BENCHMARKING FOR INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

The study is on benchmarking for institutional effectiveness in public universities in Akwa Ibom State. The study worked with two research questions and two hypotheses, and descriptive survey design was adopted and the population of the study consist all the public universities in Rivers State which consists of all the 121 Heads of Departments in the public universities in Akwa Ibom State. 79 (65%) and 32(35%) HODs were from federal and state university respectively. The sample of the population consists of 92 (HOD's) determined through a stratified random sampling technique. The study adopted a researcher designed instrument captioned "University Benchmark Scale (UBS)" with a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research question and while z-test was used to analyse the hypotheses. The study revealed that classroom design and conditions, documentation process, admission processes, registration process among others are the areas to be benchmarked and hence concluded that benchmarking is a viable approach to develop businesses and institutions, based on the conclusion, it was recommended among others that The educational administrators,

government, policy makers and other stakeholders should look out for the characteristics which may be reflected through the various rankings and those suggested by this study to ensure that institutions are right institutions to be benchmarked.

Keywords: Benchmarking, Institution, Effectiveness, Public Universities.

Introduction

Most countries and institution of the world are basically doing things differently in order to arrive at a unique and different result that can fix them at an esteemed level at international scene and at comity of nations. Instead of staying within the technical provisions of what is sourced within, the institutions makes extra effort to identify the best place, people, and institutions and fire up their resources to adopt strategies, policy, product and ideas around the globe to come even best by way of comparison of standard measurements, or similar measurement of their counterparts as to remain at a favourable place through adapting to best practice in the process of benchmarking. This wouldn't have been possible in a world with very strong and visible borders. But interestingly, the world's boundaries are diminishing by the day and the system which supported a separated world where physical borders and boundaries stood apart is gradually collapsing and giving way to new practical concepts of globalization, global citizenship, internationalization and a number of them. The events of globalization are evident on the numbers of individuals and other organisation who has launched their business and creative ideas into an international scale and scene. Evidently, the educational institutions and other organizations have extended their targets from locally based consumers of products or services to globally based customers, and graduates who are trained are trained to be fed to the global labour market through continuous improvement in their educational service delivery processes by benchmarking policies, products, and strategies to assess the level of advantage at world labour market.

Hence, the need for formalization of the process that produces the trained manpower has not just been necessary but forced for outright consideration with intense follow-up action. But even in the mist of the promises so projected by the wind of globalization, countries of the world has consistently remained remarkably different and dichotomized into the developed countries, developing countries, and least developed countries; these development terms could also be associated to terms like advanced country, industrialized country, more developed countries (MDC's), and more economically developed countries (MEDC's). In fact, we also have the Global North Countries, first world countries, and the post-industrial countries. These among others are phrases that have been adopted as a means to describe the level and degree of intensity of advancement and the degree of backwardness which is observable in the areas of technology, quality in education, standard of living, economy and national crime profile. Despite these terms

that are creatively put together to ensure that the divide counts, it is true that the various institutions of the world whether developed or not must ensure to bring on board a dynamic and highly sophisticated breed of labour force to the round table of global employers of labour; hence forced to look beyond the boundaries of their home countries. Apart from that, this breed of labour force must be aware that they are in fierce competition to outplay their counterpart in areas of creativity, invention, research, business and etcetera. And conventionally, it can also be assumed that the institutions that are the top players in the game of manpower production, not entirely in quantity but in quality must express this in terms of what their students and alumni has achieved in the various areas of life's endeavour; and this constitutes part of the metrics or indices for university or institutional rankings and it also determines who should benchmark who.

