

RANKINGS IN THE HUNGARIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

© Ildikó PETŐNÉ CSUKA

(Kodolányi János University College, Székesfehérvár, Hungary)

icsuka@bp.kodolanyi.hu

The higher education of the world, together with the Hungarian higher education has quite changed. These changes have increased the claim of interested parties in the higher education to know the higher education institutions which the international and national higher education rankings have been trying to meet. The media have picked up on this public need. In my work I lay emphasis on the analysis of Hungarian institutions' rankings among the national higher education rankings. I assess the criteria and methodology of the comparison.

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'If lots of rankings are published about relative few universities of a small country and each one is prepared with other method, then sooner or later each institution will get a high rank in one of the rankings to which the institution can refer for a long time in its marketing.' (Török, 2006:311)

How much does the 'average consumer' really know about the way rankings are compiled or the extent to which they are accurate? Most consumers also do not stop to think about whether it is appropriate to rank certain items, products, or things. For example, rankings can work well in the product domain as they draw on features intrinsic to the product (e.g. materials used) but do not necessarily work well in other domains. It is difficult to find (easily) measurable indicators in this field as a consequence of the service character, other difficult decision to find the best proportion of the objective and subjective factors, so that to be able to reflect quality of performance of a certain institution, faculty or department.

In the survey of a ranking we suppose that if there is a difference between the scores of two higher education institutions, it comes from the difference of their characteristic features and we hold the main reason is the academic quality, saying if an institution received higher score then it had also higher academic quality. But the different institutions find important other values, respects so also their roles, functions are different. Certain institution can get a top rank in the ranking according to certain respect, but it is not sure that the same should be expected from another institution. Therefore the responsibility for the choice and weighting of the various indicators is high. The choice of these indicators and weights is a value-laden decision and there may be less consensus on the indicators and weights in some areas than in others.

Rankings can influence the decisions of stakeholders of higher education. Such an important decision is:

- 1) from the government agencies: how much money is distributed to the various institutions?
- 2) from the excellent students: which university they apply for?
- 3) from the excellent staff/academics: which university they choose as their place of work?
- 4) from the employers: graduates of which institution they prefer?

The different stakeholders of higher education judge the performance of an institution by other features. Among them the opinion of students is the most different, they regard as important different things. They have different preferences, so rankings can't measure objective quality, they try to reflect the various quality judgements weighted.

None of the rankings is perfect. But what is their aim? The aim of compiling rankings is to make to be seen the differences among institutions for the potential students who want to study further, so that opportunities supplied by institutions can be compared. Three main aims are usually mentioned as compiling rankings:

- comparison of the academic standard of level
- comparison between rates of return of investments into taking a degree
- determining of the competitive market situation of an institution (in the struggle for resources).

The complexity of methodology of the rankings is mostly dependent on for who it is compiled. If the ranking is compiled for the financier then the methodology is generally more complex, it claims much more data to collect according to a lot of kinds of criteria than other rankings which target audience are the students. The methodology of the latter is simply and the market decides which is needed, which will survive. These types of rankings don't rank but only inform. The higher education institutions with mostly public financing meet first the expectations of the financier that is followed by the expectations of the students and by the own prestige viewpoints of the institutions. The rankings that target audience are the most part of stakeholders of the higher education - students, academics, leaders, financiers, etc. - have much higher reputation and are compiled not so often due to their methodology.

Whether does the function of the ranking differ according to that it is national or international ranking and what are their advantage and disadvantage?

The function of the national rankings is the influence of the potential students within the certain country, besides it can play an important role in the distribution of financing resources. Its disadvantage is that the institutions are not ranked in the international competition.

The function of the international rankings is the measurement of the performance of higher education institutions by lots of measure and according to lots of criteria. Disadvantage of this type of ranking is that the big countries having larger higher education institutions have an advantage over smaller institutions of smaller countries in the rank.

