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RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Knowledge Transfer From Business Schools to Firms Through Academics: An AMO Perspective in an Emerging Economy

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Keywords: ability–motivation–opportunity theory | academic engagement | business school | internationalization | sub-Saharan Africa | university–business collaboration

ABSTRACT

Society's growing demand for knowledge transfer from higher education institutions to firms through academics is a notable trend. Nonetheless, the nuances of how business school academics perceive their engagement in knowledge transfer to firms remain inadequately explored. This research endeavors to bridge this knowledge gap by drawing upon interviews conducted with 52 business school academics in Ghana. The synthesized findings derived from the interpretive phenomenological data analysis provide crucial insights grounded in the ability–motivation–opportunity theory framework. Within this framework, “opportunity” describes image- and project-opportunity context drivers, such as media engagement, goodwill, in-service training students, and projects by international development organizations fostered through relationship-building and networking. “Motivation” explains the established national, societal, and self-serving mandates, stimulating institutional-, society-, and person-driven motivations. “Ability” encompasses the capacity of academics to employ both generic and relational mechanisms. The interplay among ability, motivation, and opportunity catalyzes the creation of various knowledge content types linked to specific market contexts.

1 | Introduction

Business schools are educational institutions that specialize in teaching and research covering business and management (Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) 2021). Typical business schools can be private, internationally affiliated, public with local programs, or public with international programs (Abou-Warda 2015). As of 2017, there were nearly 13,000 business schools worldwide, educating around 20% of all students in higher education (Parker 2018). Beyond the traditional core missions of teaching and research, a business school plays an instrumental role in contributing to its third mission,

defined as an extensive array of activities that seek to transfer knowledge to society in general and to firms, as well as to promote entrepreneurial skills, innovation, social welfare, and the formation of human capital (Compagnucci and Spigarelli 2020; Goethner and Wyrwich 2020). Discussions on the third mission of business schools center on the aspects of the public good business schools deliver to society and their stakeholders (CABS 2021).

Academics' commitment to the public good engages partners (community, civil society, welfare, government, and firms) in society through knowledge transfer (Kruss and Gastrow 2017).

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However, business school academics engage in knowledge transfer that falls outside the mandates of university technology transfer offices (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016). Their services are not captured in knowledge transfer data managed by technology transfer offices. Consequently, technology transfer policies often overlook the knowledge transfer of business school academics (Abreu and Grinevich 2013). This shortcoming is profound in economic settings with weak structures for knowledge transfer from the higher education sector to society and firms (Nsanzumuhire and Groot 2020; Zavale and Langa 2018). Therefore, there is a need to understand business school academics' transfer of knowledge to firms (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016; Goethner and Wyrwich 2020; Halilem, De Silva, and Amara 2022) in contrast to much empirical evidence on academics in the applied sciences and engineering disciplines (Perkmann et al. 2013, 2021).

Sub-Saharan Africa hosts 1395 universities (Ranking Web of Universities 2024), most offering business management education. Business schools have constituted one of the region's fastest-growing higher education subsectors (Ibrahim, Fowler, and Kiggundu 2021; Zoogah 2021). Accordingly, they are comprised mostly of public and private universities as part of the broader national university system. The leading business schools comprise 51 members and seven associate members of the Association of African Business Schools (AABS 2020); those managed well are more than educational institutions (Honig and Hjortso 2018; Ibeh and Debrah 2011).

Previous studies suggest that knowledge transfer engagements by universities in sub-Saharan Africa have primarily been initiated by academics (Sá 2015). Limited institutional capacity has resulted in more individual initiatives than large-scale partnerships for knowledge transfer (Outamha and Belhcen 2020, 388). Within this context, academics have embraced a comprehensive understanding of knowledge transfer engagement, encompassing not only the private sector (e.g., multinational companies, SMEs, and sectoral associations) but also community entities (individuals, households, and communities), government bodies (provincial, local, and national departments), and civil society organizations (trade unions, political groups, and civic associations) as partners (Kruss and Visser 2017; Petersen and Kruss 2021; Sá 2015). Particularly noteworthy is the emphasis on academic engagement oriented toward community and social development (Kruss and Visser 2017, 904), while efforts are also being made by academics to establish connections with firms (Nsanzumuhire et al. 2021; Ssebuwufu, Ludwick, and Béland 2012; Zavale 2018).

Among some academics, engagement with businesses is not deemed appropriate to their academic field or central to their academic role (Kruss and Visser 2017). Academics and their universities in sub-Saharan Africa must be academically and institutionally stronger as they lack the resources, trust, and capabilities necessary for engaging with businesses (Ibrahim, Fowler, and Kiggundu 2021; Sá 2015). Previous research has primarily examined the internal capabilities of universities and their partners that facilitate collaborations between universities and businesses in sub-Saharan Africa, the challenges faced, and the scientific, technological, and institutional conditions of national innovation systems (Outamha and Belhcen 2020; Zavale

and Langa 2018). However, the modes of interaction and the outcomes yielded from university–business collaborations are still not fully conceptualized (Nsanzumuhire et al. 2021; Zavale and Langa 2018).

This study attempts to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring the research question: What meanings do business school academics in a sub-Saharan African economy ascribe to their engagement in knowledge transfer to firms?

We first investigate the drivers and motivations for business school academics to transfer knowledge. Next, we examine the adopted modes of interaction and resulting knowledge content. Informal forms of linkages should be investigated more in this region (Outamha and Belhcen 2020, 388). Knowledge transfer mechanisms between academics and firms are under-researched (Zavale and Langa 2018) because of the commonly informally established collaborations (Outamha and Belhcen 2020).

Approaching this research question, we conducted an interpretative phenomenological study involving knowledge transfer activities by 52 business school academics in Ghana. The rationale for and appropriateness of using Ghana as a context is twofold. First, Ghana boasts of several universities with a strong academic reputation, many hosting high-quality business schools with experienced faculty. Thirteen African countries host the top 50 business schools in Africa, including Uganda (1), Zimbabwe (1), Mauritius (1), Tanzania (1), Ethiopia (1), Botswana (1), Kenya (2), Ghana (3), Morocco (4), Nigeria (5), Tunisia (6), Egypt (11), and South Africa (13) (EduRank.org May 20, 2024). Moreover, there are 263 business and management scientists in Africa, and their total *H*-index ranges from 53 to 16. They hail from South Africa (97), Nigeria (55), Ghana (29), Kenya (27), Egypt (17), Algeria (8), Morocco (5), Uganda (4), Tunisia (4), Namibia (4), Mauritius (3), Ethiopia (2), Botswana (2), Malawi (2), Rwanda (1), Tanzania (1), Somalia (1), and Libya (1) (AD Scientific Index May 20, 2024). Specifically, there are 77 business and management scientists in Ghana, and their total *H*-index ranges from 45 to 10. They constitute five, seven, 15, and 50 scientists with a total *H*-index of 45–30, 28–20, 19–16, and 15–10, respectively (AD Scientific Index May 20, 2024).

Second, three Western African countries hold 81% of the regional gross domestic product (GDP), namely Nigeria (62.7%), Ghana (9.5%), and Côte d'Ivoire (9.0%) (African Development Bank 2023). Ghana's strategic location in West Africa is a convenient hub for accessing other regional markets. This country is known for its political stability and safety, providing a secure and conducive environment for doing business (Mo Ibrahim Foundation [Index of African Governance] 2022). Accordingly, Ghana has often become the preferred choice for foreign firms to establish their regional offices, thereby creating international opportunities for academic engagement.

Overall, this study adopts an academic perspective as a more appropriate unit of analysis to inform the development of capacity-building interventions and advocacy tools for (sub-Saharan) African business schools, governments, and international higher education development partners (Amara, Halilem,

and Traoré 2016; Ssebuwufu, Ludwick, and Béland 2012). It, thus, contributes to the existing academic engagement literature (Perkmann et al. 2021) by following a proposed framework based on the ability–motivation–opportunity (AMO) theory (Blumberg and Pringle 1982).

2 | Theoretical Background

2.1 | Knowledge Transfer From an AMO Theory Perspective

The AMO framework is fundamental in driving performance. It has been extensively applied at the individual level and is also effective in explaining behavior at the organizational level (Haghighi-Talab, Scholten, and van Beers 2020; Kim, Pathak, and Werner 2015). This framework originates from social and industrial psychology (Blumberg and Pringle 1982; Waldman and Spangler 1989).

Ability is the capacity to perform a task. This capacity encompasses physiological and cognitive capabilities, such as knowledge and skills, that enable an individual to execute a task effectively (Blumberg and Pringle 1982). Practices aimed at enhancing abilities improve physiological and cognitive capabilities. Evidence suggests that abilities can be developed through training and experience (Argote, McEvily, and Reagans 2003; Marin-Garcia and Martinez Tomas 2016).

Motivation refers to the willingness to perform a task. It is defined as “the degree to which an individual wants and chooses to engage in certain specified behaviors” (Mitchell 1982, 82), reflecting the relatively stable individual characteristics that drive behavior (Waldman and Spangler 1989). This dimension encompasses choices about direction (what goal to pursue), intensity (how much effort is to be exerted), and persistence (whether to continue to expend effort in the face of challenges) (Hong and Gajendran 2018).

Opportunity “consists of the particular configuration of the forces surrounding a person and his or her task that enables or constrains that person’s task performance and that is beyond the person’s direct control” (Blumberg and Pringle 1982, 565). Opportunity portrays a set of circumstances that enable or constrain task performance. Hence, it describes individual characteristics and working environments (Marin-Garcia and Martinez Tomas 2016), such as the characteristics associated with a job, material resources, and people (Waldman and Spangler 1989). Direct or indirect experience, informal networks, and peer learning enable individuals to create, retain, and transfer knowledge (Argote, McEvily, and Reagans 2003; Marin-Garcia and Martinez Tomas 2016). The ability and motivation dimensions represent personal factors, while opportunity describes environmental factors (Blumberg and Pringle 1982).

The AMO framework provides a sound theoretical lens for understanding the underlying determinants of performance across various contexts, including international human capital development (Kim, Pathak, and Werner 2015), repatriate knowledge transfer (Burmeister, Lazarova, and Deller 2018), knowledge management transfer (Argote, McEvily, and Reagans 2003), human resource

management (Marin-Garcia and Martinez Tomas 2016), networks (Hong and Gajendran 2018), corporate entrepreneurship (Turner and Pennington 2015), interorganizational knowledge collaboration between universities and firms (Haghighi-Talab, Scholten, and van Beers 2020), and knowledge transfer from business schools to firms (Raza, Najmi, and Shah 2018; Tho and Trang 2015).

