



Improving the quality of universities using University rankings: A case study of University of Kashmir

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Abstract

This article discusses the relevance of rankings for improving the individual performance of universities. After analyzing the most relevant indicators used by one such ranking - National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), the article suggests possible solutions to be considered by University of Kashmir if it aims to improve its position and the quality of the processes in the university. At the same time, the article also focuses on the role of academic leaders in improving university rankings.

Keywords: rankings, education, university of Kashmir, academic leaders

Introduction

Worldwide academic ranking systems contribute to an institutional visibility that extends beyond the boundaries of the local communities where they carry out their activities (Agachi *et al.*, 2007) ^[1]. Today we have several ranking systems (Sadlak and Liu, 2007) ^[1]. Rankings and league tables of universities serve many purposes. Rankings of universities are intended to describe the quality of the universities by measuring how well they satisfy the selected criteria that are considered important for achieving their main goals, as determined by the mission statements of these institutions. Universities, in particular those in small and developing countries, can benefit from the currently active processes of different university rankings. University rankings are not necessarily meant to impose competition, but to improve the university system and advise academic leaders how to develop in the region. Some of the reputed globally recognized ranking methods are Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World University (ARWU), QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education World University Rankings etc. In ARWU, the rankings are based on quality of education, quality of faculty, research output and per capita performance while in QS World University rankings the focus is on public perception, faculty student ratio, citation per faculty, International faculty, International students. Similarly in Times Higher Education World University Rankings the ranking criteria is based on International outlook, research, staff to student ratio, Ph.D. /UG Degrees Awarded, Environment, Research Impact-Citations and Industry Income. Similarly in India, National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) outlines a methodology to rank institutions across India. It was approved by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) on 29th September 2015. The different parameters on which Universities are ranked under NIRF framework include Teaching, Learning & Resources (TLR); Research and Professional Practice (RP); Graduation Outcomes (GO); Outreach and Inclusivity (OI) and Perception (PR). The list of all criteria taken into account is given below:

Teaching, learning & resources

- Student Strength including Doctoral Students
- Faculty-student ratio with emphasis on permanent faculty (FSR)
- Combined metric for Faculty with PhD (or equivalent) and Experience (FQE)
- Total Budget and Its Utilisation: (CBTU)

Research and Professional Practice

- Combined metric for Publications (PU)
- Combined metric for Quality of Publications (QP)
- IPR and Patents: Filed, Published, Granted and Licensed (IPR)
- Footprint of Projects and Professional Practice And Executive Development Programs (FPPP)

Graduation Outcomes

- Combined % for Placement, Higher Studies, and Entrepreneurship (GPHE)
- Metric for University Examinations: GUE
- Median Salary
- Metric for Graduating Students Admitted Into Top Universities (GTOP)
- Metric for Number of Ph.D. Students Graduated GPHD

Outreach and Inclusivity

- Percent Students from other states/countries (Region Diversity RD)
- Percentage of Women (WF) + (WS) + (WA)
- Economically and Socially Challenged Students (ESCS)
- Facilities for Physically Challenged Students (PCS)

Perception

- Peer Perception: Employers and Research Investors (PREMP)
- Peer Perception: Academics (PRACD)
- Public Perception (PRPUB)
- Competitiveness (PRCMP)

The University of Kashmir

The present study was conducted on University of Kashmir (J&K). The University of Jammu and Kashmir was founded in the year 1948. In the year 1969 it was bifurcated into two full-fledged Universities: University of Kashmir at Srinagar and University of Jammu at Jammu. The University of Kashmir is situated at Hazratbal in Srinagar, Kashmir. The University offers programmes in all the major faculties; Arts, Business & Management Studies, Education, Law, Applied Sciences & Technology, Biological Sciences, Physical & Material Sciences, Social Sciences, Medicine, Dentistry, Engineering, Oriental Learning and Music & Fine Arts. Besides it is also having four functional satellite campuses at Leh, Kargil, Baramulla and Anantnag. It has been constantly introducing innovative/ new programmes to cater to the needs and demands of the students and the society. Over the years, the University has marked towards excellence in its programmes and activities. In 2018, University of Kashmir participated in NIRF framework of MHRD and figured at rank 47 in India. The objective of the present paper is to critically analyse the different parameters on which University of Kashmir was ranked and to provide suggestions on the basis of NIRF results for improving the quality of University of Kashmir.

