Innovations

Process Benchmarking, Strategic Benchmarking and Organizational Performance of Secondary Schools in South-East Nigeria

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Abstract: *The broad objective of the study was to examine the effect of Process and Strategic Benchmarking on Organizational Performance of Secondary Schools in South East Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 325 staff of the selected secondary schools; Census Method of data collection was used for the research. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaire while secondary data were sourced from journals, books and internet. The primary instrument for data collection was designed on a 5-point Likert scale in line with the objectives of the study. A total of 325 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which 220 copies were correctly filled and returned. Validity of the instrument was carried-out using content validity, and this was done by three management experts. The hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression analyses at 5% probability level of significance. The findings revealed that: Process benchmarking had a significant positive effect on students' performance; and Strategic benchmarking had a significant positive effect on schools' long-term survival. The study concluded that process and strategic benchmarking had a significant relationship and effect on organizational performance. The study recommended that Organizations should take process benchmarking seriously if they want to improve their work processes and procedures and should look out for best practices carried out by other organizations that have stayed for longer period in order to adopt quality standards for all to follow and improve performance. Organizations should look out for leading organizations in*

their industry doing well and find a way to adopt their best practices using key performance indicators and finally, that strategic benchmarking must be incorporated in the corporate visioning of the organization for long term survival

Keywords: *Benchmarking, Process, Strategic, Organizational Performance, Long-term, Students and Survival.*

1.0 Introduction

Nations committed to economic and general growth make significant investments in education at all levels. Education remains the weapon for any lasting societal development. Organizations benefits from quality education because schools give them their output (graduates) which the organization depend on as human input (Employees) that carry out the organizational task. One of the ways in which organizations in all sectors (education inclusive) strives to remain relevant, pursue her goals and objectives and gain competitive advantage is through benchmarking.

Karimu, (2011) opines that the last decade of the 21st century produced benchmarking. Furthermore, that the use of this strategy as a way to highlight organizations that are top fliers and the qualities that gives them this uniqueness has grown favorably among businesses in production and services. Passos & Haddad (2013), were of the view that primarily, benchmarking is aimed at getting feedback on real occurrences as well as essential information on factors for success, and areas usually challenging and proving difficult. Findings have showed wider value of benchmarking being helpful in tactical and strategic decision and not only for corrective measures. Managers and planners search out new ideas, premises, ways and strategies for operating, making positive changes to existing ones in management science, benchmarking has been applauded for supporting the expansion of already-existing comprehensive quality program of firms and as a veritable tool to create new, a very functional and effective benchmark performance. There was a spark in the rise of practicing of benchmarking with the publication of Xerox's Manager, Robert Camp's book on benchmarking (Karimu, 2011).

Organizational performance can be ascertained in different ways. A change in the levels of revenues, customer satisfaction, profit margins, gross and net profit and market share just to mention a few. These measures are pointers to the efficient and effective running of an organization per time. This assessment can be based on different levels of comparisons. Example, from the total organization, to a function, unit or subunit level (Hashin, Yusoff, & Mat 2014). Singh, Darwish & Potocnik (2016) submit that in very generic terms, organizational performance has been defined as a

set of financial and non-financial indicators that can help in the assessment of the degree to which set goals and objectives of companies becomes accomplished.

Many schools in Nigeria especially Primary and Secondary Schools have gone into extinction due to poor management, poor infrastructure, etc. Enujuba (2020), reporting for Radio Nigeria, asserts that the Enugu State Government closed down One Hundred private schools and established Education Court as a way of sustaining quality and standard of education in Enugu State (radionigeriaenugu.gov.ng) retrieved on 29th December, 2022. The Benue State Government had also closed down 2, 219 secondary schools over poor quality standards as reported in daily post of January 30th, 2018 (dailypost.ng) retrieved on 29th December, 2022. These and many more related challenges in Nigeria schools of which these challenges may not necessarily be attributed to funding as in some cases of companies folding up with funding not being the bone of contention. On 24th January, 2022, the press release read ‘‘According to UNICEF, Nigeria's educational system can be transformed by providing adequate funding to guarantee that schools are adequately safe; the application of gender-responsive policies, including recruitment of female teachers and enhanced facilities for girls; the creation of multiple and flexible learning pathways for students, such as digital and transferable skills learning…and teacher training in the latest methodologies’’ (www.unicef.org) retrieved on 29th December, 2022. Though funding is part of the factors for an organization to succeed, there is also need for strategic planning, benchmarking and other activities necessary for organizational goal actualization etc.

Although there have been some research efforts towards the concept benchmarking, little or none have looked into the impact of benchmarking in primary or secondary schools in the educational sector. There seems to be a draw back in the educational sector/industry and schools as an organization in Nigeria. The challenges bedeviling some Nigeria schools calls for questionings and research as to why they cannot adopt best practices from schools internal (within Nigeria) or external (outside Nigeria) doing greatly in order to succeed and achieve high performance. Such challenges/problems as lack of dependable infrastructural facilities and amenities, poor teachers’ welfare, politicization of education, poor attitude of both teachers and students to the teaching and learning process, poor planning and investment in research and development efforts, weak administrators, inadequate professional teachers, etc.These problems when not solved, cripple the growth of the educational sector. Therefore, the study broadly examined whether process and strategic benchmarking has an effect on organizational performance of secondary schools in South East, Nigeria. With the specific objectives as to:

i. Determine the effect of process benchmarking on students' performance
ii. Examine the effect of strategic benchmarking on schools' long-term survival

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

i. How does process benchmarking affect students' performance?
ii. What is the effect of strategic benchmarking on schools' long-term survival?

