

**BENCHMARKING UNDERGRADUATE GEOGRAPHY COURSES:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA,
AND UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA, MALAYSIA**

Awotayo Gbenga Paul^{1&3}, Norhaslina, Hassan¹, Mariney Mohd Yusoff¹ and Raheem Usman Adebimpe², Orire Ismaila Oloyede²

¹Department of Geography, University of Malaya, Malaysia

²Department of Geography and Environmental Management, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

³Department of Geography and Remote Sensing, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria

Email: gbengapaul@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

Undergraduate courses are pivotal in shaping students' futures, guiding their skills and knowledge. Additionally, it forms an integral part of various assessments of educational quality, ranking methodologies, and accreditation prerequisites across educational frameworks. Thus, this study adopts mixed-method approach to benchmark undergraduate geography courses at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria in Africa and University of Malaya, Malaysia, located in Asia continent help identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in both departments, offering insights for further development and progress. Analysis of course documents and credit unit distributions reveal differences in core coursework emphasis and program structures. While a strong correlation ($r = 0.73$) exists in course relevance between both universities. The lack of statistical significance (T-Statistics value is 2.62 and P-Value of 0.98) could indicate that other factors are influencing the number of courses offered at both institutions. This might include differences in curriculum design, educational priorities, or regional/geographical influences on the types of courses offered. The study emphasises the significance of benchmarking in geography education for ongoing improvement. It advocates for regular comparisons and comprehensive data analysis to enhance program quality globally.

Keywords: *Undergraduate courses, Department of Geography, Benchmarking, University of Ilorin, University Malaya*

INTRODUCTION

Concerns have been raised around the world about the assessment standard, evaluation criteria, and the qualities of graduating students (Pepper et al., 2001). There is an immediate call for educational institutions to equip graduates with skills that match the expanding global demands (Durrans et al., 2020). To keep pace with industry needs, universities must continually adapt their curricula and teaching methods. Benchmarking emerges as a pivotal tool in closing the gap between industry requirements, ensuring relevance, and minimizing

discrepancies (Durrans et al., 2020). The study seeks to focus on benchmarking analysis, with a specific focus on the geography department at both the University of Ilorin (Unilorin), Nigeria, and the University of Malaya (UM) in Malaysia. The selection of these two universities is grounded in their shared British colonial educational heritage, public university status, and comparable developmental trajectories. Moreover, Malaysia's newly industrialized context offers a meaningful benchmark for Nigeria's developing system, enabling valuable cross-continental insights into curriculum quality, academic standards, and institutional advancement in geography education. This comparative approach seeks to identify key institutional and academic factors that have propelled the UM to its current global standing, thereby providing a strategic foundation for improvement and innovation at the Unilorin. Thus, the major objectives are to improve the academic quality, curriculum structure, academic expertise, and student performance outcomes in the Department of Geography and Environmental Management at Nigeria's Unilorin. However, this study also anticipates that the implementation of undergraduate benchmarking may raise concerns about increased external participation in university operations. This may encourage a more constricted view of institutional autonomy, raising concerns about the loss of the academic profession this as observed by (Pidcock, 2006). Nevertheless, the concept of benchmarking serves as a catalyst for developing cultures of continuous improvement and incremental performance. By adopting an external perspective, benchmarking opens the door to significant leaps in performance by capturing and adapting the best practices. This transformative approach not only converts continuous improvement into a pathway of continuous learning but also aids organizations in their relentless pursuit of excellence and competitive dominance (Zairi, 2010).

Significance/ Rational of Benchmarking the Department of Geography and Environmental Management, University of Ilorin, Nigeria Against the Department of Geography, University of Malaya, Malaysia

The University of Ilorin, Nigeria is located in Africa, whereas the University of Malaya, Malaysia is located in Asia, with both countries classified as developing. Although, Malaysia has recently moved to the newly industrialised nation in the world. Nigeria and Malaysia were former British colonies, influencing aspects of their legal, educational, and governmental systems. Both Nigeria and Malaysia have transitioned from the traditional British education system, characterized by three semesters, to embrace the American system with a structure of two semesters. This adaptation has redefined the academic calendar in universities, shaping it into a framework encompassing distinct harmattan and rain semesters. Moreover, this shift has not only streamlined the academic year but has also facilitated a more cohesive and synchronized learning environment within universities across both nations. The consolidation into two semesters, aligning with the American system, has enhanced curriculum planning, student engagement, and academic progression, fostering a more efficient educational experience for students and lecturers alike. Nigeria and Malaysia have transitioned from agrarian economies in the 1970s to robust economic frameworks since their independence in 1960, with Nigeria embracing oil dominance and Malaysia developing an industrial sector-based economy (Muhammad & Johar, 2019). Both countries hold significant regional positions that contribute to their respective continents' influence (Adetula, 2014; Dent, 2016).

At Unilorin, the Department of Geography has changed their name to the Department of Geography and Environmental Management and its runs both undergraduates and postgraduate programs. The department has nineteen academic staff. The Academic staff is

