



A Comparative Study of Alumni Interaction with Their Alma Mater in Public and Private Universities in Malawi

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Abstract: *This study explored how alumni from public and private universities in Malawi interact with and contribute to their former institutions, focusing on areas such as advertising, funding, donations, and scholarships. Guided by Social Exchange Theory, the research sought to understand whether alumni engagement differs significantly between these two types of institutions. Using a descriptive-comparative design, data were gathered from 175 alumni through structured questionnaires and interviews with alumni association leaders. The findings showed that, overall, alumni engagement is quite low in both public and private universities, especially in areas like consistent donations, scholarship funding, and involvement in advertising or student recruitment. However, a key difference emerged in communication: alumni from private universities reported significantly more communication with their alma maters than their public university counterparts ($p = 0.026$). This may be linked to differences in funding models and alumni outreach, as private universities often rely more heavily on alumni support. Interestingly, other areas such as loyalty, professional interaction, and participation in alumni associations did not show significant differences. The study concludes that while Malawian universities do receive occasional contributions from their alumni, especially in the form of basic resources or infrastructure support, there is still a major gap in sustained and strategic alumni involvement. To address this, both public and private universities are encouraged to build stronger alumni engagement systems, clearly communicate giving opportunities, and fostering a lasting sense of connection and value among their graduates.*

Keywords: *Alumni Engagement, Higher Education, Public and Private Universities, Social Exchange Theory, University Development.*

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1. Introduction

Alumni interactions in both public and private universities significantly influence institutional growth, development, and sustainability. In public universities like Arizona State University and the University of Nairobi, alumni associations were established early to advocate for higher academic standards, enhance infrastructure, and mobilize

financial support (Dolbert, 2002; University of Nairobi Alumni Association [UONAA], 2016). These associations often assume critical roles in institutional advancement, such as scholarship provision, mentorship initiatives, and alumni networking events. Despite limitations in public funding, universities have increasingly turned to alumni to fill resource gaps. For instance, UONAA has launched multiple development projects, including an Alumni Centre and

student bursaries, showcasing the impactful role of alumni in public university ecosystems (UONAA, 2016).

Private universities also benefit from dynamic alumni associations, though engagement levels can vary due to differences in institutional culture and alumni perception. At the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton (UEAB), alumni initiatives like the "Step Out of the Mud" project and contributions to technology upgrades illustrate how values-driven engagement can stimulate alumni involvement (University of Eastern Africa, Baraton Alumni Association). Likewise, American University alumni contribute through global volunteerism, networking events, and student mentoring programs (American University, 2018). These cases highlight that successful private institutions often leverage shared mission and consistent communication to foster a sense of community and sustained alumni commitment, beyond mere fundraising.

A notable distinction between public and private institutions lies in the scale and global reach of their alumni networks. Private universities such as Boston University and the University of Exeter have established expansive international associations with active alumni across Asia and beyond, organizing global service days, cultural events, and professional development programs (Boston University Alumni Association, 2018; University of Exeter, 2018). These events not only strengthen alumni bonds but also reinforce institutional identity worldwide. In contrast, public universities like the University of Zimbabwe and the University of Malawi struggle with alumni mobilization due to minimal outreach efforts and an underdeveloped culture of institutional giving (Alumni University of Zimbabwe, 2014; University of Malawi, 2017). While alumni in these contexts are willing, institutional shortcomings hinder sustained engagement.

Regardless of the type of institution, both public and private universities are increasingly recognizing alumni as vital assets, ambassadors, mentors, and long-term partners. Research emphasizes that effective alumni engagement hinges on loyalty, transparent communication, and meaningful interaction opportunities (Alastair, 2013; Lewis et al., 2016). When institutions invest in building strong relationships, alumni are more likely to contribute through mentorship, volunteerism, and philanthropy. As seen in the United States, alumni contributions formed a significant portion of higher education funding, with \$7.1 billion donated in 2005 alone—underscoring the potential of well-managed alumni associations (Cash, 2001; Cockrum, 2005; Council for Aid to Education, 2006). In an increasingly competitive higher education landscape, a collaborative alumni-university relationship is essential for future success.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Alumni should maintain active and mutually beneficial relationships with their alma mater by contributing financially, mentoring students, and participating in institutional development activities. In many global contexts—especially in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom alumni are deeply involved in their institutions' growth through organized associations, networking events, and fundraising efforts (Thomas & Smart, 2005; Holmes, 2009). These relationships are sustained through consistent communication, loyalty-building strategies, and platforms for professional engagement (Lewis et al., 2016). In contrast, alumni in Malawi are not interacting with their universities to the same extent. Despite the existence of alumni associations in both public and private institutions, such as the University of Malawi, participation remains low and sporadic. Alumni often feel disconnected or undervalued, leading to limited involvement and weakened support structures (Alastair, 2013).

