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## 5 TIPS TO MAKE BEST USE OF RANKINGS

### РЕЙТИНГТЕРДІ ТИІМДІ ПАЙДАЛАНУ ҮШІН 5 КЕҢЕС

### 5 СОВЕТОВ ПО ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЮ РЕЙТИНГА

**ABSTRACT.** As a result of the proliferation and increase in the number of higher education institutions that undertake serious responsibilities such as education, research and community service, both nationally and globally, the interest in the quality and performance of universities has increased, and therefore systems that rank them according to certain indicators have emerged. These systems, which provide important data and results to university candidates, their families and other stakeholders of higher education, are followed with interest today and can affect the policy development processes of universities. However, there are important points to consider when using these rankings and their findings. This article lists some recommendations for more effective benefits from ranking systems.

**KEY WORDS:** *higher education, university rankings, indicators, system rankings, quality.*

**АННОТАЦИЯ.** В результате распространения и увеличения числа высших учебных заведений, которые берут на себя серьезные обязательства, такие как образование, научные исследования и общественные работы, как на национальном, так и на глобальном уровне, возрос интерес к качеству и деятельности университетов. Поэтому появились системы, которые ранжируют вузы по определенным показателям. Рейтинговые системы предоставляют важные данные и результаты абитуриентам университетов, их семьям и другим стейкхолдерам высшего образования. Сегодня рейтинги с интересом отслеживаются обществом и влияют на процессы разработки политики университетов. Однако есть важные моменты, которые следует учитывать при использовании рейтингов и их результатов. В этой статье перечислены некоторые рекомендации для получения более эффективных преимуществ от систем ранжирования.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** *высшее образование, рейтинги вузов, показатели, системные рейтинги, качество.*

**АҢДАТПА.** Ұлттық және жаһандық деңгейде білім беру, зерттеу және қоғамға қызмет көрсету тәрізді маңызды жауапкершіліктерді мойнына алатын жоғары оқу орындары санының артуы нәтижесінде университеттердің сапасы мен жұмысына деген қызығушылық артты. Осыған орай, ЖОО-ды белгілі бір көрсеткіштер бойынша дәрежесін анықтайтын рейтинг жүйесі пайда болды. Үміткерлерге, олардың отбасыларына және жоғары білімнің басқа да мүдделі тұлғаларына маңызды деректер мен нәтижелер беретін бұл жүйелер бүгінде қызығушылықпен бақыланады және университеттердің саяси даму процестеріне әсер ету мүмкіндігі жоғары саналады. Дегенмен, осы рейтингтерді және олардың нәтижелерін пайдалану кезінде ескеру қажет маңызды жайттар бар. Бұл мақалада рейтингтік жүйелерін тиімдірек пайдалану үшін маңызды ұсыныстар беріледі.

**ТҮЙІН СӨЗДЕР:** *жоғары білім беру, университет рейтингтері, көрсеткіштер, жүйелік рейтингтер, сана.*

**INTRODUCTION.** Today, expectations from higher education institutions, which are one of the oldest organizations in the history of humanity, which equip individuals with knowledge, skills and expertise in a way that will be beneficial for both themselves and the society they live in, and which are responsible for the discovery and sharing of new information, have increased considerably and as a result have become centres of attraction. Universities are expected to work in accordance with their purposes of existence and to share what they do with different stakeholders of the

society, and if successful, this will provide them with more resources and power. Universities have to expand the boundaries of their fields of study, be autonomous, on the other hand, they have to prove to the society what they are doing and why they are doing, and be accountable. In this context, the intense competition process that has emerged with the rapid spread of the concepts of quality and performance and the increase in the demand for universities has revealed the need for systems that will meet the information needs about these universities and make necessary evaluations.

