Challenges and Prospects of Academic-Practitioner Knowledge-Sharing: Insights from Uganda Management Institute

AYIORWOTH HARRIET[1*], DAVID ONEN[2]

[1]*Department of Political and Administrative Sciences, School of Management Sciences, Uganda Management Institute, P.O. Box 20131, Kampala, Uganda*

[2]*East African School of Higher Education Studies and Development, College of Education and External Studies, Makerere University, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda*

**Corresponding author: harrietonen2@gmail.com*

Accepted 15th May 2026; Published 22nd May 2026

https://doi.org/10.58653/nche.v13i2.9

Abstract

Academic-practitioner knowledge sharing has become an increasingly critical driver of innovation and institutional effectiveness, especially in higher education environments where applied knowledge is essential to national development. Despite its importance, many institutions continue to struggle with weak linkages between academic knowledge production and practical field experience. This study investigated the challenges and prospects of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI). Guided by a qualitative research design, the study conducted in-depth interviews with 12 academic staff and 14 practitioners and analysed the resulting data thematically. Findings revealed several constraints to effective academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI, including resource constraints, structural and policy bottlenecks, and communication gaps. Nonetheless, the study also identified notable opportunities to strengthen collaboration through institutional capacity building, structural and policy reforms, and communication and relationship enhancement. Overall, the findings suggest that while significant obstacles undermine meaningful knowledge sharing at UMI, substantial potential exists

to enhance collaboration. The study advances existing research on academic-practitioner collaboration and provides context-specific strategies to strengthen engagement.

Keywords: *Academic-practitioner; Knowledge-sharing; Challenges; Prospects; Uganda Management Institute.*

Introduction

Globally, the value of academic-industry knowledge sharing is no longer questionable. Effective collaboration between academics and practitioners not only fosters innovation but also enhances the quality and practical relevance of teaching and research (United Nations University [UNU], 2018). However, despite the recognised importance of knowledge sharing between scholars and practitioners, these two communities are perceived as coming from different epistemic and cultural backgrounds, which undermines collaboration between them. Furthermore, engagement between academics and practitioners remains dismal, especially in resource-constrained, emerging economies, due to funding and structural bottlenecks (Kleiner-Schaefer & Schaefer, 2022; Adegbile et al., 2021). Nonetheless, opportunities to strengthen academic-practitioner collaborations exist through institutional and structural reforms, as well as through improvements in the communicative and relational aspects of engagement (O'Dwyer et al., 2023). In this paper, we use Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (CoP) theory to enhance the reader's understanding of how shared domain, participation in community, and a shared repertoire of resources can break down organisational barriers to foster academic-practitioner knowledge sharing and co-creation.

We chose Uganda Management Institute (UMI), a leading management development institute in Uganda, to provide the study context. Established in 1969 as the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), it has since transitioned into the Uganda Management Institute, a national centre for management training, consultancy, and research. UMI's over 50 years of experience in training and conducting consultancy with practitioners makes it a suitable case for exploring cross-professional knowledge sharing to yield valuable theoretical and practical insights.

Previous studies, for instance, by Barifaijo et al. (2016) on the community engagement functions of selected higher education institutions in Uganda, including UMI, identified several challenges, including the lack of clear community engagement policies and the lack of incentives to motivate staff to collaborate with non-academic stakeholders. Their findings relate to the context of emerging economies. Therefore, our study aimed to extend this research by further exploring the challenges and prospects of academic-practitioner engagement at UMI.

In this study, UMI academic staff comprised full-time associate professors, senior lecturers, and lecturers, all involved in teaching, research, consultancy, and community engagement. We also considered research associates to be academic staff, as they are fully involved in the institute's research. We based our categorisation on the classification of academic staff by the Government of Uganda's Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 262 (UOTIA) (2006, as amended). According to the Act, academic staff include deans of schools, directors of institutes, colleges or other academic bodies; professors; associate professors; senior lecturers; lecturers; assistant lecturers on a full-time basis for teaching and research; university librarians and other library staff; as well as any other member(s) that the institution's council may designate as a member of academic staff. However, we excluded the institute's associate consultants because they are not full-time staff.

Practitioners considered in this study comprised individuals working outside UMI in managerial, administrative, and leadership positions in public, private, and non-governmental organisations, among others. The definition provided a broad category of practitioners for the study. Based on these conceptualisations, we defined academic-practitioner knowledge sharing as the exchange of tacit knowledge in management and other areas of mutual interest between UMI's academic staff and practitioners.

Several studies have examined barriers and opportunities for collaboration (e.g., McCabe et al., 2023; Rossoni et al., 2023). However, most focused on collaborations in the highly industrialised, developed countries with a well-established knowledge sharing culture and infrastructure, ignoring resource-constrained economies in which these engagements occur. Overlooking these differences limits the contextual

understanding of collaborations. In addition, previous collaboration studies primarily reflect academics' viewpoints, downplaying practitioners' perspectives and significant contributions to knowledge production. Such studies undermine the proposition that the knowledge required to address complex societal problems needs a multi-stakeholder approach to knowledge sharing and production (Van de Ven, 2018).

Our study, therefore, fills these gaps by examining the challenges and prospects of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI, drawing on practitioners' views to provide a balanced perspective on the issues under investigation. Two key questions guided the study:

1. What are the challenges of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI?
2. What are the prospects of such knowledge-sharing?

By answering these questions, we do not only aim to produce practical, context-specific evidence on the challenges and prospects of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI, but also to generate theoretical insights on cross-disciplinary knowledge engagements.

Literature Review

Theoretical review

We situated our study within the CoP theory postulated by Lave and Wenger (1991), and refined by Wenger (1998). The CoP theory is a social learning theory that explains how groups of people sharing a domain (a common area of interest), a community (engaging in joint activities), and a practice (a shared repertoire of routines, tools, and understandings) develop and share knowledge through mutual learning, interaction, and problem solving. The CoP theory frames academic-practitioner knowledge sharing as a boundary-spanning interaction between two contrasting epistemic and cultural backgrounds.