There is doubt about the international comparison of the performance of higher education institutions in respect of methodology because of the difference of institutions of various countries. The characteristics of higher education system of a country influence considerably what criteria can be

applied to ranking of higher education institutions, because certain indicators can be misleading in the higher education context of a certain country.

We can distinguish two main types of ranking methods:

- 1) *quantitative* which is based on statistical data and its weakness is that opinions of faculties, researchers and students are not taken into account.
- 2) *qualitative* which is based on subjective opinions. Its disadvantage is: it is not sure that the real performance is reflected because the stakeholders form their subjective opinions about the institutions according to different criteria:
 - ✓ previous published rankings
 - ✓ impact of marketing and
 - ✓ activity of alumni.

What can be the subject of a ranking?

- ❖ faculties
- ❖ level of degree
- ❖ level of education and research
- ❖ quantity indicators
- ❖ effectiveness of education
- ❖ institutions.

Rankings according to the first two criteria are taken for the most reliable, besides the effectiveness is a very important criterion in the UK. Institutions are ranked according to what ratio of the enrolled students and how much time does it take for them to obtain a degree.

International higher education rankings

After the theoretical review look at how the rankings are compiled in the practise and what kind of criteria the international rankings with high reputation use. I relate as follows the history of famous international and national rankings in order of their birth. Because of the extent limit I analyse in my work only the most famous international rankings: the Shanghai Chiao Tung and the Times rankings, their characteristics, indicators and their criticism briefly.

- United States:
 - 1983 - US News & World Report
 - 1988 - Business Week
- United Kingdom:
 - 1990 - The Times
 - 1997 - Gurdian
 - 2003 - Financial Times
- Germany:
 - 1998 - Die Zeit
 - 2001 - Der Spiegel
- China:
 - 2005: Shanghai, Chiao Tung University

The *Shanghai Chiao Tung Ranking* (2005) was compiled at the famous university of Shanghai called Chiao Tung and includes 500 higher education institutions all over the world. It has a simple methodology with fewer claim of data, in consequence of this there are a great number of dead heats. In the top twenty there are only two British and a Japanese university and the others are all from the US.

Indicators of the Shanghai Chiao Tung Ranking are divided into four groups as they are presented in the following table:

Table 1 Indicators of the Shanghai Chiao Tung Ranking

Criteria	Indicator	Weight
Quality of Education	Alumni of institution winning Nobel Prize or Fields medals	10%
Quality of Faculty	Staff of institution winning Nobel Prize or Fields medals	20%
	Highly Cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories	20%
Research Output	Articles published in Nature and Science	20%
	Articles in SCIE, SSCI and AHCI (Arts and Humanities Citation Index)	20%
Size of Institution	Academic Performance with respect to the size of an institution	10%
Total		100%

(Source: *Academic Ranking of World Universities 2005. Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University*)

Criticism of this ranking:

- Individual performance is not equal to institutional performance: it is not sure that the performance of a person can become visible in the performance of an institution.
- Citation indexes are distorted by the cooperation of researchers: they cite each other in many cases.
- Bias towards certain sciences is a great problem. Researchers of domains having more periodical reviews with high impact factor have got advantage.
- The single measure of the institutional performance is the publicational activity. This motivates the educators to research more and to educate fewer. So education will be rather the task of professor assistants.
- Due to the lack of subjective opinions this ranking does not make a difference. It has already occurred that there was the dead heat of 100 institutions in this ranking.

The other famous international ranking, the *Times Ranking* (The Times Higher Education Supplement, 2004) includes the range of 200 higher education institutions. As a consequence of the more sophisticated methodology the distances between positions are bigger than in the other ranking. In the top twenty in 2006 there were five British, a Japanese, a university from Switzerland, one from Singapore, an Australian and a Chinese, the others are from the US. This ranking tries to take into consideration research performance with education performance. The methodology of the Times ranking strives after the balance of objective and subjective measures.

