

Bridging Research and Practice: Enhancing the Social Impact of Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to ensure that research generates measurable societal benefits through effective knowledge transfer and research translation. This study examined the influence of knowledge transfer and research translation on the social impact of higher education institutions. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, involving academic staff, research and innovation administrators, and community engagement officers from public universities in North Central Nigeria, with a sample size of 368. A multi-stage sampling techniques was adopted Two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The instrument was validated by three experts. A 26-item questionnaire was administered to the respondents with the help of five research assistants. A 5-point rating scale was used. The instruments were subjected to face and content validity by three (3) experts. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, and reliability was determined using Pearson Product-moment coefficient and yielded a coefficient of 0.86. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and simple linear regression at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that knowledge transfer ($M = 3.77$) and research translation ($M = 3.74$) influenced the social impact of higher education institutions to a high extent. Regression analysis further showed that knowledge transfer ($\beta = 0.250, p = 0.032$) and research translation ($\beta = 0.184, p = 0.014$) had significant positive influences on institutional social impact. The study concludes that strengthening knowledge-sharing practices and translating research into practical solutions are critical to enhancing the societal relevance and sustainable contributions of higher education institutions. It recommends strengthening university–industry partnerships, institutional research translation frameworks, stakeholder collaboration, and mechanisms for monitoring the societal impact of research.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions, Social Impact, Knowledge Transfer, Research Translation, University–Industry Collaboration.

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have always played a vital role in shaping knowledge, driving innovation, and transforming societies. Traditionally, universities have pursued their missions through teaching, research, and community service, making important contributions to science and the development of skilled people (Pee and Vululleh, 2020; UNESCO, 202; OECD, 2022). But today's world is changing fast. Technology, climate change, public health crises, growing social inequalities, and economic uncertainties are raising the bar for what we expect from universities (Alexander, 2020; Purcell and Lumberras, 2021). Now, more than ever, there is a push for universities to ensure their research does not just stay in academic journals, but actually helps solve real-world problems and support inclusive, sustainable progress. This is where the idea of social impact comes in. Unlike traditional measures of academic success, like how many papers a university publishes or how often they are cited, social impact is about how research and university activities improve things like public policy, business, education, health, the environment, and community well-being. Governments, funding bodies, and international organizations are increasingly asking universities to demonstrate that their research generates tangible and measurable benefits for society through evidence of policy influence,

innovation, community engagement, and broader societal impact (OECD, 2026; Kok *et al.*, 2024). This means working more closely with stakeholders and making sure research priorities are aligned with the biggest needs in communities, both locally and globally. The focus is shifting from producing knowledge mainly for other academics to co-creating knowledge that actively responds to society's challenges.

