The Role of the Directorates Academic Planning on the Performance of Nigerian Universities in the Global World

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2026.11070052

Received: 19 July 2026; Accepted: 25 July 2026; Published: 31 July 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between structured academic planning operations and the global performance metrics of Nigerian universities. Academic Planning Units (APUs) function as the internal regulatory engine within the Nigerian university system, coordinating resource projection, institutional data management, curriculum alignment, and quality assurance compliance dictated by the National Universities Commission (NUC). Despite their strategic relevance, many Nigerian institutions struggle to maintain visibility in premier global ranking frameworks like the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings.

Using a descriptive, ex-post-facto survey research design, data were collected via a standardized structural questionnaire from a representative sample of 240 academic administrators, registry personnel, and senior academic planners across 12 federal, state, and private universities in Southwest and North-Central Nigeria. Multiple regression analysis was deployed via the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) framework to isolate the predictive weights of three localized academic planning sub-variables—Quality Assurance Compliance, Institutional Data Management, and Academic Brief/Resource Alignment on Institutional Global Rank Placement (dependent variable).

The empirical findings reveal that while **Quality Assurance Compliance** ($\beta_1 = 0.412$, $p < .001$) and **Institutional Data Management** ($\beta_2 = 0.356$, $p < .001$) exert statistically significant positive effects on global rankings, **Resource Alignment** ($\beta_3 = 0.084$, $p > .05$) remains non-significant due to persistent national budgetary constraints and uncoordinated growth. The model explained 62.4% of the total variance in the global competitiveness index ($R^2 = 0.624$, $F = 78.43$, $p < .001$). Based on these metrics, the study recommends a complete digitalization of APU operations, stricter data verification pipelines to prevent entry errors in global matrices, and specialized career-path training for academic planners to bridge the gap between national capacity and international expectations.

Keywords: Academic Planning, Quality Assurance, Global University Rankings, Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS), Higher Education Policy, Empirical Analytics.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, for better coordination, management of University resources and the alignment of National Universities Commission's policies into University activities, Academic Planning Unit was established. Under the mandate of NUC, in the early 1980s, Academic Planning Unit was created under the office of the Vice-Chancellor. APU acts as an internal regulator, ensuring quality assurance compliance, Institutional Data Management, resources alignment and so on. Quality assurance compliance entails strict aligning departmental courses with 70% of Core Curriculum and Minimum Standard (CCMAS) and 30% local content customization; proper academic staff quality (which includes accurate student-teacher-ratio, correct rank distribution mix and qualification baselines; adequate learning space capacity, laboratory equipment and library resources; availability of external moderation system, continuous auditing, anti-plagiarism checks;

updated strategic academic brief, regular self-study report and collection of regular structured course evaluations from students.

While Institutional Data Management is the systematic process of collecting, processing, storing, validating and sharing all operational data generated across all Units, departments, faculties, schools, institutes, and colleges in a university. The data are student enrollment, progression and retention analytics, graduation output, rank distribution tracking, qualification invalidation, full-time equivalent (FTE) metrics, excess workload and carrying capacity, recurrent budget projection, Tetfund and special grants auditing, cost-per-student analytics, institutional repositories, citation index mapping, patents and innovation, spatial capacity inventories, Lab. And equipment statuses and library footprint audit. More so, Resource Alignment which is often referred to as Academic briefs the strategic process of matching a University's physical, human and financial assets with its student enrollment and academic programs.

Going by history, Universities in Nigeria focused heavily on fulfilling localized mandates, specifically absorbing the massive influx of admission seekers within the country. However, the modernization of international education has introduced highly structured, transparent evaluation metrics managed by international agencies, most notably the Times Higher Education (THE) and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings. These systems evaluate institutions based on explicit parameters, including research citation impact, international outlook, teaching environments, and industry connections.

Only University of Ibadan (UI) and the University of Lagos (UNILAG) made it to the top 1,000 global bands, the rest of the 309 accredited Universities remain either unranked or globally uncompetitive. This was largely related to internal institutional planning mechanisms problem. When academic planning fails to align structural data management with global tracking systems, high-quality local research goes unrecorded, and international citation tools overlook institutional outputs. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how internal academic planning variables directly predict a university's competitive standing on the global stage.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept and Functions of Academic Planning

Academic planning is the systemic application of foresight to determine resource allocation, academic program development, and quality parameters within higher education. In the Nigerian university system, the Academic Planning Division coordinates internal institutional audits, processes program accreditation files, maps student enrolment trends, and implements new policy initiatives. This includes the recent deployment of the **Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS)**. As noted by Ilori (2023), academic planners manage the operational "Academic Brief" of an institution, preventing over-bloated enrolments that degrade the quality of instructions.