This study sought to address the gap in alumni-university engagement by conducting a comparative analysis between public and private universities in Malawi. It focused on identifying the factors influencing alumni interaction such as communication effectiveness, loyalty, professional networking, and association activities in both institutional types. The ultimate goal was to develop a practical and adaptable model that could improve alumni relations across the higher education sector. By understanding what works and what doesn't in each setting, this research provides actionable insights for university administrators to cultivate more vibrant, committed, and supportive alumni communities thereby strengthening institutional development and sustainability (Lewis et al., 2016; Cash, 2001).

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the contribution of the alumni to the progress of the Universities in Malawi in terms of the following:
 - a) Advertising
 - b) Funding for development
 - c) Donations
 - d) Scholarship?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference in alumni interaction between public and private universities in Malawi?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in alumni interaction between public and private universities in Malawi.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), developed by George Homans (1958), which posits that individuals engage in social behavior both material and symbolic in pursuit of anticipated rewards. In the context of university alumni, giving may be motivated by recognition, belonging, or the perceived value of education received (Iskhakova, 2016). Blau (1964) emphasized the voluntary and mutually beneficial nature of these exchanges, while Emerson (1976) underscored their reciprocal character. Empirical studies have applied SET to explore alumni engagement, with findings indicating that positive academic and social experiences influence giving behavior (Weerts & Ronca, 2008; Etzelmueller, 2014). Newman and Petrosko (2011) extended this to institutional trust and commitment. Given the challenges in alumni engagement within Malawian universities, SET provides a relevant framework for understanding and enhancing reciprocal relationships that can sustain financial, professional, and mentorship contributions from alumni.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Contribution of Alumni to the Progress of the Institutions

The following factors will be reviewed: donations, giving, funding, scholarship, and advertising.

2.1.1 Advertising

According to Hendrick (2017), colleges and universities depend heavily on alumni participation in financial contributions, positive advertising, and student recruitment. As higher education institutions increase the number of fully online programs, ensuring students feel connected to the university is essential. The study by Hendrick (2017) aimed to determine if there was a correlation between non-traditional, online undergraduate students' sense of connectedness to their college and their subsequent interest in alumni participation after graduation. Pearson Product-Moment was conducted to determine if a correlation existed

between online graduates' sense of connectedness to their institution and their subsequent interest in alumni participation. Hendrick further stated that the sample was then looked at from a gender perspective to determine if there was a difference between males and females. All three hypotheses were found to have a statistically significant correlation. The author suggested that future research be conducted to determine if the same results are accurate at non-religious-based universities offering utterly online degree programs, as well as conducting a qualitative study to assess what non-traditional online students are looking for from their university alumni association participation.

Research by Withrow (2017) highlights the significance of alumni engagement, particularly among minority students at predominantly white institutions. A phenomenological action research study at Northern Kentucky University explored the experiences of minority students who participated in service-learning activities. The study, based on five individual interviews with undergraduate students, graduate students, and alumni, identified key themes such as the minority experience in a predominantly white institution, the impact of other significant courses, networking, retention, and strategies for scheduling, advertising, and recruiting minority students into service-learning courses. These findings underscore the vital role that alumni networks play in fostering a sense of belonging and professional growth among minority students, ultimately contributing to their retention and long-term success.

A study was conducted by Sanok (2015) at the University of Tennessee to determine the factors influencing advertising among alumni members to continue advertising their university beyond school. Two focus groups were conducted, one for collegiate members and one for past/current state students. Participants provided several areas of improvement for collegiate and alumni membership. Participants noted a need for more advertising from the members during the study regarding opportunities for involvement after school. They stated that their advisor was influential in deciding whether to continue advertising. Also, participants noted factors such as the desire to give back, a safe environment, opportunities to learn, and the university family as reasons for continuing involvement.

He also noted that alumni participants gave additional insights as to why they continued with advertising, including helping members overcome barriers and wanting to serve others. To increase membership beyond graduation, they recommend professional development to help advisors promote alumni membership, evaluation of advertising efforts and increasing advertisements, development of program guidelines outlining how collegiate chapters can accomplish their mission and host events aimed at personal growth, and publication of best practices on leading a successful alumni chapter.

2.1.2 Funding for Development

Owen (2016), in his research, studied community colleges with the purpose to create successful alumni associations, noted that the time has come for community colleges to realize the potential of alumni private funding gifts. While some community colleges have developed alumni associations with success as a source for private fundraising, many have yet to be successful. Leaders still need clarification about the strategies and factors that contribute to the success of alumni fundraising in the community college environment. Alumni associations can be a funding source, and alumni can be advocates, volunteers, and recruiting college ambassadors. Many community colleges need to learn how to engage former students as alumni or begin grooming current students for their role as alumni. Community colleges have to begin to realize how their alumni can be a source to address the needs of the college.