Research Hypotheses

i. There is a significant relationship between process benchmarking and students' performance
ii. There is a significant relationship between Strategic benchmarking and schools' long-term survival.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

Benchmarking cannot be said to be an entirely new concept in today's business. Benchmarking is a process organizations learn from other organizations best practices that will bring about outstanding improvement. Cobblers were said to first used the concept benchmarking to measure people's feet for shoes. The cobblers placed someone's foot on a "bench" and mark it out to make the pattern for the shoes (Agarwal, Kumar, Kansal, & Kumar 2011). Nevertheless, the concept benchmarking became well known much later in the 7th decade of the 20th century. Early stages, got the concept in great operation with firms in the industrial environment. Over a period of time, benchmarking spread and covered a lot of industrial activities. Recently, many commercial and non-commercial firms are observing the imperatives of benchmarking and are applying it for improving processes and the systems in their firms. Thus, in today's business cycle, the concept of benchmarking is widely used (Pethani & Sheth, 2020).

There is no singular conventional definition of benchmarking, but it is usually considered to be a method of making enhancements by making evaluations and learning the lessons explained by Boxwell (Patel, et al, 2022).Benchmarking is the process of comparing your own organization bearing in mind its practices and mode of doing things against similar organizations in your industry or wider environment.

2.1. Process Benchmarking

Process benchmarking is used to make more effective use of a given process or activity within an enterprise (Patel, et al, 2022). This is to compare the methods and practices for performing processes used in the strategic management, where the initiating firm focuses its observation and investigation of business processes aimed

at identifying and observing the best practices from one or more benchmark firms. Activity analysis will be needed when the focus is to benchmark cost and efficiency; expanded use of back-office procedures where outsourcing might be taken into account (Sekhar, 2011). Process benchmarking targets daily operations of the organization. Some examples of work processes that could utilize process benchmarking are the customer complaint process, the billing process, the order fulfillment process, and the recruitment process. All these processes are in the lower levels of the organization. Making improvements at these levels helps bring about improved performance speedily (Siallagan, 2021).

Early in the 1980s, Xerox discovered that it was more and more susceptible to fierce rivalry from rivals in the US and Japan. But benchmarking was part of what made the organization to bounce back after passing through down times and decrease in profit. They came back to being competitive. In 1982, the taking over of David T. Kearns (Kearns) as CEO, made him found that the average manufacturing cost of copiers in Japanese companies was 40-50% of that of Xerox. Japanese businesses were consequently able to easily undercut Xerox's prices. Kearns launched a program known as "Leadership through Quality," which brought fresh life to quality control and rapidly started focusing the reduction of manufacturing expenses. As part of this quality program, Xerox implemented the benchmarking program. These actions were crucial in saving Xerox from further difficulties in the future. The corporation was rejuvenated by Kearns' 'Leadership through Quality' program. This led to Xerox defining benchmarking as ‘‘the process of measuring its Products, Services, and Practices against its toughest competitors, identifying the gaps and establishing goals. Our goal is always to achieve superiority in quality, product reliability and cost’’. Xerox created its own benchmarking model gradually. Ten phases total, divided into five stages: planning, analysis, integration, action, and maturity, made up this methodology.

The five-stage process involved the following activities:

STAGE-I: Planning: deciding what needs to be benchmarked, locating organizations that are relevant for best practices, and choosing or creating the optimal data gathering method.

STAGE-II: Analysis: Evaluating rivals' (best practice businesses') advantages and contrasting Xerox's results with those of its rivals. The present competitive gap and the anticipated competitive gap are determined at this step.

STAGE-III: Integration: Establishing important goals from the collected data so as to achieve best performance and enshrining these goals into the firm’s formal planning processes. This stage sets the new targets of firm and strategies of passing it across.

STAGE-IV: Action: Putting defined action plans into practice and routinely reviewing them to see if the business is meeting its goals. At this point, deviations from the plan are also addressed.

STAGE-V: Maturity: Assessing if the organization has reached an improved level of performance.