Therefore, ranking and comparison of universities by considering various qualifications has become extremely common and popular all over the world. This interest in university rankings dating back to the 1800s has resulted in the development of various ranking systems by the news media, university research laboratories, professional societies, government agencies and non-governmental organizations worldwide [1]. These systems of higher education evaluation take place in the form of comparing the quality and success of universities with some indicators and ranking them according to some performance criteria. Ranking results, which are publicly announced, play an important role in making students and their families choose among higher education institutions [2], and they also help higher education institutions attract successful students and lecturers, increase their productivity, track, evaluate and improve their national and international positions over the years. In addition, ranking systems are an important evaluation tool used by academics, administrators and politicians. There are many types of these systems, which are described as a "wake-up call" for higher education [3]. These rankings can be regional, subject-specific or national as well as global. Despite their wide usage and popularity, there are things about which the users of these systems need to be careful. This article provides recommendations for using ranking systems and their findings more efficiently.

1. Be aware of what the rankings of higher education systems tell us. A quality higher education system is a vital requirement for improvements in living standards. Moreover, in our globalized world, a quality higher education system with well-developed international connections facilitates the INTRODUCTION of new ideas through the movement of students and researchers across national borders and promotes trade and other types of relations with foreign countries [4]. The rationale for ranking national higher education systems is that what is important for a nation's economic and cultural development is not just research-intensive universities, but the entire higher education system as a whole. Different higher education institutions in countries are expected to contribute to such rankings in different ways to achieve the overall national objectives. Thus, there is no single university ranking model in these systems [5]. Today, in addition to individual university rankings, some higher education systems rankings are also carried out (U21 Ranking of National

Higher Education Systems, QS System Strength Rankings). The results of such rankings have the potential to make important contributions to the determination of national higher education policies, decision-making and internationalization. These systems, which collect data with main indicators such as resources, environment, connectivity, output, system, access, flagship institution and economic context on a national scale and rank the higher education systems of the countries with predetermined methodologies dealing with the higher education system holistically and providing feedback to the countries for internationalization and global competition. Such rankings will present important findings to investors who are at the decision stage and to prospective students who plan to study in different countries regarding higher education in target countries. In addition, improvements and investments to be made in the context of criteria in the higher education systems at the national level will contribute to the development of universities in the whole country and as a result, to increase the individual visibility of universities in rankings indirectly. It is important that the results of these ranking systems are closely monitored by universities and their administrators, and that their views and expectations are communicated to national policy makers. It should not be forgotten that one variable that determines the position of universities in the international rankings is "national higher education investments and policies".

2. In addition to the composite results of the rankings, give importance to their sub-criteria. Unlike U-Multirank or CYD Ranking, most ranking systems today publish composite ranking results. This method, which is very popular as it provides a simple and easy-to-use comparison opportunity based on combined figures, may result in not focusing on the sub-indicators used in the ranking systems of universities. For this reason, in addition to reading the composite overall result, universities should also give importance to the sub performance indicators that make up this result and evaluate the results obtained in these separate indicators together with their rationale. In this way, the specific areas that need improvement will be revealed and university policy makers will focus on these areas. In addition, stakeholders using the ranking results also need to focus on these kind of data. Such composite values, which often ignore the mission differentiation of higher education institutions, might present an incomplete picture to the stakeholders. Therefore, it

would be beneficial for the stakeholders to consider the performances of the universities also in the sub-dimensions, in particular the university mission they attach importance to. For example, a prospective undergraduate student and his/her parents may give more importance to the teaching criterion in the sub-dimensions. Or similarly, a candidate researching universities for graduate study might prioritize the research performance of universities. This way, although the targeted university is not in a very high position in the rankings, it might be able to meet the specific expectations of the candidate student in one or more indicators that constitute the overall ranking result and could be preferred as a result.

3. Pay attention also to national ranking results. Like international rankings, national rankings are an important part of the world higher education system. These ranking systems are more comprehensive in terms of criteria and indicators and have a longer history than global rankings. International rankings provide information about the general status and position of universities at the global level. However, these rankings generally use a limited number of criteria and indicators due to the difficulties posed by collecting internationally valid, reliable and cross-country comparable data. In a study conducted on the subject [6], researchers reached important CONCLUSIONS regarding national systems. According to the study, national rankings tend to include more indicators that focus primarily on educational and institutional parameters compared with global systems that focus mainly on research performance and have fewer indicators. The ease of collecting more detailed data at the national level is also a factor in this. URAP Ranking, TUBITAK, UniAr Rankings in Turkey, IAAR Ranking in Kazakhstan, Bulgarian University Ranking System (Bulgaria), Maclean's University Rankings (Canada), NIRF University Ranking (India), Perspektywy University Ranking (Poland), The CYD Ranking (Spain), Complete University Guide (UK), Washington Monthly National Universities Ranking (USA) along with many other national rankings in other countries have the potential to present details that may be overlooked at the international level. For example, UniAr Rankings provide the results of satisfaction surveys for cities and universities to assist university candidates and their parents in their choices. University administrations can also use such ranking findings to make decisions about dimensions that international systems do not

address.