In CoP, members negotiate boundaries and meanings through shared domains and practices or processes that connect diverse communities beyond their professional borders (Wenger, 1998). The theory further assumes that participation in a community of practice shapes identity through shared vision or purpose, belonging and practice. The shared expertise and demonstration of competence confer

legitimacy upon a CoP. Drawing on these assumptions, we use the CoP theory to enhance the reader's understanding that, despite the challenges UMI academics and practitioners face in sharing knowledge, opportunities lie in being bound by mutual learning, joint practices, and a shared repertoire of resources, skills, and expertise that foster collaborative problem-solving. By employing the CoP theory, this paper positions academic-practitioner engagement at UMI as a social learning process that can be deliberately designed and sustained to promote innovation and the practical relevance of scientific knowledge.

Challenges of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing

The literature cites myriad challenges that hinder effective academic-practitioner engagements. We categorise these challenges under the following key sub-themes:

Epistemological and cultural differences

Although the underlying assumptions in academic-practitioner collaboration are shared interests, motivation, common goals, and mutual benefit, as the CoP theory holds, this may be ideal rather than real. Academics and practitioners are perceived to come from different cultural and epistemic worlds, characterised by differences in goals, priorities, research orientations, timelines, incentives, and perceptions of knowledge, which affect how they relate to one another, including sharing knowledge (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). For instance, while academics view knowledge as truth or facts established through rigorous scientific methodology, practitioners define knowledge as what works in a particular context and is gained through experience. According to Bartunek and Rynes (2014), cultural and epistemological divides create methodological differences in how problems are defined and addressed, leading to mistrust and a lack of confidence in each other's knowledge. These differences undermine the strength of a cross-disciplinary CoP to co-create and share knowledge

Institutional and structural barriers

Besides cultural and epistemological differences, institutional and structural barriers pose significant challenges to academic-practitioner knowledge sharing. Although the literature reports these challenges

worldwide (e.g., Michel-Schneider, 2021; Rossoni et al., 2023), they are more pronounced in emerging economies (Singh, 2019; Adegbile et al., 2021). Higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Global South often face amplified effects due to chronic funding constraints, limited research infrastructure, and weak policy frameworks. For instance, insufficient funding significantly affects collaborations in the emerging economies of sub-Saharan Africa, including Uganda, where governments spend less than 1 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on collaborative research and development (R&D) (World Bank Group, 2024).

Empirical studies by Eitu et al. (2026), for instance, found that several challenges, such as limited private sector capacity for research uptake and commercialisation due to small firm sizes, the dependence of large firms on foreign technology, the inadequate capacity of most universities to incubate innovations and start spin-offs, and the lack of a well-established science, technology and innovation infrastructure hinder strategic partnerships in Uganda. This finding aligns with the situation in many emerging economies (Adegbile et al., 2021) and highlights significant structural bottlenecks that hinder collaboration in these countries.

Previous studies also cite heavy teaching and other institutional loads as structural challenges that affect collaborations, particularly in emerging economies where insufficient funds, institutional orientation, time constraint, and limited collaboration skills constrain joint activities (O'Dwyer et al., 2023). A heavy teaching load has been shown to affect collaborative activities, such as joint research (Kuchumova et al., 2023), while the lack of clear, functional collaboration frameworks, alongside outdated and fragmented policies, compounds the challenges of strategic partnerships in these economies (Eitu et al., 2026). In these contexts, the gap between academic knowledge production and practitioner application is more pronounced. Such a scenario necessitated a context-specific investigation; hence, the justification for this study.

Prospects of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing

Despite the challenges academics and practitioners face in knowledge sharing, opportunities exist to address these barriers and maximise effective engagement. There are certainly no one-size-fits-all solutions,

but actions largely depend on the nature of the challenge, the capabilities, and the willingness of institutions or organisations to address the barriers. From the literature, we identify several opportunities for enhancing collaboration and categorise them into the following key analytical themes:

Institutional and structural reforms

Higher education institutions are perceived as initiators and drivers of academic-practitioner engagements (Guimon, 2013), suggesting the need for internal reorganisation to address collaboration challenges. Reforms such as reviewing academic staff workload to create time for engagement with practitioners have been found to be crucial for promoting collaboration (Abdullah, 2020; Kuchumova et al., 2023).

Furthermore, addressing policy gaps provides a robust regulatory framework for academic-practitioner collaboration. Kamugasha (2019) advocates a well-formulated, implemented, and monitored policy to coordinate institutional actors in the research and innovation ecosystem, while reviewing existing policies to enhance their relevance in changing circumstances.

In Uganda, for instance, the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) 2009 underwent a review in 2020 to adapt to the dynamic technology landscape (UNCTAD, 2021). Such measures aim at fostering a well-coordinated research and innovation ecosystem for technology transfer. From the CoP theory perspective, institutional and structural reforms transform ad-hoc engagements into legitimate participation in a community. These reforms enable sustained mutual engagement and participation across professional boundaries.

Resource mobilisation and capacity building

Our review of the literature established mobilising resources and building institutional capacity as critical for successful academic-practitioner collaboration. Existing studies suggest several strategies, including mobilising national and institutional funds to develop and improve knowledge interface structures such as research and technology transfer centres, and to provide incentives and rewards for joint research and innovation. For instance, Morrison and Pattinson (2020) provide

evidence of government support through adequate funding and tax incentives for collaborative research and development in the European Union. Such strategies support and promote collaboration. Etomaru et al. (2021) underscore the importance of universities building academic staff capacity through doctoral training to drive the collaboration agenda, which still necessitates adequate institutional funding.

Furthermore, some authors advocate training more entrepreneurial-oriented staff to promote academic entrepreneurship, the new mission of universities being emphasised worldwide (Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education [EDHE], 2023). To attain mutual benefits from engagements, Perkmann et al. (2021) advocate building collaboration skills of practitioners, too. These measures require a supportive, flexible, and top leadership with an entrepreneurial orientation that embraces and fosters collaboration, highlighting the interrelationships among these strategies.

Looking through the CoP theory lens, we argue that building institutional capacity through mobilising sufficient financial and human resources enables active participation of academics and practitioners in joint activities such as collaborative research. Essentially, resource mobilisation and capacity building support the three core elements of the CoP theory – shared domain, community, and shared repertoire of resources.

