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Benchmarking practices among single sex boarding secondary schools in Western Kenya

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Abstract. This study investigated benchmarking practices by single sex boarding secondary schools in the Western region of Kenya. The purpose was to establish why these schools engaged in benchmarking, whether they prioritised different or common benchmarking activities, and the factors militating against benchmarking. The study was guided by the theory of the learning organization. The target was 66 (37 Boys boarding and 29 Girls boarding schools, previously classified as provincial schools) engaged in benchmarking at the time of the study. A total of 20 schools representing 30% were randomly selected. Of the 240 who formed the study sample (20 principals, 20 DOSs, 100 HODs and 100 teachers) 215 (89.58%) responded. Data were collected using questionnaires with closed and open ended items, and analysed both descriptively (means and percentages) and inferentially (Chi-square and Z-test) using the Predictive Analytical Software (PASW) Version 19.0. All responses on the open ended questions were paraphrased and others reported verbatim in triangulation of findings. The study found that, schools benchmarked national and county schools. Most of the programmes benchmarked were targeted improvement in academic performance. Both categories of schools had common benchmarking interests and therefore sought information on similar practices and programmes. While most respondents reported it the practice had improved examination results, a number of challenges were pointed out. These were lack of time, lack of resources, too much focus on exams and poor implementation of benchmarked programmes. It was therefore recommended that, schools create ample time for the exercise, allocate sufficient resources for implementation of programmes and go beyond the focus on academics to benchmark on other practices that build an all round student.

Keywords. Benchmarking, Single sex, practices, militating and academic performance

Introduction

Benchmarking is a continuous systematic process of comparing the work processes of one organization to those of another (Kempner, 1993). It is a positive process that provides benchmarks along which to measure success and improvement. Benchmarking has been spurred by nations' desire to create knowledge based innovation economies and anchor their economic development on a solid foundation in the 21st century. Although literature shows that, benchmarking is a common practice among institutions of higher education, there is some evidence of school benchmarking in some countries (Silva, Camanho & Barbosa, 2019). Most benchmarking activities focus on the academic output. Dawkins (n.d) states that, Australia has a strong history of benchmarking practices in education. Other than

outcomes in numeracy and literacy, there is also interest in closing the performance gap between all students and those from low socio-economic backgrounds (ibid). While the focus on performance is key in benchmarking, Hattie (2009) is of the view that, benchmarking in schooling should focus attention on the growth of student learning. This calls for monitoring of individual students' progress as opposed to relying on standardized scores and minimum standards which provide no information on individualized progress. Dawkins (n.d) also cautions against overemphasis on measurable outcomes at the expense of teamwork, problem solving, cross-cultural and communication skills for these make all round students.

Cartin (2000) reports that, the success of benchmarking goes beyond the ability to set performance standards, and enable organizations to copy one another to emulating, creativity and innovation. Although benchmarking is a way of finding and adapting best practices (Achim, Cabulea, Popa and Mihalache, 2009), its real benefit comes from understanding practices which allow the performance and reasoned transfer of the identified best practices to the organization (Camp, 1995). This observation cautions against blind copying of practices because certain practices might not work in a given organization. Secondly, benchmarking can only thrive in atmosphere of cooperation as opposed to competition since it may require a high level of trust where sensitive information is shared (European Commission, 2008). Where competition overrides cooperation, benchmarking efforts may not be fruitful as Moriarty (2008) reveals that, organizations regarded as exemplars may have sound competitive reasons to secure their own advantages from others. Ownership and buy in are other factors that make adoption benchmarking practices successful. Stella and Woodhouse (2007) observed that, benchmarking was an activity that required the involvement of different constituents within an institution, including senior managers who can make major impact by using benchmarking results in their decision making. This is echoed by Hamalainen, et al. (2003) who stated that, it is important to establish internal ownership of the process among various parties involved. Furthermore, there should be a balance in the similarities and differences between the benchmarking partners.