The university rankings published by highly esteemed international organisations like the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU); Times Higher Education (THE), Quaquarelli Symonds (QS) and Centre for World University Ranking (CWUR) has shown that there are certain factors that interplay and keep the divide between the various universalities an these gap may provide sufficient reasons for benchmarking the various areas that are highly efficient and effective from the best institutions. The rankings in the various universities is an evidence that there is one thing some universities are doing right and the other universities are not doing right, and also there is another thing one university or some universities are doing better than the other universities. The assessment for rankings of the universities has shown overtime that there is a consistent indicator that borders partly on academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty/student ratio, citations per faculty, international faculty ratio and international students ratio in the institution. These criteria appear to be use useful instrument that determines which areas sets the pace in the institutional processes that ensures objective delivery of the educational policy within or above minimum standard. Based on the various outcomes the has been displayed by the quality of educational services that are given out by this universities, certain component or aspect of the universities operations can be adopted fit in to the advantage and the advancement of the universities who are technically disadvantaged based to the difference in the teaching learning process through a benching marking process. While university institutions are the central focus of this paper, it is striking to mention that the process of benchmarking overrides inter-institutional relationship and transcends to other institutions that are not related to education. Hence other institutions that are performing very outstanding in their service delivery can be benchmarked to ensure effectiveness of the university programmes. Standing on the above statement, it is stimulating to enquire through conceptual analyses of benchmarking and streamline the application of the concept on this paper. Since it is clear that though the Nigerian university may have not been doing certain things right which must have affected the various unit and programmes of the university to have fallen bellow international standard as reflected in the various world university rankings, it becomes necessary to investigate benchmarking and see how it relates to effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

The university is an institution of learning where excellence is pursued at all cost. In fact, the university is a mirror on which the society can reflect on national issues and reach for redress through systematic infusion of national values into the entire experiences that are exposed to the learners. The learners are to be trained to become a competent labour force with the desired hand on service skills to solve problems on a global scale. In essence, the leaders of the various universities must be willing to create and recreate strategies that will enable them to meet the need of the national economy through a benchmarking process. While it is necessary to retain the notion that the products of the universities are fed to global labour market, it therefore implies that the graduate of the various universities must not only be exposed to the best international practices in their various areas of studies, but must also be equipped to become and remain in advantaged position than their global counterparts. Different organisations are aware of the trend based on a highly competitive edge and they are very willing to welcome innovations and ideas across sectors and institutions. Even when this competitive edge is not selective of industries, the universities in Nigeria especially the public universities have retained the narrative of not meeting international standards in the various areas of the university administration and service delivery. Because of the current situation, the university are under pressure for immediate improvement and are also expected to be scavenging for new innovative ideas of running a 2ist century university, but must be willing to take up ideas wherever and however it's gotten and also ready to transpose this ideas to the indigenous universities practices. The Nigerian context seems to be very different as the key leaders in the various universities have only gained administrative skills that are antiquated and this has resulted in the failure in getting the desired result. Employers of labour, students and the community have complained about the declined in quality of services rendered through the university which has breed dissatisfaction in both the local and international scene. In fact, most of the techniques still in use in the some of the Nigerian universities are as far back as four to five decades ago, and this is reflected in the administrative style, policies, curriculum and physical facilities and results produced has been that of substandard and underperformance when weighed with what is obtainable in advanced countries. It is saddening that the Nigerian populace seems to spend much for education in other countries through educational tourism while the government arbitrarily spends less for education. According to the Education Partner Centre (2019), the current figure stands at N1trillion annually and there is a projection for upward trend. This sad situation is even severe that those who are the key decision makers in the Nigerian educational system also send their abroad to patronize foreign university. Even the federal and state government is not left behind as they also award scholarship to citizens to study abroad. Hence, benchmarking the excellence in the various areas to step up the quality in service delivery may be not just in need but mandatory. The various aspects of the universities and the various units and department, lacks effectiveness as shown by the different rankings, and this may have related to failure to benchmark the right institutions. Hence the current situation therefore stirred up the interest of the researchers to find

out whether the decline in the system of university education are linked to benchmarking by investigating benchmarking for institutional effectiveness in universities in Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate benchmarking by investigating benchmarking for institutional effectiveness in universities in Nigeria. But specifically, the study will intend to:

- Determine the areas that can be benchmarked to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State.
- Identify the characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

- What are the areas that can be harnessed to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State?
- What are the characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Akwa Ibom State?

