The Academic Library's use of Benchmarking to Achieve Outcomes: Benefits and Challenges. Academic Libraries in Imo State Experience.

Dr. Scholastica A.J Chukwu[1][x] Dr. Ngozi M. Nwaohiri[2][xx] Dr. Nkeiru Emezie[3][xxx] Dr. Ngozi Chima-James[4][xxxx]
Agim, Nneka C.[5]

1.   The Library, Federal University of Technology, Owerri. P.M.B 1526

2.   The Library, Federal University of Technology, Owerri. P.M.B 1526

3.   The Library, Federal University of Technology, Owerri. P.M.B 1526

4.   The Library, Federal University of Technology, Owerri. P.M.B 1526

5.   The Library, Federal University of Technology, Owerri. P.M.B 1526

[x] E-mail of the corresponding author: nnechika2005@gmail.com

Abstract:

The research examines the academic library's use of benchmarking as a means to achieve outcomes with the academic libraries in Imo State as a focal point. The study made use of survey design to investigate a total number of 44 section heads of the academic libraries in Imo State. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. Results revealed that most of the section heads were not aware if their academic library makes use of benchmark in its operations and services. It also revealed a lot of benefits that are associated with benchmarking in academic libraries. However, some challenges were identified to inhibit benchmarking in academic libraries in Imo State.

Keywords: Benchmark, academic library, benefits, challenges

1.   Introduction:

The search for better ways to produce results is an enduring challenge for academic libraries. Academic libraries must balance user's demands for efficient and effective service delivery with the institutions' mandate and academic library's tripod functions of support to teaching, learning, and research. Lawes, (1993), Kinnell and Garrod (1996) argue that library and information systems are increasingly realizing the value of quality management standards and practices that help to provide the basis for maintaining and enhancing transparency that are now necessary for effective services. Again the rapid change in the way information is been sought for by students and researchers alike in higher institutions of learning with total disregard for academic libraries resources has compelled academic libraries to consider and implement a wider variety of innovative management philosophies and strategies.

Benchmarking is a strategy researchers and scholars alike have discovered as having the ability and potential to help organizations and institutions such as academic libraries advance the performance of their services. It is the systematic recognition of other institutions ' best practices leading to superior performance. Benchmarking is a m ethod for improving performance by learning and understanding from best practices the process by which they are achieved. It involves understanding in detail the process, analyzes the process of others and then, compare the performance with that of others analyzed. According to Yasin (2002); Sisson et al, (2003); Rohlfer, (2004); Anderson and McAdam, (2004); Huq et al, (2008) and Likerman, (2009), benchmarking as a strategy has been attracting wide level of attention for its effectiveness. It is a tool commonly used by firms while competing with each other.   Benchmarking is normally about obtaining understanding through a comparative study and implementing   it   to   upgrade   processes   and   services. It is a methodology that actively demonstrates progress over a period of time. Especially in key areas such as the three E, efficiency, effectiveness, and economy, it is a catalyst for change (Gohlke, 1997).

In libraries, the purpose of benchmarking is to improve the services provided to users.Using benchmark provides library staff with a relatively easy way to identify activities where quality can be enhanced or where new initiatives can be implemented to help raise operating standards, and the secret to this is willingness to share data and c

ompare results with other peer organizations. Therefore, it is in this vein that the study sought to find out the benefits and challenges of academic library's use of benchmarking as a means to achieve outcomes.

2. Objectives:

1. To ascertain whether academic Libraries in Imo State benchmark in its operations and services
2. To identify the benefits of using benchmark in Academic libraries in Imo State.
3. To identify the challenges encountered in using a benchmark in Academic libraries in Imo State.

