

This material is presented to ensure timely dissemination of scholarly work.

Copyright and all rights therein are retained by authors or by other copyright holders. All persons copying this information are expected to adhere to the terms and constraints invoked by each author's copyright. In most cases, these works may not be reposted without the explicit permission of the copyright holder.

This version of the referenced work is the post-print version of the article—it is NOT the final published version. If you would like to receive the final published version, please send a request to e.o.mogaji@greenwich.ac.uk and I will be happy to send you the latest version.

The current reference for this work is as follows:

Kiraka, R., Maringe, F., Kanyutu, W. & Mogaji, E., 2020. University League Tables and Ranking Systems in Africa: Emerging Prospects, Challenges and Opportunities. In: E. Mogaji, F. Maringe & R. E. Hinson, eds. Understanding the Higher Education Market in Africa. Abingdon Oxfordshire: Routledge.

If you have any questions and/or would like copies of other articles I've published, please email me at e.o.mogaji@greenwich.ac.uk, and I'd be happy to help.

To access any of my published or forthcoming articles, check my profile on

- ResearchGate - https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Emmanuel_Mogaji
- SSRN - https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/cf_dev/AbsByAuth.cfm?per_id=2145935
- Sage Advance - https://advance.sagepub.com/authors/Emmanuel_Mogaji/5708444

Chapter 11

University League Tables and Ranking Systems in Africa: Emerging Prospects, Challenges and Opportunities.

Ruth Kiraka
Strathmore University, Kenya
rkiraka@strathmore.edu
0000-0001-8811-7534

Felix Maringe
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Felix.Maringe@wits.ac.za
0000-0002-7992-9079

Watiri Kanyutu
Nelson Mandela University, South Africa
watirikanyutu@gmail.com
0000-0003-1313-393X

Emmanuel Mogaji*
University of Greenwich, UK
e.o.mogaji@greenwich.ac.uk
0000-0003-0544-4842

University rankings have become an integral part and powerful influence in the higher education landscape. While the determinants of educational quality may not be clearly defined, university rankings designate an institution a numerical position based on quantifiable measurements that focus primarily on institutional resources. The outcome of these rankings is that higher-ranking positions benefit institutions via admissions outcomes, faculty recruitment, resource attainment and future reputation. This conceptual chapter argues that universities in the global north are racing to the global university rankings under the umbrella term of ‘World Class University,’ whereas universities in the global south may mainly be building institutional competence to become research-intensive universities that can address the issues of poverty, inequality, corruption and bad governance, as well as contribute to community, national and regional development, especially in the African continent. Given the possibly divergent needs of the universities, it behoves African institutions to develop relevant, inclusive, adaptable and trustworthy University League Tables and Ranking systems that are responsive to the needs of the African continent. Efforts should be made towards providing a ‘transparent, free of self-interest and methodologically coherent system, that responds to the interests and needs of the African higher education sector.

Keywords: University, Ranking, League Table, Africa, Marketing, Branding, Positioning

*Corresponding Author: e.o.mogaji@greenwich.ac.uk

Introduction

Since their inception almost two decades ago, the production, publication and use of League Tables and Rankings (LTRs) continue to grow. Although league tables were popularly used in sporting competition (Marginson, 2009), they have, in the past sixteen years, continued to feature in the higher education sector (Altbach, 2015; Hazelkorn, 2013; Rauhvargers, 2013). Rankings are often used as measure of higher education quality and excellence, a nation's economic power, and a performance benchmarking tool (Altbach, 2012). Rankings influence the long-term development of higher education across the world and expose universities to a 'structured global competition that operates on terms that favour some universities and countries' (Marginson, 2007, p. 132). As the significant hubs for knowledge dissemination and research production (Cloete, Bunting & Schalkwyk, 2018), universities use ranking positions to acquire research funding, attract high achieving academics and students, as well as defend their status quo within the sector (Pouris & Pouris, 2010). When affiliated with a highly-ranked university, academics use LTRs positions to accentuate their competence and professional status (Altbach, 2012). Indeed, LTRs appear to offer a quantitative measure on a university's status, worth and achievement, as well as an indication of a country's global attractiveness.