Furthermore, Owen (2016) stated that the study aimed to analyze and determine the most effective strategies for creating successful alumni associations. Evidence-based research was used to analyze how community colleges can identify and engage former students as alumni, what the role of the community college president and chief development officer is in establishing successful community college alumni associations, and what factors are essential in developing successful alumni programs to realize the potential of private fundraising gifts. Invest, communicate, engage, and then take the risk. It was noted that most universities will only develop alumni funding strategies when there is a financial crisis within the university. Most universities need more connections with their potential alumni members. The study suggested that successful funding will start with successful connections and contacts of the potential alumni association.

Due to periodic decreases in government funding for higher education, higher education institutions have relied increasingly on philanthropic gifts, Faisal (2017). As a result, private financing, including alumni giving, has increased over the past half-century, climbing from \$2.1 billion in 1965 to \$57.48 billion in 2016 in the United States and parts of Africa. The study investigated the relationship of student engagement to alumni giving at a private technological university. The study examined this relationship using two data sets: the National Survey of Student Engagement from the university's Office of Institutional Research and alumni giving data from the university's Development Office. These data were accessed for undergraduates who graduated in 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011.

Furthermore, consistent with a quantitative approach to the secondary analysis of existing data, data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. For the latter, logistic

and multiple regression analyses were used to determine the relationship of three factors to five dependent measures of alumni giving. Logistic regression results indicated that 16 variables derived from these three factors accounted for nearly 74% of the variance in donor status. Multiple regression results indicated that selected benchmarks and experiential and demographic characteristics were related to four measures of alumni giving. Regression analysis showed that the Benchmarks "Supportive Campus Environment" and "Student Faculty Interaction" were significantly associated with alumni giving. Further, two demographic factors, age, and ethnicity, had a significant relationship to alumni giving. Lastly, two experiential factors, status as an intercollegiate athlete and residence during the senior year, had a substantial relationship to alumni giving (Faisal, 2017).

Erin (2018) acknowledges that higher education institutions increasingly seek alumni support to help offset budget cuts and look toward technological advances to lower the cost of instruction and create new revenue streams. In light of the desire to increase funding for university programs and the potential giving power of MBA alumni, this study investigated factors that influence alumni giving from traditional and online MBA alumni. The relationship between a sense of community, alumni demographics, and donor behavior and attitudes is explored to consider factors that might predict alumni giving behavior and attitudes. The quantitative study, which used logistic regression and independent samples test statistical methods conducted by Erin at Colorado State University, acknowledges that the odds of an alumnus making a financial donation are increasingly more significant as age increases and as gender is female.

Furthermore, Erin (2018) noted that the analysis also suggested that the odds of an alumnus making a financial donation are increasingly more significant as a sense of community increases. Statistical analysis shows that online MBA alumni are different from traditional face-to-face MBA alumni in the sense of community, whereby the sense of community score for online alumni is significantly lower than that for conventional face-to-face alumni. However, this study also demonstrated that online alumni do not differ from face-to-face alumni in terms of the following characteristics: age, donor status, attitude toward giving, gender, citizenship, and race/ethnicity.

2.1.3 Donations

Donating is cultural, and Institutions expect to receive donations from well-wishers and alumni. A report given by the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) stipulated that institutions of higher learning, both public and private, sought out private giving to meet academic, financial needs, programming, and administration financial needs, as well as finances for students (Drezner, as cited in

Etzelmueller, 2014). Furthermore, he stated that the reason for seeking private giving is that external support for higher education is decreasing. However, student costs are rising, hence the need for alumni assistance. The level at which the alumni donate may also tell the level of performance of that university; the individuals who give recognize the role the university played in their education (Yang, 2008)

The polytechnic college, a constituent of Malawi University alumnus, bailed out 85 needy students (Kandiero, 2017). The college's Vice Chancellor called the move a "rare opportunity" and urged the University of Malawi alumni to do as the polytechnic college did. The address by the vice chancellor suggests that the association exists but is not active at all. Despite the urge by the polytechnic vice chancellor on the University of Malawi alumni, Kandiero (2017) reported a speech by Professor Mtenje, Vice Chancellor of the University of Malawi, lamenting the reluctance of the alumni to be part of the association and support the institutions.

Furthermore, the vice-chancellor of the University of Malawi added that since its inception, it has graduated over fifty thousand graduates, and these have failed to give back, hence the move to revamp the association so that the alumni add value to the university operations. This is evidence that the University of Malawi alumni are not interacting with their alma mater, hence the call. Lisa and Kelleher (2011), in their research, stated that if personnel based at institutions would treat students who will eventually be their alumni as store employees treat customers by establishing relationships and connections, then students will be partners with the alma mater in identifying more friends as well as fundraising opportunities. In support of the point above of establishing and maintaining relations, Worth (as cited in Kelleher, 2011) has stressed the importance of having alumni relations officers who develop relationships with graduates and strive to tap their commitment to their alma mater.

