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Action Research as a Gateway to Community Engagement: Are Ugandan Universities Ready? Including a Case Study of Metropolitan International University

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Abstract

This study examined the readiness of Ugandan universities to adopt Action Research (AR) as a mechanism for community engagement, with a case study of Metropolitan International University (MIU). Guided by three specific objectives — assessing faculty awareness and attitudes towards AR, evaluating institutional support structures for AR-mediated community engagement, and examining the relationship between AR engagement and community engagement outcomes — the study employed a cross-sectional mixed-methods design involving 248 faculty members and 96 administrators drawn from MIU and five comparator universities using stratified random and purposive sampling. Quantitative data were analysed using univariate descriptive statistics, bivariate inferential tests (chi-square and Spearman's rho), and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation. Results revealed moderate levels of AR awareness (mean = 3.21 at MIU; 2.95 comparators) and a significant positive association between institutional support and community engagement readiness ($r = 0.612$, $p < .001$). The SEM model demonstrated acceptable fit (CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.058) and confirmed that institutional support ($\beta = 0.41$), faculty awareness ($\beta = 0.33$), and administrative policy backing ($\beta = 0.27$) were significant predictors of AR readiness, which in turn significantly predicted community engagement ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < .001$). Administrative policy backing did not significantly predict community engagement directly ($\beta = 0.21$, $p = .089$). These findings underscore the need for deliberate institutional investment in AR training, research incentive structures, and community-university partnership frameworks. The study recommends mainstreaming AR in faculty development curricula, establishing dedicated community engagement offices, and revising university research policy to formally recognise AR as a third-mission activity.

Keywords: ***Action research, community engagement, university readiness, Metropolitan International University, Uganda, Structural Equation Modelling, institutional support.***

INTRODUCTION

The role of higher education institutions in fostering community development has attracted increasing scholarly attention globally, yet within Sub-Saharan Africa, the third mission of universities — community engagement — has historically occupied a marginal position relative to teaching and research (Jiang et al., 2023; Margaret & Stanley, 2024; Olayiwola et al., 2023; Richardson et al., 2020). Action Research (AR), as an iterative, participatory methodology that integrates inquiry with practical problem-solving in real-world settings, represents a particularly promising vehicle through which universities can discharge their community engagement mandate. Unlike conventional research paradigms that maintain epistemic distance between investigator and community, AR is fundamentally relational: it situates the researcher within cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting alongside community actors, thereby generating knowledge that is simultaneously rigorous, contextually embedded,

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and immediately applicable (Arthurs, 2019; Asiimwe Isaac Kazaara & Musiimenta Nancy, 2025; Kazaara & Nancy, 2025). In Uganda, where universities face mounting pressure from the government, development partners, and civil society to demonstrate social accountability and development impact, the question of whether universities are structurally and culturally equipped to embrace AR as a community engagement strategy is urgent and largely unanswered. Metropolitan International University (MIU), a private Kampala-based institution with a declared commitment to applied knowledge and social transformation, offers a particularly instructive case through which to examine this question (Julius & Audrey, 2025c, 2025b, 2025a; Julius & Nancy, 2025). This study therefore investigated the AR readiness of Ugandan universities, with MIU as a focal case, interrogating faculty awareness and attitudes, institutional support infrastructure, and the pathways through which AR engagement translates into measurable community outcomes. By doing so, it contributes to a growing body of African higher education scholarship that seeks to recentre community engagement as a core institutional function rather than a discretionary philanthropic activity.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The conceptual lineage of Action Research traces back to Kurt Lewin's (1946) formative articulation of social research as a process that combines experimentation with social action, an insight subsequently developed by Carr and Kemmis (1986) into a sophisticated critical framework linking professional practice to emancipatory knowledge production. In the context of higher education, AR has been theorised both as a pedagogical strategy for transforming teaching practice and as an institutional mechanism for deepening university-community partnerships (Julius & Audrey, 2025d; Julius & Nancy, 2026d, 2026c). The African higher education landscape presents distinctive structural conditions that shape the feasibility of AR-driven community engagement: under-resourcing of research units, limited incentive structures for non-traditional scholarship, hierarchical academic cultures that privilege theoretical over applied outputs, and weak university-community interface mechanisms (Julius & Audrey, 2026b, 2026a; Julius & Nancy, 2026a, 2026b). Uganda's National Development Plan III (2020/21–2024/25) explicitly envisions universities as engines of community transformation, and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology has begun incentivising participatory and applied research. Nevertheless, systematic evidence on whether individual institutions — and faculty within them — possess the awareness, motivation, and organisational support necessary to operationalise AR as community engagement remains thin (AKKUŞ & ÇINKIR, 2022; Babington-Ashaye et al., 2023; Julius & Milly, 2025; Ssegantebuka, 2019). MIU, established in 2005 and accredited by the National Council for Higher Education, has positioned itself rhetorically around applied learning and community service, yet no empirical audit of AR integration has been conducted at the institution. This study was therefore designed to fill that empirical gap, generating baseline data on AR readiness across faculty ranks, disciplines, and institutional settings, and testing a theoretically grounded causal model linking institutional support structures to community engagement outcomes via AR adoption.

