

Digitalisation of Academic Briefs for Effective Academic Planning and Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract: This paper examines the digitalisation of academic briefs for effective academic planning and quality assurance in Nigerian universities. Digitalisation is considered as the conversion of academic-brief information into structured electronic formats that can be securely stored, updated, retrieved, analysed and shared by authorised users. The paper discusses the potential benefits of digitalising academic briefs, including improved accessibility and retrieval of information, evidence-based academic planning, strengthened quality assurance, reduction of administrative paperwork, improved transparency and accountability, integration with national education-data systems, preservation of institutional memory, real-time monitoring, standardisation of information and improved resource allocation. The paper argues that properly designed digital academic-brief systems can strengthen the capacity of university management and regulatory agencies to access reliable and timely information for academic development and institutional decision-making. It recommends the development of standard digital academic-brief templates, staff capacity building, adequate ICT infrastructure, cybersecurity measures and integration with approved university and national education-data systems.

Keywords: Academic Brief, Digitalisation, Academic Planning, Quality Assurance, University Administration

INTRODUCTION

Universities require accurate, accessible and current information to plan academic programmes, allocate resources, monitor institutional development and maintain quality standards. One important document used for this purpose in the Nigerian university system is the academic brief. The academic brief contains important information about the academic direction and development of a university. The University of Benin describes its academic brief as a vital document that forms the basis for the academic activities and, indirectly, the physical development of the university [1]. It contains information relating to the university's philosophy, aims and objectives, academic pattern, organisational structure and future growth and development (University of Benin, n.d.). The importance of the academic brief is also demonstrated by the functions of the National Universities Commission (NUC). The Commission states that its Academic Standards Department is responsible for ensuring the orderly, balanced and qualitative development of undergraduate and postgraduate academic programmes through the analysis of academic briefs and other requests. The NUC also develops and periodically reviews guidelines for analysing academic briefs and applications for establishing new academic programmes and units (NUC, n.d.) [2]. This indicates that the academic brief is not merely an administrative document but an important instrument for academic planning and quality assurance within the Nigerian University System.

The academic brief is equally relevant to the establishment and regulation of universities. The NUC requires proposed private universities to submit draft academic briefs, and the documents are subjected to professional review and analysis by relevant departments of the Commission (NUC,

n.d.). In addition, the NUC has identified compliance with academic briefs as one of the areas considered during inspection and monitoring of Nigerian universities (NUC, n.d.). These responsibilities demonstrate the importance of maintaining accurate and accessible academic-brief information. Despite its importance, the management of academic-brief information can become difficult where universities depend heavily on physical documents and fragmented records. Paper-based records can be difficult to update, retrieve, compare, preserve and distribute to authorised users [3]. Changes in academic programmes, staffing, student enrolment, facilities and institutional development plans may also require frequent revision of the academic brief. Consequently, universities need systems that can facilitate continuous updating and efficient management of academic information.

Digitalisation provides an opportunity to address these challenges. Digitalising an academic brief involves converting its contents into an organised electronic information system through which authorised officers can enter, update, retrieve, analyse and share institutional information. Evidence from Nigerian universities shows that academic planning directorates already perform functions involving the preparation, revision, documentation and management of academic briefs. For example, the National Open University of Nigeria identifies the preparation and revision of the university's academic brief as one of the functions of its Directorate of Academic Planning (National Open University of Nigeria [NOUN], n.d.) [4]. Similarly, the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta describes the academic brief as documenting the academic plan of university programmes and services, including philosophy, mission, aims, objectives, academic pattern, curriculum, organisational structure and future growth and development plans (Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta [FUNAAB], n.d.).

Digitalisation is also consistent with the wider movement toward the use of information and communication technologies in university administration. The NUC has identified the promotion of ICT use in the delivery of university education as part of its responsibilities (NUC, n.d.). Furthermore, Nigerian universities such as Bingham University identify computer-based databases containing student and staff statistics as useful for planning, budgeting and other management requirements (Bingham University, n.d.). This demonstrates the growing relevance of electronic data management to academic planning [5]. Against this background, digitalisation of academic briefs represents an important opportunity for improving academic planning and administration in Nigerian universities. The paper therefore focuses on how digital academic briefs can enhance accessibility, planning, quality assurance, accountability, institutional memory, monitoring, standardisation, resource allocation and integration with broader university information systems.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Concept of Academic Brief

The University of Benin describes the academic brief as a vital document forming the basis for the academic activities and, indirectly, the physical development of the university. It contains the institution's philosophy, aims and objectives, academic pattern, organisational structure and future growth and development (University of Benin, n.d.). An academic brief can therefore be defined as a comprehensive university planning document that states the institution's academic philosophy, objectives, organisational arrangements, academic structure and projected future development. The Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta explains that its academic brief documents the academic plan of university programmes and services and includes the university's philosophy, mission, aims, objectives, academic pattern, curriculum, organisational structure and future growth and development plans (FUNAAB, n.d.). An academic brief is a structured academic planning document that presents the programmes, services, curriculum, organisational structure and projected academic development of a university.