Hypotheses

- There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of federal and state university dean of faculty on the areas that can be harnessed to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State.
- There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of federal and state university senate members on characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Nigeria

Benchmarking

Benchmarking would ordinarily suggests the actual process that can lead to adapting to highly developed ideals that can improve and advance the current level of an institution through comparing and analyzing better practices that can be personalized for enhanced results. Benchmarking is a very critical concept in the current business world. The waves of modern business models are highly strategic and goal driven with an infusion of current trend to the scheme of actualisation. The term benchmarking has a nexus with the areas sort after for improvement. Based on the potentials of organisational development through benchmarking, there has been an attempt to give a definitional scope to the concept, denotatively, Business Encyclopedia (2019) defined benchmarking as the process that involves measuring the

performance of a company's products, services, or process considered to be the best in the industry. Thus in benchmarking, the critical role is to find out those things done by the best group in the game and assessing the possibility of meeting up with the standard set by the best performers. In fact, Melhem (2019) defined benchmarking as the measurement of the quality of an organization's policies, products, programmes, strategies etc. and their comparison with standard measurement or similar measurement. This suggests that benchmarking permits that an organisation weighs the outcome of their operational process with that of other organisation and determine the extent that the organisation has complied with the current ideas and standards that is required. Alternatively, benchmarking is the process which involves the process of identifying the highest standard of excellence for products, services, or processes, and then making the improvements necessary to reach those standards, commonly called " best practices" (Elmuti & Kathawala, 1996). It means that benchmarking is the pursuit of excellence in the processing of seeking for improvement. Benchmarking as given is more than just gaining the information that presents an organisation in the sense of popularity, its recent practice has exceeded the mean where organisations are easily rated best due to their performance and therefore they are seen as the option for excellence (Blakeman, 2002; Global Benchmarking Network, 2010; Bain & Company, 2013; Elmuti & Kathawala, 1996). It is the process that involves buying in the ideas and creativity that leads to continuous improvement in the entire process in the organisation. In benchmarking, there is an increasing urge for the university to continually meet the expectation of the employers of labour through their input-output process. More broadly, the major goal of benchmarking in the university institutions is to identify the areas of weaknesses in the institution and find out possible way to advance on them. The benchmarking process creates the possibility and the drive to even perform better than the top players of the institutions. And this could be done by improving the different areas of lapses observable and stepping up efforts to address them within provision of the budget and institutional objectives. Benchmarking measures the effectiveness of an institution within the purview of quality, time and cost. Benchmarking enables the institution to compare itself with institution that has similar resources in terms of human and material resources. Institutional benchmarking allows the institution to bring in innovations that would ensure that they earn the needed standard recognition. In the university, benchmarking must align with university objectives and every idea that is put together to exceed institutions of best practice within and outside the local provision. In benchmarking, institutions are expected to put out competitive measures that are deliberately followed to exceed minimum standards that are set by the national policy on education. But never the less, there some characteristics that an institutions that are considered before the university can be considered best practice institutions and worthy for benchmarking. Institution should be able to look out for certain features that the institutions to qualify them for benchmarking. According to Cohen (2016), some of the output of best practice institution or what makes a good institution involves all but not limited to:

- Challenging academic environment
- Knowledgeable professors/instructors

- A wide range of academic majors
- Classes necessary to fill a degree that are readily available
- Great library with books and electronic options necessary for research
- Friendly, inviting campus
- Good food in cafeteria(s)
- Extracurricular activities that are diverse
- Comfortable dorms for live-on-campus students
- Diversity in the make-up of the student body

