



CHALLENGES FACING THE ACADEMIC PLANNING UNIT IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: March 20 th 2021 Accepted: March 30 th 2021 Published: April 18 th 2021	The academic planning units of the Nigerian Universities are critical to the development of the universities. The Academic planning unit handle critical programmes that are vital to the growth and development of the universities. It is unfortunate that this units are facing many challenges. This article discusses the challenges facing the academic planning unit of Nigerian universities. The article used secondary data. The article identified inadequate funding, inadequate working materials, inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of cooperation from other department or unit of the universities, poor capacity development programme and poor motivations. To solve the identified problems and to realize the objectives of the academic planning units, the suggestions of this paper include the increase in the unit's funding, provision of adequate working facilities, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, other units and departments within the universities should cooperate with the unit in term of provision of data, effective staff development programme and improve on the welfare of the staff.
Keywords: Academic, Planning, Challenges, Universities	

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), defines Higher Education as the Post -Secondary Section of the National education system, which is given by Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology including courses as are given by the Colleges of Education, Advanced Teachers Training colleges, Correspondence Colleges and such Institutions as may be allied to them. Obanya, (1999) views higher education thus "Higher Education is taken to embody all organized learning and training activities at the tertiary level. This includes conventional universities, those with the conventional arts, humanities and sciences faculties and specialized universities like institutions specializing in agriculture, engineering, science, and technology. It also includes post-secondary institutions such as the polytechnics and colleges of education. "Higher Education" includes all forms of professional institutions drawing from the pool of persons who have completed various forms of secondary school education: Institution of the military, the police, nurses, agriculture, forestry, veterinary workers, catering services, tourism, secretarial services and combinations of other programmes. Even this wide spectrum does not exhaust the possibilities of forms of Higher Education such as non formal higher education. Indeed, any situations that organized mature persons in order to build up their knowledge and skills, to apply knowledge to analysis and search for solutions to life problems." Bernett (1997) defines higher educational institutions as unique institutions which is differentiated from others in terms of research, and designates its managers as Provost, Rector, and Vice Chancellor. Higher education is the education for the production of manpower and for aiding social, economic and technological development of a country.

The goals and objectives of higher education in Nigeria according to National policy on education (2004) include the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment; acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2004). The National Policy on Education (2004) again stated that higher educational institutions should pursue these goals through: Teaching, Research, the dissemination of existing and new information, pursuit of service to the community; and by being store-house knowledge. The Nigerian higher education system comprised Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education offering programs in areas such as teacher education and agriculture. It is the largest and most complex higher education system on the continent. The total number of universities in Nigeria according to the NUC (2020) is 198.

NEEDS (2014) and Ogunode (2020) observed that the National Universities Commission (NUC) is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Education. Government established the Commission in 1962 with the responsibility of

developing and managing university education in Nigeria. Its functions include granting approval for all academic programmes in Nigerian universities; granting approval for the establishment of all higher educational institutions offering degree programmes; and ensuring quality assurance through regular accreditation of all academic programmes in universities. The Commission currently regulates the academic programmes of federal, state, private universities in Nigeria. The Role of National Universities Commission (NUC) in system performance cannot be overlooked. As an external quality assurance agency of the Nigerian University, the National Universities Commission (NUC); advising the federal Government on the establishment and location of universities, creating new facilities and post graduate units in the universities; advising Government on the fundamental needs of the universities; carrying out periodic plans on the general programmes to be pursued by university staff; preparing periodic plans on the general programmes to be pursued by the universities; receiving and disbursing Federal grants to Federal Universities; establishing and maintaining the minimum academic standards; accrediting the degrees and other academic programmes awarded by the universities (Lassa, 1992). The audit role and the supervisory functions of NUC have indeed contributed to the quality and sustainability of higher education in Nigeria.

The Nigerian universities in the early 1960s were among the best in the world, with world class research publications and effective graduates that can work in any part of the world. The universities in the early 1960s were funded adequately and supervised. Quality education was assured. Graduates from the various universities in the country can compete favorably with other graduates from the rest of the world.

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, 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. Since the inception of the academic planning units in the Nigerian universities, it is imperative to discuss the challenges facing the units and to suggest ways forward for the development of the academic planning unit and the universities.

2.0 CONCEPT OF ACADEMIC PLANNING UNIT

Bright, & Abdulganiyu (2015) 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. It is expected of him to meet the needs of the university and the public, as well as for effective 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.

The head of Academic Planning Unit in most universities is a Director who reports to the Vice-Chancellor. 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, University Management staffed the Academic Planning Unit with a full complement of personnel to execute the various technical and coordination aspects 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.

2.1 Function of Academic Planning Unit

Academic Planning is a continuous and collective exercise of foresight in the integrated process of taking informed decisions affecting the future of academic development in the University.

Academic planning encompasses: planning and approval for new academic programs; substantial changes to those programs; planning and approval for academic departments and changes associated with subject listings and courses. The objectives of Academic Planning Unit Federal University Wukari include:

- ❖ Ensuring the compliance of the university with the National Universities Commission (NUC) guideline on academic matters.
- ❖ Ensuring the provision of conducive teaching, learning and research environment for staff and students.
- ❖ Ensuring efficient and effective utilization of academic resources and;
- ❖ Enhancing the conformity of the university with NUC and indeed international academic standards (Olubunmi, 2015).