However, bridging the gap between research and real-world practice is still a major challenge (Wilson and Booth, 2024; El Arab *et al.*, 2025; Joyce and Cartwright, 2020). Even though there's been a huge increase in publications, much of this research is underused. Reasons include limited collaboration between universities and outside partners, weak knowledge-sharing systems, few strong institutional partnerships, and not enough integration of research into policy or practice. These obstacles mean that the full potential of research investments often goes unrealized, missing chances to inform better decision-making, support technological advances, encourage entrepreneurship, and help communities grow sustainably. To overcome these challenges, stronger collaboration is needed between universities, governments, businesses, civil society, and local communities, so research can be put into action effectively (Wilson and Booth, 2024; El Arab *et al.*, 2025; Joyce and Cartwright, 2020). New approaches like building innovation ecosystems, creating knowledge exchange frameworks, supporting entrepreneurial universities, and promoting open science are helping to create tighter links between universities and society. Collaborative research, interdisciplinary partnerships, technology transfer, service learning, community-engaged scholarship, and industry-academia collaborations are all helping make research more useful and relevant (Bridgeford and Amant, 2017; Knestis *et al.*, 2024; Joshi, 2023; Padgate *et al.*, 2026). These methods not only make academic knowledge more applicable but also increase accountability, spark innovation, promote inclusive development, and build public trust in higher education. As a result, universities are expected to be catalysts for regional growth and sustainable innovation, not just isolated places of learning. International priorities reinforce this shift. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), emphasize the importance of collaborative knowledge production, innovation, and cross-sector partnerships in addressing complex societal challenges (United Nations, 2024). UNESCO also calls on higher education to promote inclusive innovation, responsible research, civic engagement, and sustainable development through deep engagement with society (UNESCO, 2023). These global frameworks position universities as key partners in advancing social progress and addressing urgent global issues. While much has been written about university engagement, knowledge transfer, and community partnerships, research often treats these elements separately, and studies from developing countries are still relatively scarce. There is a clear need for comprehensive, real-world studies showing how universities can bridge the gap between research and practice by fostering better stakeholder collaboration, improving knowledge-sharing systems, and building stronger institutional capacity for long-term, impactful engagement (Leal Filho *et al.*, 2025; Awashreh and Almi, 2026; Awashreh, 2025; Kayyali, 2024; Subrahmanyam, 2026). In light of this, the study aims to address that need. It explores practical strategies for connecting research with practice to enhance the social impact of higher education institutions. In particular, it looks at how universities can improve knowledge exchange, build stronger partnerships with outside stakeholders, and ensure research leads to real benefits for society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Evolving Role of Higher Education Institutions in Society

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have undergone significant changes over the past few decades, expanding beyond their traditional roles of teaching and research to become active contributors to social, economic, and sustainable development (Rubens *et al.*, 2017; Ul Hassan *et al.*, 2025; Kasmia and M'hamed, 2023). For a long time, universities were mainly expected to teach, conduct research, and serve their communities. These roles helped expand knowledge, build skilled people, and preserve culture and intellectual heritage (Ma and Guo, 2024; Aneke *et al.*, 2025). But today, global challenges such as rapid technological change, climate change, shifting populations, public health emergencies, and rising inequality have increased expectations for universities (Alexander, 2020; Purcell and Lumbreras, 2021; Salmi, 2020). They are now expected not only to generate knowledge but also to help solve real social problems. This changing role shows a shift from producing knowledge to applying it for social change. Universities are now expected to produce research that can shape public policy, support industry, encourage entrepreneurship, and respond to community needs. A study by Burke *et al.* (2024) and Facer and Enright (2016) observed that this idea is closely linked to the "engaged university," where universities work with government, industry, civil society, and local communities to create knowledge together and achieve useful outcomes. In this sense, universities are no longer seen as isolated academic spaces, but as important partners in regional development, innovation, and evidence-based policymaking (Kempton *et al.*, 2016; Tijssen *et al.*, 2021).

International organizations have also supported this broader view of higher education. UNESCO emphasizes that universities should promote socially relevant research, lifelong learning, innovation, and inclusive partnerships that can address global challenges and support sustainable development (UNESCO, 2023). In a similar way, the OECD highlights the role of universities in developing advanced knowledge, digital skills, and innovation capacity in fast-changing economies (OECD, 2024). Together, these views show the importance of combining teaching, research, and community engagement to increase the public value of higher education. Recent studies also show that the role of higher education goes beyond graduate employability (Jackson, 2020; Bennett, 2019; Tight, 2023). It now includes social justice, community development, knowledge sharing, and regional

