# Cross-Institutional Learning: Benchmarking Faculty of Information Science through IAIS and POLTESA Visits

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**Abstract**
This study aims to assess and analyze aspects of academic and information management at Institut Agama Islam Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas (IAIS) and Politeknik Negeri Sambas (POLTESA) through a benchmarking visit by the Faculty of Information Science (FIS), UiTM Sarawak Branch. This study uses a qualitative approach in the form of field observations without formal data collection. The results of the observations are analyzed descriptively to identify best practices, information management gaps, and potential regional collaboration. This study also discusses implications for information management education and suggests measures for improvement in teaching, research, and community service.
**Keywords**: Benchmarking, Information Management, Higher Education, Information Literacy, Regional Cooperation.

**Introduction**
Benchmarking visits are applied by institutions of higher learning as a strategic move to upgrade academic and information management practices. The method facilitates direct implementation of knowledge transfer, perception exchange, and assessment of best practices in partner institutions within the locale. The visits leave space for internal modifications and the development of regional collaboration for an education system to address emerging demands.

Faculty of Information Science (FIS), UiTM Sarawak Branch made a benchmarking visit to two higher education institutions in Sambas, Indonesia which are the Institut Agama Islam Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas (IAIS) and the Politeknik Negeri Sambas (POLTESA). With this visit, the FIS delegation learned more about teaching practices and learning strategies and how information technology is utilized in academic management and community

engagement within the institution. Dynamic and inclusive knowledge management requires these conditions to meet higher education needs, emphasizing values, innovation, and cross-border cooperation.

The visit evaluated information literacy, digital empowerment strategies, and measures of education development taken by IAIS and POLTESA. The physical and virtual infrastructure, curricula content, and industry linkages established by the two organizations motivated FIS to design effective and feasible measures of education quality.

**Research Objectives**
As part of its continuous efforts to improve the quality of higher education, the Faculty of Information Science (FIS), UiTM Sarawak Branch set four main objectives for the benchmarking visit to IAIS and POLTESA in Sambas, Indonesia. The same objectives were also used as the basis for this study. The goals were to support the assessment of institutional practices, identify areas for development and growth, and strengthen regional cooperation networks.

The first objective was to assess the academic and information management practices undertaken by IAIS and POLTESA. This assessment afforded us a holistic view of the academic architectures of the institutions, utilization of information technology in administrative and learning practices, and the knowledge management systems and practices in place. By dissecting these elements, the delegation could analyze how institutional practices fit current higher education needs.

The second objective dealt with finding lessons learned and major issues around information management in the two institutions. The visit noted remarkable approaches in the integration of the digital systems, the attempts to improve the information literacy of the stakeholders, and the community's partnership with the institutions. These were useful for developing better information governance frameworks at FIS.

The third objective was to derive strategic implications from the outcomes and observations of the visit. These implications will inform strategic development at FIS, particularly enhancing academic governance and research endeavors. The benchmarking results will help the faculty align its strategic objectives with regional and international higher education trends.

Finally, the visit aimed to make constructive proposals for teaching quality improvement, research, and community engagement. The recommendations emphasize enhancing academic quality, building a culture of scholarship and knowledge, and facilitating the university's role in building communities.

**Literature Review**
Academic benchmarking is an essential process applied to improve the quality of education and academic governance by comparing best practices used elsewhere. Xie et al. (2020) affirm that benchmarking allows institutions to learn best methods and practices and improve their academic performance. Benchmarking in learning is not just the process of copying practice. Still, it is meant to transfer the value addition from what is observed for the effectiveness of management and learning performance (McKinnon et al., 2000). This type of benchmarking

helps institutions develop sensitivity regarding their weaknesses and their management and teaching systems. Managing information effectively is essential in the effective operation of higher education institutions. Liu et al. (2021) show that an integrated information management system facilitates storing and retrieving useful data for management and scholarly choices. Rowley (2000) emphasized in research that information management within academic institutions requires the synergy of people, processes, and technology.

While integrating technology into teaching, it is also required to enhance learning. Anderson et al. (2020) emphasized that teaching effectiveness and learning engagement can be improved by educational technology. Complementing this report, human resources and community involvement greatly influence the success of higher education. Subramaniam et al. (2020) stressed the need for continuous staff training, whereas Choi and Lee (2021) illustrated that collaboration among educational institutions and local communities is academically and socially beneficial. Moreover, Johnston & Webber (2003) suggested that rural educational institutions require a solution within a context that considers limited resources and technological literacy within the local community. In the ASEAN context, Nguyen (2018) reported that Vietnamese and Indonesian institutions are adopting hybrid practices in managing information and applying human resources to overcome technological challenges.

Benchmarking has a significant impact on improving academic management, teaching, and research quality. As per Nair et al. (2020), educational institutions can maintain pace with transformations and adopt innovations in teaching and research via benchmarking. Zainal et al. (2021) also found that information literacy-based community services programs for rural Malaysia efficiently strengthened community capacity to seek, evaluate, and use information in pursuit of social well-being. These studies justify the necessity of observational benchmarking studies, especially in cross-cultural understanding and institutional contexts.

## Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach by casual observation through benchmarking visits at IAIS and POLTESA. Observation focused on four main areas: information infrastructure, information management systems, human resources and community participation, and learning and instructional practices. The data were descriptively analyzed to express the condition and matched against differences and best practices. The result of the analysis became the foundation for synthesizing the findings, establishing implications, and suggesting appropriate improvements.