Effectiveness

Effectiveness is concerned with an institution that has clearly stated objectives. Effectiveness is the central point in any organisational goals achievement, and it transcends beyond the nature of the institution, the political undertone, ideological bases, and other indices that interplays in the attainment of organisational objective. All that is achieved and set to be achieved by an institution is always sighted in the lens of effectiveness. Though many scholars have argued that the term effectiveness cannot be sufficiently define the level of institutional goals achievement without efficiency of the process. Hence, the need for collective consideration of the two concepts of effectiveness and efficiency is a point of central consideration. But this paper lays concerted emphases on institutional effectiveness. Effectiveness entails that the output, quality, creation of value, innovation, cost is within the reach and target of the organisation. Normally, effectiveness determines the policy of the institution or the level to which an organisation realizes its own goals (Zheng, Yang & Mclean, 2010; Eya, & Leonard, 2012). This implies that institutional effectiveness helps to assess the progress towards the fulfillment of the institutional objective. Hence, the university is effective when they are able to achieve its objective. To achieve this, Heilman and Kennedy-Philips (2011) proposed that management of the institution should strive for better communication, interaction, leadership, direction, adaptability and positive environment. Most approaches to effectiveness has been justifiably labeled as administrative-technical or pro-managerial, and this is fully understandable given the source of funding, academic affiliation and data source of a vast majority of theorists (Hall, 1980). Effectiveness when applied to benchmarking; implies that the benchmarking institution are supposed to consider certain real constrains in the light of technicality and administrative considerations. These demands considerations are that the institutions (universities) should look at the cost implication, academic affiliation (knowledge base or research strength or capacity) and also the availability and accessibility of part or all the information needed for proper benchmarking. It is at this point that institutional benchmarking maybe effective. However, effective benchmarking is supposed to be well aligned with the achievement of organisational aims and objectives, hence by implication, the aims and objectives of the tertiary university must be integrated as stated by the national policy on education. The following according to the National Policy on Education (2013a) are the university objective that an effective benchmarking process must facilitate to achieve and it involves to:

- Contribute to national development through high level manpower training;
- Provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interest of Nigerians;
- Provide high-quality career counselling and lifelong learning opportunity that prepare students with knowledge and skills for self-reliance;
- Reduce skills shortages through the production of relevant skilled workers;
- Promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service
- Forge and cement national unity; and
- Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Olatunji (2018) opined that the tertiary educational institutions track these goals through: quality student intake; quality teaching and learning; research and development. While the educational institutions pursue these goals, there is every tendency that strategies employed to ensure that the goals are achieved may fail or yield results that are below expectations. Hence the achievement of the broad goals of the tertiary education can be benchmarked for effectiveness. In benchmarking for effectiveness the following questions may be asked as a criterion check in alignment with the tertiary educational objectives.

Benchmarking options and institutional effectiveness

Benchmarking is a well articulated process that is driven with a clear objective and mechanism that is made to measure, compare and find out innovative practices, and also ascertain if the process ensures a meaningful improvement. These processes also ensure a planned effort that will lead to knowledge exchange (Meade, 1998) and also focuses on learning (Wilson & Pitman, 2000; Wilson, et al., 2000).

While is it a confirmed and formal practice to benchmark, the various schools or institutions also are involved in benchmarking virtual all the aspect of the school system for an expected improvement. Benchmarking process in itself may be holistic or partly depending on the area of institutional best practices and interest.

Universities who are perceived to be the best are assumed as the standard for the institutions, also particularly, programmes, administrative style and can be taken also as standard practice which may be due to the results or output of the system in the institutions (Learning and Teaching Unit, 2012). Benchmarking is a tool for improving performance of an institution.

When institutions are willing to benchmark, they unarguably look out for the best, and the best is evidence based which leads to the comparison of input, process and output/outcome (Learning and Teaching Unit, 2012). However, benchmarking encourages that institutions should take the business of improvement by looking at the various options that available to ensure that they look beyond the conventional level of improvement and think outside the box, this ensures that while benchmarking, there is a level of uniqueness. When there is comparison of process

that seems to be the best, there is a necessity for there to be healthy comparison. In doing the benchmarking process, there are different benchmarking options which may be applicable and they include:

Types of benchmark that can be applied to universities

- **Strategic Benchmarking**: When the various institutions are benchmarking for improvement, they may be left with the option of undergoing a study for a long period of time and by doing this, they are to outline their strategies for their long term and short goals. When the institution of higher learning adopts the strategic benchmarking, their full concentration is tailored to getting the right, the strategies of the benchmarked institution. Such areas of strategies must cover the critical aspects of competencies (i.e. where the institutions do better and are very outstanding in doing that) and this may includes the competencies in the areas of teaching delivery, ICT integration, instructional effectiveness, etc. in the strategic benchmarking, the institution looks forwards to adopting viable methods that can be modified and applied to arrive at even a better result that the best practice institutions or the best of best.

