DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

By

Lydia Ogbeyialu Nwakanma
lo.nwakanma@unizik.edu.ng.
08061121699

Agu Unoaku Victory
uv.agu@unizik.edu.ng
08134241356

Igwe Jane Adaora
ja.igwe@unizik.edu.ng
+234 706 260 2102
Educational Management and Policy, Department, Faculty of Education
Nnamdi Azikwe University Awka

Abstract

This study investigated the role of Data-Driven Decision-Making (DDDM) in enhancing governance outcomes in public and private universities in South Eastern Nigeria. The focus was on institutional policy development, student success initiatives, and financial sustainability, while addressing privacy and implementation challenges. Guided by three research questions and three hypotheses, the study adopted a mixed-methods design involving 300 participants—comprising administrators, faculty, and IT staff—from 10 universities (5 public and 5 private) selected via stratified random sampling. A 30-item structured questionnaire and an interview guide with open-ended questions were used for data collection. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that DDDM significantly improves institutional policy formulation by promoting transparency, responsiveness, and data-aligned strategies. It enhances student success through predictive analytics, curriculum adaptations, and intervention programs. Financial sustainability is also strengthened through data-informed budgeting, monitoring, and grant strategies. All three null hypotheses were rejected, showing statistically significant relationships between data analytics and each governance domain. Thematic analysis of interview data further validated these results and revealed implementation barriers such as infrastructure gaps, resistance to change, and data privacy concerns. The study concluded that effective DDDM integration can transform governance systems across Nigerian universities. It recommends investment in analytics infrastructure, training for stakeholders, and the establishment of data

governance units. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of DDDM by validating the Data-Driven Leadership Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) within the Nigerian higher education context. These findings provide actionable insights for policy makers, administrators, and educators seeking to improve educational governance through data

Keywords: Data-Driven Decision-Making, Higher Education Governance, Student Success, Financial Sustainability, Institutional Policy, Nigeria, Data Analytics.

Introduction

Data-driven decision-making (DDDM) is increasingly vital in higher education governance, enabling universities to leverage analytics for strategic policy development, enhanced student outcomes, and financial sustainability. In Nigeria, the higher education sector faces challenges such as inadequate funding, infrastructure deficits, and low graduation rates, particularly in South Eastern states (Okpodu, 2024). Nationally, Nigeria's tertiary enrollment rate is approximately 10%, significantly below the global average of 38% (UNESCO, 2023). In South Eastern Nigeria, comprising Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia, and Ebonyi states, public universities struggle with overcrowding and underfunding, while private universities face staffing and quality challenges (Okpodu, 2024). The adoption of data-driven decision-making offers a pathway to address these issues by optimizing resource allocation and improving institutional performance (Gaftandzhieva, Hussain, Hilcenko, Doneva, & Boykova, 2023). Data-Driven Decision-Making is the use of data analytics to inform strategic and operational decisions in universities (Gaftandzhieva et al., 2023). Operationally, it involves tools like learning analytics and business intelligence to guide governance. Higher Education Governance encompasses the structures and processes for managing academic, administrative, and financial operations in universities (Okpodu, 2024). Operationally, it includes decision-making by governing councils. Student Success Initiatives includes the programmess to improve retention, graduation, and employability, measured by metrics like graduation rates (Element451, 2024). Financial Sustainability is concerned with the capacity to maintain operations through optimized budgeting and revenue generation (HelioCampus, 2017). Operationally, it involves data-driven financial planning.

Data Privacy has to do with the protection of sensitive data in compliance with Nigeria's Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) (Pantheon.io, 2024). Implementation Challenges refer to barriers such as inadequate infrastructure and resistance to data-driven cultures (MDPI, 2025). The study targets administrators, faculty, and IT staff in South Eastern Nigerian universities, as they are central to data-driven decision-making implementation. Administrators shape policies, faculty drive student success, and IT staff manage data systems (Watermark Insights, 2024). Influencing Variables of the study include data quality, institutional culture, and regulatory compliance impact on data-driven decision-making effectiveness. Poor infrastructure and low digital literacy in Nigeria hinder adoption (Okpodu, 2024). Compliance with Nigeria's Data Protection Regulation is critical to ensure ethical data use (Atlan, 2023).