made of 8 Professors, 5 Associate Professor, 2 Senior Lecturer and 4 others below the rank of a senior lecturer cadre. Only 16 out of the academic staff has PhDs while the remaining are at the advanced level in their PhDs Programmes. The Department boasts a dynamic team of academic staff whose diverse expertise spans across specialized domains including soil geography, medical geography, rural geography, hydrology, climatology, geomorphology, biogeography, tourism, transport, population studies, and urban geography, collectively enriching our academic landscape and fostering a comprehensive understanding of geographical principles. 13 of this academic staff are male while 6 are of the female gender. In addition, the department has an average of one hundred students at each level. The university has implemented a cutting-edge courseware platform, designed as an interactive computer-based program facilitating lectures, student engagement, curriculum outlines, and feedback mechanisms, among other functionalities. Despite its potential, this cutting-edge platform is underutilised by both academics and students. There exists a clear imperative to further refine and optimize its functionality to enhance its effectiveness and encourage increased engagement from both instructors and learners. while the Department of Geography, UM, Malaysia houses two degrees program which are Environmental studies bachelor program and Geography undergraduate study. The department has fifteen academic staff. They are made up of 1 Professor Emeritus, 2 Professors, 3 Associate Professors, 8 Senior lecturers and 1 Visiting lecturer. The Department of Geography at the UM boasts substantial funding, enabling our academic staff to access multiple grants. A significant portion of our lecturers' publications feature in distinguished journals indexed by Web of Science and Scopus, signifying the high calibre of our research output. The department expertise spans a wide array of fields, encompassing meteorology, geographical information systems, urban studies, social and cultural geography, environmental geography, agricultural geography, population geography, biogeography, remote sensing, environmental management, governance, and geomorphology. The academic staff are made of 4 males and 11 females. In addition, the department has an average of 36 students at each of the level. The academic staff within Department of Geography, UM does not necessarily possess undergraduate degrees in geography; however, many have taken geography-related courses as part of their master's or doctoral studies. They have smoothly blended into the system and, over time, have developed a profound capacity to both teach and undertake advanced research within their specialised geographic areas. The meticulous scrutiny of examination questions set by academic staff through a committee chaired by the Head of the Department, which considerably improves the quality of our question papers and student evaluations. This rigorous vetting process marks a shift in our departmental assessment strategy: moving away from traditional evaluations of subject knowledge toward assessing applied knowledge. As a result, the examination duration for a 3-credit course is not fixed at 3 hours; similarly, the examination duration for a 2-credit course is not fixed at 2 hours. Instead, the length of the test is tailored to the level of critical thinking required for students to apply their knowledge effectively in the context of contemporary concerns. The department harnesses the Spectrum computer-based platform, a highly effective tool facilitating robust student-lecturer interaction across multiple academic dimensions. This encompasses streamlined assignment management, seamless announcement dissemination, efficient sharing of lecture notes, effective lecture delivery, examination administration, student grading, and more. Students are provided with the opportunity to evaluate various aspects of lecturers' performance, including teaching quality, punctuality, and other relevant criteria. This feedback mechanism serves as a valuable tool for assessing lecturer performance, contributing to the overall performance rating of lecturers within the department and providing insights to the university at large. Moreover, at the Unilorin, Courseware teaching platform is being used by Lecturers to deliver their lectures and manage their classes for optima academic efficiency.

Benchmarking serves as a valuable opportunity to assess and enhance departmental effectiveness, identify best practices and explore avenues for fostering inclusion and diversity (Knapp, 2020). The aim of this study is to evaluate alignment within and between courses and programs offered at the undergraduate levels in the department of Geography in this two Universities for benchmarking purpose. This will provide support to institutions in pursuit of internal quality assurance and enabled the learning outcomes specified for a particular programme to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed-upon general expectations about standards. In addition, it is a tool to shape the curriculum, especially in new geography departments in universities or other higher institutions of learning. It supports universities in ensuring quality education internally. It also allows you to check if the programme meets the agreed-upon standard for learning outcomes.

A benchmarking analysis of undergraduate courses of the geography departments at the UM in Malaysia, located in the Asian continent, and the Department of Geography and Environmental Management at the Unilorin in Nigeria, located in the African continent, offers important insights into international benchmarking when assessing global standards of excellence. The global acceptance of geography in developing nations like Malaysia and Nigeria depends on attaining and exceeding international academic standards. Comparing their success stories allows for a thorough assessment of their advancement on the global scene (Buang, 2011)

The Need for Benchmarking Undergraduate's Courses

Recent studies (Delelu., Areaya., and Seyoum, 2025; Gunter 2025) reveal persistent challenges in geography education, including low student enrolment, inadequate funding, outdated curricula, and limited digital infrastructure. This study contributes to ongoing debates by demonstrating how benchmarking and curriculum reform can revitalize geography programs, enhance quality, and strengthen disciplinary relevance in developing regions.

Undergraduates courses serves as benchmark for investing in people, knowledge, future prosperity and well-being of the students (Brennan et al., 2021). The curriculum serves as the bedrock of an academic program, delineating the expected outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities for both current and prospective students. It provides vital guidance to stakeholders such as future employers, students, and other invested parties. Additionally, it forms an integral part of various assessments of educational quality, ranking methodologies, and accreditation prerequisites across educational frameworks (Evans et al., 2019; Hertzman, 2008). At the university, geography is a popular and growing subject choice, and it draws some of the best students for undergraduate degrees, although geography is diverse and changing (Thomas et al., 2017). The vitality of the discipline, encompassing both physical and human geography, relies, to some extent, on the quantity of students engaging with the subjects in educational institutions. The quality of their teaching and learning experiences, curricula or benchmark statements that guide what is taught, and students' awareness about their environment and how it can influence their interests, citizenship, and career opportunities (Thomas et al., 2017). Geography, field of study, is a multifaceted discipline that explores the intricate relationship between people and their environment. Geography, as a discipline of study, is crucial in offering a critical role in understanding contemporary global difficulties that are both natural and man-made. The emergence of geographic education is crucial to equip students with skills necessary for exploring and navigating an interconnected world as being thought in most university. Geography seeks to understand, analyse and explain the reciprocal relationships between man and his activities and the environment, both physical and built, in place, space and time. Thus, there is a greater

demand for geography graduates to acquire intellectual synthesis and skills required to tackle the complex regional and global challenges in a thoughtful way(Fournier, 2000).