## Findings and Discussion

### Information Management and Academic

Information and academic administration in both institutions, Institut Agama Islam Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas (IAIS) and Politeknik Negeri Sambas (POLTESA), remain manual or through a hybrid system that employs both traditional and digital methods. The system confirms that digitizing information is still embryonic or transitioning towards a more modern and automated administration system.

In this case, the main issues are technological infrastructure constraints and personnel training to increase the effectiveness of digital systems. However, both institutions are

committed to organizing and managing information organizationally and effectively, even with limited means.

In addition, the library plays an extremely important role as a main reference and learning resource center. The library provides physical reading materials and serves as a learning support section for students and lecturers. The role played by this library indicates the importance of access to information in supporting academic success and the development of information literacy among institutional staff.

*Infrastructure and Technology*
The infrastructural constraints of IAIS and POLTESA have necessitated lecturers to be creative in implementing the learning and teaching process. Physical constraints like limited access to the internet, lack of available technological facilities, and fewer digital classroom facilities require students and lecturers to adapt using channels like hard copies, project-based learning, and interactive face-to-face debates.

Although this lack is demanding, it permits more contextual and highly human-centered pedagogy. Manual creativity and flexibility with available materials demonstrate the institution's capacity to transcend limitations resiliently and pragmatically.

However, these constraints also highlight the need to advance students' and staff members' digital literacy. Proper utilization of technology is essential in guaranteeing that the learning processes are effective, applicable, and responsive to the needs of today's world of higher education. Advancing the skills entails operating educational software, utilizing learning management systems (LMS), and using digital resources for instruction.

*Community Role*
Institutions such as IAIS and POLTESA are great examples of close and interdependent networks with the local community, making educational institutions an integral part of the social web and regional development. This is not limited to the role of formal education but also means cooperation in social and cultural activities, demonstrating the sense of belonging among members of the institution and the community.

Student and lecturer proactive involvement in community events, such as communal work and outreach programs, strengthens the institution's role as a social development agency. Apart from providing the opportunity to practice soft skills, these activities instill empathy, leadership, and social responsibility among academics.

In addition, this close engagement also provides room for the institutions to become aware of the true aspirations of the local population and thus establish academic and research programs that are more relevant and applicable at the regional level.

Table 1

*Comparative analysis with FIS UiTM Sarawak*

| Aspect | IAIS / POLTESA | FIS UiTM Sarawak |
|---|---|---|
| **Infrastructure** | Limited, manual and semi digital | Comprehensive, fully and semi digital management system |
| **Information Literacy** | Basic, requires enhancement | Emphasized in the curriculum and training |
| **Role of Library** | Main knowledge center, supports learning, digital | Digital and collaborative information hub |
| **Technology & Digital** | Limited, undergoing transition | Innovative, supported by various ICT platforms |
| **Community Service** | Active, strong community collaboration | Structured through CSR and SULAM programs |

**Implication**

The study's implications reveal several important ones for FIS UiTM Sarawak Branch. First, the curriculum can be revised to produce flexible graduates who can fit into various technological environments, even those with few infrastructures. Second, the study offers opportunities to expand efforts in building regional people's information literacy, particularly through education and community service programs. Third, there are possibilities to develop advanced applied research focused on developing small-scale information systems in conformity with rural institutions' needs. Finally, the study also suggests opportunities for cooperation between countries in training and capacity building in information, which can strengthen regional educational networks and support the learning experience of FIS.

**Recommendations**

Based on findings and research observations, several strategic recommendations have been produced to further FIS UiTM Sarawak Branch in teaching, research, and community service capabilities. First, including manual information handling elements in student training is necessary so that graduates can get accommodated in a working setting that is not even fully digitized, especially in rural or small-sized institutions. This kind of training can also be of value in the form of an overall understanding of information management basics.

Second, implementing a community service program of information literacy education can activate the community to become more critical in accessing and evaluating information. This is within the vision of the university as a social change agent. Third, FIS is suggested to conduct academic collaboration and staff exchange programs with institutions such as IAIS and POLTESA. This move will open space for the exchange of best practices and the building of regional networks in information management.

Fourth, studies on creating low-cost information technology must be encouraged to meet the requirements of institutions or communities with limited resources. This includes coming up with small-scale data management systems and friendly applications. Finally, information ethics and social leadership skills need to be strengthened so that not only are students information literate but also leaders of change in their communities.

## Conclusion

The visit provided first-hand experience with the realities of overseas institutions, especially with their information management and pedagogical culture. Through this visit, FIS UiTM Sarawak Branch learned about the best practices and challenges of institutions such as IAIS and POLTESA, paving the way towards improving teaching, research and community outreach.

The visit also served as a strategic platform for FIS in strengthening its role towards raising awareness of the importance of information management in the Southeast Asian region. Through exposure to various practices and approaches, FIS has the potential to emerge as a trendsetter in the field of information management for the benefit of higher education institutions at the regional level.

The findings of this study are hoped to drive the intellectual and social development programs of FIS UiTM Sarawak Branch to be more dynamic and competitive. It can also promote regional cooperation, enhance quality in higher education, and drive regional excellence in information management.

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