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Benchmarking In Educational Institutions As A Strategy For Improving Quality And Competitiveness

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Abstract

This article discusses benchmarking in educational institutions as a systematic, critical, and sustainable quality development strategy. The discussion begins from the problem that some educational institutions still interpret benchmarking as a ceremonial comparative visit, whereas benchmarking should function as an institutional learning process for identifying gaps, learning best practices, and adapting them to internal contexts. This article uses a literature review approach by examining the concept of benchmarking, its objectives and benefits, implementation stages, supporting and inhibiting factors, and its implementation in improving the quality and competitiveness of educational institutions. The findings show that benchmarking is effective when implemented through focus identification, indicator development, selection of comparative partners, data collection, gap analysis, practice adaptation, and follow-up evaluation. Benchmarking also requires quality-oriented leadership, valid data, an open mphasizesnal culture, and competent implementation teams. This article mphasizes that benchmarking is not an act of imitating other institutions, but a comparative reflection strategy for building relevant, measurable, and sustainable educational quality.

Keywords: benchmarking, educational institutions, educational quality, competitiveness, quality management.

INTRODUCTION

Educational change is taking place increasingly rapidly. Schools, madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools, and higher education institutions can no longer merely conduct academic

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activities as routine. Educational institutions are required to provide quality services, accountable governance, relevant learning, and the ability to adapt to social and technological change. In this situation, educational quality is assessed not only from graduation rates, but also from the quality of processes, leadership, organisational culture, innovation, and public trust.

Benchmarking is one relevant strategy for responding to these demands. Benchmarking can be understood as the process of comparing an institution's practices, processes, performance, or standards with those of other institutions considered superior in certain aspects. However, benchmarking in education must not be understood as copying another institution's programme. Every institution has different learner characteristics, resources, work cultures, and social environments. Therefore, benchmarking needs to be understood as a critical and contextual process of institutional learning (Camp, 2024).

A common problem is that benchmarking is practised as a formal comparative visit. Institutions visit other institutions, take documentation, prepare reports, and then return to their old habits. In this pattern, benchmarking loses its strategic meaning because it is not accompanied by a problem focus, comparative indicators, gap analysis, and follow-up action. In fact, benchmarking should help institutions read their own position objectively, identify more effective practices, and design data-based improvements.

In educational quality management, benchmarking is closely related to the principle of continuous improvement. Deming emphasised that quality improvement needs to proceed through a cycle of planning, implementation, review, and corrective action. If this principle is applied to benchmarking, the results of comparison do not stop as information, but are processed into change programmes that are tested and improved (Haniifah, n.d.; Haryanto, 2020). Thus, benchmarking becomes part of a quality culture, rather than an additional activity of a temporary nature.

This article aims to explain benchmarking in educational institutions, its objectives and benefits, implementation stages, supporting and inhibiting factors, and its implementation as a strategy for improving quality and competitiveness. The discussion is presented as an academic article with in-text citations and a reference list. The focus of this article is directed towards how benchmarking can be used systematically so that educational institutions are able to learn from good practices without losing their institutional context and identity.

STUDY METHOD

This article uses a literature review method. The primary source is a paper on

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benchmarking in educational institutions, which is then strengthened by references on educational quality management, Total Quality Management, quality assurance, educational leadership, and institutional competitiveness. A literature review was chosen because the purpose of this article is not to test field data, but to explain concepts and formulate an analytical understanding of benchmarking in the educational context.

The analysis was carried out in four steps. First, the author identified the main ideas about benchmarking. Second, the author grouped the discussion into concepts, objectives, stages, supporting factors, obstacles, and implementation. Third, the author connected these ideas with Robert C. Camp's benchmarking theory and W. Edwards Deming's theory of continuous improvement. Fourth, the author developed a synthesis to show that benchmarking needs to be implemented as a quality management strategy, not merely as an administrative comparative visit.

The limitation of this article lies in its conceptual nature. This article does not yet present the results of direct observation in a particular educational institution. Nevertheless, the discussion remains useful as a theoretical basis for designing benchmarking programmes in schools, madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools, or higher education institutions.

DISCUSSION

1. The Concept of Benchmarking in Educational Institutions

Benchmarking in educational institutions is a systematic process of comparing institutional practices and achievements with those of other institutions that have relevant advantages. Its purpose is not to determine symbolically which institution is better, but to understand the processes that enable an institution to achieve superior performance. Camp (2024) defines benchmarking as the search for best practices that lead to superior performance. In education, best practices may include learning strategies, supervision systems, academic services, quality assurance, teacher development, or institutional governance.

This concept is important because educational institutions often assess themselves only through internal perceptions. A school may feel that it is already good because activities run in an orderly manner, even though learning outcomes, services, or innovation have not yet developed. Benchmarking helps institutions see themselves through external comparison. In this way, weaknesses that were previously invisible can be identified more clearly.