Good planning is an important ingredient in successful benchmarking. For instance, information about the current state of the institution (European Commission, 2008) will help determine the gap and plan for where the institution needs to be. Planning also takes into consideration the choice of who to benchmark and from what domains (Ruby, 2013). These planning issues give the benchmarking a focus targeted to specific areas where improvement is required. Therefore, before the exercise commences, the goal must be clearly defined in terms of, what the institution wants to find out, why and what to do with the results (European Commission, 2008).

Once the planning is done and schools have decided on what practices and processes to benchmark, then the exercise can be undertaken. For example, a benchmarking study report commissioned by "Achieve" for the state of Ohio indicated that, the British system took into account each school's day to day working and its capacity to change (Napolitano, Perdue & Barret, 2008). The authors further added that, states examined how other nations used assessment for accountability, the kinds of assessments they administered in whatever grades and in which subjects, content and skills the tests measured, the questions used, assessment scoring and how the results were published for accountability purposes. Cummings, Noakes and Rusiecki (2008) suggested that benchmarking efforts typically collected information on responsibilities, programme design, facilities, technical know-how and managerial talent. Through knowledge gained

by benchmarking, organizations redefined their roles and added more value. During the 1990s, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) made school-college partnerships a focal point in its national reform agenda (American Association for Higher Education, 1993). These partnerships focused on initiatives like early identification and intervention programmes, professional development, academic support and curriculum development (Wilbur & Lambert, 1993). On some of the universities involved in benchmarking, Stella and Woodhouse (2007) reported that, they had benchmarked the quantum of research funds, number and value of competitive grants, weighted research publications and number and proportion of research active academic staff. A study by Hezel Associates (2005), found that, higher education institutions used various forms of benchmarking like graduation rates, average time of graduation, job placement and graduate school placement. In Kenya, a benchmarking study carried out in Nairobi Province by Ambula (2006) revealed that, secondary schools practiced benchmarking in discipline, parental involvement, motivation, leadership teaching and learning resources.

Benchmarking is not without challenges. The innovative network (1997) regards ineffective leadership, poor team selection and preparation, inadequate support mechanisms, unrealistic time and cost expectations and inappropriate follow up as some of the factors inhibiting successful benchmarking. Ruby (2013) further adds that, it takes time and money while Stella (2001) reiterates that, benchmarking is a resource intensive exercise in terms of cost, time and human resource effort. Furthermore, it may inadvertently narrow the scope of search for improvement to what is already being done (Alstete, 1995) which essentially works against the realising expected results. Moreover, it has also been criticised for marginally improving existing processes, being a euphemism for copying, clearly demonstrating lack of innovation (Brigham, 1995; Dale, 1995) and promoting mediocrity instead of excellence (Alstete, 1995). The National Association of Colleges and University Business Officers (NACUBO) indicated that, institutional differences and uniqueness were challenges to effective benchmarking (Engelkemeyer, 1998).

Literature is awash with information on benchmarking in higher education; there is scanty information on this practice at lower education levels globally in general and specifically in the Kenya context. It is against this background that this study therefore sought to:

1. Investigate why single sex boarding secondary schools in Western Kenya engaged in benchmarking.
2. Identify programmes benchmarked by single sex boarding secondary schools in Western Kenya
3. Establish the Pre-benchmarking and post benchmarking issues addressed by by single sex boarding schools in Western Kenya
4. Establish teachers' perceptions of the factors militating against benchmarking by single sex secondary schools in the Western Kenya

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of the learning organization (Senge, 1990). The tenets therein are applicable to benchmarking in educational institutions which are essentially learning organizations. Schools are expected to have superior products in the form of high quality graduates as indicated by performance in national examinations. To realize this, there must be innovation in the teaching process which can be born out of benchmarking and emulation of best practice. Benchmarking is thus one strategy that is hoped to improve the quality of graduates through teachers finding new ways of imparting knowledge and the right

skills. Senge envisioned a learning organization as a group of people who are continually enhancing their capabilities to create what they want to create and this can be achieved through benchmarking. According to Senge (1990: 3) learning organizations are:

...organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.