Prior research on knowledge transfer from business schools to firms has predominantly focused on students. Empirical findings indicate that a student’s ability (including acquired knowledge and absorptive capacity), motivation (comprising intrinsic motivation, learning motivation, functional value, and psychological hardiness), and opportunity (such as the innovative culture within firms and job autonomy) significantly influence knowledge transfer (Raza, Najmi, and Shah 2018; Tho and Trang 2015). This study aims to explore the AMO framework further within the context of knowledge transfer from business schools to firms through academics.

2.2 | Knowledge Transfer From Business Schools to Firms Through Academics

Research on knowledge transfer from the higher education sector to firms in emerging economy contexts describes three main categories: (1) determinants (e.g., drivers and motivations to collaborate); (2) modes of interaction (e.g., mechanisms used); and (3) outcomes (e.g., benefits and obstacles) (O’Brien and Bortagaray 2015; Zavale and Langa 2018). We next discuss these dimensions.

2.2.1 | Determinants of Knowledge Transfer

Many academics engage in academic engagement, representing an essential mechanism for transferring knowledge to firms (Kruss and Visser 2017; Perkmann et al. 2013). Academic engagement refers to knowledge-related partnerships between academics and non-academic organizations (Perkmann et al. 2013, 2021). However, the extent of involvement in academic engagement relates to affiliation with a scientific discipline, with evidence suggesting considerable variation across academic disciplines and the quality of departmental faculty (Perkmann, King, and Pavelin 2011).

Academics are better viewed as tribes defined by discipline. They identify much more closely with their discipline than with employees of a particular university (Wright et al. 2009). In this context, “scientific disciplines have diverse conventions and cultures; they employ different methods and instruments, and some are more open to industry needs” (Rybníček and Königsgruber 2019, 238). Consequently, the determinants of knowledge transfer from higher education institutions to firms through academics differ across scientific disciplines.

Previous research consolidates individual, relational, institutional, and organizational factors as drivers of academic engagement (Galan-Muros and Davey 2019; Perkmann et al. 2013). Individual factors include seniority, whether locally trained or mobile, research productivity, publications in applied journals, previous non-academic work experience, and commercialization

experience drivers (Perkmann et al. 2021). Relational factors like peer effects and institutional factors like the applied discipline also play a role. Additionally, organizational factors are identified as relevant and significant drivers (Perkmann et al. 2021).

Academic engagement's drivers are primarily individual characteristics rather than department and institution-based (D'Este and Patel 2007; Perkmann et al. 2021). These individual characteristics involve academics pursuing broader goals beyond research and those who are well-established and well-connected in the academic community (Perkmann et al. 2013). Consequently, firms prefer to engage directly with academics they respect and trust, seeking to bypass formal university structures (Collier, Gray, and Ahn 2014).

Academic engagement goes hand-in-hand with academic success; it is driven by individuals who are more senior and have more publications, social capital, and government grants (Perkmann et al. 2013). Likewise, it is strongly influenced by research-related motives (D'Este and Perkmann 2011). The individual characteristics of academics have a more substantial impact on the variety and frequency of interactions than the characteristics of their departments or universities (D'Este and Patel 2007).

Concerning the organizational level drivers, academics' social environment affects their knowledge transfer to firms (Perkmann et al. 2021). Academics in departments with higher per capita research income ratios from the industry are particularly likely to engage in more frequent contract research (D'Este and Perkmann 2011). In contrast, those in lower rated research departments tend to consult more (D'Este and Perkmann 2011). Generally, academic engagement involves scholars who do not necessarily have an affiliation with higher quality research institutions (Perkmann et al. 2013). Instead, it involves academics who are highly motivated, well-established, and connected in their academic communities (Perkmann et al. 2013).

In sub-Saharan Africa, prior studies underscore the need to explore what drives firms to engage with academics and their universities or vice versa (Outamha and Belhcen 2020, 387; Zavale and Langa 2018, 14). Existing studies have focused more on structural conditions such as incentives, performance indicators, science, technology, and innovation policies than on the determinants involving academics, universities, and firms (Zavale and Langa 2018). However, individual-level factors influence various modes of interaction (Outamha and Belhcen 2020). Academics initiate several knowledge transfer collaborations from universities to society and the private sector in sub-Saharan Africa (Sá 2015). From this perspective, industry and policy practitioners believe that, "academics should take the lead in initiating partnerships because it is up to academics to provide evidence of what they can deliver [to society and the private sector]" (Sá 2015, 27).

2.2.2 | Modes of Interaction

Academic engagement involves knowledge transfer modes such as consulting, contract research, collaborative research, and informal contacts/advice (Perkmann et al. 2013, 2021).

Collaborative research involves formal collaborative arrangements for cooperation on R&D projects. Contract research describes research activities directly relevant to commercial firms. Consultancy refers to research or advisory services individual academics or academic groups provide to industry clients. It embodies paid consulting, unpaid consulting for firms, and unpaid consulting for government agencies (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016; Halilem, De Silva, and Amara 2022).

In disciplines other than the applied sciences and engineering, the knowledge transfer modes are informal or non-commercial activities, and they are often overlooked by technology transfer policies (Abreu and Grinevich 2013). Specifically, business school faculty deliver value to firms that fall outside the mandate of the university technology transfer offices (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016). They are more oriented toward offering a wide range of value-adding services and expert advice to firms (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016).

In sub-Saharan Africa, knowledge transfer from academics to firms often occurs through traditional and service modes. These modes typically include organizing seminars and workshops on industry-related issues, conducting short courses for industry personnel, providing consultancy services to enterprises, running short courses for local entrepreneurs, and supporting development-oriented technology transfer for local communities (Kruss and Visser 2017; Petersen and Kruss 2021; Sá 2015; Ssebuwufu, Ludwick, and Béland 2012). In Mozambique, when firms collaborated with academics, it was mainly through traditional channels (participation in conferences) and, to a lesser extent, service ones (consultancies) (Zavale 2018). In the post-conflict transitional economy of Rwanda, there is a low level of interaction, except in some informal channels, such as using knowledge from research to improve business practices and conference participation with professionals (Nkusi et al. 2020; Nsanzumuhire et al. 2021). Given these findings, the modes of interaction involve limited formalization, shorter agreement durations, and less organizational resource involvement. They remain, however, largely under-researched (Zavale and Langa 2018).

2.2.3 | Outcomes Portray Knowledge Content

The knowledge content describes outcomes of tangible or intangible experiences by actors in knowledge transfer engagement over a wide time range (Galan-Muros and Davey 2019). Generally, academic benefits from knowledge transfer to firms are well-documented in the literature, unlike benefits for firms (Ankrah et al. 2013, 51; Galan-Muros and Davey 2019, 1334). Prior studies have sought to measure academics' benefits, such as the consequences of academic engagement on research productivity, inventive prowess, and research quality and direction (Ankrah et al. 2013; D'Este et al. 2013; Perkmann et al. 2021). In contrast, there needs to be more understanding of the benefits to firms that complete this interaction (Perkmann et al. 2021). In particular, studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa have raised concerns about limited research on the outcomes of academics' knowledge transfer to firms (Outamha and Belhcen 2020; Zavale and Langa 2018). In this context, the outcomes often involve

embodied knowledge, such as developing the employability of graduates (Zavale 2018). The modes of interaction that generate disembodied knowledge embedded in research and development products (patents and technology prototypes) are hardly involved (Nsanzumuhire et al. 2021; Zavale and Macamo 2016).

This study focuses on disseminating knowledge types essential for internationalization through academics, from business schools to firms. International business research underscores the significance of market knowledge, internationalization knowledge, technological knowledge, and relationship knowledge for cross-border business activities (Fletcher and Harris 2012; Johanson and Vahlne 2009; Stoian, Dimitratos, and Plakoyiannaki 2018). Foreign market knowledge involves understanding the specific characteristics of national markets, encompassing aspects such as the business climate, cultural patterns, and market structure. Internationalization knowledge encompasses understanding marketing methods, international operations, and common characteristics of customers based on common patterns observed across various foreign markets. Additionally, relationship knowledge emerges through interactions with partners in cross-border business activities (Amankwah-Amoah et al. 2022; Bofo, Owusu, and Guiderdoni-Jourdain 2022; Johanson and Vahlne 2009). Accordingly, the importance of vicarious learning for knowledge types essential for internationalization is well-documented (Fletcher and Harris 2012; Stoian, Dimitratos, and Plakoyiannaki 2018).

Vicarious learning explains learning from the experience of others, for example, by observing and mimicking them in networks (Huber 1991). External network sources such as consultants and advisers offer an ideal platform for such learning. A firm's sustainable foreign market expansion is often led by functional knowledge, which advisers provide (Stoian, Dimitratos, and Plakoyiannaki 2018). Explicit knowledge, such as data from market research reports on foreign markets, something business school faculty often do, contributes to internationalization knowledge development (Stoian, Dimitratos, and Plakoyiannaki 2018). However, the voices of academics as advisers and consultants for cross-border activities within firms remain largely unheard (Stoian, Dimitratos, and Plakoyiannaki 2018, 768), even though the contribution of this constituency to firm learning can be immense.

Knowledge reservoirs, which are business school academics, serve as sources of learning for knowledge acquisition by international firms. Academics in business schools develop a pool of international, personal, and business networks through global meetings, conferences, and research collaborations that might benefit firms. That is, business owner-managers could benefit from academics' international networks. This way, they accumulate relationship knowledge that nurtures their firms' resources and capabilities (Johanson and Vahlne 2009).

Moreover, foreign market knowledge varies across different foreign markets and is contingent upon individual countries and their specific markets (Fletcher and Harris 2012). It originates within host foreign markets and requires time to be cultivated. In sub-Saharan Africa, many firms place greater reliance on the knowledge, skills, and aspirations of owner-managers rather

than on organizational structures and capabilities (Barnard, Cuervo-Cazurra, and Manning 2017), suggesting that personal learning by owner-managers is a primary source of learning (Bofo, Catanzaro, and Dornberger 2023). Foreign market knowledge is often held by firms' chief executive officers and managers (Amankwah-Amoah et al. 2022), highlighting the critical roles of people-oriented factors in international business activities (Nachum et al. 2023). In such circumstances, makeshift internationalization learning sources have emerged to fill the gaps left by weak formal institutions within the business environment, serving as alternative and trusted sources for providing foreign market knowledge, addressing export challenges, and supporting firms' entry into foreign markets (Bofo, Catanzaro, and Dornberger 2023; Bofo, Owusu, and Guiderdoni-Jourdain 2022; Omeihe et al. 2021). Consequently, the business environment in sub-Saharan Africa is conducive for firms to acquire knowledge types essential for internationalization from business school academics through vicarious learning.