economic growth. For example, Webb and Nguyen Thi Ngoc Ha (2025), in a systematic review of 58 empirical studies on college-based higher education, found that contemporary institutions play an important social role by widening participation in higher education, responding to local employment needs through the preparation of work-ready graduates, supporting community development, and advancing social justice. Other studies likewise argue that universities both respond to social change and help drive it by adjusting their teaching, research, and governance practices to meet new societal needs. Even with these developments, many universities still struggle to turn academic knowledge into practical social outcomes (Maxwell, 2014; Levin and Greenwood, 2011). Limited stakeholder involvement, weak knowledge transfer systems, insufficient funding, and institutional barriers often reduce the wider impact of university research (Ruiz-Bernardo *et al.*, 2024; Fussy, 2019; Battaglia *et al.*, 2023; Lemechea *et al.*, 2025). Because of this, scholars increasingly call for stronger collaboration, interdisciplinary research, open science, and community-engaged scholarship to improve research use and strengthen universities' role in sustainable and inclusive development (Arthur *et al.*, 2023; Dorris *et al.*, 2025; Chauke, 2025). As expectations continue to rise, universities will increasingly be judged not only by their academic performance but also by the real social impact they create.

Bridging the Research Practice Gap in Higher Education

The gap between academic research and real-world practice is a persistent challenge in higher education (Doyle, 2018; Tassone *et al.*, 2018; Robson, 2024). Despite universities producing valuable research, much of this knowledge remains unused by policymakers, industries, educators, and communities (Owen-Smith, 2018; Whitmer *et al.*, 2010). This disconnect reduces the societal value of research and limits the returns on investment in higher education. As a result, there is a growing call for research systems that prioritize translating knowledge into action, engaging stakeholders, and supporting evidence-based decision-making (Holmes *et al.*, 2017; Graham *et al.*, 2018; Garavito *et al.*, 2024; Fadlallah *et al.*, 2025). This shift means moving from simply generating knowledge to actively mobilizing it. Knowledge mobilization involves researchers and end users like practitioners and policymakers working together to identify problems, set research agendas, and put findings into practice (Freebairn *et al.*, 2017; Campbell *et al.*, 2017; Farley-Ripple and MacGregor, 2024). Unlike traditional approaches where research is just shared after completion, this collaborative model focuses on co-creation and ongoing dialogue, making research more relevant, useful, and sustainable (Pérez Jolles *et al.*, 2022; Wibeck *et al.*, 20022; Agnello *et al.*, 2025).

However, several barriers remain. Academic reward systems often emphasize publishing over community impact, discouraging researchers from engaging with external partners (Agnello *et al.*, 2025; Bell and Lewis Jr, 2023). Differences in priorities, language, and timelines between academics and practitioners can also hinder collaboration. Limited funding and weak support structures make it even harder to turn research into practical solutions (Franssen *et al.*, 2018; Nguyen and Meek, 2016). To address these issues, higher education institutions are adopting new strategies like knowledge brokering, interdisciplinary projects, community-engaged research, industry partnerships, open science, and digital tools for sharing knowledge (Galdames *et al.*, 2024; Suazo Galdames *et al.*, 2024; Abdelgaffar, 2026). A study by McGonigle *et al.* (2020) and Schmidt *et al.* (2025) revealed that Knowledge brokers help translate complex research into accessible information and support its implementation. Involving stakeholders throughout the research process increases the likelihood that findings will be adopted in practice. Institutional readiness is also crucial. Universities need supportive leadership, strong governance, and incentive structures that encourage cross-disciplinary work and stakeholder engagement (Boone *et al.*, 2020; Mittal and Bansal, 2024). This is especially important in developing countries, where limited resources make research utilization even more challenging. Ultimately, closing the research practice gap requires viewing research as a collaborative process that creates public value (Bansal *et al.*, 2024; Bansal *et al.*, 2025; Chakraborty *et al.*, 2024). However, by building strong partnerships and fostering ongoing dialogue with stakeholders, higher education can boost the relevance and impact of its research, contribute to innovation and policy-making, and support sustainable development (Binagwaho *et al.*, 2022; Trencher *et al.*, 2017; Ul Hassan *et al.*, 2025; Paunescu *et al.*, 2022).

