

программы и квалификации более прозрачными, способствовать признанию квалификаций. Естественно, любое высшее учебное заведение, стремящееся достигнуть более высокой конкурентоспособности и высокого рейтинга в системе высшего образования той или иной страны, региона и мира, должно предусмотреть возможности, предоставляемые такой системой. Она может быть применима ко всем типам учебных программ, независимо от уровня (на университетской базе или без отрыва от производства), полного или неполного курса обучения, видов обучения (формального и неформального) на протяжении всей жизни в т.ч. непрерывного. Более того такая конструкция позволяет сформировать продвинутое, отвечающие международным стандартам *Квалификационные рамки для высшего образования* с учетом национальных классификаторов/стандартов.⁶ Во многих случаях – это основное требование, как для аккредитации учебных программ вузов, так и самих вузов за рубежом. В современном мире кредитно-модульная система становится важным фактором растущего глобального измерения высшего образования.

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RANKINGS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The current Paper has been included as project material in Tempus (IV) Project 516682: “Institute of Strategic Management of Universities” (ISMU).

РЕЙТИНГ В ВЫСШЕМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ

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Статья включает материалы проекта Темпус IV «Институт стратегического управления университетов»/ISMU.

OLIV TA'LIM TIZIMDA REYTING

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Maqolada Tempus IV “Universitetlar strategik menejmenti (ISMU)” loyihasi doirasida tayyorlangan materiallar berilgan.

⁶ Background report: A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, 2005.
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

Introduction. Quality in higher education

Quality, understood as the achievement of academic excellence, has always been an intrinsic concept in higher education (HE) since the foundation of universities (Neave, 1994; Westerheijden and al. 2007).

However, since the 80's and 90's two factors have changed the concept of quality. On the one hand, society's requirements for higher education have increased and diversified. Traditionally, universities were assigned the functions of education, training and research, but since the 80's-90's their functions also include the promotion of the social, economic and cultural development of local communities. That is why families, business, governments and society have increased their expectations about universities (Bricall, 2008). As a result, in terms of higher education quality, there are now more criteria to consider and a bigger number of stakeholders to satisfy. In short, complexity has increased.

Consequently, the traditional definition of quality as (A) academic excellence is completed with additional definitions and parameters:

B.- Fitness for purpose, where the purpose is to make higher education institutions (HEIs) more sensitive to social demands.

C.- Accountability to management and to the general public based on a set of performance indicators (van Vught&Westerheijden, 1994).

D.- Value for money, or efficiency, to do more and better with less resources (Harvey y Stensaker, 2008).

E.- Internationalization and the ability of HEIs to attract talent in a global context.

Therefore, we can say that there are as many definitions of quality as stakeholder categories and functions attributed to higher education institutions by these stakeholders. We deal with a highly polyvalent and extremely elusive term. In fact, there is no consensus in literature about what is quality in HE, but there is consensus regarding the difficulty of its definition.

Rankings

In this context of lack of consensus on what is quality in HE and how to measure it, different rankings appear as another mechanism of quality measurement and comparison between institutions. They provide a simple picture of the quality of an institution expressed in a single figure, while other mechanisms manifest higher complexity. In this sense, they answer to consumer behavior, who seeks quick and easy information (Dill and Soo, 2005).

However, they offer a new perspective. They are perceived as a manifestation of **the global competition** to attract talent, in which HEIs are involved internationally and in this sense, they are also seen as a measure of world-class excellence (Hazelkorn, 2008).

But the important feature is that they emphasize another aspect of quality:

F.-Prestige.

University rankings have become very popular among the general public. In the last decade, the systematic use of rankings has become common. Eleven of the 18

most popular rankings, included in Usher and Savino report (2007), were created after 2000.

Nature of rankings

Among the definitions of ranking found in literature, Usher and Savino's definition (2007) seems to be the most inclusive: "University rankings are lists of institutions classified comparatively according to a common set of indicators, in descending order. Usually they are presented in form of a league table".

As for the **intended recipients**, there is a stream of researchers who claim that the rankings serve **students** as consumers, helping them to choose which institution to attend for their education (Dill &Soo, 2005, Cheng and Liu, 2007; Federkeil, 2008; Buela-Casal, 2007) or to change specialty or university (Federkeil, 2008)

Since education is increasingly important for the future and may represent an expensive decision, students and their families seek the information that might help them make the best choice of institution or academic program (Dill &Soo, 2005).

