Comparative Analysis of National University Ranking System in Kurdistan-Region and Other National University Rankings: An Emphasis on Criteria and Methodologies

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Abstract: The interest towards university rankings has increased tremendously recently which has led to establishment of several international and national university rankings depending on reputable surveys or accessible databases available to facilitate the determination of the ranking of universities. The aim of this research is to compare and analyze the performance criteria of National University ranking (NUR) of Kurdistan Region (NUR-KRG) with the other selected national university rankings in which the ranking system is managed or authorized by their respective government. The methodology taken for the research is qualitative by reviewing and using comparative analysis method. The results indicate that there are potential differences and similarities among the criteria adopted by national ranking of Kurdistan region and selected national university rankings, limitations of the ranking are discussed and recommendations are given.

1. Introduction

The interest towards university rankings has increased from last decade and it is going on, something that led to the establishment of several international and national university rankings depending on reputable surveys or accessible databases available to facilitate the determination of university rankings. University rankings now play an important role in changing the universities' landscape, although the validity of university rankings has been questioned and debated continuously, specifically the media-owned rankings since they are under the control of the same institutions being ranked (Johnes, 2018). However, the popularity of university rankings is still increasing (Baldock, 2013; Huang, 2011). The aim of this research is to compare and analyze the performance criteria of National University ranking (NUR) of Kurdistan Region (NUR-KRG) with the other national university rankings of other countries around the world in which the ranking system is managed or authorized by the government. There are

five countries namely (Malaysia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, India, Bulgaria), chosen for this comparative analysis, based on the factor, if they have been authorized or managed by their respective governments.

2. Literature Review

2.1 University Rankings

University ranking which is also called "League Tables" is a comparative classification of universities based on criteria developed by an organization to provide a list of top universities in national or international context through different methodologies. University Rankings are becoming one of the primary factors in evaluating the performance of universities (Bastedo & Bowman, 2009). University rankings nowadays are used by governments, news media, and funding agencies as a tool to evaluate the performance of universities (Baldock, 2013). Ranking can also help students and parents to have insights about a comparison of universities in the country or around the world to base their selection of universities in terms of time, investment, and future career prospects (Cakir, Acarturk, Alasehir, & Cilingir, 2015). Governments develop initiative to shape world-class universities in their countries to compete with other institutions around the world (Shin & Toutkoushian, 2011). However, in a research Yang (2015) found that university rankings may cause negative effects and seen as a monster and a misleading ranking because it only serves the flagship and prestigious universities. Moreover, the position of a specific university of a country in the world rankings is affected by following factors: economic potential of the country, research expenditure, long-term political stability, institutionalization, and government effectiveness (Pietrucha, 2017).

Global ranking and national ranking are both used by consumers to compare the universities. National University rankings similar to global rankings have received increased interest in their own national context as they are seen as advisable to be used to complement international rankings (Robinson-Garcia, et al., 2014; Alaşehir et al., 2014). In the future, it is expected to have more sophisticated and improved national university rankings (Alaşehir et al., 2014). Moreover, it has also been observed that national and global rankings have different results and they have lack of similarity in listing same universities (Cakir, Acarturk, Alasehir, & Cilingir, 2015).

2.2 History of University Ranking

The beginning of university rankings dates back to 20th century (Baldock, 2013). In one of the two publications from United Kingdom entitled "Where We Get Our Best Men", in 1900 by Alick Maclean the most successful men were evaluated with one of the references to where they have studied, they ended creating a listing of universities ranked based on the number of eminent alumni studied in those universities (Myers & Robe, 2009). Moreover, another list of university rankings was published by Havelock Ellis in 1904, based on the number of geniuses attended those universities (Myers & Robe, 2009). In 1925, Raymond Hughes published a report of reputational ranking of US graduate programs (Shin, 2011). However, successively universities were ranked based on peer reputation, until 1983, the US News and World Report started ranking undergraduate universities which became an annual event from 1987 (Bastedo & Bowman, 2009). Currently, there are many national and international universities in the world, some of the most famous global university rankings include: Academic ranking of world universities (ARWU) from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, The Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World

University Rankings, Webometrics rankings by Spanish National Research Council, and Times Higher Education World Ranking (THE), published by Times Higher Education in coordination with Thomson Reuters.