Geography undergraduate courses cover a broad spectrum of current topics spanning human, physical, environmental spheres, fieldwork and Geographical Information System(Castree et al., 2016; Clark & Wareham, 2003; Matthews & Herbert, 2008). These topics are explored through diverse approaches rooted in both natural and social sciences, encompassing both practical applications and theoretical perspectives(Benton & Craib, 2023; Wilson, 2018). Geography education particularly plays a vital role in shaping students' understanding of the world and their capacity to address complex global challenges (de Miguel González et al., 2018; Kerski, 2023; Maude, 2020; Tuna, 2023). Thus, benchmarking such course is of great importance. Benchmarking is a systematic, goal-oriented procedure with mechanism to monitor, compare, and identify novel practises as well as clear objectives (Scott, 2011). Its roles include determining whether practises are appropriate, adjusting as needed, and putting changes into action. In the end, it acts as a tool to increase performance(Scott, 2011).

A key advantage of benchmarking lies in uncovering innovative methods. It draws attention to areas that require improvement, inspires change and helps in goal-setting, planning , and creating strategies for improvement(Syme et al., 2021). In addition, as a result of effective and efficient benchmarking, University administrators gain insights into their institution's rating compared to others, comprehend their competitive position and identify areas for potential enhancement (McKinnon et al., 2000)

Thus, benchmarking provide a set of standard reference points for internal self-studies and external reviews(Dunn et al., 2010). Naturally, benchmarking procedures are also frequently used to assess whether a programme has met the requirements set out by an accrediting body or to compare it to another programme(Dunn et al., 2010). It helps check if goals are reached, measure meeting targets and evaluate an institution's reputation on a local or and national level. Benchmarking undergraduate courses offered at these two universities help the study to assess the graduate attribute which are the essential skills, attitudes, values and knowledge that a graduates of geography supposed to have developed by the end of the degree programme(Hill & Walkington, 2016). Therefore, choice of where to pursue higher education especially for geography program is a pivotal decision and it is imperative to consider the course content, curriculum structure and specialization options. If benchmarking is successful, it should guarantee that students pursuing a geography degree, wherever they choose to study, will have roughly equivalent educational experiences and that the degree classifications they earn upon graduation are firmly grounded in a public declaration of standards(Pepper et al., 2001). To facilitate this, the study examines the undergraduate study plans of both universities in the department of Geography.

History, Ranking and Relevance of the University of Ilorin, Nigeria and University of Malaya, Malaysia

University of Ilorin, Nigeria began in 1975 as a University college affiliated with the University of Ibadan but today has attained the status of a world-class citadel of learning (Ijaiya, 2015). Unilorin is one of Nigeria's most reputable institutions, with a student population exceeding 70,000 across undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It is widely recognized as the most sought-after university in Nigeria, consistently attracting the highest number of admission applicants—a testament to its academic excellence and strong public reputation. The University also boasts the most stable academic calendar in the country,

maintaining uninterrupted academic sessions for over two decades without industrial strikes. In addition, it occupies the largest landmass among Nigerian universities, providing ample space for future expansion and infrastructural development.

Unilorin's consistent accomplishments in teaching, research, community service, and infrastructure development bolster its image as the "Better by Far" University (Ijaiya, 2015). The university's track record in the year 2014 and 2015 illustrates its enduring dedication to excellence in academia and peaceful academic environments, having been named the most peaceful and highly sought-after institution for admissions in the two consecutive years (Ijaiya, 2015). According to the Webometrics University Ranking, the University has received great international reputation. It secured the top position in Nigeria and the 20th spot in Africa in January 2011, maintaining this esteemed position as reaffirmed in July 2014 (Kuranga et al., 2015). Furthermore, it was ranked 1,201 in the world according to the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Ranking 2026. The University of Ilorin has made significant strides in contributing to higher education and academic development within Nigeria. At Unilorin, the guiding principle, 'Probitas Doctrina,' encapsulates the unwavering commitment to fostering both exemplary character and academic excellence, ensuring a holistic approach to education that prioritizes not only learning but also the development of outstanding character." As one of the leading universities in the country, it has played a crucial role in producing skilled graduates and contributing to research initiatives across various disciplines. It has consistently been recognized as one of Nigeria's top universities, known for its commitment to academic excellence, research initiatives, and producing highly qualified graduates across diverse fields of study. Additionally, Unilorin has often been acknowledged for its contributions to community engagement, social development, and addressing local challenges through its academic and research endeavours. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Unilorin has been relentlessly pursuing world-class status. This goal is to promote the global knowledge economy, generate talented human resources, and advance national development objectives (Kuranga & Adedimeji, 2015). As a result, Nigerian universities are being encouraged to make greater contributions to both national growth and global competitiveness. This emphasises the importance of benchmarking in facilitating progress in these domains.

The Department of Geography and Environmental Management, Unilorin is offers geography programs tailored to the country's specific geographic concerns. The study of geography in Nigeria has evolved significantly, transitioning from qualitative approaches to regionalism, environmental determinism, critical geography, and now modern, quantitative methods. This development can be divided into three phases: the foundational phase (1948–1960) led by British experts, followed by the indigenization phase (1960–1970) where Nigerian scholars trained by British personnel took charge, and the consolidation phase (1970–present) marked by extensive educational reinforcement after the Nigerian civil war (Agbebaku, 2020; Craggs & Neate, 2020; Udo, 2004). During this phase, more Nigerian geographers were trained domestically, leading to a shift from British and European-centred curricula to Nigerian and African-centred ones (Areola & Okafor, 1998; Mabogunje, 1998; Udo, 2004)

The University of Malaya, established in 1949, has a rich history of academic excellence and a notable impact on higher education. With over 220,000 graduates since its inception, the university has demonstrated a strong commitment to producing skilled professionals. Achieving a remarkable position in global rankings, it secured the 201-250 band position in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Ranking 2026, and it currently holds

the 58th place in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Ranking 2026. Furthermore, it is ranked 15th in the Asia University Rankings 2026, demonstrating its regional importance. UM has made significant strides in sustainable development, earning the prestigious title of the 3rd best University in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) in THE impact ranking 2023. Embracing a global outlook, the university fosters collaborations with leading research institutions and universities from 69 countries, reflecting its dedication to international partnerships and knowledge exchange. This collaboration has strengthened the university's reputation as a leading academic institution on the global stage. In specific subject rankings, the University of Malaya's Education subject attained the 38th position in QS World University Rankings by Subject (2025) marking a remarkable advancement from its previous position and reflecting the university's sustained commitment to academic excellence and continuous improvement in teaching and research quality.

