

Academic Planning Units of Nigerian Universities: Functions, Contributions and Challenges

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Abstract: Purpose: This paper examined the functions, contributions and challenges facing academic planning units in the Nigerian universities.

Method: The paper is a review study. The paper depends on secondary data that were collected from government documents, print resources and online publication. Content analysis was used to narrow the literature to the theme of the study.

Findings: The paper revealed that data collection and management, programme accreditation, annual report compilation, academic programme development, organization of capacity building for academic staff on the implementation of CCMAS are some of the achievement of academic planning units of Nigerian universities. On challenges, inadequate funding, shortage of infrastructure facilities, poor training and shortage of staff are some of the challenges facing the units in the Nigerian universities.

Recommendations: Universities administrators should increase allocation to the academic planning units to enable the units carry out their mandates. More infrastructure facilities should be provided to the academic planning units. Academic planners should be included in Tetfund annual training to improve their capacities. More academic planner should be employed and deploy to the units to enhance effectiveness in the units.

Key words: Academic planning unit, Universities.



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Introduction

University education is a tertiary education created to prepare people for career life; hence it can transform an individual and society positively. University education is an advanced education in teaching, research and community service (Ogunode, 2020). Solomon, Ogunode and Jegede (2020) viewed university education as the education that provides post-secondary school education for citizens. It is the type of education that gives direction to career development; hence

it is an organized formal education received after secondary school education. University education globally plays a noteworthy role in the expansion of global knowledge management. The cardinal objectives of University education are; teaching, researching, community service, career development, technological development, human capital development, and national development.(Ololube, Elechi, & Uriah 2018).

Universities globally are established to produce manpower that will work in every sector of the economy. The universities are saddled with the responsibility of advancing the development of the country through the training and production of the right personnel to fill in the economy. The universities are to help in the rapid industrialization of the economy. This is done by providing manpower with adequate professional, technical and managerial skills (Ogunode, Olowonefa & Idowu, 2024;Ogunode & Ndayebom, 2022;Ogunode, & Atobauka, 2021; Ahmed & Dantata, 2016).

The universities are to help to boost the transformation of societies into knowledge societies. This is done by providing not just educated workers, but knowledge workers who will contribute immensely to the growth of the economy. The university system is saddled with the responsibilities of producing sound and effective citizens in society and developing higher self-awareness and self-realization of individuals at various tasks, enhancing better human relationships, national consciousness and effective citizenship (Otonko, 2012).

Nigerian universities in the early 1980s were faced with the problems of poor data management and poor academic programme accreditation. There was massive establishment of academic programme without taking into consideration quality assurance. This problems made the National Universities Commission to initiate and ensure the establishment of academic planning units in all the Nigerian universities. Ogunode & Musa (2022) asserted that the problem of the Nigerian universities started when the government started intervening in the administration and management of universities and the take-off of higher institutions in the country. Inadequate funding of the universities was responsible for the poor quality, inadequate infrastructural facilities and shortage of instructional resources, poor researching and poor supervision. They characterized the Nigerian universities with uncoordinated programmes planning and development, over admitting students led to overcrowding, poor planning, poor data management, lack of academic planning. To restore quality and normalcy in the Nigerian university system, the National Universities Commission (NUC) gave directive for the establishment of the academic planning unit in each of the Nigerian universities. The National Universities Commission (NUC) on realization of the need to put in place some management structure that would guide the orderly academic development of the University in performing its statutory functions of teaching, research and development and public service proposed and established the Academic Planning Unit in Nigerian Universities in the early 1980s. Establishment of the Academic Planning Units in Nigerian universities is a response to the need to coordinate and streamline the academic policies and activities arising from sudden and sometimes uncoordinated growth, development and proliferation of programmes and units in the university system. Academic Planning Unit also handles the collection and management of data and information to guide the academic development of universities while ensuring compliance with NUC's Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) and with the university senate's academic regulations. Every universities operating in Nigeria by law must establish the academic planning unit. The units are responsible for academic planning, data collection, annual report writing, academic programme accreditation and programme verifications. It is import to examine the achievement and the challenges facing the academic planning units in the Nigerian universities.