Hazelkorn (2008) identifies four categories of students: undergraduate, graduate, national and international. Each category is interested in a specific kind of ranking. According to this theory, undergraduate students primarily consult the national rankings because they seek a nearby university. Undergraduate international students represent a small percentage that consult international rankings and these rankings are not their main decision-making drivers. Their decisions are based on consultation with other students and family connections. National postgraduate students consult the rankings, but they are more interested in the quality of their chosen specialization and the overall rankings do not provide this information. International postgraduate students seem to be more interested in the overall rankings, which they use to select the institution, often within a preselected country. In short, it seems that most students use the rankings only as an orientation but not as the determinant factor. They represent a determinant factor only for those students who aspire to a prestigious diploma that will open the doors to an elite labor market.

Politicians are also interested in the rankings as a means of quality assurance in order to maintain academic standards (Dill &Soo, 2005). They consider rankings as a measure of the economic strength and aspirations of their nation in the context of the knowledge economy.

Governments are wary of confessing to what extent the rankings guide their decisions, but they state that they consult them as indicators of international competitiveness and performance and thus they indirectly help to guide policy (Hazelkorn, 2007).

Universities use them to set goals measuring their level of performance in relation to certain indicators (Hazelkorn,op.cit).

External stakeholders generally use rankings to make decisions on funding, sponsorship and recruitment. **Alumni and companies** use rankings as an indicator of the value of their relationships with HEIs and the potential return on investment of these relationships (Hazelkorn, op.cit).

Employers can use them to recruit their staff from the top-ranked institutions (Hazelkorn, op cit.).

Academics use rankings to reinforce their own prestige and status (Hazelkorn, op. Cit.).

Regarding their **purpose**, most authors agree that they **provide information to HE consumers** (Dill &Soo, 2005; Buela-Casal, 2007) who seek quick and easy information (Usher and Savino, 2006). In this sense, they share characteristics with other consumer guides (Usher and Savino, 2007).

Many authors emphasize their role for **accountability** (Dill and Soo 2005; Rozman and Marhl, 2008; Salmi and Saroyan, 2007). Other authors state that they contribute to **transparency**, since comparisons must be based on verifiable and public data (Fedekeril, 2008, Usher and Savino, 2006, Cheng and Liu, 2007).

Federkeil (op cit.) and Tambi et al. (2008) focus on the rankings in terms of quality assurance and show that rankings offer a variety of data about institutions, which can be used for internal analysis by the institution or for other types of benchmarking.

Methodology of rankings. Reliability

The reliability of rankings and therefore the methodology used to establish the ratings has been the subject of the most number of publications. It is the area of biggest concern that has spurred the most controversy.

TYPES OF RANKINGS

A specific ranking can be a combination of several of these types.

TYPE OF RANKING	CHARACTERISTICS
Institutional	Covers the institution as a whole
Subinstitutional	Compares specific units of the institution with similar units of other institutions: by disciplines, programs, specialties, areas.
Specific	Includes a specific aspect of the institution, such as connectivity, capacity of group integration, accessibility for people with reduced mobility.
Mini League tables	Sometimes a ranking classifies only those universities that share certain characteristics, creating a mini ranking.
Synthetic or Unidimensional Index	Single overall score for the entire institution
Multidimensional	Several scores for the same institution
Individual HEIs	Each institution is rated individually
Grouped HEIs	Rating by groups of institutions: top, intermediate, basic.

National	All or almost all universities in a country are compared among themselves.
International	HEIs of more than one country are rated. They can cover a whole geographic region.
Global	Rankings that include institutions around the world.

Table 2. Original table based on data from Westerheijden and al. (2008) and Usher and Savino (2007).

How the ranking works

Sources of information

One of the controversial aspects of the rankings is the primary data source. Even if further processing of the information is scientific and reproducible, if the original source is not reliable, the ranking loses its value.

As we observed in the analysis of the rankings, many classification systems are three-stage processes (Usher and Savino, 2007): The first stage is the collection of data on different indicators; the second is the scoring of data for each indicator; and the third is the weighting of scores and their compilation in a synthetic index.

Regarding the data collection method, there are three basic sources of primary data, according to Usher and Savino (. Op cit.):

- Polls/consultations among various stakeholders
- Third independent parties. Very often government agencies collect and publish data on HEIs in their jurisdiction that can be used as an objective standard to compare institutions.
- Universities themselves. The most complete and detailed data sources are the universities themselves and therefore, they are potential sources of information.

Each source has advantages and disadvantages and experts praise some and diminish others.

