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**ACADEMIC RANKING - PREREQUISITE FOR IMPLEMENTING
QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS**

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The article aims to substantiate the concept that one of the key prerequisites for implementing quality management system in higher education institutions and making productive management decisions for updating higher education in Ukraine is the formation of an objective ranking mechanism. The challenges and risks in higher education in the case of ignoring the ranking mechanism applied to measure the quality, performance or effectiveness of higher education have been identified.

The study subject is the analysis of ranking as a criterion tool for managing higher education institutions. The purpose of the article is to substantiate the importance of ranking for building an effective management system for higher education institutions. The basic study methods are systemic and comparative analysis – systemic tools reveal the importance of ranking as one of the key elements in the management system of higher education institutions, and the comparative method verifies the interdependence of ranking indicators and quality of educational services. Research findings indicate the need for continuous improvement for ranking mechanisms applied to measure the quality, performance or

effectiveness of higher education. In the era of globalization, the ranking of higher education institutions is becoming an important tool for assessing the quality of higher education; it serves to mobilize the university function as the locomotive of social development. The research findings can be used to improve the ranking mechanisms and create an effective management system for higher education institutions. The findings help to draw correlations between the effectiveness of ranking tools and the effectiveness of the management system for higher education institutions.

Keywords: ranking; ranking tools for assessing the quality of higher education; criteria; correlative dependence; system connections; prospects for modernization of higher education in Ukraine.

Introduction. The availability of ranking mechanism is not a sufficient prerequisite for correct university rankings, as well as for creating an effective strategy for higher education development – for this ranking should be based on objective criteria that comprehensively cover the functionality and role of higher education. When ranking does not meet such requirements, it means that it not only does not serve as an effective mechanism applied to measure the quality of higher education, but also discredits the very idea of rankings.

The existing connection between important scientific and practical tasks shows that the existing ranking approaches to higher education institutions in Ukraine do not yet meet the declared intentions or practical needs of the education sector and Ukrainian society as a whole. Abuse of subjective measurements inevitably leads to inadequate perception of the overall picture and the possibility for manipulative misinterpretations.

The general theoretical basis of the article is formed by scientific works devoted to the generation of intellectual potential and management of higher education development [3; 6].

The theoretical and conceptual foundation of the middle level is formed by works that highlight different approaches to understanding the roles and missions of higher education institutions, as well as the features of world-class universities [2; 7; 8; 10; 13; 14]. The theoretical basis of the article is formed by scientific publications related to the analysis of domestic and foreign expertise in assessing the quality of higher education [1; 4; 5; 9].

At the level of management of higher education institutions, there is an underestimation of the importance of rankings as a tool to improve the efficiency of the educational process in general and the quality of educational services in particular. In addition, a rating scale for each criterion, objectivity and relevance of any criterion remains a matter of debate.

The significance and relevance of the research topic is due to at least two factors – first, the ranking mechanism is considered the most accurate and adequate tool for determining the real quality of education, second, the creation of a national academic ranking is essential for designing an effective higher education development strategy.

On the other hand, the lack of objective and critically convincing ranking certification of higher education institutions automatically leads to a number of challenges and negative consequences – the illusory status quo in the quality of educational services; unfair distribution of budget funds among higher education institutions and inefficient use of allocated funds; the lack of not only healthy competition among higher education institutions as a motivating prerequisite for educational progress, but also the criterion hierarchy that should be the basis of such competition.

Goal. The article aims to substantiate the importance of ranking tools as a criterion for improving the management of higher education institutions.

Key points. It is quite objective and natural that «in the modern globalized world, the function of an important tool for assessing the quality of higher education is performed by international university rankings. As a result, the achievements of universities are measured and compared, compliance with the strategic demands of society and the needs of consumers are determined» [9, p. 113]. In the professional environment, there is no doubt that «national and international ranking of domestic universities is an important tool for building an effective strategy for higher education in Ukraine based on objective criteria for ensuring the quality of higher education and permanent improvement of quality indicators» [9, p. 114].