The basic rationale is that in situations of rapid change which characterize education institutions today, only those institutions that are flexible and adaptive will excel. Senge identifies dimensions applicable to innovative learning organizations that are applicable to benchmarking. These are: systems thinking; personal mastery; mental models; shared vision and team learning. Systems thinking calls for a paradigm shift because in order for educational institutions to excel in today's climate, they need to be creative. If educational institutions are consistently learning, they will be adapting to the new information and changes that are a constant in today's world which benchmarking addresses. Personal mastery concerns striving to be the best and being committed to lifelong learning while mental models are a pre-requisite to implementation of new practices. Further, shared vision represents collective aspirations for the group or institutional members, and has the power to bind institutions together. Lastly, team learning is the basis for teamwork which means that organizations cannot learn if team members do not come together and learn. It is a process of developing the ability to create desired results; to have a goal in mind and work together to attain it. Again all these may be enhanced by benchmarking and adaptation of best practices.

Methodology

Participants

Principals, Directors of studies (DOSs) and Heads of Academic Departments were purposively chosen while teachers were randomly chosen to participate in the study. Principals were chosen as respondents in this study as they were the chief executive officers in their respective schools in charge of the school plant. They made decisions on benchmarking. Directors of studies set the academic tempo in their schools and played key roles in determining the benchmarking activities. Head of Departments (HODs) in charge of Mathematics, Languages, Science, Humanities and Technical departments were sampled since they were expected to implement benchmarking activities in their respective departments. In addition, other teachers were included in the study so that their views could also be evaluated since benchmarking was not restricted to administrators.

To obtain a representative sample, the 66 single sex boarding public secondary schools in the region previously categorized as provincial, were stratified into two categories using the school mapping data. These were: boys' boarding schools and girls' boarding schools. This was deemed the best way of coming up with the categories because it ensured that homogenous subsets that shared the same characteristics were represented in the sample. A total of 20 schools representing 30% of the target schools were then used in the study (Gay, 1983; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The schools were proportionately and randomly selected from each stratum using the lottery method. The distribution of the respondents in the different strata is shown in table 1.

Table 1: School Type and Sample size

Sch. Type	No. of schools	Sampled schools	Principals	DOSs	HODs	Teachers	Total
Boys Boarding	37	$37 \times 0.3 = 11$	11	11	$11 \times 5 = 55$	$11 \times 5 = 55$	132
Girls Boarding	29	$29 \times 0.3 = 09$	09	09	$09 \times 5 = 45$	$09 \times 5 = 45$	108
Total	66	$66 \times 0.3 = 20$	20	20	$20 \times 5 = 100$	$20 \times 5 = 100$	240

Source: School mapping data

Instrument

Data were gathered using questionnaires because they have the advantage of gathering information from a large group of people and the response rate can be quite high. The questionnaire administered had both closed ended and open ended questions. All the participants responded to the questionnaire. The open ended response questions allowed the participants to express themselves freely and in the process, also provide any extra information that might not have been captured by closed ended questions on the instrument.

Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data analysis. Data on institutions benchmarked, and reasons for benchmarking was summarized and tabulated. The difference in the main benchmarking activities of the different categories of schools was established using the Mann-Whitney U-test and the interpretation given to the Z-test ($\alpha=0.05$) because the data was ordinal. Differences in the teachers perceptions of the factors militating against benchmarking were established using a chi-square ($\alpha=0.05$). Some findings on open ended questions were paraphrased but most of the key findings are reported verbatim.

Results

Response Rate

From 132 participants sampled from Boys' boarding schools, 117 (88.6%) responded while from 108 participants sampled from Girls' boarding schools 98 (90.7%). Therefore, out of the 240 sampled participants, 215 (89.58%). The distribution of the respondents is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Response Rate

Sch. Type	No. of schools	Sampled schools	Principals	DOSs	HODs	Teachers	Total
Boys Boarding	37	$37 \times 0.3 = 11$	11	11	43	52	117
Girls Boarding	29	$29 \times 0.3 = 09$	09	09	41	39	98
Total	66	$66 \times 0.3 = 20$	20	20	84	91	215

Source: Field Data

The high response rate may be attributed to the fact that, most participants were willing to share their experiences on the benchmarking practice.