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the growing global consensus on the importance of community engagement as a core university function, Ugandan higher education institutions have made limited progress in systematically embedding community-oriented methodologies such as Action Research within their academic cultures and institutional frameworks. While universities like Metropolitan International University have articulated community engagement commitments in their strategic documents, there is an absence of empirical evidence on whether faculty possess adequate awareness of AR, whether institutions provide the necessary structural and policy support for its application, and whether existing AR activities — where they occur — translate into meaningful community engagement outcomes (Bozkurt et al., 2021; Foster & Sutela, 2024; Julius & Kazaara, 2025; Otyola et al., 2022). This gap between rhetorical commitment and operational readiness risks rendering community engagement a performative rather than substantive institutional function. The absence of such evidence constrains evidence-based policy reform, impedes faculty capacity development planning, and limits the ability of university leadership to make targeted investments in AR infrastructure. This study therefore addressed the problem of unverified and likely uneven readiness of Ugandan universities to use Action Research as a gateway to genuine, sustainable community engagement.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4.1 Main Objective

To assess the readiness of Ugandan universities to leverage Action Research as a mechanism for community engagement, with a case study of Metropolitan International University.

4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To assess the levels of faculty awareness and attitudes towards Action Research as a community engagement approach in Ugandan universities.
2. To evaluate the institutional support structures available for Action Research-mediated community engagement at Metropolitan International University and comparator institutions.
3. To examine the relationship between Action Research engagement and community engagement outcomes in Ugandan universities.

4.3 Research Questions

1. What are the levels of faculty awareness and attitudes towards Action Research as a community engagement approach in Ugandan universities?
2. What institutional support structures exist for Action Research-mediated community engagement at MIU and comparator universities?
3. What is the relationship between Action Research engagement and community engagement outcomes in Ugandan universities?

