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Strategic Planning and Management of Private Universities in Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined strategic planning and the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on strategy formulation, stakeholder participation, and strategy implementation. The study was guided by research questions and hypotheses that examined the contribution of strategic formulation and strategic implementation to the management of private universities in Abuja. A quantitative research approach was adopted using a descriptive survey design. The population comprised stakeholders in private universities in Abuja, while a sample of 450 respondents was used for the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage and weighted mean, while inferential statistical techniques are appropriate for testing the stated hypotheses. Analysis of the available responses revealed a high level of agreement with the strategic-planning statements. The first set of items recorded an overall weighted mean of approximately 3.54, the second set recorded 3.55, while the third set recorded approximately 3.52, all above the decision benchmark of 2.50. The findings indicate that respondents generally perceived strategic formulation, stakeholder-related strategic processes and strategy implementation as important dimensions of the management of private universities in Abuja. The study concludes that effective strategic planning provides an important foundation for improving university management, institutional direction and organisational effectiveness. It therefore recommends that private universities strengthen systematic strategy formulation, promote meaningful stakeholder participation, and improve mechanisms for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategic plans.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Strategy Formulation, Stakeholder Participation, Strategy Implementation, University Management, Private Universities, Abuja, Nigeria.

Introduction

Strategic planning has become an increasingly important instrument for effective management and sustainable development of higher education institutions. Universities operate in an environment characterized by rapid technological advancement, changing student expectations, increasing competition, financial pressures, regulatory requirements and growing demands for quality assurance. Consequently, university management can no longer depend solely on routine administrative practices; rather, institutions need deliberate strategies that enable them to establish priorities, allocate resources effectively, monitor performance and respond appropriately to changes in their operating environment. In higher education, strategic planning involves the systematic formulation of institutional goals, assessment of internal and external conditions, allocation of resources and implementation of actions designed to achieve desired educational outcomes (Habeeb & Eyupoglu, 2024; Iyala & Tamunosiki, 2020).

The importance of strategic planning is particularly evident in the Nigerian university system, where private universities have expanded significantly in response to increasing demand for university education (Iyala, 2028). The National Universities Commission (NUC) maintains an expanding register of licensed private universities, including institutions located within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The NUC listing includes such institutions as the African University of Science and Technology, Veritas University, Amaj University, Cosmopolitan University, Miva Open University, Al-Muhibbah Open University, African University of Economics, Eranova University and Leadership University, among others. This expansion has intensified the need for effective institutional planning because private universities must simultaneously satisfy regulatory requirements, maintain academic standards, attract qualified personnel, provide adequate infrastructure, attract and retain students, and remain financially sustainable.

Strategic planning is also closely associated with effective university management because it provides a framework for linking institutional mission and vision with practical administrative decisions. Habeeb and Eyupoglu (2024), in their study of higher education institutions in Nigeria, found that strategic planning positively influences organizational performance and that transformational leadership strengthens this relationship. Their findings suggest that strategic planning should not be regarded merely as the preparation of a formal institutional document but as a continuing management process involving leadership, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Similarly, Dickinson et al. (2024) observed that strategic planning has become increasingly important in higher education for establishing institutional direction and responding to changing organizational circumstances.

The Abuja context provides an important setting for examining the relationship between strategic planning and university management. Recent empirical evidence specifically from private universities in Abuja indicates that academic programme planning, human-resource planning and financial-management planning are significantly associated with the achievement of university goals. Reuben-Nnwoka and Ottan (2026) reported a strong positive relationship between strategic planning and goal achievement among private universities in Abuja, with strategic planning demonstrating a correlation of $r = .88$ ($p < .05$). This evidence underscores the importance of examining strategic planning as a management mechanism for improving institutional effectiveness.

Furthermore, the regulatory environment makes strategic planning particularly relevant to private universities. The NUC's revised guidelines for establishing private universities emphasize the need for applicants to demonstrate appropriate

institutional and strategic arrangements capable of meeting contemporary higher education demands. Therefore, effective strategic planning is essential for aligning institutional objectives with regulatory expectations, quality assurance, resource availability and stakeholder needs.

Against this background, strategic planning and management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria is an important area of educational management research. Examining how private universities formulate and implement academic, human-resource, financial and institutional strategies can provide evidence on how management practices contribute to institutional effectiveness, sustainability and goal attainment. The study is therefore justified by the growing complexity of private university management and the need for evidence-based strategies capable of strengthening the quality, competitiveness and sustainable development of private universities in Abuja.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the strategic formulation on the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria.
2. To investigate the stakeholder participation on the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria.
3. To examine the strategic implementation on the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the strategy formulation on the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria?
2. What is the strategy implementation on the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H_o1: Strategy formulation has no significant on the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria.