According to Olubunmi (2015) the specific functions of Academic Planning Unit:

- Quantity and quality control organ of the University.
- It receives academic matters and policies from NUC and uses same to guide and advise all appropriate sections of the University in implementing such matters and policies under the directive of the Vice Chancellor and University Senate.
- Generation and storage of academic statistical data which concerns staff's and students' information for various departments, colleges and units in the university.
- Academic planning matters such as preparation of academic calendar etc.
- It works with the National Universities Commission (NUC) in facilitation of the accreditation of courses in the University.
- Collaborations with the NUC to establish new programme(s) in the University.
- Generation, interpretations and analyses of data for the University System Annual Review Meeting (USARM) which holds annually at NUC.
- The university involved the Directorate in the University strategic plan programme.
- Provisions of guidance for the Curriculum Review Committee.
- The Directorate prepares the Teacher/student ratio and the carrying capacity to guide and advice the University Management on employment and students' intake into departments and colleges.
- Preparation and revision of the Academic Brief of the University.
- Enrolment, projections and determination of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE).
- Assist in search of fellowships, scholarship and external aids for staff to enhance teaching, research and development.
- Guiding each unit on the operation of the University academic brief.
- Study and analyze how the University and the units within it are complying with NUC's parameters for fund allocation.
- Getting 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 students' records, financial records, research output etc.).
- Any other services that the Vice Chancellor or University Senate may direct (Olubunmi 2015).

3.0 CHALLENGES FACING THE ACADEMIC PLANNING UNIT OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

This article discussed the challenges facing the academic planning unit of Nigerian universities. The article used secondary data. The article identified inadequate funding, inadequate working materials, inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of cooperation from other departments or units of the universities, poor capacity development programme and poor motivations.

3.1 Inadequate Funding

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. Higher institutions cannot carry out their cardinal function of teaching, researching, and provision of community services. The higher institutions find it difficult to funds the sub-units in the system effectively to discharge their functions. The higher institutions, especially the university system works with many sub-units. Among these units is the unit of students' affairs unit. This unit deals with welfare of the students, this make the unit one of the prominent unit in the university system. It is unfortunate that this unit is under-funded, and this makes it ineffective in discharging its responsibilities in many universities.

3.2 Inadequate Working Materials

Working tools are office resources that support the delivering of academic and non-academic services within the educational institutions. The academic planning unit cannot effectively discharge its responsibilities without adequate working tools. An inadequate working tool is one of the major problems facing the academic planning unit of Nigerian universities. Many academic planning units across the Nigerian higher institutions do not have adequate working tools. The working tools such as computers; printers, calculators and office cabinet are not adequate for the academic planning officers working in the units across the country. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) observed that working tools or office equipment like Stapler, Eraser, Push-pin, Drawing pin (U.K)/ Thumbtack (U.S), Paper clip, Rubber stamp, Highlighter, Fountain pen Pencil, Marker, Ballpoint, Bulldog clip, Tape dispenser, Pencil sharpener, Label, Calculator, Glue, Scissors, Sticky notes, 4A Paper, Notebook, Envelope, Clipboard, Monitor, Computer, Keyboard, Folder, Fax, Filing cabinet, Telephone, Swivel chair, Desk, Wastebasket, printer and calculators are inadequate in many students' affairs units across the various universities in the country. The inability of academic planning units to have this equipment adequately is affecting the functions of the units.

3.3 Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Inadequate infrastructural facilities are a bane of the activities and programmes of the academic planning units in the Nigerian universities. Infrastructural facilities are very important in the administration of higher institutions. Infrastructural facilities are social capital that every higher institution must have in adequate to deliver effective academic and non-academic services. 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 non-academic staff. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) submitted that many students' affairs units across the universities do not have adequate ICT facilities to effectively and efficiently carry out their responsibilities. Apart from ICT facilities, there is also a problem of poor internet service and unstable electricity affecting the implementation of the programme of the units.

3.4 Lack of Cooperation from other departments and units of the universities

The academic planning units lack cooperation from the other units and departments within the universities. The functions of the units make it a central unit that must work with other units within the university system. Many departments and units within the universities will not respond to memo from the academic planning unit and respond quickly. Many units and departments of the universities will not provide maximum support for the activities of the unit by providing adequate and up-to-date data and information for the academic planning units to enable its carry out its activities and function as the planning hub of the universities.