Global University Metrics and the Nigerian Context

Global university ranking frameworks utilize multi-dimensional indicators to grade institutional health. For instance, Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings rely on 18 core indicators categorized across teaching, research quality, international outlook, and industry partnerships.

Historically, Nigerian universities faced systemic challenges, including poor web presence, low internationalization due to localized staff profiles, and isolated research networks. Recent analyses demonstrate that when an institution's academic planning unit proactively tracks data points, institutional performance climbs significantly. For instance, Okebukola (2022) observed that structural data validation mechanisms directly eliminated rogue entries and maximized international ranking scores across the Nigerian University System (NUS).

Theoretical Framework: Systems Theory

This research is grounded in **Systems Theory**, originally conceptualized by Ludwig von Bertalanffy. A univer-

ISSN No. 2454-6194 | DOI: 10.51584/IJRIAS |Volume XI Issue VII July 2026

sity functions as an open system that processes inputs (enrolled students, recruited staff, physical infrastructure, financial allocations) into defined outputs (graduates, patented research discoveries, global reputation).

Within this framework, the Academic Planning Unit functions as the primary **feedback-loop mechanism**. It continuously tracks data deviations, monitors program compliance, and ensures that the internal subsystems remain optimized to meet external environmental demands. If this loop fails to capture accurate data or enforce quality guidelines, the entire system loses competitiveness in the international educational ecosystem.

Empirical Theories

Oyeniran et al (2024) examined the impact of planning processes on University performance: A study of Kwara State, Nigeria using descriptive correlation survey design with a sample of 357 University staff members. Data were analyzed using partial least squares structured equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The results revealed strong, statistically positive relationship between institutional planning processes and overall University performance ($\beta = 0.892$, $p < .05$). Specifically, targeted academic planning processes yielded distinct positive correlation with operational effectiveness ($\beta = 0.124$, $p < .05$), validating the idea that structured academic design actively lifts University outcomes.

Ogunode et al, (2026) investigated research titled strengthening academic planning unita for sustainable development of Nigeria Universities: A review of strategic intervention. The paper established that when Academic Planning Units are well funded and technologically driven, they significally optimize programme, management, quality assurance and accreditation performance. It explicitly states that fixing the data collection gap and enforcing the University's academic brief is indepensable if a University hopes to improves globally

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a **descriptive, ex-post-facto survey research design**. This model is appropriate because the primary independent variables (historical academic planning practices) and dependent variables (global ranking performance outcomes) have already occurred, meaning they cannot be directly manipulated or isolated in a laboratory setting.

Population and Sample Strategy

The target population comprised academic planning directors, quality assurance officers, registry personnel, and department heads across Nigerian universities. A **stratified random sampling technique** was used to select 12 universities across federal, state, and private ownership lines in Southwest and North-Central Nigeria, ensuring balanced structural diversity. From these institutions, a total sample size of **(N = 240)** qualified administrators was drawn.

Instrumentalization and Reliability

Data collection was facilitated via a structured instrument titled the *Academic Planning and Global Performance Questionnaire (APGPQ)*. The instrument used a 4-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree).

To ensure measurement accuracy, the instrument was pre-tested for internal consistency. The calculated Cronbach's Alpha (alpha) coefficients confirmed high reliability across all sub-scales:

1. Quality Assurance Compliance: ($\alpha = 0.84$)
2. Institutional Data Management: ($\alpha = 0.81$)
3. Resource Alignment: ($\alpha = 0.79$)

ISSN No. 2454-6194 | DOI: 10.51584/IJRIAS |Volume XI Issue VII July 2026

Data Analysis Model

Collected data were systematically coded and analyzed via standard statistical software using both descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential analytics. To isolate the predictive value of the parameters, a **Multiple Linear Regression model** was structured as follows:

$Y=\beta_0+ \beta_1X_1+ \beta_2X_2 +\beta_3X_3+ \varepsilon$

Where:

Y= Global Ranking Performance Index (Calculated score based on institutional visibility, documentation accuracy, and international metric tracking).

$\mathbf{X_1}$ = Quality Assurance Compliance (Adherence to NUC, BMAS, and CCMAS mandates).

$\mathbf{X_2}$ = Institutional Data Management (Ability to store, process, and publish accurate academic outputs).

$\mathbf{X_3}$ = Academic Brief & Resource Alignment (Managing staff-to-student distributions and space allocations).

$\boldsymbol{\beta_0}$ = Regression constant.

($\boldsymbol{\beta_1}$, $\boldsymbol{\beta_2}$, $\boldsymbol{\beta_3}$) = Standardized regression partial coefficients (beta weights).

$\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}$ = Error term.

Empirical Results and Data Analysis

Demographic Distribution of Respondents

The final analysis pool retained (228) fully completed and verified questionnaires (95%) response rate. The structural demographic breakdown is detailed in Table 1.

