

# Chapter 25

## Understanding World University Ranking: Methodologies, Addressing Challenges, and Successful Strategies for Universities

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### ABSTRACT

*World university rankings are critical for prospective students, faculty members, and policymakers evaluating HEIs based on various ranking indicators. The author adopted a mixed-methods study design where a narrative review was carried out to describe three ranking methodologies (i.e., THE, QS, and ARWU), including HEIs' challenges in the ranking process. The identified challenges include limited research funding, scarcity of top-tier faculty, balancing quantity & quality of research publications, publishing in high-impact journals, building international research networks, enhancing academic and employer reputations, maintaining optimal student-faculty ratios, and acquiring necessary data for rankings. In addition, an autoethnographic approach was adopted to identify strategies to improve universities' ranking performance, with a focus on enhancing research outputs, expanding international research networks, improving teaching and learning environments, strengthening reputation and addressing operational challenges centered around managing ranking data.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Global university rankings serve as a critical metric for prospective students, faculty members, and policymakers and evaluate higher education institutions (HEIs) based on a variety of ranking indicators, with each indicator having varying levels of importance. HEIs value global rankings as crucial indicators of their academic reputation, influencing their ability to attract students, faculty, and funding (Pakkan et al., 2021). As such, these rankings have become increasingly important for students, teachers, and decision-makers. Students prioritize criteria like resources, infrastructure, and international orientation, believing they reflect the quality of education and research (Calitz et al., 2021). However, faculty perceptions of rankings are complex. Even though faculty believe rankings enhance institutions' reputation

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and attract resources and opportunities (Pérez Esparrells et al., 2021), they have notable concerns about the limited scope of rankings, which often neglect the quality of teaching and other important aspects of academic work (Simpson, 2011). From an institutional perspective, rankings play an important role in assessing the effectiveness and competitiveness of universities, influencing their global reputation and appeal to students and faculty members (Amunga & Korir, 2023). Yet, the emergence of global ranking systems has sparked a rivalry for prestige between academic institutions seeking to improve their positions to increase their reputation and visibility (Wolf & Jenkins, 2018). The expansion of ranking systems has also created a competitive landscape in which HEIs realize the importance of rankings and strive to achieve and maintain top rankings, often adapting their approaches and functions to suit the criteria of each ranking body.

### **Importance of Rankings for Higher Education Institutions**

Securing a higher-ranking position significantly boosts a university's reputation, global image, and international recognition, attracting prospective students, faculty, investors, and industry partners (Hazelkorn, 2015). In particular, rankings are a crucial tool for students in assessing the quality of educational offerings, global reach, and research prospects of academic institutions (Sharma et al., 2020). They provide a transparent and objective metric that helps students compare institutions and make informed decisions (Dugerdil et al., 2022). Additionally, renowned academics and researchers are more likely to join higher-ranking institutions because their competencies are better aligned. The competitive spirit created by rankings encourages institutions to improve their performance, attracting top talent (Nassa & Arora, 2021). In addition, the prestige associated with high-ranking institutions is an important signal of quality and offers better career opportunities for early career faculty researchers (González-Sauri & Rossello, 2023). Secondly, ranking affects student enrollment as it influences the reputation and excellence of the university, thereby attracting international students seeking admission to prestigious academic institutions (Soysal et al, 2022). In particular, rankings serve as an important source of information for students and their parents, helping them make informed decisions about their educational goals. These rankings are often used to assess the quality of educational offerings, level of global engagement and opportunities for research and professional training, as well as other financial aspects such as affordability and available scholarships, all of which are crucial factors in the student decision-making process (Suthathip Suanmali, 2023; Soysal et al, 2022). Furthermore, HEIs that promote inclusivity and maintain a multicultural environment, as required by various ranking bodies, improve their competitive edge and overall well-being. This type of environment fosters a sense of acceptance and ease in inter-ethnic engagements, which is critical to attracting, satisfying, and retaining students (Shaheed & Kiang, 2021).

Third, despite their limited scope compared to research-based indicators, the ranking panels use a variety of indicators to assess the quality of education offered by universities. These indicators encompass faculty credentials/qualifications, student-to-faculty ratios, and students' perceptions of the quality of teaching and learning (Calitz et al., 2021). Assessment of teaching excellence is often measured indirectly through various metrics, such as graduation rates, student employability, employer reputation, and alumni achievements, all of which indicate the effectiveness of the educational process (Pérez Rasetti, 2018). These indicators can help universities better allocate resources and improve their performance across various dimensions of educational quality (Artyukhov, 2021).

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