Institutions Benchmarked

As a preliminary, the study sought to establish the institutions that schools benchmarked. Schools in the country are classified into various categories. This was to determine the degree to which schools' benchmarked had similar or different categorization.

The findings are presented in the table 3 and the percentage given to one decimal place in brackets:

Table 3: Schools Visited for Benchmarking

Sch. Type	National schools	National& County	County	Private	All schools	Total
Boys Boarding	28(13.0)	42(19.5)	44(20.5)	1(0.5)	2(1.00)	117(54.5)
Girls Boarding	14(6.5)	44(20.5)	39(18.1)	1(0.5)	-	98(45.6)
Total	42(19.5)	86(40.0)	83(38.6)	2(1.0)	2(1.0)	215(100)

Source: Field Data

More respondents from boys' boarding schools (28; 13.0%) than girls' boarding schools (14; 6.5%) benchmarked with schools classified as national. However, the majority of respondents from both the boys' boarding schools (42; 19.5%) and girls' boarding schools (44; 20.5%) benchmarked with national and county schools. Similarly, the majority of respondents from both categories of schools (boys, 44; 20.55, and girls, 39; 18.1%) benchmarked with county schools. While national and county schools were most popular benchmarking destinations, private schools were least popular. This can be explained by the fact that, private schools and public schools operate in very different social, material and financial environments. Perhaps benchmarking with them would not have added much value.

Reasons for benchmarking

The study wished to establish why schools engaged in benchmarking activities. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate what reasons made their schools undertake benchmarking activities. Table 4 shows the summary and the percentage given to one decimal place in brackets.

Table 4: Reasons for benchmarking

Sch. Type	Superior performance of benchmark partners	Co-curricular activities	Desire to raise status	Desire to raise academic performance	Total
Boys Boarding	59(27.4)	1(0.5)	15(7.0)	42(19.5)	117(54.4)
Girls Boarding	52(24.2)	1(0.5)	9(4.2)	36(16.7)	98(45.6)
Total	111(51.6)	2(1.0)	24(11.62)	78(36.3)	215(100)

Source: Field Data

From the findings, it was evident that schools engaged in benchmarking because of two key reasons. One was the superior performance of the schools that they benchmarked with as shown by 59 (27.4%) of respondents from boys' boarding schools and 52 (24.2%) from girls' boarding schools. The second reason was that, both categories of school wished to improve academic performance in their own schools as shown by 42 (19.5%) of respondents from boys boarding schools and 36 (16.7%) from girls' boarding schools. Incidentally, schools were not keen on benchmarking co-curricular activities.

Pre-Benchmarking Activities

Benchmarking is an exercise that required proper planning before execution. The study sought to establish any issues that were collectively addressed and agreed on out prior to the benchmarking trips to ensure that, benchmarking teams had a clear vision of what practices they wanted to focus on. Findings are presented in table 5 and the percentage given to one decimal place in brackets.

Table 5: Pre-Benchmarking Planning

Activity	Boys Boarding		Girls Boarding		TOTAL
	N=117		N=98		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Institution (s) to benchmark	109 (50.7)	8(3.7)	91(42.3)	7(3.3)	215(100)
Programs/practices to Benchmark	108(50.2)	11(5.1)	88(41.0)	10(4.7)	215(100)
Participants in Benchmarking	105(48.8)	12(5.6)	94(43.7)	4(1.9)	215(100)

Source: Field Data

Findings revealed that, there were pre-benchmarking planning activities by both school categories. This entailed identifying the institutions (schools) to benchmark with (109; 50.7% from boys' boarding schools, 91; 42.3% from girls' boarding schools), the programmes to benchmark for adoption or adaption (108; 50.2% from boys' boarding schools, 88; 41.0% from girls' boarding schools) and the members that formed the team for the benchmarking trip (105; 48.8% from boys' boarding schools, 94; 43.7% from girls' boarding schools). This means that, benchmarking was not an exercise that was undertaken blindly. It was properly planned so as to yield the expected outcomes.

