

Global University Rankings and African Universities

(Sintayehu Kassaye Alemu (PhD fellow, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education, December 2013)(CEPS Webpage done)

The university ranking has been started in the US in 1870. In this year, the US had classified universities on the basis of specialisation. And in 1983 the first nationwide university ranking was published in the United States by US News and World Report. The modern period university ranking has begun in 2003 by the publication of the first results of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking called 'Academic Ranking of World Universities'(ARWU) (Rauhvargers, 2011) The publication has "stirred the fire" and shocked the world and particularly Europe because the top ten ranks were occupied by the UK and US universities. In 2004, as a response to ARWU, Europe inaugurated Times Higher Education Supplement (Times Higher Education, THE). Since this time many other global rankings were formed. (Rauhvargers, 2011)

ARWU considers every university that has any Nobel Laureates, Fields Medalists, Highly Cited Researchers, or papers published in Nature or Science. In addition, universities with significant amount of papers indexed by Science Citation Index-Expanded (SCIE) and Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) are also included. In total, more than 1000 universities are actually ranked and the best 500 are published on the web.(ARWU, 2013)

According to ARWU, the selection criteria are four namely, quality of education, quality of faculty, research output, and percapita performance. Each one of this has 30%, 40%, 20% and 10% points respectively. The indicators are six: (ARWU, 2013)

- Alumni of an institution winning World Nobel Prizes and Field Medals (10%)
- Staff of an institution winning Nobel prizes and Field Medals (20%)
- Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories (20%)
- Papers Published in Nature and Science (20%)
- Paper Indexed in Science Citation Index-Expanded and Social Science Citation Index (20%)
- Per capita academic performance of an institution (10%)

The THE also uses five criteria for its rankings. (THE, 2013)

- Teaching: the learning environment (worth 30% of the overall ranking score)
- Research: volume, income and reputation (30%)
- Citations: research influence (30%)
- Industry income: innovation (2.5%)
- International outlook: staff, students and research (worth 7.5 per cent).

Teaching, carrying a weight of 30%, which is worthy since all global rankings are known to be heavily research-biased. However, the problem lies on the details. The dominant performance indicator (representing 15% of the overall ranking score) used for Teaching results from a survey of worldwide experienced scholars' (about 16,600) perception of the prestige of a particular university in teaching. The reputation of these scholars worldwide seems to be mainly through their research work, hardly through their teaching. In this case, it is clear that these scholars perceive the universities not from the teaching angle but from the research perspectives. To qualify teaching, it requires pedagogical knowledge as well. The other indicators are faculty-student ratio that represents 4.5%, which does give a crude indication of the quality of teaching; the proportion of doctoral degrees awarded as a proportion of bachelor's degrees and as a proportion of faculty, together counting for 8.25%, but it is questionable whether these are indicators of good teaching and learning; and finally, the institutional income per faculty (2.25%), adjusted for purchasing-power parity, aiming to give an indication of the institution's infrastructure and facilities. (THE, 2013) All these are economic matters. Truly, economic situation affects teaching and education, but do not necessarily bring quality.

Research is the second criterion used and it counts 30% of the overall ranking score. Here again, 16,000+ scholars perception predominates the performance indicator (18%) on the university's reputation for research excellence. This means that, the total ranking score of a university is based on the subjective opinion of scholars and their research dominated perception. The other indicators are the institutional research income per faculty (6%) and the number of papers published in quality, peer-reviewed journals per faculty (6%). It should be noted here that any university that publishes less than 200 such papers annually is excluded from the THE Rankings competition, and this has implications for African universities and many other newly established universities. (Mohammedbhai, 2012)

The third criterion is Citations, or knowledge transfer that worths 30% of the total ranking score. The indicator here is the number of citations of a university's publications by scholars. The fourth criterion is International

Outlook represented by the proportion of international students (2.5%) and international faculty (2.5%), and the proportion of the university's research journal publications that have at least one international co-author (2.5%). The last criterion weights 2.5%. It is based on the proportion of income from industry per faculty that the university is able to attract.