Despite the value attached to the practice of LTRs, it is not without criticisms (Bowden, 2000; Dill & Soo, 2005; Boshoff, 2009). Ranking systems are imperfect. They are partial in coverage, and their indicator scores give a false sense of precision (Marginson, 2007; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). While recognising the global reach of these rankings, efforts have been made to develop regional rankings, and Africa appears to be neglected, both regionally and globally. Perhaps, there could be an attempt to explore how African universities compare with other universities in the world, as the Chinese did with Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (Liu & Cheng, 2005). However, China is a big country, while Africa is a continent with many countries and different educational systems, many of which are hereditary from respective colonial regimes (Cloete et al., 2018). Additionally, Hazelkorn (2013) argues that although some countries can afford to invest heavily in high-quality education systems, the majority of countries are economically constrained; many of them due to public debts. Currently, this is the case in the majority of countries on the African continent.

Arguments regarding the participation and publication of LTRs exist, and more are expected to arise. However, it is worthwhile to note that there are university stakeholders who perceive the practice to be of importance, especially in making educational and career choices. For example, a willing and able student may wish to have an academic experience outside his or her country, but for various reasons (primarily financial, logistical and personal) may not afford universities outside the continent. At the same time, the student may wish to have a comprehensive view of universities on the continent. This comprehensive view will include aspects such as the teaching and learning experiences, access to facilities that aid in a better learning environment, and the quality of programmes offered in a university. In such a case, having access to a league table that features universities in Africa may enhance the students' university choice-making process. The availability of such information enables a student to narrow down a perfect or ideal university, based on the capabilities (financial or otherwise) of the student. Similarly, specific African league tables and rankings publications may be relevant for academics, university managers and funding organisations.

In acknowledging that there is perhaps a possibility to explore how African universities compare with others globally, this chapter draws attention to the policy and implications of rankings, while canvassing for a holistic league table for Africa. This chapter is conceptual and therefore no empirical or statistical studies are discussed. While many technicalities are pertinent to this discussion, the authors attempt to argue the information herein from a professional standpoint. However, data and relevant literature are referenced where necessary.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, a highlight of existing ranking systems is provided. The second section provides an argument relating to the criticism of LTRs, with specific attention to the methodology used to produce these publications, the effect of the practice on internationalisation activities, the power LTRs have in the higher education sector, in addition to the use of rankings as a proxy for quality of higher education. The third section highlights some challenges, which are likely to face African universities while attempting to participate in the ranking practice or produce specific LTRs. The motivation for the publication of specific league tables and rankings for African universities is discussed in the fourth section, while the fifth section provides vital areas that should be given more attention when producing these league tables and rankings. A summary of the chapter is provided in the final section.

Different ranking systems

Currently, there are over ten global ranking systems, although some are more outstanding than others. Depending on the purpose for which these systems produce the LTRs, the systems are either global, regional or national. Globally, the media is also noted to produce league tables, either for sale to stakeholders or to initiate public attention or debate.

Globally, there are three main and longest-established ranking systems:

- Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) produced by Shanghai Ranking Consultancy, which began in 2003;
- Times Higher Education Supplement, which commenced in 2004 and offered a combined index of 'the best universities' in the world; and
- QS World University Rankings produced by Quacquarelli Symonds published annually since 2004.

Regionally,

- The Centre for Higher Education Development in Germany (<http://www.che.de>) develops a comprehensive and detailed university comparison in German-speaking countries.
- UK has the Complete University Guide, which ranks UK universities both nationally and in 70 subjects, Guardian University league table, The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2019.
- Universities in India are ranked using the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF),
- Maclean's publishes an annual ranking of Canadian Universities, called the Maclean's University Rankings.
- THE Regional Rankings includes Latin America, Asia and Emerging Economies University Rankings.

- QS World University Rankings by Region covers BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), Asia, Arab Region, Latin America and EECA (Emerging Europe and Central Asia).
- QS University Rankings by Location covers Mainland China, India, Japan, South Korea, Mexico.

Regarding African universities, the list of top universities is often extracted from the global ranking list. For example, in 2019, 17 African universities were featured on the QS World University Rankings, with the majority (nine) of these found in South Africa. This list was not made explicitly for African universities, as the first eight universities are all ranked in the 801-1000 range on the World Ranking (QS, 2018b). In the same year, THE listed 47 best universities in Africa using their World University Rankings data (THE, 2018c). UniRank also provides African University Ranking of the top 200 recognised higher-education institutions in Africa, using non-influential web metrics provided by independent web intelligence sources (uniRank, 2018). The rigour of this ranking cannot, however, be substantiated. This identifies the neglect of African Universities in terms of league tables that are explicitly developed for African Universities.