Practices and Programmes Benchmarked

This study investigated the kinds of practices schools went out to benchmark. Respondents from sampled schools were asked to rank the 8 given activities in the order of importance by assigning one to most important and 8 to the least important activity during their benchmarking trips. During data entry, the reverse was used in coding with the most important factor scoring 8 and the least important factor scoring one. The Mann-Whitney U-test ($\alpha=0.05$) was used to establish if there were significant differences in the practices and programmes benchmarked by participating schools. Since with large samples ($n > 20$) the value of U approaches a normal distribution, the null hypothesis was tested by Z-test. Data was presented in Ranks and Test statistics as shown in table 6 and 7 respectively.

Table 6: Benchmarking activities (Ranks)

Factor	School Type	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Adm. Policy	Boys Boarding	117	120.30	14075.00
	Girls Boarding	98	93.32	9145.00
		215		
Internal promotion policy	Boys Boarding	117	107.06	12526.50
	Girls Boarding	98	109.12	10693.50
		215		

Evaluation	Boys Boarding	117	108.52	12696.50
	Girls Boarding	98	107.38	10523.50
	Total	215		
Student Motivation	Boys Boarding	117	102.52	11994.50
	Girls Boarding	98	114.55	11225.50
	Total	215		
Student Intervention	Boys Boarding	117	100.61	11771.00
	Girls Boarding	98	116.83	11449.00
	Total	215		
Academic functions	Boys Boarding	117	101.90	11922.00
	Girls Boarding	98	115.29	11298.00
	Total	215		
Staff Expectations	Boys Boarding	117	111.09	12998.00
	Girls Boarding	98	104.31	10222.00
	Total	215		
Staff Support	Boys Boarding	117	105.12	12299.50
	Girls Boarding	98	111.43	10920.50
	Total	215		

Source: SPSS output

In the Mann-Whitney U-test, the scores were ranked from the lowest to the highest, therefore the group with the lowest mean rank was the group with the greatest number of lower scores in it. Similarly, the group with the highest mean rank had the greatest number of higher scores within it. Table 6 was therefore useful in interpreting the results in table 7 as far as determining the significance of the results was concerned.

Table 7 Benchmarking activities (Test Statistics)

Factor		Test Result
Adm. Policy	Mann-Whitney U	4294.000
	Wilcoxon W	9145.000
	Z	-3.224
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
Internal promotion policy	Mann-Whitney U	5623.500
	Wilcoxon W	12526.500
	Z	-.245
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.807
Evaluation	Mann-Whitney U	5672.500
	Wilcoxon W	10523.500
	Z	-.138
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.891
Student Motivation	Mann-Whitney U	5091.500
	Wilcoxon W	11994.500
	Z	-1.436
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.151

Student Intervention	Mann-Whitney U	4868.000
	Wilcoxon W	11771.000
	Z	-1.927
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.054
Academic functions	Mann-Whitney U	5019.000
	Wilcoxon W	11922.000
	Z	-1.780
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.075
Staff Expectations	Mann-Whitney U	5371.000
	Wilcoxon W	10222.000
	Z	-.814
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.416
Staff Support	Mann-Whitney U	5396.500
	Wilcoxon W	12299.500
	Z	-.782
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.434