The alumni campus-based relations officer can achieve this by designing diverse quality programs that will create opportunities for the alumni to fully engage in offering a lifetime service to their alma mater. It is paramount that the alumni also be committed to the programs designed and reunions and how much participation is needed in the alma mater events. This commitment can only be realized if a social bond has been established between the alumni and alma mater. The social bond can be learned through knowing the students, communicating in a meaningful way, and establishing relationships among the alumni themselves as well as with the school (Kelleher, 2011)

According to Weerts, Cabrera, and Sanford (2010), alumni play an essential role in supporting their alma mater when it comes to giving. The statistics show that in 2007, United States of America colleges and Universities raised \$29

billion in private gifts; 28% of the whole figure was from the Alumni Council of Aid to Education, Kofi and Danso (2013). Many students wish to attain higher education but fail due to a lack of financial resources. This action by the United States universities and college alumni will care for financially handicapped students.

The universities need to note that there are better times than graduation for them to start forming an alumni association. Still, the spirit of plowing back to the alma mater has to be embedded within the University system. Qualitative method research conducted at the Kumasi Campus in Ghana by Ampomah and Danso (2013) revealed that alumni's experiences while still students determine their interactions with their alma mater (Sun et al., 2007). Furthermore, Sun, Hoffman, and Grady (2007) have also agreed with the latter view. They have stated that in a study they conducted at Midwest University, it was found that the alumni who felt that their alma mater contributed to their career had high levels of satisfaction and that such alumni who were satisfied with school experiences would give more.

As people interact in society, they socialize in groups that share a common and distinctive culture. Studies have discovered that ethnicity is a significant determinant of whether or not an individual will give (Iskhakova, 2016). Several factors compel alumni to financially support their alma mater, including the education they received. Several factors are a hindrance to the alumni such that they fail to interact with their alma mater through donations:

The job markets are flooded such that many graduates are not employed and not paid according to their level of education; this automatically leaves them financially crippled and will fail to give back to the institution (Iskhakova, 2016). According to Publications and Products, in November 2016, students involved in campus life activities were most likely to give. Still, those who were not could not provide as they were not connected to the university (Iskhakova, 2016). Furthermore, publications and products have indicated that some alumni do not give because they feel their University does not require visitation (Iskhakova, 2016).

A study by Rubin (2017) on Yale University alumni revealed that they had been grateful and financially supported by the university until they decided not to give because of specific issues. The following are some of the problems observed:

- (a) The university changed its focus from education to politics and social justice.
- (b) Unfairness with issues of remuneration, where administrators are hired at higher rates than professors.
- (c) There is much racism going on.
- (d) The university talks about diversity, yet it must be genuine.
- (e) Lack of adequate preparation of graduates such that PhD graduates fail to fit into the real-world job market.

Giving is an act of kindness done willfully by the giver. Dictionary.com (2012) explained that giving is presenting voluntarily without expecting compensation. Alumni play a vital role in supporting colleges and universities through charitable giving, and this has been endorsed by Gaier (2005), who stated that alumni are considered to be one of the primary financial sources of support for their institution. However, alumni support is not only limited to giving but spreads to other areas like college advisory boards and leadership expertise in formulating strategic directions for institutions (Masterson, 2010).

In some instances, the alumni can become mentors to the younger alumni who have just completed school and wish to establish their careers and job prospects. In addition, the alumni can play a role in recruiting students for the university, thereby increasing enrollment and eventually funding. In a study conducted at Midwest State University in 2005, Gaier found significant increases in alumni giving and participation based on the degree of alumni satisfaction with the undergraduate academic experience. Furthermore in the same research, Gaier (2005) stated several factors that influence the alumni to contribute financially to their alma mater as follows: (1) involvement in the institution as undergraduates, (2) involvement as alumni with their alma mater, (3) institution and prestige, (4) Economic success of individual alumni, (5) Emotional attachment and quality of the relationships between alumni and alma mater, (6) Academic success, (7) Overall satisfaction with the student experience. Therefore, the alma mater has to know these factors to develop a good working interaction at the university entry point.

In support of the study by Gaier above, Monks (as cited by Sung & Yang, 2009), in his research conducted in the United States of America, included 28 institutions, and he aimed to find out the attributes and experiences of graduates who are most likely to donate to their alma mater. According to Monks, the alumni edge to give is determined by individual satisfaction with their undergraduate experiences, such as participation in extracurricular activities, student government (SRC), and intercollege activities; the more significant the satisfaction, the larger the donation.

When the alumni are extensively involved with their alma mater, there is always some significant development because they support universities through finances, human capital, physical resources, and great ideas, as the two are engaged in dialogue. Research has it that in the United States of America, donations from alumni are the source of funds supplement in higher education and now are up to constitute 26.6% of the donations given to universities (Chow & Pully, as cited in Hsuan-fu Ho & Shu-Lin Huang, 2009). Moreover, giving by the alumni is a great source of finances that can offset declines in tax-funded appropriations intended for

learner's scholarships and the retention of talented and committed faculty (Eicher & Chevaillier, 2002)—another example of the benefits to alumni in Taiwan. The alumni interaction is high in Taiwan. Over the past two decades, higher education institutions have increased rapidly from 22 to 147 with very little funding from the government, Hsuan-fu Ho and Shu-Lin Huang (2009).