As the premier educational institution in the country, UM remains steadfast in its commitment to providing world-class education and advancing quality research. Its vision is to continue providing world class education and quality research in line with the efforts to be a global university impacting world.

The UM's Geography Department, established in 1959 within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, holds the distinction of being Malaysia's oldest and the only full-fledged Geography department in Malaysia that sanctions geography as a discipline in its own right(Lee, 2008; Savage, 2003). It stands as the benchmark for the steady advancement of geography in Malaysian higher education(Lee, 2008). Due to its innovative nature and long history, the department has served as a model for other Malaysian universities' geography departments as they have developed. As a result, the Department becomes the national model for the expansion of the field(Buang, 2011). The department is also one of the best geography departments in the world based on the 2026 QS subject ranking.

In essence, to benchmark the Department of Geography and Environmental Management at the University of Ilorin against the Department of Geography at the University of Malaya, a comprehensive assessment of their establishment, history, global rankings, research impact, regional influence, and collaborations would be necessary in examine their experts in delivering the undergraduate curriculum in their respective institution of higher learning. This evaluation would help identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in both departments, offering insights for further development and progress.

Research Method

The research adopts comparative content analysis design. Data was systematically extracted from the official departmental course brochures of both Universities. This methodology enabled a detailed analysis and direct comparison of course structures and content, with the specific aim of identifying key areas of similarities and divergence between the two Institutions.

The data collected for analysis are program documents including course syllabi, program descriptions, course outlines and credit units. Descriptive statistics was used to highlights the distinct credit unit distributions, core course ratios within the two universities. While Pearson product moment correlation was used to the strength of association between the aspects of geography in the Department of Geography in the two different Universities. The benchmarking study approach for undergraduate courses in Geography department in the

two universities adopt the four pillar model postulated by (Raoufi et al., 2018) in Figure 1. This concept depicted in Figure 1 is not confined to Geography programs, rather, it has the potential to facilitate benchmarking endeavours across various degree programs. The emphasis of the benchmarks for this study is assess the undergraduate courses offered at the Department of Geography in these two universities in order to measure the quality objectives of the program, examine the weakness and strength of the department as well as examine how the department as leverage on the human resources available at their disposal to achieve their goals. Experts have listed eight areas that shape good academic programs in arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences: how the program feels, what students learn, their growth , the subject taught, the teachers, the resources, the help from administration, and how they are checked and recognised (Dunn et al., 2010)

