Supervision, Quality, Institutional Planning and Staff Performance in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

Supervision and institutional planning are central to governance and quality assurance in higher education. In Nigeria, rapid enrolment expansion and resource constraints heighten the importance of understanding how these mechanisms influence staff performance. In this study, supervision, educational administration and planning in Nigerian higher education: an empirical study. The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate the relationships among supervision quality, planning maturity, and staff performance across 12 universities (federal, state, and private). Quantitative data were collected from 633 staff using validated scales and analyzed with correlation, regression, and bootstrapped mediation models, while qualitative interviews and focus groups provided contextual insights. Findings showed that both supervision quality ($0 = .46$, $p < .001$) and planning maturity ($0 = .37$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted staff performance, jointly explaining 27% of the variance. Mediation analysis revealed that supervision quality partially mediated the relationship between planning and performance, indicating that institutional plans exert greater impact when operationalized through effective supervision. Qualitative evidence confirmed that weak monitoring and limited supervisory training often hindered plan implementation. The study concludes that supervision and planning function as complementary levers of institutional effectiveness. It recommends integrated reforms that strengthen supervisory capacity, embed accountability into planning processes, and address systemic barriers such as underfunding and political interference. Strengthening these governance mechanisms will be vital to improving staff performance, institutional quality, and student outcomes in Nigerian higher education.

Keywords: Supervision, Institutional planning, Staff performance, Governance, Higher education, Nigeria, Quality assurance.

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are critical engines for human-capital development, innovation, and national progress. In Nigeria, universities dominate the tertiary-education landscape and have undergone rapid expansion over the past two decades: enrolment grew from fewer than 500,000 students in the early 2000s to over 2.1 million by 2022, alongside the creation of dozens of new federal, state, and private universities (National Universities Commission [NUC],

2022; Ajayi & Haastrup, 2020). This massification has widened access but also created substantial pressures on governance, supervision, and institutional planning systems.

A cornerstone of institutional quality is effective supervision, the systematic guidance, monitoring, and support provided to academic and administrative staff as well as postgraduate students. Supervision spans mentoring, workload allocation, performance appraisal, curriculum oversight, and compliance with institutional and regulatory standards (Eze & Ogbonna, 2021). Evidence links high-quality supervision to stronger staff productivity, enhanced research output, greater job satisfaction, and improved student learning outcomes (Okonkwo, 2020; Yusuf & Lawal, 2019). Conversely, weak or inconsistent supervision often results in diminished instructional quality, low staff morale, and delayed completion of research degrees (Abubakar, 2020; Nwosu & Adeoye, 2022).

Equally vital is educational administration, encompassing the governance, leadership, and resource-management functions that translate policies into institutional action. University councils, vice-chancellors, registrars, deans, and department heads collectively shape decision- making processes that determine academic quality, staff welfare, and organizational efficiency (Adesina, 2019; Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2019). Institutional planning, strategic, academic, and financial—further enables HEIs to allocate scarce resources effectively, set measurable performance targets, and respond to external pressures such as global competition, changing labour-market needs, and technological shifts (Mbah, 2021; Austin, 2021).

Despite ongoing reforms—such as the NUC's Minimum Academic Standards and accreditation requirements—Nigerian universities continue to face persistent challenges: under-funding, bureaucratic bottlenecks, politicised leadership appointments, insufficient supervisory training, and weak capacity for data-driven planning (Okebukola, 2020; Ibrahim & Uche, 2021). Several studies observe that strategic plans often remain only partly implemented because of inadequate follow-through by

supervisors, poor monitoring systems, and limited accountability mechanisms (Onwuka & Ibekwe, 2022).