3. Literature review:

Benchmarking is most used to measure performance using a specific indicator resulting in a metric of performance that is then compared to others. Benchmarking is one of the best practices in order to improve performance. According to Elder and Massam, (2016), benchmarking is an exploration of new ways to manage the institution more efficiently by using new approach while Tasopoulou and Tsiotras, (2017) were of the view that benchmarking plays a major role in continually improving and staying reasonable in the industry. Sarkis (2001) posit that benchmarking is an ongoing, systematic process of evaluating the services or certain fields that they want to benchmark.

Benchmarking can help improve performance, set standards of excellence and identify gaps in learning. It is a powerful management tool that was originally developed to maintain high standards in industries. In the context of libraries, benchmarking may be defined as an ongoing structured process by which we evaluate the functions, work processes, and services of other organizations (not always libraries) recognized for their leadership and innovation (Sayers, Walton and Smith, 2008). Although a relatively new initiative for many library operations, benchmarks are now rapidly gaining recognition as a useful tool to help shine a light on critical areas of librarianship. It is the process of establishing a high standard of excellence by regularly comparing library services with best practices from other institutions. Ettorchi-Tardy (2012) notes that the key characteristics of all benchmarking are that its part of a comprehensive and participative policy of continuous quality improvement. Barton (2006) wrote a paper on benchmarking, outsourcing, and evaluation in the IT industry and indicates that benchmarking compares the performance of different organizations. According to him, "It differs from pure Performance Measurement and Evaluation by introducing external comparisons – setting targets based on what has been achieved by other organizations.

There are several main issues that both inhibit organizations actively involved in benchmarking and prevent others from attempting active involvement. According to Muschter (1997), the main limitation of benchmarking is the focus on data rather than processes that result in the data. He notes that benchmarking should be used as a guide for improvement and not for statistical precision. Omachonu and Ross (1994) point out that the lack of proper implementation is a major challenge in benchmarking. One example of a potential pitfall of benchmarking is the lack of actively involving employees during the process. These employees will be the ones ultimately using the information and improving the process. They further claim that some organizations experience challenges by treating benchmarking as a one-time project as opposed to a continuous process.

Another inherent challenge in benchmarking is the inability to confirm where data originated (Benchmarking Challenges, 1997) which can cause errors in comparisons. According to Business performance improvement resource (BPIR) (2019), a number of issues inhibit organizations from actively getting involved in benchmarking. These include difficulties in finding the right benchmark peers, challenges in data comparison, staff resistance, and inappropriateness of the exercise and resource constraints. Lapão (2015) writing on the challenge of benchmarking health systems exerts that benchmarking presents a set of challenges, such as methodology choice and actual impact assessment while Phillips & Appiah-Adu,(1998) states that a lack of resources and knowledge lead to a low commitment to benchmarking.

Gohlke, (1998) states that benchmarking benefits libraries by helping to improve it to better meet the needs of its clients and make it operate more effectively and efficiently. Benchmarking provides a purpose for seeking outperformance feedback from your users which in turn can expand and improve knowledge of the institution. It can help show how valuable library resources and staff are to the institution.

4. Methodology

The study made use of a descriptive survey using the questionnaire to collect data from 44 section heads of academic libraries in Imo State. The questionnaire was designed using a four-point Likert scale and out of the 44 questionnaires, 43 copies representing 83.8% were returned and found usable.

5. Result

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean values were employed to present data. The following was used in calculating the mean from the responses based on the Likert scale: Strongly Agree = 4; Agree = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1. The decision to accept or reject any statement of the objectives were based on the decision rule for each table of the objectives.

5.1 Academic libraries in Imo State use of benchmark in its operations and services

Does your library make use of the benchmark?