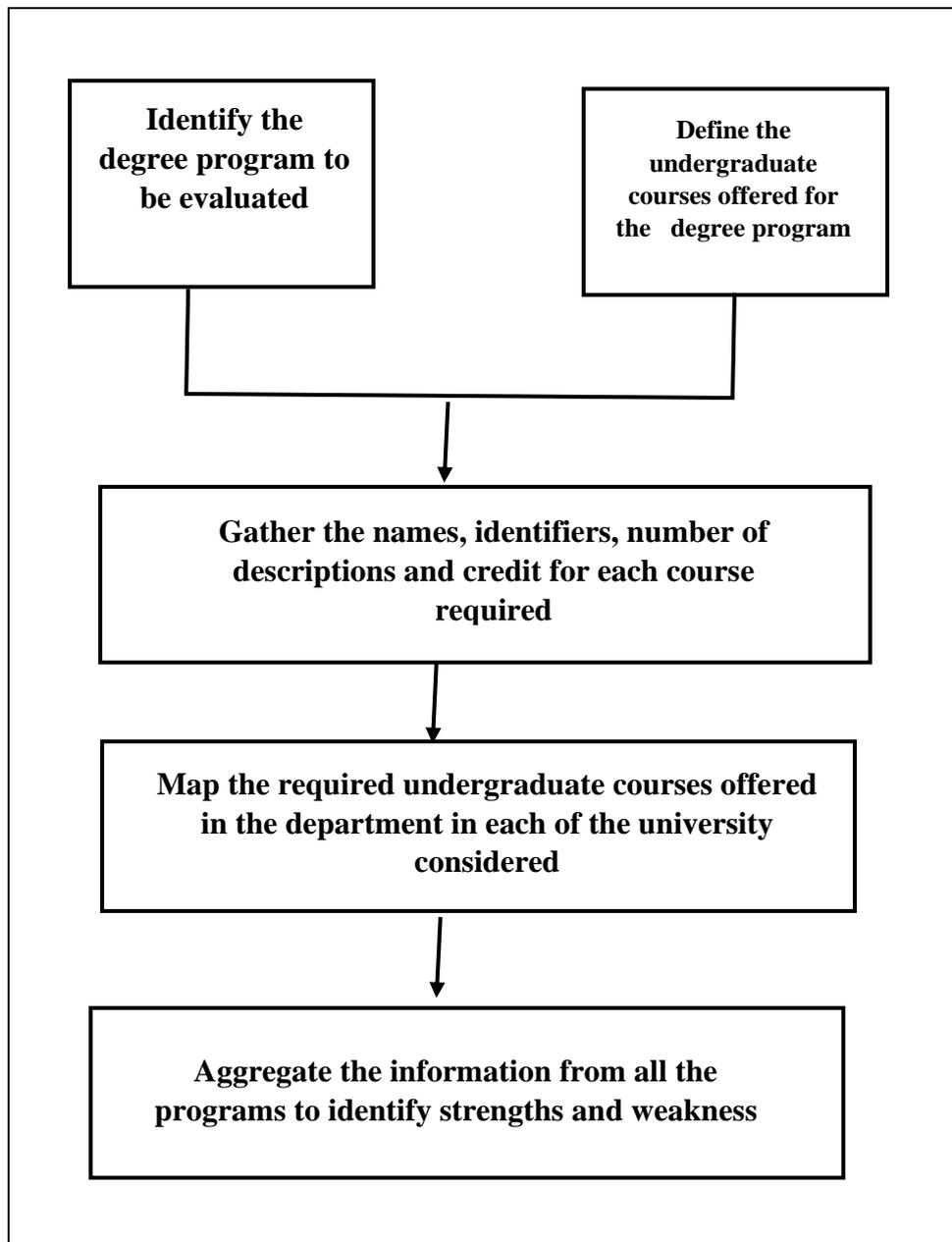


Figure 1 Bench study Approach

Source: (Raoufi et al., 2018) with slight modification

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

In a comparative study between Unilorin and UM, the structure and requirements of their Geography undergraduate programs were analysed. At Unilorin, the Geography program spans 50 courses throughout the undergraduate program, totalling a minimum of 146 credit units (Appendix 1). Among these, 39 courses (110 credit units) are core Geography courses, which implies 78% core geography course accounting for 75% of the credit units while the remaining 11 courses (36 credit units) encompass University, Faculty, and elective courses related to Geography (Table 1). Thus, it implies that students only require only 22% of its courses and 25% of its credit units in university and faculty elective based courses to achieve the minimum graduation requirements.

Table 1: Number of Courses Offered at the Undergraduate level in Different Aspect of Geography, at the Department of Geography and Environmental Management, Unilorin, Nigeria

Level	Number of Human Geography Courses Offered	Number of Physical Geography Courses Offered	Number of Fieldwork Courses Observed	Number of Industrial Training Observed	Number of Techniques in Geography Courses Offered	Number of Mapworks and Cartography Courses Offered	Research Project	Number of Geographic Information System Courses Offered
100	2	3	-	-	-	2		-
200	2	3	1	1	-	1		1
300	4	3	2	1	3	1		1
400	3	2	-		2	-	1	-
Total	11	11	3	2	5	4	1	2

Source: Authors Compilation from Unilorin, Department of Geography and Environmental Management, Students Transcripts, 2022

On the other hand, the UM Geography program consists of minimum of 40 courses, totalling 121 credit units (Appendix 1). Here, 19 courses (66 credit units) are core Geography courses which translate to 48% courses, (55% credit units) while the remaining 21 courses (55 credit units) covers University, faculty and elective Geography -related courses (Table 2). This implies UM demands a higher proportion of its courses and credit units for graduation, 52% and 45% respectively, encompassing both university and faculty-based courses. This discrepancy emphasizes the distinct emphasis placed on core coursework and program structure between the two institutions. Furthermore, the significant variation in core course ratios at both universities emphasises the academic approaches' diversity.

In addition, the core geography courses at the UM uniformly carry 3 credit units, with the exception of projects provided in the first and second semesters, which carry 4 credit units each, and an industrial attachment for 10 credit units. At the Unilorin, core geography courses range from one to three credit units. Courses such as fieldwork and industrial training attachments are 1 credit unit each, repeated thrice and twice, respectively, throughout the program (Table 1). Thus, in tune with the national benchmarking statements for geography that clearly enshrine fieldwork at the heart of geographical effort and expertise (McGuinness & Simm, 2005). Furthermore, the department offers 2-credit courses such as Biogeography, Climatology, and Economic Geography, although the majority of courses are 3 credit units. This disparity in credit unit distribution in fundamental geography courses at both universities demonstrates disparities in curriculum design and assessment. UM's consistent 3-credit

structure for core courses alongside substantial credit allocation for projects and industrial attachments indicates a streamlined emphasis on course weightage. However, Unilorin's varied credit units for core courses and repetitive yet lower-credited fieldwork and industrial training reflect a more diversified approach, potentially impacting the depth of learning and skill acquisition.

Table 2: Number of Related Courses Offered at the Undergraduate level in Different Aspect of Geography, at the Department of Geography, University Malaya, Malaysia

Level	Number of Human Geography Courses Offered	Number of Physical Geography Courses Offered	Number of Fieldwork Courses Observed	Number of Industrial Training Observed	Number of Techniques in Geography courses offered	Number of Mapworks and Cartography Courses Offered	Research Project	Number of Geographic Information System Courses Offered
100	2	2	-	-	1	-		-
200	1	1	1	-	1	-		2
300	2	1		-	1	-	2	1
400	-	-	-	1	-	-		-
Total	5	4	1	1	3	-	2	3

Source: Authors Compilation from Geography Department Office, University Malaya, 2023

The Unilorin prioritizes a foundational understanding of traditional map making and cartography, viewing it as essential groundwork before introducing students to Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This approach is grounded in the belief that proficiency in cartography enhances comprehension and proficiency in utilizing the advanced technology of GIS. In contrast, the curriculum at UM extends beyond conventional cartography, incorporating cutting-edge technologies with a concentration on GIS and remote sensing. This strategic integration is a pillar of the Department of Geography, exposing students to cutting-edge methods for exploiting spatial data in complex analysis and decision-making processes. This innovative programme at the UM fits in perfectly with the global trend towards digital mapping technologies. By immersing students in GIS and remote sensing, they are effectively prepared for a variety of tasks within industries where these technological competencies are becoming increasingly important. The emphasis on these advanced tools positions students to excel in careers that require proficient use of spatial data for informed decision-making, ensuring their readiness for the geospatial industry's evolving terrain.