Stakeholder Collaboration and Knowledge Transfer Mechanisms

Stakeholder collaboration and knowledge transfer are now at the heart of universities' missions, marking a shift from simply producing knowledge to working with others for real-world impact (Scholz, 2020; Trencher *et al.*, 2014; Leal Filho *et al.*, 2025). Today's universities are expected to partner with governments, industries, civil society, and local communities, ensuring research is turned into innovation, sound policies, and sustainable solutions. In corroboration of this is the opinion of Gray and Purdy (2018; Waddell, 2017; Krlev, 2023) that addressing complex societal issues requires joining forces; no single institution can do it alone. Knowledge transfer means more than just sharing research findings; it's about a two-way exchange where universities and their partners co-create and apply ideas to solve practical challenges (Pocol *et al.*, 2022; Mischczak and Patel, 2018; Eta *et al.*, 2025). This approach boosts innovation, keeps research relevant, and supports better decision-making everywhere from government to business. Effective knowledge exchange isn't limited to patents or licensing; it thrives through collaborative projects, professional development, community engagement, and informal networks (Boodai and Boodai, 2025; Zamiri, and Esmaeili, 2024; Thakur, 2025; Vetrivel and Arun, 2025).

The success of such collaboration depends on strong institutional support, like industry partnerships, research centers, innovation hubs, and digital platforms, which help build trust and enable joint work (Rossoni *et al.*, 2024; Evans *et al.*, 2023; Subrahmanyam, 2025). Studies show that when universities work closely with external partners, the results include new technologies,

organizational learning, policy changes, workforce growth, and economic development. However, barriers such as fragmented institutions, limited funding, rigid incentive structures, and a lack of coordination can hold back progress (Yamasaki *et al.*, 2026; Masucci *et al.*, 2025; Giles *et al.*, 2021). In conjunction with this, Sarpong *et al.* (2026) and Santos *et al.* (2024) believe that to maximize impact, universities need better governance, investment in knowledge-sharing infrastructure, more interdisciplinary research, and policies that value collaboration and societal engagement. These steps are vital for ensuring higher education makes a meaningful difference in society.

Social Impact of Higher Education Institutions

The social impact of higher education institutions (HEIs) is now recognized as a vital measure of their success, reflecting a shift from focusing only on academic achievements to considering the broader benefits universities bring to society (Păunescu *et al.*, 2022; Edu, 2025). Traditionally, universities were judged by research publications, graduate numbers, and rankings (Johnes, 2018; Kochetkov, 2024; Fauzi *et al.*, 2020). Today, there is a growing emphasis on how universities help solve economic, social, environmental, and cultural challenges, making their positive influence on society a priority. Social impact refers to the real-world improvements sparked by higher education, such as better public policy, innovation, community growth, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and healthcare (Awashreh, 2025; Findler *et al.*, 2019; Chauke, 2025). This perspective recognizes that the knowledge created inside universities should not remain confined to academic circles. Instead, universities are expected to engage with communities, share knowledge, and collaborate with various partners to turn research into practical solutions (Sathorar and Geduld, 2021; Greenhalgh *et al.*, 2016). Universities are now seen as drivers of regional development, public decision-making, technological progress, and sustainable economic growth (Klofsten *et al.*, 2019; Pete *et al.*, 2023). Global policies increasingly call on higher education to address complex challenges through interdisciplinary research and partnerships with governments, industries, and civil society (Ul Hassan *et al.*, 2025; El-Jardali *et al.*, 2018).