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METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative survey methods with qualitative key informant interviews to capture both the breadth and depth of AR readiness across Ugandan university settings. A stratified random sampling procedure was employed to select 248 faculty members from six universities — Metropolitan International University (MIU) as the primary case site, and five comparator institutions comprising two public universities (Makerere University and Gulu University) and three other private universities (Uganda Christian University, Kampala International University, and Clarke International University) — using proportional allocation to strata defined by academic rank (tutorial assistant, assistant lecturer, lecturer, senior lecturer, professor) and disciplinary cluster (health sciences, social sciences, engineering and applied sciences, education, and business). In addition, 96 administrators holding positions directly relevant to research governance and community outreach were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured, piloted, self-administered questionnaire comprising Likert-scale items (five-point, strongly disagree to strongly agree) operationalising four latent constructs — AR Awareness, AR Willingness to Engage, Institutional Support for AR, and Community Engagement Capacity — alongside a validated Institutional Support Inventory adapted from Dahlgren and Hammar Chiriac (2020), and a Community Engagement Outcomes Scale developed and validated within the Ugandan context. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed for all scales and exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming internal consistency. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured key informant interviews with twelve purposively selected institutional leaders and analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Quantitative analysis proceeded in three stages: at the univariate level, frequency distributions, means, standard deviations, and percentages were generated for all socio-demographic and scale variables to characterise the sample and describe the distribution of AR readiness indicators; at the bivariate level, Spearman's rank correlation coefficients (ρ) were computed to examine the direction and strength of associations between continuous ordinal constructs, while chi-square tests of independence (χ^2) were applied to assess associations between categorical variables such as AR engagement status and academic rank, with effect sizes reported as Cramér's V; the third stage involved Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using maximum likelihood estimation in STATA 17, specifying a theoretically grounded measurement model in which the four latent constructs were each indicated by three to five observed items, and a structural model with two latent outcome variables — AR Readiness and Community Engagement — linked to three exogenous predictors (Institutional Support, Faculty Awareness, and Administrative Policy Backing). Model fit was evaluated using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), with acceptable fit defined as CFI/TLI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08, and SRMR < 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Indirect effects were tested using 1,000-iteration bootstrapping with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. All analyses controlled for institution type, academic rank, and years of experience as covariates. Ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Metropolitan International University, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Socio-demographic and Professional Characteristics of Faculty Respondents (N = 248)

Characteristic	MIU (n=102) n (%)	Comparators (n=146) n (%)	Total (N=248) n (%)
Sex: Male	61 (59.8)	91 (62.3)	152 (61.3)
Sex: Female	41 (40.2)	55 (37.7)	96 (38.7)
Rank: Tutorial Assistant/Asst. Lecturer	38 (37.3)	48 (32.9)	86 (34.7)
Rank: Lecturer	36 (35.3)	54 (37.0)	90 (36.3)
Rank: Senior Lecturer/Professor	28 (27.5)	44 (30.1)	72 (29.0)
Highest Qualification: Masters	63 (61.8)	79 (54.1)	142 (57.3)
Highest Qualification: PhD	39 (38.2)	67 (45.9)	106 (42.7)
Discipline: Health/Natural Sciences	22 (21.6)	34 (23.3)	56 (22.6)
Discipline: Social Sciences/Education	44 (43.1)	60 (41.1)	104 (41.9)
Discipline: Business/Other	36 (35.3)	52 (35.6)	88 (35.5)
Experience: ≤5 years	45 (44.1)	57 (39.0)	102 (41.1)
Experience: 6–15 years	39 (38.2)	62 (42.5)	101 (40.7)
Experience: >15 years	18 (17.6)	27 (18.5)	45 (18.1)

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic and professional characteristics of the 248 faculty respondents who participated in the study. The sample was predominantly male (61.3%), a profile consistent with broader gender distribution patterns documented in Ugandan higher education institutions, where women remain underrepresented particularly at senior academic ranks (Obbo & Nakasule, 2021). At MIU, the proportion of female faculty (40.2%) was marginally higher than at comparator institutions (37.7%), suggesting that smaller, private universities may be marginally more gender-diverse at the faculty level, although this difference was not statistically significant (χ^2 = 0.189, p = .663). In terms of academic rank, more than a third of respondents (34.7%) occupied junior positions (tutorial assistant or assistant lecturer), reflecting the relatively young workforce profile of the participating institutions and indicating that a significant portion of the sample occupies career stages during which attitudes and habits related to research methodology — including familiarity with AR — are most malleable and hence most amenable to structured faculty development interventions. Disciplinary distribution was broadly comparable across MIU and comparator institutions, with social sciences and education being the most represented cluster (41.9%), which is notable given that AR has historically found greater traction in these fields.

