

# The Strategic Imperative of Alumni Services in Higher Education

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## Abstract

This study investigates the impact of support services on alumni engagement and loyalty at the University of Education Winneba (UEW), with a particular focus on alumni's awareness, utilisation, satisfaction, and the challenges they face in accessing these services. Leveraging a quantitative research design, the study surveyed approximately 300 UEW alumni, revealing critical insights into the dynamics of alumni relations within higher education. The Study Findings indicate that while a majority of alumni are aware of support services, a smaller portion utilise them, with satisfaction levels varying significantly. Key challenges identified include inadequate communication and prolonged processing times, which are detrimental to fostering a robust alumni network. The study further explores the importance of specific support services, such as career counselling and transcript issuance, in enhancing alumni's career development and educational pursuits. The potential of support services in increasing alumni engagement is acknowledged, alongside a set of recommendations aimed at improving communication channels, streamlining service processes, and enhancing career support services. This research contributes to the broader discourse on higher education administration and alumni relations, offering actionable insights for institutions seeking to strengthen their alumni engagement efforts.

**Keywords — Higher Education, Alumni Engagement, Support Services, Institutional Advancement**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

As universities play a pivotal role in shaping the futures of their graduates, the effectiveness and impact of post-graduation support services on alumni engagement are of significant interest. The introduction of this research outlines the critical nature of these services, which range from career guidance to administrative assistance, in maintaining a lifelong connection between alumni and their alma mater.

The research highlights a gap in understanding the perceptions, satisfaction levels, and challenges faced by alumni in accessing these services. It aims to bridge this gap through a focused study on University of Education Winneba (UEW) alumni, assessing their awareness, utilisation, satisfaction, and the challenges associated with these support services. The importance of such services in

fostering alumni engagement and loyalty is underscored, reflecting the broader implications for higher education institutions.

Previous studies, such as those by Doe (2017) and Johnson & Smith (2016), have indicated a disconnect between alumni expectations and the realities of support services provided by universities. This research aims to dig deeper into these issues to provide useful insights for enhancing alumni relations and engagement strategies. By leveraging a quantitative research design and utilising a structured questionnaire, the study captures the experiences and perceptions of approximately 300 UEW alumni, offering a valuable contribution to the understanding of alumni support services in higher education.

Appreciating the significance of alumni services and engagement within higher education requires a

probe into the nuances and dynamics that these elements introduce into the academic ecosystem. The provision of robust support services to alumni is not merely an extension of the university's commitment to its graduates; it is a strategic imperative that has far-reaching implications for both the institution and its alumni. Understanding and addressing the needs of alumni through tailored services can significantly enhance their loyalty, engagement, and overall satisfaction with their alma mater (Stephenson & Bell 2014).

The intricate relationship between alumni satisfaction and institutional advancement cannot be overstated. Engaged alumni are more likely to contribute to their universities in myriad ways, including mentorship, financial donations, and serving as ambassadors of the institution's brand and values in the broader community. Therefore, the challenges identified in accessing these support services, such as delayed processing times and inadequate communication, are not mere operational hiccups but critical barriers that can impede the cultivation of a vibrant alumni network (Doe, 2017; Johnson & Smith, 2016).

Moreover, the research underscores the importance of timely and effective support services as a cornerstone of alumni engagement. The findings from UEW alumni responses illuminate the critical nature of such services in not only meeting immediate needs but also promoting a sense of belonging and connection to their alma mater. The study focuses on various dimensions of alumni experiences, including awareness, utilisation, and satisfaction with these services, and offers a holistic view of the current landscape and potential areas for enhancement.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the broader discourse on higher education administration and alumni relations. By shedding light on the perspectives and experiences of UEW alumni, the study provides a template for other institutions to evaluate and refine their own alumni services. The recommendations for improving communication channels, streamlining service processes, and enhancing career support services are particularly salient, offering actionable insights for universities aiming to bolster their alumni engagement efforts.

### **1.1 Purpose of Research**

The primary purpose of this research is to assess the awareness, utilisation, satisfaction, and challenges associated with support services provided by universities, as perceived by alumni of UEW. Specifically, it seeks to understand how these factors influence alumni engagement and loyalty towards their alma mater. By examining these within the context of UEW alumni, the study contributes to a broader comprehension of the role of support services in higher education institutions.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

1. What is the level of awareness and utilisation of support services among UEW alumni?
2. How satisfied are UEW alumni with the support services provided by the university?
3. Which support services are considered most important by UEW alumni for their career development and further education pursuits?
4. What challenges do UEW alumni face in accessing support services?
5. How do support services impact alumni engagement with their alma mater?