Recent research highlights that a university's social impact goes beyond economic gains (Berbegal-Mirabent and Martin-Sanchez, 2026; McMahon, 2021; Schofer *et al.*, 2021; Barnett-Itzhaki *et al.*, 2025). It also involves promoting equity, inclusion, community empowerment, and democratic participation. Through initiatives like community-based research and public engagement, universities can ensure their work addresses genuine social needs (Chowdhury and Alzarrad, 2025; Kelly and Given, 2024; Yamamura and Koth, 2023). For example, studies show that widening access to education and responding to local workforce needs can strengthen a university's social role and advance social justice. To maximize their impact, universities must build strong collaborations with industry, government, nonprofits, and local communities (Yamamura and Koth, 2023; Bikard *et al.*, 2019; Vivona *et al.*, 2023). These partnerships help turn research into real-world outcomes, like new policies, technologies, businesses, and community projects. Effective knowledge transfer and stakeholder engagement are now essential for ensuring that higher education creates meaningful public value (Leal Filho *et al.*, 2025; Adhikari and Shrestha, 2023). Despite this progress, measuring social impact remains challenging. Outcomes often unfold over years and are difficult to capture with traditional academic metrics (Antadze and Westley, 2012; Tahamtan and Bornmann, 2020; Dean, 2026). Scholars advocate for broader evaluation methods that consider factors like policy influence, community well-being, and social innovation.

Statement of the Problem

Universities possess a significant potential and have the ability to produce research that are not only advances knowledge but also delivers real social, economic, and policy benefits. Universities equally can produce research that is beyond academic journals, which can reach decision-makers, industry, or communities where it could make a difference (Haenlein and Jack, 2025). However, in recent times, much university research stays within academic journals and rarely reaches decision-makers, industry, or communities where it could make a difference. Several issues contribute to this disconnect: weak collaboration between universities, industry, and government; poor knowledge-sharing systems; limited involvement of stakeholders; insufficient support for turning research into practical solutions; and ineffective ways to share findings with those who need them (Bruneel I., 2010; Ahmed *et al.*, 2022). As a result, valuable research often fails to inform decisions or solve urgent societal problems. This gap between research and its application limits universities' ability to contribute to sustainable development (Nölting *et al.*, 2022; Vogt and Weber, 2020). While past studies have explored knowledge transfer, community engagement, and research use separately, there's little evidence on how these can work together to boost universities' social impact, especially in developing countries. This highlights the need for research on practical ways to bridge the gap between research and practice through better collaboration, knowledge exchange, and institutional support.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the:

1. Determine the influence of knowledge transfer on the social impact of higher education institutions.
2. Examine the influence of research translation on the social impact of higher education institutions.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does knowledge transfer influence the social impact of higher education institutions?
2. To what extent does research translation influence the social impact of higher education institutions?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

H₀₁: There are no significant differences between the mean responses of academic staff, research and innovation administrators, and community engagement officers on the influence of knowledge transfer on the social impact of higher education institutions.

H₀₂: There are no significant differences between the mean responses of academic staff, research and innovation administrators, and community engagement officers on the influence of research translation on the social impact of higher education institutions.

Research Methodology

The study was carried out in Public Universities in North Central Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), survey research is a quantitative research approach in which data are collected from a sample that represents a larger population, allowing researchers to describe, compare, or explain the characteristics, attitudes, opinions, or behaviours of the entire population based on the findings from the selected sample. Multi-stage sampling techniques were adopted for the study. Purposive sampling technique was first used to select 6 public universities in the study area. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to categorize the respondents into academic staff, research and innovation administrators, and community engagement officers. The 368-sample size was divided into three according to the strata: 30%, 35%, and 35%, resulting in 110 academic staff, 129 research and innovation administrators, and 129 community engagement officers. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Knowledge Transfer, Research Translation, and Social Impact Questionnaire" (KTRSIQ). The questionnaire consists of two parts: Part A and Part B, with twenty-six (26) items, for the mean rating of respondents on Knowledge Transfer, Research Translation, and Social Impact. Five-point rating scales of Very High Extent (5), High Extent (4), Moderate Extent (3), Low Extent (2), Very Low Extent (1) were provided for respondents to make their responses with the cut-off points for the interpretation of the mean of the respondent's opinions were Very High Extent (4.50 – 5.00), High Extent (3.50 – 4.49), Moderate Extent (2.50 – 3.49), Low Extent (1.50 – 2.49) and Very Low Extent (1.00 – 1.49), using decision rule approach, If $p \leq 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_0) is reject, and If $p > 0.05$, fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0). The instrument was validated by one expert in Vocational and Technical Education, one expert in Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Lagos, and one expert in Computer Science from the University of Ibadan. Cronbach's Alpha determines the internal consistency, while Pearson Product-moment coefficient was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, which yielded a coefficient of 0.86. The researchers administered the instrument directly to the respondents with the help of the five research assistants. The data gathered for the study were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation, while Simple Linear Regression was employed to examine the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. When the calculated value is higher than the threshold from the table, it means we reject the null hypothesis. On the other hand, if the calculated value falls below the threshold, we uphold the null hypothesis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 30 was used for the computation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question 1. To what extent does knowledge transfer influence the social impact of higher education institutions?