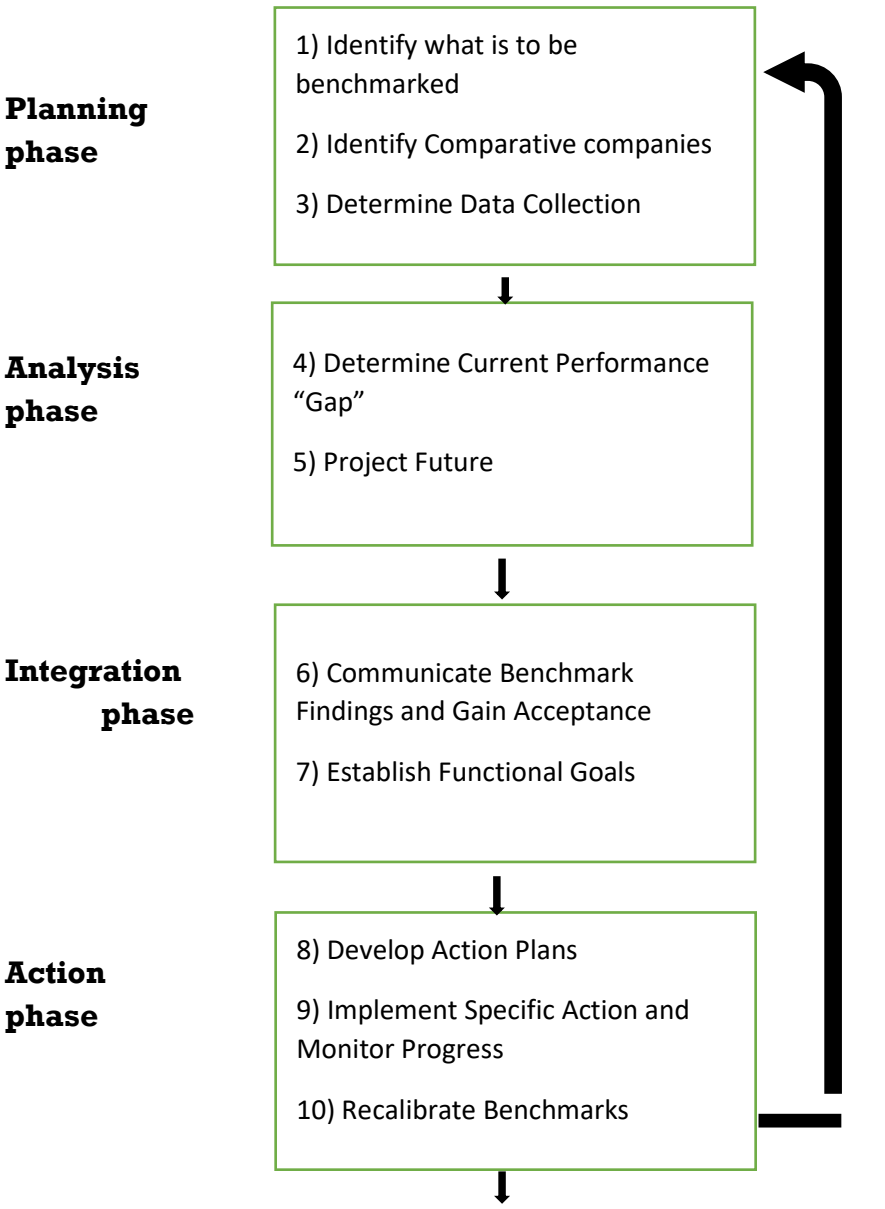

Figure 1: Shows the benchmarking process model.

These five stage process agrees with the benchmarking process of Camp (1989) in Hashin, Yusoff, & Mat (2014).

2.2 Strategic Benchmarking

Strategic benchmarking is the process of analyzing a long-term plan in order to improve an organization's overall performance (Patel et al., 2022). When a business seeks to enhance its overall performance, strategic benchmarking is employed to investigate common tactics and long-term strategies that have proven successful for highly efficient businesses. High-level viewpoints are included, such as the development of new goods and services, a change in the operational balance, and a rise in resistance to environmental change. The adjustments that should produce this kind of benchmarking can be challenging to put into practice, and their effects typically take time to become apparent (Goncharuk, Lazareva, &Alsharf, 2015).

The organization's strategic concerns are the main focus of this benchmarking. In this instance, the firm's own strategy and the strategy of the top organization in the sector are compared. The organization's strategy would be examined by the review team for this benchmarking, and they might also suggest other approaches to the company's industry positioning. Comparisons within the industry or with an organization from a different industry that has the best strategy in that industry can be established through strategic benchmarking (Pethani& Sheth, 2020). The focus of strategic benchmarking is on how businesses compete. This type of benchmarking examines the tactics that the businesses are employing to achieve success. The majority of Japanese businesses employ benchmarking strategies similar to this one. The reason for this is that the Japanese prioritize long-term outcomes (Siallagan, 2021).

2.3 Organizational Performance

The academic literature is still debating the definition of performance, despite the efforts of numerous writers to do so. This argument centers on issues related to terminology, analysis depth, and conceptual underpinnings of evaluation. Within businesses, there are three performance levels that are regarded as distinct. They therefore distinguish between three types of performance: financial, business, and organizational effectiveness. The last has since been renamed as organizational performance (Hashin, Yusoff, & Mat 2014). Griffin described organizational performance as the extent to which a firm can satisfy stakeholders need and organizational self-need for longevity. This formulation extended the definition of organizational performance to include several other non-financial factors, expanding it beyond purely market-focused metrics like profit margin, market share, or product quality, all of which are significant to some stakeholders and the overall survival of the organization (Gutterman, 2023).

In the work of Singh, Darwish, and Potocnik (2016), organizational performance is a collection of financial and non-financial metrics that may be used to gauge how well an organization has achieved its goals and objectives.
Karimu (2011), posits that there are three ways to evaluate an organization's performance: process, response, or impact. The first focuses on an institution's internal operations, the second addresses how an organization interacts with its environment, and the final one tries to gauge how the environment responds to an institution's actions. He submits performance factors to be; Efficiency; Effectiveness; Productivity; Profitability; Solvency; Leverage; Activity; Morale.

2.4 Students performance:

Academic performance is sure a desire for every student wants to achieve. This can be seen from how they do the tasks given in class and at home. However, some students perform well while others don't. Students' poor performance academically has been an issue of discuss to many stakeholders like parents, administrators, educators, psychologists and counsellors (Beckhama, Akeha, Mitaarta, &Moniaga, 2023).Students' school performance studies have received particular attention in recent decades because of their importance and complexity, which make them one of the main topics of contention in educational research. In addition to our nation, several other Latin American nations and continents also have serious worries about school performance, including parents, teachers, and authorities. The idea of an academic accomplishment is the first step toward its complexity. Although the terms "school readiness," "academic achievement," and "school performance" are occasionally used interchangeably, semantics primarily explains the conceptual differences between them (Lamas, 2015).