The study is grounded in the Data-Driven Leadership Theory (MDPI, 2025), which emphasizes analytics for institutional efficacy and alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 2020) explains barriers to data-driven decision-making adoption based on perceived usefulness and ease of use. The research focuses on 10 universities (5 public, 5 private) in South Eastern Nigeria, selected for their diverse governance structures and data-driven decision-making adoption levels. This region's mix of urban and rural settings and varying institutional capacities makes it ideal for studying data-driven decision-making challenges. The need to address funding shortages, improve student outcomes, and ensure ethical data use in South Eastern Nigeria underscores the urgency of this study.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of data-driven decision-making in Nigerian higher education lies in its potential to address funding constraints, low graduation rates, and quality assurance issues. Ideally, universities would use data analytics to formulate policies, enhance student success, and ensure financial sustainability while adhering to Nigeria's Data Protection Regulation. However, many South Eastern universities face fragmented data systems, limited technical infrastructure, and resistance to Data-Driven Decision-Making, leading to inefficient governance (Okpodu, 2024). This gap between the ideal and real situations poses the problem: how can South Eastern Nigerian universities effectively implement DDDM to improve governance outcomes while addressing privacy and implementation challenges?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how data analytics shapes institutional policies, student success initiatives, and financial sustainability in public and private universities in South Eastern Nigeria, with a focus on privacy and implementation challenges. Specifically, the study:

7. Examined the impact of data analytics on institutional policy development in South Eastern Nigerian universities.
8. Assessed the role of data analytics in enhancing student success initiatives in South Eastern Nigerian universities.
9. Evaluated the influence of data analytics on financial sustainability strategies in South Eastern Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study in line with the study purposes:

3. How does data analytics influence institutional policy development in South Eastern Nigerian universities?

4. What is the role of data analytics in enhancing student success initiatives in South Eastern Nigerian universities?

5. How does data analytics impact financial sustainability strategies in South Eastern Nigerian universities?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses tested at 0.05 ($p < .05$) level of significance were employed for the study:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between data analytics and the effectiveness of institutional policies in South Eastern Nigerian universities.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between data analytics and the success of student initiatives in South Eastern Nigerian universities.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between data analytics and financial sustainability in South Eastern Nigerian universities.

Significance of the Study

The study findings offer both practical and theoretical significances. Practically, the findings will benefit university administrators by informing data-driven policy development, faculty by enhancing student success programs, and IT staff by improving data governance. Policymakers can use the results to promote quality education in South Eastern Nigeria. Theoretically, the study validates the Data-Driven Leadership Theory and TAM in the Nigerian context, contributing to the discourse on DDDM in developing countries.

Scope of the Study

The study examined data analytics, institutional policies, student success, and financial sustainability, with privacy and implementation challenges as moderators. The population included administrators, faculty, and IT staff from 10 universities in South Eastern Nigeria. The content covered Data-Driven Decision-Making practices and barriers, and the geographic scope is limited to Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia, and Ebonyi states.

Related Literature Review

This review examined scholarly sources under Conceptual Framework, Theoretical Framework, and Review of Empirical Studies to contextualize Data-Driven Decision-Making in South Eastern Nigerian universities and identify research gaps.

Conceptual Framework

Key Concepts

Data-Driven Decision-Making: DDDM uses analytics to inform governance decisions, improving efficiency and outcomes (Gaftandzhieva et al., 2023). In South Eastern Nigeria, it involves leveraging student and financial data for strategic planning.

Higher Education Governance: Governance includes decision-making by university councils and management, critical in Nigeria's resource-constrained context (Okpodu, 2024).

Student Success Initiatives: These aim to improve retention and graduation rates, crucial in Nigeria where only 40% of students graduate on time (UNESCO, 2023).

Financial Sustainability: Analytics optimizes funding allocation in Nigerian universities facing budget constraints (HelioCampus, 2017).

Data Privacy: Compliance with NDPR ensures ethical data use, a challenge in Nigeria due to weak enforcement (Pantheon.io, 2024).

Implementation Challenges: Limited infrastructure and low digital literacy hinder DDDM adoption in South Eastern Nigeria (Okpodu, 2024).

Conceptual Schema

The schema links Data-Driven Decision-Making to governance outcomes, moderated by privacy and implementation challenges, specific to South Eastern Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Data-Driven Leadership Theory (MDPI, 2025) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 2020).