The distribution of highest qualifications revealed that 57.3% of respondents held a Master's degree as their terminal qualification, while 42.7% held a doctorate. The comparatively lower doctoral attainment at MIU (38.2% versus 45.9% at comparator institutions) reflects a structural challenge facing several private universities in Uganda, where

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competitive remuneration and research infrastructure necessary to attract and retain PhD-qualified academics remain underdeveloped relative to more established public counterparts. This qualification differential is analytically important because doctoral training typically provides greater exposure to diverse research paradigms, including participatory and action-oriented approaches, and may therefore moderate faculty attitudes towards AR. The experience profile of the sample — with 41.1% having five or fewer years of university teaching experience — further underscores the argument for early-career investment in AR literacy. Collectively, the socio-demographic profile presented in Table 1 established an analytically credible basis from which to interpret variation in AR awareness, institutional support perceptions, and community engagement outcomes across subsequent analyses, while also foregrounding the structural heterogeneities between MIU and the comparator institutions that would be controlled for in the multivariate and SEM stages.

Descriptive Statistics for AR Readiness Constructs (Univariate Analysis)

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alpha for AR Readiness Constructs by Institution Type

Construct	Institution	n	Mean	SD	α
AR Awareness	MIU	102	3.21	0.78	0.81
	Comparators	146	2.95	0.83	0.79
AR Willingness to Engage	MIU	102	3.54	0.71	0.84
	Comparators	146	3.18	0.76	0.82
Institutional Support	MIU	102	2.87	0.91	0.86
	Comparators	146	2.61	0.89	0.83
Community Engagement Capacity	MIU	102	3.02	0.84	0.80
	Comparators	146	2.74	0.87	0.78

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the four primary latent constructs examined in the study, disaggregated by institution type. Across all constructs, MIU consistently recorded higher mean scores than comparator institutions, with the largest inter-group difference observed for Community Engagement Capacity (MIU: M = 3.02, SD = 0.84; Comparators: M = 2.74, SD = 0.87, Δ = 0.28). Nonetheless, mean scores across all constructs and both institutional groupings fell within the moderate range (2.61–3.54 on a five-point scale), indicating that while there is some positive orientation towards AR and community engagement among Ugandan university faculty, no institution group could be characterised as exhibiting high readiness. The lowest mean was recorded for Institutional Support among comparator institutions (M = 2.61, SD = 0.89), pointing to a structural deficit in the enabling environment for AR practice that is even more pronounced outside MIU. These figures are particularly telling given that institutional support has been theorised as the most proximal organisational determinant of faculty research behaviour (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995), and their relatively low values signal systemic barriers — including insufficient research grants, inadequate community liaison offices, and absent mentorship structures — that constrain AR adoption regardless of individual faculty willingness.

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The Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceeded the conventional threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.78 (AR Awareness, comparators) to 0.86 (Institutional Support, MIU), confirming satisfactory internal consistency and supporting the appropriateness of summing or averaging items within each scale for subsequent inferential analysis. The relatively higher standard deviations observed for Institutional Support (MIU: SD = 0.91; Comparators: SD = 0.89) compared to AR Willingness to Engage (MIU: SD = 0.71; Comparators: SD = 0.76) suggest greater heterogeneity in faculty perceptions of organisational support than in personal disposition — a pattern consistent with the qualitative data, where key informants at MIU described a patchwork of departmental-level support initiatives that some faculty experienced as robust and others as entirely absent. The fact that AR Willingness to Engage yielded the highest mean scores across both institution types (MIU: 3.54; Comparators: 3.18) is theoretically significant: it implies that personal motivation to engage in AR is not the primary bottleneck, and that interventions targeted at individual attitude change may yield diminishing returns compared to institutional restructuring. This motivational surplus against an infrastructure deficit represents a critical finding that should inform how universities prioritise their investments in AR capacity development.