- **Competitive Benchmarking or Performance Benchmarking**: In the university, when process benchmarking is done, the universities compares their rankings based on the skills that are displayed by their students or the beneficiaries of their programmes outcome who are their key products and also the impact of their research (whether they are ground breaking, innovative, inventive, etc). However, when there is performance benchmarking, only institutions within the same specialty are benchmarked. For instance, university of technology cannot be benchmarked with college of education; more monotechnics cannot be benchmarked with universities. Though it can be argued that in the university system where there are institutes of technology, the university can benchmark university of technology on the ground that the benchmarking process is to lead to an improvement of the institution of technology and not for general application to nonrelated institutions.

- **Process Benchmarking**: In process benchmarking, the universities are interested in the process that leads to the best practice. Though, in process benchmarking, the universities must identify the processes and operations that are being carried out to sustain the best practice. This institutions or institutions must be institutions that are in the same line of instructional offerings. In process benchmarking, the institutions are very concerned about adopting the process that converts the resources (both Human and material) into the expected best outcome.

- **Functional Benchmarking or Generic Benchmarking:** In generic benchmarking, the university looks outside the box by finding out other areas apart from the educational institutions. This other institutions may have a process or line of activities that can be

benchmarked to ensure that the best processes of similar functions are of central focus. The aviation sector are generally regarded to perform exceptionally well in customer care services and with available data, their services can be benchmarked in terms of customer services with university admission counselors or officers or the admissions offices or department.

- **Internal Benchmarking**: This kind of benchmarking is done by the universities who operate various campuses that are located in different areas of within close proximity. When ding an internal benchmarking, the university does not go outside what is obtainable within the university, rather they benchmark departments, campuses, study centres, units, faculties, institutes, and schools within the same structure but not necessarily in the same location. This is because a particular department may be doing best in service delivery when compared to the other departments; hence they become best practice that can be obtained within the university. An internal benchmarking therefore ensures that the data, information and other requirement needed for benchmarking is easy to acquire and it takes less time and resources.

- **External Benchmarking**: In the university, when carrying out external benchmarking, the university seeks the assistance in form of technical aid to help them reach the level of the university in terms of best practices. In external benchmarking, the university tends to concentrate more on another university that is perceived to be the best in certain unit, departmental, faculty of general educational offerings. The faculty of applied medical science can reach out to another university that is doing better in the area.

- **International Benchmarking**: International benchmarking is better pronounced at the verge of the trend of globalization and internationalism. Since the product of education is fed to the global market, running a university that can stand the global quality is of great concern. Hence, the various universities in the world are scavenging the best practices in areas of teaching, research and community development. In fact entrepreneurial universities are the new trends now. In international benchmarking requires that the university look outside the international scene to benchmark best practices. This is believed to give the university the opportunity to look out for best outside local provisions.

Areas of Improvement, Benchmarking and Institutional Effectiveness

Generally, the university is a system that is used to produce highly skilled manpower. The highly skilled manpower though cannot be better than the system that produced them. It is worthy to note that some universities in Nigeria have done remarkably well in certain areas and there are prospects for improving generally. Though even when this is true, the universities in Nigeria seems to have been lagging behind in the administration, planning, student administration, management of records, admission process. The areas of benchmarking cover also the areas of research and development. Some of the areas of improvement base on the various university are

different, however, Rowena Scott (2011) summed some of the areas to include: classroom design and conditions, documentation process, admission processes, registration process, instructional delivery process, institutional relationship and communication, institutional allied businesses, student – lecturer ratio, administrative process, research process and support system, online resources and presence, hostel and lodging, and procurement processes. Though this areas may change in name and policy directives in some institutions.

