

ACADEMIC BRIEF AND UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By

Niyi Jacob Ogunode

niyijacobogunode@gmail.com

Department of Educational Management, University of Abuja, Nigeria.

Abstract

The academic brief is a strategic planning document that guides the establishment, development, and management of universities in Nigeria. It provides comprehensive information on the philosophy, mission, academic programmes, staffing requirements, student enrolment projections, physical facilities, financial plans, governance structure, research priorities, and institutional development strategies of a university. Beyond serving as a statutory requirement for the establishment of universities, the academic brief is an indispensable instrument for institutional planning, quality assurance, programme accreditation, and evidence-based decision-making. Despite its significance, many Nigerian universities face considerable challenges in implementing the provisions contained in their academic briefs. These challenges include inadequate funding, shortage of qualified academic planning personnel, weak institutional planning culture, poor data management systems, leadership instability, political interference, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, and rapid institutional expansion without corresponding resources. This paper examines the concept of the academic brief, discusses its importance to university management, analyses the major challenges militating against its effective implementation, and proposes practical strategies for enhancing its implementation. The paper concludes that strengthening institutional planning, ensuring adequate funding, promoting data-driven decision-making, and improving the capacity of Academic Planning Units are essential for the successful implementation of academic briefs and the sustainable development of Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Academic brief, university management, academic planning, higher education, institutional planning, quality assurance, Nigerian universities.

1.0 Introduction

Universities are established to advance teaching, research, innovation, community service, and national development. Achieving these responsibilities requires effective planning, efficient

management, prudent utilization of resources, and continuous quality assurance. Institutional planning provides the foundation upon which universities formulate policies, allocate resources, develop academic programmes, and evaluate performance (Federal University Kasheri 2025). One of the most important planning documents used in the Nigerian university system is the academic brief.

An academic brief is a comprehensive institutional planning document prepared before the establishment of a university and periodically reviewed to guide its growth and development. It outlines the university's philosophy, vision, mission, objectives, governance structure, academic programmes, staffing projections, student enrolment estimates, physical facilities, financial plans, research agenda, and implementation strategies. According to the National Universities Commission (NUC), every proposed university in Nigeria is required to prepare an academic brief as one of the mandatory documents for licensing and institutional development. The document serves as a roadmap for orderly growth and ensures that academic expansion is aligned with available human, financial, and physical resources (National Universities Commission [NUC], 2018).

The importance of the academic brief extends beyond the establishment of universities. It serves as a strategic management instrument for policy implementation, programme development, quality assurance, institutional accreditation, budgeting, staff recruitment, infrastructure planning, and performance evaluation. University administrators, governing councils, Academic Planning Units, and regulatory agencies rely on the academic brief to make informed decisions regarding institutional development. By providing realistic projections and measurable development targets, the academic brief promotes accountability, transparency, and efficient resource utilization (Ogunode, 2026).

In Nigeria, Ogunode, and Musa, (2021) noted that the Academic Planning Unit coordinates the preparation, implementation, monitoring, and periodic review of academic briefs. The Unit also oversees institutional data management, programme accreditation, resource verification, strategic planning, and quality assurance. Consequently, the effectiveness of university management depends significantly on the quality and implementation of the academic brief.

Despite its strategic importance, the implementation of academic briefs in many Nigerian universities remains inadequate. Several institutions encounter challenges such as inadequate funding, shortage of qualified academic planning personnel, poor institutional databases, weak planning culture, leadership instability, political interference, ineffective monitoring and evaluation systems, and rapid institutional expansion without corresponding resources. These constraints often result in deviations from approved staffing projections, infrastructure development plans, student enrolment targets, and academic programme schedules, thereby

affecting institutional efficiency and educational quality. Given the central role of the academic brief in university governance and development, there is a need to examine the challenges hindering its effective implementation and identify practical measures for improving its utilization. This paper therefore discusses the concept and features of the academic brief, analyses the major challenges militating against its effective implementation in Nigerian universities, and offers recommendations for strengthening institutional planning and promoting sustainable university development.