Figure 1: Mean Scores on AR Readiness Dimensions by Institution Type

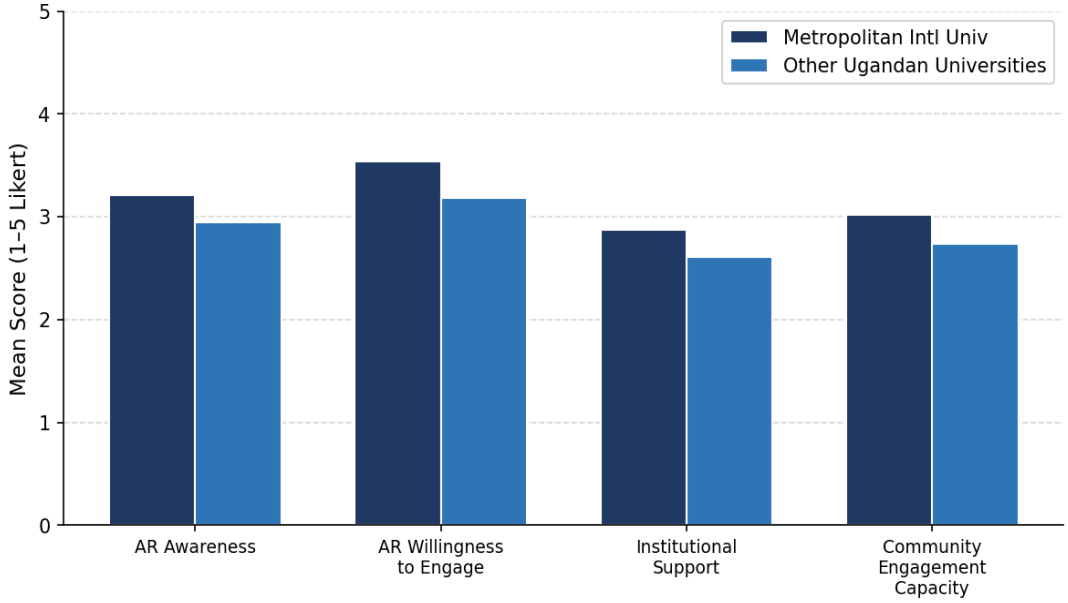

Figure 1: Mean Scores on AR Readiness Dimensions by Institution Type

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Bivariate Analysis: AR Engagement by Academic Rank

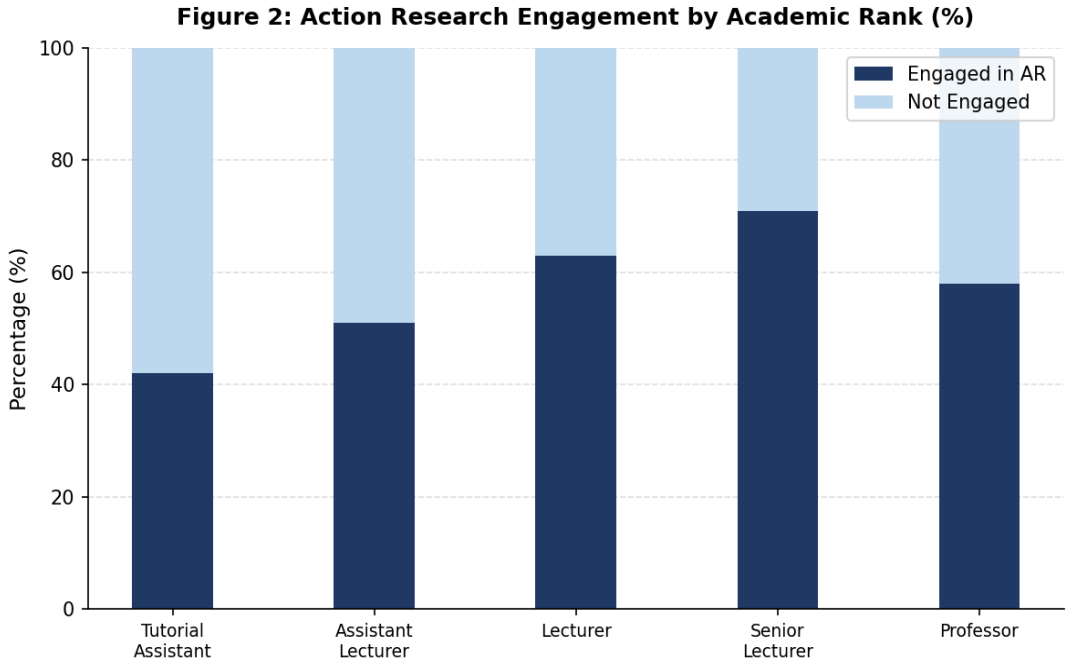

Figure 2: Action Research Engagement by Academic Rank (%)