These are some of the measurements by which global university rankings are carried out by different ranking organizations. University rankings themselves are intensely debated. Proponents of global university rankings are convinced that rankings improve transparency and offer students the opportunity to make informed choices. On the other hand, critics argue that rankings do not address the various important functions of higher education. The "indicators used in rankings measure distant proxies rather than quality itself, and that rankings have serious biases" (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). The strongest of the biases is that of favouring research in natural sciences and medicine, under-representing engineering and social sciences, and completely or almost ignoring the humanities. Favouring English language publications is often mentioned as a further bias (Rauhvargers, 2011).

From this perspective, the position of African universities, if we take ranking seriously, is astonishing. Only a handful of universities from South Africa appear in the ranking list.

Ranking organization	Ranking year	African University	Rank
THE	2013/14	University of Cape Town	125
		University of Witwatersrand	249
		Stellenbosch University	349
	2012/13	University of Cape Town	113
		University of Witwatersrand	250
		University of Kwazulu-Natal	374
	2011/12	University of Cape Town	103
		University of Witwatersrand	275
		Alexandria University (Egypt)	350
QS World University Ranking	2013	University of Cape Town	145
		University of Witwatersrand	313
		American University in Cairo	348
		Stellenbosch University	387
		University of Pretoria	471-480
	2009	University of Cape Town	146
		University of Witwatersrand	321
	2008	University of Cape Town	179
		University of Witwatersrand	319
		University of Kwazulu-Natal	401-450
ARWU	2013	University of Cape Town	259 (201-300)
		University of Witwatersrand	301-400
		University of Kwazulu-Natal	401-500
	2012	University of Cape Town	258 (201-300)
		University of Witwatersrand	301-400
		University of Kwazulu-Natal	401-500
	2011	University of Cape Town	255 (201-300)
		University of Witwatersrand	301-400
		University of Kwazulu-Natal	401-500
	2010	University of Cape Town	257 (201-300)
University of Witwatersrand		301-400	
University of Kwazulu-Natal		401-500	

The above table clearly shows that University of Cape Town ranking between 100 and 300 and University of Witwatersrand located between 200s and 300s. Other few appear and disappear. The largest portion of the African university does not appear in the ranking list. What does it mean for Africa? What do African Universities think and do about it? These questions require actually more research efforts, however, one can easily make some general observatory analysis on the basis of the existing general situation in Africa.

The different ranking organizations may be due to the application of different criteria, have ranked the same university differently. This issue partly shows the shaky nature of ranking. For instance, Cape Town University has been ranked by the three ranking organizations as follows:

Year	Ranking Organization		
	THE	QS	ARWU
2013/14	125	145	259
2012/13	113	154	258
2011/12	103	156	255

(Source: Compiled from THE, QS, and ARWU)

The above table shows that Cape Town University, for the THE ranking and ARWU, is declining, while it is improving in the QS ranking. This shows that ranking is not objective and free from biases and subjectivities. So, that university ranking should not be taken seriously, but as an opportunity to reconsider internal performances, but not at the expense of national and institutional priorities.

It is easy to observe and analyze that African universities donot have the chance of appearing in the ranking lists of THE Rankings, ARWU or the QS World University Rankings, which equally use criteria with a heavy bias, in one way or another, on teaching, research, publications in international refereed journals and citations.

For one thing, most African universities are recent in their formation and suffer from financial neglect in the 1980s and 1990s due to World Bank's advise of the African leaders to emphasize on basic education. They are struggling against the unequal competition of all aspects of globalization and internationalization. African universities are painfully affected by condition loaden aid programs. As peripheries, they are grappling with issues of curriculum, management, funding, collaboration... African universities have to cope with huge student enrolment with limited financial and physical resources. They are short of academic staff, a large proportion of whom do not have a PhD. Most of them have gone abroad in search of better living and education. Brain drain is a chronic problem in Africa. The African Diaspora serves the ranking position of many universities in the West. Not surprisingly, African universities' research output and performance in postgraduate education are poor and triggered for promotion issues. African universities, unlike most other universities of the world, are not stabilized. They have many tasks to be performed in curriculum design, governance, funding, and enrolment. It is clear that, not only in the ranking race, but also in many other phenomenon of globalization, African universities are playing on an unequal status and play ground.