Critique of university ranking/league tables

Rankings are arguably the only, albeit crudest measure we have available to compare university performance across the globe. In this part of the chapter, we argue that despite the value rankings bring to intellectual development broadly, their use inadvertently promotes, reproduces and entrenches the inequalities that exist between the global north and south. Rankings are an imprecise mechanism for making fair comparisons on multiple levels (UNESCO, 2015).

1. Rankings and the methodologies

Although rankings present complex multi-indicator, which are unmanageable and contentious, they assist in the development of policy/strategy guidelines (Pouris & Pouris, 2010). Rankings use different methods, which produce different results for individual nations (Marginson, 2007) and often focus predominantly on university research output neglecting the teaching and learning contribution to society. For example, ARWU has a Nobel Prize criterion, which Marginson (2007) considers the most controversial, as the prizes are submission-based and scientific merit is not the only determining factor. Furthermore, these awards use a voting process, and are in-part reputation-based and may render them subjective (Guo & Chen, 2014; Marginson, 2009). Gingrass and Wallace (2010) further argue that the Nobel Prizes are awarded years after the respective discoveries are made and at a time when the investments of these contributions are at the highest, which may make these awards counter-intuitive. With the case of South African universities that appear in the global league tables, Pouris & Pouri (2010) notes that no scientist, while working at a South African university, has received a Nobel Prize or a Fields Medal. It, therefore, becomes difficult or impossible for South African universities to strategically position themselves towards scoring on this indicator and this inadvertently affects their ranking. Usher and Savino (2006) examine 19 league tables and university rankings systems from around the world. Like Van Dyke (2005), they make the point that different purposes drive the different rankings systems and are associated with different notions of what constitutes university quality.

There is also differential access to the so-called top journals, which ostensibly publish the best research (Willinsky, 2003). Access into such journals tends to be easier for scholars in the global north than those in global south universities. A few factors contribute to this differentiated access. First is the gatekeeping role of the journal editorial processes through language, journal themes, and lately the cost of page fees. Many global south scholars use English as a second language. There is some evidence which suggests that papers submitted for review by global south scholars have an 80% chance of rejection compared to 30% for first language users of English (Harnard, 1996). Global rankings of journals, just like those of the universities show that nearly 95% of the top journals are hosted in the rich countries of the global north. Success breeds more success while poor performance tends to be self-perpetuating and replicating. Scholars in global south universities thus tend to publish in the journals in the last quarter of the least impactful journals.

2. Rankings and internationalisation

Previous studies have made an effort to challenge the neglect and bias of current league tables, even though developing countries are also interested in relevant rankings that could assist them in developing appropriate higher education policies (Pouris & Pouris, 2010). The studies have, however, predominantly focused on universities in South Africa, which presents and highlights a gap in understanding the whole African higher education system. Pouris and Pouris (2010) applied a university ranking based on a single indicator – citations, while Boshoff (2009) critically examined the methodology of the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and generated raw scores for the ‘big five’ South African research universities. Like globalisation (Hang-Soon, 2003), university ranking tables provide a false standard of the universality of quality standards, a false homogeneity through which apples and lemons are compared with a resultant confirmation and affirmation of high standards associated with global north universities and perpetual low quality amongst universities in the global south.

3. Rankings, dominance and power

Looking at global university rankings, these publications tend to have the same institutions and in the same or slightly manipulated order. The top ten institutions, for example, play around those positions like musical chairs, to which they have a right. The rankings nourish the myth of Ivy League institutions that have a select corner in higher education and offer some superior education. Global league tables promote exclusivity and social elitism. Efforts to improve access and affordability, especially for the minority and/or marginalised groups that many African universities pride themselves in, seem to have no place in the rankings. A different kind of ranking or appreciation that has the interests of African universities and their educational efforts is therefore needed.