The ranking of higher education institutions contributes to the achievement of many goals, in particular, it «responds to consumer inquiries about the status of higher education institutions, stimulates competition among them, ensures sound financing, and so on. Provided that the information is interpreted correctly, it makes a significant contribution to the definition of quality for a higher education institution. That is why the ranking of higher education institutions is an important and integral part of national approaches to ensuring the quality of higher education, and more and more countries give priority to ranking system» [9, p. 108]. In general, we can assume that «academic ranking has become an integral part of the global movement for educational quality, achieving its competitiveness, attractiveness, and recognition» [4, p. 91].

The complex nature of efforts to build a respectable rating mechanism determines a set of methods by which the research goal is achieved. Methods of systemic and comparative analysis are of key importance – a systematic approach focuses on the systemic nature of both the subject of study and the means of effective operation, and the comparative method

reflects the need for a significant comparative basis as an objective and necessary prerequisite for sound conclusions and proposals.

In modern Ukrainian realities, «the main task of rankings is to become a tool for removing domestic higher education from the state of chaotic movement and direct it towards sustainable development» [12, p. 72]. In addition to this functional load, the ranking of higher education institutions performs many other tasks, the main of which are the following:

Orientation – gives the consumers of information the opportunity to understand the objective educational status of the university, its advantages, the specifics of the activities and main achievements, and hence their own prospects;

Image – demonstrates the level of confidence in the quality of services of higher education institutions;

Reputation – certifies the authority of higher education institution in the market of educational services, the degree of its attractiveness for applicants;

Development – encourages development strategies and increased funding for promising areas of activity;

Standardization – stabilizes the developed standards and motivates other institutions to implement such standards;

Competition – stimulates higher education institutions to permanently confirm their level of educational services;

Cluster – based on ranking, it is possible to objectively group the same type of educational institutions and distribute funding according to the quality of their educational services.

It should be noted that all these functions significantly affect the implementation of an effective management system for higher education institutions, decision-making on improving the quality of intellectual potential and the introduction of innovations in the educational process. More

precisely, they provide a set of criteria necessary for the formation of an effective management system for higher education institutions; and whether this opportunity will be used properly is the prerogative of management, not the developers of a perfect ranking system.

In addition, «modern analysis of the composition and mission structure of higher education institutions indicates their leading role in ensuring global, regional and national progress, and the ranking concept serves to mobilize such a function of universities as drivers of social development. Therefore, it is extremely important to focus on the university's mission in forming a culture of ranking and to apply a ranking system that is most adequate for a modern university, its mission, and generic purpose and vocation. In the triangle of the university mission, the function of research is most often discussed and sometimes not accurately interpreted. A typical mistake is to separate research from education in a higher education institution and to consider research as foreign business-oriented, i.e. not integrated into education to provide research-based higher education» [12, p. 82-83].

The problem of determining ranking criteria and collecting factual data does not lose its relevance, and is becoming more acute. First of all, «it is crucial to compare the performance of higher education institutions using the criteria that form the basis for the academic ranking. Ranking is a classification of institutions due to their achievements, so it can be used to design a network of higher education institutions in accordance with their competitiveness. The impartiality and effectiveness of academic rankings depends on the accuracy of databases, the level of indicator significance, as well as the ability to obtain clear benchmarks and samples to improve the quality of educational services. Since each academic ranking operates with a different set of indicators, this fact is a natural prerequisite for competition among ranking agencies and conceptual confrontations among

experts who analyze the advantages and disadvantages of existing and potential ranking options» [9, p. 107].

The fundamental contradiction on the ranking criteria is that each academic ranking characterizes the object using the appropriate quantitative measurement, which should identify not the quantitative indicators, but the quality of educational services. However, the above contradiction in the vast majority of cases is not a fatal shortcoming, because in practice there is a clear correlation between quantitative and qualitative indicators applied to educational institutions in general and higher education institutions in particular. However, in some cases the coherence of quantitative and qualitative indicators is not very clear, and in some situations it leads to misinterpretation and disagreement in the expert community. This is the main disadvantage of academic ranking as a tool for a quality measurement.