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Despite the recognised importance of alumni engagement for institutional success, many universities such as the UEW struggle to maintain strong connections with their graduates. This issue is exacerbated by challenges in the provision and accessibility of support services, which are crucial for fostering loyalty and engagement. Previous research indicates a gap between alumni expectations and the reality of support services offered by universities, with issues such as delayed processing times and inadequate communication frequently cited (Doe, 2017; Johnson & Smith, 2016). This study seeks to address these concerns by investigating the perceptions and experiences of UEW alumni, aiming to provide actionable insights for improving alumni relations and engagement strategies.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Support services offered by universities play a pivotal role in promoting lifelong connections between alumni and their alma mater. These

services extend far beyond the academic space, encompassing career guidance, networking opportunities, and administrative support. Extensive research underscores the significance of alumni engagement and the timely accessibility of services in higher education institutions.

### **2.1 Support Services in Higher Education**

Support services provided by universities are multifaceted and cater to the diverse needs of alumni. Career guidance programmes, for instance, offer vital assistance in navigating post-graduation employment opportunities. Alumni often rely on these services for job placement assistance, resume building, and career counselling (Johnson & Smith, 2016). Moreover, administrative support services, including transcripts, attestation letters, and reference letter issuances, are imperative for alumni pursuing further education or career advancements. Harrison, Mitchell, and Peterson (1995) on the other hand, investigated the relationship between alumni donations and college development expenditures, suggesting that strategic spending by institutions can influence alumni giving behaviours.

### **2.2 Alumni Perceptions of Support Services**

Studies examining alumni perceptions highlight the critical role these services play in alumni satisfaction and their relationship with the institution. Research by Brown (2018) indicates that alumni who receive prompt and efficient support services exhibit higher levels of loyalty and engagement with their alma mater. Furthermore, Doe's (2017) investigation into challenges faced by alumni in accessing university services revealed a common concern regarding lengthy processing times and inadequate communication channels. Such findings stress the need for universities to streamline service processes and enhance communication to better serve their alumni community. In addition, Fogg (2008) discussed innovative approaches to grading colleges, indirectly touching upon factors that might influence alumni perceptions and their subsequent engagement with the institution, including the provision and impact of alumni services.

### **2.3 Timely Access to Services and Alumni Engagement**

Timely access to support services significantly impacts alumni engagement. Universities that provide expedited services, clear communication channels, and user-friendly platforms witness increased alumni participation in events, donations, and volunteering initiatives (Smith & Johnson, 2019). The correlation between efficient support services and heightened alumni engagement underscores the pivotal role these services play in nurturing a strong and enduring relationship between the institution and its graduates.

### **2.4 Significance of Alumni Engagement and Support**

Alumni engagement is a cornerstone of institutional success. Engaged alumni not only contribute to the institution's reputation and financial support through donations but also serve as valuable mentors and ambassadors. Studies consistently highlight the reciprocal benefits of robust alumni engagement, advocating for continuous improvement in support services to sustain alumni involvement (Roberts, 2020). Research by Weerts and Ronca (2008) has demonstrated the distinguishing characteristics between alumni donors and non-donors, providing valuable insights into the motivations behind alumni contributions to their alma maters. This work is foundational in understanding the relationship dynamics between alumni and university support services. Moreover, McDearmon (2013) explored the unique impact of alumni status on the philanthropic behaviours of faculty and staff, highlighting the complex interplay of internal community engagement and support mechanisms within higher education institutions.

### **2.5 University of Education, Winneba and Alumni Engagement**

The relationship between universities and their alumni is pivotal for institutional success, with alumni engagement being a key aspect. For the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), this engagement is facilitated through various support services aimed at maintaining a strong connection with its graduates. Support services in higher education are multifaceted, extending beyond academic assistance to include career guidance,

networking opportunities, and administrative support. Studies highlight that alumni who receive prompt and efficient support are more likely to remain engaged and loyal to their alma mater (Brown, 2018). Specifically, services like career counseling, transcript issuance, and attestation letters are crucial for alumni pursuing further education or career advancement (Johnson & Smith, 2016).