Relational and communicative strategies

Addressing the relational aspect can help mitigate mistrust and a lack of confidence in each other's knowledge, thereby enhancing knowledge sharing (Perkmann et al., 2021). Measures such as inviting guest lecturers who are practitioners to teach in universities, joint curriculum development, joint publications, joint development of research agendas, and engaging academic staff in specific assignments in industry or other productive sectors (pracademics) have been found to build mutual trust and confidence, thereby strengthening relations between academics and practitioners (O'Dwyer et al., 2023). Relationship building through mutual trust requires adequate time to enable sustained cooperation between academics and practitioners, facilitating boundary-spanning engagements.

Critically, we found that most existing studies on academic-practitioner engagement rely on normative opinions rather than on empirical evidence, highlighting the challenges and prospects of academic-practitioner collaboration. These gaps motivated this research.

Methodology

Research approach, design, and sampling

A qualitative single case study explored the challenges and prospects of knowledge sharing at UMI, given the dearth of research in this area at the institute. The case study methodology provides an in-depth understanding of a complex issue or phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). This exploratory single-case study design was, therefore, employed to provide an in-depth, contextual analysis and understanding of the knowledge sharing challenges and prospects at UMI, rendering it primarily an intrinsic case study.

However, the study's findings may provide insights that inform broader theories, practices, or research, making the case study instrumental to some extent. UMI was selected as the research site due to its over 50 years of intensive engagement with diverse practitioners since its inception as the IPA in 1969. The institute is a renowned national, competency-based education centre for management training, research, and consultancy, specialised in developing practical managerial and administrative competencies. These features made it an analytically critical and relevant case for exploring academic-practitioner knowledge exchange.

Twelve academic staff members from across the four schools of the institute (the School of Management Science, the School of Business and Management, the School of Civil Service, Public Administration, and Governance, and the School of Distance Learning), disciplines, ranks, and sexes were purposively selected to ensure holistic coverage and a variety of responses. They comprised the selected academic staff, who had at least four years of experience engaging with practitioners; thus, they were considered relevant for providing the requisite information on the issues investigated. The selected academic staff included one school dean, two departmental heads, one research associate, and eight

non-administrative academic staff, ensuring diversity. The interviews reached saturation after the 12th academic staff member.

Fourteen practitioners were selected through the snowball method, since the researcher had no prior knowledge of them. A few practitioners whom the researcher knew identified others. The sample comprised three bank managers, four NGO managers, two local government administrators, two public service managers, two policy analysts, and one police administrator. This diversity ensured a variety of responses. The practitioners selected had engaged with UMI in various ways, for instance, through class and training sessions, executive programmes, public policy dialogues, and curriculum review meetings. The snowball chain collapsed after the 14th practitioner.

Data collection

We collected data between November 2021 and February 2022 through semi-structured interviews that explored the individual experiences of UMI academic staff and practitioners regarding knowledge-sharing challenges and prospects. Semi-structured interviews provided greater flexibility than structured ones while still allowing researchers to remain closely aligned with the research questions.

Since we collected data towards the end of the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda, participants could choose between face-to-face and virtual interviews. We took safety measures for the face-to-face interviews, such as wearing face masks to prevent contracting the virus. The interviews, conducted in English, were audio-recorded promptly with the consent of the interviewees and lasted, on average, 45 minutes. We transcribed these interviews later, although the interviewer summarised the discussions in writing during the face-to-face interviews.

To ensure consistency, we asked the interviewees the same questions, using an interview guide aligned with the research questions and study objectives. We pre-tested the guide with five UMI academic staff and four practitioners who were not part of the final interviewees. Room was allowed for novel insights, meanings, and interpretations generated by the study participants' responses to the interview questions. We also used probes and sub-questions to follow up on the interviewees' responses. Such flexibility in semi-structured interviews allows for the

exploration of issues that arise spontaneously from interviewees (Tod, 2006).

Data quality control

We undertook rigorous quality control measures during the study. These included member checking, where we prepared a recap or summary of the interview conversations immediately after the interviews, or where we sent the audio recordings to the interviewees later. In both cases, the interviewees confirmed that the record was accurate. Member checking allowed the interviewees to verify and validate the information provided to the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Continuous researcher reflexivity, through self-awareness of the biases, was used to minimise personal bias in self-reporting (Daniel, 2019). For instance, having prior knowledge of UMI from being a former student there, the researcher reflected on personal assumptions, prejudices, and beliefs that could have influenced the kinds of interview questions, data analysis and interpretation, and reporting. We did not share our views on the challenges and prospects of knowledge sharing at UMI with the interviewees to avoid influencing the interview outcomes.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), reflexivity reveals the researcher's maturity, openness, honesty, and a strong sense of discipline during the study. We ensured transferability through a detailed and rich description of UMI as the research site, academic staff and practitioners as the study participants, and study findings, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or to generalise to theory, which is the key aim of qualitative case studies.

Furthermore, the researcher explained clearly the data collection method (interviewing) in the preceding section to enable the reader to understand how we conducted the research, making it easier to apply similar methods in similar contexts to enhance transferability (Daniel, 2019). Critically, we employed theoretical framing to ensure transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), that is, illustrating how our study findings extend the CoP theory to explain cross-boundary knowledge engagements. We intended these data quality control measures to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study findings.

Data analysis

We transcribed, coded, and analysed the interview data thematically on the challenges and prospects of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI. To enhance the qualitative rigour of the thematic analysis, the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) was employed to develop codes, sub-themes, and central themes that explain the knowledge sharing challenges and prospects at UMI.

One researcher did the coding and was iterative, refining and improving the codes. Involving a single researcher was intended to ensure consistency in the coding approach, minimise lengthy inter-coder discussions, avoid potential disagreements, and maintain confidentiality. The process was inductive, with codes emerging from the data, and involved data familiarisation, assigning initial codes (open coding), and refining the codes to identify, categorise, and integrate patterns for theme development (axial coding) (Gioia et al. 2013). Combining open and axial coding aimed at developing a rich understanding of our data and identifying meaningful patterns. Constant comparisons of data and codes, as well as checking codes against raw data, were done to validate the movement from the raw data to themes. This systematic procedure of coding and theme development ensures transparency in the data analysis process, as is visually illustrated in the succeeding section on findings.