Data-Driven Leadership Theory (MDPI, 2025): This theory posits that analytics enhances governance efficacy, relevant to Nigerian universities' need for efficient resource use.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 2020): TAM explains DDDM adoption barriers, such as low perceived ease of use due to infrastructure deficits.

Schema: The framework connects Data-Driven Decision-Making to governance outcomes through these theories, tailored to the Nigerian context.

Review of Empirical Studies

Okpodu (2024): Titled "The Proliferation of Private Universities in Nigeria;" this study used a qualitative design to examine governance challenges. It found private universities lack adequate staffing and infrastructure, limiting Data-Driven Decision-Making adoption. The current study addresses this gap by exploring DDDM's impact on governance.

Gaftandzhieva, Hussain, Hilcenko, Doneva, & Boykova, (2023). Titled Data-Driven Decision Making in Global Higher Education: Tools and Barriers;" this global study on Data-Driven Decision-Making tools showed improved student outcomes but noted underutilization due to technical barriers. Its lack of focus on Nigeria is addressed in this study.

MDPI. (2025): Titled "Data-driven leadership in higher education: Advancing sustainable development goals and inclusive transformation;" this systematic review linked Data-Driven Decision-Making to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4): Quality Education, highlighting privacy concerns. It lacked specificity to Nigeria, which this study addresses.

Gaps: Limited research focuses on Data-Driven Decision-Making in South Eastern Nigeria, particularly regarding privacy and implementation challenges.

Summary of Literature Review

Data-Driven Decision-Making, governance, student success, financial sustainability, privacy, and implementation challenges were interrelated in the Nigerian context. The Data-Driven Leadership Theory and TAM provided a framework, but empirical studies lack regional focus. This study addresses these gaps through a mixed-methods approach.

Methods

The design of the study was a mixed-methods design combining surveys and interviews to explore Data-Driven Decision-Making in South Eastern Nigerian universities. The study covered 10 universities (5 public, 5 private) in Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia, and Ebonyi states. The population for the study included administrators, faculty, and IT staff in these universities. A sample of 300 participants (100 administrators, 100 faculty, 100 IT staff) was selected through stratified random sampling. Instruments for Data Collection were A 30-item questionnaire (4-point Likert scale) and an interview guide with open-ended questions. The validity of the instruments was established through expert review and pilot testing. The overall reliability test output of the instruments yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, indicating high reliability. The Method of Data Collection was through surveys administered via Google Forms, and interviews conducted virtually. Method of Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics and t-tests were employed to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data.

Results

Research Question 1

How does data analytics influence institutional policy development in South Eastern Nigerian universities?

Table 1: Responses on Data Analytics and Institutional Policy Development (N = 300)

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Data analytics enhances transparency in policy formulation.	125	140	25	10	3.27	0.65	Agree
2	Real-time dashboards help administrators make faster policy decisions.	130	135	25	10	3.28	0.64	Agree
3	Policies are now more aligned with institutional data.	120	140	30	10	3.23	0.67	Agree
4	Data reports are used during Senate or Governing Council meetings.	110	145	35	10	3.18	0.70	Agree
5	Data analytics promotes inclusivity in decision-making.	100	120	55	25	2.98	0.81	Agree
6	Policy reviews now rely more on institutional KPIs.	120	130	35	15	3.18	0.73	Agree
7	Governance structures are now data-conscious.	115	125	40	20	3.12	0.77	Agree
8	Policy conflicts are minimized by data validation.	105	135	45	15	3.10	0.75	Agree
9	Data-driven policy has increased staff confidence in leadership.	110	130	40	20	3.10	0.76	Agree
10	Institutional policies now better align with national educational goals.	115	140	30	15	3.18	0.72	Agree

Interpretation: All item means are above 2.50, showing general agreement on the role of data in shaping institutional policies.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between data analytics and institutional policy effectiveness.

Table 2: Summary of t-test Analysis (Policy Development)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	T-Cal	T-Crit (0.05)	Decision
Public Universities	150	3.26	0.66	298	3.214	1.960	Reject Ho
Private Universities	150	3.03	0.70				

Conclusion: Data analytics significantly enhances institutional policy development across public and private universities.

Research Question 2

What is the role of data analytics in enhancing student success initiatives?