Stages of benchmarking

Planning

Planning process in the university system takes a longer time of the entire process. At the planning stage the university will identify those areas that need to be benchmarked (Global Benchmarking Network, 2010). Before taking benchmarking, it is basic that educational institutions must identify what should be benchmarked. For example, the procedures and legality of the process would be the center exercise that can possibly give the university.

Such procedures would entail a significant expense from the university purse. Ideally, the consequences of benchmarking are mostly on the cost and the sources of information that would be used. The exercises ought to be quantifiable and subsequently effective as the benchmarked institution.

Before commencing the benchmarking process, the procedure stream should be given due thought. For example, improving one center competency in the university may result that the benchmark may yield just little importance, though it may be of very great importance if the institutions to be benchmarked are sincere to supply the appropriate and genuine information.

Accordingly, some best practice universities may decide to give genuine data when they are supportive in the benchmarking option. Hence, a procedure stream diagram is considered to be perfect for this reason, so exclusions and blunders are limited; along these lines empowering the organization to get a more clear thought of its key objectives, it's essential business forms, client desires and basic achievement factors. A legitimate examination of the institutional qualities, shortcomings and environmental data would end up being of colossal use when adjusting such a procedure. Another stage in the planning procedure would be for the institution to pick a suitable benchmark against which their strength and resources can be estimated. The benchmark can be a solitary element or an aggregate gathering of organizations, which work at ideal productivity.

At the planning stage, the methodology that is to be adopted is to be considered and needed documents to ensure that the process gains access to all the information needed for

benchmarking should also be considered. Also, the personnel or the resource persons that are to be identifies and be informed at the planning stage.

Data collection

The institution at the second stage should find and classify the data that needs to be collected. Conventionally, the data can be classified into the primary and secondary data.

The primary data involves the direct collection of data from the institution itself. While the secondary data are information that are gotten from a third party channels, e.g. from the journals, brief from documentation units, libraries, information from the press, publication and other websites are also sources for data. Other forms of collecting data may involve interviewing the resource persons that were involved in the development of the best practices and others who have wide range of experiences.

When engaging in the primary research that would aid the university to benchmark it units or process, the institution is can redefine the method that would be suitable for colleting the primary data (Elmuti & Kathawala, 1996). The nature of the institutions should be put under consideration. The modification of the methods to suit the primary data collection based on the nature of the institution may require a draft of a unique questionnaire that is tailored to this needs of the university and areas that needs to be benchmarked. Other flexible but effective means includes face to face interview, putting forward telephone calls to the appropriate persons in the institution, emailing, on site visitation and also making proper documentation of this data.

Data analysis

Once the needed data is collected successfully, the nest thing to be done is from the university to analyze the data collected. In analyzing the data, there is need for data presentation. This can be done graphically, this is to enable the university to be able to make a classification analyses in respect to the needs and gaps to be covered through benchmarking. The major course of the differences between the institution and best practice institution is the enabler is identified.

Reporting (implementation and monitoring)

Reporting is combined with implementation and monitoring process. This stage becomes the most important stage of benchmarking. The changes that are expected to be made in the institution ought to be made and this is to be done in details. At the reporting stage, benchmarked institution must concentrate on filling the performance gap that has been identified. While this stage imbibes the implementation stage, the organisational culture is considered at this stage while the factors that elicits resistance to change is managed to ensure that there is no impact or that the impact is reduced to zero. While this stage is progress, the members of the institution who works in affected unit or department of faculty or even facility that is under of benchmarking process should be given the right orientation and be fully briefed. Management staff commitment is highly needed from the planning stage up to this stage and the other staffs are to be fully involved in the process. The full benefit of benchmarking should be evaluated to ensure that the benchmarking process is still tailored towards a predetermined line. This