Feedback is information that one or company or institution gets on how they perform a specific task, and it is used to reinforce the good and eliminate the bad. Apart from alumni injecting funds, feedback is one of the ways universities benefit from alumni. Escobar (as cited in Ampomah & Danso, 2013) stated that alumni can provide essential feedback on how well the university meets its goals and their contentment with its performance. Among the many services the alumni can offer, they can assist their universities through volunteering, advocating, advising, and mentoring (Weerts & Ronca, 2007).

When institutions are supported through financial donations, local funds are used for projects and alleviate financial constraints on the regional budget (Iskhakhova, 2016). This will be a great benefit, especially if the workers are given that money as part of their allowance, and their motivation levels will be boosted. Universities must note that alumni funding is a lifetime funding source that will always continue if adequately harnessed.

2.1.4 Scholarships

Campell (2016) asserts that many students from low- and middle-income countries seek scholarship support to pursue higher education overseas. Often, scholarship programs mandate that recipients "give back" to their home countries following their studies so scholars "apply" their experiences to aid their countries of origin. In this comparative qualitative study, 40 Georgian and Moldovan scholarship alumni who studied in the United States were asked how alumni networks assist their ability to influence social and economic change in their home countries. Campell (2016) further stated that the comparative findings point to the value of alumni networks in terms of graduates backing each other's activism projects and feeling part of a community of like-minded individuals who seek change. Where these networks were not present, alumni desired a supportive association to assist in their attempts to influence reform. Findings suggest that alumni network development facilitates individual scholarship participants' efforts to "give back" to their countries of origin.

Garvey (2016) highlighted that philanthropy in higher education has evolved from being a supplementary financial benefit to a crucial element in maintaining institutional budgets and expanding college accessibility. A growing

focus on identity-based philanthropy acknowledges the significant role social identities play in shaping alumni engagement and contributions. However, research and practical initiatives concerning lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) alumni remain limited, often relying on anecdotal accounts rather than empirical data. This study established conceptually and empirically valid factors for alumni philanthropy scholarships, offering a foundation for further research and practice while amplifying the voices of this essential alumni community.

Overall, Garvey (2016) stated that it is argued that the Australia Africa scholarship program, for instance, has a positive impact on alumni and is viewed favorably by alumni employers and their alumni families. However, many challenges and struggles can impede alumni's success in bringing forth the change they might envisage. Some of these factors include finding a job at a suitable level, implementing their new knowledge, using their new skills, and, generally, reintegrating into their home country both socially and professionally. Alumni's role is key for the development of higher education institutions throughout the world. They can provide the needed support to students, Universities, and society, moreover their contributions and involvement can significantly increase the University's reputation both nationally and globally. Scholarships contribute to students' quality learning experience and academic success, reduce the University dropout rate, and enhance the students' life diversity. As ambassadors of their alma mater, alumni are fundamental for revenue mobilization and placement opportunities for students.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-comparative research design to examine the differences in alumni engagement between public and private universities. Data was collected using a structured, four-point Likert scale questionnaire developed with guidance from academic advisors at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton. The target population consisted of alumni from Malawi's six public and thirteen ranked universities, as per the 2019 Ministry of Education data. From these, three ranked universities were purposively sampled. Alumni association leaders utilized snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961; Noy, 2008) to identify additional respondents via referrals through social media and meetings, yielding a sample of 175 alumni. The study also included six alumni association representatives for interviews. The questionnaire's validity was enhanced through face and content validation by experts and research supervisors, while reliability was confirmed through a pilot study in one public and one private university. Cronbach's alpha was used to

measure internal consistency, and a reliability coefficient of 0.60 or higher, in line with Kothari (2004), was deemed acceptable.

Data collection involved collaboration with the alumni affairs offices, who facilitated contact with alumni networks. Questionnaires were distributed and returned through both digital and physical formats. The data obtained was coded and analyzed using SPSS (version 29). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were applied to the first two research questions. An independent sample t-test was used to assess differences in interaction between alumni of public and private universities, The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$, guiding the interpretation and development of a predictive model for effective alumni engagement.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Contributions of Alumni to the Progress of Universities in Malawi

Research Question 1: What is the contribution of the alumni to the progress of the Universities in Malawi in terms of the following:

- a) Advertising
- b) Funding for development
- c) Donations
- d) Scholarships

This research question focused on the contribution of the alumni association to the progress of universities in Malawi. Ideally, many alumni contribute financially to their universities through donations, endowments, and fundraising efforts. These contributions provide essential funding for scholarships, research grants, infrastructure development, and other academic programs. Alumni donations can significantly impact a university's financial stability and growth. The study focused on some of these aspects.