The key challenge in analyzing the a posteriori shortcomings in academic rankings is the inconsistency of the set of criteria underlying most rankings. In addition, among the developers of specific academic rankings and among professionals in general, there is no conceptual agreement on the importance of any ranking criteria, and therefore they have to deal with a much larger problem – the incompatibility and/or significant differences in the criteria ranges underlying different academic ranking approaches.

For example, despite the fact that the expert community has the greatest confidence in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), also known as Shanghai Ranking given the objectivity and relevance of the criteria, it is clear that there may be more than six differentiating indicators than Shanghai Ranking has, and the share of each of them and the hierarchy they form is not conventionally agreed. In other words, in practice the ideal ranking model is impossible and unattainable in principle, and the ranking option, which is as close as possible to the ideal,

can be such only under certain conditions and circumstances, and therefore requires revision and changes synchronized with any changes in the functions of higher education institutions. Therefore, it is possible to indicate the presence of problematic issues both horizontally (list of necessary and sufficient ranking indicators) and vertically (specific value, the significance of a particular criterion in the overall system).

Although the existing international rankings are not perfect, they accumulate much more development experience, which is quite valuable and instructive in many respects. Therefore, it is quite natural that «analysis of international and national rankings is of key importance for improving quality assurance and its measurement in higher education in general and in Ukraine in particular» [12, p. 72].

It should be noted that «because international rankings use different criteria, the results of their assessments do not match. However, most of them draw very similar conclusions. The list of indicators used for ranking is not constant; this factor is characterized by a tendency to evolutionary changes in accordance with new requirements and updated priorities» [9, p. 113-114].

The impossibility of introducing a perfect academic ranking does not deny the need to move in this direction, but encourages moving in this direction. The concept that «important characteristics in academic rankings should be considered in view of their fluctuation (variability) and mixing them does not cause objections in the expert community. The collected information helps to adequately compare ranking approaches taking into account both the natural variability of ranking lists (due to uneven development of institutions and constant improvement of rankings themselves) and low ranking accuracy due to its low validity (insufficient instrumental compliance with declared measurements)» [11, p. 51].

Although the objectivity of the criteria underlying academic rankings is a key indicator of each ranking system, there is a significant lack of theoretical and conceptual support for this substantive and structural component of the university ranking system. Developers of ranking systems usually interpret their ranking systems very concisely, and the expert community also reacts sparingly, after which academic ranking begins to live its own life without any adjustments to its objectivity and effectiveness.

This state of affairs leads to a somewhat phantasmagoric impression - on the one hand there is a single environment of higher education institutions (whether national or transnational), and on the other hand this environment is tested using rankings with different (sometimes incompatible) sets of indicators. The overall picture is completed by the lack of expert debates on the advantages and disadvantages of both existing ranking systems and the indicative content of each of them. It is difficult to call this state of affairs favorable for the successful ranking concept development; rather, it acquires features that discredit this concept.

In such circumstances, the strategic advantages do not belong to the developers and users of existing rankings, but to those who have taken as few steps as possible on this path, because such actors are not overwhelmed by the burden of previous decisions.

The advantages of such a new actor in academic ranking are very obvious in modern Ukraine. This does not mean that the national scientific and educational spheres do not have the slightest experience in academic ranking in one way or another – just all previous efforts were either «preliminary attempts» or unsuccessful improvisations, and therefore there is a desire to stop these unsuccessful experiments as soon as possible.

However, it is necessary to state a disappointing preliminary conclusion – all previous and current Ukrainian rankings are affected by excessive bias and a high level of discrimination against institutions, so they are not

credible. This state of affairs leads to disorientation of stakeholders, employers and society as a whole regarding the real state of affairs in higher education. The lack of an objective academic ranking on a domino basis leads to a variety of shortcomings, challenges and risks: from the inability to have an adequate understanding of the situation to the unfair distribution of public funds and other incentives among higher education institutions providing high level educational services.

