



Volume: 2, Issue: 9, 137-140
Sep 2015
www.allsubjectjournal.com
e-ISSN: 2349-4182
p-ISSN: 2349-5979
Impact Factor: 4.342

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Examining the Role of Academic Planners in the Development of Higher Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education is a systematic process of imparting knowledge. Being a process, therefore, connotes a step-by-step progression –both in teaching and learning. The teaching and learning outcomes are, often, predetermined. It, therefore, becomes imperative that well thought-out guidelines be evolved in order to ensure seamless fulfillment of expected outcomes. It is in pursuit of ensuring this fulfillment that necessitates the importance of academic planning. The development of Nigeria's higher education system is dependent on the effectiveness of academic planners, charged with the function of ensuring efficient and effective teaching and learning deliveries. This paper seeks to examine the concept of academic planning; and academic planners in Nigeria Universities. Also, takes a study on the development of accreditation, before accreditation, during accreditation and after accreditation exercises as well as accessing some of the challenges facing academic planners while discharging their duties. A university, been a complex environment, composed of several separate communities with divergent interest thus required the need and expertise of academic planners from academic planning unit. The unit draws experiences from previous challenges and experience and applying them to deal with challenges arising from future growth expectation and potentials. The unit among others; ensures that quality and standard are maintained in Nigeria Universities. Also ensure that various activities of the University are in line with the vision, mission and strategic objective of the institution.

Keywords: Academic planning challenges, universities, higher education development, National Universities Commissions (NUC)

1. Introduction

Academic planning, in the university system, is the hub of university education strategic plan. It is the backbone of every well-meaning university. Academic planning is concerned with issues (in the university system) including curriculum development, programme planning, quality assurance and resource planning among others.

The place of academic planning for the growth and development of the Nigerian university system cannot be over-emphasized. It is a corporate engagement that must be accorded its rightful place in order to make a remarkable progress. This perception is reiterated by Omoregie (1985) as he posits that the lack of a functional academic unit in any university is an indication of a major administrative dysfunction within such learning institution.

To drive the course of academic planning towards the development of higher education in Nigeria, competent personnel are required. Having competent caliber of academic planners, to execute the responsibilities of the various departments in a school, is basic to fulfilling teaching and learning objectives. These personnel (Academic Planners) are charged with the responsibility of coordinating and executing academic plans.

As aptly noted by Adebayo and Adeoye (2012) ^[1], the Nigerian academic planners have only recently begun to work "outside the box". They assert that many young planners need guidance to make a career of this discipline; and to make a success of the career. Importantly, these authors are of the opinion that such collaborative and mentoring efforts are of dual benefits. First, it will help in redefining the role of academic planners in contemporary context. Second, a systematic replenishment of academic practitioners is engendered; and the required knowledge for growth would be made readily available to them.

Thus, this paper highlights the extent of academic planning, as a concept. However, the author also dwells on challenges faced by Nigerian universities in conforming to quality assurance.

1.1 Scope of the Study

Higher education comprises all teaching and learning institutions of further studies, after secondary education. In Nigeria, higher education can be attained in colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechs, and universities among others. For the purpose of this discourse, focus is on the university system in Nigeria. It is on this basis that matters of academic planning are considered.

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1.2 Concept of Academic Planning

An effective academic plan must address the world of learners; translating learner's needs into organizational structures, work process and service delivery that adequately support the learning process. (Sherman 2001) ^[16]

(Comb 1970) define academic planning as the application of rational, systematic analysis to the process of university development with the aim of making education more effective and more efficient in responding to the needs and goal of its students. (Adebayo, 2001) asserts academic planning to be an aspect of educational planning hence it appears to be generally applicable to the university arm of educational planning with specific reference to the statutory functions of the university which includes teaching, research and community service.

Long (1980) ^[9] suggest that academic planning is an extension of traditional planning and is open, coherent and effective in the great measure an evolutionary stage in efforts to develop a striking strategy by which universities and colleges respond to the current and forecasted flattering enrollment and resource growth curves.