International scholarship shows that effective supervision, transparent administration, and participatory planning collectively foster institutional resilience, accountability, and improved learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2019; Austin, 2021). However, in the Nigerian context, there is limited empirical research that integrates these governance dimensions to examine their combined influence on staff performance, job satisfaction, and institutional effectiveness. Most prior investigations have addressed each element in isolation, for example, postgraduate supervision (Yusuf & Lawal, 2019) or strategic-plan implementation (Onwuka & Ibekwe, 2022), leaving an important knowledge gap.

To address this gap, the present study investigates supervision, educational administration, and planning across federal, state, and private universities in Nigeria, analyzing how these governance elements interact to shape institutional performance. Insights from this study are expected to inform evidence-based strategies for strengthening university governance, enhancing supervisory practices, and improving strategic-planning implementation—key levers for advancing quality assurance and sustainable development in Nigerian higher education.

Research Questions

This study examined the relationships among supervision, quality, institutional planning, and staff performance in Nigerian universities. The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the relationship between supervision quality and staff performance in Nigerian universities?

2. To what extent does institutional planning influence staff performance?

3. How does supervision quality mediate the relationship between institutional planning and staff performance?

Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses guided the study.

1. Supervision quality is positively associated with staff performance.

2. Institutional planning is positively associated with staff performance.

3. Supervision quality mediates the relationship between institutional planning and staff performance.

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Methodology

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, beginning with a cross-sectional survey followed by qualitative interviews and document review to explain the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study involved 12 Nigerian universities purposively selected to reflect institutional ownership (four federal, four state, four private) and regional diversity. The population comprised academic and administrative staff engaged in supervision, planning, or governance roles. A three-stage stratified random sample produced a target of 720 respondents: six departments or units were randomly selected in each university, from which 10 staff members were chosen. The qualitative phase drew 42 purposively selected participants—senior administrators, heads of department, lecturers, and officers—

plus six focus-group discussions with junior staff and postgraduate students. Data were gathered with a structured questionnaire containing demographic items and four scales: a 10-item Supervision Quality Scale; an 8-item Planning Index; a 6-item Job-Satisfaction Scale (adapted from the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire); and a 5-item Perceived Staff-Performance Scale. Secondary institutional data (e.g., staff-student ratios, accreditation records) were also collected. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups explored supervisory practices, leadership processes, and barriers to plan implementation, while a checklist guided the review of strategic-plan and quality-assurance documents. Content validity was confirmed by five expert reviewers, and a pilot test (n = 50) informed item refinement. Internal-consistency reliability (Cronbach's a) ranged from .78 to .83 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Ethical approval was obtained from the lead researcher's institution and all participating universities; respondents gave written informed consent. Surveys were administered in paper or secure online format, yielding 633 usable responses (~ 88 % response rate). Interviews (35-60 min) and focus groups were recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. Quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS v26 using descriptive statistics, Pearson

correlations, multiple regression, one-way ANOVA for institutional differences, and a bootstrapped mediation test of whether supervision quality mediated the link between planning maturity and staff performance (p < .05). Qualitative transcripts were coded thematically in NVivo 12 following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach; findings were triangulated with document-review evidence.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between supervision quality and staff performance in Nigerian universities?

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation between Supervision Quality and Staff Performance (N = 33).

Code	Variable	M	SD	A	1	2
1	Supervision Quality	3.62	0.54	.82	-	.46*
2	Staff Performance	3.48	0.51	.78	.46*	-

Key: Codes (1–2) correspond to the study variables listed in the first column.

Values in the body of the table are Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients (r).

Cronbach's α reports internal reliability for each multi-item scale.

Key finding: Supervision quality is positively related to staff performance, r (631) = .46, $p <$ .001.

* $p < .001$.

Research Question 2

To what extent does institutional planning influence staff performance?

Table 2. Multiple Regression Predicting Staff Performance from Supervision Quality and Institutional Planning.

