

Innovations

Higher Education and Management in Nigeria: A Framework for Benchmarking Best Practices

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Abstract: *The structures of Higher Education systems, that is, the shape and the size of the national higher education systems in Nigeria have been at the crossroads of external expectations and internal dynamics. Nigeria has witnessed massive expansion in social demand for and in participation in higher education. Some of the key changes in Higher Education over recent times have been driven by what is sometimes termed 'massification' of higher education, indicating an increasing proportion of the population going to Universities and Colleges. Mass higher education has created various problems, but challenges rise and fall on the shoulders of management. This paper explores emerging issues in Nigerian higher education and the place of benchmarking best practices in educational management in meeting funding and relevance challenges. Qualitative design was employed in reviewing challenges of higher education in Nigeria. Policy implications and recommendation are made in line with the findings of the study. It was recommended that Nigerian universities will do well to partner and adopt one or two performing universities outside their country and model their management and administration in order to enhance performance.*

Keywords: *Best practices; management of higher education; challenges of higher education in Nigeria; Benchmarking; higher education in Nigeria*

Introduction

Higher education in Nigeria is officially under reforms. The management and administration of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria has been fraught with a myriad of challenges- from funding, staffing to relevance. The shared challenges across public institutions in Nigeria have only served to strengthen the call for reforms in the management and administration HEI in the country. However, reforms

also should be methodic, following best practices. This is often done by studying leading institutions and adopting their best practices, in a process termed benchmarking.

The management of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria has two organs; the external and the internal management teams. The external management comprises of the governing council headed by chairman of the council and members, all appointed by the visitor, who is the Nigerian President in the case of federal universities, or the State Governor for State owned universities. On the other hand, the internal organ comprises of the university senate, headed by the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar as the Secretary. This organ regulates the academic and administrative activities of the university. The governing council oversees the operations of the university. All appointments are ratified by the council and the internal management is accountable to the council. This arrangement also ensures checks and balances. However, university governing councils being political appointees have failed to stand up to government with respect to fulfilling their commitments to agreements reached with university based unions. They have failed to offer vision and leadership to the school internal management. The school internal management headed by the vice chancellor and academic staff is thus, charged with the responsibility of providing leadership and management of the institution. This is done with the help of a management team and the university senate, comprising of Professors and heads of different faculties, departments and directorates. Administration is centrally run with no devolution of powers. All requests originate from departments and directorates. Requests from heads of each unit are referred to the Dean and onward submission to the office of the Vice chancellor for approval. Layers of bureaucracy make simple decision tedious. For academic settings, that in itself is a challenge.

Beyond the day to day administration of higher education institutions are the challenges of managing of the core mission of higher education. The structures of Higher Education systems, that is, the shape and the size of the national higher education systems in Nigeria have been at the crossroads of external expectations and internal dynamics. Nigeria has the largest population and highest enrollment rate in higher education across Africa (Ogunode & Musa, 2020). The educational institutions have however, performed below par. Rather, there has been a steady decline in the quality of education in Nigeria. The indices are obvious, from the quality of graduates, quality of research output, the learning environment and rankings of universities in Nigeria globally.

Changing dynamics in higher education in Nigeria has been largely driven by the exigencies of external drivers, such as global education and internal changes such as educational policies and social change. Some of the key social changes in Higher

Education in recent times have been driven by ‘massification’ of higher education, indicating an increasing proportion of the population going to Universities and Colleges. The population of higher education institution (HEIs) across Nigeria has increased exponentially. It is estimated that over a million students are admitted into colleges of education, polytechnics and universities every year in Nigeria. Facilities, infrastructure, teaching and non-teaching staff are however, not growing at the same rate. Large class sizes, dilapidated structures and strained staff characterize higher education (HE) system in Nigeria. While high enrollment rate in higher education is a good thing, the management of learning spaces, work environment and academic objectives have become challenging.

With higher enrollment rates, the need to manage sparse resources has come to the fore. Education in Nigeria is highly subsidized. Public HEIs in Nigeria rely solely on the government for staff emolument, infrastructural development and maintenance as well as research and development funds. The government is still opening more higher education institutions across the country. More institutions are drawing from the same public fund and while the share of funds to institutions may have increased over time, this has not reflected in the quality of infrastructure and learning environment. Public funds have not kept pace with rising student population and dilapidated infrastructure. More means less for higher education institutions. The government has come out to publicly admit that they cannot fund education alone. This calls for a review of funds management by higher education administrators and the development of new models of financing higher education in Nigeria.