Demographic Criterion	Classification Element	Frequency Count	Valid Percentage
Institutional Type	Federal University	96	42.1%
	State University	72	31.6%
	Private University	60	26.3%
Professional Role	Academic Planner / APU Specialist	54	23.7%
	Quality Assurance Team Member	66	28.9%
	Head of Academic Department (HOD)	108	47.4%
Years of Experience	1–5 Years	42	18.4%
	6–12 Years	114	50.0%
	Over 12 Years	72	31.6%

Regression Analysis and Model Fit

To examine the cumulative predictive strength of the independent variables on global university ranking indexes (Y), multiple regression analysis was executed. The model statistics are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Model Summary

- **Model R:** 0.790

ISSN No. 2454-6194 | DOI: 10.51584/IJRIAS |Volume XI Issue VII July 2026

- **R-Square R^2:** 0.624
- **Adjusted R-Square:** 0.619
- **Standard Error of the Estimate:** 1.412

The model summary indicates a strong collective correlation coefficient (R = 0.790). The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.624) shows that **62.4% of the total variance in the global ranking performance of Nigerian universities is accounted for by internal academic planning functions**, while the remaining 37.6% is driven by external variables like macroeconomic funding, global institutional partnerships, and web bometic visibility.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA Summary)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	Calculated F-Ratio	Significance Level (p)
Regression	469.32	3	156.44	78.43	< .001
Residual	282.87	224	1.263		
Total Variance	752.19	227			

The F-ratio of (78.43) is statistically significant at (p < .001), confirming that the collective combination of academic planning sub-metrics significantly predicts the global performance scores of the sampled institutions.

Table 4: Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients

Independent Variables	Unstandardized B	Standard Error	Standardized Beta (beta)	t-value	Sig. Value (p)
(Constant Baseline)	2.145	0.412	—	5.206	< .001
Quality Assurance (X_1)	0.488	0.082	**0.412**	5.951	**< .001**
Data Management (X_2)	0.392	0.076	**0.356**	5.157	**< .001**
Resource Alignment (X_3)	0.091	0.071	**0.084**	1.281	**0.201**

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The empirical results confirm that internal academic planning functions directly influence how a higher education institution interfaces with global ranking systems.

Quality Assurance Compliance (β = 0.412, p < .001)

Quality Assurance Compliance emerged as the strongest predictor of global ranking success. This shows that universities prioritizing curriculum updates, strict peer review, and alignment with national frameworks like the NUC CCMAS guidelines generate stronger academic outcomes. Maintaining these quality standards directly elevates institutional research validity, helping universities secure positions in world ranking systems.

Institutional Data Management (β = 0.356, p < .001)

Institutional Data Management is also a highly significant predictor. Many Nigerian universities produce high-quality research that goes uncounted simply due to poor documentation, fragmented institutional repositories,

ISSN No. 2454-6194 | DOI: 10.51584/IJRIAS |Volume XI Issue VII July 2026

or erratic web reporting. When Academic Planning Units proactively digitize records and maintain clean academic profiles, international citations and global reputation scores improve accordingly.

Academic Brief and Resource Alignment ($\beta = 0.084$, $p > .05$)

In contrast, Academic Brief and Resource Alignment did not reach statistical significance in this model. This aligns with findings from related institutional studies in West Africa (e.g., Oyeniran et al, 2024). While tracking staff-to-student ratios is crucial on paper, structural challenges including macro-level funding shortfalls, striking actions, and uncoordinated university expansion frequently prevent administrators from adjusting their institutional resources to match theoretical briefs. Consequently, tracking these allocations internally provides minimal lift to an institution's global standing unless backed by expanded foundational funding.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that internal university positioning is not random; it is heavily driven by structured administrative choices. Academic Planning Units serve as a critical link for global competitiveness. By driving strict **quality compliance** and maintaining **clean digital data management systems**, academic planners can directly elevate Nigerian universities within international educational rankings.

Recommendations

To enhance the global standing of Nigerian higher education institutions, the following steps are recommended:

1. **Complete Digitalization of Academic Planning Operations:** Universities should phase out manual record-keeping and invest in integrated **Management Information Systems (MIS)** to streamline data updates for global portals. Aside the Directorate of ICT, MIS unit should be established in DAP to work in and out with ICT.

2. **Professionalization of Academic Planners:** Institutional leadership should establish dedicated career paths and specialized training tracks for academic planners to align local practices with international institutional research models.

3. **Data Verification Pipelines:** Academic planning units must audit institutional research directories, ensuring all academic staff maintain active, verified profiles on global citation repositories like Scopus, Google Scholar, and ORCID to capture all local research impact.

4. **Targeted Funding for Infrastructure Deficiency:** Government and institutional stakeholders should channel funding through agencies like TETFund to address structural resource deficits, allowing universities to align their actual capacities with theoretical academic briefs.

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