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Digitalization of Academic Planning Units of Nigerian Universities for Optimal Performance

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Abstract: This paper explore the import of digitalizing the academic planning units of Nigerian' universities for optimal performance. The paper is a position paper and it used secondary data to support every point raised. The paper employed systematic review system to collect data online and in the print resources. The paper concluded that digitalization of academic planning units in Nigerian' universities will lead to improved efficiency, support effective and efficient service delivery, aid resources verification and accreditation programme exercise, support timely data collection and dissemination, support collaboration with other units, aid data safety and cost minimization in the operation of the units. Based on the finding, it is crucial for universities managers in Nigeria to ensure all academic planning units in the universities are fully digitalized by embracing digital solutions in order to stay competitive and provide the best possible academic experience in the university's communities. The government and private institutions should support the universities by providing adequate digital infrastructure facilities to the units. The National Universities Commission should ensure constant training and retraining of the staff in the academic planning units.

Keys words: Academic Planning Units of Nigerian Universities, Digitalization

1.0 Introduction

Planning is vital in realizing the objectives of university education. The National Universities Commission (NUC) which is a commission under the Federal Ministry of Education was established to see to the planning of university education in Nigeria. This they do in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education to bring about effective and efficient planning and administration of university education in Nigeria. The planning of federal, state and private universities in Nigeria are managed by the federal and the state governments respectively through the National Universities Commission (NUC) (Ogunode & Abubakar, 2021). Bright and Abdulganiyu (2015) and NOUN (2012), acknowledged that National Universities Commission (NUC) as an external quality assurance agency of the Nigerian University advises the Federal Government on the establishment and location of universities as well as new faculties and postgraduate units in the universities. The NUC directed universities in Nigeria to create the academic planning unit. The academic planning units/divisions of various universities help to further drive NUC's functions in order to realize the goals of the commission and the university at large.

Academic planning unit is involved with the entire accreditation process i.e. the pre-accreditation, accreditation proper and post accreditation processes. During the pre-accreditation process, the unit sends a list of programmes due for accreditation to the NUC on behalf of management of the university, notifies the schools, the Deans /Heads of Departments of the said programmes, provide a copy of the self- study form to be prepared by the departments and proof read/corrected by the division before final production. Academic planning conduct a mock accreditation process in the departments to be accredited by inspecting their facilities (offices, libraries, classrooms/lecture theaters, laboratories etc (Ogunode et al 2021).

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 reports 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, Bright et al (2015).

According to Oyeniran, Muhammed and James (2021) the role of academic Planning unit has to do with performing task related to curriculum development, quality assurance, and information processing among others. Akpan and Etor (2016) posited that Academic Planning unit serves as an internal quality assurance monitoring unit in most institutions. An effective and efficient academic planning unit provides necessary focus, leadership and coordination for resourceful planning to attain the goals of the institutions. The major functions of the unit among others are planning and approval of academic departments, new programmes, modifications of these programmes, preparation for accreditation of programmes, and issues of funding. The unit ensures that quality and standard are adhered to in line with the NUC Bench Mark Academic Standard (BMAS) being that the activities in the universities are patterned after the vision, mission and objectives of the institutions (Bright & Kenneth, 2015).

The general objectives of Academic Planning Unit includes 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; quantity and quality control organ of the University; 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; generation and storage of academic statistical data which concerns staff and student information for various departments, colleges and units in the university; academic planning matters such as preparation of academic calendar etc; collaborates with the National Universities Commission (NUC) to facilitate the accreditation of university courses, establish new programmes, generate, interpret and analyzes data for the University System Annual Review Meeting (USARM) which holds annually at NUC. The Directorate is involved in the University strategic plan programme; provisions of guidance for the Curriculum Review Committee. 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; 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 and 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 students' records, financial records, research output etc.) and any other services that the Vice Chancellor or University Senate may direct by the Director, (Olubunmi, 2015).