2.3 | AMO Theory Explains Knowledge Transfer From Business Schools to Firms Through Academics

In sub-Saharan Africa, bridging the cultural gap between academia and the private sector underscores the need for industry confidence in academics and their universities as potential collaborators (Kruss and Visser 2017; Sá 2015; Zavale 2018). For example, Zavale (2018) discovered that approximately 80% of surveyed firms in Mozambique had either never or rarely engaged in knowledge transfer with academics and universities. Similarly, Kruss and Visser (2017) observed that South African universities more frequently partnered with academic, community, government, and welfare sectors, while interactions with firms and civil society were less common. Consequently, academic engagement focused on community and social development appears more pronounced than engagement with firms.

At the same time, however, there are common challenges such as inadequate communication platforms, unclear policies, low interest and commitment from firms, lack of networking with firms, and departments lacking structured procedures to foster academic engagement (Nsanzumuhire et al. 2021; Outamha and Belhcen 2020).

As succinctly put, "Governments face accusations of failing to incentivize knowledge transfer collaborations through specific policies and funding. The higher education sector is criticized for lacking resources and academic capacity. Industries, particularly those of foreign origin or multinational connections to science and technology centers abroad, are blamed. Domestic industries, on the other hand, are deemed marginal to the economy and operate in a non-innovative environment" (Zavale and Macamo 2016, 249).

In the context of myriad challenges rather than opportunities, academics may perceive engagement with the private sector as outside their academic role (Kruss and Visser 2017). Situations of this nature demand an understanding of academics' capacity to excel, their drive and willingness to excel, and a supportive working environment conducive to excellence. Accordingly,

opportunity theory elucidates the factors that enable academics to transfer knowledge to firms. Motivation theory explains academics' willingness to transfer knowledge. Ability theory delineates academics' capacity to utilize various mechanisms to transfer knowledge to firms.

3 | Methodology

3.1 | Research Approach

Academic engagement studies heavily emphasize quantitative methods (Ankrah et al. 2013; Perkmann et al. 2021). Sub-Saharan African countries exhibit underdeveloped national innovation systems with low scientific outputs, limited academic capabilities within universities, and fewer technologically advanced firms (Nkusi et al. 2020; Zavale and Langa 2018). Consequently, adopting quantitative methodologies based on spin-off creation rates, patents, and licensing agreements poses challenges due to their low registration rates. As a result, quantifiable metrics only capture a narrow spectrum of knowledge transfer from academics to firms, potentially diverting attention from other modes of knowledge transfer (Compagnucci and Spigarelli 2020). In this context, we opted for an interpretive interview approach (Lamb, Sandberg, and Liesch 2011; Smith, Jarman, and Osborn 1999; Stoian, Dimitratos, and Plakoyiannaki 2018), which we deemed most suitable, given that knowledge transfer from academics to firms primarily occurs informally through interpersonal relationships (Outamha and Belhcen 2020; Zavale and Langa 2018).

In the university context, the decision to engage in knowledge transfer is primarily made at the individual level (Perkmann et al. 2013). We focused on academics rather than their departments or universities, as individual decisions play a significant role in initiating and sustaining knowledge transfer collaborations (Ankrah et al. 2013). In achieving this, we drew on evidence of multiple realities (Doz 2011, 584), enabling an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience among academics active in business engagements.

3.2 | Selection of Participants

The academic perspective is a more appropriate unit of analysis for studying individual business school faculty's knowledge transfer to firms (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016; Halilem, De Silva, and Amara 2022; Perkmann et al. 2021). In this context, we sent a letter of introduction via email to the 229 faculty members of the top four university business schools in Ghana (Table 1). Collectively, these schools accounted for approximately 68.09% (36,148 students) of the total enrollment in business programs (53,090) at Ghana's public universities (50,126 students) and specialized/professional tertiary education institutions (2964 students) in 2019, as reported in Ghana's Tertiary Education Statistics Report (National Accreditation Board 2020).

The emails were personalized rather than general to garner interest and establish closer relationships (Evered and Louis 1981). After following up, 52 academics agreed to participate in this research: full professors (eight), associate professors (15), senior lecturers with doctoral degrees (21), and lecturers with doctoral degrees

(eight). They taught various courses in business programs and had many years of industry engagement (Table 2). Some participants held university positions such as rectors (two), pro-vice-chancellor (one), business school deans (four), and heads of departments (nine). They benefited from greater access to visibility, networks, security of tenure, and experience. The studied academics were critical decision-makers with extensive and exclusive information that influenced essential outcomes, either alone or with others, through knowledge transfer to firms (Aguinis and Solarino 2019).

The business school faculty is involved in knowledge transfer to domestic market firms, international firms, and international development organizations. International firms include sub-Saharan African firms and foreign firms operating in sub-Saharan Africa. We found that 11, 21, and 20 academics engaged with firms for 1–5 years, 6–10 years, and 11 or more years, respectively. Additionally, we discovered that 37, 10, and 5 academics worked in the industry for 1–5 years, 6–10 years, and 11 or more years, respectively, before joining their university business schools. Utilizing multiple data sources based on academics with varying academic rankings, business school departments, and years of engagement with firms, allowed us to validate the data and broaden the scope of inquiry by increasing the variety of data used (Nielsen et al. 2020).

3.3 | Data Collection

We utilized in-depth semistructured interviews and augmented them with meticulous note-taking to complement the audio recordings. Additionally, we gathered secondary data from the business schools' websites, encompassing news articles and scholars' curriculum vitae. The primary author conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants at the university offices. Our interview protocol was informed by the literature review (Graebner, Martin, and Roundy 2012, 281), resulting in a semistructured interview guide that empowered interviewees to share their experiences and insights candidly. We employed follow-up questions and probing techniques to extract pertinent information from the interviewees.

The 52 audio-recorded interviews lasted approximately 45 h. However, beyond this point, our explorations through discriminant sampling (Creswell 2007) failed to yield fresh insights from new participants. Despite reaching out to new academics, they frequently directed us to colleagues they believed were better equipped to address our inquiries, though we had already engaged with those faculty members. Consequently, the point of saturation aligns with previous interpretive studies, which recommend a sample size of between 15 and 25 respondents (Lamb, Sandberg, and Liesch 2011).

Furthermore, we exclusively interviewed faculty from business schools. Academics typically engage in knowledge transfer activities at the individual level (Ankrah et al. 2013, 50; Perkmann et al. 2013, 425). Consequently, we regarded the academic viewpoint as the most suitable unit of analysis to guide the creation of capacity-building interventions and advocacy tools for African business schools, governments, and international higher education development partners (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016; Ssebuwufu, Ludwick, and Béland 2012). In this context, academics are recommended to

TABLE 1 | An overview of the studied business schools.

| | Business school | | | |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| | A | B | C | D |
| Established in a | Public university | Public university | Public university | Specialized/ professional tertiary education institution |
| Year of establishment ^a | 1960 | 2005 | 1975 | 2003 |
| Number of departments | Six | Four | Six | Three |
| List of departments | (i) Accounting (ii) Marketing and entrepreneurship (iii) Finance (iv) Operations and management information systems (v) Organization and human resource management (vi) Public administration and health services management | (i) Marketing and corporate strategy (ii) Human relations and organizational development (iii) Accounting and finance (iv) Supply chain and information systems | (i) Marketing and supply chain management (ii) Finance (iii) Human resource management (iv) Accounting (v) Management (vi) Entrepreneurship and small enterprise development | (i) Accounting and finance (ii) Business management (iii) Management science |
| Faculty with a minimum of a lecturer position ^b | 79 | 50 | 57 | 43 |
| Student enrolment in business programs (in 2019) | 10,085 | 6872 | 16,915 | 2276 |
| Member | AABS, AACSB, GNAM | AABS | AABS, AACSB | AABS, GBSN |
| Business school ranking in Africa ^c | 10 | 25 | 44 | 102 |

Note: Student enrolment is based on the latest tertiary education statistics (National Accreditation Board 2020, <https://gtec.edu.gh/publications>).

Abbreviations: AABS, Association of African Business Schools; AACSB, Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business; GBSN, Global Business School Network; GNAM, Global Network for Advanced Management. ^aThe Business School (A), previously the School of Administration (1962) and the College of Administration (1960), was rebranded in 2004. The Business School (C), originally the Department of Business Studies (1975), was rebranded in 2004.

^bWe excluded faculty with an assistant lecturer position. However, the faculty population includes those with a minimum of a lecturer position, even if they do not have a PhD. The following are the faculty links: Business School A: <http://ugbs.ug.edu.gh/faculty>; Business School B: <https://business.knuist.edu.gh/people>; Business School C: <https://directory.ucc.edu.gh/d/school-of-business>; Business School D: <https://gimpa.edu.gh/business-school/>.

TABLE 2 | An overview of research participants (business schools' faculty).

| Assigned number for informants | Qualification and recent position | Department | Year range of professional work experience in industry | Year range of knowledge transfer to industry through academic engagement | Time and duration of the interview |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|------------------------------------|
| EI_001 | Full Professor and Dean, School of Business | Public administration and health services management | 1–5 years | 11–15 years | March 21, 2022; 86:55 min |
| EI_002 | Associate Professor and Head of Department | Operations and management information systems | 1–5 years | 1–5 years | March 31, 2022; 53:32 min |
| EI_003 | Full Professor and Head of Department | Marketing and entrepreneurship | 1–5 years | 11–15 years | March 22, 2022; 44:16 min |
| EI_004 | Associate Professor | Public administration and health services management | 16–20 years | 16–20 years | March 31, 2022; 58:23 min |
| EI_005 | Associate Professor | Public administration and health services management | 1–5 years | 1–5 years | May 25, 2022; 43:32 min |
| EI_006 | Associate Professor | Marketing and entrepreneurship | 1–5 years | 11–15 years | March 22, 2022; 33:05 min |
| EI_007 | Associate Professor | Organization and human resource management | 6–10 years | 6–10 years | May 3, 2022; 47:45 min |
| EI_008 | Full Professor and Rector | Business management | 11–15 years | 16–20 years | April 27, 2022; 72:47 min |
| EI_009 | Full Professor and Head of Department | Business management | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | March 29, 2022; 35:28 min |
| EI_010 | Associate Professor and Director of Academy of Leadership and Executive Training | Management science | 1–5 years | 11–15 years | April 8, 2022; 51:59 min |
| EI_011 | Associate Professor and Head of Department | Management science | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | April 6, 2022; 49:19 min |
| EI_012 | Full Professor and (former) Rector | Business management | 1–5 years | Over 20 years | March 29, 2022; 49:32 min |