4. Make sure you take into consideration the limitations regarding teaching and learning. In the evaluations on the ranking systems, it is seen that the research mission of higher education institutions is prioritized more than the others. Research efficiency is considered to be as the most prestigious and the most reliable and easy to collect data indicator. Therefore, the vast majority of the most successful young universities, whether public or private, do not appear in rankings that measure high-quality research output. This is because most young universities are local institutions focused solely on educating students. Contrary to the sensitivity applied to research, attempts by universities to measure the quality of teaching and learning often use representative and proxy indicators that have a very indirect relationship to teaching and learning quality. However, it should be noted that quality is not one-sided. It is a multidimensional process and journey. Therefore, it is of great importance to develop and strengthen our universities in other fields and dimensions that are not represented well in the rankings while benefiting from the results of such rankings and monitoring our positions developmentally over the years. The fact that the education dimension is not adequately represented in international rankings should not distract universities from this mission. It should be remembered that all aspects and missions of education, research and society in higher education institutions are very important and they must be included in university policies. It would be appropriate for students who will choose a university to look at the results of different evaluation tools in addition to the ranking results related to the education quality of the university they target.

5. Benefit from different quality assurance systems besides rankings. Although they mirror higher education institutions, offer opportunities for benchmarking, and prompt universities to review their policies, most university rankings cannot explain the characteristics and complexity of the entire higher education system due to their limited number of indicators and narrow scope. Currently, there are no universally accepted indicators for measuring the quality of higher education and universities among ranking systems. Another criticism levelled at the rankings is that higher education institutions often focus on their position in the rankings and neglect the improvement and

other quality processes. While determining the policies of higher education institutions and general higher education systems and developing the vision, findings and results obtained from rankings can of course be used. However, these findings should not be used as a mere data source. In addition to these, other quality tools should also be used. These can be external evaluation processes such as accreditation as well as evaluations, feedback and opinions of students, academics and employers. Besides, quality culture should certainly be established in higher education institutions to embrace all faculty and students.

**CONCLUSION.** While pursuing quality, to some extent it is beneficial to make use of the knowledge and experience created by ranking systems that guide the strategies in higher education and reveal the strengths and improvement aspects of universities. Also, as one of the transparency and accountability instruments, rankings provide international visibility and global opportunities for higher education institutions, set new goals in the institutional context and strengthen internationalization. One of the most effective ways to reduce the influence of context and allow for the meaningful use of rankings is to use them to monitor the performance of a unit - program or institution - over time, rather than comparing different units at a given moment. Such use of indicators for medium to long-term observation will help determine the development trends in question. In addition, the main aim of

universities and related systems should not be to be at the top of these rankings and to allocate all their resources in this direction. Such an approach can distract institutions from their existential goals and make universities alike. In addition to conducting research, universities should also provide quality education and service to the community. The assignment of all policies according to rankings would make such responsibilities of universities less visible. Similarly, ranking systems should develop measures to cover all the missions of the university among their criteria and indicators, and they should also be able to offer different weightings and ranking groups in a way that takes into account the mission differentiation, instead of evaluating all higher education institutions with the same criteria. Today, it is difficult for higher education institutions that cannot provide services with new methods, stay up-to-date, prepare students for necessary changes, and do not develop their research potential [7]. In this context, it is of great importance for universities to maintain their continuous development and conduct quality processes. Users of ranking results, on the other hand, should be aware of the different ranking systems and learn in detail about the methods and approaches of rankings. This attitude will result in much more benefit from ranking results.

For more detailed evaluation of ranking systems, you can refer to my PhD dissertation which will be ready in a few months.

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