Table 1: What extent does knowledge transfer influence the social impact of higher education institutions?

S/N	Items	Overall $\bar{X}_A$	Average SD_A	Decision
1	Research findings generated by my institution are effectively disseminated to relevant stakeholders.	4.54	0.83	Very High Extent
2	Academic staff regularly share research knowledge with industry partners.	3.43	0.82	Moderate Extent
3	Knowledge generated through research is applied to address societal challenges.	4.67	0.66	Very High Extent
4	My institution promotes collaboration between researchers and community organizations.	3.53	0.99	High Extent
5	Research outcomes are effectively communicated to policymakers for evidence-based decision-making.	3.58	0.93	High Extent
6	Knowledge-sharing activities have improved community development initiatives.	3.59	0.95	High Extent
7	Industry partnerships facilitate the transfer of university knowledge into practical applications.	3.54	0.82	High Extent

8	Workshops, seminars, and conferences organized by the institution enhance knowledge dissemination.	4.55	0.89	Very High Extent
9	Research collaboration with external stakeholders has increased the societal relevance of university research.	4.65	0.79	Very High Extent
10	Digital platforms effectively support knowledge transfer between the university and society.	3.58	0.90	High Extent
11	Knowledge transfer activities have strengthened innovation within local communities.	3.56	0.99	High Extent
12	Institutional policies adequately support knowledge transfer for societal benefit.	3.60	0.91	High Extent
13	Knowledge transfer initiatives have significantly enhanced the social impact of my institution.	2.90	0.70	Moderate Extent
Grand Mean/SD		3.77	0.86	High Extent

Table 1 shows that knowledge transfer influences the social impact of higher education institutions to a high extent, with a grand mean of 3.77 and a standard deviation of 0.86, indicating a relatively consistent pattern of responses among participants. Respondents rated the application of research to address societal challenges ($M = 4.67$), collaboration with external stakeholders ($M = 4.65$), dissemination of research findings to stakeholders ($M = 4.54$), and the use of workshops, seminars, and conferences for knowledge dissemination ($M = 4.55$) as occurring to a very high extent. They also perceived institutional collaboration with communities, communication of research to policymakers, community development initiatives, industry partnerships, digital platforms, innovation in local communities, and institutional policy support as contributing to social impact to a high extent. However, regular knowledge sharing with industry partners ($M = 3.43$) and the perceived overall enhancement of institutional social impact through knowledge transfer initiatives ($M = 2.90$) were rated at a moderate extent, suggesting that although knowledge transfer practices are generally well established, stronger university–industry engagement and more visible translation of these efforts into measurable social impact remain areas for improvement.

Research Question 2. To what extent does research translation influence the social impact of higher education institutions?

Table 2: What extent does research translation influence the social impact of higher education institutions?