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

| Assigned number for informants | Qualification and recent position | Department | Year range of professional work experience in industry | Year range of knowledge transfer to industry through academic engagement | Time and duration of the interview |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|--|------------------------------------|
| EI_013 | Full Professor and Dean, School of Business | Management science | 1–5 years | 11–15 years | April 6, 2022; 59:53 min |
| EI_014 | Full Professor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor | Entrepreneurship and small enterprise development | 1–5 years | Over 20 years | April 14, 2022; 61:01 min |
| EI_015 | Full Professor and Dean, School of Business | Finance | 1–5 years | 11–15 years | April 12, 2022; 60:03 min |
| EI_016 | Associate Professor and Head of Department | Finance | 0 year | 11–15 years | May 24, 2022; 40:56 min |
| EI_017 | Associate Professor | Marketing and corporate strategy | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | March 9, 2022; 46:10 min |
| EI_018 | Associate Professor | Human resources and organizational development | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | March 9, 2022; 40:32 min |
| EI_019 | Associate Professor | Accounting and finance | 1–5 years | 16–20 years | May 9, 2022; 48:46 min |
| EI_020 | Associate Professor and Head of Department | Accounting and finance | 6–10 years | 6–10 years | March 14, 2022; 51:04 min |
| EI_021 | Associate Professor and Head of Department | Human resources and organizational development | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | March 10, 2022; 37:36 min |
| EI_022 | Full Professor and Dean, School of Business | Marketing and corporate strategy | 1–5 years | 11–15 years | March 11, 2022; 57:06 min |
| EI_023 | Associate Professor and Provost | Marketing and corporate strategy | Over 20 years | Over 20 years | May 11, 2022; 43:08 min |
| EI_024 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Marketing and entrepreneurship | 6–10 years | 6–10 years | March 26, 2022; 66:58 min |
| EI_025 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Public administration and health services management | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | March 23, 2022; 50:41 min |

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

| Assigned number for informants | Qualification and recent position | Department | Year range of professional work experience in industry | Year range of knowledge transfer to industry through academic engagement | Time and duration of the interview |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|------------------------------------|
| EI_026 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Organization and human resource management | 6–10 years | 6–10 years | March 22, 2022; 46:44 min |
| EI_027 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Marketing and entrepreneurship | 6–10 years | 1–5 years | March 18, 2022; 53:50 min |
| EI_028 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Public administration and health services management | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | May 26, 2022; 62:31 min |
| EI_029 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Accounting and finance | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | April 5, 2022; 91:01 min |
| EI_030 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Public administration | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | April 7, 2022; 65:31 min |
| EI_031 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Business management | 1–5 years | 1–5 years | April 4, 2022; 51:43 min |
| EI_032 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Business management | 6–10 years | 16–20 years | March 28, 2022; 43:27 min |
| EI_033 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Public administration | 1–5 years | 11–15 years | April 5, 2022; 36:16 min |
| EI_034 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Business management | 1–5 years | 1–5 years | March 30, 2022; 54:32 min |
| EI_035 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Management science | 16–20 years | 6–10 years | March 30, 2022; 30:33 min |
| EI_036 | PhD, Senior Lecturer, and Head of Department | Management | 6–10 years | 6–10 years | April 13, 2022; 66:42 min |
| EI_037 | PhD, Senior Lecturer, and Head of Department | Accounting | 0 year | 6–10 years | April 11, 2022; 25:26 min |
| EI_038 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Entrepreneurship and small enterprise development | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | April 11, 2022; 46:30 min |
| EI_039 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Marketing and supply chain management | 1–5 years | 1–5 years | April 12, 2022; 31:38 min |
| EI_040 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Human resources and organizational development | 11–15 years | 11–15 years | March 15, 2022; 46:13 min |
| EI_041 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Supply chain and information systems | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | March 10, 2022; 51:41 min |

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

| Assigned number for informants | Qualification and recent position | Department | Year range of professional work experience in industry | Year range of knowledge transfer to industry through academic engagement | Time and duration of the interview |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|------------------------------------|
| EI_042 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Human resource and organizational development | 6–10 years | Over 20 years | March 11, 2022; 22:12 min |
| EI_043 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Supply chain and information systems | 0 year | 1–5 years | March 8, 2022; 45:01 min |
| EI_044 | PhD, Senior Lecturer | Human resource and organizational development | 1–5 years | 1–5 years | March 10, 2022; 27:39 min |
| EI_045 | PhD, Lecturer | Business management | 6–10 years | 1–5 years | April 8, 2022; 70:17 min |
| EI_046 | PhD, Lecturer | Finance | 0 year | 6–10 years | April 12, 2022; 57:01 min |
| EI_047 | PhD, Lecturer | Marketing and supply chain management | 1–5 years | 6–10 years | April 11, 2022; 49:12 min |
| EI_048 | PhD, Lecturer | Entrepreneurship and small enterprise development | 1–5 years | 11–15 years | April 14, 2022; 72:85 min |
| EI_049 | PhD, Lecturer | Marketing and supply chain management | 1–5 years | 1–5 years | April 17, 2022; 53:76 min |
| EI_050 | PhD, Lecturer | Supply chain and information systems | 6–10 years | 1–5 years | March 9, 2022; 59:31 min |
| EI_051 | PhD, Lecturer | Supply chain and information systems | 6–10 years | 6–10 years | March 8, 2022; 56:35 min |
| EI_052 | PhD, Lecturer | Management science | 1–5 years | 1–5 years | April 19, 2022; 47:44 min |

initiate knowledge transfer engagements because they must provide evidence of what they can deliver to society and the private sector (Sá 2015).

We mitigated participant bias by interviewing academics from different departments within four highly distinct university business schools based in Ghana's three largest regional capitals: Accra, Kumasi, and Cape Coast. These cities have varying levels of infrastructure and firm sizes. Accra, the national capital, generally hosts firm headquarters. From a higher education perspective, Kumasi and Cape Coast are Ghana's second and third most significant cities, boasting relatively active business environments. The four universities are members of highly reputable global and regional business education networks (see Table 1). Second, our interviews were not conducted in a traditional question-and-answer format but were dialogue-based. We consistently asked participants to elaborate on their descriptions by providing concrete examples (Lamb, Sandberg, and Liesch 2011).

3.4 | Data Analysis

We adopted Eisenhardt's (1989) "24-h rule" for transcribing interviews verbatim, resulting in a hefty 201 pages of single-spaced text. Participants frequently requested their transcripts for review, corrections, and discussion, fostering data validation and confirmation. We ensured a robust approach by employing various analytical triangulation techniques (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013; Nielsen et al. 2020). Initially, we synchronized data analysis with data collection, focusing on each business school's first five interviewed academics. By so doing, it allowed us to delve into specific emerging themes, such as indigenous milieu knowledge, benefiting from the flexibility in data collection. Subsequently, we linked our findings to existing literature, enhancing internal validity, extending generalizability, and elevating the conceptual depth (Eisenhardt 1989).

Figure 1 illustrates the data structure. We adopted the interpretive approach principles (Smith, Jarman, and Osborn 1999) commonly used in international business research (Lamb, Sandberg, and Liesch 2011; Stoian, Dimitratos, and Plakoyiannaki 2018). Following the footsteps of previous interpretive studies (Stoian, Dimitratos, and Plakoyiannaki 2018), we initially pinpointed first-order categories directly from the interviews and then amalgamated these categories into second-order themes. Each author meticulously combed through the transcripts, deliberated on the segments they uncovered, and reached a consensus on the pertinent categories. We amassed 1025 segments/quotations from the transcription material with MAXQDA's (version 2022) assistance, resulting in 19 first-order categories culminating in nine second-order themes.

4 | Findings and Analysis

4.1 | Drivers of Business School Academics' Knowledge Transfer Engagement

Our findings coalesce into two dimensions of drivers. First, image-opportunity context drivers encompass media engagement, goodwill, and in-service training students.

Second, project-opportunity context drivers characterize projects undertaken by international development organizations and involve relationship-building and networking activities. Below, we elaborate on these drivers in detail.

4.1.1 | Image-Opportunity Context Drivers

4.1.1.1 | Academics in Media Engagements Receive Opportunities From Firms. The media occasionally contacted business school academics, or the academics instead requested to share their views on industries and national economic issues. In doing so, the media advertised academics and their affiliated departments, schools, and universities.

Academics engaged by the media attracted non-academic partners to the business schools. It helped society legitimize academics, giving them a good image. Accordingly, "the transference of public endorsement is to see you as a competent academic" [Snr Lecturer > EI_024]. In effect, academics in media engagements had many opportunities to engage firms. As one recounted, "Academics use the popularity of media engagement as a bridge to initiate industry engagements" [Snr Lecturer > EI_027]. In this vein, "if you should appear on national media for discussion on business issues, most businesspeople may be listening to you, so when they have a project in line with that, then they will approach you—the other time we heard you discussed this issue, so could we engage you" [Prof > EI_015].

Nevertheless, the challenge of media engagement is that your engagements may fall outside your discipline area. For instance, "commenting on national issues does not necessarily mean that you are researching. You may get consultancies that are not the focus of your research works" [Snr Lecturer > EI_024]. In addition, the media approach limits the critical assessment of academics: "You have to say things to retain your popularity in public" [Snr Lecturer > EI_027].

4.1.1.2 | Goodwill. Like other faculty, business school academics are unlikely to advertise themselves because universities strictly forbid that. At the same time, "some academics are not in tune with firms; as a result, organizations are sometimes a bit scared" [Snr Lecturer > EI_032].

As a result, the snowball approach was used to look for competent academics. It is through recommendation—"I went somewhere, and someone talked about you" [Snr Lecturer > EI_025]. Primarily, these recommendations were based on academic productivity and capacity to work in the private sector. On one part, students, both former students and current student workers, recommended academics to their firms. As one indicated, "Sometimes, firms have past students from this business school who are in management positions. So, when they face a problem, they think about who can help, and then they come to me" [Snr Lecturer > EI_040].

In other ways, firms referred to previous academic engagements and requested expert recommendations. As one noted, "so often, when firms are looking for academics, they ask people for references and recommendations [...] Other times I have done something somewhere, somebody was in that project.