Grouping variable: School category Source: SPSS Output

The findings on the practices targeted by boys' boarding schools and girls' boarding schools revealed that, there were significant differences in benchmarking the admission policy ($Z=-3.224$; $p=.001$). The values of mean ranks indicated that, differences in the means (120.30 for boys boarding, 93.32 for girls boarding). These clear differences in the mean rankings showed the diverse interests of the schools during benchmarking trips. The higher mean by the boys' schools showed that, while boys boarding schools were keen on benchmarking the criteria governing the admission of students, girls' boarding schools were not. The null hypothesis was rejected on this one factor following the above findings since $p<0.05$. However, findings showed no significant differences on internal promotion policy ($Z=-.245$; $p=.807$), evaluation ($Z=-.138$; $p=.891$), student motivation ($Z=-1.436$; $p=.151$), student intervention ($Z=-1.927$; $p=.054$), academic functions ($Z=-1.780$; $p=0.075$), staff expectations ($Z=-.814$; $p=0.416$) and staff support ($Z=-.782$; $p=.434$) between the boys' and girls' boarding schools. The mean ranks for the all these benchmarking activities were also fairly close for the two categories of schools on internal promotion policy (107.06 for boys' boarding, 109.12 for girls' boarding); evaluation (108.52 for boys' boarding, 107.38 for girls' boarding); student motivation 102.52 for boys boarding and 114.55 for girls' boarding), student intervention (100.61 for boys' boarding, 116.83 for girls boarding) academic functions (101.90 for boys' boarding, 115.29 for girls' boarding) staff expectations (111.09 for boys' boarding, 104.31 for girls' boarding) and staff support (105.12 for boys' boarding, 111.43 for girls' boarding) clearly indicating that, the interests of the two schools during benchmarking trips was similar. The null hypothesis was not rejected as far as these factors were concerned because $p>0.05$.

Responding to an open ended question on any other activity or practice that schools benchmarked, respondents indicated that, their schools benchmarked discipline meaning they wished to find out how other institutions instilled discipline in their students. They also took interest in staff motivation to establish how teachers were motivated to render their best services, remedial teaching for weak students who found it hard to cope and the testing policies to determine how frequently students in other schools were assessed.

Sentiments expressed by participants in response to open ended questions substantiating on the usefulness of the practices and programmes they benchmarked indicated that, benchmarking had helped raise academic standards, enhanced team building, motivated students and helped identify programmes that produced better results in schools. In other schools, it had enabled sharing of ideas and led to improvement in pedagogy, restructuring of programmes, adoption of best practices and adjustment in testing policy. For example, one Principal from a boys' boarding school said,

The school's mean score has improved. Furthermore, our students' attitude towards Mathematics and other science subjects is very positive. This has been a result of benchmarking. In addition it has helped our school discover why other schools excel in academics as well as co-curricular activities and enabled us to develop standards upon which to measure our performance. We have also improved in our time management and team spirit.

One Director of Studies from a girls' boarding school observed that,

Our teachers have benefited a lot from benchmarking because there has been marked improvement in teaching methods and general service delivery. This is because they have picked the best practices that make other schools perform well in national examinations.

A Head of Department remarked from a girls' boarding that,

Benchmarking has exposed our learners to new ideas and they have been very receptive. Additionally, we have made a lot of changes regarding our evaluation and testing policy.

A teacher from one of the boys' schools said,

It has made us exchange productive ideas and adopt what we thought was beneficial like time management over lunch time.

A Director of Studies from a boys' boarding school stated that,

Benchmarking provides an opportunity for self evaluation hence leading to a change in the way we deal with educational issues. I can today talk about quality curriculum delivery and early syllabus coverage which resulted from benchmarking. It has also improved student-teacher interaction considerably, and participation in the teaching-learning process. There is clear goal setting and working towards achievement.

Post-Benchmarking Activities

Effective implementation of benchmarking practices required that, schools have post benchmarking evaluation of what was learnt and what could be implemented and how. To gauge whether schools did this, respondents were asked whether they effectively addressed key issues like how to implement best practices, the programmes and processes to adopt, the setting of benchmarks against which to measure their performance in terms of quality grades and putting in place measures to raise their mean scores. Findings are presented in table 8 and the percentage given to one decimal place in brackets.