2.0 Conceptual terms

2.1 Concept of academic brief

An academic brief is a comprehensive academic development document that outlines a university's philosophy, vision, mission, objectives, academic pattern, organizational structure, and projections for future academic and physical growth. It serves as the blueprint for the orderly development of the institution (Ahmadu Bello University, 2022). An academic brief is a strategic planning document that specifies the long-term direction of a university by defining its academic programmes, supporting infrastructure, staffing requirements, enrolment projections, and implementation strategies required to achieve institutional goals (Ahmadu Bello University, 2022). An academic brief is an official university planning document prepared to guide academic management, programme development, quality assurance, resource allocation, and institutional decision-making in accordance with the guidelines of the National Universities Commission (NUC) (National Universities Commission, n.d.). An academic brief is a comprehensive institutional planning document that provides detailed information on the establishment, organization, implementation, monitoring, and future expansion of academic programmes while ensuring the systematic growth and sustainability of the university (University of Benin, n.d.).

An academic brief is a regulatory planning document that contains baseline institutional data, academic policies, development projections, and programme plans required for resource verification, accreditation, quality assurance, and compliance with National Universities Commission standards (University of Lagos, 2025). Ogunode (2026) viewed academic brief as a comprehensive strategic planning document that provides the framework for the establishment, operation, management, evaluation, and sustainable development of a university by defining its academic philosophy, programmes, human resources, infrastructure, financial requirements, governance structure, and long-term development priorities. He further stated that an academic brief is a comprehensive planning document that outlines the philosophy, vision, mission, objectives, governance structure, academic programmes, admission policy, staffing requirements, physical facilities, financial projections, student enrolment estimates, research priorities, and implementation strategies of a university. It serves as the academic blueprint upon which

institutional development is built. Before a university introduces new programmes or expands existing ones, the academic brief provides the necessary information for planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. For university management, the academic brief is more than an administrative requirement; it is a strategic management instrument that supports evidence-based decision-making. It enables management to coordinate academic activities, allocate resources efficiently, maintain quality standards, comply with regulatory requirements, and pursue sustainable institutional development. Without a well-prepared academic brief, universities are likely to experience uncoordinated expansion, duplication of programmes, poor resource utilization, inadequate staffing, and declining academic quality (Ogunode, 2026).

2.2 Features of an Academic Brief in Nigerian Universities

Comprehensive Institutional Profile

An academic brief presents a detailed profile of the university, including its history, vision, mission, core values, legal framework, governance structure, location, and philosophy. It provides stakeholders with a clear understanding of the institution's identity and strategic direction.

Evidence-Based and Data-Driven

A quality academic brief is developed using accurate, current, and verifiable information. It contains statistical data on student enrolment, staffing, academic programmes, physical facilities, research outputs, finances, and institutional performance, making it a reliable planning and decision-making document.

Strategic Planning Document

The academic brief serves as a blueprint for the university's academic development. It outlines institutional goals, priorities, projected growth, programme expansion, infrastructure needs, staffing requirements, and quality assurance measures over a specified period.

Comprehensive Coverage of Academic Activities

It provides detailed information on all academic programmes, faculties, colleges, schools, departments, research centres, admission policies, curriculum, teaching and learning processes, student support services, and research activities. This broad coverage ensures that every aspect of the university's academic enterprise is adequately documented.

Dynamic and Periodically Updated

An academic brief is not a static document. It is reviewed and revised periodically to reflect new academic programmes, changes in policies, infrastructural development, staffing, student population, accreditation status, and emerging national educational priorities.

Quality Assurance and Regulatory Compliance Tool

The academic brief demonstrates how the university complies with the standards and guidelines of regulatory agencies such as the National Universities Commission. It provides essential information required for programme accreditation, resource verification, institutional licensing, strategic planning, and quality assurance exercises.

Future-Oriented Document

An academic brief is forward-looking. It projects the university's future academic, infrastructural, human resource, and financial needs. It identifies expected areas of expansion and provides realistic targets that guide sustainable institutional growth.

Decision-Making Instrument

The academic brief provides reliable information for university administrators, governing councils, policymakers, and regulatory agencies. The document supports informed decisions on programme development, staff recruitment, student enrolment, budget preparation, infrastructure development, and resource allocation.

Resource Planning and Allocation Guide

An academic brief identifies the human, financial, physical, and technological resources required to achieve the university's objectives. It assists management in prioritising projects, mobilising resources, and ensuring that available resources are efficiently utilised.