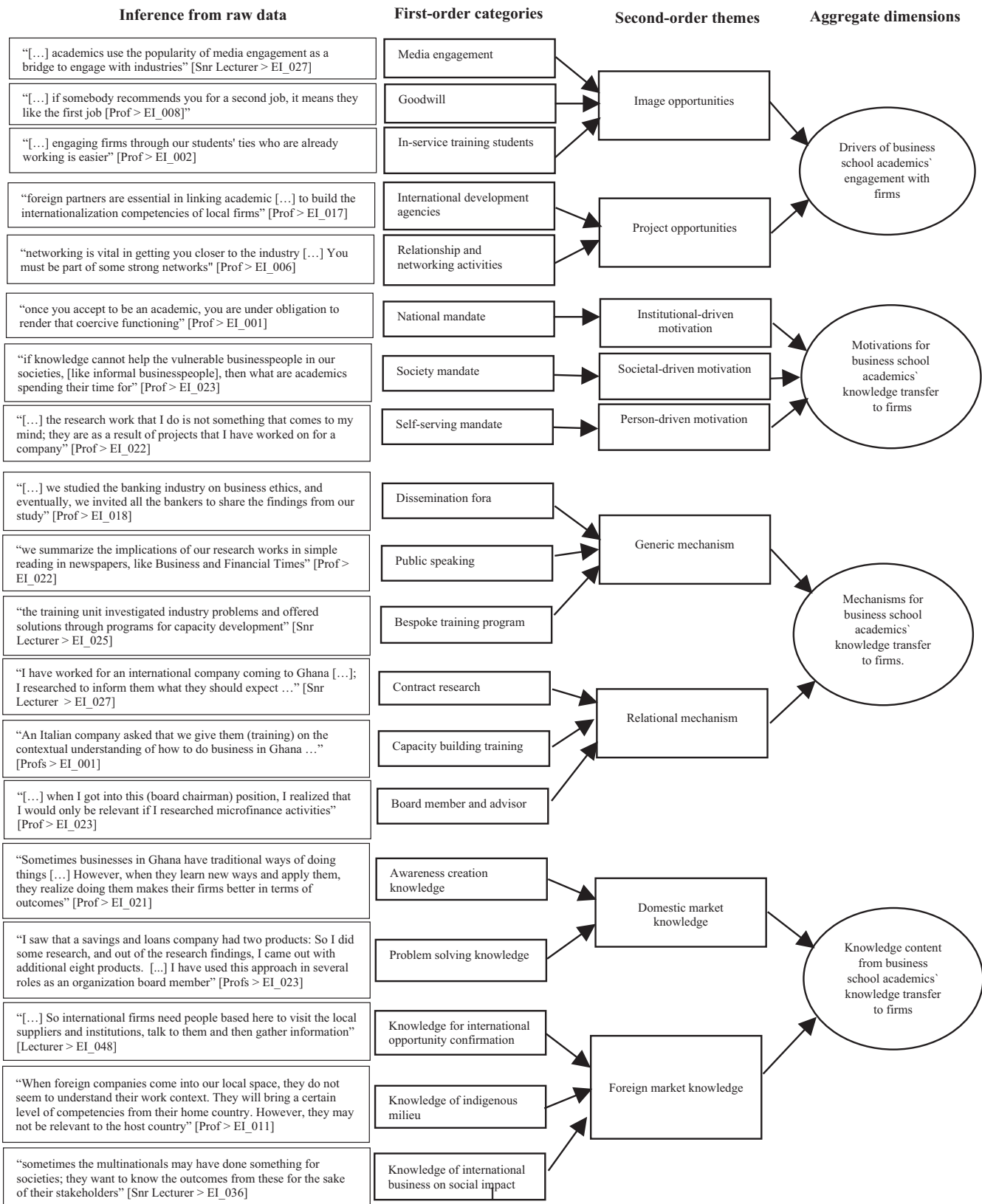


FIGURE 1 | Data structure.

This person recommended me in the future" [Prof > EI_001]. Altogether, "[...] if somebody recommends you for a second job, it means they like the first job" [Prof > EI_008]. Accordingly, firms engaged academics through good word of mouth.

4.1.1.3 | In-Service Training Students Are Used as Bait to Engage Firms. In-service training students work full-time for their firms and simultaneously study full-time or part-time, often on evenings and weekends at university business schools.

They “did not directly engage academics, but they referred academics to the firms they worked for” [Snr Lecturer > EI_037]. As pointed out, “engaging firms through our students already working is easier. The students are used as bait to engage the industry” [Prof > EI_002].

In-service training students informed academics of engagement opportunities in their firms: “We got one consultancy in the mining industry through a student. He saw our capabilities and led us to that job” [Lecturer > EI_051]. In another stream, “There was a distribution company manager in my current class. I taught their class a course, and he thought that my course was very relevant to a problem in his organization. He asked his human resource office to engage me via consultancy” [Prof > EI_011].

Supervising students’ thesis and semester projects also offered platforms for academics to engage firms. Students were often encouraged to research problems in their firms. One affirmed that, “I used students to embark on industry-driven research. The research findings serve as a springboard to engage industries through consulting and training” [Prof > EI_012].

Summarizing the above remarks, relating theory to practice was crucial for in-service training students to recommend without academics being involved or even aware. Your teaching will always sell you to the students. Students appreciated it when academics related their teachings to the local industry. Accordingly, “the more I made my teaching practical, the more students recommended me to their firms” [Lecturer > EI_047]. In realizing this, academics often referred to their previous industry engagements: “I have opportunities to work on many international projects, which I use as classroom examples. The students realize that I have a vast array of experiences, so anytime their firms want something similar, they know that it is something that I can deliver” [Prof > EI_014].

These benefits notwithstanding, only some in-service training students facilitated academic engagement. As one recounted: “It is a viable channel, but it depended on the job positions of my students [...] Those well-positioned easily facilitated my engagement with industries” [Prof > EI_003].

4.1.2 | Project-Opportunity Context Drivers

4.1.2.1 | Projects by International Development Organizations. International development organizations engaged academics to facilitate knowledge transfer to indigenous firms. They served as knowledge transfer supporters. “Local firms often were interested in engaging academics when a third party instituted that” [Snr Lecturer > EI_034]. International development organizations connected academics to firms that depended on their services. “Foreign partners were essential in engaging academics to build the internationalization competencies of local firms” [Prof > EI_017]. However, the challenge was the sustainability of this academic engagement. There was a dependency syndrome with common findings that “local firms often stopped engaging academics when internationally funded projects lapsed” [Prof > EI_012].

Moreover, government-owned international development organizations engage academics who have studied in their countries, often focusing on developmental projects within an academic’s home country and subregion. For instance, “the Danish International Development Agency has a network of students who studied in Denmark. In most cases, when they are looking for local consultants, that becomes a channel” [Prof > EI_003]. As frequently recounted, “I know academic friends who had doctoral studies abroad [...] They are always engaged in international projects in Ghana, from development organizations in the countries they studied” [Prof > EI_002].

4.1.2.2 | Relationships and Networking Are Vital in Getting You Closer to Firms. Academic engagement is about people knowing you—mainly about relationships and networking. “Networking was vital in getting academics closer to the industry [...] You must have some strong ties” [Prof > EI_006].

Informal academic engagements were more often through personal ties. They are about individual activities based on personal relationships and networks. Academics belonged to professional bodies and participated in meetings of industry associations. As pointed out, “We have developed modules for firms exporting to African countries, and for firms exporting beyond Africa [...] this activity was done with industry associations” [Snr Lecturer > EI_029].

Moreover, firms preferred formalizing their academic engagement. In this context, findings demonstrate that established dean’s units and committees manage knowledge transfer engagements rather than technology transfer offices. As often stated, “Multinationals send requests to the business school dean. The dean forms a consultancy team. So far, my work with international firms has been through team composition from the business school” [Snr Lecturer > EI_026].

4.2 | Motivations for Business School Academics’ Knowledge Transfer Engagement

4.2.1 | National Mandate

The state mandates the university and its downstream structures (colleges, faculties, schools, departments) to teach, research, and offer extension services. This mandate is often enshrined in business schools’ vision and mission statements, in parallel with the university. The taxpayers’ money is used to pay public university academics. Accordingly, “once you accept to be an academic, you are under obligation to render that coercive functioning” [Prof > EI_001]. As often illustrated, “I will look at my academic engagement from an institutional perspective because [our business school] was established to train staff in public and private sectors” [Prof > EI_013].

4.2.2 | Society Mandate

The advancement of society rests on knowledge. Business school academics were motivated by society’s contributions to their current position of acquired knowledge through scholarships and subventions. As underlined, “I schooled at [at this

university] from 1991 to 1996. The university was virtually free, covering accommodation and tuition fees. So, the motivation is how to help industries benefit from my knowledge” [Prof > EI_013].

The motivation from a society mandate was researching local industry problems. As commonly said, “I have more passion for firms in the informal sector because they need us the most but are neglected” [Prof > EI_009]. “The motivation is to be able to research local business problems and share the research findings with practitioners. In our part of the world, most business decisions are based on what business owner-managers think is the norm” [Prof > EI_022].

Academics derived their value by demonstrating their relevance in society. Their passion was that “knowledge is not only restricted to academic publications” [Prof > EI_023], “Citations are good, but that is for self-glorification” [Prof > EI_017]. As often illustrated, “anytime I get a call from development and business organizations, to consult for them, it gives me that kind of joy [...] it is the most exciting part of the work I do as an academic” [Snr Lecturer > EI_030]. As academics engaged organizations, “the more their university brand became visible to society. They gained loyalty and acceptance in society” [Prof > EI_011].

4.2.3 | Self-Serving Mandate

A self-serving mandate involves acquiring an additional source of income, enriching classroom teaching, and informing future research activities. Other benefits include boosting your chances of promotion and expanding your professional network. These examples illustrate individual enhancement incentives.

Business school academics engaged firms to fulfill their academic promotion requirements. However, this engagement counted little toward academic promotion, juxtaposed to scientific publications.

So, academics engaged by firms were seen as “unacademic by not being part of the academic culture” [Snr Lecturer > EI_024]. As one bemoaned, “Compared to my colleagues, I have few publications. I spent most of my time on business engagements. My colleagues who were into publications climbed the academic ladder faster than I did” [Prof > EI_023].

Given this situation, academics often considered what they could gain from publications before collaborating with firms. Their academic engagement was to inform future research activities because of the mantra of “publish or perish” (Harzing 2010). The institutional-driven “you-must-research” influences researching for the sake of promotion. Emphatically, “You can research without engaging the industry and get your promotion, [...] as far as institution drives us to do research, I do not think that is a higher motivation” [Snr Lecturer > EI_028]. “If you are doing research without industry impacts, then you are a typical academic, publishing for the sake of publishing” [Prof > EI_022]. Supporting the view that “high-level theoretical research may probably bring about promotion within academia, but may not be toward finding solutions to local industry and national development challenges” [Lecturer > EI_045].

Moreover, academics used the knowledge generated from business engagements to inform their research questions. Accordingly, “[...] the research work that I do is not something that comes to my mind; they are as a result of projects that I have worked on for firms” [Prof > EI_022]. In addition, academic engagement enriches classroom teaching performance. “Academics engaged by international firms became famous; they were more relevant in their teaching” [Prof > EI_012]. “Students like examples from industry practices more than books that may not have been locally contextualized. So, the best way is to have this fusion, which greatly motivates me” [Snr Lecturer > EI_036].