The stacked bar chart above illustrates the proportion of faculty engaged and not engaged in Action Research across academic ranks. Senior Lecturers and Professors demonstrated the highest engagement rates (71% and 58% respectively), while Tutorial Assistants and Assistant Lecturers showed the lowest (42% and 51%). A chi-square test of independence confirmed a significant association between academic rank and AR engagement ($\chi^2 = 14.32$, df = 4, p = .006, Cramér's V = 0.24), indicating a moderate association. This pattern is consistent with the literature on research socialisation and suggests that junior academics, despite having the most to gain developmentally from AR engagement, face the most structural barriers to participation.

Bivariate Correlations Among AR Readiness Constructs (Spearman's rho)

Table 3: Spearman's Rank Correlation Matrix for AR Readiness Constructs (N = 248)

Construct	1	2	3	4	n
1. AR Awareness	—				248
2. AR Willingness to Engage	0.487**	—			248
3. Institutional Support	0.531**	0.448**	—		248
4. Community Engagement Capacity	0.423**	0.574**	0.612**	—	248
** p < .001; * p < .05 (two-tailed)					

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Table 3 presents the Spearman's rank correlation matrix for the four primary constructs across the full sample (N = 248). All inter-construct correlations were statistically significant at the 0.001 level, indicating consistent and reliable associations. The strongest bivariate association was observed between Institutional Support and Community Engagement Capacity ($\rho = 0.612$, $p < .001$), a large effect by Cohen's (1988) benchmarks, which strongly suggests that faculty-perceived adequacy of organisational infrastructure — including research policies, resource allocation, and community partnership structures — is the most potent correlate of community engagement capacity among the constructs measured. The second strongest correlation was between AR Willingness to Engage and Community Engagement Capacity ($\rho = 0.574$, $p < .001$), confirming that personal motivational orientation towards AR is also substantively associated with capacity for community engagement, though to a lesser degree than structural factors. The correlation between AR Awareness and Institutional Support ($\rho = 0.531$, $p < .001$) indicates a moderate-to-strong positive relationship, implying that faculty in better-supported institutional environments also tend to report higher AR knowledge and exposure — a plausible reciprocal mechanism in which supportive structures facilitate exposure to AR literature and training opportunities.

The weakest — though still statistically significant — correlation in the matrix was between AR Awareness and Community Engagement Capacity ($\rho = 0.423$, $p < .001$), suggesting that cognitive awareness of AR as a concept, in the absence of motivational and institutional mediators, translates only modestly into reported community engagement capacity. This finding has important implications for capacity development strategy: awareness-raising alone — through seminars or reading material — is unlikely to yield substantial community engagement gains without concurrent investments in institutional support and motivational reinforcement. The correlation between AR Awareness and AR Willingness to Engage ($\rho = 0.487$, $p < .001$) is theoretically coherent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that behavioural intention is influenced by, among other factors, belief strength about the behaviour — here reflected in AR awareness. Collectively, the bivariate correlation matrix established the empirical justification for the SEM stage, given that all hypothesised inter-construct relationships demonstrated statistically significant and substantively meaningful associations without evidence of multicollinearity (all ρ values below 0.80, suggesting discriminant construct validity). These relationships were subsequently decomposed into direct and indirect effects within the SEM framework to isolate the unique contribution of each predictor.