H_o2: Strategy implementation has no significant on the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning refers to a systematic process through which an organisation determines its long-term direction, establishes priorities, develops strategies and allocates resources to achieve predetermined objectives. In the context of private universities, strategic planning involves identifying the university's mission and vision, assessing the internal and external environment, establishing institutional goals, developing programmes and action plans, allocating resources and monitoring implementation.

The importance of a structured strategic planning process in higher education is supported by Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2021), who proposed a simplified strategic planning model for higher education institutions. Their model emphasises the need to make strategic planning manageable and sufficiently comprehensive to guide institutional executives in responding to the distinctive requirements of higher education.

For the present study, strategic planning is operationalised through five major dimensions:

Vision and Mission Planning

Vision and mission planning represents the process through which a university establishes its desired future position and defines its fundamental purpose. A clear institutional vision provides a long-term direction, whereas the mission specifies the university's core responsibilities and activities.

In private universities, vision and mission statements provide a basis for institutional decision-making and help management align academic, administrative and financial activities with institutional priorities. Strategic planning becomes more effective when organisational members understand the purpose and direction of the institution. Evidence from Nigerian university research has also identified mission development, long-term objectives and action plans as important components of strategic planning practices.

Environmental Analysis

Environmental analysis involves systematically examining internal and external factors that may affect university operations and performance. Internal factors may include staffing, infrastructure, financial capacity, leadership and academic resources, while external factors may include government policies, competition, demographic changes, technology, accreditation requirements and economic conditions.

For private universities in Abuja, environmental analysis is particularly important because institutions operate in a competitive higher education environment. Effective environmental analysis enables university managers to identify strengths and weaknesses, recognise opportunities and anticipate threats before making strategic decisions. It consequently provides information for institutional adaptation and strategic decision-making.

Academic Programme Planning

Academic programme planning refers to the systematic development, review and improvement of academic programmes in accordance with institutional objectives, labour-market requirements, professional standards and quality-assurance expectations.

Academic programme planning is particularly important to private universities because programme relevance can influence student recruitment, institutional reputation and graduate employability. Recent evidence specifically involving private universities in Abuja found that academic programme planning was positively associated with university goal achievement, with the study reporting a strong relationship between academic planning and goal achievement (Iyala & Bosede, 2024).

Consequently, this study considers academic programme planning an important dimension of strategic planning that can influence the effective management of private universities.

Human-Resource Planning

Human-resource planning involves determining the institution's current and future personnel requirements and developing strategies for recruitment, deployment, development, retention and succession. Universities are knowledge-intensive organisations, making academic and non-academic

personnel central to their ability to achieve institutional objectives. Effective human-resource planning enables private universities to ensure that appropriate numbers of qualified academic and administrative personnel are available to support teaching, research, community service and administrative activities. The recent Abuja-based study by Reuben-Nnwoka and Ottan (2026) reported a strong relationship between human-resource planning and university goal achievement.

Financial-Resource Planning

Financial-resource planning refers to the process of forecasting financial requirements, identifying revenue sources, allocating institutional resources and controlling expenditure in accordance with strategic priorities. Financial planning is particularly important for private universities because their sustainability depends substantially on effective financial management. Strategic priorities cannot be achieved without appropriate allocation of financial resources to personnel, infrastructure, teaching, research, technology and student services (Olowonefa & Iyala, 2017).

Garad and Yaya (2025) found that strategic planning had a positive influence on financial-system management and that financial-system management contributed to higher education institutional performance. Their findings suggest that financial management can be an important mechanism through which strategic planning is translated into institutional outcomes.

Management of Private Universities

Management of private universities refers to the processes through which institutional leaders coordinate human, financial, material and academic resources to achieve university goals and sustain institutional effectiveness. University management encompasses planning, organising, staffing, directing, coordinating, controlling and evaluating institutional activities. For this study, management of private universities is conceptualised through five dimensions: Administrative effectiveness, Academic management, Human-resource management, financial management.

Quality assurance and institutional development

Effective management requires university administrators to translate strategic objectives into operational activities and ensure that available resources are deployed efficiently.