Academic performance is the outcome of learning, driven by the teacher's instructional activity and generated by the student, according to a number of writers. Academic performance is defined as "the product given by the students and it is usually expressed through school grades" from a humanistic perspective. Academic performance is a gauge of the responsive and indicative skills that convey, in an approximative manner, what a person has learnt via an educational or training process. It also entails achieving the targets, milestones, and goals that are established in the course or program that the student is enrolled in. Grades, which are the outcome of an evaluation that entails passing or failing particular exams, subjects, or courses, are used to express these. Academic performance is also level of expertise show cased in a particular subject or topic in comparison to the norm, usually measured by the use of grade point average universally (Lamas, 2015). Student Performance (usually abbreviated as ‘‘Academic Performance’’ or ‘‘Academic Achievement’’), is a measurement of how students work towards the

educational achievement of their long-term goal. Completing such benchmark brings about diplomas and degrees as evidence of the academy (Beckhama, Akeha, Mitaarta, &Moniaga, 2023). The overall aim of any institution is to achieve learning.

2.5 Long Term Survival:

Organizational survival is what every organisation aspires to achieve. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines survive as to remain alive or in existence,live on, or to continue to function or prosper. Idemobi (2010) asserts that anybody watching corporate business would frequently question why some companies succeed—even extraordinarily—while others fail—and frequently quite badly, too. It is not enough to simply be a looking at change in order to survive; one must actively participate in its shaping. Dissimilar to living entities, companies have the ability to exercise their will by strategizing and executing core adjustments in an endeavour to capitalize on prospects. Subsequently, a company's ability to adapt to the constantly shifting and frequently unstable environment in which it operates would be the determining factor in its survival.

There appear to be no universally approved definition for organizational survival may be due to the myriads of terminologies used in its explanation. But there appear to be a consensus ad idem about survival describing it as a firm's capacity to attain current objectives and not threatening future opportunities. From a business standpoint, Roper (2012) defined survival as the capacity of an organization to achieve its goals and boost long-term value for investors by integrating social, environmental, and economic prospects into its business plans. Organizational survival provides an explanation for a company's ability to effectively pursue its objectives while preserving the environment and promoting the welfare of people or society (Sharma & Ruud, 2003).

2.6 Economic Benchmarking Theory

Helden & Tillema (2005), submit that the essential question that an economic theory of public sector benchmarking should address is whether benchmarking should be seen as a replacement for market forces. Given the existence of market forces, customers should be able to compare product features (such price and quality) among several providers before selecting the one that best meets their needs. This approach incentivizes underperforming suppliers to improve their operations since it threatens their survival as a result of limited demand. Furthermore, those suppliers that are now performing at a level that is competitive have an incentive to increase their efficacy and efficiency even further because a slower rate of progress could jeopardize their ability to remain in business in the long run bearing in mind their competitors. So, economically, it is believed that all organizations faced with competition will work to improve performance. This leads to an average

improvement in the sector due to market forces presence. But, because their survival is more seriously threatened, underperforming organizations will have greater motivation to change. Moreover, companies operating in highly competitive environments must modify their product features to meet market demands. However, in less competitive environments, businesses can differentiate themselves from their rivals. Nevertheless, businesses always concentrate on what their rivals do or do not do, regardless of how fierce the competition may be. Stated differently, organizations must exhibit a particular level of conformist behavior according to economic theory. This kind of behavior probably lessens the performance gaps across different firms (Helden & Tillema, 2005). This study is hinged on this economic benchmarking theory.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study comprised 325 staff of selected private secondary schools in South-East, Nigeria, selected purposively for having equipped modern educational facilities. Census technique was adopted as all the population of the selected schools was used for the study. This gave a better representation of the views of the respondents. Data were sourced primarily through a structured questionnaire designed in a 5-point Likert scale system. Content validity was used to ascertain the validity of the instrument. This was done by three experts in the field of management. Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument, which gave a good coefficient for acceptability. Data collected were analyzebdusing Simple Linear Regression and Pearson Product Moment Correlation, at 5% probability level of significance.

Population Distribution

Schools	Academic Staff	Non-Academic Staff	Total Staff
Roseville School	25	15	40
Hillrange School	40	10	50
Prime Academy	25	5	30
Pine Crest College	25	5	30
Royal Orchard	17	3	20
Graceland college	30	20	50
Regent College	20	5	25
Spring of Life (Main Campus)	75	5	80
Total	257	68	325

Source: Personnel Dept of all firms, 2023.

4.0 Data Presentation, Analyses And Discussion

Out of 325 questionnaires administered to the academic and non-academic staff of the schools under study, a total of 220 responses were correctly completed, collected, and used for analysis. Table 4.0 shows the questionnaire response rate.

Questionnaire Response Rate

Schools	**Total Questionnaire distributed to Staff**	**Total Questionnaire Retrieved**
Roseville School	40	29
Hillrange School	50	46
Prime Academy	30	15
Pine Crest College	30	16
Royal Orchard	20	20
Graceland college	50	34
Regent College	25	7
Spring of Life (Main Campus)	80	53
Total	**325**	**220**

The table shows that out of the 325-questionnaire distributed, 220 which represented 68% of the responses that were returned while 105 which represents 32% of the responses were not returned. This shows that the return rate was high and that the sample was properly represented in the final analyses.