Ethical considerations

The study upheld ethical standards by informing participants of its purpose, procedures, potential benefits and risks, and their right to withdraw at any time. We addressed anonymity by using the pseudonyms "AS" and "Pr" for academic staff and practitioners, respectively, to facilitate participation, while maintaining confidentiality through secure data handling. We accommodated participants' convenience by offering convenient times and places for individual interviews to ensure distributive justice. Since data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, strict health and safety measures, such as wearing masks and using sanitisers, were adhered to (Uganda National Council for Science and Technology [UNCST], 2020).

Findings

This section presents the study's key findings on the challenges and prospects of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI, guided by the following research questions: What are the challenges of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI? What are the prospects of such knowledge-sharing?

Challenges of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI

The study identified several challenges to academic-practitioner knowledge sharing organised around three key themes: Resource constraints; Structural bottlenecks; and Communication gaps. Figure 1 illustrates how we systematically derived these themes in the data structure.

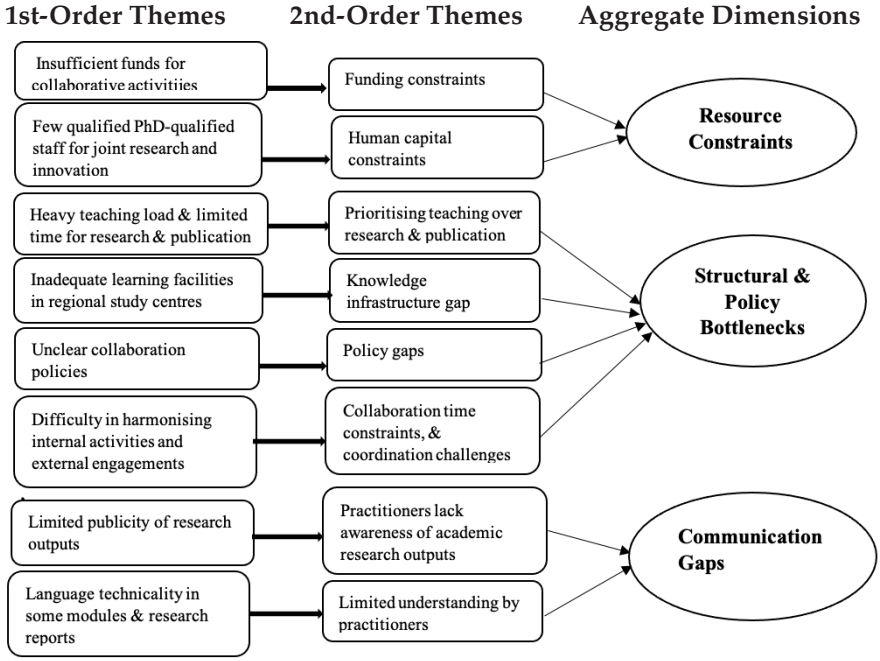

Figure 1: *Data structure of the themes on the knowledge sharing challenges at UMI*

Figure 1 illustrates the progression from first-order concepts to second-order themes and aggregated dimensions. The analysis reveals three major challenge categories: Resource Constraints; Structural and Policy Bottlenecks; and Communication Gaps. Together, these themes demonstrate that challenges to academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI are multidimensional, spanning resource limitations, structural bottlenecks and communication gaps.

Resource constraints

Data analysis revealed resource constraints as a significant challenge to academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI. Insufficient funding from UMI, the government and the private sector limits joint R&D activities. A shortage of PhD-qualified staff to engage in impactful joint research further compounds collaboration challenges. The following remarks further confirm the finding on resource constraints:

> Due to limited funding, academic staff and practitioners cannot undertake comprehensive data collection, analysis, report writing, and publication in reputable journals. Also, limited funds cannot sufficiently reward and incentivise staff to engage productively in research and innovation. So, you see the challenge? (AS 3)

A practitioner also commented: "Currently, UMI lacks the critical mass of highly knowledgeable and skilled academia to undertake scientific research that impacts policies and programmes. I mean, they need more academic staff with PhDs…" (Pr 14).

The comments highlight insufficient funding and a limited number of PhD- qualified academic staff as resource constraints that hinder knowledge sharing at UMI. Inadequate institutional, government, and private-sector financial support creates low incentives and rewards for collaborative knowledge sharing activities, such as joint research and innovation, which require adequate funding.

Meanwhile, an insufficient number of PhD-qualified academic staff limits UMI's research capacity, challenging its ability to execute complex research projects. The remark by Pr 14 underscores the vital role that PhD-holding academic staff play in collaborative or participatory research for impact, suggesting increased PhD training for academic

staff to facilitate the institute's transition to a research-oriented higher education institution.

Structural and policy bottlenecks

The findings also revealed several structural bottlenecks that hinder knowledge sharing between UMI's academic staff and practitioners. Key structural challenges established included a heavy teaching load, which limits academic staff's time for research, innovation, and publication. Some practitioners also complained about time constraints for engaging with UMI. These remarks illustrate the findings: "The teaching load per staff here is quite cumbersome…We are also engaged in other institutional responsibilities…when can one have time to research and publish, or even attend conferences out there" (AS 2). "My work schedule is so tight that I always reach late for my class…Sometimes I miss it altogether" (Pr 1).

The above remarks reveal that time constraints affect both academics and practitioners due to a heavy institutional workload, suggesting that effective engagement requires adequate time for each other. Critically, the study established that a heavy teaching load constrains UMI academic staff from conducting research and publishing, which are vital for staff promotion and institutional profiling. If not strategically addressed, a heavy teaching load at UMI could undermine its repositioning as a research and innovation-led higher education institution.

Other structural challenges this study found included inadequate knowledge infrastructure in UMI's regional study centres, unclear collaboration policies, and difficulty coordinating institutional activities and non-academic engagements, as this remark demonstrates: "Our classroom for project planning and management is too small and very congested for us. You have to squeeze in or miss the class…" (Pr 7). Such a remark reveals that a shortage of knowledge infrastructure, such as small classrooms and libraries, hinders effective learning and knowledge sharing in the upcountry study centres. These challenges, specific to practitioners in the regional study centres, imply an inequality in access to knowledge compared to their Kampala counterparts, a scenario that UMI's top management needs to address urgently.