The findings in Tables 1 and 2 show the substantial structural variations in curriculum design and industrial training time between the Geography undergraduate programmes at the Unilorin and the UM. At Unilorin, the academic curriculum extends courses until the 400 level, with industrial attachments scheduled during semester breaks. In addition, the 6 credit units' research project is carried out in 400Level (Table 1). In contrast, the University of Malaya concludes its courses by the 300 level, with industrial attachments occurring during the 400 level and lasting at least 6 months. The student's research project takes place at 300 levels, split between first and second semesters, carrying a total of 8 credits, with 4 credits allocated per semester. This contrasting approach in program structure indicates a fundamental divergence in educational methodologies. The tables also show the disparity in the number of courses offered between the two institutions. Unilorin appears to offer a significantly higher volume of courses compared to the UM. This raises concerns about the potential impact on student performance, as the excessive workload may lead to heightened stress and potential disengagement. The overload of information might impair critical

thinking, which is vital for applying acquired knowledge to tackle contemporary global challenges. Since, there is a fundamental shift in modern education from mere accumulation of knowledge to practical application. However, the multitude of courses at Unilorin can serve as a catalyst for specialized interest and expertise among students pursuing postgraduate studies in geography. Additionally, the broad curriculum equips students with a versatile skill set, enhancing their preparedness to address practical challenges in the field beyond academia. In addition, Figure 2 also indicates a notable difference in credit unit allocations, highlighting the variations between universities and courses across different levels of study within the Department of Geography.

In essence, these findings shed light on the contrasting educational philosophies and program structures of the Geography undergraduate programs at Unilorin and the UM. The variations in curriculum design and industrial training timing reveal the significance of tailoring educational approaches to meet the evolving demands of a contemporary, globally connected world. The analysis reveals significant variations in credit allocation, which may influence the depth and breadth of knowledge in Geography programmes. While the standardised credits at the UM favour depth, Unilorin's flexible allocation may provide a broader but potentially shallower understanding. This finding prompts further examination into how credit unit distribution affects the depth and breadth of knowledge acquisition and skill development in geography education, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on curriculum design and educational outcomes in higher institutions.

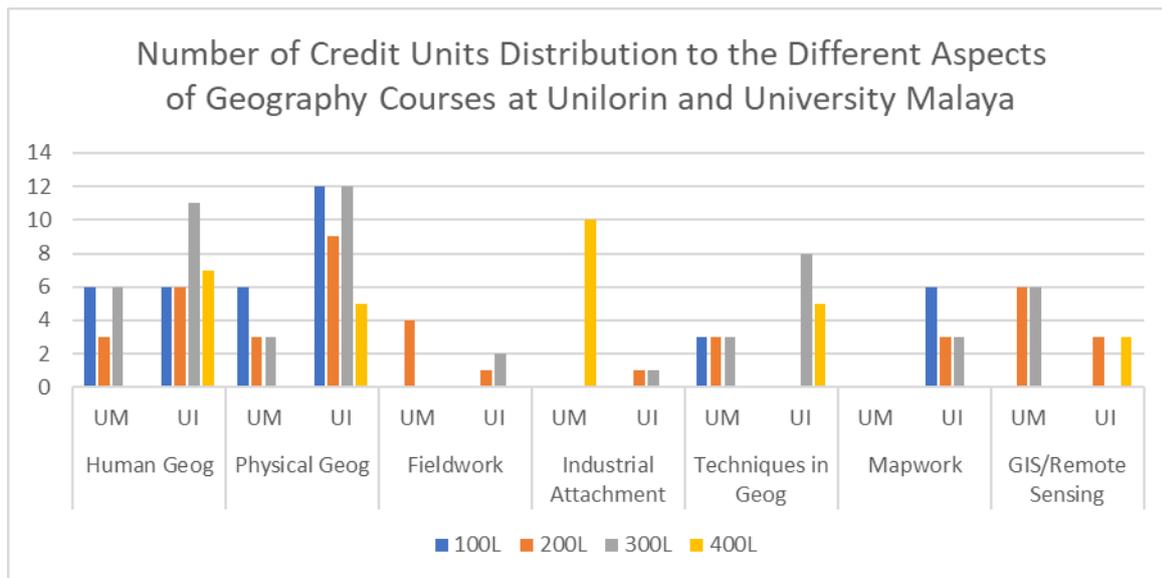


Figure 2: Aspects of Geography Undergraduate Courses Offered Across level in the two Universities

Source: Authors Computation, 2023

A Pearson correlation (r) value of 0.73 in Table 3 suggests a relatively strong positive relationship exist between the Department of Geography, Unilorin and Department of Geography, UM, Malaysia. It indicates that as one aspect of geography courses changes in Unilorin, there tend to be a predictable and strong direction in how the same aspect changes in UM and vice-versa. However, the correlation does not imply causation. A high correlation does not necessarily mean one variable causes the other to change. It is more of association or a shared influence by other underlying factors. The T-Statistics value is 2.62, but the P-Value of 0.98 indicates that the correlation is not statistically significant at the standard level (often

less than 0.05). Despite a strong correlation between the numbers of relevant courses given at the two universities, the lack of statistical significance could indicate that other factors are influencing the number of courses offered at both institutions. This might include differences in curriculum design, educational priorities, or regional/geographical influences on the types of courses offered.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis of Related Courses Offered at the Two Different University