4.1. Question Items on Process Benchmarking

We plan on which area of the organization to improve on.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	.5	.5	.5
	Disagree	1	.5	.5	.9
	Undecided	19	8.6	8.6	9.5
	Agree	62	28.2	28.2	37.7
	Strongly Agreed	137	62.3	62.3	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

The table shows that out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received,1(0.5%) strongly disagreed, 1(0.5%) disagreed, 62(28.2%) Agreed, 137(62.3%) strongly agreed, and 19(8.6%) were undecided about the statement "We plan on which area of the organization to improve on".

We compare our own processes and practices against the best practices around regardless of industry.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	1.8	1.8	1.8
	Disagree	9	4.1	4.1	5.9
	Undecided	24	10.9	10.9	16.8
	Agree	102	46.4	46.4	63.2
	Strongly Agreed	81	36.8	36.8	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted intable, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received,4(1.8%) strongly disagreed, 9(4.1%) disagreed, 102(46.4%) Agreed, 81(36.8%) strongly agreed, and 24(10.9%) were undecided about the statement "We compare our own processes and practices against the best practices around regardless of industry".

Our school set goals and integrate them for all staff to work with

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	.9	.9	.9
	Disagree	3	1.4	1.4	2.3
	Undecided	8	3.6	3.6	5.9
	Agree	55	25.0	25.0	30.9
	Strongly Agreed	152	69.1	69.1	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 2(0.9%) strongly disagreed, 3(1.4%) disagreed, 55(25.0%) Agreed,

152(69.1%) strongly agreed, and 8(3.6%) were undecided about the statement "Our school set goals and integrate them for all staff to work with".

Sharing teaching and quality ideas gotten from other schools or organizations helps us.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	1.4	1.4	1.4
	Disagree	6	2.7	2.7	4.1
	Undecided	21	9.5	9.5	13.6
	Agree	105	47.7	47.7	61.4
	Strongly Agreed	85	38.6	38.6	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 3(1.4%) strongly disagreed, 6 (2.7) disagreed; 105(47.7%) Agreed, 85(38.6%) strongly agreed, and 21(9.5%) were undecided about the statement "Sharing teaching and quality ideas gotten from other schools or organizations helps us".

Establishing useful action plans aids our school activities.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	.9	.9	.9
	Disagree	2	.9	.9	1.8
	Undecided	8	3.6	3.6	5.5
	Agree	66	30.0	30.0	35.5
	Strongly Agreed	142	64.5	64.5	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 2(0.9%) strongly disagreed, 2(0.9%) disagreed, 66(30.0%) agreed, 142(64.5%) strongly agreed, and 8(3.6%) were undecided about the statement "Establishing useful action plans aids our school activities.".

We integrate best practices into our work processes as a school.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	.9	.9	.9
	Disagree	6	2.7	2.7	3.6
	Undecided	13	5.9	5.9	9.5
	Agree	63	28.6	28.6	38.2
	Strongly Agreed	136	61.8	61.8	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 2(0.9%) strongly disagreed, 6(2.7%) disagreed, 63(28.6) agreed, 136(61.8%) strongly agreed, and 13(5.9%) were undecided about the statement "We integrate best practices into our work processes as a school".

4.2 Question Items on Strategic Benchmarking

There is strategic alignment with school vision and planned objectives in our school.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	3	1.4	1.4	1.4
	Undecided	11	5.0	5.0	6.4
	Agree	74	33.6	33.6	40.0
	Strongly Agreed	132	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 3(1.4%) disagreed, 11(5.0%) agreed, 132(60.0%) strongly agreed, and 74(33.6%) were undecided about the statement "There is strategic alignment with school vision and planned objectives in our school".

Adopting best practices help initiates the formulation of long-term goals and objectives for our school.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	.5	.5	.5
	Undecided	8	3.6	3.6	4.1
	Agree	86	39.1	39.1	43.2
	Strongly Agreed	125	56.8	56.8	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 1(0.5%) disagreed, 86(39.1%) agreed, 125(56.8%) strongly agreed, and 8(3.6%) were undecided about the statement ''Adopting best practices help initiates the formulation of long-term goals and objectives for our school''.

Our school has improved capabilities for dealing with changes in the external environment through strategic comparison

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	.9	.9	.9
	Disagree	6	2.7	2.7	3.6
	Undecided	27	12.3	12.3	15.9
	Agree	114	51.8	51.8	67.7
	Strongly Agreed	71	32.3	32.3	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 2(0.9%) strongly disagreed, 6(2.7%) disagreed, 114(51.8%) agreed, 71(32.3%) strongly agreed, and 27(12.3%) were undecided about the statement ''Our school has improved capabilities for dealing with changes in the external environment through strategic comparison''.

Looking at institutional polices of other organizations in the industry help our organization remain long term driven.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	16	7.3	7.3	7.3
	Disagree	34	15.5	15.5	22.7
	Undecided	32	14.5	14.5	37.3
	Agree	79	35.9	35.9	73.2
	Strongly Agreed	59	26.8	26.8	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 16(7.3%) strongly disagreed, 34(15.5%) disagreed, 79(35.9%) agreed, 59(26.8%) strongly agreed, and 32(14.5%) were undecided about the statement "Looking at institutional polices of other organizations in the industry help our organization remain long term driven.".