Table 2 Indicators of the Times Ranking

Indicator	Weight
Peer review survey of academics	40%
Survey of 'global employers'	10%
Proportion of academic faculty who are foreign	5%
Proportion of students who are foreign	5%
Staff-student ration	20%
Research citations per head of academic faculty	20%
Total	100%

(Source: *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, November 2004)

The first two indicators measures subjective opinions of international experts (academics and employers). The third and fourth indicators measure the attraction of the institution. The staff-student ration tries to measure the quality of education (commitment to teaching). The last one is the research impact.

Criticism of the Times Ranking:

- The great weight of subjective factor can distort (through the activity of alumni and marketing).
- Staff-student ratio is very dependent on the science.

The conclusion of the above analysed international rankings. These international rankings reflect the prestige of the institutions, and the rank of an institution with high reputation will be higher and higher by publishing of rankings. Analysing the ranks we could see the superiority of American institutions. This kind of institution requires great resources and can maintain only in countries with outstanding economic performance. There was no country from the EU among the top twenty. The main reason of the low rank of South- and Central European institutions: the lower rate of the state finance support for education and research & development.

Hungarian higher education rankings

First in 2002 was published a ranking of Hungarian universities/colleges of economics by the Figyelő. It was a limited survey about "What is the value of economist's degrees? Then in 2005 there was a decisive change: several Hungarian daily and weekly papers published rankings of faculties: *Heti Válasz*, *Világgazdaság*, *Népszabadság*, and *HVG* from 2006. Their methodology were different so their result, the rank order of higher education institutions were also different in consequence of this the

evaluations varied. I examine the methodology of rankings according to their order of time. Because of the extent limit I compare the first rankings published in 2005 and the last ones published in 2008, I analyse whether there was a change in the methodology after that time. The two most known and acknowledged rankings in Hungary are the rankings of *Heti Válasz* and *HVG*.

The ranking of *Heti Válasz* in 2005 included the range of the three most popular degree programmes: business, law and tourism. The range of these rankings widened with newer three degree programmes until 2008: mechanical engineer, computer science and communication. In 2008 ranking of six degree programmes were published. The ranking of *Heti Válasz* is based on the following indicators:

- Admission/application ratio (student selectivity)
- Opinion of employers
- Opinion of personnel consultants
- Number of OTDK place winners
- Student/staff ratio
- Composition of staff (proportion of professors, academics with higher degree)

The first indicator measures the institution how popular is, the second one is analysed according to the opinions of human resources managers. In the third case it is examined whether the personnel consultants employ the graduates of a certain institution with pleasure. The number of OTDK place winners and the student/staff ratio theoretically show the quality of education. The composition of staff show how much experienced teacher with a high degree educates in the institution. Besides the indicators mentioned above, preferences of students and opinions of employers and head-hunters were taken into account.

The range of the indicators didn't change since 2005, the same indicators were used also in 2008. Only the circle of employers were widened in order to cover the all regions of the country, besides multinational employers, the middle- and small employers were drawn into the survey.

Before analysing the indicators of *HVG* (the other most famous ranking), let us see the 'Felvi Ranking 2006'. This ranking was the first and last Felvi Ranking because after compiling of this ranking the Felvi conducted the rankings of *HVG*. Felvi Ranking 2006 was based on:

- opinions of students
- statistical data
- opinions of employers.

Surveys were carried out among university students (4.870) in 2003 and among college students (6.850) in 2005. The following themes were questioned:

- ◆ institution choice
- ◆ evaluation of education and institution
- ◆ postgraduate plans
- ◆ plans of employment after graduation.

The most important subject is the evaluation of education and institution. Table 1 shows the questions asked in this thema.

Table 3 Criteria of institutional rankings

Data used in the institutional rankings	Data description
Difficulty of admission	classification among 1-5, arithmetic average of the received marks
Difficulty of studies	Same
Domestic acknowledgement of diploma	Same
International acknowledgement of diploma	Same
Staff's readiness to help	Same
Assurance of possibility of work during the instruction	Same
Giving information to the students in study affairs	Same
The best institution on the highest level in a certain field	the ratio of mentionings of a certain institution within the all mentionings (%)
Would you apply for admission again to your chosen institution?	