The criteria used for measuring performance tend to reflect or represent western values of quality (Ward 2014). It is a fallacy that there can be a universal standard by which quality can be determined, let alone measured, especially in a world with such vast disparities of socio-economic and cultural capitals. Universities in the global north exist in countries that have a combined wealth measured in GDP terms worth almost 90 times larger than the combined wealth of countries in the global south (Gladwell 2011). Wealth is both a driver and a product of the economic performance of nations. Global north universities thus exist in economically productive nations, while those in the global south exist in economically less productive and frequently dependent or deprived economies. University research performance, measured both quantitatively and qualitatively, traces the contours of wealth distribution across the world.

Research requires funding to drive data gathering and analyses. So, it is clear that global south universities would never compete equally with their counterparts in the global north, both in terms of the quantity and quality of research outputs.

4. Rankings and quality

The international quality of universities is another measure with the most flawed criteria. Measured in terms of the numbers of international staff and students in the universities, this measure only suits countries in the global north. Amongst the pull factors which attract mobility and study destination decisions, the economic performance, stability and opportunities offered by the rich universities rank high in both students and staff migration tendencies. Data on human capital and intellectual flows clearly show net migration of scholarship capital from global south to global north countries (Hang-Soon 2003). Undertaking performance comparisons based on the internationalisation criteria is at best an exercise in self-fulfilling prophecy and at worst, a practice in data deception of the highest magnitude. While internationalisation plays an important role especially in research collaboration (Altbach & de Wit, 2018; Knight, 2018), its use in the production of league tables remains contentious. Knight (2011) argues that although the attraction of international students and adoption of international policies may be well-intentioned for some universities in the global north, others adopt internationalisation policies to obscure ill-intentions such as charging exorbitant fees or improving ranking positions. Unfortunately, not many universities in the global south have the power to attract much intellectual mobility because of prevailing conditions of poverty, political instability, and poor economic performance, among other substantial unattractive factors.

Challenges of the African League Tables

There are anticipated challenges in going on with the idea of university rankings and league Tables in Africa, albeit this is a new initiative and the challenges in achieving these objectives are recognised and highlighted.

1. Whose Responsibility?

The first challenge is to identify the organisation that will be responsible for this initiative. Will it be some self-appointed experts, money-making schemes by commercial organisations or academic or research organisations (Altbach, 2015), or government and accreditation agencies, or the universities themselves? Government and accreditation agencies and higher education organisations have developed their systems for evaluating and ranking institutional performance: e.g. CHE (Germany), AQA (Austria) (Hazelkorn, 2007). Besides, there are commercial organisations and popular media engaging in developing these rankings. It will not be surprising to see THE and QS creating a new league table for Africa because they have the framework already in place. They can afford to pull the data from their world ranking to create a league table for Africa, but there is still the concern about how well they can capture the different university systems and challenges of higher education in Africa. There are concerns about how inclusive this will be. It can also be suggested for a new body to carry out this activity in Africa, perhaps like the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), which is produced by Shanghai Ranking Consultancy, or we may expect a media or publishing house with good coverage of Africa to undertake this initiative. The commercial interest in the development should also be explored. Would it be carried out for nonprofit or there will be

financial interest in the development of the league table? These are some of the questions that need to be addressed while considering this initiative.

2. Making it Inclusive

The non-inclusive nature of the global league table has been one of the criticisms it often receives. Recognising the intricate nature of higher education across Africa and the difference between higher education in the North, South, East and West Africa is paramount, and it will be imperative to make sure that the league table is inclusive. It is known that rankings often do not consider the fact that universities have different missions and goals, which may influence their teaching style or research activities (Altbach, 2015). Birkbeck, University of London announced in 2018 that it would withdraw from UK university rankings because the methodologies do not fairly recognise its strengths or represent it in a way that is helpful to students. Altbach (2015, p4) noted that many rankings ‘resemble “popularity contests”—asking groups in the academic community, especially administrators, their opinions about peer institutions.’

Despite having highly-rated teaching and research, other factors caused by its unique teaching model and unrelated to its performance, push it significantly down the ratings (BBK, 2018). With a specific focus on Africa, efforts should be made to address these concerns often raised by the global league tables. The league table should not just be about the top universities in South Africa, Egypt or Nigeria, or about the research impact and funding received, but should include the use of both quantitative and qualitative metrics in place, which have a holistic understanding and coverage of higher education in Africa, Perhaps moving away from just journal publication and research impact to qualitative measures of the impact of universities within the community. This will enable the league table to evaluate a more excellent range of institutions, a practice that will allow more inclusion at an institutional level.