Purpose of the paper

The purpose of the paper includes:

1. To find out the achievement of academic planning units in the Nigerian universities; and
2. To find out the challenges facing the academic planning units in the Nigerian universities.

Method

This paper is a position paper. The paper depends on secondary data. The secondary data were collected from online publications and print materials resources. Content analysis was employed for selection of the final literature used.

Concept of Academic Planning Unit

Academic planning unit is an integral part of the Vice Chancellor's office. This unit caters for the most critical needs of the University. It takes charge of projecting the university's needs and responding to them appropriately through effective planning, delivering relevant programmes, evaluating the outcome of efforts and reporting that outcome back to stakeholders. Academic planning unit is very essential for balanced growth and development of the university education system. Every academic planner, regardless of position, responds to request from faculties, departments, units and the public. He is expected to be proactive in taking the initiative to meet the needs of the university and the public, as well as for effective and efficient management of the system. The academic planning unit makes this possible by taking cognizance of past challenges and experiences and by using a pragmatic approach to deal with those challenges through logical processes and procedures by (Bright & Abdulganiyu 2015)

The Academic Planning Unit is headed by a Director, who reports to the Vice-Chancellor in most universities. In some universities, it is an arm of the registry. Whether it is an autonomous Division or part of the Registry, the function is still the same. For these functions to be carried out successfully, the Academic Planning Unit is staffed with a full complement of personnel to execute the various technical and coordination aspect of the job. The Academic Planning Unit plays a vital role in successful conduct of university business. It must, therefore, be staffed with competent and result-oriented personnel to enable it perform its functions effectively. The competence and sustainability of the staff are very important. It does not matter what structure the University wants the Unit to adopt; what matters is that the Unit has a better understanding of its functions and is properly organized to perform them effectively. As a guide on how its functions are to be carried out, the National Universities Commission published a management manual in 1996 in which it spelt out these functions as: allocate planning, feedback planning, process planning, institutional planning, research, statistics and publication, and secretarial services.

Functions of Academic planning Units

The objectives of Academic Planning Unit Federal University Wukari include

1. Ensuring the compliance of the university with the National Universities Commission (NUC) guideline on academic matters.
2. Ensuring the provision of conducive teaching, learning and research environment for staff and students.
3. Ensuring efficient and effective utilization of academic resources and; enhancing the conformity of the university with NUC and indeed international academic standards by (Olubunmi 2015).
4. According to Olubunmi the specific functions of Academic Planning Unit
5. Quantity and quality control organ of the University.

6. It receives academic matters and policies from NUC and uses same to guide and advice all appropriate sections of the University in the implementation of such matters and policies under the directive of the Vice Chancellor and University Senate.
7. Generation and storage of academic statistical data which concerns staff and student information for various departments, colleges and units in the university.
8. Academic planning matters such as preparation of academic calendar etc.
9. It works with the National Universities Commission (NUC) in facilitation of the accreditation of courses in the University.
10. Collaborations with the NUC to establish new programme in the University.
11. Generation, interpretations and analyses of data for the University System Annual Review Meeting (USARM) which holds annually at NUC.
12. The Directorate is involved in the University strategic plan programme.
13. Provisions of guidance for the Curriculum Review Committee.
14. The Directorate is responsible for the preparation of the Teacher/student ratio and the carrying capacity to guide and advice the University Management on employment and student intake into department and colleges.
15. Preparation and revision of the Academic Brief of the University.
16. Enrolment, projections and determination of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE).
17. Assist in search of fellowships, scholarship and external aids for staff to enhance teaching, research and development.
18. Guiding each unit on the operation of the University academic brief.
19. Study and analyze how the University and the units within it are complying with NUC's parameters for fund allocation.
20. Obtaining up-to-date, relevant and accurate data for processing and generating information to guide University Management for accurate and timely decision-making on University matters (e.g. staff and student's records, financial records, research output etc.) and Any other services that the Vice Chancellor or University Senate may direct by the Director (Olubunmi 2015).

Achievement of academic planning Units

There are many achievement of the academic planning units. Some of them includes; data collection and management, programme accreditation, annual report compilation, academic programme development, organization of capacity building for academic staff on the implementation of CCMAS.