The external drivers of change in higher education management in Nigeria have been largely the changing landscape of global education and the emerging knowledge economy. The evolution of the global economy from agricultural and industrial production and the progression to knowledge production has transformed every aspect of society globally. It has been widely acknowledged that the transition to a more knowledge-based economy requires heightened capacity and capability to create, disseminate and exploit “scientific and technological knowledge, as well as other intellectual assets, as a means of enhancing growth and productivity” (OECD, 2004, p. 11). Since knowledge has become the foundation of economic, social and political power, higher education is at the top of the policy agenda. Many countries, Nigeria inclusive, face difficulties associated with knowledge creation and management. HEIs globally, play noteworthy roles in the expansion of global knowledge management. HEIs have become centres for creating knowledge and knowledge management. The management of higher education in Nigeria is faced with the challenge of relevance of training. Globalization and the internalization of education are not just making campuses multicultural, diverse and international, they are also offering cutting edge curricula in line with industry demands, while also

setting the pace in research and development. These are areas where higher education in Nigeria is failing. HEIs are struggling to retain Nigerian students let alone attract foreign students. Issues of obsolete curriculum and inadequate training facilities have dogged higher education in Nigeria for decades.

Higher education systems everywhere in the world are fraught with challenges, the difference is the scale as well as the responsiveness of management in dealing with the issues. Management challenges in higher education have given rise to solutions, some of which have become best practices in educational management. Adopting this best practice in new situations is often done through a process called benchmarking. Benchmarking is the process identifying key performance measures in one or more higher education institutions and adopting best practices by evaluation of services, structures and processes with the aim of improving performance in another institution. The Learning and Teaching institute (2020) sees benchmarking as an evidence-based process that inculcates the concept of comparisons with other institutions in order to enhance good practice. Benchmarking is a quality process used to compare the University's standards and performance with higher education institution peers. It allows the University to monitor its relative performance, identify gaps, seek fresh approaches to bring about improvements, set goals, establish priorities for change and resource allocation, and follow through with change processes based on empirical evidence (Learning and Teaching institute, 2020). Thus, benchmarking can be seen as a tool to assist organizations identify processes they need to change to be able to achieve specific strategic goals and objectives after they may have assessed themselves (Hacker & Kleiner, 2000).

Benchmarking is essential for Higher Education systems as a method of identifying best practices and approaches to higher education management of developed countries, to imitate and apply new models of higher education management in other to improve management performance of higher education institutions in Nigeria. However, there are different types of benchmarking as there are different approaches to benchmarking. This study explores the best possible approach for HEIs in Nigeria seeking to adopt benchmarking as a means of improving higher education managerial performance.

Statement of the Problem

In addition to the dynamic nature of education, new and emerging challenges in the field of higher education requires responsive leadership and management. Widening participation and increasing access to higher education has not only led to diversified campuses, but also higher student population in Nigeria. Stuck between growth and reforms, higher education managers in Nigeria are grappling to comprehend the scale of the effect of massification and how best to manage their institutions in the era

of global education and the knowledge economy. Issues of funding, infrastructure and relevance have dogged higher education institutions in Nigeria. This is exacerbated by the internalization and globalization of education, changing curricula, technology and new models of higher education management and administration in developed countries. Admittedly, all educational systems have challenges, but some are managing theirs more effectively and making progress. Universities have always collaborated in different areas, including areas of quality. Benchmarking has been applied as a quality assessment and improvement tool between and among higher education institutions. The challenges faced by HEIs in Nigeria are almost the same in most respects. Thus, applying benchmarking by identifying institutions outside their country and assessing such institutions with the aim of adopting best practices in educational management, would be a viable process of improving HE management in the country. However, such an effort should be rooted in proven benchmarking process suitable for institutions in Nigeria, as there are different processes of carrying out a benchmarking study. This study, thus, seeks to simplify the benchmarking process for HEIs in Nigeria by identifying benchmarking operational process suitable for Nigerian institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The overall objective of this study is to determine the challenges facing the management of higher education institutions in Nigeria and the benchmarking process for adopting best practices in educational management. Specifically, the study sought to

- Determine the challenges of managing higher education institutions in Nigeria
- Ascertain the benchmarking operational procedure for adopting best practices in educational management from other institutions.