S/N	Items	Overall X_A	Average SD_A	Decision
11	Research findings are translated into practical solutions that benefit society.	4.57	0.85	Very High Extent
12	My institution effectively converts research outcomes into policies and programmes.	3.46	0.84	Moderate Extent
13	Research outputs are frequently adopted by industry and government organizations.	4.66	0.69	Very High Extent
14	Research translation has improved innovation and entrepreneurship within my institution.	3.53	1.00	High Extent
15	Communities benefit from the practical application of research conducted by the institution.	3.58	0.96	High Extent
16	Institutional support enhances the translation of research into societal practice.	3.00	0.90	Moderate Extent
17	Researchers collaborate with external stakeholders to implement research findings.	3.28	0.86	High Extent
18	Research translation contributes to solving local and national development challenges.	4.54	0.92	Very High Extent
19	Research-based innovations developed by the institution are successfully implemented in practice.	4.57	0.73	Very High Extent
20	Research translation has strengthened public confidence in the institution's research activities.	3.50	0.90	High Extent
21	My institution has effective mechanisms for transforming research into community service initiatives.	3.55	0.95	High Extent
22	Research translation has increased the visibility and societal relevance of the institution.	3.60	0.97	High Extent

23	Research translation has significantly enhanced the social impact of higher education institutions.	2.81	0.78	Moderate Extent
Grand Mean/SD		3.74	0.87	High Extent

Table 2 indicates that research translation influences the social impact of higher education institutions to a high extent, as reflected by a grand mean of 3.74 and a standard deviation of 0.87, suggesting fairly consistent responses among the participants. Respondents rated the translation of research into practical societal solutions ($M = 4.57$), the adoption of research outputs by industry and government ($M = 4.66$), the contribution of research translation to addressing development challenges ($M = 4.54$), and the implementation of research-based innovations ($M = 4.57$) as occurring to a very high extent. Similarly, research translation was perceived to contribute to innovation, community benefits, stakeholder collaboration, public confidence, community service, and institutional visibility to a high extent. However, the conversion of research into policies and programmes ($M = 3.46$), institutional support for translating research into practice ($M = 3.00$), and the overall enhancement of social impact through research translation ($M = 2.81$) were rated at a moderate extent, indicating that although research translation is generally effective, greater institutional commitment is needed to strengthen policy uptake and maximize its societal impact.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁: There are no significant differences between the mean responses of academic staff, research and innovation administrators, and community engagement officers on the influence of knowledge transfer on the social impact of higher education institutions.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression of Model Summary of the Mean Responses of Respondents on the influence of knowledge transfer on the social impact of higher education institutions

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.594 ^a	0.639	0.445	0.76433

Table 4: ANOVA of the Mean Responses of Respondents on the influence of knowledge transfer on the social impact of higher education institutions.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.805	1	.756	3.668	.020
Residual	87.651	367	.266		
Total	81.68	368			

Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 5: Coefficients^a of the Mean Responses of Respondents on the influence of knowledge transfer on the social impact of higher education institutions.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.820	.128		15.884	.002
Ethical AI Adoption	.174	.144	.250	1.879	.032

The regression results indicate that knowledge transfer has a significant positive influence on the social impact of higher education institutions. The model produced a correlation coefficient of $R = 0.594$, suggesting a moderate positive relationship between knowledge transfer and social impact. The ANOVA result ($F = 3.668$, $p = 0.020$) shows that the regression model is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Furthermore, the regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.250$, $t = 1.879$, $p = 0.032$) reveals that improvements in knowledge transfer are associated with increased social impact. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which stated that knowledge transfer has no significant influence on the social impact of higher education institutions, is rejected. This finding suggests that strengthening knowledge-sharing practices can meaningfully enhance the societal contributions of higher education institutions.

H₀₂: There are no significant differences between the mean responses of academic staff, research and innovation administrators, and community engagement officers on the influence of research translation on the social impact of higher education institutions.