Nevertheless, benchmarking is not the same as imitation. Excellent practices from other institutions must be interpreted critically. The success of a programme is influenced by resources,

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leadership, work culture, learner characteristics, and community support. Therefore, effective benchmarking always requires adaptation. Institutions need to select relevant elements, adjust them to internal conditions, and then test them through gradual improvement programmes (Ruslan & Aminah, 2025).

Benchmarking can also be directed towards academic and non-academic aspects. In academic aspects, institutions can compare learning outcomes, assessment, literacy, supervision, and teaching quality. In non-academic aspects, institutions can compare administrative services, information systems, resource management, partnerships, and quality assurance. The breadth of this scope shows that benchmarking is a strategic instrument in educational management.

2. Objectives and Benefits of Benchmarking for Educational Quality

The main objective of benchmarking is to help educational institutions improve quality by learning from more effective practices. Benchmarking provides a basis for institutions to understand their quality position, identify gaps, and determine directions for improvement. Through benchmarking, institutions do not merely ask whether a programme has been implemented, but whether the programme is as effective as that of another institution with better achievements.

From the perspective of Total Quality Management, educational quality must be built as the responsibility of all elements of the institution. Sallis emphasises that educational quality management is related to leadership, teamwork, strategy, measurement, and continuous improvement. This view shows that benchmarking must not stand alone. Benchmarking results must be integrated into the quality management system so that they can influence policies, learning, and educational services (Maulana, Masruri, & Sari, 2025).

The first benefit of benchmarking is improved accuracy in quality planning. Institutions can design programmes based on evidence, not merely assumptions. For example, if a madrasah finds that a comparative institution excels in literacy because it has strong formative assessment, the madrasah can design teacher training, assessment instruments, and follow-up programmes in a more targeted way.

The second benefit is increased accountability. Institutions that conduct benchmarking have a stronger basis for explaining why a particular policy is adopted and how its success is measured. This is important because society is increasingly critical in assessing the quality of educational institutions. Quality that can be demonstrated through data and real improvements will increase public trust (Romlah et al., 2024).

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The third benefit is the growth of a learning organisational culture. Benchmarking encourages teachers, educational staff, and leaders to be open to evaluation. Institutions do not become quickly satisfied with internal achievements, but continually seek better ways of working. Such a culture becomes an important asset for maintaining quality in the long term.

3. Stages of Benchmarking Implementation

The implementation of benchmarking requires clear stages. The first stage is determining the focus of benchmarking. The focus must be specific, such as improving the quality of formative assessment, accelerating academic services, strengthening literacy, or improving the effectiveness of learning supervision. A focus that is too general will make it difficult for the institution to determine indicators and assess results.

The second stage is forming a team and developing comparative indicators. The team should involve leaders, teachers or lecturers, educational staff, and quality assurance elements. Indicators need to be adjusted to the focus. If the focus is learning, indicators may include lesson planning, media use, learner engagement, assessment, and follow-up on learning outcomes. If the focus is service, indicators may include timeliness, clarity of procedures, user satisfaction, and number of complaints.

The third stage is selecting benchmarking partners. Partners do not have to be the most famous institutions, but institutions that are superior in the aspect to be studied and have a sufficiently relevant context. Selecting the right partners will make findings easier to adapt. Conversely, selecting partners merely based on image may cause benchmarking to end in admiration rather than learning.

The fourth stage is collecting data. Data may be quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data include learning outcomes, graduation rates, attendance, service duration, or satisfaction surveys. Qualitative data may be obtained through observation, interviews, discussions, and document review. At this stage, the main question is not only how much the comparative institution has achieved, but how its work processes produce those achievements (Nugraha et al., 2023).

The fifth stage is analysing gaps. Institutions compare their internal condition with the partner's practices to identify gaps. The analysis must not stop at numerical differences. Institutions need to interpret the causes, such as teacher competence, work culture, leadership, evaluation systems, facility support, or internal policies. This stage transforms benchmarking from mere comparison into institutional diagnosis.

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The sixth stage is preparing an adaptation plan. Excellent practices are not copied in full, but selected and adjusted. At this stage, Deming's PDSA cycle can be used. Institutions plan a change, test its implementation, study the results, and then determine the next improvement. With this pattern, benchmarking becomes a process of continuous improvement, not a one-time activity (Rosidin, Herawan, & Nurdin, 2025).

The final stage is monitoring and evaluation. Institutions need to examine whether the programmes produced from benchmarking truly improve quality. If the results are good, the practice can be established as a new standard. If it has not been successful, the institution needs to refine its strategy. Monitoring keeps benchmarking connected to real change.

4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Benchmarking

The success of benchmarking is strongly influenced by the internal condition of the institution. The first supporting factor is leadership commitment. School principals, madrasah leaders, or higher education leaders need to view benchmarking as a strategic agenda. Without leadership support, benchmarking can easily stop as a visit and a report. Strong leadership ensures that benchmarking results are incorporated into work programmes and institutional evaluation (Afrianti, Radiyah, & Azainil, 2025).