Our school re-visit its strategies and try to incorporate global best practices.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	2.7	2.7	2.7
	Disagree	4	1.8	1.8	4.5
	Undecided	12	5.5	5.5	10.0
	Agree	107	48.6	48.6	58.6
	Strongly Agreed	91	41.4	41.4	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 6(2.7%) strongly disagreed, 4(1.8%) disagreed, 107(46.8%) agreed, 91(41.4%) strongly agreed, and 12(5.5%) were undecided about the statement "Our school re-visit its strategies and try to incorporate global best practices".

Our school focuses on its core competencies relative to best performers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	.5	.5	.5
	Disagree	2	.9	.9	1.4
	Undecided	19	8.6	8.6	10.0
	Agree	109	49.5	49.5	59.5
	Strongly Agreed	89	40.5	40.5	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 1(0.5%) strongly disagreed, 2(0.9%) disagreed, 109(49.5%) agreed, 89(40.5%) strongly agreed, and 19(8.6%) were undecided about the statement "Our school focuses on its core competencies relative to best performers".

To improve overall performance, our school focuses on general approaches and strategies that have enabled high-performing schools to succeed.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	12	5.5	5.5	5.5
	Disagree	5	2.3	2.3	7.7
	Undecided	18	8.2	8.2	15.9
	Agree	97	44.1	44.1	60.0
	Strongly Agreed	88	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in the table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 12(5.5%) strongly disagreed, 5(2.3%) disagreed, 97(44.1%) agreed, 88(40.0%) strongly agreed, and 18(8.2%) were undecided about the statement "To improve overall performance, our school focuses on general approaches and strategies that have enabled high-performing schools to succeed.".

4.3 Question Items on Study Performance

Students pay attention during every lesson and discussion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	1.4	1.4	1.4
	Disagree	23	10.5	10.5	11.8
	Undecided	14	6.4	6.4	18.2
	Agree	116	52.7	52.7	70.9
	Strongly Agreed	64	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 3(1.4%) strongly disagreed, 23(10.5%) disagreed, 116(52.7%) agreed, 64(29.1%) strongly agreed, and 14(6.4%) were undecided about the statement "Students pay attention during every lesson and discussion".

Students actively participate in every discussion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	.5	.5	.5
	Disagree	29	13.2	13.2	13.6
	Undecided	19	8.6	8.6	22.3
	Agree	105	47.7	47.7	70.0
	Strongly Agreed	66	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	220	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 1(0.5%) strongly disagreed, 29(13.2%) disagreed, 105(47.7%) agreed, 66(30.0%) strongly agreed, and 19(8.6%) were undecided about the statement "Students actively participate in every discussion".

Our students enjoy doing homework and activities because it can help them improve their skills in every subject.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	2.7	2.7	2.7
	Disagree	27	12.3	12.3	15.0
	Undecided	29	13.2	13.2	28.2
	Agree	111	50.5	50.5	78.6
	Strongly Agreed	47	21.4	21.4	100.0
	Total	220	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 6(2.7%) strongly disagreed, 27(12.3%) disagreed, 111(50.5%) agreed, 47(21.4%) strongly agreed, and 29(13.2%) were undecided about the statement "Our students enjoy doing homework and activities because it can help them improve their skills in every subject.".

Our students want to get good grades in every subject.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagreed	5	2.3	2.3	2.3
	Undecided	5	2.3	2.3	4.5
	Agree	83	37.7	37.7	42.3
	Strongly Agreed	127	57.7	57.7	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 5(2.3%) disagreed, 83(37.7%) agreed, 127(57.7%) strongly agreed, and 5(2.3%) were undecided about the statement "Our students want to get good grades in every subject".

Our students gain focus when they see technical problems

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	1.4	1.4	1.4
	Disagree	11	5.0	5.0	6.4
	Undecided	40	18.2	18.2	24.5
	Agree	110	50.0	50.0	74.5
	Strongly Agreed	56	25.5	25.5	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 3(1.4%) strongly disagreed, 11(5.0%) disagreed, 110(50.0%) agreed, 56(25.5%) strongly agreed, and 40(18.2%) were undecided about the statement "Our students gain focus when they see technical problems".

4.4 Question Items on Long-Term Survival

We are innovative

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	.5	.5	.5
	Undecided	17	7.7	7.7	8.2
	Agree	85	38.6	38.6	46.8
	Strongly Agreed	117	53.2	53.2	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 1(0.5%) disagreed, 85(38.6%) agreed, 117(53.2%) strongly agreed, and 17(7.7%) were undecided about the statement "We are innovative".

We adapt to changes in the environment or industry.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Undecided	23	10.5	10.5	10.5
	Agree	93	42.3	42.3	52.7
	Strongly Agreed	104	47.3	47.3	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 93(42.3%) agreed, 104(47.3%) strongly agreed, and 23(10.5%) were undecided about the statement "We adapt to changes in the environment or industry".

We are flexible and open to change.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	2	.9	.9	.9
	Undecided	20	9.1	9.1	10.0
	Agree	86	39.1	39.1	49.1
	Strongly Agreed	112	50.9	50.9	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 2(0.9%) disagreed, 86(39.1%) agreed, 112(50.9%) strongly agreed, and 20(9.1%) were undecided about the statement "We are flexible and open to change".

