

Towards a University Ranking System in Algeria:

rank ordering the notorious, the old and ... the others

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Introduction

Talking about university rankings systems entails answering a series of legitimate but pressing questions: ▶

Are we obliged to surrender to the university rankings **logic**?

Is there a need to use a **global benchmark** to assess universities' progress?

Is ranking of **any value** to the institutions?

How can a rankings system deal with a **complex structure** of HE like the one in Algeria (**45** universities, **10** university centres, **4** university annexes, not to mention **19** écoles nationales supérieures, **5** écoles normales supérieures **10** écoles préparatoires, **2** écoles préparatoires intégrées)?

So, is there an **alternative** to ranking?

Are we not in a **new education order** that uses dictates its agenda?

IS A RANKING SYSTEM: NECESSARY OR INEVITABLE?

Even within a public service, it is NECESSARY because:

- * It will work as a **benchmark** not just for the university's reputation but also the government's and the university's policy and HE practices
- * It will develop **self-evaluation mechanisms**
- * It will install nationally recognized **self-evaluation tools** (reference tools: to support a national reform (LMD reform 2004))

It is INEVITABLE because:

one feels that it is high time the country as much as the universities did the housework, that is to say **harmonise** the system for **TRANSPARENCY** and **VISIBILITY** sake. The higher education system seems to be still difficult to lay people **to read** it and comprehend **its ins and outs** mostly after the 2004 LMD Reform.

A VALID AND RELIABLE RANKING SYSTEM: SCOPE AND LIMITS

From a philosophical viewpoint, this can be possible only if there is a **PARADIGM SHIFT**: from a **logic of MEANS** to an **obligation of RESULTS**.

- The **VALIDITY** issue will respond to the question: **COMPETE FOR WHAT?** The State has total **MONOPOLY** on degrees awarding
- Its main function will be to check if the universities meet **accepted criteria**. Among these, one needs to assess the teaching criterion. Its **RELIABILITY** will depend highly on the weighing of indicators, but also on the data collected. **CAN ONE RELY ON SELF-REPORTED DATA?**
- **RELIABILITY** will entail the complementary **on-site visits**. One thing which seems problematic is **the place of students as stakeholders** (politicized student unions).
- **NATIONAL VISIBILITY** will have to go beyond the structural differentiation between **universities** vs. **university centres**. The ranking system will have to fight against the strongly engrained stereotypes that cling to the repeated distinction between the **OLD (MOTHER) universities** (Algiers, Oran, Constantine), the more **PROACTIVE** universities (USTO, Tlemcen, USTHB), and the **PACK** of universities lagging behind (the others).

- Establishing a national rankings system will need to limit the **damaging effects of a CENTRALIZED higher education system**.
- Bigger shares must be given to the **PRIVATE SECTOR** : complementary schemes for teaching exist at pre-school, primary and even secondary levels, over **200** institutions: since 2008 for universities.
- The **TOP-DOWN CENTRALIZED education system** needs reforming to facilitate the implementation of a national rankings system.
- **international world visibility** suffers from a **LINGUISTIC BIAS**, if not a **LINGUISTIC DIVIDE**: Arabic or even French hardly compete with English and this is detrimental to the wish and capacities of universities to appear in the Shanghai ARWU, the THEWUR, or the QSWUR system.
- Besides, one also questions the usefulness of ranking systems based on **RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY** (case of SARWU) when research conditions are not optimal in our countries.
- a period of **CONTINUOUS INTERNAL EVALUATION** is a good alternative to international ranking in order to instill a culture of nationally competitive universities.
- **DEMOCRATIZATION** and massification have postponed the struggle for **excellence**. Necessity to introduce an **ENDOGENOUS SYSTEM** of **ranking**. Universities' ultimate aim should be less to **compete or excel** but **gain** and **MAINTAIN CREDIBILITY**.
- Building a **NATIONALLY CONGRUENT SYSTEM of EDUCATION (3 cycles)** is a priority.
- **PLEA for a regionally-agreed rankings system for post-secondary institutions improvement. VITAL** in a world where **MOBILITY** has become a leitmotiv and the universities' biggest challenge more demanding than the simple appearance in a world rankings system.

Perspectives

- Avoid the **BANDWAGON EFFECT!**
- Settle for good, the **PRINCIPLE** of Quality education
- Enter healthy competitive ranking systems fully **equipped** and **aware**
- Envisage the switch from ranking systems to new metrics less in **money** terms and more in terms of **values**.