Research Questions

The following research questions are stated for the study

- What are the challenges of managing higher education institutions in Nigeria?
- What are the benchmarking operational procedures for adopting best practices in educational management from other institutions?

Literature Review

Higher Education in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education, a policy document of the federal government of Nigeria (2013), defines Higher Education as the Post -Secondary Section of the National education system, which is given of Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology including courses as are given by the Colleges of Education, Advanced Teachers Training colleges, Correspondence Colleges and such

institutions as may be allied to them. According to Adeyemi (2001), the Higher Education refers to a system which embraces much of the country's research capacity and reproduces majority of the skilled professionals that are required in the labour market. Modebelu and Joseph (2012) further described higher education in terms of the goals it seek to attain and the function of it in national development. They averred that higher education contribute to manpower training, local capacity development, intellectual development, advancement of scholarship and community development and promotion of interaction between national and international understanding.

Higher education is a community of scholars, free to pursue knowledge without undue interference from anywhere. From a broad perspective, economic and social progresses are growingly propelling the improvement and application of knowledge. Education in general and higher education in particular, is central to the transformation of societies and economies. Every nation sees in higher education, via its traditional roles of teaching, research and community service to evolve manpower and transmit needed knowledge that are required in industry and other spheres of the nation's existence. The higher education in Nigeria is at a crossroad. Its objectives wile laudable has been far from reality. The inputs, processes and outputs of the higher education need overhauling. While the outputs are decided by the inputs and processes, the challenge has been with managing the inputs and processes. The volume of input may not yield the desired output if the management of higher education do not take into cognizance the myriad of changes in higher education and apply appropriate educational management principles to enhance the output of higher education in Nigeria.

This is calls for proper administration and management of university systems and higher education system in realization of the importance of the administration and management in higher education system in Nigeria (Modebelu & Joseph, 2012).

Managing Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria: Issues and Contexts

HEIs in Nigeria are grappling with the dynamism of change towards providing cutting edge knowledge in Research and Development (R&D), so that its graduates can compete globally. What should follow are management efforts in intensifying programmes that promote, through research, training and information exchange, greater professionalism in the management of institutions of higher education, and the facilitation of a wider dissemination of practical management methods and practices. Commenting on the essence of enhancing the efficiency of higher education institutional management, Kayizzi-Mugerwa, *et al*(1998) averred that sparse resources necessitates that HEIs should be run efficiently and effectively if they are to achieve their set goals, both institutionally and nationally. Achieving 'more with less' resources, entails that H.E management is expected to make critical choices so as to

be able to proceed to strategic decisions, which can be implemented within a reasonable time and, which are for the good of the institutions. Meeting the demands for change is suggestive of the need to improve the quality of university management, by changing the mechanisms, techniques and styles of institutional management.

Higher education institutions in Nigeria are facing financial constraints, this is in addition to the fact that relevance and quality are becoming key performance indicators for which institutions are judged. Thus, effective management of institutions is becoming critical for their continued relevance. Barnett (1992) identified the following demands on higher education institutions:

1. To find ways of using their resources better and to generate more resources.
2. To be more 'accountable' to wider society, through planning effective means of assuring better academic standards.
3. To develop improved system of strategic planning and institutional management.
4. To engage more fully with society in which they function -in access for students, links with other educational establishments, or through course offerings, consultancies, and applied research (Barnett 1992).

These pressures put together, ensure that the art of management becomes both more demanding and more central in maintaining institutional effectiveness. In the wake of these developments, quality has become a key concept for the modern institutions (Barnett 1992, 64). Therefore, the maintenance and improvement of the quality of institutions must be a responsibility of institutional managers.

Challenges of Managing Higher Education in Nigeria

Higher education systems around the world have generic challenges. There are also peculiar problems in each institution. However, when challenges persist over time, it is an indication of managerial failure. Akinyemi, et al (2017) averred that Nigeria tertiary institutions system is fast losing its high esteem in the labour market and in the education sub sector globally. The graduates from Nigerian universities lack necessary skills required in the 21st century knowledge economy and emerging global labour market. Another challenge is that the system suffers from an absence of "NEED" driven curriculum to address national needs.