The NUC's Academic Standards Department analyses academic briefs to facilitate the orderly, balanced and qualitative development of academic programmes in Nigerian universities. The Commission also develops guidelines for analysing academic briefs and applications for the

establishment of academic programmes and units (NUC, n.d.). An academic brief can be defined as an institutional academic planning and regulatory document that provides information required for evaluating, developing and monitoring university academic programmes in accordance with approved standards. For the purpose of this paper, an academic brief is a comprehensive institutional academic planning document that presents a university's philosophy, mission, aims and objectives, academic programmes, curriculum, organisational structure, staffing and other relevant information and projections required for effective academic planning, quality assurance and future institutional development.

B. Concept of Digitalisation of Academic Brief

Digitalisation of an academic brief refers to the process of converting the preparation, storage, management, updating, presentation and dissemination of an institution's academic information from predominantly paper-based methods to electronic and digital systems. An academic brief is an important institutional document that presents essential information about a university, its academic programmes, colleges, faculties, departments, staff, students, facilities, research activities and other areas relevant to academic planning and administration. Traditionally, academic briefs in Nigerian universities have largely been produced in printed form. The preparation of such documents often involves collecting information from different departments and units, compiling the information manually, printing multiple copies and distributing them to relevant stakeholders. Digitalisation changes this process by allowing institutional information to be collected, stored, processed, updated and accessed through computers, institutional databases, cloud platforms and other digital technologies.

The digitalisation of an academic brief therefore involves more than simply converting a printed document into a PDF file. It includes establishing an organised electronic system through which information can be continuously updated and retrieved when required. For example, information on student enrolment, academic programmes, teaching staff, research activities, physical facilities and departmental structures can be maintained electronically and incorporated into the academic brief. Digitalisation can also improve the accuracy and usefulness of academic briefs. When institutional information is maintained electronically, changes in staff strength, student enrolment, academic programmes, accreditation status and infrastructure can be updated more easily. This makes the academic brief a more dynamic source of information for university management, academic planners, regulatory agencies, researchers and other stakeholders. In the Nigerian university system, Ogunode (2025) digitalising of academic planning unit that host academic briefs can support evidence-based educational planning and decision-making. University administrators can use electronically maintained information to identify areas of shortage, monitor institutional development, prepare reports and make decisions concerning staffing, facilities, academic programmes and student services.

Digitalisation of academic brief in the universities requires adequate technological infrastructure, reliable electricity supply, appropriate information-management systems, staff digital competence, data security and regular updating of institutional records. Universities must therefore approach the digitalisation of academic briefs as part of broader institutional digital transformation rather than merely as a change from paper to electronic documents.

C. Key Components of Academic Brief Digitalisation

The key components of academic brief digitalisation are the major elements required to convert an academic brief from a traditional paper-based document into an organised, accessible, secure and continuously updated digital information system.

Digital Data Collection

This involves collecting institutional information electronically from faculties, departments, centres, institutes and administrative units. Data may include student enrolment, staff strength, academic programmes, facilities, research activities and institutional achievements.

Electronic Data Storage

Academic brief information needs to be stored in secure digital databases, institutional servers or approved cloud-based platforms. Proper storage makes information easier to retrieve, update and

preserve.

Digitisation of Existing Records

Existing paper-based academic records and documents are converted into electronic formats such as searchable PDFs, spreadsheets and database records. This helps reduce dependence on physical files.

Data Management and Updating

Digital academic briefs should have mechanisms for regularly updating information. Changes in staff, student numbers, programmes, accreditation status, facilities and other institutional information should be reflected promptly.

Institutional Database Integration

The academic brief can be connected to existing university information systems such as student information systems, staff databases, library systems, examination systems and research management platforms. Integration reduces duplication and improves consistency of information.

Digital Presentation and Reporting

Information should be presented in clear electronic formats, including tables, charts, dashboards and downloadable reports. This enables university administrators and other authorised stakeholders to understand institutional data easily.

Data Security and Privacy

Digital academic brief systems must protect institutional and personal information against unauthorised access, alteration, loss and cyber threats. User authentication, access controls, backups and appropriate security measures are therefore essential.