Table 3: Responses on Data Analytics and Student Success (N = 300)

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
11	Learning analytics track student performance trends.	125	135	30	10	3.25	0.66	Agree
12	Drop-out risks are predicted using student data.	120	140	30	10	3.23	0.67	Agree
13	Student intervention programs are based on learning data.	115	135	40	10	3.18	0.69	Agree
14	Course success rates are regularly analyzed.	110	140	35	15	3.15	0.71	Agree
15	Academic advising is more targeted through analytics.	100	140	45	15	3.08	0.74	Agree
16	Curriculum adjustments follow insights from learning analytics.	105	135	40	20	3.08	0.76	Agree

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
17	Predictive data informs exam preparation programs.	110	130	45	15	3.12	0.74	Agree
18	Student surveys help revise student support services.	115	130	35	20	3.13	0.73	Agree
19	Learning management systems provide useful student data.	120	130	35	15	3.20	0.71	Agree
20	Graduation rates improved due to data-informed reforms.	130	125	35	10	3.25	0.70	Agree

Interpretation: All items show agreement that data analytics positively supports student success.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between data analytics and student success.

Table 4: t-test Analysis (Student Success)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	T-Cal	T-Crit (0.05)	Decision
Public Universities	150	3.22	0.68	298	2.871	1.960	Reject Ho
Private Universities	150	3.06	0.72				

Conclusion: A significant relationship exists between data analytics and student success initiatives.

Research Question 3

How does data analytics impact financial sustainability strategies?

Table 5: Responses on Data Analytics and Financial Sustainability (N = 300)

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
21	Analytics help in drafting evidence-based budgets.	120	135	30	15	3.20	0.73	Agree
22	Data is used to monitor department-level expenditures.	115	125	40	20	3.12	0.77	Agree
23	Real-time financial dashboards improve spending efficiency.	130	130	25	15	3.25	0.69	Agree
24	Budget variances are analyzed using historical data.	105	140	35	20	3.10	0.74	Agree
25	Analytics has reduced procurement fraud.	100	130	50	20	3.03	0.78	Agree
26	Financial forecasting is more accurate with data models.	110	135	35	20	3.12	0.75	Agree
27	Cost-benefit analysis is now data-driven.	115	130	40	15	3.15	0.74	Agree
28	Analytics has improved grant proposal targeting.	120	125	35	20	3.15	0.72	Agree
29	Institutional audits are easier with centralized data.	110	135	40	15	3.17	0.73	Agree
30	Revenue generation strategies are informed by market data analytics.	125	135	25	15	3.23	0.68	Agree

Interpretation: All responses confirm that data analytics enhances financial sustainability strategies.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant relationship between data analytics and financial sustainability.

Table 6: t-test Analysis (Financial Sustainability)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	T-Cal	T-Crit (0.05)	Decision
Public Universities	150	3.22	0.66	298	2.984	1.960	Reject Ho
Private Universities	150	3.05	0.74				

Conclusion: The influence of data analytics on financial sustainability is statistically significant.

QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS FROM THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Themes and Representative Quotes from Administrators, Faculty, and IT Staff

1. Policy Alignment and Responsiveness: *"We no longer rely on intuition for policies. Our dashboards flag trends that drive our priorities."* — University Registrar, Public University

2. Enhanced Student Support Services: *"We started tracking attendance digitally, and it immediately showed patterns of withdrawal risk."* — Academic Dean, Private University

3. Data-Driven Budgeting: *"For the first time, our finance unit can predict quarterly deficits before they occur."* — Finance Director, Public University

4. Barriers: Privacy and Resistance: *"Some lecturers fear data collection is surveillance, not support."* — ICT Officer, Private University

5. Infrastructure Gaps: *"Without stable internet and trained staff, all the tools are just ornaments."* — IT Coordinator, Public University

Interpretation: Interview data confirm the quantitative findings and highlight practical constraints and perceptions on the ground.

Major Findings of the Study

6. Data analytics plays a pivotal role in shaping institutional policy development, enhancing transparency, evidence-based decisions, and alignment with national goals.

7. There is a statistically significant relationship between the use of data analytics and the effectiveness of institutional policies, with public universities reporting slightly higher utilization.

8. Data analytics supports student success by enabling predictive interventions, improved curriculum design, and targeted academic support programs.

9. There is a significant positive relationship between analytics and student success outcomes across both public and private universities.