Source: Felvi Rangsor 2006

The opinions of students were questioned about their institutions but there were several questions which they had to answer with comparison of other institutions, for example in connection with the difficulty of admission and the prestige of the faculties.

In the following table it can be seen that the high reputation is more attractive among the university students than among the college students. About the reputation of an institution is easier to obtain information than about the level of education.

Table 4 Criteria of institution's choice

Criteria of institution's choice	Criterion on the first place (%)	
	University students	College students
High reputation (prestige)	52,20%	34,30%
Level of education	16,00%	12,10%
Nearness to home	12,40%	18,10%
Results in secondary school	7,30%	17,50%
Other	5,80%	5,90%
Effervescent institutional life	3,90%	5,90%
Friends applied for also here	1,70%	5,20%
She/he doesn't know	0,70%	1,00%
Total:	100%	100%

(Source: Felvi Rangsor 2006)

The research provides evidence of the relationship between the successful of entrance exam and the institution's choice. If someone gained admission to the institution written for the first place on the application form then the prestige and level of education were the decisive criteria of institution's choice. If someone gained admission to the institution written for the second or other places then student chose according to his/her opportunities (for example results in secondary school). The conclusion is:

- Students choose institution for the first place which has the highest reputation and level of education.
- Students choose institution for the second place to which they surely gain admission (for example according to their results).

The other famous and acknowledged ranking in Hungary is published in HVG. This ranking in 2006 was based on objective data. Opinions of students were not taken into consideration by compiling of rankings. Eight indicators were created: four in connection with students, four in connection with staff. Rankings were compiled separately according to each indicator. Two summarized staff rankings were compiled (one for the institutions and one for the faculties) according to the average value of the ranking places of institutions. The same was compiled (summarized) for the four student indicators. And finally a summarized ranking was conducted from the average value of places/ranks according to the all eight indicators.

Table 5 Ranking criteria of HVG in 2006

Summarized rankings	Indicators used for ranking
Summarized staff ranking	Proportion of academics and staff with high degree
	Publication per staff
	Proportion of staff with more examinations in language
	Number of students per staff
Summarized student ranking	Overapplication for the entrance exam
	Proportion of students with one or more examinations in language
	Proportion of PhD students
	Students per computer

(Source: Special edition of HVG: 'Diploma' 2006)

The criteria of evaluation refined until 2008. Ranking of HVG published in 2008 used more indicators. So there is no sense of comparison because the number of indicators used for ranking widened. We can't check the change of quality of institutions because of the change of methodology. Other essential change is that rankings were compiled only for faculties not for institutions and other new thing in 2008 that faculties with the same degree programmes were ranked for each field of science according to objective data and opinions of students.

Table 6 Ranking criteria of HVG in 2008

Summarized rankings	Indicators used for ranking
Summarized staff ranking	Students per academic staff (staff with a high degree)
	Academics/Total staff
	Staff with a high degree (Academics, Habil)
Summarized student ranking	Quality of secondary school (winners of OKTV, students came from best secondary schools)
	Number of applicants
	Admission gained from the applicants
	Average score of students gained admission
	Students gained admission with language exam
	Full-time student per OTDK-winner
	PhD programme (Number of students, number of obtained degree)

Source: Special edition of HVG: 'Diploma' 2008

The number of ways to rank institutions is as varied as the types of information used to rank them. In consequence of the above-mentioned there are a lot of debates about the rankings. The debate over the rankings requires the involvement of those who produce the rankings (media), those who are ranked by them (the institutions) and those who use them (the public).

Consumers need to think about these issues when making choices in any area that does not have readily visible or agreed upon criteria. The consumer needs to be educated. Students and their parents need to learn how to pick the institution that's right for them and also how to be a critical and analytical consumer of the information on institutions provided by media and by individual higher education institutions.

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