The effective administration of higher educational institutions depends largely on the availability and proper utilization of its resources - human, material and financial resources. These resources according to Gambo and Fasanmi (2019), largely determines the extent of achievement of the set goals of the institution. Most crisis in HEIs in Nigerian are funding related. On the whole, there has been an increase in budgetary allocation to higher education in Nigeria, however, Ike (2012) found that this has been considered to be rather grossly inadequate considering the

phenomenon of massification and increasing cost, which has been aggravated by inflation.

HEIs often blame the government for inadequate funding, while the government on the other hand, blames the sector for inefficient utilization of resources allocated to them. The challenge of inadequate funds has plagued the HE in Nigeria for decades. However, there are concerns on effective management of funds and the lack of creativity in generating funds by HE managers in Nigeria. Gambo and Fasanmi (2019) averred the way and manner the available funds are utilized is also an issue of concern in Nigerian universities. It is no longer news that the economic recession in the country has greatly affected government's monetary support for universities. It is however worrisome that the available funds in universities are not judiciously used for the purpose for which it was meant. Corruption which has become the order of the day in the Nigerian polity is also becoming prominent in universities. Akinrinade (2015) in Gambo and Fasanmi (2019) expressed fear on the increasing level of corruption in Nigerian universities. The high incidence of corruption in the university system threatens its existence. In essence, universities are facing the problem of funding not only because of the hard times the economy of the nation is undergoing, but because the available funds are actually not judiciously utilized by the management of universities.

Another challenge facing the Nigerian higher institutions is the problem of unstable academic calendar. Unstable academic calendar is also caused by the various trade union groups within the schools. They often embarked on strike actions due to disagreement with the government on welfare issues. Strike actions in the tertiary institutions of learning have constituted a serious threat to effective learning. Non-accreditation of some of the programmes in tertiary institutions is another major factor for quality of instruction (Jacob & Musa, 2020). Ogunode (2020) did a study investigated the causes of unstable academic calendar in Nigerian higher institutions. Data collected were analyzed and the result showed that that Academic staff union of universities/Non-academic staff of union of universities strike, students' election, communal crisis, increase in school fees, cultic conflict, National programme and public holiday are factors responsible for unstable academic calendar of higher education in Nigeria. Lingering labour disputes are indications of poor approach by management in tackling the problem.

Benchmarking higher education management

Babalola & Adedeji (2007) described the situation in higher education institutions in Nigeria as "institutional failure". The challenges of higher education in Nigeria since the early 90s still persist. This has been compounded by the myriad of changes in education globally. There has been no evolution in the management of higher

education in Nigeria. The flawed managerial process has produced the same undesirable results. In a time when HEIs are reinventing themselves globally, in terms of values, objectives, management as well as inputs, processes and products by taking advantage of globalization and internalization, HEIs in Nigeria seem excluded from the emerging global education system. The drivers of change in higher educational management are globalization and the internalization of education. National education systems have become global and an educational management system with local objective is out of tune with the emerging HE management trends. While schools are local, their objectives have become global. The globalization and internalization of education has brought about new paradigms in managing higher education institutions.

The internationalization and globalization of education has impacted on HEI management in very many ways. In the case of higher education, Knight, (2002) defined internationalisation of education as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education. Globalization, on its part, is the worldwide flow of ideas, resources, people, economy, values, culture, knowledge, goods, services facilitated by technology. The consequences for HE include the explosive growth in the quantity and accessibility of knowledge and the continual increase in the integration and interdependence of global education systems (Grunzweig & Rinehart, 2002). Features of international education according to Futao (2007) includes accepting incoming international students, developing internationalized curricula and integrating international dimensions into teaching, learning and research activities into home institutions. It is further deepened by sending students abroad, faculty members, researchers and transnational or cross-border higher education activities, including curricula that are exported and provided in higher education institutions in foreign countries.

