty, 2002; Strand, 2000). Whatever their personal motivations, faculty and students' agendas are also shaped by the realities of their profession and their particular disciplines.

Funding Conditions

In many HEIs one of the top most requirements for promotion is a series of publications in peer-reviewed journals or books published by academic presses. In many disciplines, these venues do not support applied work, and indeed often encourage work that treats communities as subjects (Strand, 2000). Similarly, community engagement contributes to good scholarship. Although faculty are encouraged to acquire external funding, usually in the form of research grants, these grants very often support more traditional, academically oriented as opposed to applied types of research. Thus, faculty face very concrete pressure to mould their research, or to avoid certain kinds of research such as community-based research, to fit academic requirements for rewards and advancement within their field (Hill & Dougherty, 2002).

Mistrust by Community

Research (e.g. Benson & Harkavy, 2001) has found that, in many communities, it is almost impossible to overstate the amount of distrust community leaders feel towards academics–in large part because of the persistent experience of having their reality reinterpreted, devalued, ignored, or otherwise disrespected. There has been evidence of a mismatch of incentives, driven by the layers of relationships that characterize and shape each partner's environment (Dugery and Knowles, Eds. (2003). While community partners sign onto joint research projects for concrete resources, additional access to the institution, expanded networks and legitimacy, their higher-education partners very often approach the same projects with both the best of intentions and a heavy baggage of professional and institutional priorities and assumptions that can skew their partnership behaviour. Thus, academics driven by professional needs to publish might use community-provided access to individuals without enough regard for their points of view. The point is not to excuse poor behaviour but to note how the very institutions and wider networks that make higher-education partners attractive to community partners also stoke incentives that can and do undercut the mutuality of the partnership.

Inadequate Capacity

One other undercutting partnerships is the lack of adequate capacity on one or both sides to deliver on commitments and so realize the full potential of the partnership. Many community leaders get frustrated with researchers, and in particular students, who leave when the semester ends or are otherwise hamstrung by the confines of the academic term (Escrigas, Sanchez, Hall, & Tandon, 2014). Interestingly, there has been little attention paid due to other pressures, and how more active management on their part would have improved the results. However useful research may be, it represents an investment in the future and is seldom as pressing as the next item on the agenda. Like the small business owner who knows that some market analysis could enhance her business but is too busy running the business to acquire and use the research, community partners find themselves putting their higher-education-community research partnerships on the periphery of their daily work.

Absorption Capacity

Contributing to the community partners' lack of capacity to absorb what the higher education partner has to offer is the higher education partners' difficulty in communicating and packaging its services. Due to the sheer complexity of universities and even small colleges, many respondents remain frustrated about the organizational impediments undermining access to resources as well as finding the time to learn how to navigate the higher education bureaucracy. Even when incentives are aligned and capacity adequate, the larger institutional contexts within which faculty researchers and community organization staff operate do not always provide support for higher-education-community research partnerships. On the university side, would-be partners often have to fight both their institutions of higher education and their disciplines for space to conduct community-driven research (Nyden & Wiewel, 1992; Strand, 2000).

Just as all politics is local, all partnerships are personal. They begin with, rely on, and are nurtured by, personal contacts. Thus, it is critical that individual incentives mesh so that partnerships are not derailed by incongruous motives between the two parties. When asked what types of attributes they look for in higher education partners, community respondents were quick to request higher education partners who understand that community-based research means community-driven research. Respondents particularly appreciated higher education partners who were willing to share control, data, results, and resources. Positive signs included "the ability to listen," "sensitivity to the organization's objectives," and the commitment to finish projects even when they do not match academic calendars.

Finally, community respondents desire higher education partners who demonstrate awareness of and respect for the assets community partners bring to the partnership, despite any cultural, racial, and class divisions. Respondents pointed to the importance of translating such respect into democratic structures such as shared control, agreed-on procedures, and joint communication with funders and policy makers. One respondent noted how their higher-education-community research partnership did not launch their first project until the parties had spent more than a year getting to know each other and working out governance and communication procedures, including procedures for ensuring equal air time and for counteracting academic tendencies to slip into the expert role.