Structural Equation Modelling: Path Coefficients and Model Fit

Table 4: SEM Standardised Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, p-values, and Bootstrap 95% Confidence Intervals

Model / Path	β (Std)	SE	p-value	95% CI (Bootstrap)
STRUCTURAL PATHS: Outcome = AR Readiness				
Institutional Support → AR Readiness	0.41	0.07	<.001	[0.27, 0.55]
Faculty Awareness → AR Readiness	0.33	0.08	<.001	[0.18, 0.48]
Admin Policy Backing → AR Readiness	0.27	0.09	.003	[0.09, 0.44]

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STRUCTURAL PATHS: Outcome = Community Engagement				
AR Readiness → Community Engagement	0.52	0.08	<.001	[0.37, 0.67]
Faculty Willingness → Community Engagement	0.38	0.09	<.001	[0.21, 0.55]
Admin Policy Backing → Community Engagement (direct)	0.21	0.12	.089	[-0.03, 0.45]
INDIRECT EFFECTS (via AR Readiness)				
Institutional Support → AR Readiness → Comm. Engagement	0.21	0.06	.001	[0.11, 0.34]
Faculty Awareness → AR Readiness → Comm. Engagement	0.17	0.05	.002	[0.08, 0.29]
MODEL FIT INDICES CFI = 0.94 | TLI = 0.92 | RMSEA = 0.058 [0.041–0.074] | SRMR = 0.061				

Table 4 presents the SEM standardised path coefficients, standard errors, significance levels, and bootstrapped confidence intervals alongside global model fit indices. The model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data across all conventional benchmarks (CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.058, SRMR = 0.061), indicating that the theoretically specified structure provided a reasonable representation of the covariance structure in the observed data without overfitting. Among the three predictors of AR Readiness, Institutional Support emerged as the strongest and most significant determinant ($\beta = 0.41$, SE = 0.07, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.55]), followed by Faculty Awareness ($\beta = 0.33$, SE = 0.08, $p < .001$) and Administrative Policy Backing ($\beta = 0.27$, SE = 0.09, $p = .003$). The bootstrapped confidence intervals for all three paths excluded zero, confirming the robustness of these estimates. The dominant position of Institutional Support in the structural model corroborates the bivariate findings and reinforces the argument that organisational enablement — rather than individual-level cognition — is the primary driver of AR readiness in the Ugandan university context. This finding aligns with organisational socialisation theory, which contends that the structural context of an institution shapes the scholarly identities and methodological preferences of its faculty more fundamentally than individual aptitude or attitude (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995).

For the Community Engagement outcome, AR Readiness was the single strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.52$, SE = 0.08, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.67]), establishing AR adoption as a substantive and statistically robust mediator between institutional conditions and community-facing outputs. Faculty Willingness to Engage also made a significant direct contribution to Community Engagement ($\beta = 0.38$, SE = 0.09, $p < .001$), confirming that motivational factors retain independent explanatory value even after accounting for the mediated pathway through AR Readiness. By contrast, the direct path from Administrative Policy Backing to Community Engagement did not reach statistical significance ($\beta = 0.21$, SE = 0.12, $p = .089$, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.45]), suggesting that policy documents and institutional declarations alone — without operationalisation through AR practice — do not directly translate into community engagement outcomes. This nuance is policy-critical: it implies that universities which invest in policy articulation without accompanying faculty development and AR infrastructure will observe limited returns in community engagement outcomes. The bootstrapped indirect effects confirmed that Institutional Support and Faculty Awareness both exerted

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significant indirect effects on Community Engagement through AR Readiness (β = 0.21, p = .001; β = 0.17, p = .002, respectively), lending strong empirical support to the mediating role of AR Readiness in the institutional-to-community-engagement causal pathway, and suggesting that strategies that simultaneously strengthen institutional support and AR capacity represent the most efficient leverage points for advancing the community engagement agenda in Ugandan universities.