One of the benefits of globalization and the internationalization of higher education is that they are not just bringing about shifts in educational centres of excellence, in terms of quality research outputs and knowledge creation, but an expansion of centres of excellence, cutting across nations (East and West, developing and developed countries). A visible pattern is the replication of higher education management success in one institution in another institution, whether within the same country or in other regions of the world. With the rapid progress of globalization in its multifaceted dimension, advancement of new technology and the increasing frequent exchanges between HEIs, some HE management principles that were once applied within countries are likely to reach a higher level of adoption globally, possibly resulting in universally accepted standards or values. This process of adopting

educational management principles and best practices by other institutions with the aim of enhancing performance is termed benchmarking.

The emerging global educational environment allows for the sharing of ideas, the adaptation of processes and techniques of management in one institution by another. It allows for the study of one or more institutions by another institution, with aim of modeling HE management for enhanced effectiveness. HEIs in Nigeria can benefit a whole lot from benchmarking. Continuous improvement has been the hallmark of leading universities across the globe. According to Vasilkova (2015), for other universities aspiring to become centres of excellence, the focus on innovation in all areas that provide them with significant and unique competitive advantages is quite essential. For universities that are just trying to reach international level, it may be beneficial to use benchmarking, a tool that is increasingly being applied in higher education management.

Benchmarking is the continuous process of measuring products, services and business methods belonging to one's own institution, in comparison to the ones of the most powerful competitors and of those companies which are known as being industry leaders (Achim, et al, 2009). Benchmarking is an internal organizational process which aims to improve the organisation's performance by learning about possible improvements of its primary and/or support processes by looking at these processes in other, better-performing organizations (Franciscus, et al, 2008). Benchmarking has become an essential tool for evaluating institutional performance by employing a comparative analysis of institutions and external influencers in a bid to diagnose problems in performance, identify efficiencies and best practices to be adopted. The growth of benchmarking in Higher Education according to Franciscus, et al (2008) reflects the search for continuous quality improvement and for a more effective way of improving performance in a highly diversified higher education sector in order to ensure that public funding is used effectively to support it.

Higher education, have in many countries adopted benchmarking as a useful management tool. Benchmarking allows a higher education institution to identify and monitor standards as well as performance in order to improve a university's outcomes, processes and practices; to discover new ideas for attaining the university's strategic goals as they are outlined in its strategic plan; to provide an evidence-based framework for change and improvement; to inform planning and goal-setting; to improve decision-making through referencing of comparative data; to bring an external focus to internal activities (Vasilkova, 2015). Benchmarking indicates clearly the success or failure for an institution in terms of management, as it has been widely recognized as a technique that can dramatically improve process performance to best practices level.

Spendolini (1992) in Achim, et al (2009) averred that benchmarking is a continuous process and not a one-off event; a process that provides valuable information rather than simple answers; a process of learning from others rather than mere copying of ideas or practice; a time-consuming and labour intensive process rather than being quick and easy; and viable tool for improving virtually any organization's activity. The objective of benchmarking as one of the performance management strategies is setting realistic performance standards (Nahmia, 2000). It is also concerned with searching new ideas and practices, which must be able to be copied or adapted. The success of benchmarking, however, is largely due to more than its ability to set performance standards and enable organizations to copy one another. It is essentially about emulating, creativity and innovation (Cartin, 2000). Thus, institutions intending to use benchmarking as an improvement tool must adopt proven strategies for seamless assessment and implementation. Successful application of best practices depends on a systematic analysis of the identified institution(s). This requires detailed knowledge about the organisation's own performance and performance of other organisations.

Prasad (2005) identified a model for adoption of best practices:

1. Identification of best practices
2. Implementation of best practices
3. Institutionalization of best practices
4. Internalization of best practices
5. Dissemination of best practices

The approach can be described as “Four I and D Model”:

Benchmarking in the view of Norman (2001) in Magutu, et al (2011) has been widely applied as an assessment and improvement tool, a methodology and a technique for continuous improvements in educational management, structures and processes as well as to gain and maintain competitive advantage. Participating in benchmarking has promoted a culture of thinking about quality, assessing one's own performance and taking responsibility for it. Benchmarking promotes self-criticism and based on the extent of an institutions' operations (how excellent, good, bad or indifferent an institutions' operations are), it determines the direction, urgency and priorities for implementing reforms and quality enhancement. At its simplest competitive performance standard, it would consist merely of judging whether the achieved performance of an operation is better than, the same or worse than that of its competitors (Norman, 2001 in Magutu, et al, 2011).