Shifting the location of meetings from the university to the community shifted the power dynamics and improved trust. When the meetings were held on the university campus, community attendance was reduced (due to time-consuming and expensive parking or lengthy and complex public transit commutes) and community partners were somewhat intimidated. By contrast, holding meetings in the community reduced some of the social inequities by putting the community partner in the Community Research Partnerships host seat, reinforced the message of respect for the community (because academic partners were willing to travel and share community food and space), and saved much time and money on parking.

In short, many community respondents viewed the higher education partners' willingness to listen, meet on community turf, "hang with the staff and clients," honour community assets and expertise, share resources and credit, follow through, and commit to the long haul as central to the workings of the partnership. Such signs of respect are necessary for any healthy and productive relationship, but are even more important for higher-education-community research partnerships because of the deep distrust many community partners bring to the relationship.

Developing trusting and respectful relationships also requires that both parties understand the incentives of the other. Community groups must understand that faculty are often under severe pressures to publish their research in peer-reviewed venues, to secure external funding for research that often is not of an applied nature, and do not typically receive rewards for community service activities. In short, faculty engagement in community-driven research activities often involves sacrifices on the part of the researcher. Similarly, academic researchers need to understand, as many of our respondents noted, that community organizations survive on their ability to obtain grant money and build political support that they are often understaffed and poorly resourced, and that research, particularly of the more academic kind, is almost a luxury.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Internships are crucially important given their ability to develop skills, expand opportunities for employment and the exposure interns acquire from the community. Industries and higher education institutions benefit greatly from such partnerships. However, lack of work description for students on internship, lack of clear targets, lack of performance indicators and assessment criteria are some of the barriers to successful internship. Consequently, internship usually fails to add value to the students.

Higher-education-community partnerships are often forged out of the conflicting agendas of different individuals operating in highly complex and sometimes contradictory organizational settings. The fact that so many partnerships exist and that they seem to be increasing in number is indeed a sign that resolutions can be reached. Hence, the usefulness and potential of higher-education-community research partnerships cannot be overemphasized. There are numerous barriers to realizing the benefits from higher-education-community research partnerships. Issues of trust and respect stemming from faculty, student, and university involvement in the community are ever present and can derail even the most well-intentioned efforts. Indeed, the conflicting agendas and actions of different actors; HEIs and the community can undercut even the most promising partnerships

It is essential that both the researcher and the community leader understand their capacities and limitations. The inability to deliver can sour a relationship and undermine future possibilities for partnering. Large imbalances in abilities between the two partners can also damage relationships and future possibilities by reinforcing pre-existing negative stereotypes of "self-serving academics" or "incompetent communities." The link between HEIs research, teaching and learning to community service was widely described as real. The work of staff in communities provided them an opportunity to generate new learning resources such as research reports and recommendations needed in their teaching. Research reports also inform both practice and further research which benefit both the HEIs and the community.

The relationship between HEIs and the Community is imbalanced. To the extent that the ideal representation within a community is determined by its members, this is not achieved when members are not adequately organized to self-determine leadership, and it often is the responsibility of a third party or the researchers themselves to ensure that there is a leadership structure to provide agency. In such circumstances, the idea of group agency is opaque and concerns of the legitimacy of the representatives who speak for the group magnifies agency risks. It is also more likely that researchers impose their own agenda on unstructured groups that have not identified for themselves their own research agenda priorities. Experience from diverse settings enables communities to gain insights from HEIs and provides HEIs actors with opportunity to incorporate research findings into their teaching

HEIs together with the community should set targets as well as performance indicators to guide internship activities. It is critical that both work based and HEI supervisors meet regularly to review the performance of the intern. The community or industries should be clear on their requirement in order to guide institutions on their future curricula. Power relations should be balanced. There should be trust in a partnership, and the outcome of the venture should be published for all actors to benefit. Leaders in HEIs should endeavour to empower the community to competently and meaningfully participate in partnership ventures as equal partners with the HEIs. Potential partners from both the HEIs and the community should ask themselves if they have the desire, capacity, and support they require to successfully engage in meaningful partnerships, where success is defined as the ability to deliver on commitments. Each partner should strive to understand, as well as possible, the incentives, capacities, and constraints of the other partner.

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