User Access and Accessibility

Authorised users should be able to access relevant academic brief information through computers and other digital devices. Different levels of access can be assigned to management, academic planning officers, faculties, departments and other authorised personnel.

Data Accuracy and Quality Assurance

Digitalisation requires mechanisms for checking the accuracy, completeness and reliability of information before it becomes part of the academic brief. Verification should be carried out by responsible officers or designated units.

Digital Skills and Human Capacity

Staff responsible for preparing and managing academic briefs need adequate digital skills. Training should cover electronic data collection, database management, data analysis, document management and information security.

Backup and Data Preservation

Regular backups are necessary to prevent permanent loss of academic brief information resulting from system failure, accidental deletion or other disruptions. Digital preservation also ensures that historical institutional information remains available for future planning and research.

Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

The digital academic brief system should be periodically evaluated to identify weaknesses and improve its efficiency. Feedback from users can help the institution improve data collection, accessibility, accuracy, security and reporting.

D. Components of an Academic Brief

An academic brief according to NUC (2024) normally contains important information that provides a comprehensive picture of the academic and administrative activities of an institution. Although the exact format may differ from one university to another, the following are major components. Some of the key components includes:

Historical Background of the Institution

This section provides information about the establishment and development of the university. It may include the year of establishment, legal foundation, historical milestones, changes in institutional status, major developments and the evolution of the university's academic activities. The historical background helps readers understand the origin and development of the institution.

Vision, Mission and Philosophy

The academic brief usually presents the institution's vision, mission, philosophy and major objectives. These statements explain the institution's purpose, direction and fundamental values. They also provide a basis for assessing whether academic programmes and institutional activities are consistent with the university's overall objectives.

Organisational Structure

The organisational structure shows the administrative and academic arrangement of the institution. It may include the Governing Council, Senate, Vice-Chancellor, principal officers, colleges, faculties, schools, institutes, departments, centres and other academic or administrative units. An organisational chart may be included to illustrate relationships among the various units.

Academic Programmes

Information about academic programmes constitutes a major component of an academic brief. It may include undergraduate, postgraduate, diploma, certificate and professional programmes offered by the institution. Details may include programme titles, departments responsible for them, duration, admission requirements, degree awarded and accreditation status.

Student Enrolment

The academic brief normally contains information on student enrolment. This may be presented according to colleges, faculties, departments, programmes, levels of study and gender where appropriate. Historical enrolment data may also be provided to demonstrate changes in student population over time.

Academic and Non-Academic Staff

This component provides information about the human resources of the institution. Academic staff information may include professors, associate professors/readers, senior lecturers, lecturers and other academic ranks. Non-academic staff may also be classified according to their relevant cadres and units. Staff statistics are useful for determining whether the institution has adequate human resources to support its academic programmes.

Faculties, Departments, Institutes and Centres

An academic brief provides information about the various academic units of the university. For each faculty or department, information may include its history, objectives, programmes, staff strength, student enrolment, research activities and major achievements. Institutes, centres and other specialised academic units may also be documented.

Academic Facilities and Infrastructure

Information on physical and academic facilities is another important component. These may include lecture theatres, classrooms, laboratories, workshops, libraries, information and communication technology facilities, staff offices, hostels, health centres and other educational infrastructure. The availability and condition of such facilities can provide useful information for institutional planning.

Library and Information Resources

The academic brief may provide information about the university library and its resources. This can include the number and types of books, journals, electronic resources, databases, library branches, seating capacity and digital library services. Such information demonstrates the institution's capacity to support teaching, learning and research.

Research and Innovation Activities

This section presents information about research activities within the institution. It may include research centres, research projects, publications, research grants, patents, innovations, conferences and collaborations. Research information is particularly important in demonstrating the institution's contribution to knowledge creation and societal development.

Community Service and Extension Activities

Universities are expected to contribute to society beyond teaching and research. The academic brief may therefore document community development programmes, consultancy services, outreach activities, public lectures, extension services and other forms of university-community engagement.

Accreditation and Professional Recognition

Information about the accreditation of academic programmes is an important component of an academic brief. It may indicate programmes that have received accreditation, the relevant regulatory or professional bodies, accreditation dates and the status of programmes. This information is useful for institutional monitoring and quality assurance.

Academic Calendar and Major Activities

The academic brief may include the academic calendar and major institutional activities. These can include admission periods, registration, lectures, examinations, matriculation, convocations, semester breaks and other important academic events.

Student Support Services

Information on student support services may include counselling, health services, accommodation, sports, students' affairs, career services, financial assistance and other welfare programmes. These services are important because they contribute to students' academic success and general well-being.