The expert community explains the unsatisfactory current ranking position of Ukraine by several reasons and factors «for example, due to significant and long-term dispersion of intellectual potential and resource capacity, duplication of training and professional inadequacy. Therefore, it is obvious that resource deconcentration in higher education institutions is a key reason for unsatisfactory current ranking position of Ukraine» [12, p. 89].

The movement towards the concentration of intellectual, logistical and organizational resources is not an original recommendation relevant to the current Ukrainian status quo in higher education: in fact, it is a global megatrend of today. That is why most ambitious universities understand that in the absence of maximum concentration of resources to obtain competitive advantages is a priori impossible, and therefore plan their activities based on this principle.

The conceptual and organizational level for optimizing the functioning of higher education institutions is insufficient: it should be supplemented by certain principles covering the functioning of higher education institutions and by forming a ranking system to measure the quality of educational services. The majority of the expert community agrees that «the basic principles underlying the formation of the National Academic ranking should include the following: objectivity; reliability; transparency; openness; intelligibility; validity» [11, p. 63].

It is also undeniable that «National Academic Ranking should serve to making use of additional capacity by using ranking indicators in funding and raising funds (investors, individuals, endowment, etc.) in line with the Shanghai ranking indicators, and developing competitiveness strategy among national universities» [11, p. 63].

At this stage, our country needs to have, if not samples, then at least reliable guidelines for the formation of the National Academic Ranking. «Ukraine is positioned in the world as a large country (in terms of territory, population, resources), and therefore potentially able to gain global competitiveness (particularly among world universities), and use the correct methodological guidelines of the Shanghai ranking, because, for a big country, its true sovereignty means independence and self-sufficiency in all aspects of public life, including higher education» [4, p. 92].

In addition, it should be recognized that «by developing the National Academic Ranking, it is necessary to identify the optimal list of international criteria and indicators that would be implemented by national universities as an effective tool to develop their capacities based on the expertise of world university rankings. The formation of the National Academic Ranking requires the development of the National Academic Ranking Concept together with clear definitions of general provisions and by updating problematic issues, methods, methodologies (principles, methods, procedures, approaches, criteria and indicators), as done in Shanghai ranking» [11, p. 63]. Given this strategy, one can count on the formation of a National Academic Ranking based on objective and essential criteria, as well as on the continuous improvement of the level of educational services provided by universities.

Conclusion and Further Research Prospects.

1. The key prerequisites for effective and efficient decision making regarding the modernization of higher education in Ukraine while creating more capacity for students in higher education institutions, as follows: first, the introduction of National Academic Ranking based on objective criteria and indicators, and thus – operation by the most comprehensive information array as a necessary tool for correct ranking criteria and indicators; secondly, the high level of competence and responsibility of all actors in the ranking process.

2. The key functional advantages provided by university rankings: awareness of the target audience (university applicants, parents, employers) about educational and scientific capacities in higher education institutions; innovative teaching and learning techniques designed to improve the effectiveness of education; competition among higher education institutions and development of existing capacities; justification for providing financial support to the relevant higher education institution.

3. These prospects for further studies are related to the intensification of debates on the objectivity and relevance of ranking criteria. Although the list of ranking indicators is not constant and at any given time should reflect evolutionary changes in line with the new requirements and priorities, and therefore requires more effort to find objective ranking indicators.

4. A crucial shortcoming that prevents Ukraine from rising to higher positions in international university rankings is the dispersion of intellectual potential and resource deconcentration. Under such circumstances, it can be stated that there are no real prospects for improving the level of educational services provided by higher education institutions in Ukraine.

5. The National Academic Ranking Concept project should be open for discussion by experts, stakeholders, employers, and Ukrainian society as a whole. It is not about discussion as an end in itself, but about debates as a

way to achieve a goal and development of essential and agreed criteria for building university capacity.

6. Each ranking project requires the use of pre-tested mechanisms in the mode of experimental testing and verification testing. Only such a method is acceptable for the objective reflection of critical features and indicators applied to measure the quality, performance or effectiveness of higher education.

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