Method

The study is based on secondary sources. The critical analysis of University of Kashmir has been done on the basis of different parameters laid down in the methodology of NIRF framework as presented on their website in 2018. The methodology of NIRF is shown in table 1:

Table 1: Summary of Ranking Parameters and Weightages- 2018

S. No	Parameter	Marks	Weightage
1.	Teaching, Learning & Resources	100	0.30
2.	Research and Professional Practice	100	0.30
3.	Graduation Outcomes	100	0.20
4.	Outreach and Inclusivity	100	0.10
5.	Perception	100	0.10

Results and Discussion

The NIRF was launched in 2015 with the main objective of assessing the ranks of educational institutions of India. Rankings of 2018 were categorized into different categories depending on the various disciplines taught and type of higher educational institution. The participating educational institutions were divided into various categories viz. engineering, management, universities list, colleges list, pharmacy and overall list. The University of Kashmir figured at rank 47, thus ranking among the top 50 universities of India with the point Score of 43.96 in the ranking system. University of Jammu stood at 51 with the total point score of 43.19. This achievement by University of Kashmir is really significant despite the obstacles faced by institutions of higher learning in J&K due to various unfavorable conditions.

The different parameters on which University of Kashmir was assessed included Teaching, Learning & Resources (TLR); Research and Professional Practice (RP); Graduation Outcomes (GO); Outreach and Inclusivity (OI) and Perception (PR).

In 2018, IISc Bangalore once again topped in the overall list with the points in different parameters as:

Table 2: Score of IISc Bangalore (2018)

TLR (100)	RPC (100)	GO (100)	OI (100)	Perception (100)
84.54	91.08	75.48	43.70	100.00

On the other hand while comparing University of Kashmir with IISc Bangalore, the result of NIRF rankings 2018 show that University of Kashmir is getting higher score in Graduation Outcomes than IISc Bangalore which is good but other important parameters cannot be ignored.

Table 3: Score of University of Kashmir (2018)

TLR (100)	RPC (100)	GO (100)	OI (100)	Perception (100)
62.39	20.08	77.61	36.99	0.00

On the other hand comparing the score of University of Kashmir which they got in NIRF rankings during 2017 and now in 2018, the score has increased by 14.54 in Teaching, Learning & Resources (TLR), 3.34 in Research and Professional Practice (RPP), 10.66 in Graduation Outcomes (GO), 1.55 in Outreach and Inclusivity (OI) but the score in perception has decreased from 0.10 in 2017 to 0.00 in 2018 which should be a matter of concern for the administrators. Similarly, Jammu University has also improved in its ranking as compared to 2017 rankings of NIRF with the increase of 20.26 points in Teaching, Learning & Resources (TLR), 1.54 in Research and Professional Practice (RPP), and 0.63 in Perception (PR). But the score of Jammu University in 2018 has decreased in parameters of Graduation Outcomes (GO) and Outreach & Inclusivity (OI). Another positive point that has yielded from the rankings is the performance of University of Kashmir in Teaching, Learning & Resources (TLR) parameter. The TLR score of University of Kashmir (62.39) is more than Anna University which has been ranked 4th in the list with the TLR score of 57.31, Jadavpur University (57.08) ranked at 6th, University of Delhi (52.52) ranked at 7th, Calcutta University (45.47) ranked at 14th, BITS Pilani (61.02) ranked at 17th, Panjab University (52.59) ranked at 20th in NIRF rankings of 2018 to name a few. In the research parameter, University of Kashmir is also giving a tough fight to other universities in the race with 778 publications in web of science, 945 publications in scopus with a total of 6821 citations.

The University can be in the top 10 if the score in Perception and Outreach & Inclusivity parameters can be improved. Infact in the 2018 rankings there are only 6 universities having scored 0 in perception parameter including University of Kashmir. University of Kashmir loses out on marks on the perception count. This is due to the various unfavorable conditions prevailing in the valley. Academics and employers consulted by the ranking firms do not perceive J&K institutes to be "research intensive", even though their research papers are published by reputed journals. Quality research is being undertaken in almost every department/centre. Regarding Outreach and Inclusivity University of Kashmir is also lagging behind despite having such centres being established in the campus like UNESCO Madanjeet Institute of Kashmir

Studies (UMIKS). The objective of this centre is to attract the best students from across South Asia to study at the Post-Graduate level, regardless of background or circumstance. On the same pattern, centres can be established and MOUs can be signed, student exchange programmes can be initiated which will have a bearing on OI score of University of Kashmir in the future rankings. University of Kashmir should give fellowships to foreign students/ students from other states who want to study here which will be one of the motivational forces to come here thereby increasing the diversity in the education system. It will be encouraging to see the improved score in the Outreach and Inclusivity (OI) parameter, which will showcase its regional diversity, international outreach as well as its focus on creating a better environment for women, economically and socially challenged as well as the physically challenged students.