Aspect of Geography	Number of Related Courses at Unilori n (X)	Total Credit Unit at Unilori n	Number of Related Courses at University Malaya (Y)	Total Credit Unit at UM	$x = X-X$	$y = Y-Y$	Xy	x^2	y^2
Human Geography	11	30	5	15	6.125	2.625	16.078	37.516	6.891
Physical Geography	11	29	4	12	6.125	1.625	9.953	37.516	2.641
Fieldwork	3	6	1	3	-1.875	-1.375	2.578	3.516	1.891
Industrial Training	2	6	1	10	-2.875	-1.375	3.953	8.266	1.891
Techniques in Geography	5	15	3	9	0.125	0.625	0.078	0.016	0.391
Mapwork and Cartography	4	12	0	0	-0.875	-2.375	2.078	0.766	5.641
Geographic Information System	2	6	3	9	-2.875	0.625	-1.797	8.266	0.391
Research Project	1	6	2	8	-3.875	-0.375	1.453	15.016	0.141
Total	39	110	19	66	00	00	34.374	110.878	19.878
Pearson Correlation (r)			0.73						
T – Statistics			2.62						
Df			6						
P-Value			0.98						

Source: Authors Computation, 2023

CONCLUSION

The Unilorin in Nigeria and the UM in Malaysia both provide extensive undergraduate Geography programmes with distinct strengths. They both incorporate fieldwork, laboratory procedures, and industrial training as practical and research component in their programme. The structured approach and specialisation possibilities at the Unilorin make it excellent for students seeking a systematic and concentrated study in certain subfields of geography such as climatology, environmental management, and economic geography, among others. Students are encouraged to pursue their interest through specialisation electives. Both Institutions leverage technology strategically, though their implementation differs. Unilorin utilises a dedicated courseware platform to streamline lecture delivery and condense course content. In contrast, UM employs a more comprehensive platform called spectrum that integrates a full-featured Learning Management System (LMS).

Balancing Strengths and Addressing Gaps in the Department of Geography, University of Ilorin, Nigeria and University of Malaya, Malaysia

1. The Department of Geography and Environmental Management at the Unilorin, boasts a higher number of teaching and research personnel compared to the Department of Geography, UM. These robust human resources base allows Unilorin to cover a broader spectrum of geographical sub-disciplines.
2. The Department of Geography and Environmental Management at Unilorin have few of its staff below the rank of a Senior Lecturer in order to ensure a balanced academic structure and succession continuity which gives room for mentorship by the Senior academics . However, the Department of Geography, UM there is no academic staff below the rank of a Senior Lecturer.
3. The Department of Geography and Environmental Management at Unilorin should consider adopting a more proactive approach by regularly reviewing its curriculum. The UM's Department of Geography provides an excellent example, as it conducts curriculum reviews every three years. This practice ensures that the curriculum stays abreast of industry demands, thereby enhancing the employability of graduates in the labour market and ultimately preparing students for successful and relevant careers.
4. The Department of Geography at the Unilorin should consider fostering a culture that grants students the opportunity and privilege to assess their lecturers, akin to the practice at the Department of Geography, UM. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to improve the functionality of the Unilorn's computer-based interface known as 'courseware'. These include the need for regular updates and effective utilization of the university's digital courseware, as outdated materials often limit the platform's instructional impact. Additionally, inconsistent internet connectivity poses significant obstacles to students' access to online learning resources and course materials. The situation is further compounded by frequent electricity interruptions, which disrupt both teaching and learning activities, thereby reducing the overall efficiency of academic engagement and digital integration within the institution.

It should be revamped to facilitate meaningful student-lecturer interactions, drawing inspiration from the successful model at the University of Malaya known as Spectrum. This enhancement will not only empower students to provide valuable feedback on their learning experiences but also promote a more dynamic and engaging educational environment

5. The Department of Geography at the Unilorin should provide opportunities for industry specialists to share their knowledge by adding practical insights into the curriculum. This initiative would provide students with hands-on experiences and expose them to the real-world demands of the industries they are likely to encounter after graduation. By engaging professionals from relevant fields as educators on a contract basis, the department can bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application, ensuring that students are well-prepared for the challenges they will face in their future careers.
6. The Department of Geography at the Unilorin should prioritize the enhancement of its Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing components, recognizing their integral role in the future of geography. Strengthening these aspects will not only align the department with emerging trends but also equip students with essential skills crucial for the evolving landscape of geographic studies. By investing in advanced technologies and curriculum development in GIS and remote sensing, the department can better prepare its students for the contemporary demands and opportunities within the field of geography

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APPENDIX 1

Undergraduate Study Plan at Department of Geography in University of Ilorin, Nigeria and University of Malaya, Malaysia

Department of Geography and Environmental Management University of Ilorin Undergraduate Study Plan

Table 4: 100 - Level Courses at Unilorin Geography Department

Level	Components	1 st Semester			2 nd Semester			
		Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	
100	University Courses	GNS 111	Use of English I	2	GNS 112	Use of English II	2	
	Faculty Courses							
	Departmental Core Courses	GPE 121	Introduction to Environmental System I	3	GPE 122	Introduction to Environmental Systems II	3	
		GPE 131	Introduction to Human Geography I	3	GPE 132	Introduction to Man-Environment Interaction	3	
		GPE 141	Nigeria Environment	3	GPE 194	Introduction to Cartography	3	
		GPE 193	Introduction to Map work	3	GPE 196	Introduction to Environmental Management	3	
Specialization Elective Courses	Choose 2 courses			4	Choose 1 course		2	
Total Credit					18			16

