

Do we Really need Rankings!

In my previous article "pertinence of university rankings" I have explicitly discussed about the importance of academic rankings for different stakeholders around the globe. I have already discussed that rankings predominantly covers teaching, research, reputation, employability, community development, internationalization and partnership.

Now, in this article I would like to discuss about the need of universities' ranking, and at this moment let's keep in mind that any ranking is eventually an arbitrary arrangement of indicators aimed at labeling what it is being pre-defined by the ranker as a "good" educational institution.

Let's take teaching, where various reputed university ranking provider's measure quality with research productivity either by the number and impact of their publications in peer-reviewed journals. This proxy of quality adversely impacts the institutions that place greater emphasis on teaching. Besides, funding place another hurdle for teaching oriented universities because internal and external funding may tend to favor academic programs or research units that are more inclined to get involved in the dynamics of researching and publishing. As far as research is concern ranking tends to impose a one-side of the coin of an institution i.e. research oriented university- which is not necessarily the most responsive to the varied needs of the communities where these institutions are located.

Another aspect of rankings tends to measure is "reputation" by gathering opinions thru set questionnaires from faculty members or field experts or researchers or employees of the university having an official email. It is expected that, people overwhelmingly tend to favor certain institutions regardless of the quality of their academic programs just because the fame or recognition that precedes them. As such, other institutions that may not be famous, but are providing meaningful contributions to the society by producing the graduates required for their local and regional economy, couldn't make it to good ranking. Likewise, the appropriateness of measuring the reputation of a higher education institution by its alumni's job profile attract criticism. Thus, it is highly arguable that ranking should also develop criteria for job-satisfaction, work-life-balance and equal opportunity beside employability.

Taking the above criticism into account, it would be naive to assume that rankings will lose their importance in the future. However, while recognizing that they are here to stay, we must be aware of their many limitations, their intended and unintended biases, and their convenience-based usage by institutions and even by national governments of some countries.

Eventually, we may argue that in the absence of sound and comparable information, rankings are the best option for determining the quality of colleges and universities.