evaluation is usually in regular bases and adjustment is made until the perfect benchmark is reached.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design and the population of the study consist all the public universities in Rivers State which consist of all the 121 heads of departments in the public universities in Akwa Ibom State. Among this number, there are currently one federal university and one state university fully accredited to award degrees in various field in Akwa Ibom State. In the population, 79 Heads of Departments (HOD's) were from university of Uyo while 42 heads of department were from Akwa Ibom State University. The source of the data was from the various university websites (www.uniuyo.edu.ng and www.aksu.edu.ng). Also, University of Uyo had 79 HOD's which is (65%) of the population, and Akwa Ibom State had 42 HODs which is (35%) of the entire population. Through a stratified random sampling technique, a sample of 92 was determined through Taro Yamane formulae (1967). Based on the sample, 60 (65%) was made up of federal universities and 32(35%) was made up of state universities 37. The instrument captioned "University Benchmark Scale (UBS)" was face and content validated by experts in the department of educational management and planning and an expert in department of test and measurement from the University of Port Harcourt. To determine the reliability coefficient, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, and a reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained. Mean, standard deviation was used to answer the research question. Z-test was used to analyse the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha significant level.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the areas that can be benchmarked to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1*: mean scores and standard deviation on the areas that can be benchmarked to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State.*

S/n	Items	$\bar{x}_1$ Federal (60)	Sd_1	$\bar{x}_1$ State (32)	Sd_2	Mean Set	Decision
1.	Classroom design and conditions	3.48	1.86	3.24	1.8	3.36	Accepted
2.	Documentation process	3.55	1.88	3.29	1.81	3.42	Accepted
3.	Admission processes	3.25	1.80	2.33	1.52	2.79	Accepted
4.	Registration process	3.82	1.95	3.58	1.89	3.64	Accepted

5.	Instructional delivery process	3.52	1.87	3.46	1.86	3.49	Accepted
6.	Institutional relationship and communication	2.83	1.68	2.41	1.55	2.62	Accepted
7.	Administrative process	2.76	1.66	2.11	1.45	2.43	Accepted
8.	Research process and support system	2.34	1.52	2.23	1.49	2.28	Accepted
9.	Institutional allied businesses	2.53	1.59	2.42	1.55	2.47	Accepted
10.	Student – lecturer ratio	2.44	1.56	2.34	1.52	2.39	Accepted
11.	Online resources and presence	3.22	1.79	2.45	1.56	2.83	Accepted
12.	Hostel and lodging	3.12	1.76	3.44	1.85	3.28	Accepted
13.	Procurement processes	2.37	1.53	2.81	1.67	2.59	Accepted
	Total	3.01	1.72	2.77	1.65	2.89	

Based on table one, it showed that the areas that can be benchmarked to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State. classroom design and conditions, documentation process, admission processes, registration process, instructional delivery process, institutional relationship and communication, institutional allied businesses, student – lecturer ratio, administrative process, research process and support system, online resources and presence, hostel and lodging, and procurement processes. This is because the various items had a mean above the mean criterion of 2.5.

Research question 2: What are the characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: *mean score and standard deviation of the characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Akwa Ibom State.*

S/n	Items	$\overline{x}_1$ Federal (60)	Sd$_1$	$\overline{x}_1$ State (32)	Sd$_2$	Mean Set	Decision
1.	Challenging academic environment	3.38	1.83	2.54	1.59	2.96	Accepted

2.	Knowledgeable professors/instructors	2.65	1.62	2.42	1.55	2.53	Accepted
3.	A wide range of academic majors	3.22	1.79	2.43	1.55	2.82	Accepted
4.	Great library with books and electronic options necessary for research	2.77	1.66	2.32	1.52	2.54	Accepted
5.	Friendly, inviting campus	3.66	1.91	3.22	1.79	3.44	Accepted
6.	Good food in cafeteria(s)	2.45	1.56	2.76	1.66	2.59	Accepted
7.	Classes necessary to fill a degree that are readily available	3.25	1.80	3.22	1.79	3.23	Accepted
8.	Extracurricular activities that are diverse	3.49	1.49	3.28	1.81	3.38	Accepted
9.	Comfortable dorms for live-on-campus students	2.48	1.57	3.14	1.77	2.81	Accepted
10.	Diversity in the make-up of the student body	3.57	1.88	3.12	1.76	3.34	Accepted
	Total	3.09	1.71	2.84	1.67	2.96	

Table two shows the mean score and standard deviation of the characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Rivers State. the characteristics accepted includes: challenging academic environment, Knowledgeable professors/instructors, A wide range of academic majors, Great library with books and electronic options necessary for research, Friendly, inviting campus, Good food in cafeteria(s), Classes necessary to fill a degree that are readily available, Extracurricular activities that are diverse, and Comfortable dorms for live-on-campus students.