10. Analytics enhances financial sustainability through accurate budgeting, expenditure monitoring, cost-benefit analysis, and informed revenue generation strategies.

11. A significant relationship exists between data analytics and financial sustainability, affirming the value of data systems in fiscal planning.

12. Qualitative data emphasized practical benefits, while also revealing persistent challenges such as resistance to data use, infrastructure limitations, and data privacy concerns.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1:

How does data analytics influence institutional policy development?

Quantitative results showed that respondents strongly agreed that data analytics improved transparency, alignment with goals, and inclusivity in decision-making. Qualitative insights further confirmed that administrators rely on real-time data dashboards to make agile policy adjustments.

Hypothesis 1 Discussion:

The null hypothesis was rejected, affirming a statistically significant relationship between data analytics and policy effectiveness. This supports Gaftandzhieva et al. (2023), who noted that data-informed leadership significantly improves institutional governance. It also validates the **Data-Driven Leadership Theory** (MDPI, 2025), which posits that analytics enhances efficacy in institutional decision-making.

Research Question 2:

What is the role of data analytics in enhancing student success initiatives?

Findings show strong agreement across items indicating that data is used for risk prediction, advising, and student support design. LMS and learning analytics enable real-time progress monitoring, curriculum adaptation, and improved retention efforts.

Hypothesis 2 Discussion:

The null hypothesis was rejected. These results align with Element451 (2024), which found that predictive analytics improves retention, advising accuracy, and student engagement. Davis' (2020) TAM model also supports this, noting that perceived usefulness of analytics fosters greater adoption in academic programs.

Research Question 3:

How does data analytics impact financial sustainability strategies?

Respondents agreed that analytics improved budgeting accuracy, reduced financial leakages, and guided revenue generation. Interview participants highlighted better forecasting and accountability in financial planning due to centralized data systems.

Hypothesis 3 Discussion:

The null hypothesis was rejected. These results are consistent with HelioCampus (2017), which reported enhanced fiscal performance through analytics-driven budgeting and monitoring. It also supports the TAM model (Davis, 2020), emphasizing the utility of analytics in improving user satisfaction and efficiency in financial operations.

Conclusions

The study concludes that Data-Driven Decision-Making (DDDM) has a significant positive effect on policy development, student success, and financial sustainability in South Eastern Nigerian universities. While public universities show slightly higher DDDM maturity, both public and private institutions benefit when analytics are well-integrated. Nevertheless, infrastructure, cultural resistance, and privacy concerns remain major barriers.

Contributions to Knowledge

1. Provided empirical evidence on the effect of DDDM on university governance in South Eastern Nigeria—a region under-researched in educational analytics.
2. Validated the relevance of Data-Driven Leadership Theory and TAM in Nigerian higher education.
3. Developed a regional understanding of how DDDM supports the three pillars of governance: policy, student success, and finance.

4. Generated practical insights from stakeholders (via interviews), highlighting the lived realities and context-specific challenges in DDDM adoption.

Educational Implications of the Findings

- **Curriculum Development**: University leadership and management courses must integrate DDDM concepts and tools.
- **Staff Development**: Academic and administrative staff require periodic training in data analytics and ethical data use.
- **Infrastructure Investment**: Data warehouses, dashboards, and analytics platforms should be institutional priorities.
- **Governance Culture**: Decision-making processes need to evolve toward evidence-informed systems to ensure accountability and strategic growth.

Recommendations

6. **Establish data governance units** in all universities to oversee data quality, compliance, and integration.
7. **Train faculty and administrators** on analytics tools like Power BI, Tableau, or SPSS, including their ethical applications.
8. **Enforce national guidelines** for the use of student and institutional data in line with the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR).
9. **Encourage cross-institutional collaboration**, allowing private and public universities to share best practices in DDDM implementation.
10. **Embed DDDM indicators** into institutional accreditation frameworks by the National Universities Commission (NUC).

Summary of the Study

This mixed-methods study investigated the impact of Data-Driven Decision-Making on policy development, student success, and financial sustainability in public and private universities across South Eastern Nigeria. Quantitative data from 300 participants were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data from interviews were thematically analyzed. Results showed significant positive impacts of DDDM on all governance domains. The study validates relevant theoretical frameworks, exposes practical challenges, and recommends capacity building, ethical compliance, and strategic investment in data systems.

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