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design to achieve the purpose of the study. This study aims to identify the challenges of higher education management in Nigeria. Data were collected through content analysis and review of literature. Thus, this study will lead to a deeper understanding of the issues studied. This study is a benchmark study, incorporating qualitative assessment design, aimed at identifying best practices, processes and performance for improving higher education institution management. Benchmarking enables an organization to compare itself with others, to identify its relative strengths and weaknesses, and to improve the working practices accordingly (Jackson & Lund 2000). Benchmarking was adopted for this study because it focuses on creation, the development of excellence and the discovering of new ideas. It offers a chance to learn from one another because we “can learn something new from another organization, whether they are best-in-class or not (Karjalainen et al. 2002). The study employs the use of explorative style of making use of relevant studies, empirical and conceptual in relations to higher education management challenges in developed countries, particularly, in Nigeria. The study relies primarily on document analysis, supported by interviews and questionnaire data collected. 10 education experts were interviewed for the study.

The study performed a thematic analysis of the challenges of HEI management in Nigeria as well as the process of benchmarking suitable for Nigerian higher education institutions. The challenges were grouped into similar codes and further categorised into appropriate themes. Content validation of the analysis was performed by a qualitative expert. For the reliability of the findings, a peer checking process is performed and reviewed by experts.

Presentation of Findings

Challenges of higher education management in Nigeria

Table 1: Challenges of higher education management in Nigeria

S/N	Higher education management challenges	Thematic Areas
1	Incessant strikes by the university based unions	Labour issues
2	Poor Capacity Development Lecturers	
3	Frequent labour disputes	
4	Inadequate Academic Staff	
5	Infrastructural Decay	Challenges of funding
6	Inadequate Public Financing	
7	Economic Constraints	
8	Poor Internally Generated Revenue (IGR)	
9	Poor infrastructure	

10	Brain-Drain	
11	Access issues in University Education	Administrative Issues
12	Carrying Capacity	
13	Institutional Corruption	
14	Total dependence on govt for funding	
15	Insecurity Problems	
16	Instability of Academic Calendar	
17	Indiscriminate issuance of licenses for establishing new universities	Political interference
18	University autonomy dilemma	
19	Changing demographics	Higher education governance and management
20	Curriculum design/alignment	
21	Unsustainable cost of traditional methods of instruction	
22	Widening participation	
23	Adopting emerging technology	
23	Addressing of plagiarism	
25	Accreditation	
26	Under matching	
27	A changing population	
28	Assessment	
29	Social issues	
30	Student Employability	Higher education relevance
31	Conducting Research and Creating New Knowledge	
32	Issue of Curriculum and Course System	
33	Issue of Student Activism and Administration	
34	Issue of Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HE)	
35	Compete & collaborating globally in research and talent	
36	Contribution to economy	
37	Integration of knowledge capital and cross-curricular initiatives	
38	Compete and collaborating globally in research and talent	
39	Quality of learning and teaching	
40	Quality of research	

Table 1 presents the summary of the higher education management challenges and thematic areas identified from the survey and content analysis. From the interviews conducted on 10 participants, there were 40 issues identified as the main challenges facing higher education management in Nigeria. These include strikes by labour union, infrastructural decay, institutional corruption, university autonomy dilemma, curriculum design/alignment, student employability and quality of research.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, the researcher has identified thematic areas of higher education management challenges. The six identified areas are labour issues, challenges of funding, administrative issues, political interference, Higher education governance and management challenges as well as Higher education relevance.

Table 2: Summary of benchmarking operational process for Higher education management

S/N		
1	Identify the activities that need to be benchmarked prior to engaging in benchmarking	Breath
2	identify all the potential kinds of indicators that could give information about the desired priority areas without regard to their plausibility or ease of gathering	
3	The benchmarking exercise should consider the missions of higher education: education (learning and teaching), research, and engagement with the wider world (third mission).	
4	Identify and baseline the benchmark performance, a point against which improvement effort can be measured.	
5	Determine the organisations to be benchmarked	
6	decide whether to use existing pre-standards/benchmarks as starting point	Quality Of Data
7	develop an action plan for the data gathering, review it with higher education institutions in the partnership	
8	The benchmarking exercise should be evidence-based and statistically robust, conforming to recognised best practice in the production of statistical information.	
9	Data used for the indicators should be of high quality, and collected in a consistent way across the countries (or relevant jurisdictions).	
10	Indicators should have a good sample base, use consistent definitions, and use a transparent methodology.	
11	Developing expertise levels and scoring	
12	The benchmarking exercise, with time, should incorporate new indicators, developed to address identified gaps, in response to policy needs.	