The study also found that unclear collaboration guidelines and challenges in coordinating internal institutional activities and external engagements at UMI hinder effective knowledge sharing within the institution. One of the participants observed that "[t]here are no clear guidelines on how we should undertake community engagement…We are not sure how to engage the community in a way that can be appropriately rewarded" (AS 5). Another one commented: "As an organisation, we try to align our internal and external engagements, but it is not always easy to coordinate them" (Pr 10). The remarks highlight the mutual challenge posed by the lack of clear collaboration frameworks and by the need to coordinate internal and external operations. Clear guidelines or policies for institutional and organisational collaborations, as well as efficient coordination among actors in the knowledge ecosystem to achieve common goals, are therefore vital. Without these crucial elements, cross-professional collaborations are difficult to achieve.

Communication gaps

The study identified communication gaps as a challenge to academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI. The gaps concern the limited publicity of scientific research outputs, such as publications by UMI academics, policy briefs, and PhD theses, and the use of technical jargon in research reports and in some modules, such as quantitative methods, that practitioners fail to grasp. A practitioner had this to say: "I am a business manager interested in the outcomes of marketing research conducted by reputable institutions like UMI and Makerere University Business School. But I cannot easily understand the language in these reports..." (Pr 3). An academic staff member also commented: "We have a lot of consumable research shelved here… How can we get them out there to potential users?" (AS 8).

The above remarks indicate that research findings from UMI rarely reach practitioners owing to limited publicity, and even when they do, the technical jargon deters practitioners from reading and potentially utilising them. The language barrier reflects Caplan's (1979) "two communities" concept, which pits academia and practitioners against one another. However, the CoP theory provides valuable insights

into how boundary-spanning activities can blur communication gaps through the use of non-sophisticated language (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014).

Prospects of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI

The second research question concerned the prospects for academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI. Our analysis identified several opportunities to foster successful academic-practitioner collaboration and knowledge sharing. These prospects are analysed under three key themes, as illustrated in the data structure in Figure 2 below:

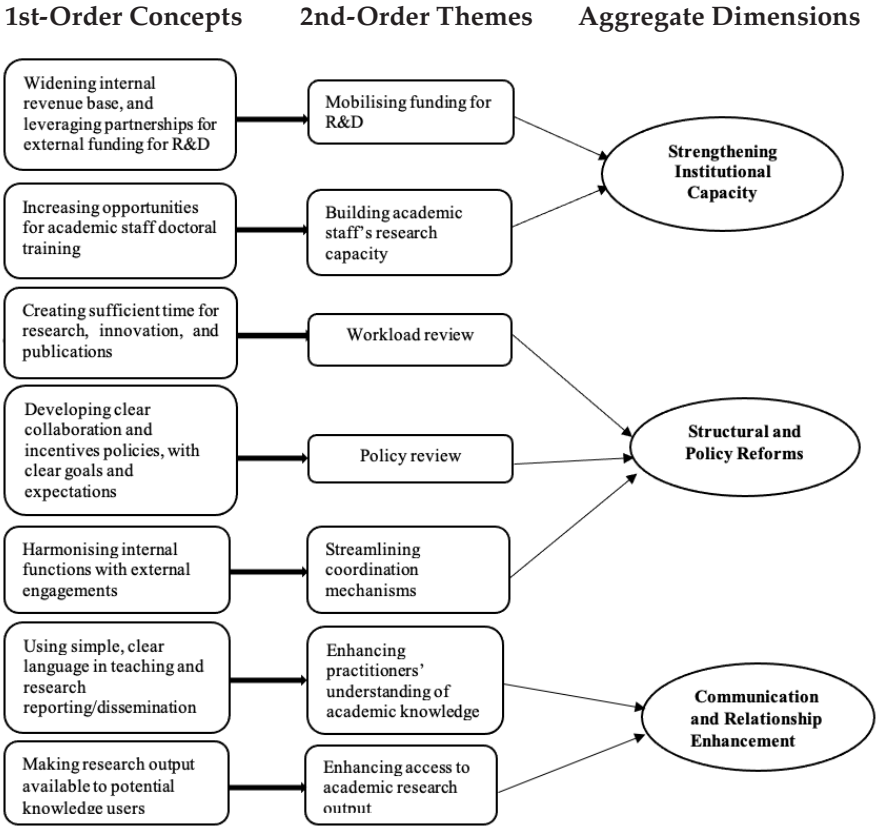

Figure 2: *Data structure the themes on the knowledge sharing prospects at UMI*

Figure 2 shows the logical progression from 1st-order concepts to 2nd-order themes and aggregated dimensions. The coding process generated three key themes, explained below:

Strengthening institutional capacity

We established that strengthening institutional capacity through mobilising funds and building academic staff's research capacity is crucial to promoting knowledge sharing at UMI. The institute needs to mobilise internal funds and seek external support to fund collaborative research and expand knowledge infrastructure at the regional study centres. Remarks from some interviewees demonstrate this finding: "We have to look for consultancy contracts to generate more funding for our research and infrastructure projects… We are lucky to have our top leadership at the helm of all these" (AS 9). "I believe UMI can attract significant research government funding as Makerere University does, if it can engage more in applied management research…" (Pr 12).

The above comments demonstrate the importance of adequate institutional funding to facilitate and sustain collaborations and knowledge sharing, underscoring the vital role of top leadership in resource mobilisation. Securing adequate funds from diverse sources, for instance, from consultancy projects, supports the research function of higher education institutions and facilitates the development of knowledge interface infrastructures. Critically, the remarks emphasise prioritising research areas with high-impact potential to attract government funding and other incentives for collaborative research.

The study further established that building UMI's academic staff's research capacity through doctoral training is vital to strengthening the institute's research and innovation functions, enabling it to collaborate. Many academic staff have reportedly received sponsorship for PhD training to enhance the research skills and competencies needed for advanced research methodologies, as this remark confirms: "A good number of staff are on sponsored PhD programmes in South Africa, and in Europe…" (AS 3). In addition, we established that the institute regularly organises training to impart research knowledge and skills, retooling academics with emerging research methodologies. These findings imply that greater opportunities for effective collaboration and

knowledge exchange depend, partly, on raising a critical mass of PhD-holding academic staff to undertake impactful research. Taken together, sufficient funding and the development of human resource capacity are vital to strengthening UMI's institutional capacity for effective collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Structural and policy reforms

Our analysis revealed notable structural and policy reforms that could increase opportunities for effective knowledge sharing between academics and practitioners at UMI. Reviewing the teaching load was commonly mentioned as a structural reform measure aimed at enabling UMI academic staff members to engage more in research and publications. An academic staff member commented: "The institute is already reviewing the academic staff's workload to enhance research and publication time, although there are still some reallocation challenges" (AS 11). This remark underscores UMI's efforts to allocate more time to research, a move that supports the institute's transition to a research-led institution. Publications are a channel for academics to disseminate their research findings to potential knowledge users, such as policymakers. Therefore, appropriating more time for academics to engage in research and publication could enhance opportunities for collaboration. However, the remark also highlights the challenge of workload review, given the several institutional functions competing for limited time. Nonetheless, the recognised importance of research in higher institutions of learning globally warrants adequate time being allocated to it.