Table 8: Post-Benchmarking Activities

Activity	Boys Boarding N=117		Girls Boarding N=98		TOTAL
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
	Implementation of best practices	104 (48.4)	13 (6.1)	83 (38.6)	
Decisions on programmes to adopt	101 (47.0)	16 (7.4)	81 (37.7)	17 (7.9)	215 (100.0)
Setting Mean Score Targets	97 (45.1)	2 (9.3)	82 (38.1)	16 (7.4)	21 (100.0)
Establishing measures of raising quality grades	115 (53.5)	2 (1.0)	97 (45.1)	1 (0.5)	215 (100.0)

Source: Field Data

From the findings, the majority of the respondents from both school categories said there were post benchmarking activities to agree on implementation of best practices (104; 48.4% from boys' boarding and 83; 38.6% from girls' boarding schools), decisions on what programmes to adopt (101; 47.0% from boys' boarding and 81; 37.7% from girls' boarding schools), setting of mean score targets (97; 45.1% from boys' boarding and 82; 38.1% from girls' boarding schools) and establishing measures of raising quality grades (115; 53.5% from boys boarding and 97; 45.1% from girls' boarding schools),

Factors Militating against Benchmarking

To investigate factors that hindered successful benchmarking and adoption of best practices, participants responded to a ten item 5 factor likert scale rating. The findings are summarized and presented in table 9.

Table 9: Factors hindering Benchmarking

Factor	Boys Boarding N=117					Girls Boarding N=98					X2	Df	Sig
	SA	A	U	D	SD	SA	A	U	D	SD			
Negative Attitude	26	40	5	36	10	17	27	7	37	10	3.315	4	.507
Lack of Support	17	31	8	45	16	15	26	7	37	13	0.042	4	1.00
Lack of resources	18	49	12	25	13	9	45	4	32	8	7.601	4	.107
Lack of sufficient time	17	64	6	24	6	5	52	8	24	9	7.049	4	.133
Lack of top schools	7	11	5	66	28	9	8	4	63	14	3.923	4	.417
Low student ability	10	14	8	61	24	8	23	5	48	14	5.651	4	.227
Too much focus on exams	23	50	4	27	13	10	57	6	20	5	8.968	4	.062
Frequent transfer of	9	15	20	63	20	9	22	7	50	10	5.043	4	.283

head teachers														
Lack of achievement orientation	5	7	6	73	26	1	6	10	65	16	4.948	4	.293	
Poor implementation	21	61	5	15	15	13	62	7	10	6	5.444	4	.245	

LEGEND: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; U-Undecided; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree

Findings indicated no significant differences in the perceptions of the respondents on the factors hindering benchmarking. The majority of the respondents from both boys and girls boarding schools strongly agreed and agreed that, benchmarking was constrained by lack of sufficient time (boys' boarding schools, 81; 37.7%; girls' boarding schools, 57, 26.5%), too much focus on exams (boys' boarding schools, 73; 34.0%; girls' boarding schools, 67, 31.2%) poor implementation (boys' boarding schools, 82; 38.1%; girls' boarding schools, 75, 34.9%) and lack of resources (boys' boarding schools, 67; 31.1%; girls' boarding schools, 54, 25.1%).

The majority of the respondents from both boys and girls boarding schools strongly disagreed and disagreed that, benchmarking was hindered by lack of support (boys' boarding schools, 61; 28.4%; girls' boarding schools, 50, 22.2%), lack of top schools to benchmark (boys' boarding schools, 98; 45.6%; girls' boarding schools, 87, 40.5%) low student ability (boys' boarding schools, 85; 39.5%; girls' boarding schools, 62, 28.8%) frequent transfer of head teachers (boys' boarding schools, 83; 38.6%; girls' boarding schools, 60, 27.9%) and lack of achievement orientation (boys' boarding schools, 99; 46.0%; girls' boarding schools, 81, 37.7%). This implies that, teachers had support, there were enough top performing schools to benchmark with, students had potential to learn, there was no high turnout among head teachers and schools were keen on posting good results.