Anketell (1996) ^[2] posits that an institution's academic plan is an identification of programme strengths area of expertise, and certain priorities where the institution wants to focus its attention and resource. These definitions also identify the need for academic plan to be connected to the institutional strategic plan. He also suggests an openness and willingness to change that may not always be present in many institutional academic planning activities.

Academic planning needs focus on two things: one, the need for and shape of education in the college or university's service area; and two, the ability of its current resource base to adequately provide for these needs.

Daniel. j Rowley (2004) ^[5], posit that the process must be objective, and the reality of potential change must be embraced. Also, with the prevailing objective to match current academic strength with needed academic opportunities (including teaching, research and service).

2. Role of Academic Planners in the Development of Higher Education in Nigeria Universities.

Academic planners play a fundamental role in the development of higher education in Nigeria. This is ranging from one aspect to the other. The academic planning unit ensures that quality and standard are maintained in higher education in Nigeria. This is because, various activities of the university are in line with the vision, mission, and strategic objectives of the institution, and are in compliance with international standard.

The unit also establishes academic linkages and collaborative efforts with universities within and outside the country; the unit interacts with the NUC on accreditation and resource matters as posited by Uvah (1995) ^[18]

(Oladosu. A, 2011) ^[13] in his paper presentation on; the NUC, The Academic Planner and University Management in Nigeria, enumerated the role of academic planners in pre-accreditation, during accreditation and after accreditation exercise in Nigeria Universities.

On pre-accreditation, academic planners send the list of academic programmes due for accreditation in particular year, to the NUC. They interact and meet with the Deans, Head of departments and staff of concerned departments over accreditation issues.

Academic planners write and advice the concerned department and faculties to set up departmental accreditation committees for self-evaluation of their academic programmes in collaboration with the academic planning unit.

On the self-study form, academic planner complete section A of the form which request for information about the university. They collect section B of the self-study form from the concerned department which request for information about the programme, discipline or sub-discipline to be accredited.

They vet the self-study form to ensure that all the pieces of information required are provided and that all the NUC guidelines and parameters are strictly complied with. These are in respect of: Number of academic and non-academic staff, staff/ student ratio, adequacy of physical facilities like office space, lecture rooms, lecture theatres, laboratories etc., availability of: staff list, staff letters of appointment, student list by levels, student admission files, examination questions, answer scripts, marking schemes, score sheets/examination results, external examiners' report, employer's report, sample of students' completed projects, budget allocation for the concerned department, malpractice records, if any, etc.

It is expedient and imperative for academic planners in tertiary education, before accreditation proper, to visit concerned department to assess their level of preparedness, harvest their final accreditation needs and process those needs to the authorities of the university. Planners also conduct a mock accreditation of concerned programmes/departments; send the result of the mock accreditation to the concerned department for necessary remedial measures. At this juncture, the planners produce and vet 12 copies of the completed self-study forms for concerned programmes ahead of the arrival of the NUC accreditation team.

During the accreditation, academic planner communicate with the secretary to the NUC accreditation team to confirm the possible time of member's arrival, either by air or road. Make hotel reservations for members of the team and inform the secretary to the team about the details of the hotel where accommodation is provided.

The academic planners receive the team and ensure that members of the team are comfortable throughout their stay. Arrange for team's courtesy call on the Vice-Chancellor on the 1st day of the accreditation exercise as well as be present at the team courtesy call with the Vice-Chancellor, and take relevant notes and also lead the accreditation team to the concerned faculty/department and also attend the briefing with the Dean, HODs and Staff and perform other responsibilities associated to accreditation exercise. Summit the completed self-study form to the secretary of the accreditation team.

At the end of accreditation exercises, academic planners get the final report and verdict of the NUC and carry out its responsibility which is dependent on the status earned by a particular programme. If an institution for instance earned full accreditation, that is having overall score of 70% and above in its core areas of staffing, academic content, physical facilities and library. The academic planners as one of her responsibilities work very hard to sustain this status. If the accreditation is interim, academic planners will liaise with the concerned department to ensure that the departmental accreditation committee in collaboration with academic planning unit, studies the deficiencies and address the deficiencies that could be directly remedied and also determine the cost implication of other deficiencies and conveyed such to the university management as well as put every machinery in place to receive the NUC re-accreditation team.