4.1.1 Alumni Contribution in Terms of Advertising

Alumni contribution is evident in their active role in promoting their alma mater through advertising efforts. Many alumni express a strong desire to support student recruitment by sourcing prospective students and assisting in the admissions process.

Table 1: Alumni Contribution in Terms of Advertising

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am actively involved in advertising the university	175	1	4	1.72	.658
I have sourced students through advertising	175	1	4	2.45	.908
I have assisted in the recruiting and admission of students	175	1	4	2.39	1.005
I have the desire to advertise the school	175	1	4	1.93	.727
Advertising	175	1.00	4.00	2.2143	.62899

Table 1 shows that alumni disagreed that they are actively involved in advertising school (M=1.72, SD=0.66). The participants also disagreed that they sourced students through advertising (M= 2.45, SD= 0.91). There is a high variability of opinions on this item. Additionally, the participants disagreed (M= 2.39, SD=1.0) that they had assisted in recruiting and admitting students. The standard deviation of 1.0 is evidence that some strongly disagree with the statement that they have recruited students for admission. In contrast, others strongly agreed, which brought a very high variability in the participants' opinions. When asked whether they have the desire to advertise the university, alumni Association members disagreed (M= 1.93), the standard deviation of (SD=0.73)

With an overall rating of (M=2.21) and a standard deviation of (SD=0.63), the participants disagreed that they contribute as alumni of the university in advertising their respective universities. Not all alumni may know the various opportunities or channels to promote their alma mater. Universities often have alumni associations or specific programs to engage with graduates and facilitate their

involvement in promotional activities. If alumni are unaware of these opportunities, they may not actively advertise their alma mater. This is in line with the findings of the study by (Khanna et al., 2019) in a study entitled Promoting Business School Brands Through Alumni (past Customers)-Analysing Factors Influencing Their Brand Resonance, where they found that Loyalty and Sense of community create feelings of gratitude which imparts brand resonance; alumni who do not have strong feelings of appreciation limit their interaction with their alma mater on all parameters.

4.1.2 Alumni Contribution in Terms of Funding

Alumni contribution in terms of funding reflects a sustained commitment to supporting their alma mater financially. Many alumni recognize the importance of their giving in sustaining institutional activities and express a long-term dedication to continued financial support.

Table 2: Alumni Contribution in Terms of Funding

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have continuously funded my alma mater	175	2.87	.858
I have taken part in funding my alma mater	175	1.67	.570
Alma mater needs my giving to support its activities	175	1.86	.655
It is essential to fund my alma mater	175	2.59	.898
I will forever take part in funding my Alma mater	175	2.94	.849
Funding	175	2.30	.55

Although some agreed, the study also noted that some disagreed. In this variable, the participants agreed that they have continuously funded their Alma mater (M=2.87;

SD=0.86). The standard deviation is low, suggesting that some of the participants do not participate in funding their alma mater.

Most participants also disagreed that they had taken part in funding their alma mater (M=1.67, SD= 0.57). In addition, alumni disagreed that they contribute to support their alma mater’s activities (M= 1.86, SD=0.66). However, they agreed that it is important to donate to their alma mater (M= 2.59, SD=0.9). Some strongly disagreed, while others strongly agreed that it is essential to contribute or donate to their Alma mater. In a perception that looks contrary to their earlier opinion, the participants agreed that they will forever take part in funding their Alma mater with a standard deviation of (SD= 0.85; M= 2.94); this is evident that almost equal percentage of the participants disagree while at the same they agree.

In addition, the participants disagreed that they contribute in terms of funding to the Alma mater (M=2.30; SD=0.5). Hence, it can be concluded that alumni associations do not contribute towards developing their alma mater universities in terms of funding in Malawi. Gaier (2005), in his research entitled “Alumni Satisfaction with Their Undergraduate

Academic Experience and the Impact on Alumni Giving and Participation,” found out that even though young alumni were more likely to participate than all other alumni, they were less likely to give than all other alumni, they indicated a reluctance to give due to lack of financial ability.

4.1.3 Contribution of Alumni through Donations

Alumni contribute significantly to their alma mater through various forms of donations, reflecting their continued care and support. These donations range from financial contributions to material support such as food supplies, books, teaching and learning equipment, building materials, clothing for needy students, and recreational facility equipment, highlighting a strong commitment to the institution’s growth and student welfare.

Table 3: Contribution of Alumni through Donations

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am consistent with donations to my alma mater	175	2.22	.836
I consider it important to donate to my alma mater	175	1.88	.627
I donate food supplies to the university	175	2.81	.860
I donate books to the school	175	1.72	.521
I donate lecturing equipment	175	1.70	.530
I donate money to the university	175	1.65	.545
I donate building materials	175	1.74	.634
I donate clothes to the needy students	175	1.65	.607
I donate recreational facility equipment	175	1.80	.743
Donations	175	1.91	.50

Most alumni are inconsistent with donations to their Alma mater (M= 2.22; SD=0.84). They also disagreed that they consider it important to donate to their alma mater (M= 1.88; SD=0.63). Additionally, alumni agreed that they donate food supplies to the alma mater, with a mean rating of There was high variability on this item, meaning that some agreed while others disagreed.