Data collection and management

The academic planning units of Nigerian universities have achieved a lot in the areas of data collection, storage and management. Data management according to Ogunode, Olowonefa & Idowu, (2024) is the systematic way of data organization, collection, interpretation and presentation for institutions' usage, and decision-making and improving institutions' effectiveness. Data management is the coordination of data within the institutions for supporting institutional' plans, decision making and operations. Data management involves the practical arrangement of data in systematic ways to improve organizational planning, resource allocation and decision-making. Data management is the practical way of handling data to support institutions' growth and development in terms of planning and decision-making. Data management is the application of organized and coordinated data for institutions' decision-making and planning for the

realization of institutions' goals. Ogunode, et al (2024) noted that effective data management supports effective university planning, effective decision-making in the universities, effective resource allocation and effective university administration. The academic planning units according to Salihu, (2018) are saddled with the responsibilities of collecting students' data yearly and storing them for decision making and resources allocation purposes in the various universities. The functions according to Olubunmi (2015) is been handled properly and effectively by the academic planning units.

Academic programme accreditation

The academic planning units of Nigerian universities since inception have been ensuring perfect accreditation programme for the universities. Accreditation of academic programs according to Akpan & Etor (2018) is all-embracing and involves assessing the appropriateness of programme philosophy and objectives, the adequacy and relevance of the curricula to the students in their specific areas of study and the world of work. It involves examining the adequacy of students' admission and graduation requirements, quality and quantity of teaching staff, support staff, teacher/student ratio, external examiners' reports on moderation of degree examination questions and scores, adequacy of budgetary allocation and other sources of funds to support the programs. Ogunode & Samuel, (2022) submitted that accreditation aid quality education in the universities. The objectives of accreditation of higher institutions/programs as outlined by the NUC (2012a) include; to ensure that at least the minimum academic standards documents are attained, maintained and enhanced; to assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programs have attained an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization; to certify to the international community that the programs offered in Nigerian universities are of a high standard and their graduates are adequate for employment and further studies. The academic planning units have achieved great success in the accreditation programmes of the Nigerian universities. The units have recorded successes in both undergraduate and post-graduate programme.

Annual report compilation

The academic planning units have helped in the compilation of annual reports yearly in all the universities in Nigeria. Every year, the units ensures that the annual report are prepared and presented to the universities management to document.opined that writing of annual report is a core function of the academic planning units and this functions is been handled effectively in most of the universities across the country. Salihu, (2018) concluded that the efforts of the academic planning units has assisted the universities annually to give a detailed account of the both human and materials resources under their watch.

Academic programme development

The academic planning assisted the various universities in developing new academic programme in their respective universities. Ogunode, & Idris (2023) maintained that a department can suggest the mounting of a new programme in the department and faculty. Well-drafted documents about the new programme will be prepared and submitted to the academic planning unit for their input and the feasibility of the programme. The academic planning will forward the document on the new programe to the senate through the Director of the Academic planning senate consideration and debate. The document if found worthy is further stepped up to the committee on programme development and accreditation to review it and come up with a better structure and objectives. The document after due review by the committee on programme development and accreditation is sent back to the senate for final approval. The document is then returned to the academic planning unit to forward to the national universities commission for their input in terms of the development of curriculum and policy implementation. After the development of the necessary curriculum and policies standard, the document is adopted by the NUC and sent back to the university to

commence with the planning of resources verification and programme accreditation before the programme can officially take off in the university that promoted the mounting of the new programme. Academic planning units have aided the development of many new programme in the Nigerian universities.