3. Access to Data

Challenges in accessing the required ranking data are expected. Whomever that takes responsibility for this initiative needs access to data to make sure it is inclusive, up-to-date and provides a true reflection of higher education in Africa. Data from journal citations may not be difficult to access, but with universities expected to report their data on students, academic staff and resources for use in calculating the ranking and producing the league tables, data inaccessibility may pose a challenge. It is either the universities do not have the data, or these data are not collected suitably or are sometimes tampered with. Data for ranking calculations are amenable to manipulation through appropriate management instruments (Pouris & Pouris, 2010). Ensuring greater transparency over the core raw data is essential, and even though some data are publicly available, reports from participating universities on the number of students, the student gender ratio, the staff-to-student ratio, and the percentage of international students may be exaggerated in order to position themselves better on the league table. Besides, there will be challenges in accessing some of the qualitative data, which has not be quantified. Altbach (2015) argued that there are no widely accepted methods for measuring teaching quality, and assessing the impact of education on students, a highlight that key metrics are at risk of omission. The omission of unquantifiable data may make some universities to be excluded, primarily if the universities cannot provide information to justify their ranking or if there is no information available for submission.

4. Qualitative Measure

While most of the global ranking institutions rely on quantitative data to publish their league tables, there are challenges in understanding and developing an inclusive league table. Qualitative data are challenging to quantify, and are more often than not subjective and incomparable to numerical data, which are easily measurable and quantifiable. THE World University Ranking measures each university based on five categories: Teaching, Research, Citations (research influence), Industry Income, and International Outlook. These quantitative data are assumed to be a proxy for quality, which they are to a significant extent (Altbach, 2015). However, the number of articles published does not necessarily relate to the quality or impact of the articles. Besides, while data from these categories can be quantitatively presented, there are qualitative data that highlight the contributions of a university to the society, their student experiences, initiatives, and corporate social responsibilities. It will be good for the African league table to recognise these qualitative insights and make efforts to capture these data for use in the production of league tables. These insights indicate what the university is contributing to the development of society and should be recognised.

5. Trust and Adaptation

Universities take pride in their ranking and showcase their ranking position on their marketing communications. Taking pride in league tables is an indication that universities somewhat trust the measurements and believe that they reflect what is going on in their university. It is crucial as well for African universities to trust these league tables and be able to take pride in the publications. While recognising that the production of African university league tables is a new initiative that may take time to adopt, efforts should be made into ensuring that they are objective, credible and reliable, right from the beginning. Having higher education stakeholders on board will also be paramount to make sure that these rankings are well adopted and accepted across the sector. Universities in Africa should be able to present their ranking on their marketing communications platforms and make a genuine effort into improving their position on these tables. It is essential that there is buy-in from the stakeholders and to make sure that they provide the needed data to develop the league table yearly. Taking into consideration that ranking has an implication for marketing and advertising as universities also try to legitimate their positions for reasons of prestige, and student and staff recruitment (Altbach, 2015), it is essential that the ranking is rigorous and transparent to achieve the set aims and objectives. Furthermore, encouraging buy-in from the participating universities, coupled with trust amongst the stakeholders, is expected to create a healthy competitive environment within the sector.

Rationale for Ranking

While recognising that one size (of LTRS) does not fit all universities, this chapter presents opportunities for different stakeholders – users of the league tables publications, including students, parents, employers, government and universities, to configure their data in the most favourable way or otherwise attempt to influence the input metrics (Hazelkorn, 2008). This section highlights the implications of league tables for university education development, students, and student recruitment.

1. Understanding the Sector

These specific ranking indicators provide university administrations with a detailed understanding of their institutional strengths and weaknesses. Using this data, the

administrators can monitor the university's progress and put measures in place to develop and improve the institutional activities and performance. LTRS offer an opportunity for African universities to benchmark performance against other universities within the continent that are facing similar challenges. Universities can have a sense of improvement as they see their ranking increase. Funders and sponsorships can also rely on the league table to make their funds allocation decision, especially as they tend to support the best in the rank financially. This can individually work for the school-specific ranking where a funder is interested in the progress and outcome of a specific course/field, but not the overall ranking of the university.