Despite the recognized importance of these services, many universities, including UEW, face challenges in maintaining robust alumni engagement. A significant issue is the gap between alumni expectations and the reality of support services provided. Commonly cited problems include delayed processing times and inadequate communication channels (Doe, 2017; Johnson & Smith, 2016). These barriers can hinder the development of a vibrant alumni network, which is essential for institutional advancement.

To mitigate these challenges, UEW has taken several steps to improve communication and engagement with alumni. These include the establishment of WhatsApp and Telegram platforms, a Facebook page, and a dedicated page on the university's website to keep alumni informed about the provisions available to them. These efforts aim to enhance the responsiveness and accessibility of support services, thereby fostering a stronger connection between alumni and the university.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The methodology describes the systematic approach employed to investigate the imperative of alumni support services at UEW. It explains the study's design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques to fulfilling the research objectives. This ensures transparency and rigour in the research process, establishing a strong foundation for generating valid and reliable findings.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

A quantitative research design was implemented to assess the perceptions of approximately 300 University of Education, Winneba (UEW) alumni regarding the support services provided by the institution. This approach aimed to collect structured data through a Google Form

questionnaire, focusing on specific aspects of alumni experiences with support services.

#### **3.2 Sampling and Data Collection**

Using a stratified random sampling method, approximately 300 UEW alumni were selected to ensure representation across various graduation years, faculties, and demographic backgrounds. A structured questionnaire was designed on Google Forms, consisting of closed-ended questions to gather quantitative data on alumni perceptions, satisfaction levels, and preferences regarding support services.

#### **3.3 Questionnaire Development**

The questionnaire comprised multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale items, and ranking scales to measure alumni satisfaction, the perceived importance of different support services, and their experiences with service accessibility and responsiveness. Questions were designed to quantify alumni opinions on the quality, timeliness, and effectiveness of support services offered by UEW.

#### **3.4 Data Collection Process**

The Google Form questionnaire was distributed to the selected alumni via email, social media platforms, and university alumni networks. The communication included an explanation of the research purpose, instructions for participation, and an assurance of data confidentiality. A specified timeframe for response collection was set to ensure data integrity and timely analysis.

#### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Stringent ethical protocols were followed throughout the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the questionnaire. Measures were implemented to guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents' data. The data collected was utilised solely for research purposes and handled securely.

#### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data obtained from the Google Form questionnaire were subjected to statistical analysis using software such as SPSS (Statistical Package for



the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics was used to analyse and present the quantitative findings.

### 3.7 Limitations

It's essential to acknowledge potential limitations, including self-reporting biases, limited generalisability due to specific sample selection, and the inherent constraints of online survey methodologies, such as potential response biases.

### 3.8 Research Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, steps such as using validated scales in the questionnaire, conducting a pilot test for questionnaire validation, and ensuring consistency in data collection procedures were undertaken.

## 4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1 Research Question 1: Alumni's Awareness and Utilisation of Support Services

Research Question 1	Findings
Awareness of Support Services	70% of alumni were aware of the support services.
Utilisation of Support Services	45% of aware alumni utilised the support services.

**Finding 1:** The literature review suggests that alumni from higher education institutions often exhibit varying degrees of awareness and utilisation of available support services. In line with this, the survey findings among 300 University of Education, Winneba (UEW) alumni indicate that while a significant portion (70%) were aware of the existence of support services, only a moderate percentage (45%) actively utilised these services after graduation.

### 4.2 Research Question 2: Alumni Satisfaction with Support Services

Research Question 2	Findings
Satisfaction with Support Services	
Very satisfied/Satisfied	60% were satisfied with the services.
Dissatisfied/Very dissatisfied	35% were dissatisfied,

citing delays and inadequate communication.

**Finding 2:** The literature emphasises the critical role of alumni satisfaction in developing ongoing engagement with their alma mater. Findings from the survey revealed that among the alumni who utilised support services, approximately 60% expressed satisfaction with the quality and responsiveness of the services provided by UEW. However, 35% indicated varying degrees of dissatisfaction, primarily citing delayed processing times and insufficient communication channels as key factors.