The world of University education is rapidly changing, and digitization is playing a significant role in this transformation. Digitization in university education refers to the integration of digital technologies into everyday learning, such as online courses, virtual classrooms, and digital textbooks. This shift towards digital learning has been made possible by advances in technology that have enabled educators to provide tailored learning plans and curricula to their students (Reberts 2024). Digitizing departments and units in the universities system has opened up a range of possibilities for both lecturers and students especially for non-academic staff. For example, academic planning unit staff can now access a wide variety of resources and data quickly and easily, allowing them to disseminate to other units and department. Additionally, students can now access information and on their academic programme and schedules online with greater speed and accuracy than ever before. However, the complexity in the tasks and responsibilities of academic planning officers in the academic planning units in the universities demand full integration of the unit into digital units. It is based on this that this paper seeks to discuss the digitalization of the academic planning units of Nigerian' universities for optimal performance.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Digitalization

Digitalization involves internet platforms which include, but are not limited to, Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Meets, Google Hangouts, Skype, Microsoft Teams, or FaceTime, where learning may be done synchronously or asynchronously online (Daniel 2020; Ray 2020). In the view of Bejinaru (2019), digitalization is the conversion of text, pictures, video, and music into digital format utilizing technologies such as a laptop computer, the internet, mobile devices, a scanner, a digital camera, a projector, and a printer, among others, that may be played by a computer. Digitalization of education according to Akinyemi et al., (2022) is a concept adopted to ensure the innovative incorporation of modern technology and digital tools to assist the progress of teaching and learning and to create more room for remote learning.

Micheal and Jacob (2017) defined digitization as the process of converting educational resources from material forms to electronic forms where they can be stored and manipulated by a computer. The transfer of data from analogue to digital is viewed as a crucial driver of innovation in teaching and learning (Gillpatrick, 2020). Jagboro et al. (2012) viewed digitization as all the steps involved in the process of making collections of historical and other materials available online. Digitization is the process of converting manual information or data to a digital format for a more meaningful interpretation. Digitalization is the process of transforming physical educational resources into packages or platforms or electronic forms where they can be stored and manipulated by a computer for the implementation of teaching and learning programmes in school (Ogunode & Ndayebom, 2023).). Several national and international policy frameworks support this digital shift. For example, the Nigerian National Policy on Education, the Digital Protocol Network, the National Digital Policy launched by the World Economic Forum, and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development all promote technology integration in education. Additionally, the National Policy on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in School Education emphasizes digital learning as a key pathway for equipping students with labor market- relevant skills (Adegboyega, Asemota & Edinoh, 2025).

2.2 Concept of Academic Planning Unit Digitalization

Academic planning unit digitalization is a digital transformation process that involves the integration of digital technologies into all areas of academic planning unit, leading to fundamental changes in how the unit operates and carry out their function digitally. Digitization of academic planning units refer to the act of converting the physical functions of the units into digital format. Digitization of academic

planning Units is the use of digital technologies to operate academic planning functions.

3.0 Method

This paper discussed the benefits of digitalizing academic planning unit in universities in Nigeria. The study used secondary data. The content analysis method was adopted for the selection of data. The data were collected from the following sources review of published articles from reputable international journals such as CEON, Elsevier, Hindawi, JSTOR, IEEE, Learn Techlib SAGE, Nebraska and Springer amongst others.

4.0 Data analysis on Benefits of Digitalizing Academic Planning Units in Nigerian Universities

Effective and efficient service delivery

Service delivery refers to the comprehensive process through which a business or institution provides a service to its customers or stakeholders. It involves every phase of engagement—from the initial interaction to service execution, and post-service support. The term "service delivery" can also be understood in specific contexts. For instance, it may refer to fulfilling requests via digital platforms where goods or services are picked up and delivered by a designated provider (Edinoh, Asemota & Olowonefa, 2025). With the rise of technology in management of universities system and digitalization of academic planning, the traditional pen and paper methods of academic planning will be gradually replaced by digital solutions. This will lead to significant changes in the way universities approach academic planning and will have a significant impact on the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the academic planning process. Ogunode, Abdulrazak, and Abubakar (2023) opined that digitalization academic planning units will also improve the overall service delivery because most of the academic activities will now be digitally performed. With digital tools, planners can have easier access to students' course schedules, academic requirements, and other important information and send them to respective students for course registration. Digitalizing academic planning units will make it possible for staff to interact with students online and provide immediate solution to students' academic challenge. Digitalizing academic planning units can help support students' academic plan in their academic journey more efficiently and reduce the likelihood of errors or misunderstandings. Digitalizing academic planning unit of Nigerian universities has numerous benefits. Digitalization of academic planning units allows for more efficient and accurate planning and tracking of academic schedules, reducing waste of resources and time (Ogunode, et al 2023). Digitalization of academic planning units of Nigerian universities will help to improve job performance in the units. The deployment of digital facilities to execute the functions in the units will help to improve the job performance of the academic planning officers. Digitalization of academic planning unit will improve and increase efficiency in the units. It will also enhance efficiency and effectiveness in the collaboration between the unit and the National University Commission (NUC)**.**