Role of academic leaders in improving university rankings

The difference between the top universities of India and J&K Universities also lies in the leadership style adopted by the academic leaders. Why DU, JNU, IISc, IIMs, IITs are considered best? One of the possible reasons is the continuous sustained leadership available to such institutions. The accent is on continuity of leadership. These institutions are fortunate enough to have found persons of high competence and integrity as heads of their institutions and programs, who are also given a high degree of autonomy to implement their vision. Their search and selection process for vice-chancellors, directors and heads have been directed toward identifying visionary attributes of the leader. Many Indian prestigious institutions have declined in stature simply by one wrong choice of the academic leader like not understanding the emotions of their employees working under them which resulted in ineffective decision making. Equally important is the need to avoid periods of uncertainties resulting in vacant positions of leadership. The rapid growth in the number of higher educational institutions and the dearth of suitable persons to head them, along with cumbersome procedures in initiating the selection process, have frequently lead to leadership vacuum for periods ranging from several months to a few years. This situation creates fertile ground for all sorts of mischief to take place dragging the institution down. Such lapses are common in state as well as centrally funded institutions which should be looked into in developing world class universities.

Academic leadership is central to any university. At the same time, world class universities must be effectively managed, and top university leaders should have significant control over strategic decisions. The university's vice-chancellor, deans, and other key leaders have to be chosen for their talent, leadership capacity, and their understanding of emotions and not because of personal connections.

Suggestions

The quality of university education, like other levels of education can be measured through an analysis of: (a) inputs such as teaching and non-teaching staff, curricula, facilities and technologies for teaching and learning arrangements for students' catering and institutional management; and (b) outputs such as tests and examinations. Physical planning in

the universities in many countries does not commensurate with their rate of growth and expansion as more students are enrolled; the academic administrators of universities continue to accommodate them in the existing facilities. This has often led to an over-stretching of such facilities. As a consequence, there is congestion in lecture theatres, workshops, laboratories, and libraries. The required inputs are seriously lacking in most universities. The massive expansion of enrolments without a corresponding increase in the number of teaching staff has meant that the staff to student ratio has risen. The improvement in rankings can be achieved through a variety of measures. Urgent attention should be paid to the establishment and gradual implementation of standards of provision for the full range of inputs to teaching and research. The provision of libraries with the necessary print and non-print resources should be the highest priority, closely followed by supplying laboratories and workshops with consumables and materials needed for equipment maintenance and repair. If the Universities of J&K have to sustain their rankings certain measures are to be taken like:

- We have to stop unplanned expansion of higher education.
- Comprehensive policy is to be laid down.
- Curriculum to be revised.
- We have to develop inspiring and motivating classroom interactions.
- We must apply new changes and innovations.
- Students have to be motivated and teachers to be dedicated.
- Crazy rush for degrees should be stopped.
- The cream of the student community attracted by the foreign countries should be stopped. These students should be provided good incentives in their own land.
- We have to develop professionalism.
- We should not establish colleges and Universities for vote bank and for other non-academic reasons such as caste, community or political patronage.
- Exploitation of students in the name of tuitions should be stopped.
- The Universities and Colleges have to develop will power to curb unhealthy practices.
- Providing facilities to physically handicapped students whether in laboratories, libraries etc.
- Student exchange programmes with world leading universities.
- Signing of MOUs should be practical but not only on paper.
- Creation of more Research Centres.

Conclusion

In this paper, the results of a case study at the University of Kashmir have been presented based on NIRF rankings. The university is developing in accordance with international trends among universities worldwide. Higher education, especially at the university level is of paramount importance for J&K's future. J&K requires both highly trained people and top-quality research in order to be able to formulate the policies, plan the programmes and implement the projects that are essential to economic growth and development of the state. Preparing individuals for positions of responsibility in

government, business, and in professions is a central role of the universities and supporting these individuals in their work with research, advice and consultancy is another equally important role. If all the above parameters are taken care of, the day is not far when we will have higher educational institutions figuring in the top 100 of different world university rankings. We also hope that this ranking will help students to make informed decisions regarding their studies.

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