On the issue of negative attitude, respondents 44 (20.5%) from girls' boarding schools were in agreement that it hindered successful benchmarking while 47 (21.9%) were of the contrary opinion. The number of those who agreed was almost equal to those who disagreed. As for the boys' boarding schools a clear majority (66; 30.7%) blamed negative attitude compared to 46 (21.4%) who did not think this was a hindrance.

Although most participants found benchmarking rewarding, a few expressed the feeling that it had not been very beneficial.

A teacher from one of the boys' said,

I have not found it beneficial because of differences in facilities. Most of the schools we benchmark have far better facilities than ours. It would be fruitless to try and copy what they do. Another problem is that my school is a boys' school but most of our benchmarking trips have been to girls' schools. Although the schools are performing very well, the challenges and needs in boys' schools are very different from those in girls' schools.

A Director of Studies from a boys' boarding school was of the view that,

Benchmarking is time consuming and expensive. In addition some programmes cannot work in our school because of the negative attitude of the teachers who are supposed to implement. Every school also has its own culture which

influences programmes in the school. This should be put into consideration during benchmarking.

A Head of Department remarked from a girls' boarding disclosed that,

Some schools are not ready to be benchmarking with. They feel bothered by a visiting school when they think there isn't much to gain. They end up not giving you the information you require. Some actually misinform on purpose!

Discussion

The findings of the current study were similar to those of Ambula (2006) which revealed that, secondary schools practiced benchmarking in discipline and motivation. However, this study found that schools benchmarked other programmes and practices like admission policy, internal promotion policy among others. The difference in the findings could be attributed to the fact that, the study by Ambula had a general. Again this study differs from that of Stella and Woodhouse (2007) which found that, institutions benchmarked the quantum of research funds, research publications and research active grants by academic staff which apply to higher education while this study investigated the practice at secondary school level where such factors are not applicable.

This study also found that schools benchmarked intervention programmes and academic support agreeing with Wilbur and Lambert (1993) whose study had similar findings. In addition, this study found that, schools addressed issues of who to benchmark with and the domains in the form of programmes just like Ruby (2013) and European Commission (2008). However, while Cummings et al. (2008) found that institutions were keen on responsibilities, facilities technical know-how and managerial talent, this study found that schools focused on factors with immediate impact on academic achievement.

Qualitative findings agree with Moriaty (2008) that some exemplar organizations may want to secure their own advantages. This study found that some schools were unwilling to share information and regarded visiting institutions as a bother. Such institutions definitely wanted to secure their competitive advantage by not divulging their success secrets. According to Achim et al. (2009), benchmarking is about finding and adopting identified best practice. Most respondents in this study testified to adopting best practices for improvement in performance. It was also reported that, some practices could not be adopted by benchmarking institutions, an observation that agreed with Camp (1995) on the need for reasoned transfer of practices. Findings of the current study on factors hindering benchmarking agree with Ruby (2013) and Stella (2001) who identified time as a challenge.

Conclusions and Recommendations

From the findings, it is concluded that, schools preferred to benchmark with national and county schools. On benchmarking practices, schools were keen on practices and programmes that had an immediate impact on examinations results. This is because schools were ranked according to the performance index, and there was a desire to be ranked among the top in the league tables. The performance index was based on academic performance of the students therefore activities geared towards academic performance took precedence over any other activities. It is therefore recommended that, schools focus on other activities that make an all round student like co-curricular activities which most schools seemed least interested in.

Although schools planned and prepared for the benchmarking trips, some settled for the wrong choice of schools to benchmark with resulting in minimal best practices to transfer. It is recommended that, schools identify top performing schools with similar characteristics for

benchmarking so that it is easy to adopt best practices. In addition, they should seek schools that are willing to share information.

Most respondents identified lack of time, resources, poor implementation and too much focus on examinations as hindering successful benchmarking. It is recommended that, schools create ample time for benchmarking activities by scheduling it on their calendar of events, shift focus away from examinations to other indicators of learning, carefully and systematically implement programmes benchmarked and allocate sufficient resources to the exercise.

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