2. Enhance the quality of Education

When done well, there are opportunities for league table in Africa to enhance the quality of education. League tables can be valuable to consumers, policymakers, and academic institutions as they compare themselves with peer institutions at home or abroad (Altbach, 2015). While universities may not want to place public emphasis on their ranking, they are privately trying to avoid slipping (Griffith & Rask, 2007), highlighting the inherent value of LTRS for shaping education development. Institutions can also compete for grants and public support based on their ranking, especially those not explicitly focusing on research activity rankings. Understanding the implications of the LTRS can stimulate research output and teaching quality amongst universities and academics.

3. Marketing Communications

Specific LTRS for African Universities offers an additional marketing communication strategy. Universities can take pride in their ranking as they reach out to prospective students (Mogaji, 2019). Universities can refer to their ranking in advertising and marketing material as positive rankings generate 'better marketing' and 'support of public opinion'; while the opposite is also true (Hazelkorn, 2008). Universities that offer unique teaching and learning experiences, for instance study abroad opportunities, access to state of the art facilities (such as libraries and laboratories), which may not have been captured in the research-intensive league table, can use their ranking positions to attract and encourage prospective students to apply.

4. Student Recruitment

With intense competition existing amongst students who want to study at the most prestigious schools, LTRS is seen to provide a cue to students (Hazelkorn, 2008). School-specific rankings can also indicate the ratings of a course which a student or parent might be interested, in comparison to the overall ranking of the university. The social impact ranking can also present a cue for students' decision-making process if they are looking beyond the global ranking system. Universities can incorporate their rankings for marketing communication and student requirements and highlight their ranking and the improvements achieved over the years (Mogaji, 2016; Mogaji & Yoon, 2019). High achieving students are also able to compare universities concerning course programs and use the ranking positions as a guide to select the university of choice. While the majority of African universities are financially constrained and therefore lack good infrastructure, others have invested in modern facilities that are used to support the learning and teaching experiences. The production of league tables that compare different fields enables high achieving students, who may not have resources to travel overseas, to identify universities that can support their career goals.

5. Staff Recruitment

LTRS highlight the performance of universities, both from an academic and managerial perspective and can influence the recruitment of staff, especially for those who may be thinking of coming to Africa to secure employment, those who are interested in specific areas of teaching, and those who might want to change jobs. High-quality future faculty are also more attracted to highly ranked institutions, making recruitment easier because of their excellent reputation (Hazelkorn, 2007). Organisationally, good rankings have a positive impact on faculty morale (Hazelkorn, 2008) due to the positive energy that is encouraged in highly ranked universities. By nature, human beings are competitive, and as such, excellent and well-qualified academics will compete to work in a well-established and recognised institution. Additionally, working in a highly ranked university guarantees or promises these academics a supportive environment, which enables them engage better, for instance with students - which improves the teaching and learning experiences, provides the academics with a supportive environment for research, and subsequently improves the research output. These positive outcomes become the same ranking factors, which are used to rank universities and subsequently benefit the institutions and the staff members.

6. African solution for African problems

Even in their contentious nature, LTRS is believed to provide a competitive environment, in which academic success thrives. As mentioned earlier, universities in the global north differ significantly from those in the global south, and it is unfair to compare these institutions using the same metrics. As such, it would be unfair to expect that African universities to compete with universities in the global north. As a continent, Africa faces economic and geopolitical challenges, which can only be solved by those people who best understand the problems – the Africans themselves. The continent has highly qualified academics and professionals who are capable of working together to identify and solve issues that face the universities. In as much as we have international academics who are willing to assist with issues (such as increase in research output, internationalisation, improve the teaching and learning experiences), it is essential to remember that the homegrown academics have a better understanding of the problems facing the education system and only they would be able to propose ways to improve the education system. The identification and use of these homegrown talents to help strategise and develop ranking systems that are in line with activities are what we think will help develop ranking systems that are best suited for the African higher education sector.

Proposed African League Tables

While recognising that there is no ‘one best university’ across all areas and ‘minimal differences produced by random fluctuations may be misinterpreted as real differences’ (CHE, 2019), this chapter proposed five critical areas for African University Leagues Tables:

1. An African University League Table.

This is an effort to present a holistic understanding of African Universities on a league table. The inclusions, definitions, methods, implications and effects are of great importance (Marginson, 2007). This could focus on research output and could be further implemented regionally, perhaps something like the CHE which encompasses North, East, South and West Africa.