Table 6: Simple Linear Regression of Model Summary of the Mean Responses of Respondents on the Ethical AI adoption in promoting social responsibility in higher education institutions.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.264 ^a	.068	.084	.988

Table 7: ANOVA of the Mean Responses of Respondents on the Ethical AI adoption in promoting social responsibility in higher education institutions.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	3.196	1	2.288	9.898	.021
Residual	88.697	367	.264		
Total	90.682	368			

Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 8: Coefficients^a of the Mean Responses of Respondents on the Ethical AI adoption in promoting social responsibility in higher education institutions.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.219	.124		9.959	.001
Ethical AI Adoption	.169	.034	.184	3.858	.014

The regression analysis revealed that research translation significantly influences the social impact of higher education institutions. The model showed a positive relationship ($R = 0.264$), while the ANOVA result ($F = 9.898$, $p = 0.021$) confirmed that the regression model was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. In addition, the regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.184$, $t = 3.858$, $p = 0.014$) indicates that increased research translation contributes positively to the social impact of higher education institutions. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, implying that effective translation of research into policies, innovations, and community practices plays a significant role in enhancing the societal contributions of higher education institutions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings revealed that knowledge transfer significantly enhances the social impact of higher education institutions, as reflected in the high grand mean ($M = 3.77$). Respondents particularly acknowledged the application of research to societal challenges ($M = 4.67$) and collaboration with external stakeholders ($M = 4.65$) as key drivers of societal impact. However, the relatively lower rating for knowledge sharing with industry ($M = 3.43$) suggests that stronger university–industry partnerships are still needed to maximize the societal value of research. The regression analysis further confirmed that knowledge transfer significantly predicts social impact ($\beta = 0.250$, $p = 0.032$). This finding is consistent with Henry Etzkowitz and Loet Leydesdorff (2000), who argued that stronger collaboration among universities, industry, and government accelerates innovation and societal development. It also supports the findings of Sibhensana and Maistry, (2023), who reported that effective knowledge exchange enhances universities' contributions to community development and public value.

Similarly, the study found that research translation positively influences the social impact of higher education institutions, with a high grand mean ($M = 3.74$). Respondents highly rated the adoption of research outputs by industry and government ($M = 4.66$) and the translation of research into practical solutions ($M = 4.57$), indicating that research is increasingly addressing societal needs. Nevertheless, the moderate rating for institutional support for research translation ($M = 3.00$) highlights the need for stronger institutional mechanisms to facilitate the uptake of research findings. The regression result ($\beta = 0.184$, $p = 0.014$) further confirms that effective research translation significantly improves the social impact of higher education institutions. This finding aligns with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022), which emphasizes that research creates greater public value when translated into policy and practice. It also agrees with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2023), which advocates strengthening research utilization and innovation ecosystems to address societal challenges and advance sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that knowledge transfer and research translation are significant drivers of the social impact of higher education institutions. The findings demonstrate that effective dissemination of research, stakeholder collaboration, and the translation of research outputs into practical solutions contribute meaningfully to addressing societal challenges and enhancing institutional relevance. Although both factors exerted a significant positive influence on social impact, the moderate ratings for university–industry collaboration, institutional support, and policy uptake indicate opportunities for improvement. The study, therefore, concludes that strengthening knowledge exchange mechanisms, fostering strategic partnerships, and enhancing institutional capacity for research translation will enable higher education institutions to maximize the societal value of their research and make more sustainable contributions to national and community development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings by the researcher, the followings are recommended:

1. Higher education institutions should strengthen knowledge transfer mechanisms by promoting regular collaboration with industry, government, and community stakeholders to enhance the societal relevance of research.
2. University management should establish and support effective research translation frameworks that facilitate the conversion of research findings into policies, innovations, and community development initiatives.
3. Governments and funding agencies should provide greater policy and financial support for research commercialization, knowledge exchange, and stakeholder partnerships to maximize the social impact of higher education research.
4. Higher education institutions should implement monitoring and evaluation systems to regularly assess the societal impact of research activities, ensuring that research outputs are effectively translated into measurable benefits for communities, industry, and public policy.

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