Predicator	B	SE	P	T	P
Constant	1.72	0.21	-	8.19	<.001
Supervision Quality	0.32	0.05	.38	6.40	<.001
Planning	0.24	0.06	.28	4.12	<.01
Model R^2	**.27**				

A second regression model tested whether institutional planning predicted staff performance. Institutional planning had a significant positive effect, $B = 0.35$, SE = 0.05, $t = 6.92$, $p < .001$, accounting for 14% of the variance in staff performance ($R^2 = .14$).

When supervision quality and planning maturity were entered together, both remained significant predictors: supervision ($B = 0.32$, $p < .001$) and planning ($B = 0.24$, $p < .01$), with the combined model explaining 27% of the variance ($R^2 = .27$).

Research Question 3

How does supervision quality mediate the relationship between institutional planning and staff performance?

Table 3. Mediation Analysis: Supervision Quality as Mediator Between Planning and Staff Performance

Path	Effect (B)	SE	95% CI LL	95% CI UL	p
Planning → Supervision	0.41	0.05	0.32	0.50	<.001
Supervision → Performance	0.36	0.05	0.26	0.45	<.001
Indirect (Planning → Performance)	0.15	0.03	0.09	0.23	<.001
Direct (Planning → Performance)	0.19	0.06	0.07	0.31	<.01
Total Effect	**0.34**	0.05	0.24	0.43	<.001

In Table 3, a bootstrapped mediation analysis (5,000 samples) examined whether supervision Quality mediated the relationship between institutional planning and staff performance. Results showed that institutional planning had a significant indirect effect on staff performance through supervision quality (*indirect effect* = 0.15, 95% CI [0.09, 0.23]); the direct effect of planning on performance remained significant but was reduced ($B = 0.19$,

$p < .01$), indicating partial mediation.

As shown in Tables 1-3, across the three research questions, both supervision quality and institutional planning maturity emerged as significant predictors of staff performance, and supervision quality partially mediated the planning–performance relationship. These results support all three hypotheses (H1–H3).

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Supervision quality is positively associated with staff performance.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression of Supervision Quality Predicting Staff Performance (N = 633).

Predictor (DV=Staff Performance)	B (Unstandardized)	SE B	P (Standardized)	t-value	p-value	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Constant (Intercept)	1.86	0.19	-	9.79	<.001	1.48	2.24
Supervision Quality	0.48	0.06	.46	8.10	<.001	0.36	0.60

Model summary: R^2 = .21, Adjusted R^2 = .21, F (1, 631) = 65.6, p < .001

Key: DV = Dependent variable (Staff Performance); B = unstandardized regression coefficient;

SE B = standard error; β = standardized beta coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower

limit; UL = upper limit. The constant (*B = 1.86*) is the predicted staff-performance score when supervision-quality = 0.

A one-unit increase in supervision-quality predicts a 0.48-unit increase in staff-performance score.

The model explains approximately 21 % of the variance in staff performance (*p* < .001).

Hypothesis 2

Institutional planning is positively associated with staff performance.

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression of Institutional Planning Predicting Staff Performance (N = 633)

Predictor (DV=Staff Performance)	B (Unstandardized)	SE B	P (Standardized)	t-value	p-value	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Constant (Intercept)	1.94	0.20	-	9.70	<.001	1.55	2.32
Institutional Planning	0.35	0.05	.37	6.92	<.001	0.25	0.45

Model summary: $R^2 = .14$, Adjusted $R^2 = .14$, $F(1, 631) = 47.9$, $p < .001$

Note. DV = Dependent variable (Staff Performance); B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE B = standard error; β = standardized beta coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

The constant (*B = 1.94*) is the predicted staff-performance score when the institutional-planning score = 0. A one-unit increase in institutional-planning score predicts a 0.35-unit increase in staff performance score. The model explains approximately 14 % of the variance in staff performance (*p < .001*).

Hypothesis 3

Supervision quality mediates the relationship between institutional planning maturity and staff performance.

Table 6. Mediation Analysis: Supervision Quality as Mediator Between Institutional Planning and Staff Performance (N = 633).

