Academic Planning Unit of Public Universities in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward

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Abstract: Planning is very important in university administration. Planning is critical to the attainment of universities goals and objectives. It laid down the foundation for every other process to take off. Academic planning unit in public universities are faced with a lot of challenges. This paper is aimed to discuss the challenges facing Academic planning unit in public Universities in Nigeria. The data were collected from both print and online publications. The paper concluded that inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor capacity development programme, lack of cooperation, inadequate working materials, poor motivation and shortage of ICT facilities are the major challenges militating against service delivery of Academic planning unit of public Universities in Nigeria. Based on the identified challenges, the paper among other points recommended that the Universities administrators should allocate adequate funds to the Academic planning units and provide efficient and effective ICT facilities among other basic needs as identified in the paper.

Keywords: Academic, Planning, Public, University.

Introduction
Public universities are universities owned by the government. Public universities are universities established to provide post-secondary schools for Nigerian. These Universities are established by act of parliament to serve the interest of the general public. Public Universities deal with the provision of teaching, research and communities services. The objectives of the universities in Nigerian Higher education, including professional education has the following aims: 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; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2014). Public Universities in Nigeria are grouped into Federal and State owned Universities. The Federal Universities are owned by the federal government of Nigeria while the state universities are owned by the state government. The total number of federal and state public Universities is 49 and 60 across the country (NUC, 2022).

The federal government of Nigeria established the National universities commission (1968 as supervisory agent which later reformed to NUC in 1974) to oversee the external administration and supervision of all Universities in Nigeria. The administration of public universities in Nigeria takes two dimensions: the external administration and internal administration. The external administration is done through the federal ministries and other regulatory agencies in the country. The external administration handles planning, policy formulation, programme accreditation, supervision, funding and quality control of the universities. The internal administration headed by the school administrators and other principal managers within the
universities. These are to ensure implementation of policies, supervise and organize the human and materials resources of the Universities to accomplish the objectives of the universities. The realization of the universities’ goals and objective depends on effective administration and planning. Planning therefore is a key to the development of university education in Nigeria. Planning covers all aspects of the university.

The National Universities Commission on realizing that planning is critical to the realization of the universities education in Nigeria directed all the universities to establish academic planning unit in the various universities across the country. Ogunode (2020) described academic unit as the critical part of the university system that makes the universities succeed. The academic planning unit in the public universities are plagued with many challenges. These challenges are militating against their effectiveness in the university system. Ogunode, Abubakar, Abashi, Ireogbu & Longdet (2021) observed that it is common to see many academic planning officers unable to deliver their assignments using ICT facilities in their various offices in the universities. Many official meeting of the universities” committees have been suspended or canceled due to failure from the academic planning officers to prepare the document needed for such meetings to take place due to problems preventing them from using ICT effectively in the universities. It is imperative to examine the various challenges the academic planning of public universities in Nigeria are facing.

**Concept of Academic Planning Unit**

Academic planning unit is a unit in the university that handles data collection, distribution and storage. The unit specifically deals with programme resource verification, accreditation and academic calendar preparation among other functions to the university. Bright, & Abdulganiyu (2015) defined Academic planning unit is an integral part of the Vice Chancellor’s office. The 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 that Planners meet the needs of the university, researchers 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.

There are many functions of the academic planning unit in the universities. According to Olubunmi (2015) the functions of academic planning unit include the following:

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;
4. 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:

a) Quantity and quality control organ of the University.
b) 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.
c) Generation and storage of academic statistical data which concerns staff’s and students’ information for various departments, colleges and units in the university.
d) Academic planning matters such as preparation of academic calendar etc.
e) It works with the National Universities Commission (NUC) in facilitation of the accreditation of courses in the University.
f) Collaborations with the NUC to establish new programme(s) in the University.
g) e. Generation, interpretations and analyses of data for the University System Annual Review Meeting (USARM) which holds annually at NUC.
h) The university involved the Directorate in the University strategic plan programme.
j) 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.
k) Preparation and revision of the Academic Brief of the University.
l) Enrolment, projections and determination of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE).
m) Assist in search of fellowships, scholarship and external aids for staff to enhance teaching, research and development.
n) Guiding each unit on the operation of the University academic brief.
o) Study and analyze how the University and the units within it are complying with NUC’s parameters for fund allocation.
p) 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.).
q) Any other services that the Vice Chancellor or University Senate may direct (Olubunmi 2015).

Challenges of Academic Planning Unit of Public Universities in Nigeria

There are many challenges militating against effective service delivery of academic planning unit in the Nigerian public universities. Some of these challenges include; inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor capacity development programme, lack of cooperation, inadequate working materials, poor motivation and shortage of ICT facilities.

Inadequate Funding

Most public universities in Nigeria are faced with the problems of shortage of funds and these problems affected all other sub-units and department in the universities. Academic planning unit
is one of the units that is mostly affected with the problems of poor funding. This submission is attested to by Ogunode & Abubakar (2020a), who 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. 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. It is apparent the university system works with many sub-units, among these units is the 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.

Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Another problem hindering effective service delivery of the academic planning unit in most of the public universities is inadequate infrastructure facilities. Mark (2017) and Ola (2015) submitted that inadequate infrastructural facilities are a very big problem that has affected 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 (2020a) viewed infrastructural facilities as classrooms, offices, exam halls, laboratories, tables, chairs, desks, power supply, water, good roads network within the schools, etc. In many public universities in Nigeria, office accommodation is inadequate. About four to six non-academic staff shares offices in some institutions (some of which are small rooms). The offices are not comfortable, and do not have necessary ICT facilities and this affect effective service delivery of both academic and non-academic staff. A study by Ogunode et al., (2021) revealed that some academic planning unit 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.