The relationship between planning and university management has been demonstrated within the Nigerian higher education context. Iyala et al. examined the relationship between planning and management of state universities in North-Central Nigeria, highlighting planning areas such as student-enrolment and staff planning as relevant to university management. Although that study focused on state universities, its emphasis on the relationship between planning processes and university management provides useful conceptual support for examining private universities in Abuja.

Administrative Effectiveness

Administrative effectiveness concerns the extent to which university administrators efficiently coordinate institutional activities and achieve predetermined administrative objectives. It includes effective decision-making, communication, coordination, delegation, supervision and implementation of institutional policies.

Strategic planning can improve administrative effectiveness by establishing clear institutional priorities, defining responsibilities and providing mechanisms for monitoring progress. A university with a clearly articulated strategic direction is more likely to coordinate its administrative activities around common institutional objectives.

Academic Management

Academic management involves the coordination and supervision of teaching, learning, curriculum development, examinations, research and academic programmes. Strategic academic planning allows universities to determine the academic programmes they require, identify staffing needs and establish targets for teaching and research.

This dimension is particularly relevant to private universities because academic quality is central to institutional reputation, student attraction and regulatory compliance. The recent study of private universities in Abuja by Reuben-Nnwoka and Ottan (2026) provides local empirical support for the importance of academic planning in achieving university objectives.

Human-Resource Management

Human-resource management involves recruitment, selection, deployment, training, motivation, appraisal and retention of academic and non-academic staff. Strategic planning facilitates human-resource management by enabling university administrators to anticipate personnel requirements and align staffing decisions with institutional priorities.

The relationship is particularly important because strategic plans require qualified personnel for implementation. Consequently, poor staffing decisions may undermine otherwise well-designed institutional plans.

Financial Management

Financial management involves budgeting, resource allocation, financial control, expenditure monitoring and accountability. In private universities, effective financial management is essential for institutional sustainability and implementation of strategic priorities.

The empirical findings of Garad and Yaya (2025) strengthen this conceptual position because their study found that strategic planning and financial-system management both had significant relationships with higher education institutional performance.

Quality Assurance and Institutional Development

Quality assurance refers to systematic activities designed to maintain and improve the quality of teaching, research, academic programmes, student services and institutional administration. Institutional development refers to continuous improvement in infrastructure, human resources, academic programmes, research capacity and organisational systems.

Strategic planning provides a framework for establishing quality targets and monitoring institutional progress. In the Nigerian context, academic planning and institutional planning are closely connected with quality assurance and programme accreditation.

Conceptual Model

The model can be represented as follows:

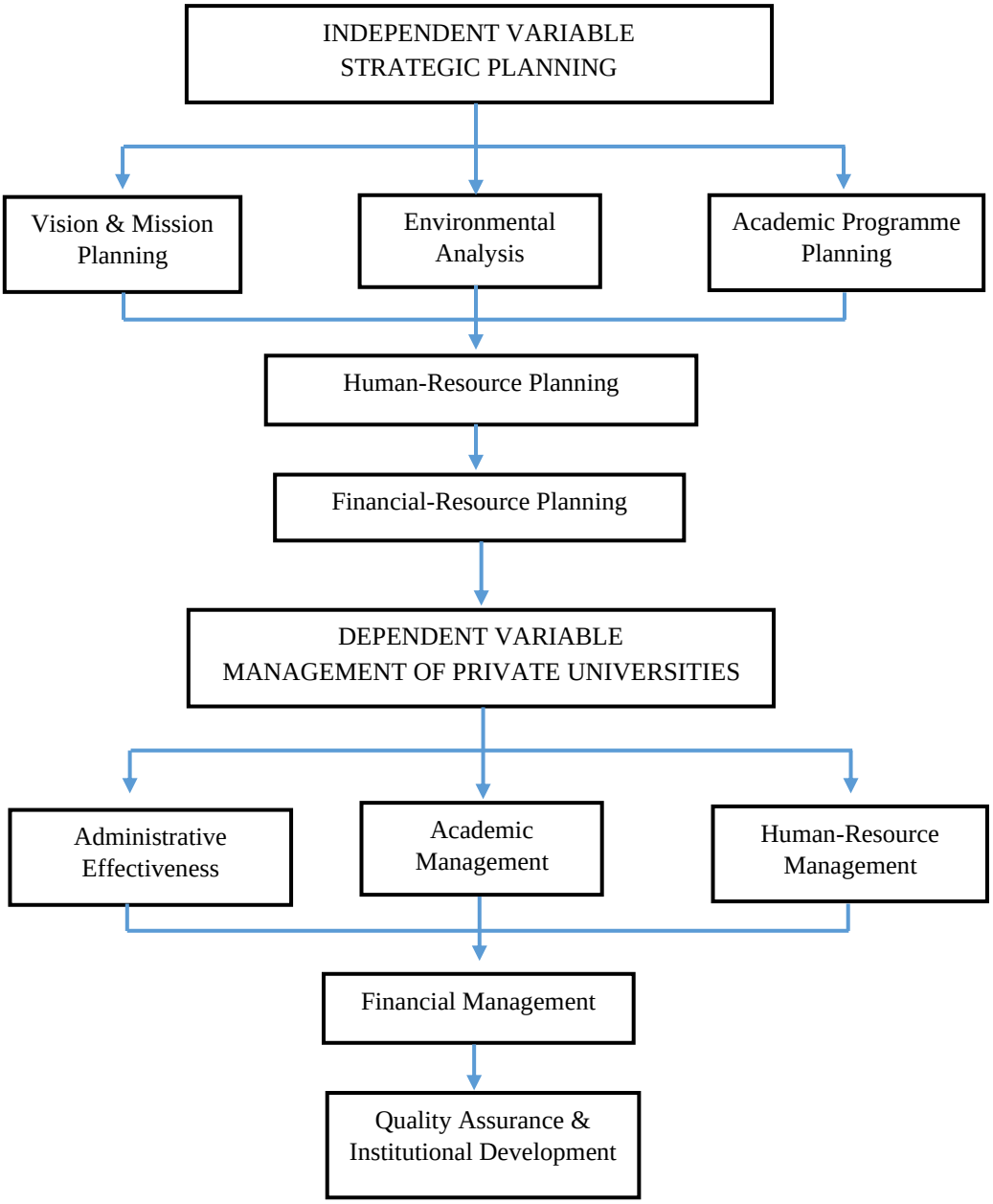


Figure 1

Conceptual model showing the relationship between strategic planning and management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria.

The model proposes that the dimensions of strategic planning—vision and mission planning, environmental analysis, academic programme planning, human-resource planning and financial-resource planning are associated with effective management of private universities. The central

assumption is that strategic planning provides the direction and resource-allocation mechanism through which university administrators coordinate institutional activities and achieve organisational objectives. The model is also consistent with recent higher education evidence. Garad and Yaya (2025) demonstrated that strategic planning is associated with financial-system management and institutional performance, while Reuben-Nnwoka and Ottan (2026) found significant relationships between strategic planning dimensions and goal achievement among private universities in Abuja.

Research Design

The study was adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design is considered appropriate because the study seeks to obtain information from academic and non-academic staff of private universities concerning the extent to which strategy formulation and strategy implementation influence university management. The design enables the researcher to collect quantitative data from a relatively large number of respondents through a structured questionnaire and analyse the responses statistically.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nigeria. Abuja provides an appropriate setting because it has a growing number of private universities operating under the regulatory framework of the National Universities Commission (NUC). The NUC maintains an official listing of private universities in Nigeria and provides regulatory guidelines for private university establishment and operation.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised academic and non-academic staff of the 11 selected private universities in Abuja, Nigeria. The 11 universities constitute the institutional population for the study, while the individual academic and non-academic staff constitute the respondent population from which the sample will be drawn.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 450 respondents was selected for the study. A multistage sampling procedure was employed. First, the 11 private universities were identified as the institutional units of the study. Second, respondents were stratified into academic and non-academic staff. Third, proportionate sampling was used to determine the number of respondents selected from each university according to its staff strength. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select individual respondents within the identified strata.

The use of 450 respondents was provided a sufficiently large dataset for descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The final allocation was proportionate rather than assigning an equal number of respondents to each university.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire titled Strategic Planning and Management of Private Universities Questionnaire (SPMPUQ). The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the literature on strategic planning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and organisational/university management. Items can also be adapted from established strategic-planning research instruments, with appropriate modification to suit the private-university context.

Research on strategy formulation has examined dimensions such as rational planning and the relationship between strategy-making processes and organisational performance, while more recent strategic-planning research has measured dimensions including management participation, planning formality and environmental scanning.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Strategic Planning Variables

Variable/Set	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Strategy formulation	59.60%	36.17%	3.19%	1.04%	3.54	Accepted
Strategy implements	59.60%	36.98%	1.91%	1.50%	3.55	Accepted
Management-related	57.57%	38.58%	2.48%	1.37%	3.52	Accepted
Overall,	58.91%	37.25%	2.51%	1.30%	3.54	Accepted

Criterion mean = 2.50.