Our school values high performance standards.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	.5	.5	.5
	Undecided	12	5.5	5.5	5.9
	Agree	73	33.2	33.2	39.1
	Strongly Agreed	134	60.9	60.9	100.0
	Total	**220**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: Field Study, 2024

As depicted in table, out of the two hundred and twenty (220) responses received, 1(0.5%) strongly disagreed, 73(33.2%) agreed, 134(60.9%) strongly agreed, and 12(5.5%) were undecided about the statement ‘‘Our school values high performance standards’’.

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Mean, Standard Deviations, and Inter-item Correlations

In this section, the mean, standard deviations, inter-item correlations of the study would be tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on SPSS (v.24); while the hypotheses for the study would be tested using simple linear regression as the technique. Evidence from Table 4.5.1 shows that there are statistically significant relationships between the variables of the study. It reveals a statistically significant correlation between process benchmarking and strategic benchmarking (γ = 0.534, p< 0.01); between process benchmarking and students' performance (γ = 0.298, p< 0.01); and between process benchmarking and long-term survival (γ = 0.438, p< 0.01).

Table 4.5.1: Mean, Standard Deviations and Inter-item Correlations

S/N	Variable	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1.	STAFF STATUS	1.19	0.39	1													
2.	TENURE	2.23	1.00	.073	1												
3.	EDU. QUAL.	3.22	0.75	-.234**	.017	1											
4.	GENDER	1.49	0.53	.008	-.113	.017	1										
5.	PROBENCH.	26.48	3.16	.018	-.089	.039	-.012	1									
6.	INTBENCH.	23.41	3.54	-.066	-.230**	.011	.048	.438**	1								
7.	PERFBENCH.	19.12	4.36	-.205**	-.268**	-.026	.053	.289**	.552**	1							
8.	COMPBENCH.	19.43	3.24	-.180**	-.272**	-.024	.135*	.390**	.578**	.650**	1						
9.	STRABENCH.	29.42	3.95	-.066	-.220*	-.032	.052	.534**	.520**	.619**	.630**	1					

					*												
10.	STUDPERF.	20.13	3.20	.122	.095	-.050	.047	.298**	.146*	-.182**	134*	.186**	1				
11.	CUSTSAT.	17.46	2.38	-.007	-.043	-.047	-.047	.330**	.228**	.253**	.366**	.515**	.316**	1			
12.	SERVDEL	39.11	4.55	.097	-.035	.009	.015	.323**	.250**	.297**	.351**	.565**	.311**	.756**	1		
13.	LEARNENV	21.93	2.80	.091	-.111	.021	.018	.422**	.235**	.327**	.351**	.621**	.212**	.692**	.776**	1	
14.	LONGSURV.	17.75	2.28	.057	-.053	.031	-.002	.438**	.274**	.435**	.402**	.635**	.190**	.649**	.729**	.788**	1

Note: *=p<0.05; **=p<0.01; ***=p<0.1 Edu. Qual.: Educational Qualification of Respondents; PROBENCH: Process benchmarking; INTBENCH: Internal Benchmarking; COMPBENCH: Competitive benchmarking; STRABENCH: Strategic Benchmarking; STUDPERF: Students' Performance; CUSTSAT: Customer Satisfaction; SERVDEL: Service delivery; LEARNENV: Learning Environment; LONGSURV: Long-term Survival

Further look at Table 4.5.1 also showed that there was a statistically significant association because Strategic benchmarking was found to relate with students' performance (γ = 0.186, p< 0.01); and with long-term survival (γ = 0.635, p< 0.01). Students' performance was found to correlate significantly with long-term survival (γ = 0.190, p< 0.01).

Test of Hypothesis One

Implicit model: STUDPERF= f (PROBENCH)

Where: PROBENCH is the process benchmarking of the selected secondary schools under study

STUDPERF is the students' performance of the selected secondary schools under study

Proposed model: STUDPERF = $\beta o + \beta_1$PROBENCH + e

Statement of Research Hypothesis

H_0: There is no effect of process benchmarking on students' performance of selected secondary schools in South East, Nigeria

H_1: There is an effect of process benchmarking on students' performance of selected secondary schools in South East, Nigeria

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	10.012	2.230		4.489	.000
	Staff Status	.788	.537	.097	1.467	.144
	Tenure	.394	.208	.123	1.898	.059
	Educational Qualifications	-.179	.281	-.042	-.638	.524
	Gender	.390	.391	.064	.997	.320
	PROBENCH	.313	.065	.310	4.811	.000
a. Dependent Variable: STUDENTPERF						

Source: SPSS

Resultant model: STUDPERF = 10.012 + 0.310PROBENCH

The resultant model above shows that the effect of process benchmarking on students' performance is statistically significant, after staff status, tenure, educational qualification, and gender were controlled for. The level of significance reveals a statistically significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.310$; $p < 0.05$; $n = 220$). This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, process benchmarking as implemented by the selected schools under study would improve the performance of students in the selected secondary schools operational in South East, Nigeria.

Furthermore, the result here shows that an increase in the level of process benchmarking would pre-empt an equivalent increase in students' performance to the extent of 31.0%.

Test of Hypothesis Two

Implicit model: LONGSURV= f (STRABENCH)

Where: STRABENCH is the strategic benchmarking of the selected secondary schools under study

LONGSURV is the long-term survival of the selected secondary schools under study

Proposed model: $LONGSURV = \beta o + \beta_1 STRABENCH + e$

Statement of Research Hypothesis

H_0: There is no effect of strategic benchmarking on long-term survival of selected secondary schools in South East, Nigeria

H_1: There is an effect of strategic benchmarking on long-term survival of selected secondary schools in South East, Nigeria.