Poor Capacity Development Programme

Poor capacity development programme of academic planning officers is another challenge facing the unit. Unfortunately, most of the Universities 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, Ahaotu & Solomon (2021) observed, poor staff development is a major challenge facing the non-academic staff of public universities in Nigeria. Training and retraining programme is very important for non-academic staff of universities. Capacity building programmes like workshops, seminars and conferences are meant to develop the skills, knowledge and capacity of workers in the universities. It is unfortunate that many non-academic staff in the Nigerian public universities are not privileged to training and retraining programmes since they have been employed into the universities system. Bakera (2019) observed that the skills expected from administrators differ, depending on the office, section or unit he serves. An administrator working in Central Administration for instance will need to internalize the modes and manners of the job in this place, the structure and cadence of its minutes, the ways to service the committees and sub-committees, what to do, when to do them and how to deliver the services. Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2009) posited that lack of staff development programmes
accounted for the decline in quality of tertiary education in Nigeria. Adeogun, (2006) concluded 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.

**Lack of Cooperation**

During data collection exercise in most public universities, the academic planning unit are not given cooperation by other department in the universities in terms of providing the data demanded by the academic planning unit. Ogunode et al., (2021a) observed that 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.

**Inadequate Working Materials**

Most academic planning units in public universities in Nigeria are faced with the challenges of adequate working tools. Ogunode, et al (2021) stated that inadequate working materials is a very big problem facing non-academic staff of public universities in Nigeria. Many public universities do not have adequate Information, Communication and Telecommunication (ICT) facilities for their non-academic staff to carry out administrative functions. There are shortages in the supply of office stationaries. Ogunode et al., (2021) observed that working tools or office equipment like Stapler, Eraser, Push-pin, Drawing pin (U.K)/ Thumback (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 as well.

**Poor Motivation**

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 (Atiya & Palwasha 201). 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, et al and Ogunode et al (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 the opportunity to develop their career. Ogunode et al. (2020) observed that the Nigerian higher institutions non-academic staff are poorly motivated. The non-academic staff are not treated well with the level of their input to the development of higher education in Nigeria. The non-academic staff are being discriminated in terms of salaries, staff development and other benefits in the higher institutions where they work. Non-academic staff are generally dissatisfied with their basic conditions of employment and their working conditions. This has resulted in low morale and low esteem in the profession. Earned allowances are not paid regularly by the government and even when paid in arrears, non-academic staff are given very insignificant percentage like 20% of the amount paid while the remaining 80% goes to academic staff as speculated during the 2021 distribution of the Earned Academic Allowance (EAA) outstanding arrears headed by Academic Staff Union of Universities. Amadi and Urho (2015) identified the condition of service or employment to consist features like working conditions (i.e. working
environment, hours of work, over time shift work, flexible working hours), fringe benefits, (i.e. sick pay, subsidized meals, pension scheme, company goods at a discount, company cars) and application of fair judicial procedures.

**Shortage ICT Facilities**

The Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria (2010) viewed ICT to encompassing all equipment and tools (inclusive of traditional technologies of radio, video, and television to the newer technologies of computers, hardware, firmware, etc.), as well as the systems, practices, concepts, and principles that come into play in the conduct of the information and communication activities. Information and Communication Technologies includes hardware and software such as radio, television, motion picture, projector, camcorders and emerging hardware and software like computers, netbooks, mobile phones, MPS, e-book readers, personal digital assistants, interactive white board, e-mail, video conferencing. Gusen & Olarinoye (undated) posited that ICT in education is critical to administrative, societal and cultural empowerment. In education, ICT possess the potentials of remodeling pedagogical methods, Increase access to quality education as well as refine the management of education systems. Zurich (2013) submitted that ICT made our work more sustainable: saving energy and materials resources by creating more value from less physical input, increasing quality of life forever more people without compromising the future generation ability to meet their needs.

The academic planning officers of the unit employ the use of different ICT facilities to work in their offices. The ICT tools commonly use include computer systems, laptop, printers, projectors, photocopy machines, internet service and micro-computer. These facilities are used to typing, storing, calculating, Presentation of report, sending of document, uploading of official document and for management of student and staff data. The ICT is also used for computing of student data and writing of annual report for the university. A study by Ogunode, et al. (2021) revealed inadequate ICT facilities, unstable power supply, unstable internet service, high cost of ICT facilities, poor computer literacy among academic planning officers, poor implementation of ICT policies in the universities, poor maintenance culture among the academic planning officers, lack of technical support for repairs and maintenance of ICT facilities by universities technicians and poor ICT capacity development programme for Academic planning officers are the challenges preventing effective utilization of ICT by academic planning officers.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper examined the challenges militating against effective service delivery of public universities academic planning unit. The paper concluded that inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor capacity development programme, lack of cooperation, inadequate working materials, poor motivation and shortage of ICT facilities are the major challenges militating against service delivery of academic planning unit of public universities in Nigeria.

Based on the identified problems, the paper hereby recommended the following:

a) 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.

b) 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.

c) 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.
d) Units, departments and directorates 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.

e) 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.

f) The university administrators should motivate the staff of academic planning units by
providing allowance for overtime job during programme accreditation and resource
verification.

g) The university administrators should provide adequate ICT facilities in the academic
planning unit to enable them carry out their work effectively.

h) The Universities should assist the Academic Planners to be attending the annual Conferences
of the Institute of Planners Nigeria (IPN).

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