YES		NO		NOT AWARE	
Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
8	18.6%	5	11.6%	30	69.7%

5.2 Level of agreement of the following benefits of using benchmark in academic libraries in Imo State

The following were identified as the benefits of using benchmark in academic libraries in Imo State

S/N	Benefits of benchmarking	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean
A	It helps in the establishment of best practices	23	17	3	-	43	3.4
B	It makes provision of shared management information	17	24	2	-	43	3.3
C	It helps in the evaluation of opinions, views, and needs of users	23	20	-	-	43	3.5
D	It encourages the exchange of ideas and views	9	30	4	-	43	3.1
E	It improves staff development including learning new analysis methods	16	25	2	-	43	3.3
F	It improves libraries to better meet the needs of Users	14	27	2	-	43	3.3
G	It helps build relationships within the profession	8	31	4	-	43	3.1
H	It supports both goals of Users and the library	12	29	2	-	43	3.2
I	It improves performance and Users satisfaction	12	31	-	-	43	3.3
J	It identifies and streamlines work process	11	31	1	-	43	3.2
K	It increases competitiveness and utilization of resources.	10	30	3	-	43	3.1
	Significant mean value	3.25					

Decision Rule: 3.25

Analysis of data revealed that the mean response on benefits of using benchmark in academic libraries in Imo State was high in the following areas: It helps in the establishment of best practices (3.4), It makes provision of shared

management information (3.3), It helps in the evaluation of opinions, views, and needs of users (3.5), It improves staff development including learning new analysis methods (3.3), It improves libraries to better meet the needs of Users (3.3), It improves performance and Users satisfaction (3.3). However, it was low in It encourages the exchange of ideas and views (3.1), it helps build relationships within the profession (3.1), It supports both goals of users and the library (3.2), It identifies and streamlines work process (3.2) and It increases competitiveness and utilization of resources. (3.1).

5.3. Challenges of benchmarking in academic libraries in Imo State.
The following were identified as the challenges of benchmarking in academic libraries in Imo State

S/N	Challenges of benchmarking	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean
a	The unwillingness of employees to change	17	22	4	-	43	3.3
b	Inadequate understanding of the exercise of benchmarking	8	30	2	3	43	3.0
c	Inadequate data from other institutions	8	25	10	-	43	2.9
d	Poor execution of the benchmarking exercise	12	24	6	1	43	3.1
e	Inability to confirm where data originated	9	23	9	2	43	2.9
f	Difficulties in finding the right benchmark peers	10	32	1	-	43	3.2
g	The inappropriateness of the exercise and resources constraints	7	35	1	-	43	3.1
h	There are challenges in data comparison	8	32	2	1	43	3.1
i	There is no clear choice of methodology in benchmarking	11	26	4	2	43	3.1
j	Lack of resources and knowledge	6	25	6	6	43	2.7
	Significant mean value	3.0					

Decision Rule: 3.0

Analysis of data indicated that the mean response on the challenges of benchmarking in academic libraries in Imo State was high in the following areas: Unwillingness of employees to change (3.3), Inadequate understanding of the exercise of benchmarking (3.0), Poor execution of the benchmarking exercise (3.1), Difficulties in finding the right benchmark peers (3.2), Inappropriateness of the exercise and resources constraints (3.1), There are challenges in data comparison (3.1), There is no clear choice of methodology in benchmarking (3.1). However, it was low in the following areas: Inadequate data from other institutions (2.9), Inability to confirm where data originated (2.9) and Lack of resources and knowledge (2.7).

6. Discussion of findings.
The findings of the study revealed that 69.7% of the respondents were not aware of whether their academic library makes use of benchmarks in its operations and services. This finding proves that most of the section heads were not aware of what is happening in their libraries. This lack of knowledge may be a result of nonchalant attitude of some of the section heads of what is obtainable in their places of work.

The study also discovered various benefits of using benchmark in the operations and services of academic libraries in Imo State which include, establishment of best practices, provision of shared management information, evaluation of opinions, views and needs of users, improvement of staff development including learning new analysis methods, improvement of libraries to better meet the needs of users and improvement of performance and users satisfaction. This is in line with Gohlke, (1998) statement that benchmarking benefits libraries by helping to improve it to better meet the needs of its clients and make it operate more effectively and efficiently.