2. Teaching League

This is a form of the league table that has often been neglected as focus has been on research ranking. Times Higher Education recently piloted the Europe Teaching Rankings in 2018 focusing on institutions' teaching and learning environments for students. Overall, the ranking is underpinned by 13 individual performance metrics. More than 240 universities across western and southern Europe have been ranked. This is an option for African universities as well, to develop a league table that will not divert attention from some central purposes of higher education.

3. Ranking of Student Experiences

The idea of this ranking is to explore students' experiences of their universities, which allows the universities to identify areas that they can improve. This ranking encompasses the diversity on campus, the facilities, and any other activities that the students engage in while on campus. Participants in the 2018 Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey were asked to provide a rating between "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" on whether their university has: good social life, community atmosphere, extracurricular activities/societies, and enjoyable environment on campus / around university (THE, 2018). The answers to these questions were then combined to give an overall rating of the universities' student experience.

4. School-specific rankings

That is ranking of Business Schools, Law Schools or Medical schools, against other similar schools, rather than ranking the university as a whole. This will increase homogeneity in ranking as it will be comparing like-with-like. A university could have a very vibrant business or law school, but weak humanities school. Given that students enrol in a programme in an academic school, there is prestige in 'being in the best business school in Africa', for example.

5. Ranking for social impact

Academics are often rewarded for testing theories, rigorous research and publications in journals with high impact factors. However, what about relevance and value to society? How do these studies translate to innovations that impact society, for example, better crop varieties, tracking, managing and minimising spread of disease, financial inclusion for the 'bottom-of-the-pyramid, and so forth? The impact may also be considered concerning informing policy. Policy development and review is informed by well-grounded research. There is no doubt that there are many universities' innovations that are impacting local communities and governments, but how many get documented, how many contribute to rankings that would give the university a reputable position?

Conclusion

This chapter recognises the value of university league tables and ranking systems within the higher education sector. We acknowledge that LTRS is essential for higher education stakeholders, both locally and globally. However, the main issue at hand lies in how different higher education institutions are compared against each other, using the same ranking criteria - a practice that more often than not leads to misleading and contentious outcomes. The chapter highlights the absence of league tables and ranking systems that specifically focus on the African higher education system. Key critics of the global league tables are highlighted in the chapter and five critical areas for producing appropriate African University Leagues Tables proposed. While acknowledging the prospects of this initiative, key challenges and opportunities that the initiative is likely to face are presented. From the discussion in this

chapter, it is clear that, if used well, higher education league tables are reasonable and can be used to improve on the higher education sector in the continent.

While recognising that there may be other legitimate indicators or combinations of indicators which are left out in silence in the league tables (Usher & Savino, 2006), there is a need to explore more opportunities for ranking universities in Africa. The chapter concludes that efforts should be made towards providing a ‘transparent, free of self-interest and methodologically coherent system, which generates an across-the-board dynamic of improvement’ (Marginson, 2007, p. 141). Global ranking systems should not be the ‘holy grail’ in determining international standing (Boshoff, 2009), but should instead act as a guide to university stakeholders, depending on their interests in the higher education sector.

Criteria that closely reflect the contexts of African universities need to be included in the mix of variables used to measure the quality and performance of universities. We propose six such criteria, which should be included in the mix of factors which determine performance:

1. How universities deal with issues of poverty and inequality in their societies.
2. How universities deal and cope with the lack of resources to mitigate student performance.
3. How universities deal with issues of decolonising higher education.
4. How universities contribute to community, national and regional development issues.
5. How universities deal with issues of corruption and bad governance in society.
6. The contribution universities make towards increasing epistemological access, especially of students from previously marginalised sectors of societies.

Having presented these challenges and opportunities, it is anticipated that the outcome of this chapter will initiate and drive a discussion along with the need for Africa specific league tables and a ranking system. Perhaps a commercial organisation, research organisations, the government and accreditation agencies or the universities themselves, will take up the responsibility to develop an inclusive University League Tables and Ranking Systems in Africa, which can be trusted and adapted, based on a rigorous and transparent methodology. A further discussion relating to the criteria that university stakeholders perceive to be important is also encouraged. The identification of these criteria is also expected to assist in developing an applicable ranking system that is fit for Africa. Otherwise, the establishment of such a system becomes a ‘lip service’ project.

