

- 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 it is a confirmed and formal practice to benchmark, the various schools or institutions also are involved in benchmarking virtually 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 include 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 than the best practice institutions or the best of best.
- **Competitive Benchmarking or Performance Benchmarking:** In the university, when process benchmarking is done, the universities compare 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 doing 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, its 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 identified 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 its units or process, the institution is can redefine the method that would be suitable for collecting 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 next 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	Sd ₁	\bar{x}_1	Sd ₂	Mean Set	Decision
		Federal (60)		State (32)			
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	\bar{x}_1 Federal (60)	Sd ₁	\bar{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.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Sd</i>	<i>Z-cal.</i>	<i>Z-crit.</i>	<i>Decision</i>
<i>Federal</i>	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 than the z-crit of 1.96, hence the null hypothesis that there is no significant 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

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

freedom standing at 90, it therefore implies that a z-cal of 0.68 is less than the z-crit of 1.96, hence the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant 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 be 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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