Other structural reforms this study established include developing clear policies to guide and support collaborative research and knowledge sharing, and strengthening coordination between the institute's internal operations and its external knowledge engagements. An interviewee emphasised the importance of the institute having collaboration policies with clear goals and expectations regarding rewards and incentives to motivate academic staff in joint research: "There is need for clear policies to guide our external engagements… At the moment, it is done ad hocly…" (AS 4). Such emphasis underscores the importance of clear policies to guide collaboration and knowledge sharing. Further, a seamless, well-coordinated interaction between internal stakeholders and external

partners was found to be crucial to enabling stronger collaborations and knowledge sharing. The institute's research and innovation centre (IRIC) is instrumental in coordinating the research collaboration agenda, challenges notwithstanding.

Communication and relationship enhancement

Our study underscored the importance of removing communication and relationship barriers between academics and practitioners to foster knowledge sharing. Simplifying the language academics use in teaching, consultancy, and research is vital in motivating practitioners to participate productively in knowledge sharing and co-creation, as this remark confirms: "As a policy analyst, I must say that academics should tone down their sophisticated jargon when disseminating their research evidence; otherwise, who is interested in reading those complicated, lengthy reports?" (Pr 14).

The above kind of remarks highlights not only the challenges of the complex academic communication style as a deterrent to effective knowledge sharing, but also suggests ways to address them to increase the potential for engagement. Explicit explanations and illustrations of research findings capture practitioners' attention, facilitating knowledge transfer and valuable feedback for further research. Effective communication fosters trust and improved relationships between the academic and practitioner communities. Otherwise, poor dissemination of research evidence limits knowledge transfer to potential end users, diminishing trust in scientific knowledge.

Besides simplifying the sophisticated language, the study found that adequate publicity of academic research outputs enhances the opportunity for effectively sharing knowledge with practitioners, as illustrated in these quotes: "We need to publicise more our research findings…Many people are not aware of our journal, policy briefs, and research dissertations" (AS 8). "Where can one get these research reports?" (Pr 5). The remarks underscore the importance of sufficient publicity and awareness in promoting knowledge sharing, particularly of documented knowledge. Using the media and forums, such as conferences, was found to be helpful for publicising scientific research outputs. We established other opportunities for strengthening communication and

mutual relationship and engagements at UMI, such as the use of guest facilitators, joint curriculum development with stakeholders, and public policy dialogues, which promote cooperative knowledge sharing. These strategies enhance academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI, fostering a CoP spirit.

Discussion

In this section, we discuss our study findings, compare them with the existing literature, evaluate their potential practical and policy implications, and identify key insights and takeaways. We based our discussions on our key findings regarding the challenges and prospects of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI. We identified several knowledge sharing challenges at UMI and categorised them under Resource Constraints, Structural Bottlenecks, and Communication Gaps. Regarding resource constraints, we found that inadequate institutional funds constrain UMI from undertaking research and innovation, and, worse still, from collaborating with practitioners. This finding, common with HEIs in under-resourced contexts such as in sub-Saharan Africa (Outamha & Belhcen, 2020), contrasts with those in better-resourced contexts, such as in the Global North, where substantial funding and other incentives support robust collaborations (Morrison & Pattinson, 2020).

However, although the shortage of funds constrains collaborative knowledge sharing activities such as joint R&D at UMI, the institute's historical prioritisation of teaching and consultancy over research and innovation significantly limits adequate fund allocation to the latter. Therefore, while many conventional universities' funding models partly support R&D ecosystems, for instance, Makerere University's Research and Innovations Fund (Mak-RIF) (Makerere University, 2019), UMI's orientation towards teaching and consultancy weakens financial support for sustained knowledge sharing through joint research and innovation activities. More importantly, resource constraints limit boundary-spanning engagement, challenging the use of the CoP theory in explaining academic-practitioner knowledge sharing in under-resourced contexts.

Further, we found that UMI lacks a sufficient number of PhD-qualified academic staff to undertake impactful collaborative research, reflecting the situation in most HEIs in less developed countries. Kasozi (2019) and Etomaru et al. (2021), for instance, report a limited number of doctoral academic staff undertaking high-impact research in many Ugandan universities, highlighting the critical role PhDs play in research and innovation at universities. A plausible explanation for the limited number of doctoral academic staff in UMI's context is the institute's decades-long focus on short courses and programmes that may not necessarily require such a calibre of faculty. Such a scenario at the institute implies limited advanced research skills to frame complex problems that sit at the intersection of theory and practice, thus weakening a robust CoP with practitioners. With inadequate research-proficient staff, joint enterprises such as collaborative R&D lack intellectual leadership, and mutual engagement is hardly sustained. However, with the institute's gradual transition into a reputable research-led higher education institution, consistent with global trends in universities, having a critical mass of PhD-qualified academic staff to engage in impactful, collaborative research is vital (UMI, 2019a).

This study further established several structural and policy bottlenecks as significant obstacles to academic-practitioner engagements at UMI, reflecting findings in many sub-Saharan African countries (Outamha & Belhcen, 2020). Insufficient knowledge infrastructure, such as libraries, classrooms, and computer labs in UMI's regional study centres, the lack of clear collaboration policies, heavy teaching loads, and the challenges of coordinating institutional and external engagements pose considerable structural bottlenecks to academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at the institute. These structural bottlenecks have significant implications for collaboration and knowledge sharing at UMI: First, participants (practitioners) in UMI's regional study centres have insufficient access to the requisite knowledge, creating a learning imbalance with their counterparts in the Kampala study centre. Second, heavy teaching and other institutional loads constrain collaborative activities such as joint research and innovation, which are considered critical for today's HEIs' relevance and ranking (Kumuchova et al., 2026). Third, the lack of clear collaboration policies and coordination

challenges reduces the opportunities for formal, structural engagements, encouraging informal interactions that are relatively less significant in institutional profiling. Crucially, structural bottlenecks impede the effective participation of members in a CoP.