Support resources verification and accreditation exercise

Digitalizing academic planning units is the elimination of manual processes, which are often time-consuming and prone to errors. With digital solutions, the planning process can be streamlined, saving valuable time and resources. This allows academic planning units to focus on more important tasks, such as analyzing data and making strategic decisions. Digitalization of academic planning unit in the Nigerian universities will aid academic programme accreditation and resources verification in the universities. Academic planning units are saddled with the responsibilities.

Timely data collection and dissemination

Digitalizing academic planning units also enables universities to collect and analyze data more efficiently. By digitalizing data collection and storage, academic planning units can access accurate and up-to-date information, enabling them to make more informed decisions about course offerings, faculty workload, and other important factors (Ogunode, Ayoko, & Orifah, 2023). Digitalization of academic planning unit aids data-driven decision making in the unit and in the university in general: Digital

Intelligent operations provide the units with real-time data that can be used to make informed decisions and improve operations to drive university growth. The data collection aid development of the unit and the universities. With digitalization, the units can store, process and visualize data in new ways to speedup decision making. Digitalizing academic planning units will helps to streamline administrative tasks, freeing up time for more meaningful academic activities. It also makes data collection and analysis easier, facilitating evidence-based decision making. Overall, digitalizing academic planning unit of Nigerian universities has the potential to greatly enhance the quality and effectiveness of academic planning and management (Oladosu, 2011). By digitalizing and automating tasks of data collection, analysis and storage and streamlining processes of data collection and computation in the unit, the academic planning can reduce costs, increase productivity and improve the speed and accuracy of the unit operations. Problems of data dissemination can be quickly increase and the pace with which both inefficiencies and opportunities are identified (Ogunode, 2025).

Support collaboration with other units

Digitalization of academic planning units via digital solutions can facilitate communication and collaboration among various departments within the university. With real-time access to data and information, departments can work together more effectively to ensure a cohesive and well-planned academic curriculum. Digital devices aid having forms and processes that are structured and readily available to academic staff and planners makes for streamlined collaboration across departments. Digital curriculum can help improve academic service, processes, and services with the ability for simultaneous input from anywhere in the world. Academic planning officer with digital facilities in the units can communicate with other colleagues from other universities. Olatunde, Ogunode, and Eyiolorunse, (2021) noted that digitalization of academic planning units improves communication and collaboration among faculty members, students and staff, leading to better allocation of resources and improved academic outcomes.

Data safety

Digitalization of academic planning unit support data safety in the units. Digitalizing the units and institutionalizing the automated systems will aid data safety and it is more reliable than manual systems. Digitalization of academic planning unit will help the units to reduce the risk of data mismanagement and improve data safety in the units.

Cost minimization

Digitalization of academic planning unit in the universities will help to reduce high cost of operation. By automating the tasks and function in the academic planning units it will assist to reduce downtime costs. Administrative intelligent operations can help the academic planning units to reduce costs and improve their bottom-line operation. An effective digital transformation strategy in the academic planning units goes beyond academic planning and data processes. The academic planning officer must also be involved. Digital transformation can help fill skills gaps and upskill a staff in the units in the universities.

Finding

The paper revealed that digitalization of academic planning units in Nigerian universities will lead to improved efficiency, support effective and efficient service delivery, aid resources verification and accreditation exercise, support timely data collection and dissemination, support collaboration with other units, aids data safety and cost minimization in the operation of the units.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the impact of digitalizing academic planning units in Nigerian universities has been overwhelmingly positive. It can lead to improved efficiency, support effective and efficient service delivery, aid resources verification and accreditation exercise, support timely data collection and dissemination, support collaboration with other units, aid data safety and cost minimization in the

operation of the units. As technology continues to advance, it is crucial for universities managers in Nigeria to ensure all academic planning units in the universities are fully digitalized by embracing digital solutions in order to stay competitive and provide the best possible academic experience in the university's communities. The government and private institutions should support the universities by providing adequate digital infrastructure facilities to the units. The National Universities Commission should ensure constant training and retraining of the staff in the academic planning units.

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