2.3 Dimensions of University Ranking

University evaluation has two main approaches, one is peer review-subjective, which depends on expert's opinions and second is bibliometric-objective, which is using statistical analyses on bibliographic data (Huang, 2011), and some universities base their evaluations on subjective, objective or both. Moreover, the criteria used by the universities to evaluate universities are based on (Size dependent Indicators and Size Independent Indicators) (Waltman, 2016). The dimensions of university rankings are typically based on three amalgamations of university performance (Teaching, Research, and Services). Teaching is usually measured by statistics generated from student class or student satisfaction evaluations, Research is measured by the number of publications or citations produced by the academicians, and service is measured commonly by the contribution of the university to the society (Shin & Toutkoushian, 2011).

2.4 National University Ranking of Kurdistan Region's Universities

The NUR ranking was founded in 2015 and annually provides a list of two different rankings of public and private universities. The Ranking is managed by the Ministry of Higher Education of Kurdistan Regional Government. The main purpose of the ranking is to measure to what extent the university vision meets the vision of the Ministry of Higher education's vision. The criteria and number of indicators are illustrated in Table 2. There are 8 criteria used by the rankings to evaluate the performance of the universities and the weights given for indicators based on (static and Dynamic) weights. The ranking has published its Edition 1 - 2015 ranking and Edition 2-2016 ranking, but 2017 ranking was not published. However, according to the announcement of the official website of the National Ranking, in September/2018, the University Ranking 2018 will be published. The scoring is based on the data submitted by the universities of Kurdistan Region using two spreadsheets, E-Master sheet includes (list of academic staff, Student feedback, Teachers portfolio, and Continuous Academic Development) and E-Smart Ranking includes (Scientific research, Journals published by the university, International Activities, and Web-presence), for each activity the university needs to provide a proof. In the official website of National Ranking of Kurdistan Region, the detailed information is not available if the indicators are Size-Dependent or Size-Independent indicators. The national ranking ranks the universities on tiers of (A, B, C, and D) groups, the universities fall in the Group (A and B) have more privileged of Student enrolment limitation than Group (C and D).

Table 1: League table of Public universities of Kurdistan 2015 and 2016 ranking

Public Universities	2015	2016	Private Universities	2015	2016
Koya University	B	B	American University in Sulaimani	B	B
Salahaddin University	B	B	Cihan University in Sulaimani	B	C
Soran University	B	B	Human Development University	B	B
Sulaimani University	B	B	Cihan University in Hawler	C	C
Zakho University	B	C	Ishik University	C	B
Duhok University	C	B	Komar University	C	C
Garmian University	C	D	Newroz University	C	D
Hawler Medical University	C	B	Bayan University	D	D
Raparin University	C	C	Cihan Duhok University	D	D
Charmo University	D	C	Hayat University	D	D
Duhok Polytechnic University	D	B	Lebanese-French University University	D	B
Erbil Polytechnic University	D	D	SABIS University/ University of Erbil	D	D
Halabja University	D	C			
Sulaimani Polytechnic University	D	C			

3. Methodology

The research has used a qualitative approach which is defined as "a method to explore, describe, or understand the reasons for a certain phenomenon" (Chawla & Sondhi, 2011) and used comparative analysis as a method which is defined as "a fundamental tool of analysis to sharpen our power of description, and plays a central role in concept-formation by bringing into focus suggestive similarities and contracts among cases" (Collier, 1993). Comparative Analysis is used to analyze the similarities and differences existed between the criteria and methodologies adopted by National University ranking of Kurdistan with other selected national university rankings.

3.1 Selection of National University Rankings

In order to ensure the conduct of a reliable comparison between national university rankings, the criteria taken for selecting the sample national university rankings, were the following: the national university ranking was governed or authorized by the government of the specific country in order to have the same set of National university ranking of KRG, for being authorized by government. There is a detailed definition of the methodologies and their dimensions for evaluating the universities on the website. There are six national university rankings (Including National University Ranking of KRG) chosen for this study based on above conditions.

3.2 Overview of Selected National University Rankings

The country, National University ranking's name, year of launch, type of organization managing the ranking, criteria/dimensions, dimension's weight, and indicators of the national university rankings are summarized and illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Name, Organization type, Criteria, weight, indicators of selected National University Ranking