These findings suggest the need for structural and policy reforms to strengthen academia-practitioner collaborations, not only in UMI, but in sub-Saharan Africa generally.

Communication gaps were among the challenges found to hinder knowledge sharing at UMI. Using complicated language in research dissemination and in the teaching of modules such as quantitative methods was found to inhibit effective knowledge sharing between the academic staff and practitioners. We further established that the lack of feedback from policymakers on the relevance and potential utilisation of UMI's scientific research evidence creates a communication gap, and discourages academic staff from sharing their research findings with practitioners. While previous research acknowledges communication gaps between academics and practitioners (Perea & Brady, 2017; Bartunek & Rynes, 2014), it does not demonstrate explicitly how these gaps erode mutual trust and participation in cross-disciplinary communities of practice. Our finding, therefore, addresses this analytical gap by demonstrating that academics' technical language and the lack of practitioner feedback on scientific research evidence adversely affect boundary-spanning engagements. Collaborating within a CoP framework emphasising mutual learning and shared practices can address communication and relationship gaps.

Regarding prospects, this research established several measures to strengthen academic-practitioner collaboration and knowledge sharing at UMI. First, the institute's top leadership has an uphill task to mobilise and allocate sufficient funds to support its collaborative activities, particularly research and innovation. Additionally, stakeholder support through substantial government research and innovation funds and other incentives such as tax reliefs to lower the cost of joint R&D, were found to be crucial in strengthening collaboration and knowledge sharing at UMI. However, these measures require UMI, government and other relevant higher education stakeholders in resource-constrained settings to prioritise scientific research and innovation, which are considered

the core function of HEIs globally. There is substantial evidence of such interventions and their positive impact on collaborations, for example, in the European Union (Morrison & Pattinson, 2020). Despite the contextual contrasts regarding funds and other incentives availability, we argue for a deliberate and concerted financial resource mobilistaion effort and incentives in under-resourced settings to support and strengthen academic-practitioner collaborations for national innovations and socio-economic development.

Our study established that human resource capacity building through doctoral training is vital to facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration at UMI. However, Etomaru et al. (2021) caution against doctoral training in Uganda's HEIs without regulation and supervision by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), as this could compromise the quality of PhDs. We subscribe to this argument and advocate regulatory measures to ensure UMI produces and recruits high-quality PhDs to support collaborations. But we also contend that merely having adequate doctoral-qualified academic staff without substantially incentivising their research and innovation frustrates meaningful collaboration and knowledge sharing, hence weakening CoP to co-create knowledge. Further prospects for collaboration at UMI lie in reviewing the teaching load to enable its academic staff to focus on collaborative research and innovation activities. While we support such a strategy, we acknowledge the daunting task involved in balancing among the increasing and competing faculty roles and responsibilities in today's HEIs.

This research found that strengthening communication and mutual relationships are essential for enhancing academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI. We established that these can be achieved through various strategies, including UMI academic staff using clear, simple, and concise research dissemination language that appeals to knowledge end-users, as Perea and Brady (2017) posit. However, we established that accessibility of the institute's research output to practitioners remains challenging. A lot of UMI's research output, such as graduate theses and policy briefs, are often shelved, denying practitioners the opportunity to access them for potential use. Strengthening scientific research dissemination and practitioner feedback on research findings

are vital aspects of enhancing communication that can significantly boost knowledge exchange between the academics and practitioners. These are critical issues for UMI academic staff if they are to enhance communication and sustain collaboration and knowledge sharing for their mutual benefit. However, according to Kieser and Leiner (2009), academics pride themselves on using technical language to preserve their identity and the methodological rigour that defines scientific knowledge production. Whereas identity preservation supports academic freedom, it undermines the spirit of cooperation and mutual trust that characterises communities of practice.

UMI's stakeholder engagement through joint curriculum development and public policy dialogues adds to the strategies that are considered effective in fostering mutual relationships and trust for valuable collaboration (Perkmann et al., 2021). Closer ties with stakeholders builds stronger communities of practice that facilitate knowledge sharing and co-production.

Regarding structural reforms, we established that strengthening knowledge interface structures such as business incubation centres and technology transfer offices are crucial for fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange. As UMI repositions itself into a management research and innovation-led institute, the importance of sufficient and well developed infrastructure that facilitates knowledge sharing cannot be overlooked. This infrastructure enhances the institutional capacity for effective engagement. Additionally, clear and relevant collaboration policies and other frameworks provide opportunities for greater academic-practitioner engagements, supporting the three core elements of CoP – domain (common interest area), community (joint participation), and a shared repertoire of resources. The literature acknowledges that clear policies and other collaboration frameworks set expectations, define roles, and guide collaboration activities, while reducing potential conflicts among collaborators, for instance, regarding incentives and rewards (Kamugasha, 2019). Therefore, this study's findings suggest that robust, strategic collaboration with practitioners depend, in part, on structural reforms that enhance higher education institutions' capacity to spearhead and manage these engagements. We underscore the pivotal role of institutional leadership in building capacity and mobilising

stakeholder support to strengthen academic-practitioner collaborations for impact.

Overall, our findings on academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at UMI challenge the traditional assumptions of an unbridgeable divide between academics and practitioners, but extends the CoP theory that emphasises knowledge creation in a social context. This paper, therefore, elevates the reader's understanding of academic-practitioner engagements from the theory-practice gap to knowledge co-production through communities of practice. We recognise practitioners' significant role in knowledge creation, highlighting this study's vital contribution to the collaboration literature, which, hitherto, has focused on academics as knowledge monopolists.

Conclusion

Our study investigated the challenges and prospects of academic-practitioner knowledge sharing at the UMI. We identified key challenges such as resource constraints, structural bottlenecks, and communication gaps, that can be addressed by strengthening the institutional capacity, implementing structural and policy reforms, and improving communication to enhance knowledge sharing. The study contributes to the literature on academic-practitioner collaboration by demonstrating how structural, communicative, and relational barriers intersect with resource constraints to hinder academic-practitioner collaborations.