Source: Unilorin, Department of Geography, Students Transcripts, 2022

Table 5: 200 - Level Courses at Unilorin Geography Department

Level	Components	1 st Semester			2 nd Semester			
		Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	
200	University Courses	GNS 211	Philosophy Logic and Nigerian Culture	2	GNS 212	Introduction to Social Sciences and Citizenship Education	2	
		CSC 227	Introduction to Computer	2				
	Faculty Courses	SOC 217	Introduction to Social Statistics	2	ECN 216	Introduction to Statistics for Social Sciences II	2	
	Departmental Core Courses	GPE 221	Environmental Science	3	GPE 222	Principles of Geomorphology and Soil Geography	3	
		GPE 223	Principles of Climatology and Biogeography	3	GPE 232	Man- Environment Interaction	3	
		GPE 231	Spatial Organization	3	GPE 296	Geographic Information System	3	
		GPE 293	Surveying and Map Analysis	3	GPE 298	Industrial Training Attachment	1	
		GPE 299	Local Field Work	1				
	Specialization Elective Courses	Choose 1 Course			2	Choose 1 course		2
	Total Credit					21		

Source: Unilorin, Department of Geography, Students Transcripts, 2022

Table 6: 300 - Level Courses at Unilorin Geography Department

Level	Components	1 st Semester			2 nd Semester		
		Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	Course Code	Course	Credit Unit
300	University Courses	GNS 311	History and Philosophy of Science	2	GNS 312	Digital Skill Acquisition	1
		GSE 301	Graduate Self Employment	3			
	Faculty Courses	GPE 301	Computer Appreciation in the Social Sciences	3			
	Departmental Core Courses	GPE 311	Geographical Thought	3	GPE 322	Geomorphology	2
		GPE 321	Climatology	2	GPE 326	Biogeography	2
		GPE 331	Population Geography	3	GPE 336	Economic Geography	2
		GPE 391	Field work and Laboratory Techniques	1	GPE 344	Geography of Africa	2
		GPE 393	Fieldwork	1	GPE 346	Location Theory	3
		GPE 395	Cartography	3	GPE 392	Data Analysis and Computer Appreciation	2
		GPE 399	Transport Geography	3	GPE 396	Philosophy and Methodology	3
				GPE 398	Industrial Training Attachment	1	
Specialization Elective Courses				Choose 1 course		3	
Total Credit				24			21

Source: Unilorin, Department of Geography, Students Transcripts, 2022

Table 7: 400 - Level Courses at Unilorin Geography Department

Level	Components	1 st Semester			2 nd Semester			
		Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	
400	Departmental Core Courses	GPE 441	Environmental Impact Assessment	2	GPE 426	Environmental and Development in Nigeria	3	
		GPE 443	Developing World	2	GPE 428	Population, Health and Environment	3	
		GPE 491	Advance Quantitative Techniques	3	GPE 436	Environment Planning		
		GPE 499	Project	6	GPE 444	The Developed World	2	
					GPE 492	Geographic Information system and Environmental Management	3	
	Specialization Elective Courses	Chose 1 course		3	Choose 1 course		3	
Total Credit					16			14
Total Credit Amount		146						

Source: Unilorin, Department of Geography, Students Transcripts, 2022

Department of Geography, University of Malaya, Malaysia Undergraduate Study Plan

Table 8: 100 Level Courses at Geography Department, University of Malaya

Level	Components	1 st Semester			2 nd Semester			
		Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	
100	University Courses	GIG 1012	Philosophy of Current Issues	2	GIG 1013	Appreciation of Ethics and Civilization/ Basic Malay language	2	
			English Communication/ Foreign Language I	2		English Communication/ Foreign Language II	2	
						Co-curricular	2	
	Faculty Courses				AIX 1005	Community Building , Social action and Innovation	2	
	Departmental Core Courses	AIB 1001	Physical Geography: Processes and Form	3	AIB 1007	Analytical Method in Geography	3	
		AIB 1002	Human Geography: Pattern and Processes	3	AIB 1012	Study the Climate	3	
		AIB 1004	Economic Geography	3				
	University Elective Courses	Students Attribute Improvement Course 1		2	Students Attribute Improvement Course 2		2	
	Total Credit				15			16

Source: Geography Department Office, University Malaya, 2023

Table 9: 200 Level Courses at Geography Department, University of Malaya

Level	Components	1 st Semester			2 nd Semester			
		Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	
200	University Courses				GIG 1003	The Basic of Entrepreneurial Culture	2	
	Faculty Courses	AIX 2007	Digital Humanities	2				
	Departmental Core Courses	AIB 2001	Systems Approach in Physical Geography	3	AIB 2008	Remote Sensing	3	
		AIB 2002	Geographic Information System	3	AIB 2016	Geographic Statistical Methods	3	
		AIB 2015	Population Geography and Demographics	3	AIB 2009	Human-Environment Interaction in the Field	4	
	Specialization Elective Courses	Choose 3 courses			9	Choose 2 courses		6
	University Elective Courses	Students Attribute Improvement Course 3			2	Students Attribute Improvement Course 4		2
Total Credit					22			20

Source: Geography Department Office, University Malaya, 2023

Table 10: 300 Level Courses at Geography Department, University of Malaya

Level	Components	1 st Semester			2 nd Semester		
		Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	Course Code	Course	Credit Unit
300	Departmental Core Courses	AIB 3024	Research Project	4	AIB 3024	Research Project	4
		AIB 3011	Application and Implementation of Geographic Information System	3	AIB 3018	Analysis of Location and Space	3
		AIB 3015	Qualitative Method	3	AIB 3020	Social Geography	3
	AIB 3021				Urban Dynamics	3	
	Specialization Elective Courses	Choose 3 courses		9	Choose 2 courses		6
Total Credit				19			19

Source: Geography Department Office, University Malaya, 2023

Table 11: 400 Level Courses at Geography Department, University of Malaya

Level	Components	1 st Semester			2 nd Semester		
		Course Code	Course	Credit Unit	Course Code	Course	Credit Unit
400	Departmental Core Courses	AIB 4001	Industrial Training	10			
Total Credit				10			
Total credit Amount		121					

Source: Geography Department Office, University Malaya, 2023