13	Creating a plan for collecting data from selected targets, conducting site visits and creating a site visit report.	Data Collection
14	Determine the simplest data sources and the most difficult	
15	Decide which combination of the four types of sources-internal, published, external or original research-would yield optimal results	
16	Collect and organize all the data to be used in benchmarking.	
17	Conduct a desktop review/research about your counterpart HEI and the specific area/aspect to be benchmarked	
18	Identify the techniques to be used for data collection from a range of research techniques available such as informal conversations, exploratory research techniques, re-engineering analysis, process mapping, quality control variance reports, financial ratio analysis, or simply reviewing cycle times or other performance indicators.	
19	Analyze the data for gaps	
20	The benchmarking exercise should provide information on identified data gaps to drive better data collection.	
21	Compare the performances on the specific area/aspect of the two HEIs/academic units/programs. Identify the good practices of both, gaps and areas for improvement.	
22	Determine the activities or practices that will be beneficial in the improvement of the area/aspect being benchmarked.	
23	communicating the benchmarking results and their implications	Enhancement
24	develop an action plan with targets for improvement	
25	facilitate the formulation of an institutional development plan (IDP) to build upon strengths and address the identified gaps	
26	Implement plans, monitor progress and achievements	
27	Determine future trends	
28	Recalibrate benchmarks	
29	Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan for the implementation of recommendations	
30	Prepare the benchmarking report that includes a background on the benchmarking activity, rationale, objectives, methodology, findings or outcome of the benchmarking activity	Dissemination
31	Recommend actions to be taken based on the outcomes of the benchmarking activity	
32	Details of the methodology and benchmarking process should be made available at the same time for the benefit of all users	
33	The publication of the results of the benchmarking exercise should include guidance for readers and contextualisation to facilitate appropriate interpretation of the results.	

Table 2 shows the codes and themes for benchmarking operational framework for higher education institution adoption in Nigeria. Based on the thematic analysis conducted, there are 33 identified codes. The codes are then grouped into same category. Then, the categories were further grouped according to the appropriate themes. A total of 5 themes have been formed. The identified themes are Breath; Quality of Data; Data Collection; Enhancement and; Dissemination.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study identified 40 challenges of higher education management in Nigeria. This was further grouped into categories and themes. The six identified higher education management themes are labour issues, challenges of funding, administrative issues, political interference, Higher education governance and management challenges as well as Higher education relevance. Higher education in Nigeria is struggling with administrative issues, plagued with low employability of graduates, insignificant number of foreign students, obsolete curriculum and low international ranking. Beyond issues of funding and relevance, these are ultimately, management related shortcomings. This finding is in tandem with Akinyemi, et al (2017) who found that higher education failings in Nigeria is systemic and traced to poor management. This finding is further supported by Gambo and Fasanmi (2019) who averred that the major challenge of higher education in Nigeria are inadequate management of human, material and financial resources.

The findings of the study also identified thematic steps for carrying out a benchmark study. The identified steps are breath of the benchmark study, quality of data, data collection techniques and analysis, enhancement and dissemination. This coincides with similar steps identified by Anaele, et al (2019) and Franciscus, et al (2008) and Prasad (2005) which includes identify and understand your processes, agree on what and who to benchmark, collect data, analyze data and identify gaps, plan and action improvement, review

Conclusion and recommendation

This study analyzed the challenges of higher education management in Nigeria and identified the methodology in employing benchmarking for higher education management reforms in Nigeria. The study identified the different categories of HEI management challenges and thematic areas. The study also identified the benchmarking process for adoption by HEI in Nigeria. The study concludes that the main higher education management challenges are labour issues, funding challenges, administrative challenges, political interference, Higher education governance and management challenges and Higher education relevance. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that operational know-how and real

world experience is required to determine if practices are transferable. Thus, a thorough analysis and adoption should consider the peculiarities of the home institution and nation as well. Surveys can also be used to collect comparable data that provide benchmarking opportunities at the regional level and to compensate for the lack of statistics and information.

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