Generally, the participants disagreed that they donate books for the school, lecturing equipment, money to the university, building materials, clothes to needy students, and recreational facilities equipment. The mean rating was (M=1.72 ; M= 1.70, M=1.65, M=1.74, M=1.65 and M=1.80) respectively. There was high variability in the donation of recreational facilities equipment with a standard deviation of (SD=0.74) compared to a donation of food with the highest standard deviation of (SD= 0.86). The high variability in opinion in these two items showed that some participants

donate food while others do not donate recreational facilities equipment, while others do not. When the mean average was computed, the majority did not agree that alumni donate to their alma mater, lowering the average perception to disagree.

The average perception's overall mean rating (M=1.91: SD= 0.5) shows no high variability of opinions, while the mean rating remained relatively disagree. Therefore, most participants disagreed that they donate to their alma mater. According to Weerts, Cabrera, and Sanford (2010), alumni play an essential role in supporting their alma mater when it comes to giving. Statistics show that in 2007, US colleges and universities raised US\$29 billion in individual donations, 28% of the total from the Educational Assistance Alumni Council, Kofi and Danso (2013). Many students aspire to higher education but are frustrated because they cannot

afford it. This initiative by US college graduates helps economically disadvantaged students.

Research shows that alumni donations fund higher education grants in the United States, accounting for up to 26.6% of university donations (Chow & Pully; Hsuan-fu et al., 2009).

In addition, alumni donations are an excellent source of funding that can offset the reduction in taxpayer funding for student scholarships and securing talented and dedicated teachers (Eicher & Chevaillier, 2002). Another example where alumni can benefit is Taiwan. With alumni exchanges flourishing in Taiwan, the number of higher education

institutions has proliferated from 22 to 147 over the past 20 years, with little government funding she said, Hsuan-fu Ho and Shu-Lin Huang (2009).

One way alumni associations give back to the universities they graduated from is by offering scholarship opportunities to continuing students. Table 9 revealed that alumni associations in Malawi disagreed that there is a scholarship fund in the alumni Association ($M= 2.49$, $SD= 0.86$).

The pictures below show some of the alumni donations to their respective alma maters.



This picture shows a concrete outdoor table and bench set placed under a tree of one of the university campuses. As an alumni donation to the alma mater, this contribution provides a durable and functional space for students and staff to

gather, study, or socialize in a natural, shaded environment. Such a donation reflects alumni commitment to improving campus facilities and enhancing the student experience by creating welcoming communal areas.



This picture showcases a thoughtfully enhanced school environment featuring a beautifully constructed and a well-paved footpath, captured by the researcher during data collection. As a donation from the alumni to their alma

mater, this contribution offers a functional and aesthetically pleasing space where students and staff can walk without mud.



This picture captures a set of chairs generously donated by alumni to their alma mater, symbolizing a lasting bond and a spirit of giving back. Neatly arranged in a designated space in a classroom setting these chairs provide both comfort and utility for students and staff. More than just furniture, they represent alumni commitment to supporting learning, improving school infrastructure, and creating a more conducive environment for academic and social engagement. This thoughtful donation reflects a legacy of care, pride, and continued investment in the future of the school community.

4.1.4 Alumni Contribution in Terms of Scholarships

Alumni contributions play a significant role in supporting and shaping the future of educational institutions. One notable form of this support is through scholarship funds, which assist in bridging financial gaps and empower students to pursue their academic goals.

Table 4: Alumni Contribution in Terms of Scholarships

Item	Std.		
	N	Mean	Deviation
There is a scholarship fund by the Alumni Association	175	2.49	.857
I am part of the scholarship fund	175	1.62	.630
I have always contributed to the scholarship fund	175	1.55	.574
Many students have benefited from the scholarship fund	175	1.58	.571
Scholarship	175	1.64	.59

Most participants also disagreed with their part of the scholarship fund in the universities they graduated from, with a very low rating (M=1.62; SD=0.63). Moreover, the participants disagreed that they have always contributed to a scholarship fund (M=1.55; SD=0.57) and disagreed that many students have benefited from it (M=1.58; SD=0.57).

The overall rating revealed disagreement by the respondents that the alumni association contributes to scholarships for their alma mater. This study perceives that some alumni may need to be aware of their alma mater's specific scholarship opportunities or fundraising initiatives. Universities often rely on effective communication and outreach to inform alumni about scholarship programs and the impact of their contributions. If alumni are adequately informed and engaged, they may be aware of the opportunities to contribute towards the university's scholarship program. A lack of alignment with the university's mission may make them less inclined to contribute financially. Another possible reason is that alumni may feel disconnected from their alma mater due to negative experiences or changes in institutional values. Suppose alumni are dissatisfied with their educational experiences or perceptions. A strong sense of affinity and positive experiences often motivate alumni to support their alma mater through scholarships.