Organization of capacity building for academic staff on the implementation of CCMAS

The academic planning units of Nigerian universities handled the training and retraining of academic staff that are to implement the new CCMAS in the universities. The units organized internal training for all academic staff to adhere to the directives of the National Universities Commission. The National Universities Commission commenced the journey to restructure the BMAS in 2018, introducing in its place, the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS), to reflect the 21st Century realities, in the existing and new disciplines and programmes in the Nigerian University System. The new CCMAS is a product of sustained stakeholder interactions over two years. The composition of each panel took into consideration, the triple helix model, as a unique feature. This involved a blend of academic experts, academies, government (represented by NUC), professional bodies and of course, the private sector represented by the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) (Ogunode, Mshelizam, & Mohammed, 2024). The commencement and implementation of the CCMAS in all Nigerian universities according to the National Universities Commission is to start in the 2023/2024 academic session. The realization of the CCMAS' goals and objectives depends on effective collaboration and partnership with other critical stakeholders in the universities. The management, administration and implementation of the curriculum require the involvement and participation of all stakeholders in the university system (Ogunode, Abdullahi, & Sani, 2024). The National Universities Commission designed capacity development programme along the implementation of the CCMAS (Ogunode, Ohibime, & Jegede, 2023a). It is expected that both managers and implementer of the CCMAS must be training for an effective implementation of the CCMAS in the universities. The success of this retraining and retraining programmes for the academic staff is an achievement to the academic planning units across the Nigerian universities.

Challenges facing academic planning Units

There are many challenges militating against the activities of academic planning units. Some of these challenges includes; inadequate funding, shortage of infrastructure facilities, poor training and shortage of staff are some of the challenges facing the units in the Nigerian universities.

Inadequate funding

One of the major problem facing academic planning units in the Nigerian universities is inadequate funding. The units lacks adequate funds to carry out its functions and programmes in the various universities. Ogunode & Musa (2021) observed that inadequate funding is one of the major challenges facing the academic planning units of Nigerian universities. The annual budgetary allocation for the unit administration and management is inadequate, and this is affecting the effective performance of the units in the delivering of its mandate in achieving the overall objectives of the university system. According to Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) one major problem affecting the administration of higher education in Nigeria is underfunding. Inadequate funding is a challenge to the realization of the aim of education in Nigeria. The funding style adopted by the government for the funding of tertiary education is not stable and is affecting the development and survival of the university system. Funding is a major problems in the Nigerian universities (Tunde, & Issa, 2013; Adetunji, & Ogunleye, 2015; Atelhe, & Akande, 2018; Daniel-Kalio, 2019).

Shortage of infrastructure facilities

Another problems that is affecting the academic planning units of Nigerian universities is shortage of facilities and resources. Nuhu (2024) noted that the provision of adequate facilities and infrastructures enhances the effective management of education. Ogunode (2020) refers to infrastructural facilities to include classrooms, offices, exam halls, laboratories, tables, chairs, desks, power supply, water, good roads network within the schools, etc. In many public universities in the Country, office accommodation is inadequate. About four to six non-academic staff share offices in some institutions (some of which are small rooms). The offices are not comfortable, no not have necessary ICT facilities and this affect effective service delivery of both academic and nonacademic staff. The units in most universities lack adequate ICT facilities to carry out their functions. There is no stable internet services and no constant electricity.

Poor training

Shortage of staff

Most academic planning units lacks adequate manpower to execute their mandates. The lacks of manpower affects the functions of most of the academic planning units. Adeyemi, (2018) submitted that there are shortage of non-academic staff in most Nigerian universities and this is affecting implementation of universities programme. Some units in the universities not have adequate staff. Abubakar, (2022) observed that most academic planning units are facing shortage of staff. Universities in Nigeria are understaffed (Akomolafe, & Ibijola, 2014; Akpan, & Etor, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper discussed the functions, contributions and challenges facing academic planning units in the Nigerian universities. The paper revealed that data collection and management, programme accreditation, annual report compilation, academic programme development, organization of capacity building for academic staff on the implementation of CCMAS are some of the achievement of academic planning units of Nigerian universities. On challenges, inadequate funding, shortage of infrastructure facilities, poor training and shortage of staff are some of the challenges facing the units in the Nigerian universities.

Based on the findings, the paper put the following suggestions forward:

1. Universities administrators should increase allocation to the academic planning units to enable the units carry out their mandates.
2. More infrastructure facilities should be provided to the academic planning units.
3. Academic planners should be included in Tetfund annual training to improve their capacities.
4. More academic planner should be employed and deploy to the units to enhance effectiveness in the units.

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