In summary, the self-serving mandate represents a person-driven motivation geared toward enhancing teaching and project-based research activities and advancing an academic's career progression and networks. It hinges on academics' readiness and resolve to disseminate knowledge to firms. Meanwhile, the societal mandate embodies a motivation driven by societal needs. Finally, the national mandate serves as an institutional-driven motivation, with academics fulfilling their coercive functional roles underpinned by statutory laws.

4.3 | Mechanisms for Business School Academics' Knowledge Transfer Engagement

4.3.1 | Generic Mechanism

The generic mechanism involves knowledge transfer to non-targeted recipients. There is no binding contract between the partners. Next, we describe the shared reported mechanisms.

4.3.1.1 | Dissemination Fora. Business school academics organized stakeholder engagement to create awareness of their research findings. As often remarked, “Every research work is to solve business problems, so once you solve these problems, you desire to communicate your findings to business owner-managers” [Prof > EI_018]. This mechanism was commonly practiced by academics who were members of professional bodies. In one illustration, “I am the chair of the Ghana Chartered Institute of Procurement Supply. I often present my research findings to the association members” [Lecturer > EI_047]. In resource-constrained settings, individuals and firms often have limited access to subscribed publication outlets, which publishers in Western countries mainly own. Considering this, academics employed this conventional approach.

4.3.1.2 | Public Speaking. Business school academics utilized media speaking and talk shows to educate the public on national and industry issues. Public speaking encompassed participation in media engagements and other on-site collective platforms (e.g., public lectures) for knowledge dissemination. Participation in this mechanism was voluntary. Mostly, “there is nothing like signing contracts or being paid for your engagements” [Snr Lecturer > EI_025]. However, in the long term, “when everybody realizes you are the master of your field, then comes the economic incentives. Yeah, it is like I am building my portfolio” [Lecturer > EI_050]. Moreover, academics advocated for industry changes through public talks and lectures. Echoing, “I summarize the implications of my

research works in simple reading in newspapers, like Business and Financial Times. Sometimes, I use policy briefs published in newsletters and magazines” [Prof > EI_022].

4.3.1.3 | Bespoke Short Programs. Established training units offered general short programs for industry practitioners. The programs were not customized for individual firms but were profession-based programs for sectors and industries. In this context, academics first examined the most typical problems within the sectors of industries. They then developed non-academic programs that responded to the challenges faced by industry players. Accordingly, “the training unit investigated industry problems and offered solutions through programs for capacity development” [Snr Lecturer > EI_025]. This knowledge transfer mechanism differs from the conventional route of mainstream degree programs offered in business schools. Among other benefits, the manuals for customized short programs were also utilized for mainstream degree programs.

4.3.2 | Relational Mechanism

The relational mechanism explains knowledge transfer to targeted recipients. We found binding contracts between the knowledge source (academic) and the recipient. In the following, we outline the shared reported mechanisms.

4.3.2.1 | Engaged as an Organization Board Member and Advisor. Business school academics joined firms as board members, advisors, and committee chairs to provide intellectual leadership. They often directed their research interests to the sector activities of their engaged firms. As frequently exhibited, “I became a board chairman of a financial firm for about nine years [...] when I got into this position, I realized that I would only be relevant if I researched microfinance activities” [Prof > EI_023].

In addition, international firms engaged academics on their corporate boards to explore the host market knowledge. Academics’ scientific works investigate local firms. Hence, they understood the local business knowledge. As shown in this typical example, “The only international projects I have done have been through serving on corporate boards of international firms [...] I became the chairman of a foundation for foreign telecommunication firms. I was teaching Executive MBA students about social responsibility, and one student approached me and said, we are setting up a corporate social responsibility foundation. You seem to know a lot about this. They came to see me, and I eventually became the Chairman” [Prof > EI_012].

4.3.2.2 | Capacity Building Training. Capacity-building training is demand-driven, based on individual firm needs. Academics initially assessed “what an organization needs, what the organization wants to accomplish, and if training can contribute to that” [Prof > EI_010]. Among domestic firms, academics found it “easier to transfer knowledge through [a sector association] training because of minimal cost” [Lecturer > EI_050]. A typical case illustrates, “We engaged in training a group of artisans. I frequently visited these artisans. Some of the things they did were fantastic. When I asked whether they export these products, most responded that when a foreigner comes here to buy. Our training was a contract service

from the association. The training influenced the artisans to internationalize their businesses” [Prof > EI_022].

For international firms operating in the host (Ghanaian) market, capacity-building training is often about understanding context. As repeatedly illustrated, “An Italian company asked that we give them a contextual understanding of how to do business in Ghana. We trained them about the country’s regulations, culture, and level of doing business” [Prof > EI_001].

The first step in academic engagement with business was through capacity building. Firms initially recognize your value through your delivery. Subsequently, you may be further engaged in providing consultancy and contract research. As noted, “Sometimes you go out to do training for firms. After the training, they look at your skill sets and feel they can further engage you through consultancies and research. So, it goes beyond just training” [Prof > EI_011].

4.3.2.3 | Contract Research. International firms offer contract research to assess business feasibility and evaluate potential markets. On the one hand, academics research business feasibility to confirm international opportunities. In one case example, “a foreign company wanted to establish a fertilizer production and processing plant in the Volta region. This company engaged us to embark on a feasibility study on the project’s marketability, profitability, and sustainability” [Prof > EI_004].

Following the market entry stage, international firms continue to engage academics to enhance their competitiveness in the host market. We found this commonly among inexperienced international firms that have expanded to an institutional void market. As usually said, “My jobs are primarily for younger international firms [...] At the early stage, they often seek contextual intelligence to understand their new environment [...] Once they settle, they move on” [Prof > EI_013].

The subsequent phase involves international firms establishing stability in foreign markets. They are concerned about gaining societal recognition and seek to understand stakeholders’ perceptions of their services and products. One typical case is that “we had contract research with a foreign mining company. They wanted to assess how the communities saw their works and how the goldmine had impacted the community. Before the start of their operations, the community lacked essential facilities. However, the community people were still unsatisfied with the company [...] we got to know the community’s demands or needs, what the company was doing for the community, and what could be improved” [Prof > EI_017].

4.4 | The Knowledge Content From Business School Academics’ Knowledge Transfer Engagement

4.4.1 | Knowledge Type for a Domestic Market

Findings indicate that awareness creation and problem-solving knowledge are essential for domestic market firms. Awareness creation knowledge describes learning a new understanding

of doing things. As often reported, “Sometimes businesses in Ghana have traditional ways of doing things [...] However, when they learn new ways and apply them, they realize doing them makes their firms better in terms of outcomes” [Prof > EI_021]. This way, academics offered insights to firms.

Moreover, problem-solving knowledge represents academics offering potential solutions to industry problems (research-driven solutions) and general business knowledge for firms to carry out successful business activities (functional/application knowledge). In his illustration, “I saw that a savings and loans company had two products; group and individual loans. I asked myself, are these the only products they could offer the market? So, I researched and developed eight more products from the research findings. They have sold these products over the years to the market until now [...] I have used this approach in several roles as an organization board member” [Prof > EI_023]. In this vein, academics provided intellectual leadership to firms.

4.4.2 | Knowledge Type for Pre-Internationalization

Business school academics facilitated the transfer of knowledge to confirm international opportunities. Two decision-making approaches underlie why firms engage academics before entering foreign markets. The first is a programmed decision, referring to routine decisions firms make through standard operating procedures.

Conversely, a non-programmed decision necessitates careful deliberation involving multiple stakeholders, brainstorming, and considering variables associated with the issue before concluding. The latter presents challenges in economic settings with limited access to reliable codified information. Data challenges include data gaps, outdated data, biased data, and incorrect numbers (Miller, Moore, and Eden 2024; Rosenberg and Goodwin 2016). In such situations, access to primary data is often crucial for making informed decisions with reduced risk. For illustration, “You can sit here and do desktop research and find out a lot about developed economies because most of the things are published online, but here it is difficult. So international firms need academics to collect data from local partners” [Lecturer > EI_048].

Therefore, business school academics enriched the decision-making toolkit by assisting firms in making informed decisions regarding foreign market entry. A representative example reads, “a German food company is proposing to operate in Ghana. They are into the production of piggery. I have already done the preliminary work, including land acquisition. They are interested in investing in local farmers to establish piggery farms to buy the pigs when they grow” [Snr Lecturer > EI_029].

4.4.3 | Knowledge Type During Internationalization

The host market environment determines a foreign firm's success. Academics served as gatekeepers to access indigenous knowledge. As often revealed, “When foreign companies come into our local space, they do not seem to understand their work context. They will bring a certain level of competencies from

their home country. However, they may not be relevant to the host country” [Prof > EI_011]. Accordingly, academics “contextualized business problems and worked on possible solutions based on the appreciation of the views of internationalized firms' owners and management” [Prof > EI_004]. A representative example reads, “a Dutch Company brought staff from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to be on a project for 2 years in Ghana. They realized they did not achieve the expected performance one and a half years into the project. Immediately, they reached out through an organization I had gone to consult before” [Prof > EI_011].

Moreover, academics provided knowledge on the social impact of international business. International firms engage with academics to learn from their corporate social responsibilities. Their aim is not to waste resources, as echoed by this representative example: “Sometimes, the multinationals may have done development projects for societies; they want to know the outcomes” [Snr Lecturer > EI_036]. Another recounted, “I worked for a foreign mining company; they needed help managing their stakeholders [...]. The research framework helped them to stabilize their working environment. Their competitors in Ghana's gold mining industry have suffered much instability in their communities over the past ten years” [Snr Lecturer > EI_027].

5 | Discussion and Implications

Figure 2 synthesizes the qualitative findings into a four-stage integrative framework, highlighting that conceptual frameworks can emerge from exploratory research and experiential knowledge beyond existing theories and thought experiments (Collins and Stockton 2018). Next, we discuss the findings of each stage.

5.1 | Drivers of Business School Academics' Knowledge Transfer Engagement

Media engagement, goodwill, and in-service training students created an opportunity to transfer knowledge through image building. In-service training students acted as a bridge between academia, firms, and industries, facilitating knowledge transfer by bridging cultural barriers. They informed academics about knowledge transfer opportunities within their firms. In-service training students work and attend school simultaneously (Tho and Trang 2015). In sub-Saharan African business schools, they often pursue executive Master of Business Administration programs and hold various positions within firms, ranging from low to middle to high levels (Ibeh and Debrah 2011).

In addition, academics offered discussions on local and national media, primarily radio, television, and newspapers. In return, they used the popularity gained as a bridge to engage with firms. Academics engaged by the media received opportunities for knowledge transfer engagements.