Financial and Material Resources

Depending on the purpose and level of detail required, an academic brief may contain information on institutional funding, internally generated revenue, grants, endowments, major projects and material resources. Such information assists management in understanding the resources available for implementing institutional programmes.

Institutional Achievements

This component highlights major achievements recorded by the institution. Achievements may include academic awards, research accomplishments, successful accreditation exercises, infrastructure development, innovation, staff development, student achievements and notable institutional partnerships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An academic brief is an important institutional document containing information about a university's academic programmes, staffing, students, facilities, development plans and other matters relevant to institutional planning and quality assurance. In Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) uses academic briefs in the analysis and development of academic programmes and university master plans [6], [7]. The benefits of digitalizing academic brief includes:

Improved accessibility and retrieval of academic information

Digitalising academic briefs makes university information easier and faster for authorised users to access. Under a paper-based system, academic planners and administrators may need to search through physical files to locate information about programmes, staffing, facilities or student enrolment. A digital system can provide searchable and organised information that can be retrieved within a short period. This benefit is particularly important because the NUC uses academic briefs in academic programme planning and master-plan development. The Commission's Programme Planning Division is responsible for analysing academic briefs and compiling academic development plans for universities (NUC, n.d.). Digitalisation can improve the speed with which universities prepare, retrieve and submit relevant academic information [8].

Improved academic planning and evidence-based decision-making

Digital academic briefs can provide university administrators with timely information for academic planning and decision-making. When information concerning programmes, students, academic staff, facilities and institutional development is stored electronically, it can be analysed more easily to identify institutional strengths, deficiencies and emerging needs. The NEDI initiative emphasises that reliable education data are essential for policy formulation, resource allocation, curriculum improvement and institutional performance measurement (FME, n.d.). Similarly, UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning identifies education management information systems as important sources of quality data for education planning and policy dialogue (UNESCO IIEP, n.d.) [9]. Digital academic briefs can help university management make decisions based on current institutional evidence rather than incomplete or outdated information.

Strengthened quality assurance and accreditation

Digitalisation can strengthen quality assurance and accreditation processes in Nigerian universities. Academic briefs contain information that can assist regulatory authorities and university managers in assessing academic programmes, resources and institutional development.

The NUC has a specific mandate to monitor compliance of Nigerian universities with academic briefs, physical master plans and other quality-assurance requirements (NUC, n.d.) [10]. The NUC also identifies analysis of academic briefs as part of its responsibility for ensuring the orderly and qualitative development of university academic programmes (NUC, n.d.). A digital academic-brief system can make relevant information more systematically available for internal quality assurance and external regulatory assessment. It can also make it easier for university management to identify missing information and areas requiring improvement before accreditation or monitoring exercises.

Reduction in paperwork, duplication and administrative burden

Digitalising academic briefs can reduce the dependence on paper documents and minimise the duplication of institutional records. In a paper-based environment, several university offices may maintain separate copies of similar documents, creating additional printing, storage and updating responsibilities [11], [12]. A centralised digital system can provide authorised personnel with access to a common and updated version of institutional information. This approach corresponds with the broader movement toward integrated education-data systems. NEDI identifies scattered data sources, manual records and unstandardised formats as challenges that can reduce efficiency and visibility in education management (FME, n.d.). UNESCO also emphasises that effective education management information systems should support data collection, processing, management, storage, archiving and analysis (UNESCO IIEP, n.d.). Digital academic briefs can reduce repetitive administrative activities and allow academic-planning personnel to devote more time to analysis and institutional improvement [13].

Improved transparency, accountability and monitoring

Digital academic briefs can strengthen transparency and accountability in university administration. A well-designed digital system can include user authentication, access permissions, approval procedures, version control and audit trails. These features can help establish who entered or modified information and when the change occurred. The NUC undertakes periodic monitoring and assessment of the academic, financial and administrative performance of universities using established parameters and guidelines (NUC, n.d.). Digital records can make such monitoring more systematic because relevant institutional information can be organised and retrieved more efficiently. Similarly, NEDI emphasises secure and authorised access to education information and seeks to improve transparency through a centralised education-data infrastructure (FME, n.d.) [14]. Digitalisation of academic briefs can therefore contribute to stronger institutional accountability when appropriate data-protection and access-control measures are implemented. Digitalisation can promote institutional transparency and accessibility. Where appropriate information is made available through an institution's official digital platform, stakeholders can obtain relevant institutional information without depending entirely on printed copies. It can also reduce the cost and time associated with repeated printing, transportation and physical storage of academic documents.