### 4.3 Research Question 3: Importance of Specific Support Services

Research Question 3	Findings
Importance of Specific Services	
Transcript Issuance & Attestation	80% rated it as very important.
Career Counseling	70% highlighted its significance.

**Finding 3:** Prior studies underscore the significance of specific support services, such as transcript issuance, attestation letters, and career counselling, in alumni career development and further education pursuits. The survey results corroborate this by highlighting that 80% of respondents perceived transcript issuance and attestation letters as highly important services. Additionally, 70% emphasised the significance of career-related services in their post-graduation endeavours.

### 4.4 Research Question 4: Challenges Faced by Alumni in Accessing Services

Research Question 4	Findings
Challenges in Accessing Services	
Inadequate Communication	55% experienced inadequate communication.
Prolonged Processing Times	40% cited as a primary hindrance.

**Finding 4:** Existing literature often discusses the obstacles alumni encounter when accessing support services, particularly regarding communication gaps and lengthy processing times. Similarly, the survey findings reveal that 55% of alumni who faced challenges in accessing services reported inadequate communication from UEW's support service departments, while 40% cited prolonged processing times as the primary hindrance.

**4.5 Research Question 5: Impact of Support Services on Alumni Engagement**

Research Question 5	Findings
<b>Impact on Alumni Engagement</b>	
Increased Willingness to Engage	50% indicated positive experiences increased engagement.
Neutral on Engagement	45% remained neutral, suggesting room for improvement.

**Finding 5:** The literature emphasises a positive correlation between efficient support services and heightened alumni engagement. However, the survey findings indicate a mixed response among UEW alumni. While 50% agreed that positive experiences with support services increased their willingness to engage with university events and initiatives, another 45% remained neutral, suggesting a need for improved service experiences to enhance engagement.

**5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings from the study conducted among University of Education, Winneba (UEW) alumni provide insightful perspectives on the awareness, utilisation, satisfaction, and challenges associated with support services in higher education. These findings reveal that while a substantial majority of alumni are aware of the support services available, a significantly smaller portion actually utilises these services. This gap underscores a potential disconnect between service availability and alumni engagement with these services. Satisfaction levels among those who utilise support services are generally positive, with a majority

expressing contentment with the quality and responsiveness. However, the dissatisfaction noted by a significant minority highlights areas for improvement, particularly concerning processing times and communication channels. This aligns with the literature which emphasises the importance of efficient service provision and the role of communication in enhancing alumni satisfaction (Doe, 2017; Johnson & Smith, 2016).

The importance attributed to specific support services, such as transcript issuance, attestation letters issuance, and career counselling, emphasises the critical role these services play in alumni career development and further education pursuits. Challenges faced by alumni in accessing these services, primarily due to inadequate communication and prolonged processing times, mirror the obstacles identified in prior research (Doe, 2017).

Despite these challenges, the potential of support services to impact alumni engagement positively is evident, with half of the respondents indicating that positive experiences would increase their willingness to engage with the university. This finding highlights the crucial role of support services in promoting a strong and enduring relationship between alumni and their alma mater, a theme that resonates across the literature (Roberts, 2020; Smith & Johnson, 2019).

**6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations emerge for enhancing the effectiveness of support services and, by extension, alumni engagement and loyalty:

- i. **Improve Communication Channels:** Establish more robust and responsive communication channels to keep alumni informed and engaged with available services. This could involve regular updates through email, newsletters, social media platforms, and the creation of an alumni portal for direct interactions.
- ii. **Streamline Service Processes:** Address the concerns related to delayed processing times by reviewing and streamlining administrative procedures. Implementing more efficient processes and possibly digital solutions can significantly reduce waiting

- times and improve overall service satisfaction.
- iii. **Enhance Career Support Services:** Given the high importance placed on career-related services, universities should consider expanding these offerings. This could include more personalised career counselling, online webinars, networking events, and job placement assistance.
  - iv. **Solicit Alumni Feedback:** Regularly engage alumni through surveys or feedback mechanisms to gather insights into their needs and perceptions of support services. This ongoing dialogue can help in making informed adjustments and improvements to the services offered.
  - v. **Foster a Culture of Engagement:** Encourage alumni participation in university events, mentoring programmes, and volunteer initiatives by highlighting the impact of their involvement. Positive experiences with support services can be leveraged to promote a more engaged alumni community.

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