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

An academic brief provides benchmarks for assessing institutional performance. It enables university management to monitor the implementation of academic plans, evaluate progress towards strategic objectives, identify performance gaps, and introduce corrective measures where necessary. It also facilitates periodic institutional self-assessment and external evaluation by the National Universities Commission and other relevant stakeholders.

3.0 Result and Discussion on challenges to effective implementation and strategies for Sustainable Institutional Development

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding remains the most significant challenge affecting the implementation of academic briefs in Nigerian universities. An academic brief contains institutional projections relating to staff recruitment, construction of lecture theatres, laboratories, libraries, student hostels, ICT infrastructure, research facilities, and academic programme expansion. These projections

require substantial financial resources for implementation. However, many federal and state universities receive budgetary allocations that are insufficient to meet their operational and developmental needs. Consequently, projects identified in the academic brief are either delayed, implemented partially, or abandoned altogether. The National Universities Commission (NUC) has repeatedly identified inadequate funding as a major obstacle to quality university education in Nigeria. According to the Commission, underfunding has resulted in poor infrastructure, inadequate research funding, shortage of qualified academic staff, and declining quality assurance activities within the Nigerian University System. Similarly, Akinyemi and Bassey (2012) and Ifeyinwa and Okemute, (2023) observed that the rapid expansion of higher education has not been accompanied by corresponding increases in financial resources. The consequence is that universities struggle to implement institutional development plans, including those outlined in their academic briefs. Iwerebor (2023) and Funaab (2025) focusing specifically on Academic Planning Units have also identified inadequate funding as the principal constraint limiting effective implementation of academic planning responsibilities such as academic brief preparation, programme accreditation, institutional data management, and quality assurance.

Weak Institutional Planning Culture

Another important challenge is the weak planning culture that exists in many Nigerian universities. Although universities prepare academic briefs to satisfy regulatory requirements, many fail to use the document as a continuous guide for institutional development and decision-making. After approval by the NUC, the academic brief is often shelved and receives little attention during annual budgeting, staff recruitment, infrastructure development, or academic programme expansion. A sound planning culture requires that university administrators periodically review institutional goals, compare actual performance with approved projections, and adjust implementation strategies where necessary. Unfortunately, this practice is weak in many institutions. Decisions are frequently influenced by immediate pressures rather than long-term institutional plans. The Academic Planning Unit of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka explains that one of its core responsibilities is to generate accurate institutional data and guide university management in evidence-based planning and decision-making. It also notes that Academic Planning Units were established by the NUC to coordinate academic policies and promote orderly institutional development. The NUC has emphasized that every licensed university should operate according to its approved Academic Brief and Physical Master Plan because these documents provide long-term strategic direction for institutional growth. Failure to adhere to these planning documents often results in uncoordinated expansion, poor resource utilization, and institutional inefficiency.

Shortage of Qualified Academic Planning Personnel

The effective implementation of an academic brief depends largely on the availability of competent academic planners, institutional researchers, statisticians, ICT specialists, and data management officers. These professionals are responsible for collecting, analysing, interpreting, and disseminating institutional data required for planning, programme development, accreditation, quality assurance, and policy implementation. However, many Nigerian universities operate with inadequate numbers of trained academic planning personnel. This shortage reduces the capacity of Academic Planning Units to coordinate the implementation of academic briefs effectively. The shortage of skilled personnel often results in poor institutional forecasting, delayed preparation of annual reports, weak monitoring of institutional performance, inaccurate projections of student enrolment, and ineffective evaluation of academic programmes. In some universities, staff members assigned to Academic Planning Units have little or no formal training in educational planning, institutional research, or higher education management. Consequently, the quality of planning and implementation is adversely affected. According to Ogunode and Musa (2021), inadequate manpower and poor staff development programmes are among the major challenges confronting Academic Planning Units in Nigerian universities. The authors recommended continuous professional development and the recruitment of qualified academic planners to strengthen institutional planning. Similarly, Shehu (2025) and Emiko, (2023) and Daniel-Kalio (2019) identified shortage of qualified personnel as one of the major constraints limiting the effectiveness of Academic Planning Units in Nigerian universities, noting that adequate staffing is essential for programme accreditation, academic brief implementation, and institutional data management.