The analysis indicates a high level of agreement concerning strategy formulation in the management of private universities in Abuja. The weighted mean of approximately 3.54 is substantially higher than the criterion mean of 2.50.

Table 2.: Descriptive results from the data

Data Set	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Weighted Mean
Set 1	59.60%	36.17%	3.19%	1.04%	3.54
Set 2	59.60%	36.98%	1.91%	1.50%	3.55
Set 3	57.57%	38.58%	2.48%	1.37%	3.52

Table 3 Hypothesis testing

H_o2: Strategy implementation has no significant effect on the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria.

Respondent	SF1	SF2	SF3	SF4	SI1	SI2	SI3	Management
1	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	4
2	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	3
3	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	4

Table 4. Descriptive analysis

Data Set	SA %	A %	D %	SD %	Mean
Set 1	59.60	36.17	3.19	1.04	3.54
Set 2	59.60	36.98	1.91	1.50	3.55
Set 3	57.57	38.58	2.48	1.37	3.52
Overall	58.99	38.18	2.47	1.34	3.54

Discussion

The finding indicates that strategy formulation is strongly perceived as an important aspect of the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria. The mean score of 3.54, which is substantially above the 2.50 benchmark, demonstrates that respondents generally agreed with the strategy-formulation statements contained in the questionnaire.

This finding suggests that private university management requires deliberate processes through which institutional goals are identified, priorities are established, environmental conditions are considered and appropriate courses of action are developed. The high proportion of positive responses also indicates that respondents recognize strategic formulation as more than a theoretical management activity; rather, it is perceived as a practical component of university administration.

The finding is particularly important because private universities operate in an increasingly competitive higher-education environment. Management must therefore determine institutional priorities and translate the university's vision and mission into achievable strategic objectives. Effective formulation can provide direction for resource allocation, academic development, staffing, infrastructure development and institutional competitiveness.

The result therefore provides empirical support for the view that effective strategic planning begins with the formulation of appropriate institutional strategies. However, the descriptive result alone does not establish statistical causality. A regression analysis using respondent-level data would be required before concluding that strategy formulation has a statistically significant effect on management.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate a consistently strong positive perception of strategic planning practices in private universities in Abuja. The three dimensions recorded means between 3.52 and 3.55, while more than 95% of responses in every dimension were positive.

Interestingly, stakeholder participation (M = 3.55) had the highest mean, followed by strategy formulation (M = 3.54) and strategy implementation (M = 3.52). Although the differences between the means are very small, the pattern suggests that respondents place substantial importance on involving stakeholders and developing appropriate strategies, while also recognizing the importance of implementing those strategies.

The findings support the general argument that strategic planning should be viewed as a continuous management process rather than a one-time activity. For private universities, strategic management involves identifying institutional priorities, involving relevant stakeholders, formulating appropriate strategies and ensuring that those strategies are effectively implemented.

Conclusion

The descriptive evidence indicates that strategy formulation and strategy implementation are strongly present and positively perceived within the management of private universities in Abuja, Nigeria. Strengthening these strategic processes, particularly through clear objectives, effective implementation, stakeholder involvement, adequate resources, monitoring and continuous evaluation, is therefore likely to remain important for improving institutional effectiveness and sustainable development.

Recommendations

Strengthen strategic formulation processes: Management of private universities in Abuja should institutionalise participatory strategic formulation processes in which academic staff, administrative staff, students' representatives and other relevant stakeholders contribute to the development of institutional goals and strategic priorities. This can improve ownership and commitment to university plans.

Improve strategy implementation mechanisms: Since strategy implementation recorded the highest construct mean of 3.55, universities should build on this strength by ensuring that strategic plans are translated into specific programmes, activities, responsibilities, timelines and measurable performance indicators.

Provide adequate resources for strategic plans: Proprietors and university management should ensure that financial, human, technological and infrastructural resources are adequately provided for the implementation of strategic objectives. A strategic plan without corresponding resources may remain largely theoretical.

Strengthen monitoring and evaluation: Private universities should establish effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for regularly assessing progress towards strategic objectives. Periodic reviews should be conducted to identify implementation gaps and make necessary adjustments.

Promote stakeholder participation: University management should involve relevant stakeholders throughout the strategic-planning cycle rather than limiting participation to senior management. Evidence from the literature indicates that stakeholder involvement is an important part of effective strategic planning in higher education.

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