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Global university rankings - a comparative analysis

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Abstract

Over the last years, the global university rankings appeared in order to measure the performances of higher education institutions from all over the world after some pre-established indicators. The rankings make it possible to evaluate complex information according to various combinations of various factors. In this paper, I described and analyzed three of the most known, influential and widely observed international university rankings, in order to identify the similarities and especially the differences between them regarding the methodology, criteria and weights, top universities, research and educational process or the global outlook, using the public and available information from their web-sites. Also, I want to see the impact of these rankings and how they influence the stakeholders, which are winners of each of these global university rankings, from what countries or regions. Global university rankings tend to focus more on the research area and less on teaching and learning environment. After the results of these rankings and others, all universities whether small or large, can improve practices that will make them stronger. For the contemporary society it is also important for a university to be able to innovate and help industry and businesses with consultancy and innovations.

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1. Introduction

According to the dictionary, a **ranking** represents a relationship between a set of items such that, for any two items, the first is either “ranked higher than”, “ranked lower than” or “ranked equal to” the second. In mathematics, this is known as a weak order or total preorder of objects. It is not necessarily a total order of objects because two different objects can have the same ranking.

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In the current globalized economy, global university rankings are used to measure their global competitiveness, being simultaneously criticised and lauded. Most of the university rankings have been conducted by magazines, newspapers, websites, governments, or academics. The international rankings cover at this moment only a small percentage of approx. 2-3% of the total of universities.

Why using rankings in higher education institutions? There are several reasons, such as:

- ✚ The rapid globalization of higher education,
- ✚ The internationalization of higher education,
- ✚ Approx. 4 mil. students enrolled in higher education outside their country of origin and continually increasing (7 million estimated students by 2020)
- ✚ To encourage institutions to participate in broader national and international discussions.
- ✚ To foster collaboration, such as research partnerships, student and faculty exchange programmes

The **key pillars** for a world university are, regardless the specific of any university rankings, are:

- Teaching
- Research
- Knowledge transfer
- Global outlook

2. Research methodology

The **methodology** for this comparative analysis contains:

- ✓ Selection of university rankings
- ✓ Ranking Criteria and Weights for each selected international ranking
- ✓ Definition of Indicators
- ✓ Data Sources
- ✓ Top 20 best universities – similitudes and differences between the selected rankings
- ✓ Comparative analysis, regarding the ranking criteria and weights, top universities, statistics by regions and by countries.

3. The 2014 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)

The Academic Ranking for World Universities (ARWU) is the first world known university ranking. It was compiled by the Center for World-Class Universities at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, starting from 2003 and funded by the Chinese government and it is also known as Shanghai University Ranking. Now, this ranking is maintained by the Shanghai Ranking Consultancy. This ranking uses six objective indicators to rank universities from all over the world:

- 1) Staff awards (winning Nobel Prizes or Fields medals) – 20%;
- 2) Highly cited researchers – 20%;
- 3) Papers published in Nature and Science – 20%
- 4) Papers indexed in Science Index-Expanded and Social Science Citation Index – 20%;
- 5) Quality of education (Alumni winning Nobel Prizes or Fields medals) – 10%;
- 6) Per capita Performance of an institution – 10%.

Some criticisms of ARWU is that the methodology is focused towards the natural sciences and English language science journals. Also, in the opinion of some researchers (Armstrong and Sperry, 1994) the ARWU is known for "relying solely on research indicators" and it doesn't measure "the quality of teaching or the quality of humanities" and "the ranking is heavily weighted toward institutions whose faculty or alumni have won Nobel Prizes.

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