Finally, the study also revealed some of the challenges encountered during benchmarking in academic libraries to include, the unwillingness of employees to change, inadequate understanding of the exercise of benchmarking, poor execution of the benchmarking exercise, difficulties in finding the right benchmark peers, inappropriateness of the exercise and resources constraints, challenges in data comparison, and lack clear choice of methodology in benchmarking.

7. Conclusion

Benchmarking is a tool for improving performance by learning from best practices and understanding the process by which they are achieved. It involves understanding in detail the processes, analyzes the processes of others and then, compare the performance with that of others analyzed. This study, therefore, has revealed that with benchmarking in academic libraries in Imo State, a lot will be achieved in its operations and services despite its inherent challenges as regards its tripod functions of teaching, learning, and research.

References.

Anderson, K. & McAdam, R. (2004) A critique of Benchmarking and Performance Measurement: Lead of Lag? *Benchmarking: An International Journal,* 11, 465-483. https://doi.org/10.1108/14635770410557708

Barton, N. (2006). Benchmarking, Outsourcing, and Evaluation In The IT Industry. Retrieved from http://homepage.ntlworld.com/n.barton/NeilBartonECITEKeynote.pdf

Benchmarking Challenges. Retrieved from (www.mediapool.com/offtherecord/cfo-ben.html

BPIR.com (n.d).Benchmarking, What is Benchmarking. Retrieved September 19, 2019, from http://www.bpir.com/benchmarking-what-is-benchmarking-bpir.com.html

Elder, R & Massam, D. (2016). Using Copac data to benchmark collections. Retrieved from https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Using-Copac-data-to-benchmark-collections-Elder-Massam/17e7aebcb4c9dbcde9b897a3178daa158f3687e9

Gohlke, A. (1997). Benchmark for strategic performance improvement. *Information Outlook*, 1 (8): 22-24

Gohlke, A. (1998). Features – The Value of Benchmarking For Law Librarians. Retrieved from https://www.llrx.com/1998/01/features-the-value-of-benchmarking-for-law-librarians/

Huq, F., Abbo, M.-H. & Huq, Z. (2008). Perceptions about benchmarking best practices among French managers: an exploratory survey. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 15, 382-401

Kinnell, M. & Garrod, P. (1996). Performance measurement, benchmarking and information service sector. *Libri,* 46(3): 141-148.

Lapão, L.V. (2015). The challenge of benchmarking health systems: is ICT innovation capacity more systemic than organizational dependent? *Israel Journal of Health Policy Research,* 4 (43): 1-4

Likierman, A. (2009). The five traps of performance measurement. *Harvard Business Review,* 87(10), 96-101.

Omachonu, V. K., & Ross, J. E. (1994). Principles of total quality. Delray Beach, Fla: St. Lucie Press.

Phillips, P., & Appiah-Adu, K. (1998). Benchmarking to improve the strategic planning process in the hotel sector. Service Industries Journal, 18(1), 1-17.

Rohlfer, S. (2004), "Benchmarking concepts in the UK and Germany: A shared understanding among key players?" *Benchmarking: An International Journal,* 11(5), 521-539.

Sarkis, J. (2001), Benchmarking for agility. *Benchmarking: An International Journal,* 8(2), 88-107.

Sayers, R.; Walton, G. & Smith, I. (2008). Researching and Benchmarking Best Practice in Library Staff Development: A Joint Australia – United Kingdom Study. *Australian Library and Information Association Biennial Conference.*

Sisson, K.;. Arrowsmith, J.; & Marginson, P. (2003), 'All benchmarkers now? Benchmarking and the 'Europeanisation' of industrial relations', *Industrial Relations Journal,* 34 (1).

Tasopoulou, K., & Tsiotras, G. (2017). Benchmarking towards excellence in higher education. Benchmarking: *An International Journal,* 24(3), 617-634.

Yasin, M. M (2002), 'The theory and practice of benchmarking: then and now', *Benchmarking: An International Journal,* 9(9).