Poor Data Management Systems

Accurate, reliable, and timely data are fundamental to the successful implementation of an academic brief. Every projection contained in the academic brief including student enrolment, staffing requirements, physical facilities, research output, financial planning, and programme expansion is based on institutional data. Therefore, poor data management undermines effective planning and decision-making. Many Nigerian universities still depend largely on manual record-keeping systems, fragmented databases, and inconsistent reporting procedures. As a result, Academic Planning Units often receive incomplete, inaccurate, or delayed information from faculties, departments, and administrative units. This affects the preparation of statistical reports, accreditation documents, annual reports, and implementation reviews. The National Universities Commission (NUC) has emphasized that accurate institutional data are indispensable for national educational planning, quality assurance, funding decisions, and policy formulation. Universities are therefore expected to maintain credible databases covering enrolment, staffing, research, infrastructure, and graduation statistics. Ogunode (2021) further argued that reliable data constitute

the foundation of educational planning because inaccurate information leads to poor forecasting, inefficient resource allocation, and weak institutional development.

Frequent Changes in University Leadership

Leadership continuity is essential for the successful implementation of long-term planning documents such as academic briefs. Unfortunately, frequent changes in Vice-Chancellors, principal officers, governing councils, and other university administrators often disrupt institutional planning and development. Every academic brief contains long-term goals covering infrastructure expansion, manpower development, research growth, academic programme diversification, and financial sustainability. These objectives are expected to be implemented over several years. However, new administrations sometimes introduce different priorities and abandon projects initiated by previous leadership without considering the provisions of the approved academic brief. This weakens policy continuity, delays project implementation, and results in inefficient utilization of institutional resources. Educational planning literature consistently identifies policy discontinuity and leadership instability as major impediments to effective educational planning in Nigeria. Ogunode (2021) found that political influence, policy discontinuity, and administrative instability significantly affect the implementation of higher education plans and institutional development programmes. For this reason, experts recommend that university governing councils should ensure that successive administrations implement institutional development plans based on approved academic briefs rather than personal administrative agendas.

Political and External Interference

Political and external interference remains a major obstacle to the effective implementation of academic briefs in Nigerian universities. Universities are expected to implement their academic briefs based on institutional priorities, available resources, and the standards prescribed by the National Universities Commission (NUC). However, external actors, including political office holders, government agencies, governing councils, and influential stakeholders, sometimes influence university decisions relating to programme establishment, student admissions, staff recruitment, campus expansion, and appointment of principal officers. Such interference often compels universities to deviate from the staffing projections, enrolment targets, infrastructure development plans, and academic programme schedules contained in their approved academic briefs. For instance, political pressure may lead to the establishment of new academic programmes without adequate physical facilities, qualified academic staff, or financial resources, thereby undermining institutional planning and quality assurance. The National Policy on Education emphasizes that higher education institutions should enjoy sufficient autonomy to facilitate effective planning, administration, and academic development (Federal Republic of Nigeria

[FRN], 2013). Likewise, the National Universities Commission (2022) maintains that institutional planning documents such as the Academic Brief should guide the orderly growth and development of universities in Nigeria. Research by Ogunode (2021); Ololube (2016) and Oluremi & Oyewole, (2014) further identified political interference and weak institutional autonomy as major constraints to educational planning and sustainable university development in Nigeria.

Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are indispensable components of successful academic brief implementation. Monitoring enables university management to assess whether planned activities are being implemented according to approved timelines, while evaluation determines whether institutional objectives are being achieved. Without an effective M&E system, universities cannot accurately determine whether staffing plans, infrastructure projects, enrolment projections, research targets, and academic development programmes outlined in the academic brief are being implemented as intended. Unfortunately, many Nigerian universities have weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Academic Planning Units often face shortages of personnel, inadequate logistics, poor funding, and limited ICT facilities required to conduct regular implementation reviews (Olubunmi. 2015). Implementation gaps remain undetected until NUC accreditation or resource verification exercises reveal significant deficiencies. The National Universities Commission recognizes monitoring and evaluation as a critical responsibility of Academic Planning Units because it promotes accountability, quality assurance, and continuous institutional improvement (NUC, 2018). Similarly, Ogunode and Musa (2021) and Iwerebor (2023) reported that inadequate funding, poor manpower, and weak institutional support reduce the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation activities within Academic Planning Units. Strengthening institutional monitoring systems would enable university management to identify implementation challenges early, make timely adjustments, and ensure that development projects remain consistent with the approved academic brief.

