

Guest Editorial

Ranking of Institutions of Higher Education

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Ranking of higher education institutions (HEI) is a convenient and easily understandable method of evaluation and assessment. An ordinal number assigned to an HEI by a ranking system represents its comparative position in a list of ranked institutions based on marks obtained by it on various performance parameters or indicators. Ranking of HEIs have been lauded and criticised simultaneously. University rankings are often criticised for methodology used, choice of indicators and weightage assigned to them, focus on science, technology and English language publications, assessment of institutions as whole (instead of individual program) and the practice of assigning an ordinal number or a rank to represent quality of an HEI. At the same time, university rankings are lauded for serving as information tools for students, researchers, funding agencies, policy makers and other stakeholders as well as for instilling a competitive spirit amongst institutions to perform better in ranking systems. However, most experts agree that rankings are here to stay in the education market place. As such, although ranking system cannot measure quality of education and research in absolute term, it does serve as indicator to various aspects of quality in higher education, which, in turn, can be used by institutions themselves for improving their performance on these parameters. While universities are welcomed to use rankings for improving their performance, ranking systems should not dictate university policy, either at a national or institutional level, but should be used as a source of information for guiding policies that should be decided according to the needs of the university's own community, traditions, market niche, national role and so on¹.

Realizing the fact that a national ranking of Indian universities can play an important role in improving performance and quality of academic institutions, National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) was released by the Minister for Education (Formerly MHRD), Government of India in September 2015, which was used for rankings HEIs in India as India Rankings from 2016 onwards. The India Rankings offers a wealth of unitary data, mostly in public domain, either through its website, or through web sites of participating institutions that are required mandatorily to host the data provided by them to NIRF for public scrutiny. Out of eight articles included in this special issue on "Ranking of HEIs", six articles are on different aspects of India Rankings.

The first article of the special issue entitled "Revisiting Ranking of Academic Institutions: An Overview" provides an overview of ranking systems including its historical evolution, use of rankings by different stakeholders, ranking indicators, merits and demerits of different ranking systems and performance of Indian universities in past one decade. The article briefly describes nine global ranking systems and compares them based on weightage assigned to different categories of indicators and source of data used for ranking of HEIs. Lastly, article provides statistical inter-correlation amongst various ranking systems as well as intra-correlation within ranking systems at interval of five and ten years.

The second article of the special issue are entitled "Five Years of India Rankings (NIRF) and its Impact on Performance Parameters of Engineering Institutions in India. Pt.1. Teaching, Learning and Resources, Graduation Outcome, Outreach and Inclusivity, and Perception. Part 1 of the article analyses data on five years of India Rankings to assess its impact on performance parameters of institutions of higher education on four broad categories of parameters mentioned in the subtitle of the article. The analysis of data on performance parameters mentioned above provides an interesting insight and reveals that participating institutions are making strenuous effort to improve their performance on various parameters or sub-parameters identified under NIRF with an aim to improve their ranking as well as for claiming their eligibility for research funds, scholarships and other amenities.

The third article of the special issue entitled "Impact of Expanding Window from Three Years to Five Years for Research Performance Parameter in India Rankings", focuses on the study of research performance parameters of India Rankings while expanding window of data considered from three-years to five-years. Based on analyses, the article recommends five years of window instead of three years as is being practiced now.

The fourth article of the special issue entitled "The five years of India Rankings (2016–2020): An Evolutionary Study" traces evolution of India Rankings, its life cycle, framework, parameters and sub-parameters.

The fifth article of the special issue entitled "Ranking of Indian Research-Intensive Higher Education Institutions using Multiple Ranking Methodologies: A Correlation Analysis",

compares ranking of same set of Indian HEIs using four different methodologies, namely:

- Overall (NIRF);
- Overall (Research and Professional Practices);
- Research Ranking Methodology; a new methodology evolved for ranking of research-intensive institutions under NIRF;
- IFQ2A Index.

The article also conducts correlation analyses on the resultant four sets of rankings.

The sixth article of the special issue entitled “Research productivity of Sri Lankan universities in international ranking systems and the mandatory contribution of librarians”, analyses research productivity of Sri Lankan State universities in reputed international university ranking systems during 2015-2020. Research-related scores of the Sri Lankan state universities from 2015-2020 in four ranking systems, i.e. THE, QS, SIR, and URAP are analysed.

The seventh article of the special issue entitled “Quest for Ranking Excellence: Impact Study of Research Metrics”, qualitative-quantitative analysis using different parameters of research output to explain the importance of various metrics.

The eighth and last article of the special issue entitled “Reframing the debate on Quality versus Quantity in research assessment”, is a short communication that advocates for use of single composite indicator that reasonably senses both quality and quantity of performance of HEIs. It suggests improvement in quality measurement to obtain the rankings more rationally with finer tunings.

I am sure that the articles published in this special issue on Rankings of HEIs based on large set of data submitted by the participating institutions as well as data sourced from third-parties would add value to the existing collections of articles on India Rankings as well as global rankings.

REFERENCE

1. Taylor, Paul & Braddock, Richard. International university ranking systems and the idea of university excellence. *J. High. Educ. Policy Manag.*, 2007, 29(3), 245-260.