Coefficients				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig.

				s		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.694	1.293		3.630	.000
	Staff Status	.662	.310	.114	2.134	.034
	Tenure	.183	.122	.080	1.496	.136
	Educational Qualifications	.239	.162	.079	1.476	.141
	Gender	-.129	.226	-.030	-.571	.569
	STRABENCH	.384	.031	.664	12.472	.000
a. Dependent Variable: LONGSURV						

Source: SPSS

Resultant model: LONGSURV = 4.694 + 0.664STRAPBENCH

The resultant model above shows that the effect of strategic benchmarking on long-term survival of the selected schools is statistically significant, after staff status, tenure, educational qualification, and gender were controlled for. The level of significance reveals a statistically significant positive effect (β = 0.664; $p < 0.05$; n = 220). This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, strategic benchmarking as implemented by the selected schools under study would improve long-term survival in the selected secondary schools operational in South East, Nigeria.

Furthermore, the result here shows that an increase in the level of strategic benchmarking would pre-empt an equivalent increase in long-term survival to the extent of 0.664%.

4.6 Discussion

This study sought to investigate the effect of benchmarking on the performance of selected private secondary schools in South East, Nigeria. The first hypothesis sought to unravel the influence of process benchmarking on the students' performance of selected secondary schools in South East, Nigeria. Thus, the summative values of process benchmarking were used to predict the summative values of students' performance. The level of significance reveals a statistically significant positive effect of process benchmarking on students' performance (β = 0.310; $p < 0.05$; n = 220). Evidence from literature shows that this result is well corroborated (Nugroho & Jaqin, 2021; Stewart, 1996; Zairi & Whymark, 2000). Tasopoulou & Tsiotras (2017) adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the study of benchmarking towards higher education excellence and not only

found that benchmarking in general had a significant positive effect on the academic excellence of students through assessment and comparison, but that process benchmarking in particular would precipitate tangible outcomes such as transformation, improvement, and enhancement of higher education learning systems. When schools compare their process of delivery education to that of other leading schools in the industry, it means that there may be tangible changes in the curriculum and mode of teaching delivery, which would ultimately have positive effects on the students' performance (Skedsmo, 2018).

Amunga, Ondigi, Ndiku, & Ochieng (2013) found that schools that collaborated and engaged in benchmarking would produce average mean scores that other schools within their province did not produce during a 5-year period. The collaboration and benchmarking process should include the subjects, departments, and the entire school in order to yield maximum students' performance. Nyaoga, Mundia, & Irungu (2013) also found that there was a statistically significant relationship that exists between process benchmarking and academic performance of schools.

Finally, the second hypothesis sought to investigate the influence of strategic benchmarking on the long-term survival of selected secondary schools in South East, Nigeria. Thus, the summative values of strategic benchmarking were used to predict the summative values of long-term survival. The level of significance reveals a statistically significant positive effect of strategic benchmarking on long-term survival ($\beta = 0.664$; $p < 0.05$; $n = 220$). This means that the long-term survival of secondary schools can be improved by their strategic benchmarking process to the tune of 66.4%. Like other results in this study, evidence from extant literature confirm this result. Al-kharabsheh (2020) studied benchmarking as a strategic tool for achieving excellence in higher education in Jordan and found that benchmarking can offer sound solutions on the best ways that schools can improve their activities and processes while also providing benchmark comparators with the tools to develop comprehensive measurement frameworks. When strategic benchmarking is creatively and innovatively done, then it can offer very powerful tools for the students of the school to achieve excellence in their studies. Weller (1996) made an argument for the importance of strategic and generic benchmarking in engendering quality transformation in schools as well as for facilitating orderly, planned change. Strategic benchmarking may also be useful for ensuring that teachers and other employees of schools personalize the change processes by aligning the knowledge of teachers, their interests, and their skills to their benchmarking demands.

5.0 Summary Of Findings

Summary of the findings of the study were as follows:

i. Process benchmarking had a significant positive effect on students' performance ($\beta = 0.310$; $p < 0.05$; $n = 220$).
ii. Strategic benchmarking had a significant positive effect on schools' long-term survival ($\beta = 0.664$; $p < 0.05$; $n = 220$).

5.1 Conclusion

The findings shows that benchmarking had a significant positive effect on the effective performance of an organization. This indicates that organizations that invest in benchmarking will among other benefits remain relevant and achieve organizational transformation ensuring long term survival of the organization. Thus, organizations should look out for leading organizations in their industry and adopt best practices and processes to enhance performance and ensure long term survival satisfying stake holders expectations.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations were proffered:

i. Organizations should take process benchmarking seriously if they want to improve their work process and procedures in carrying out their day-to-day activities. This will make for an improved pattern or method of doing business activities thereby enhancing performance.
ii. For an organization to achieve organizational transformation and long-term survival, organizations must think long term. Questions like how do long lasting firms think, what are their strategies etc must be asked and searched out by organizations that wants to achieve same and survive for a long period of time otherwise they might go into extinction. Hence, it is recommended that strategic benchmarking must be incorporated in the corporate visioning of the organization for long term survival.
iii. Organizations should not see investment in benchmarking activities as a waste of fund.

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