Despite resource-related, structural, and communication challenges, our study identifies opportunities for knowledge sharing through resource mobilisation, structural reforms, and improved communication and relationships. The study further highlights the pivotal role that leadership in HEIs plays in addressing these challenges to foster meaningful collaborations. By incorporating practitioners' perspectives, this research offers a more balanced understanding of knowledge-sharing dynamics in HEIs in emerging economies. The study's major limitation is its use of a single-case design, which undermines statistical generalisation. Therefore, future research should employ multiple case studies of academic-practitioner collaboration to enhance external validity and the robustness of conclusions.

References

Abdullah, N. H., Mustafa, A., Wahab, E., Ahmad, M. K., & Rahim, M. A. (2020). Does academic workload affect research performance? *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research, 9*(2), 5840–5845

Adegbile, A., Sarpong, D., & Cao, D. (2021). Industry-university collaborations in emerging economies: A legitimacy perspective. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, vol. (In-press), p. (In-press).

Bartunek, J.M. & Rynes, S.L. (2014). Academics and practitioners are alike and unlike: The paradoxes of academic-practitioner relationships. *Journal of Management, 40*(5), 1181–1201. Doi: 10.1177/0149206314529160.

Chryssou, C. E. (2020). University-industry interactions in the Sultanate of Oman: Challenges and opportunities. *Ind High Educ, 34*(5), 342–357. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422219896748.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach (5th ed.)*. Los Angeles: Sage.

EDHE (2023). *Universities-industry collaboration underscored as a major prerequisite for success in entrepreneurship*. AIT-SASBI Spring Conference held on 23rd February 2023 in Gauteng, South Africa – edhe.co.za/universities-industry-collaboration-underscored-as-a-major-prerequisite-for-success-in-entrepreneurship.

Eitu, I., Muramuzi, I., & Lwanga, D. (2026). Institutional and systemic determinants of university- industry collaboration for start-up growth in Uganda. *African Journal of Enterpreneurship & Innovation, 1*(5), 65–85.

Etomaru, E., Bakkabulindi, F. E. K., & Balojja, T. D. (2021). *State of doctoral education and training in Uganda*. Research Report. CEPIDE-FINAL-REPORT.pdf.

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigour inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organisational Research Methods*. Sage Publications. Doi:10.1177/1094428112452151.

Guimon, J. (2013). *Promoting university-industry collaboration in developing countries*. Innovation Policy Platform, OECD, and World Bank. Technical Report, Doi: 110.13140/RG.2.1.5176.8488.

Kasozi, A. B. K. (2019). Creation of the next generation of thinkers and innovators: Doctoral training in Ugandan universities. *Makerere Journal of Higher Education, 10*(2), 3–17. Doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/majohe.v10122

Kieser, A., & Leiner, L. (2009). Why the rigour-relevance gap in management research is unbridgeable. *Journal of Management Studies, 46*, 516–533.

Kleiner-Schaefer, T., & Schaefer, K. J. (2022). Barriers to university-university collaboration in an emerging market: Firm-level evidence from Turkey. *The Journal of Technology Transfer, 47*(3). Doi:10.1007/s10961-022-09919-z.

Kuchumova, G., Bilyalov, D., & Jonbekova, D.A. (2023). Faculty engagement in university-industry research: Findings from a developing country. *Studies in Higher Education, 48* (9), 1455–1467. DOI:10.10803075079.2023.2203135.

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Makerere University (2019). *Strides with Makerere University's Research and Innovation Fund (MakRIF).* Rif.mak.ac.ug/strides-with-makerere-university's-research-and-innovations fund-rif-2/

McCabe, A., Osegowitsch, T., & Parker, R. (2021). Knowledge co-production in academic-practitioner research collaboration: An expanded perspective on power. *Management Learning, 52*(5), 604–629. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507620988431.

Michel-Schneider, M. (2021). *Challenges for university-industry collaborations: A stakeholder review*. 12th Business & Management Virtual Conference, 15th September, Prague. Doi:10.20472/BMC.2021.012.007.

Morrison, A., & Pattinson, M. (2020). *University-industry collaboration* Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform on Research and Innovation. Lille: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform.

O'Dwyer, M., Filieri, R., & O'Malley, L. (2023). Establishing successful university-industry collaborations: Barriers and enablers deconstructed. *J Technol Transfer 48*, 900–931. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10961-022-09932-2.

Perea, E., & Brady, M. (2017). Research rigour and the gap between academic journals and business practitioners. *Journal of Management Development, 36*(8), 1052–1062. Doi:10.1108/JMD-12-2016-0332.

Perkmann, M., Salandra, R., Tartari, V., McKelvy, M., & Hughes, A. (2021). Academic engagement: A review of the literature 2011–2019. *Research Policy, 50*(1).

Rossoni, A. L., Gondim de Vasconcellas, E. P., & Rossoni, R. L. (2023). Barriers and facilitators of university-industry collaboration for research, development and innovation: A systematic review. *Management Quarterly Review*. Doi:10.1007/s11301-023-00349-1.

Singh, A. (2019). Challenges in developing university-industry relationships: Quantitative evidence from higher education institutions in the UAE. *Emerald Open Research, 1*(10),1–11.http://doi.org/10.12688/emeraldopenres.12891.

Tod, A. (2006). Interviewing: In: Gerrish, K., & Lacey, K. (eds.), *The research process in nursing*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Uganda Management Institute (2019a). UMI comes of age. *The Golden Jubilee Magazine 2019*. Kampala, Uganda.

Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) (2020). *National guidelines for conduct of research during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic*. Kampala, Uganda: Author.

United Nations University (2018). *Academia and communities: Engaging for change*. Innovation in Local and Global Learning Systems for Sustainability. Learning contributions of the Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development. Tokyo, Japan. UNU-IAS Publication.

Van de Ven, A. H. (2018). Academic-practitioner engaged scholarship. *Information and Organisation, 28*(2018), 37–43. www.elsevier.com/locate/infoandorg.

World Bank Group (2024). *Research and development expenditure (% of GDP)*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). data.wordbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS

Wenger, L. J. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (*6th ed.*). Thousand Oaks.