Rapid Expansion of Universities without Corresponding Resources

The growing demand for university education in Nigeria has encouraged many universities to establish new faculties, departments, academic programmes, satellite campuses, and distance learning centres. While expansion improves access to higher education, it often occurs without corresponding increases in funding, qualified academic staff, laboratories, classrooms, libraries, ICT facilities, and student support services. This imbalance creates serious implementation challenges for academic briefs because universities are unable to meet the staffing, infrastructure, and resource projections contained in their approved planning documents. Excessive student enrolment beyond approved carrying capacity also places enormous pressure on existing facilities, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, overstretched academic staff, declining educational quality,

and poor learning outcomes. The National Universities Commission (2022) has consistently stressed that programme expansion should be based on available human and material resources and should conform to approved academic briefs and physical master plans. Similarly, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) emphasizes that the expansion of higher education institutions must be accompanied by adequate funding, qualified personnel, and physical facilities to maintain quality standards. According to Saint, Hartnett, and Strassner (2003), Yahaya, Jamari, Mustapha, Abubakar, and Inuwa, (2019) and Waheed (2023) the rapid expansion of higher education in Nigeria has not always been matched by adequate investment in infrastructure and academic resources, thereby affecting institutional effectiveness and educational quality.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The academic brief is one of the most important strategic planning documents in the Nigerian university system. It provides the blueprint for institutional development by outlining the university's philosophy, mission, academic programmes, staffing requirements, student enrolment projections, physical facilities, financial plans, research priorities, and long-term development strategies. The document also serves as a critical reference during resource verification, programme accreditation, quality assurance, and institutional performance assessment by the National Universities Commission (NUC).

Despite its significance, the implementation of academic briefs in many Nigerian universities remains below expectation due to several interconnected challenges. These include inadequate funding, weak institutional planning culture, shortage of qualified academic planning personnel, poor data management systems, leadership instability, political interference, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, and rapid institutional expansion without corresponding resources. Based on this findings, the study recommends the following:

Increase Funding for Academic Planning and Institutional Development

The Federal and State Governments should provide adequate and predictable funding to universities to enable the implementation of projects and programmes contained in approved academic briefs. Universities should also strengthen internally generated revenue while ensuring that such revenue supports institutional development priorities.

Strengthen Academic Planning Units

University management should recruit qualified educational planners, institutional researchers, statisticians, ICT professionals, and monitoring and evaluation specialists. Regular capacity-building programmes should be organized to improve staff competence in strategic planning, institutional research, and data analytics.

Digitalize Institutional Data Management

Universities should adopt integrated Management Information Systems (MIS) and digital databases to improve the collection, storage, analysis, retrieval, and dissemination of institutional data. Reliable data will enhance evidence-based planning and facilitate effective implementation of academic briefs.

Institutionalize Monitoring and Evaluation

Every university should establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for tracking the implementation of academic briefs. Academic Planning Units should prepare periodic implementation reports highlighting achievements, challenges, and areas requiring management intervention.

Promote Policy Continuity

University governing councils should ensure that changes in university leadership do not disrupt long-term institutional development plans. Successive administrations should continue implementing approved academic briefs while making only necessary revisions based on institutional needs and NUC guidelines.

Protect University Autonomy

Governments and other external stakeholders should respect the autonomy of universities in matters relating to academic planning, programme development, staff recruitment, and resource allocation. Institutional decisions should be guided primarily by approved academic briefs and regulatory standards rather than political considerations.

Ensure Periodic Review of Academic Briefs

Academic briefs should be reviewed periodically to reflect emerging realities in higher education, technological innovations, labour market demands, demographic changes, and national development priorities. Periodic review will keep institutional plans relevant and responsive.

Align Institutional Expansion with Available Resources

Universities should ensure that the establishment of new academic programmes, faculties, campuses, and increased student enrolment are supported by adequate funding, qualified staff, physical infrastructure, and learning resources, in accordance with NUC standards and approved academic briefs.

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