Moreover, we demonstrated project opportunity-context drivers, such as projects by international development organizations, and engaged in relationship and networking activities. International development organizations largely undertake

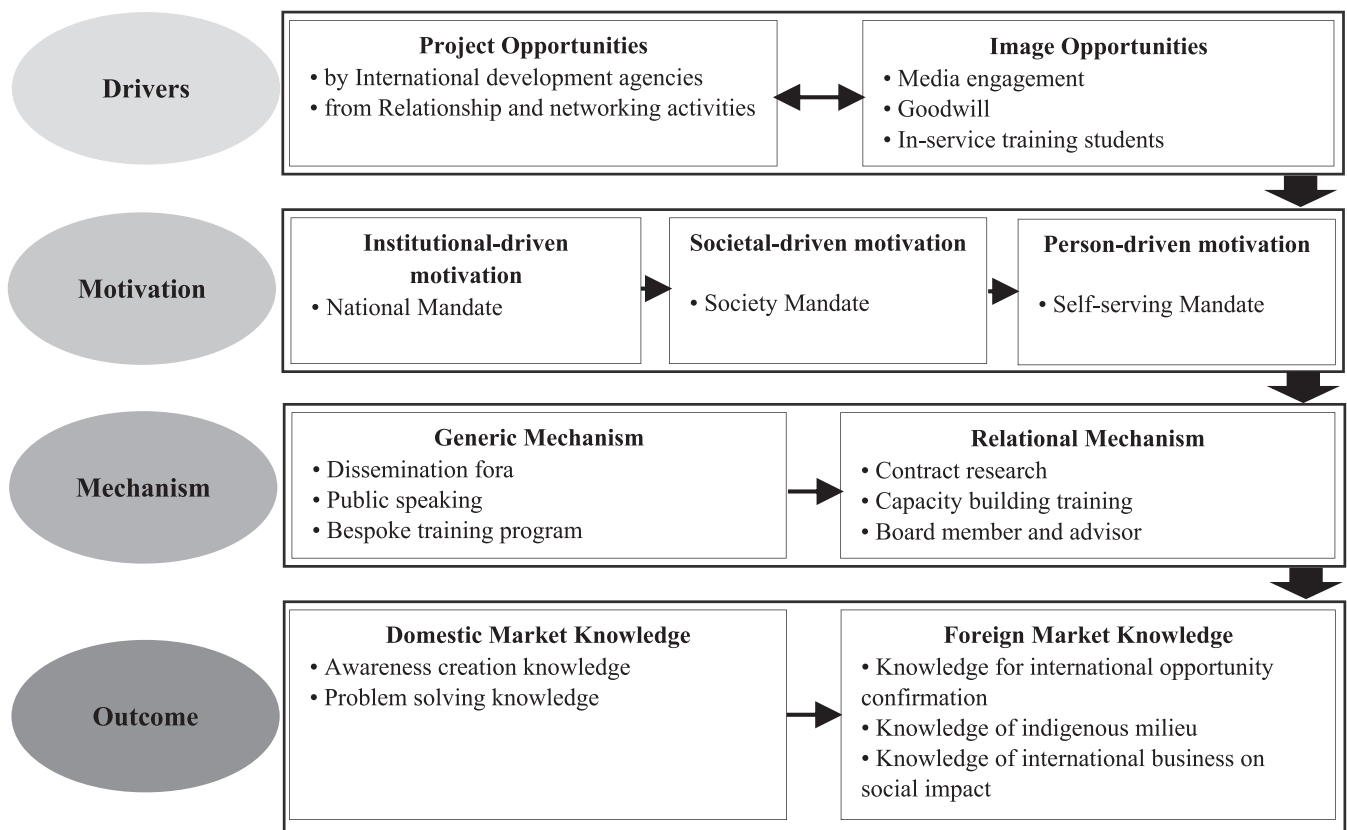


FIGURE 2 | An integrative framework.

projects in developing and emerging economies due to the common economic and social development challenges they face. In sub-Saharan Africa, achievements of sustainable development goals are progressing too slowly, and improvement requires more significant contributions from official development assistance (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2023). In this context, government-owned development organizations, primarily from Western countries, often request services from academics who have pursued postgraduate or doctoral studies through scholarships and exchange programs in their countries. Such engagements cover project-type interventions implemented in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa. Consistent with Sa's (2015) assertion, international development organizations all share the aim of strengthening capacity building in African universities to partner with the private sector.

Additionally, personal ties created opportunities for academic engagement. A critical driver for knowledge transfer is the personal relationships between academics and businesspeople and how they interact (Galan-Muros and Davey 2019; Perkmann et al. 2013). Business school academics joined professional associations to cultivate relationships and business networks. They also followed the lead of their departmental peers within their close networks.

In summary, business school academics depended on intangible drivers, which required fewer financial resource commitments and less involvement from university technology transfer offices. Therefore, we propose that:

Business school academics into knowledge transfer for firms are more likely induced by image opportunity (i.e., media engagement, goodwill, in-service training students) and project opportunity drivers (i.e., by international development organizations and from relationship and networking).

5.2 | Motivations for Business School Academics' Knowledge Transfer Engagement

Knowledge transfer from business schools to firms through academics depended on national, societal, and self-serving mandates, stimulating institutional, societal, and person-driven motivations.

About the national mandate, academics executed their coercive functional roles backed by statutory laws, as enshrined in the business schools' vision and mission statements. Once they accepted the academic role, they were obligated to fulfill these coercive functions. Academics were paid with taxpayers' money, which made them feel indebted to the state. Increasing funding pressure on higher education, graduate unemployment, and responding to national development imperatives have prompted calls for national responsibility from business school faculty.

Second, concerning the societal mandate, academics were motivated by what they could contribute to the community, civil

society, and welfare partners (university community, NGOs, churches, media, and development agencies). They saw that society had contributed to their academic profession through scholarships and subventions. Academics realigned their engagement goals to solve social and development challenges confronting humanity. In sub-Saharan Africa, academic engagement oriented toward the community, government, welfare, and civil society partners appears more significant (Kruss and Visser 2017; Sá 2015). Kruss and Gastrow (2017) used the term “development imperatives” to describe academic actors’ commitment to social justice and the public good. Consequently, academics contributed to the developmental university perspective by addressing societal needs (Bayuo, Chaminade, and Göransson 2020).

For self-serving mandates, academics are motivated by various factors, including gaining an additional source of income, enhancing classroom teaching, and contributing to future research endeavors. Other motivations include advancing promotion prospects and expanding professional networks. These factors represent individual enhancement incentives. Similarly, Amara, Halilem, and Traoré (2016) discovered that earnings from consulting services incentivized business school academics to offer value-adding services to firms. Additionally, the findings regarding the enrichment of classroom teaching validate the positive impacts of academic engagements, leading to improved material presentation, enhanced course structure, a stronger teaching reputation, and increased student employability (Perkmann et al. 2021).

To summarize, the various mandates influenced academics’ motives for knowledge transfer. It was found that academics, especially those new to the field, initially prioritize fulfilling their national and societal mandates to establish moral legitimacy. However, academics focus on fulfilling their self-serving mandate as they progress in their careers, which is commonly observed among those with high research productivity and strong industry relationships and networks. Consistent with Kruss and Gastrow’s (2017) findings, national and societal mandates are driven by development imperatives, while the self-serving mandate is primarily motivated by financial and intellectual considerations.

Prior studies have conceptualized motives as underlying reasons for engagement with firms, construed as anticipated benefits regarding knowledge goals, access to resources, and personal income (Ankrah et al. 2013; Perkmann et al. 2021). The decisions of academics to work with firms were driven by research complementarity and resources (Perkmann, Neely, and Wlash 2011). Likewise, D’Este and Perkmann (2011) demonstrated expectations about learning opportunities, access to in-kind resources, access to funding, and personal economic returns. The elaborated expectations from engagement with firms largely reflect the fulfillment of self-serving mandates; however, expectations to fulfill national and societal mandates must be considered. In sub-Saharan Africa, knowledge transfer by academics and their universities means establishing links to the community to enhance people’s standard of living and contribute to national development (Sá 2015). Accordingly,

As a business school academic, your motivation to transfer knowledge is more likely influenced by national, societal, and self-serving mandates.

5.3 | Mechanisms for Business School Academics’ Knowledge Transfer Engagement

The knowledge transfer mechanisms encompassed various modes, including contract research, capacity-building training, dissemination fora, public speaking engagements, bespoke training programs, board membership, and advisory roles. They were categorized as generic and relational mechanisms, depending on the nature of recipients, contract availability, and knowledge content. A common method of classifying knowledge transfer through university–business linkage is by examining the primary content of the activities upon which a particular collaboration is centered (Thune 2011).

On the one hand, the generic mechanism caters to non-targeted recipients; thus, no binding contract exists between the knowledge source (business school academic) and the recipients. This mechanism primarily serves industry professional associations, communities, governments, welfare organizations, and civil society partners who, in their pursuit of progress, seek knowledge from business school academics through dissemination fora, public speaking engagements, and bespoke training programs.

Bespoke training programs represent lifelong learning activities, targeting particular skills and industry training needs (Galan-Muros and Davey 2019; Thune 2011). Academic engagement through teaching and research includes offering professional courses on a fee basis to respond to industries’ specific skill and training requirements (Ssebuwufu, Ludwick, and Béland 2012). Academics further utilize dissemination fora by organizing stakeholder engagements to raise awareness of their research findings. Additionally, they voluntarily participate in public speaking via media and on-site collective platforms (e.g., public lectures) to inform and educate people about industry concerns. This finding resonates with Abreu and Grinevich’s (2013, 420) observation that contributing to radio and television programs is a potential mechanism for academic knowledge transfer. These generic links have low relational engagement, but help alleviate firms’ competency gaps and internal resource constraints (Jones and De Zubielqui 2016).

On the other hand, relational mechanisms target recipients and are characterized by high relational involvement between the partners involved. Thus, a binding contract exists between the knowledge source and recipients. The relational mechanism describes academic engagement in individual firms’ projects to produce typical benefits. Academics serve as organization board members and advisors, providing capacity-building training and conducting contract research. Academics occupy positions as non-executive directors in different firms simultaneously, which relates to interlocking directorates, an essential route for knowledge transfer (Emre-Yildiz et al. 2022). Additionally, contract research refers to non-academic publications reflecting project-driven, competence-based, and action research intended for knowledge exploration and exploitation by firms.

Collectively, the generic and relational mechanisms are person-centric. In particular, transferring knowledge via dissemination fora, public speaking, and bespoke training programs allows for searching as a mode of knowledge acquisition by recipients. Likewise, recipients could vicariously learn by engaging scholars as board members and advisors and through contract research and capacity-building training. This finding extends our understanding of knowledge transfer from business schools to firms through academics, which prior studies have solely based on consultancy services and expert advice (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016; Wright et al. 2009). Accordingly,

Business school academics are more likely to adopt personal-centric knowledge transfer mechanisms.