Usher and Savino (op.cit.) think that surveys or consultations may constitute a scientific method, if data is collected with rigor. They can measure intangibles and also the added value offered by a university to its students, ie, what a student “gets” after years in college (Dill &Soo, 2005).

Martin Ince (2007) defends the survey methodology. Federkeil (2008a, 2008b) is also a defender of student, professor and specialist surveys.

Other authors question surveys and consultations because of their subjectiveness (Taylor & Braddock, 2007; Salmi and Saroyan, 2007, Salmi and Malee, 2009). They claim that an opinion poll, by nature, is a subjective assessment tool and therefore it is unreliable for a rigorous ranking. They define this source and method as prestige-oriented compared to other sources such as Thomson or Scopus databases, considered more objective and reliable to rate performance. Cheng and Liu (2007) express the same idea, thus justifying the fact that rankings are based mainly on bibliometric criteria.

Taylor and Braddock (op.cit.) state that a justified report on all the elements that constitute the university excellence would be appropriate. Williams (2008) suggests that if opinion polls are used, the validity of the results depends largely on the respondent's knowledge.

Consultations with official third parties are considered by Usher and Savino (2007) as "the gold standard" to obtain comparative data, since they are rigorous and fair. However, the disadvantage of this kind of data is that very often it is not collected to be used primarily in a ranking, but for administrative and financial purposes. Consequently, its use can lead to choose a set of indicators suited to the available data and not the optimal set of indicators that would contribute to a more adequate idea of quality.

Sometimes universities themselves become the primary data sources; when relevant data cannot be obtained through surveys or third parties, the ranking elaborators will frequently go directly to universities. The advantage is access to certain information that could hardly be obtained otherwise. The big disadvantage of the universities as an information source is that they might not provide rigorous data, since they have a clear incentive to present the data that most benefits them.

Criteria and indicators

Usually rankings do not provide theoretical or empirical justification for their selection of indicators nor the weighting used to compute the scores and positions in the ranking. The choice of a set of criteria, indicators and weighting involves a certain degree of subjectivity (Taylor & Braddock, 2007). The key question underlying any assessment of the credibility of a ranking and its methodology is who decides what is most important to determine that an institution is better than another (Salmi and Maleen, 2009).

When analysing global rankings, the first observation to be made is that **research** is the main scoring factor.

Taylor and Braddock (op.cit.) claim that a ranking that measures excellence should also contemplate the quality of teaching as an essential function of a university. They also state that it is easier to measure the quality of teaching with a national ranking, rather than with an international one. This is confirmed by an analysis performed by Usher and Savino (op.cit.), Dill and Soo (op.cit.) and van Dyke (op.cit.).

Cheng & Liu (2007) state that it would be impossible to compare the quality of teaching at international level because of the substantial differences between universities, the variety of HE systems and the technical difficulties in obtaining comparable data.

The **internationalization** of the institution is another common criterion used in the rankings. It measures the ability to attract talent, both the best students and the best professors at an international level.

Employability of graduates is another criterion used by some rankings (Thiaud and Lesueur, 2009). In relation to employability, the criterion for the quality of continuous education or lifelong learning appears in some rankings, but it is never

included in global rankings for the same reasons that affect the quality of teaching. Yet many authors claim the need to consider this criterion (Marginson, 2008) due to the impact of continuous education in the **development of local communities**.

European U-Multirank ranking included the criteria related to knowledge transfer, applied research and innovation.

Indicators

All the rankings work by comparing institutions based on a set of indicators. The number of indicators can vary significantly in different rankings.

The choice of a set of indicators and the weighting given to each indicator generates huge differences in the final result. It would not be an exaggeration to say that if the publishers of a ranking announce that their ranking determines the best institutions, it is really the publishers themselves who determine which are the best institutions via their choice of indicators.

Some rankings even evolve every year and change the set of indicators used to rank universities. The problem is that different indicators generate different results that have nothing to do with the university's improvement or worsening during the year. For some universities the consequences can be dramatic and it proves the importance of methodological changes (Salmi and Malee, 2009).

Dill & Soo (2005) established four categories of indicators: input, process, output and prestige. Input indicators play the most important role in the rankings, especially at the international or global level. Process and output indicators are less numerous and have less influence (Federkeil, 2008) because the information is unavailable or is not comparable.

Input Indicators

The most common are the following:

- Admission score to the university - used to measure the quality of students.
- Qualifications of professors, their awards and distinctions; ability to raise funds for research - used to measure the quality of professors of the university.
- The student / teacher ratio - used to measure the quality of teaching
- The origin of the students - used to measure internationalization, inclusiveness or gender equality
- Infrastructure and budget available to the institution per student - used to measure the quality of both teaching and research.