References

Altbach, P., 2015. The dilemmas of ranking. *International Higher Education*, Volume 42, pp. 2-3.

Altbach, P. G. (2012). The globalization of college and university rankings. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 44(1), 26-31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2012.636001>

BBK, 2018. BIRKBECK TO LEAVE UK UNIVERSITY LEAGUE TABLES. [Online]

Available at: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/news/league-tables>

[Accessed 22 2019].

- Boshoff, N., 2009. Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and the 'big five' South African research universities. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 23(4), pp. 635-655.
- Bowden, R., 2000. Fantasy higher education: University and college league tables. *Quality in Higher Education*, 6(1), pp. 41-60.
- Cloete, N., Bunting, I., Van Schalkwyk, F., Amito, H., & Bailey, T. (2018). *Research Universities in Africa*. Cape Town, South Africa: African Minds.
- Dill, D. D. & Soo, M., 2005. Academic quality, league tables, and public policy: A cross-national analysis of university ranking systems. *Higher Education*, 49(4), pp. 495-533.
- Griffith, A. & Rask, K., 2007. The influence of the US News and World Report collegiate rankings on the matriculation decision of high-ability students: 1995–2004. *Economics of Education Review*, 26(2), pp. 244-255.
- Hazelkorn, E., 2007. The impact of league tables and ranking systems on higher education decision making. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 19(2), pp. 1-24.
- Hazelkorn, E., 2008. Learning to live with league tables and ranking: The experience of institutional leaders. *Higher Education Policy*, 21(2), pp. 193-215.
- Hazelkorn, E. (2013). How Rankings are Reshaping Higher Education. In V. Climent, F. Michavila, & M. Ripolles (Eds.), *Los Rankings Universitarios. Mitos y Realidades*. Madrid: Tecnos.
- Liu, N. C. & Cheng, Y., 2005. The academic ranking of world universities. *Higher Education in Europe*, 30(2), p. 127–136.
- Marginson, S., 2007. Global university rankings: Implications in general and for Australia. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 29(2), p. 131–142.
- Marginson, S., 2009. *Open Source Knowledge and University Rankings*, Thesis Eleven. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513608099118>
- Marginson, S. & van der Wende, M., 2007. To rank or to be ranked: The impact of global rankings in higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4), p. 306–329.
- Mogaji, E., 2016. Marketing strategies of United Kingdom universities during clearing and adjustment. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(4), pp. 493-504.
- Mogaji, E., 2019. Branding Private Universities in Africa: An unexplored territory. *Research Agenda Working Papers*, 2019(9), pp. 120-148
- Mogaji, E. & Yoon, C., 2019. Thematic Analysis of Marketing Messages in UK Universities' Prospectuses. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(7). pp. 1561-1581
- Pouris, A. & Pouris, A., 2010. Competing in a globalising world: International ranking of South African universities. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), pp. 515-520.
- QS, 2018a. *QA World University Ranking Asia*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/asian-university-rankings/2018>

[Accessed 2 2 2018].

QS, 2018b. Top Universities in Africa. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings-articles/world-university-rankings/top-universities-africa>

[Accessed 2 2 2019].

Rauhvargers, A., 2013. Global University Rankings and their impact - Report II -. Brussels.

THE, 2018a. Japan University Rankings 2019. [Online]

Available at: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/rankings/japan-university/2019#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats

[Accessed 2 2 2019].

THE, 2018b. Latin America University Rankings 2018. [Online]

Available at: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2018/latin-america-university-rankings#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/undefined

[Accessed 2 2 2019].

THE, 2018c. Best universities in Africa 2019. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-africa>

[Accessed 2 2 2019].

THE, 2018. Student Experience Survey 2018: best UK universities for student social life. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/student-experience-survey-2018-best-uk-universities-student-social-life>

[Accessed 2 2 2019].

uniRank, 2018. Top 200 Universities in Africa. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.4icu.org/top-universities-africa/>

[Accessed 2 2 2019].

Usher, A. & Savino, M., 2007. 2007. A global survey of university rankings and league tables. Higher Education in Europe, 32(1), p. 5–15.