3.5 Poor Capacity Development Programme

Poor capacity development programme of academic planning officers is another challenge facing the unit. Unfortunately, most of the schools authorities failed to give many workers in the academic planning units across the country the opportunities to attend constant training and retraining programme to develop their planning capacity, and this is affecting their productivity. Training and development is the key to high performance of non-academic staff in the Nigerian Universities. Ogunode & Abubakar and Romalia (2016) submitted that most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack staff development programme for training and re-training of staff. Vibrant staff development programme continuously will help academics and non-academics to clarify and change their behaviour, attitude, value, skills and competencies. In this way, they grow and develop in their knowledge and thus become more effective and efficient in performing tasks. Staff development is paramount because knowledge of today is only sufficient for today. In this era of knowledge explosion and emergent knowledge based economy, staff development should be the priority of any nation. It is unfortunate that many staff in academic planning unit across the country have not been given the opportunities to attend the workshops. Many staff of the academic planning units lack the capacity development programme. A study research Bernadette & Ukaegbu, (2017)cited by Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) on impact of poor implementation of welfare policies on training and development on performing academic staff in selected federal Universities in South-South Nigeria showed that, whereas there are good welfare policy statements in the study area, the level of implementation of these policies were poor. In addition, over 90% of the respondents insisted that full implementation of welfare policies would have a positive impact on workers' performance to a very large extent. The results further showed that there have been very few in-house and outside training programmes in the study area. A total of 87% of respondents agreed that poor level of implementation of welfare policies on training and development is a source of discouragement which have negatively affected academic performance of both teaching and non-teaching staff and have led to poor service delivery in our Universities. Adeogun, (2006) opined that an employee who is not trained and exposed to continuous retraining in the modern methods and new discoveries in his or her field will soon become irrelevant to the organization. According Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009) the lack of staff development programmes accounted for the decline in quality of tertiary education in Nigeria.

3.6 Poor Motivation

Poor motivation is another problem facing the staff of academic planning units of Nigerian universities. Many staff of academic planning units across the country are not happy with the job due to poor motivation. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) cited Atiya & Palwasha (2015) who defined motivation as a driving force that compels an individual to take some actions in order to achieve certain goals. Motivational level of everyone is different, like perception, attitude of everyone is different. For example, a person feels hungry, and as a response that person eats so the feelings of hunger get diminished. Ogunode & Abubakar (2021) observed that Nigerian non-academic staff in the universities are motivated poorly. Many non-academic staff are also dissatisfied with their working environment and salary conditions. The reason behind the poor motivation of non-academic staff is that they have low salaries as compared to other professionals, poor work environment, and also not giving them the opportunity to develop their career. Motivation plays an important role in the organization because it increases the productivity of employees and the goals can be achieved efficiently. The behavior of employees can be changed through motivation in any organization. Motivation and performance are very important factors in terms of organization success and achievements. If changes occur in external environment, then it is necessary for an organization to adopt that change because it may motivate to gain a competitive advantage (Ogunode & Abubakar 2021, Atiya & Palwasha 2015).

4.0 WAYS FORWARD

To solve the identified problems and to realize the objectives of the academic planning units, this paper suggested: increase in the unit's funding, provision of adequate working facilities, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, other units and department within the universities should cooperate with the unit in term of provision of data, effective staff development programme and improve on the welfare of the staff

4.1 Increase in the Funding of the Academic Planning Units

The university administrators should increase the budgetary allocation for the academic planning units to enable them effectively carry out their programmes for the university system. The government should also increase the funding of the universities to enable the universities to provide adequate infrastructural facilities and other instructional materials.

4.2 Provision Adequate Working Facilities

The university administrators should provide adequate working tools such as computers, A4 papers, printers, calculators and office cabinet to the academic planning unit of the university.

4.3 Provision of Adequate Infrastructural Facilities

The government should provide adequate infrastructural facilities in all the universities across the country. This will help the university administrators to have adequate infrastructural facilities to give different units and departments within the university, especially the academic planning unit.

4.4 Cooperation

Units, departments and directory within the universities should cooperate with the academic planning units of the universities by responding to memo demanding for data and up to date information.

4.5 Effective Staff Development Programme

The university administration should allocate more slots for staff of academic planning units for workshops because their jobs and responsibilities demand up-to-date planning methods, approaches, skills and knowledge. According to Bernadette & Ukaegbu, (2017) training can provide an effective channel for two ways communication especially if workshops are used to bring managers and employees together to discuss organizational issues and develop plans jointly to deal with them. Training can contribute to the satisfaction of people's needs for achievement and recognition; for example, to be singled out to attend a course can be a powerful motivation. Training helps workers exercise greater responsibility and can enlarge their portfolio of skills that they can use both to their own advantage and that of the company/ organization. Fourthly, education and training are essential ingredients in change management programme.

4.6 Improve on the Welfare of the Academic Planning Officers

The university administrators should motivate the staff of academic planning units by providing allowance for overtime job during programme accreditation and resource verification. Awards of welfare packages on training and development such as scholarship, study leave, payment of study leave, training and development allowances, promotion allowances should be given to those that are due and the trained should be promoted accordingly without tribalism and gender bias. More funds should be allocated for in-house training to help the workers get regularly updated with current methods of doing their work.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This article discussed the challenges facing the academic planning unit of Nigerian universities. The article identified inadequate funding, inadequate working materials, inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of cooperation from other departments or units of the universities, poor capacity development programme and poor motivations. To solve the identified problems and to realize the objectives of the academic planning units, this paper suggestions include: increase in the unit's funding, provision of adequate working facilities, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, other units and departments within the universities should cooperate with the unit in term of provision of data, effective staff development programme and improve on the welfare of the staff.

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