Country	National ranking Name and launch year	Organization	Criteria	Criteria weight	Indicators
Kurdistan Region, Iraq	National University ranking of Kurdistan Region – 2015	Government	Scientific Research	43%	41
			Quality	22%	
			Academic staff	12%	
			Cultural and Community Activities	7%	
			International Activities	5%	
			Library	5%	
			Alumni and Private Sector Placement	3%	
			Student Satisfaction	3%	
Malaysia	SETARA- 2007	Malaysian Qualifications Agency - Government	Process/Quality Assurance	40%	62
			Graduate's quality and satisfaction	40%	
			Governance	12%	
			Talent (Experience and Diversity)	5%	
			Physical and financial resources	3%	
Pakistan	Pakistan Higher education	Higher Education	Teaching Quality	30%	25
			Research	41%	

	university Ranking – 2010	Commission-Government	Quality assurance implementation	15%	
			Social Integration/ Community Development	4%	
			Finance and Facilities	10%	
Kazakhstan	Ranking of Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan - 2008	Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency for Education-Government	Resource and Quality of university	70%	44
			Quality of Activities	15%	
			Employers and Regional bodies satisfaction	15%	
India	National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) – 2015	Ministry of Human Resources Development - Government	Teaching, Learning & Resources	30%	21
			Research and Professional Practice	30%	
			Graduation Outcomes	20%	
			Outreach and Inclusivity	10%	
			Perception	10%	
Bulgaria	Bulgarian University Ranking System- 2010	Ministry of Education and Sciences - Government	Career, relevance to the labor market and regional importance	40%	21
			Teaching and learning	30%	
			Prestige	15%	
			Science and Research	10%	

| | | | Teaching and Learning Environment | 2.5% | |
| | | | Welfare and Administrative Services | 2.5% | |

Table 3: The 8 criteria used in NUR-KRG and comparison of their weights

Ranking Criteria of KRG	KRG	Malaysia	Pakistan	Kazakhstan	India	Bulgaria
Scientific Research	43%		41%		30%	10%
Quality	22%			70%		2.5%
Academic staff	12%	3%*				
Cultural and Community Activities	7%		4%			
International Activities	5%				10%	
Library	5%		4%**			
Alumni and Private Sector Placement	3%	40%			20%	40%
Student Satisfaction	3%					

*Talent criteria of Malaysia contain both qualities of staff and students, total weight is 5%, student's weight 2% has been deducted and quality of staff is 3%.
** The 4% has been taken from 2% from Research and 2% from Finance and facilities criteria as three indicators related to the library.

4. Discussion

Table 2 is a comparison of eight criteria/dimensions used in National University Ranking of KRG, compared with the selected National University Rankings. The following facts can be interpreted: Scientific Research 43%, similar weights are assigned in the rankings of Pakistan 41%, India 30%, and Bulgaria 10%. Quality 22%, similar weights are assigned in the rankings of Kazakhstan but with a higher weight of 70%, and Bulgaria 2.5%. Academic staff 12 %, and its weight is in Malaysia 3%. Cultural and Community Activities 7 %, and its weight is in Pakistan 4%. International Activities 5%, and in India 10%. Library 5%, and in Pakistan 4%. Alumni and Private Sector placement 3%, and in

Malaysia and Bulgaria with a higher weight of 40%, and India 20%. Student Satisfaction 3%, not used as a criterion in any of the selected national university rankings.

- There are no criteria existed to evaluate Research in the National Rankings of Malaysia and Kazakhstan, which can be seen a limitation of the Ranking methodology, as Research is seen as one of the main dimensions of Ranking Evaluation (Shin & Toutkoushian, 2011).
- There are obvious differences in terms of criteria used by each National University Ranking, and that can be observed in Table 2 and Table 3. National University Rankings especially when it is managed by the government, attempt to encourage the universities of the country to meet the vision of the Higher Education's expectation of the government.

5. Conclusion

The comparisons in this paper have indicated that there are potential differences and similarities between the criteria adopted by National University Ranking of Kurdistan Region and the selected National University rankings in Table 2. The main differences were found in the criteria of (Academic staff, Cultural and Community Activities, International Activities, Library, and Student Satisfaction) as they were not commonly used as criteria by the selected national university rankings. The main similarities were found common among the selected national university rankings were (Scientific Research and Alumni and placement). It is recommended to combine the private and public universities in the table leagues to increase the competition between private and public universities and in order to reveal their effectiveness. Moreover, it is recommended to use Size-Dependent indicators in case if private and public universities are combined and measured, as this will evaluate the universities of large and small size more fairly. Limitation of National Ranking of Kurdistan Region is first, lack of Accreditation indicator as an indicator, it is recommended to be added under (Quality) criteria for Kurdistan Regions Ranking, as the case of Bulgaria Ranking assigned a weight for university or programs accredited. Second, lack of detailed handbook of the Ranking methodology, a definition of the indicators and mechanism of the grouping of the universities.

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