The second supporting factor is data availability. Benchmarking is meaningful only if the institution has valid internal data. Institutions need to know their own problems before learning from others. Data on learning outcomes, supervision, attendance, service satisfaction, and programme evaluation form the basis for determining the focus and assessing change (Simarmata, 2024).

The third supporting factor is an open organisational culture. Benchmarking often reveals institutional weaknesses. If the organisational culture is defensive, benchmarking findings will be rejected or perceived as personal criticism. Conversely, if the organisational culture is reflective, benchmarking will be accepted as an opportunity for shared learning.

The fourth supporting factor is the competence of the implementation team. The benchmarking team must be able to develop indicators, collect data, read excellent practices, and assess their relevance. This competence is important because educational practices are often complex. Learning quality cannot be assessed only from documents, but also from classroom interaction, assessment, and follow-up on learning.

On the other hand, the main obstacle to benchmarking is a shallow understanding. Some institutions still equate benchmarking with an ordinary comparative visit. If this understanding is

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not corrected, the benchmarking process will produce general notes without operational recommendations. Another obstacle is limited resources. Benchmarking requires time, funding, personnel, and access to data. Institutions with a heavy administrative burden often find it difficult to provide sufficient space for analysis.

Another obstacle is contextual difference. Practices that succeed in one institution do not necessarily succeed in another. Differences in learners, organisational culture, parental support, and infrastructure need to be considered. Otherwise, benchmarking turns into policy imitation. Internal resistance can also become an obstacle. Teachers or educational staff may feel compared or blamed. Therefore, benchmarking needs to be communicated as a process of shared improvement, not as a tool for finding fault.

5. Implementation of Benchmarking for Quality and Competitiveness

The implementation of benchmarking as a strategy for improving quality and competitiveness needs to be directed towards measurable internal change. The competitiveness of educational institutions does not arise from promotion alone. Competitiveness grows from service quality, learning quality, governance effectiveness, programme innovation, and the relevance of graduates. Benchmarking helps institutions identify aspects that need to be strengthened in order to achieve a better position in the eyes of society.

The first implementation step is connecting benchmarking results with strategic planning. Benchmarking findings must be incorporated into work programmes, quality indicators, and institutional policies. If benchmarking results show weak learning supervision, the institution needs to create a more scheduled academic supervision programme, clear observation instruments, and follow-up support for teachers.

The second step is strengthening educator development. Benchmarking often shows that leading institutions have teachers or lecturers who continue to learn. Therefore, benchmarking results need to be translated into training, learning communities, mentoring, and learning reflection. Institutional quality will be difficult to improve if teacher practice does not change.

The third step is building realistic excellence. Institutions do not need to excel in every aspect at once. Schools or madrasahs may choose a specific focus, such as literacy, character, digital services, project-based learning, tahfiz, student research, or community partnerships. Benchmarking helps institutions see how such focuses are developed by other institutions and then adjust them to internal potential (Fitri, 2021).

The fourth step is ensuring periodic evaluation. Every practice produced from

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benchmarking must be assessed for its impact. Evaluation needs to look at changes in both process and outcome. For example, a literacy improvement programme should not be assessed only from the number of reading activities, but also from changes in text comprehension ability, student participation, and the quality of teacher assessment. Through this evaluation, institutions can ensure that benchmarking truly results in quality improvement.

In the context of Islamic educational institutions, benchmarking must also preserve institutional identity. Madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools may learn from excellent practices in other institutions, but they still need to adjust them to Islamic values, a culture of adab, and the mission of character formation. In this way, benchmarking does not weaken the distinctive character of the institution, but instead strengthens it through better management practices.

CONCLUSION

Benchmarking in educational institutions is a comparative reflection strategy for systematically improving quality. Benchmarking is not sufficient if it is understood merely as a comparative visit or an activity of imitating other institutions. Its essence is to study best practices, understand the processes that produce excellence, and adapt them according to the institution's internal context.

Benchmarking implementation needs to proceed through clear stages, namely focus identification, team formation, indicator development, partner selection, data collection, gap analysis, adaptation planning, and follow-up evaluation. These stages move benchmarking from comparison towards transformation. Without these stages, benchmarking risks becoming an administrative activity that has no impact on quality.

The success of benchmarking is supported by quality-oriented leadership, valid data, an open organisational culture, and competent implementation teams. Conversely, benchmarking can be hindered by shallow understanding, limited resources, contextual differences, and resistance to change. Therefore, benchmarking must be managed as a participatory institutional process.

As a strategy for improving quality and competitiveness, benchmarking helps educational institutions identify gaps, choose development priorities, improve learning and services, and build relevant excellence. Meaningful benchmarking does not ask which institution is the most superior, but what can be learned, how it can be adapted, and to what extent the change affects educational quality.

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