Test of hypotheses

Hypotheses one: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of federal and state university dean of faculty on the areas that can be harnessed to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State.

Variables	N	Df	Mean	Sd	Z-cal.	Z-crit.	Decision
Federal	60	90	3.01	1.72	0.65	1.96	Accept

State	32		2.77	1.65	

Table 3: mean score, standard deviation and z-test of the difference in the mean ratings of federal and state universities the areas that can be harnessed to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State.

Based on the z-test calculated at 0.05 percent significant level, and with the degree of freedom standing at 90, it therefore implies that a z-cal of 0.65 is less that the z-crit of 1.96, hence the null hypothesis that there is no significance difference in the mean ratings of federal and state universities HOD's areas that can be harnessed to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State is therefore accepted.

Hypotheses two: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of federal and state university senate members on characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Nigeria

Table 4: mean score, standard deviation and z-test of the difference in the mean ratings of federal and state universities on the characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Nigeria. Based on the z-test calculated at 0.05 percent significant level, and with the degree of

Variables	N	Df	Mean	Sd	Z-cal.	Z-crit.	Decision
Federal	60	90	3.09	1.71	0.68	1.96	Accept
State	32		2.84	1.67			

freedom standing at 90, it therefore implies that a z-cal of 0.68 is less that the z-crit of 1.96, hence the null hypothesis stating that there is no significance difference in the mean ratings of federal and state universities HOD's on the characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Akwa Ibom State is accepted.

Discussion of findings

Based on the findings, it was discovered that classroom design and conditions, documentation process, admission processes, registration process, instructional delivery process, institutional relationship and communication, administrative process, research process and support system,

student – lecturer ratio, institutional allied businesses, online resources and presence, hostel and lodging, and procurement processes are the areas that can be benchmarked to ensure institutional effectiveness in universities in Akwa Ibom State. These findings are in line with the suggestions given by Cohen (2016). Though, some of these characteristics manifest in different ways in different institutions.

It was also discovered that challenging academic environment, Knowledgeable professors/instructors, A wide range of academic majors, Great library with books and electronic options necessary for research, Friendly, inviting campus, Good food in cafeteria(s), Classes necessary to fill a degree that are readily available, Extracurricular activities that are diverse, and Comfortable dorms for live-on-campus students the characteristics of higher education institutions that can aid the identification of best practice universalities for effective benchmarking in universities in Nigeria. These findings find support by Scott (2011), who stated the above as the characteristics. Hence, for institutions to be benchmarked, the other institution must go on a fact finding mission and access some of the institutional resources and examine them to know if these institutions through the manifestation of the characteristics are among the best practice institutions that are doing their best in certain aspect.

Conclusion

The study took a background analyses to arrive at the reason for institutional divide in terms of boundaries existing among the different institutions. Apart from that the study through a descriptive approach was able to analyze the contextual application of the concept of benchmarking as it relates to higher education institution. The study identified a consensus on the fact that benchmarking is a viable approach to develop businesses and institutions and therefore outlined various areas to be benchmarked and the characteristics institutions must watch out for.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, it was recommended that:

1. The government and other agencies that are directly concerned in planning the educational system and development of the institutions should find out through a comparative study, about the areas that can be benchmarked, and also in the process factor-in the cultural variation between the benchmarked institution and the institution to ne benchmarked.
2. The educational administrators, government, policy makers and other stakeholders should look out for the characteristics which may be reflected through the various rankings and those suggested by this study to ensure that institutions are right institutions to be benchmarked.

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