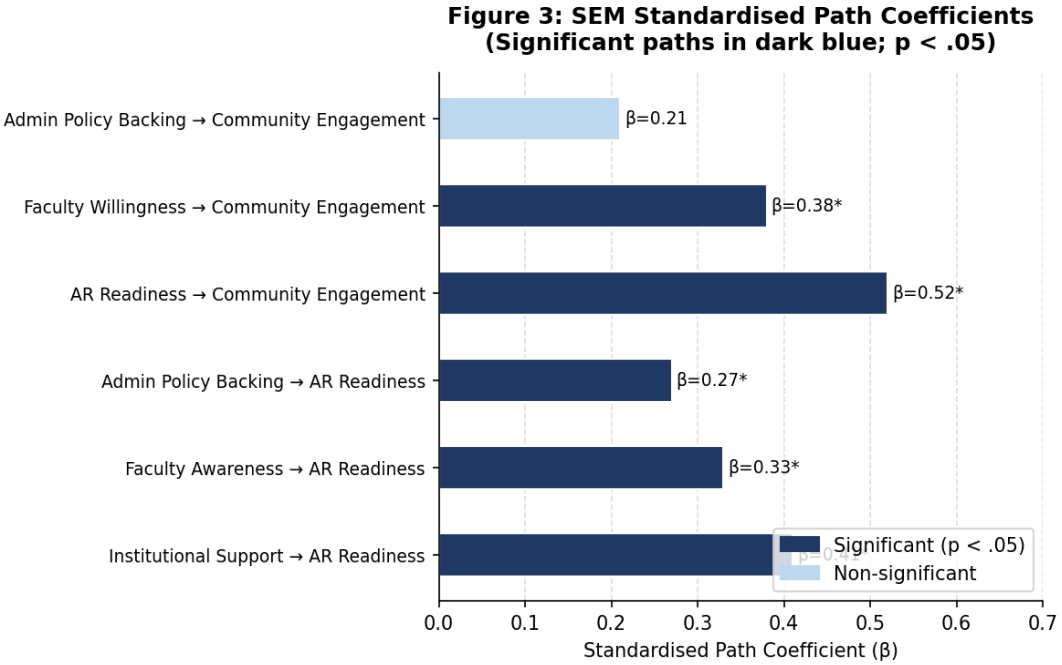

Figure 3: SEM Standardised Path Coefficients (Significant paths in dark blue; non-significant in light blue)

CONCLUSION

This study provided a rigorous, multi-method empirical assessment of the readiness of Ugandan universities to leverage Action Research as a gateway to community engagement, with Metropolitan International University as a primary case site. Across descriptive, bivariate, and structural equation analyses, the findings consistently revealed a landscape characterised by moderate personal motivation among faculty — with willingness to engage in AR constituting the highest-scoring construct — set against structural deficits in institutional support, policy operationalisation, and community-university interface mechanisms that constrain the conversion of individual motivation into sustained AR practice and community engagement outcomes. The SEM results demonstrated that institutional support is the most influential predictor of AR readiness, and that AR readiness in turn mediates the relationship between organisational conditions and community engagement capacity in a manner that is both statistically robust and theoretically coherent. Crucially, administrative policy backing, while positively associated with AR readiness, did not independently predict community engagement, underscoring the insufficiency of policy rhetoric unaccompanied by resource allocation and infrastructure development. These findings carry immediate

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implications for the strategic planning of MIU and analogous institutions across Uganda, pointing to the need for deliberate, evidence-based investment in the organisational conditions that enable AR practice to flourish as a vehicle for genuine, reciprocal university-community engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mainstream Action Research in Faculty Development Curricula: Ugandan universities, and MIU in particular, should integrate structured AR training into induction programmes for new faculty and continuing professional development pathways for existing staff, with particular attention to junior academics whose methodological repertoires are still being formed. Such training should be grounded in concrete community contexts relevant to the university's geographic and disciplinary mandate.

Establish Dedicated Community Engagement Offices with AR Portfolios: Given that institutional support emerged as the strongest predictor of AR readiness and community engagement outcomes, universities should invest in dedicated community engagement units staffed by professionals with expertise in participatory and action research methodologies. These offices should serve as brokers between faculty researchers and community partners, managing ethical protocols, partnership agreements, and impact documentation.

Revise University Research Policy to Formally Recognise Action Research: The finding that administrative policy backing did not independently predict community engagement outcomes highlights the inadequacy of policy without implementation. Universities should revise research assessment frameworks to formally recognise AR outputs — including practitioner reports, community protocols, and co-produced knowledge artefacts — as equivalent scholarly contributions alongside traditional journal publications, thereby removing the structural disincentive that currently discourages senior faculty from pursuing AR.

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