5.4 | Knowledge Content From Business School Academics' Knowledge Transfer Engagement

Findings demonstrate two broad types of knowledge content following the context of knowledge application. Domestic market knowledge describes awareness creation knowledge, which constitutes transferable business knowledge and exposure to business laws and practices. Awareness creation knowledge explains learning new ways of doing things. Academics created awareness of their research findings conducted in a local industry setting that was previously unknown and inaccessible to firm management, industry practitioners, and policymakers. In this way, academics shared insights from their research findings to inform firms' decisions, policies, and strategies (Tung et al. 2023). Academic engagement increases firms' capacity to learn, allowing their management to reflect on their own experiences and those of other business partners (Gordon, Hamilton, and Jack 2012).

The second element of domestic market knowledge is problem-solving knowledge. Business school academics produced knowledge for practical application as their research was positioned at the intersection of theory and practice (Wright et al. 2009). Academics who provided solid and clear practical implications made their research more relatable and relevant to businesspeople, thereby creating a more direct link between theorizing and practical application (Morris et al. 2023). Engaging in "problem-driven and phenomenon-based research" involves listening to and engaging with practitioners to understand opportunities and challenges in the international arena (Tung et al. 2023). In line with Amara, Halilem, and Traoré (2016), knowledge transferred to firms by business school academics fostered a better understanding of business problems. Academics in business schools provided expert advice by applying existing scientific knowledge to specific business problems; therefore, they transferred existing rather than new knowledge (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016). Sa (2015) established that most partnerships between scholars and the private sector in sub-Saharan Africa involve the application of knowledge to solving relatively fundamental issues.

Accordingly, academic engagement enhanced firms' explorative and exploitative learning (Bishop, D'Este, and Neely 2011). Awareness-creation knowledge enhanced firms' capacity to identify and interpret information relevant to research (i.e., explorative learning). This explicit knowledge is associated with

concrete data and information, readily codified and communicated (Shahzad, Chilba, and Arslan 2024). In contrast, the capacity to apply knowledge to downstream activities (i.e., exploitative learning) was enhanced by problem-solving knowledge, which entails tacit knowledge drawing on an academic's know-how and intuition (Shahzad, Chilba, and Arslan 2024). Academics contributed to fundamental understanding and access to information for new processes, as well as direct assistance in problem-solving (Bishop, D'Este, and Neely 2011).

Moreover, foreign market knowledge describes knowledge for confirming international opportunities and understanding both the indigenous milieu and the impact of international business on society. These aspects are reflected in market knowledge (Amankwah-Amoah et al. 2022; Fletcher and Harris 2012). Such knowledge is sought after from business school academics by international firms seeking to operate in Ghana, sub-Saharan Africa, or those with branch offices in the subregion.

During the pre-internationalization phase, academics in business schools enriched the decision-making toolbox by aiding in recognizing international opportunities. Next, in their early internationalization phase, international firms acquired tacit knowledge of the indigenous milieu from business school faculty. We found this commonly reported among international firms that had failed their initial trials or struggled in emerging markets after downplaying the socio-cultural contexts. Indigenous milieu knowledge represents the tacit knowledge of the natives, including norms, values, institutional knowledge of local stakeholders (e.g., chief-taincy), local conditions, and opportunities.

At the mature internationalization phase, international firms engaged academics to acquire explicit knowledge about the impact of their international business practices on society. They sought to learn and gain explicit knowledge of issues that benefited societies through their corporate social responsibilities. The premise of "doing good" was a common motivation for these international firms. Institutional pressures compelled them to adopt responsible business activities that conformed to the norms of their external environments in host foreign markets.

In this context, international firms engaged academics, often collaborating with business schools and universities, to facilitate knowledge transfer and become legitimate by conforming to prevailing social norms. Increased legitimacy opens doors to other business relationships, helping firm's access crucial resources and expertise. Firms collaborate with academics and universities to appear "socially responsible" by addressing societal problems through these partnerships (Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa 2015). In doing so, international firms fulfill their transformational role in sub-Saharan Africa, supporting the notion of Africapitalism (Kamoche and Wood 2023). This finding implies that international firms enhance their image, reputation, and legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders by associating with business school academics. We, therefore, propose that:

The knowledge content for firms derived from business school academics' knowledge transfer is more likely influenced by the market contexts (i.e.,

domestic or foreign) in which the knowledge is applied.

5.5 | Theoretical Implications

The study's findings contribute to comprehending academic engagement within a business school context. The proposed framework provides valuable insights grounded in the AMO theory (Blumberg and Pringle 1982; Waldman and Spangler 1989). Opportunity encompasses image and project opportunities, serving as contextual drivers that facilitate scholars' knowledge transfer to firms. Media engagement, goodwill, and in-service training students create image opportunities for knowledge transfer engagement. Project opportunity contexts entail projects facilitated by international development organizations and fostered through relationship-building and networking. As a result, business school academics heavily rely on intangible drivers for knowledge transfer to firms, necessitating fewer financial resources and support from university technology transfer offices and enterprise development centers.

Motivation encompasses the influence of national, societal, and self-serving mandates on academics' willingness to transfer knowledge. This study illustrates institutional-driven, societal-driven, and person-driven motivations. While prior studies on scholars' expectations from engagement with firms have largely focused on fulfilling self-serving mandates (Perkmann et al. 2021), these findings indicate the importance of considering expectations related to national and societal mandates, especially in regions like sub-Saharan Africa, where knowledge transfer aims to contribute to societal and national development (Sá 2015).

Ability describes the capacity of business school academics to employ generic and relational mechanisms for knowledge transfer to firms. Scholars adopt personal-centric knowledge transfer mechanisms that facilitate searching and vicarious learning by firms. Dissemination fora, public speaking, and bespoke training programs enable firms to acquire knowledge by searching. Similarly, firms can vicariously learn by engaging academics as board members and advisors and through contract research and capacity-building training. These mechanisms enrich our understanding of business school academics' knowledge transfer, and previous studies have primarily focused on consultancy services and expert advice to firms (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016; Halilem, De Silva, and Amara 2022; Wright et al. 2009).

Finally, business school academics transfer two broad types of knowledge content based on the context in which the knowledge is applied, describing the outcomes of interactions between ability, motivation, and opportunity.

5.6 | Practical and Policy Implications

First, business school academics serve as an alternative source of foreign market knowledge for firms. Traditionally, firms

expanding abroad rely on self-directed and experiential learning to acquire foreign market knowledge (Amankwah-Amoah et al. 2022; Fletcher and Harris 2012; Stoian, Dimitratos, and Plakoyiannaki 2018). However, when operating in emerging markets with weak formal institutions and limited data (Miller, Moore, and Eden 2024; Rosenberg and Goodwin 2016), international firms often need support obtaining current and reliable market information. Engaging with business school academics provides an alternative avenue for accessing valuable foreign market insights, enabling international firms to save time and cut down on additional financial costs associated with learning and professional development for successful foreign business operations.

Second, the findings provide insights for university management seeking to enhance knowledge transfer in tacit knowledge disciplines, such as social sciences and humanities, to achieve collective and inclusive dissemination to diverse audiences. Importantly, knowledge transfer engagements can occur independently of specific transfer structures, such as technology transfer offices, as evidenced by the influence of image and project-opportunity context drivers and the generic and relational mechanisms of interactions. Consequently, university management should prioritize providing academics with training in entrepreneurial skills and industry experience orientations. Developing crucial skills such as entrepreneurship, marketing, and strategic planning becomes imperative for reinforcing university-business linkages in sub-Saharan Africa (Ssebuwufu, Ludwick, and Béland 2012). Thus, university business schools in this region must proactively enhance their internal capacity to collaborate with firms and industries.

Third, findings call for business owners and managers to comprehend the diverse mandates that shape academics' motivations for engaging in knowledge transfer initiatives. Academics are employed across diverse university types, engaging with various stakeholders. Their involvement spans knowledge transfer engagement with the private sector, government, community, and civil society as collaborative partners (Kruss and Visser 2017; Sá 2015). Simultaneously, academics may be associated with research universities, comprehensive universities, universities of technology, or rural universities (Kruss and Visser 2017).

The distinct characteristics of these university types and the array of stakeholders significantly influence academics. This influence guides them in selecting suitable mandates and motivations for knowledge transfer initiatives. For example, academics affiliated with rural universities will likely be motivated by societal mandates. Academics at rural universities may tend to engage with the community (including individuals, households, and specific local communities), government (at provincial and regional levels), and civil society (including trade unions, political organizations, and civic associations) as collaborative partners.

In contrast, academics associated with universities of technology are likely driven by national and self-serving mandates. They are more likely to collaborate with firms and national government departments.

Finally, university management must reconsider the academic promotion criteria, particularly recognizing the increasing significance of community engagement and social development in sub-Saharan Africa (Kruss and Visser 2017). Academic promotions hinge on individuals' contributions to teaching, research, and the third missions of their universities. Nevertheless, the distribution of emphasis on these dimensions varies across contexts, often assigning a comparatively lower weight to knowledge transfer activities involving communities, civil society, and government entities. This finding emerged as a prevalent concern among our study participants, given that their respective institutions predominantly prioritize research outputs, such as publications.

5.7 | Limitations and Implications for Future Research

We acknowledge certain limitations in this exploratory study that present potential avenues for further research. First, we adopted an academic perspective, which serves as a suitable unit of analysis for informing the development of capacity-building interventions and advocacy tools for (sub-Saharan) African business schools. This approach aligns with previous studies as academics engage in knowledge transfer individually, and their experiences provide valuable insights (Amara, Halilem, and Traoré 2016; Perkmann et al. 2021). We interviewed academics from diverse business school departments, encompassing various academic rankings and years of engagement in knowledge transfer activities. For future studies, we recommend incorporating perspectives from business representatives.

Second, our 52 participants are from Ghana's top four university business schools. Research suggests that regional, institutional, and individual factors influencing academic engagement vary globally (Galan-Muros and Davey 2019; Perkmann et al. 2021). Nevertheless, interpretive interview studies aim to achieve analytical generalization of findings, as shown in this study, rather than statistical generalization. We suggest further research avenues to test the robustness of our findings through a quantitative survey-based survey in Ghana and other national settings.

6 | Conclusion

We embarked on this exploratory study by addressing a critical yet under-examined question: What meanings do business school academics in a sub-Saharan African economy attribute to their engagement in knowledge transfer to firms? The synthesized findings from the interpretive phenomenological data analysis reveal four key insights. First, business school academics engaging in knowledge transfer are primarily induced by image and project opportunity drivers. Additionally, national, societal, and self-serving mandates motivate them to transfer knowledge. Furthermore, they tend to adopt personal-centric knowledge transfer mechanisms. Lastly, the knowledge content for firms is influenced by the market contexts (i.e., domestic or foreign) in which the knowledge is applied.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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