In the case of denied accreditation, academic planners go through the whole rigorous process of preparing for a fresh accreditation exercise. It is therefore pertinent to remark that academic planners work round the clock as to ensure its responsibilities are fully discharged.

Apart from the role of academic planner in accreditation, academic planners according to Federal University Wukari academic brief (2011) [7], perform the following responsibilities;

Annually update, analyze and project population data for planning and preparation of the universities' recurrent budget and resources allocation based on approved budget. They assist in the development of new guidelines and criteria and the review of the existing ones. Academic planners also collect, analyze and interpret relevant data from University unit based on trend in University activities, such as enrolments, staffing, staff training, graduate output, etc., and make such data available for research. They participate in curricular review of University academic brief and regularly update and evaluate data from relevant University unit to analyze the performance of the University.

3. Challenges Facing Academic Planners in Nigeria Universities

Academic planning is becoming a very complex responsibility due to a variety of changes that are both internal and external to the academic institution. The use of technological tools to combat some of these challenges therefore becomes imperative. In the near future, academic planners may be prompted to use mathematical models and forecasting techniques to predict, and therefore, plan for change with enough lead time so as to make these changes effective. It is necessary to know that, the work of academic planners contribute directly to the quality of the institutions.

(Ibrahim & Usman, 2012) [8], in a practical guide for academic planning, asserted that, Academic planners in tertiary institutions are the internal experts on the national norms for the institutional development and as such, planners need bring themselves up to speed with emerging policies and planning issues. It is therefore important to examine the current needs of planning, which are important for institutional development, especially as it concerned academic programmes and governance. Hence, the following are some of the challenges:

3.1 Incredible Escalation in Number of Admission Seekers.

The unusual increase in the number of candidates seeking admission into Nigeria University, had over time raises alarm particularly to academic planners since the traditional way of delivering education in Nigeria Universities is unable to keep pace with this volume of candidates seeking entry to the universities. As such, Nigeria Universities had resulted to setting high cut-off point to wade-off such pressure and in the process, denied access to some candidates who might have the potentials to contribute positively to the development of the nation. Academic planners are presently faced with the problem of how to widen access to University education without overstressing the available resources and lowering quality. There is therefore need for expansion of resources for existing programmes as well as establishment of new programmes to increase the absorptive capacity of the universities.

3.2 Over-Bloated Admission

Bright C.M. *et al.* (2015), in their opinion suggest that Nigeria Universities should adhere strictly to the national policy on admission so as to avoid exceeding her carrying capacity which often result to over-bloated admission. Though the carrying capacities of most Nigeria Universities have not increase over the years, students enrolment had continued to grow from year to year apparently owing to high demand for

spaces from the growing population, which in turn had ensued to overloading in classes, consequently making it difficult for lecturers to cope successfully.

3.3 Scholars' trench

A good number of intelligent and well renowned academic planners are opting out of the University environment to the outside world owing to deprived condition of service, the consequence of which is the making of graduates that are ailing furnished to meet the needs of the employment market. The productivity of every University is determined to a large extent by the input of the workforce and the operational condition put in place by the University management. However, the exit of prominent academic planners from various universities now make good numbers of graduates find it demanding to meet with today's challenges.

3.4 Shortage of Resources

The level of financial commitment on the part of the Government continually fails to keep stride with the growing rate of population in the University system, and as such, the favorable destiny of the tertiary institutions dwindles progressively.

4. Conclusion

This publication has taken us through some definitions of academic planning, the role of academic planners and challenges faced by academic planners in the development of higher education in Nigeria. It is emphasized that academic planners play a vital role in the running of tertiary institution in Nigeria. The unit in every University is unarguably the hub of the institution since its primary responsibility for quality assurance run through the various academic and administrative activities of higher institution. Accreditation of a University is indeed an assessment and an evaluation of the academic planning unit and the individuals to drive this cause home are the academic planners. Academic planners therefore play a pivotal role in the development of higher education and as such must possess not only the basic academic and professional qualification and competencies, but equally required zeal, passion, integrity, commitment, patriotism, selflessness, efficiency, resourcefulness, inspiration and the vision to execute appropriate leadership role in the unit and indeed beyond.

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