Tertiary education enrolment in some African countries (1999-2005)

Countries	Percentage increases
Burundi	235%
Ethiopia	265%
Kenya	98%
Lesotho	96%
Mali	75%
Mauritius	122%
Rwanda	365%
Senegal	102%
South Africa	16%
Swaziland	21%
Tanzania	171%
Burkina Faso	182%

(Source: Sintayehu, 2011)

Fundamentally, the financial austerity that has stemmed from increasing unit and the expensiveness of higher education cost has escalated with the growing number of students, staff, programs and institutions, and the world economic situations. These factors are more prevalent and more serious in Sub-Saharan Africa (Johnstone, 2004). These situations do not allow African universities to focus on ranking criteria and indicators, which have been cumulatively well established in the rest of the world and formulated without considering the differentiated contexts under which global universities are working in.

Global university ranking is a matter of economic competition, higher education (historical background and achievements) heritage and biases. Hence, African universities should not take global ranking seriously and invest additional budget from the meagre resources for it. African universities should focus on other important issues of stabilization such as curriculum, quality and governance and others.

Universities are often either flattered or ashamed depending on their current position in the ranking league or the change of position over time. There are forces both inside and outside the university encouraging it to make every effort to improve its position in the rankings or simply be included in the league tables at all costs. African universities should feel ashamed not because of not appearing in the ranking list but if they fail to contribute in

the socio-economic, cultural and political development of the continent. And the encouragements and all the efforts should be triggered towards enabling universities to serve the community of the continent and the world at large.

At the moment, the priority for African universities should be to train skillful and ethical manpower required to alleviate shortage of working force and corruption; to undertake research to solve the many-fold problems Africa is grappling against and to support the development endeavors of the burgeoning industries. For these reasons, the research may not necessarily be through publications in international journals. These tasks and priorities do not fit to the criteria for global rankings. The contemporary aim of African universities and governments should not be global ranking but the assurance of quality geared to solve the many-faceted socio-economic and political problems of the region. They will have their own time in the future to compete for ranking, if ranking is found to be that much important.

References

- ARWU. (2013). Academic Ranking of World Universities.
[http://gse.buffalo.edu/org/IntHigherEdFinance/files/Publications/foundation_papers/\(2004\)_Higher_Education_Finance_and_Accessibility_Tuition_Fees_and_Student_Loans_in_Sub-Saharan_Africa.pdf](http://gse.buffalo.edu/org/IntHigherEdFinance/files/Publications/foundation_papers/(2004)_Higher_Education_Finance_and_Accessibility_Tuition_Fees_and_Student_Loans_in_Sub-Saharan_Africa.pdf) (Accessed, on 7 November 2010)
<http://www.shanghai ranking.com/ARWU-Methodology-2013.html> (Retrieved 06 December 2013)
<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2012-13/world-ranking> (Retrieved on 05 December 2013)
- **Johnstone**, D. Bruce. (2004). *Higher Education Finance and Accessibility: Tuition Fees and Student Loans in Sub-Saharan Africa*.
- Marginson, S., and Wan der Wende, M. (2007). To Rank or To Be Ranked: The Impact of Global Rankings in Higher Education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Vol. 11, No. 3/4, http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/people/staff_pages/ Retrieved 06 December 2013
- Mohammedbhai, Goolam. (2012). Should African Universities be Globally Ranked? On ‘‘The World View’’ <http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/world-view/should-african-universities-be-globally-ranked> accessed on 05 December 2013.
- Rauhvargers, Andrejs. (2011). *Global University Rankings and their Impact*. EUA: European University Association Rankings 2011
- QS.(2013). *World University Rankings*.
- Sintayehu K. (2011). *Analysis of Higher Education Cost Sharing Implementation in Ethiopia*. MA Thesis in higher education, Portugal: Aveiro University
- THE (2013). *Times Higher Education: World University Rankings*.