Process Indicators

They refer to the key processes of HEIs. The major unsolved issue of the rankings are the indicators that measure the process of teaching and learning. Some rankings simply do not measure this process; others measure it mainly with input and output indicators, which in many cases are linked to research.

Dill & Soo (2005) claim that the rankings should be able to measure the “added value”, that is the value that a student takes from the university or the difference

between a student's knowledge and skills when entering and leaving the university. This measurement would be directly attributable to the HEI.

As for the national rankings, this issue is relatively well resolved, since the quality agencies, governments and third parties in general tend to publish data and statistics that may be used by rankings. Here we see the same problem as in the case of the primary data sources, namely, that the data is not published with a ranking as its primary purpose and therefore is often not suitable for comparative purposes.

Results Indicators (outputs and outcomes)

- In global rankings research results are the most frequently used output indicator.
- Indicators related to satisfaction are also common.
- The main output indicator is the enrolled students/graduates ratio.
- The ratio of employability, although data on this indicator is not always available.
- Another less common indicator is the salary of recent graduates.

Berlin Principles

In this context, UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES) and the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington DC created in 2004 the International Expert Group (IREG) in order to structure numerous conceptual and methodological problems of rankings.

At its meeting in 2006 the Expert Group established a set of good principles for the internal quality of the rankings: "Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions". Since 2006 the rankings are ruled by these principles as a universally accepted and agreed model of quality assurance that facilitates the analysis of the rankings, which can since be compared with a standard of quality.

Impact of rankings on the policy and strategy of the universities

Governments. Governments want to have world-class universities (Altbach 2004). In the current knowledge economy, it seems essential for every country to have world-class universities and global rankings seem to rank the best HEIs and the most prestigious knowledge producers. As a result, many governments around the world are reviewing the structure and organization of their HE systems (Hazelkorn, 2008).

The rankings influence the HEIs' thinking and strategic plans. Many institutions in the world use the rankings to identify a vision and an ambition and to establish ultimate indicators. These aspirations are compared to the institution's current performance in order to identify strengths and weaknesses as well as strategic objectives, to establish performance and progress indicators and to allocate necessary resources. In this sense, the rankings provide the justification and the basis for significant changes.

The rankings influence the HEIs' reorganization or restructuring. Fusion of compatible disciplines taught by different departments, merging of whole

institutions usually located in the same region or town and the opposite process of unbundling undergraduate and graduate studies through creation of semi-autonomous research institutes, centers of excellence or Graduate schools. In countries where English is not the native language, special units are being created that use English as a working language. These changes may be enhanced by the institution itself or by the government who promotes initiatives that compel different HEIs to work together.

The rankings also influence the priorities, including those related to the curriculum, e.g. increasing the number of Master's programs taught in English and the number of teachers who teach in that language in order to attract international students and professors. But the biggest shifts are detected in the rebalancing between teaching and research, with an increase of the latter. And the most controversial initiative is the allocation of more resources to those areas that are most likely to increase the score in the rankings.

In other cases there are **perverse effects** stated by Hazelkorn (2008), Westerheijden, Federkeil, et al. (2008) and Salmi and Saroyan (2007). A University may adapt its strategy to the rankings' indicators, but these changes may match neither its mission nor the goals that it must achieve in order to contribute to the development of local community. The potential **diversity decrease** may cause the exclusion of those HEIs that do not conform to the standardization imposed by the rankings.

Many HEIs have one strong concern: if they gain positions nationwide, adapting their missions to the needs of their local communities, they lose them in the international level. And the opposite, if they gain positions standardizing their strategies and adapting them to the rankings, they risk **losing innovation capacity**. (Marginson, 2008).

Conclusions

The rankings of higher education institutions are being created not only by private entities related to media, but also by professional associations and governments. The university rankings play an increasingly crucial role as an information tool for consumers at a local, national and international level, even though they are sometimes subject to criticism. The growing public interest in university rankings is also reflected in the research and number of publications that have covered this issue in recent years.

There is no doubt that accepting and empowering a tool like a ranking, which directly impacts the prestige and influence of a university, implies considerable risks. Therefore, most authors agree on the importance of research on rankings, either to position oneself in them, to defend oneself from them or to improve them.

Currently there are plenty of university rankings of different nature and diverse methodology. The perfect ranking should encourage universities to improve their performance, but universities in turn should avoid one of the main risks of using this tool, which is to treat the rankings as a goal, rather than as a means to improve quality.

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