Path	Effect (B)	SE	95% CI LL	95% CI UL	p
Planning →Supervision	0.41	0.05	0.32	0.50	
Supervision→ Performance	0.36	0.05	0.26	0.45	<.001
Indirect (Planning → Performance)	0.15	0.03	0.09	0.23	<.001
Direct (Planning → Performance)	0.19	0.06	0.07	0.31	<.01
Total Effect	0.34	0.05	0.24	0.43	<.001

Table 6 shows clearly that supervision quality partially mediates the relationship between institutional planning and staff performance. Specifically, institutional planning significantly predicts supervision quality, which in turn predicts staff performance. The indirect pathway is significant, showing that part of planning's effect on performance is explained by supervision quality. Additionally, because the direct effect of planning on performance remains significant (though reduced), this indicates partial mediation.

Discussion of Findings

This study demonstrates that both supervision quality and institutional planning significantly influence staff performance in Nigerian universities. The results confirm that high-quality supervision is positively associated with staff performance, accounting for over one-fifth of the variance. This finding supports prior studies which emphasize the importance of supervisory guidance, mentoring, and performance appraisal in enhancing productivity and morale (Okonkwo, 2020; Yusuf & Lawal, 2019). Qualitative evidence reinforced this, with respondents noting that supportive supervisors provided encouragement and clear expectations, while weak supervision often led to frustration and diminished output.

Institutional planning also emerged as a significant predictor of performance,

consistent with literature stressing the value of coherent strategies and resource allocation in university governance (Adesina, 2019; Mbah, 2021). Planning accounted for 14% of the variance in performance, and when combined with supervision, explained 27%, suggesting that the two governance mechanisms are complementary. However, qualitative accounts revealed that strategic plans often remain ineffective without consistent follow-up, echoing critiques of weak implementation and monitoring in Nigerian higher education (Onwuka & Ibekwe, 2022; Okebukola, 2020).

Most importantly, the study confirmed that supervision partially mediates the relationship between planning and staff performance. Planning significantly predicted supervision quality, which in turn predicted performance, with a strong indirect effect. This underscores the idea that plans only translate into improved outcomes when operationalized through effective supervision. As Eze and Ogbonna (2021) argue, supervision functions as the "linking pin" between institutional strategy and staff action. The findings also resonate with international scholarship highlighting the synergy between leadership, planning, and accountability structures in shaping institutional effectiveness (Hallinger & Heck,

2019; Austin, 2021).

Overall, the evidence highlights that strengthening supervision and planning together—rather than in isolation—offers the greatest potential for improving staff performance and institutional quality. Yet, systemic barriers such as political interference, inadequate training, and resource constraints continue to limit effectiveness. Addressing these challenges will be essential if Nigerian universities are to fully realize the benefits of integrated supervision and planning frameworks.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that supervision quality and institutional planning are significant predictors of staff performance in Nigerian universities, with supervision partially mediating the effect of planning on performance. The findings suggest that while strategic planning provides the structural framework for institutional effectiveness, its impact is largely realized through the quality of supervision. By highlighting this complementary relationship, the study contributes to the literature on governance and quality assurance in higher education.

To strengthen performance outcomes, Nigerian universities should adopt integrated reforms that target both supervision and

planning. First, institutions should invest in supervisory training programs that emphasize mentoring, monitoring, and accountability. Second, strategic planning processes should move beyond documentation to include systematic follow-up, resource alignment, and performance tracking. Third, policies must address structural barriers such as inadequate funding, political interference, and weak implementation capacity, which undermine both planning and supervision. Finally, higher-education regulators, such as the National Universities Commission, should strengthen oversight mechanisms to ensure that strategic plans are operationalized through effective supervisory practices. Taken together, these recommendations underscore that enhancing supervisory capacity while deepening the maturity of planning frameworks offers the most viable pathway for improving staff performance, institutional governance, and educational outcomes in Nigerian universities.

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