4.2 Difference in Alumni Interaction between Public and Private Universities in Malawi

Research Question 2: Is there any statistically significant difference in alumni interaction between public and private universities in Malawi?

This research question attempted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the participants' perceptions of alumni interaction with the alma mater between private and public universities in Malawi.

H₀₁ There is no significant difference in the level of alumni interaction

between public and private universities.

In testing the stated null hypothesis, the researcher employed an independent sample t-test and then analyzed it based on the variables of communication, loyalty, social professional interaction, alumni association, and network to determine if there are significant differences between private and public universities. The confidence level set is 95%, with a p-value of 0.05.

Table 5 shows Group statistics between public and private institutions regarding their alumni interactions in five areas: communication, loyalty, social-professional interaction, alumni association, and networks. Table 14 presents the independent samples t-test analysis to show whether significant differences in alumni interaction exist in these areas when private universities are compared.

Table 5: Differences in Alumni Interaction between Public and Private Institutions

	Type	University Grad	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication	Public		45	1.9333	.78206
	Private		130	2.2218	.73177
Loyalty	Public		45	2.4317	.43660
	Private		130	2.4451	.62324
Social_Profess_interaction	Public		45	2.3778	.82908
	Private		130	2.1987	.62674
Alumni_Association	Public		45	2.5397	.60906
	Private		130	2.6484	.72258
Networks	Public		45	2.4667	.53258
	Private		130	2.3492	.61973

Table 6: Significant Difference in the level of Alumni Interaction between Public and Private Universities in Malawi

		Independent Samples T Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference		Lower	Upper
Communication	Equal variances assumed	1.275	.260	-2.239	173	.026	-.28846	.12883	-.54275	-.03417
	Equal variances not assumed.			-2.168	72.442	.033	-.28846	.13308	-.55373	-.02320
Loyalty	Equal variances assumed	10.887	.001	-.132	173	.895	-.01331	.10057	-.21181	.18520
	Equal variances not assumed.			-.157	109.398	.876	-.01331	.08499	-.18176	.15514
Social Professional interaction	Equal variances assumed	6.917	.009	1.514	173	.132	.17906	.11829	-.05441	.41253
	Equal variances not assumed.			1.324	62.298	.190	.17906	.13526	-.09130	.44942
Alumni Association	Equal variances assumed	1.146	.286	-.903	173	.368	-.10867	.12029	-.34609	.12875
	Equal variances not assumed.			-.981	90.030	.329	-.10867	.11072	-.32864	.11130
Networks	Equal variances assumed	1.523	.219	1.134	173	.258	.11744	.10356	-.08697	.32184
	Equal variances not assumed.			1.221	88.298	.226	.11744	.09622	-.07376	.30863

The t-test yielded a p-value of 0.026 on communication, which is smaller than 0.05 ($p=0.026<0.05$), and it is the only one that shows a significant difference. Alumni who graduated from private institutions ($M = 2.22, SD = .73$) have a significantly higher level of communication with their alma mater than those who graduated from public institutions ($M = 1.93, SD = .78$). The implication from the finding is that graduates from private institutions tend to communicate more with their alma mater than graduates from public institutions. This could be because public institutions get

government funding, unlike private institutions. This is supported by Kretovics (2011), as cited by Volin (2016), who stated that private institutions' budgets rely on fees since they do not receive appropriations like public institutions. This then leads private institutions to engage alumni for monetary engagement. Again, in another study about job satisfaction by (Luo et al, 2017) the results showed that degree holders from private colleges were more satisfied significantly with their careers and quality life than degree holders from public colleges. Therefore, one can conclude in support of my

findings that the satisfaction alumni from private institutions makes them communicate more with their alma mater.

The rest of the areas of involvement did not show significant differences, with p values higher than 0.05: loyalty = .876>0.05; social-professional interaction = .190>0.05; alumni association = .368>0.05; networks = .258>0.05. This shows that mean differences are similar for alumni who graduated from private and public schools in all these areas.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study revealed that alumni in Malawi, whether from public or private universities, show generally low levels of active contribution to their alma maters in key areas such as advertising, funding, donations, and scholarships. While some alumni demonstrated a willingness to support through food supplies and basic infrastructure, most were not consistently involved in financial or strategic engagement, and scholarship support was notably minimal. The only statistically significant difference observed was in communication, where alumni from private universities reported higher levels of engagement with their institutions than those from public universities likely due to differences in institutional funding structures and alumni relationship strategies. These findings highlight the need for more targeted alumni engagement strategies to maximize alumni contributions for university development.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Universities should establish structured alumni engagement programs that include regular communication, recognition of alumni contributions, and opportunities for involvement in institutional planning.
2. Public and private universities should create transparent and accessible scholarship and donation platforms, with clearly communicated goals and measurable impacts.

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