Improved integration with national education-data systems

Another important benefit is the possibility of connecting university academic-brief information with broader national education-data systems. Nigeria is increasingly developing digital systems for collecting and analysing education information across different levels. NEDI is designed to centralise education data from basic to tertiary education and provide information that supports institutional performance monitoring and evidence-based policymaking (FME, n.d.). Its tertiary-education scope includes information such as admission trends, academic progression, graduation rates, alumni tracking, research outputs and innovation indicators (FME, n.d.). Digitalising university academic briefs in standardised formats could therefore facilitate more efficient reporting and information exchange between universities and authorised regulatory or government agencies

[15]. This could reduce repeated requests for institutional information and improve consistency between university records and national education statistics.

Improved institutional memory and preservation of records

Digitalising academic briefs helps universities preserve important institutional information for long-term use. Academic briefs contain information about programmes, academic structures, staffing patterns, grading systems and projected institutional development. The NUC has described the academic brief as a statutory requirement that helps determine the academic growth pattern of a university. When such information is stored digitally, universities can maintain historical versions and retrieve previous records when required. This is particularly useful when there are changes in university management, academic programmes or administrative personnel. Digital preservation can therefore reduce the risk of losing institutional knowledge through misplaced, damaged or deteriorated paper documents.

Facilitates real-time monitoring of university development

Digital academic briefs can make it easier for university management to monitor institutional development in real time. Information on academic programmes, staffing, student enrolment, facilities and other indicators can be updated periodically and presented through digital dashboards or reports. The Nigeria Education Data Initiative (NEDI) is designed to provide centralised education data and support institutional performance tracking and real-time insights for decision-making (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], n.d.). Similarly, UNESCO explains that modern education-data systems can provide more timely information for planning and help authorities monitor educational development. Digital academic briefs can enable university administrators to identify emerging academic or infrastructural gaps earlier and take corrective action before such problems become more serious.

Promotes standardisation and interoperability of university information

Another important benefit is the standardisation of institutional information. Different universities may traditionally prepare, store and present academic information in different formats. Digitalisation provides an opportunity to establish common data fields, definitions, formats and reporting procedures. The NEDI initiative specifically seeks to address scattered data sources and unstandardised formats by creating a unified education-data infrastructure in Nigeria (FME, n.d.). UNESCO also emphasises that interconnected and interoperable data systems and standardised methods of data collection are important components of effective digital transformation in education. For Nigerian universities, standardised digital academic briefs could make it easier to compare institutional information, prepare reports for regulatory agencies and transfer appropriate data between university systems and authorised national education databases.

Supports better resource allocation and institutional efficiency

Digital academic briefs can provide reliable information for determining where university resources are most urgently required. For example, electronic information on student enrolment, academic programmes, staffing and facilities can help management identify areas with shortages or excessive capacity. UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning notes that digital technologies and education management information systems can support planning and improve the allocation of resources. NEDI similarly states that reliable education data can support resource allocation and identify institutional gaps (FME, n.d.). Digital academic briefs can help university managers make more evidence-based decisions about the allocation of academic staff, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, ICT facilities and other institutional resources. This can improve efficiency and reduce the possibility of allocating scarce resources without adequate information.

CONCLUSION

Digitalising academic briefs can significantly improve the administration and development of universities in Nigeria. The major benefits include improved accessibility of information, stronger academic planning, enhanced quality assurance, reduced paperwork and duplication, greater transparency and accountability, and improved integration with national education-data systems. These benefits are consistent with the NUC's use of academic briefs for programme planning,

monitoring and quality assurance and with Nigeria's emerging national emphasis on digital education data. Digitalisation should go beyond simply scanning paper documents. Universities should develop structured databases that allow information to be updated, verified, searched, analysed and securely shared. UNESCO stresses that effective education data systems require reliable data, interoperability, standardised collection methods and appropriate data-protection measures. Based on the findings, the paper recommends the following: Universities should establish digital academic-brief platforms that allow authorised staff to create, update, retrieve and manage institutional academic information electronically. The NUC should develop a standard digital academic-brief template to ensure uniformity in the information submitted by federal, state and private universities. Universities should integrate academic briefs with institutional management information systems so that information on students, programmes, staff, facilities and research does not have to be repeatedly entered. Adequate cybersecurity and data-protection mechanisms should be established. Digital academic briefs should be protected through authentication, access controls, backups, encryption and regular security monitoring. Academic planning and ICT staff should receive regular training in digital records management, data analysis, cybersecurity and information verification. Government should provide sustainable funding for digital infrastructure, including reliable internet connectivity, servers, appropriate software and technical support. Academic briefs should be regularly updated and validated. Each university should designate responsible officers to verify the accuracy and currency of information before submission to the NUC or other authorised agencies.

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