Ranking Higher Education in Current Situation in Vietnam

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Abstract: *In the process of developing higher education in Vietnam, there is a need to rank universities. In recent time, universities in Vietnam have mainly participated in international university rankings such as: QS, webometrics, Unirank,.. In fact, the ranking position of universities in Vietnam in international university rankings was not high and in the opinion of many experts, most of the criteria of international university rankings were not suitable for universities of Vietnam. In such a context, in September 2017, a group of independent experts published a ranking of 49 Vietnamese universities based on the evaluation criteria they developed and determined with the reference; analyze the criteria of the ranking of international universities. This was the first time that there was a ranking for Vietnamese universities. However, there are many critical comments about the criteria, the rating method, the data collected for ranking and the ranking results of the universities. The paper addresses the role of ranking universities in Vietnam, the current ranking status of Vietnamese universities and proposes some solutions for ranking universities in Vietnam.*

Keywords: rankings, universities, university and higher education rankings, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In the period of international integration, the quality of higher education of a country, including Vietnam, needs to be public, in which university ranking is one of the media channels receiving the attention of the government, universities, employers, educational institutions and especially learners and parents. With a university education developed in the context of integration, in fact, universities in Vietnam have mostly participated in international university rankings, but most of them have not invested in this activity absolutely. In other words, ranking universities is an issue that has received the attention of most universities; however, universities have not really been vitally critical for ranking. This will greatly affect the development of Vietnamese universities, especially the recognition of the quality of the training programs in the region and world. In addition, universities in Vietnam find it difficult to participate in international university rankings because the criteria of international university rankings are different.   The issue of ranking universities in Vietnam according to the ranking criteria developed by independent experts or independent ranking organizations for universities in Vietnam will be a suitable option which motivates universities in Vietnam actively in participating in university rankings, including newly established or small-scale universities.

2. The role of higher education ranking in Vietnam

Firstly, higher education ranking is one of the objective information channels to communicate the quality of the nation's higher education system. This is particularly meaningful in the context of globalization when the quality of higher education is no longer the boundary between countries. Besides, implementing higher education ranking shows the openness and transparency of the higher education system.

Secondly, ranking higher education provides learners, parents a common picture, an objective channel of information about the quality of the university so that they can choose and decide to study at the university they believe in the quality of training, especially in the current situation, there are too many universities competing on a field, a major educated in many universities. If there is one ranking bank, learners will choose a direction that suits their abilities and conditions easily.

Thirdly, the results of higher education rankings to ensure the quality of the university for society, are valuable and supervised the evidence of the quality of universities. Simultaneously these results to improve the quality to improving the rankings in the higher education rankings, because in order to really have a solid position in the higher education rankings, universities must pay attention to the quality of universities in the process of survival and development. This is the motivation for Vietnamese higher education to reach higher levels in the region and the world. Fourthly, ranking results directly impact on the admissions of universities as well as attract good lecturers. For universities with high rankings in the rankings, there is a good reputation for quality. This means that there are many students enrolled in universities and many of them are good students, contributing significantly to improving the quality of the entrance. Besides, many good lecturers and good researchers expect to work at high-ranking universities.

Fifthly, the results of higher education rankings are the basis for international universities to cooperate with universities in Vietnam in training and scientific research, as well as a basis for donors for investing in the development of schools.

Sixth, through university rankings and ranking results, universities in Vietnam have the opportunity to match universities in Vietnam, in the region and in the world. Since then, universities can determine the direction and roadmap of development contributing to overcoming the current lagging

situation compared with advanced higher education in the world.

3. Current status of higher education ranking in Vietnam

In recent years, universities in Vietnamare mainly ranked according to the rankings of international universities such as QS (Quacquarelli Symonds - QS World University Rankings), Webometrics, uniRank of International Colleges and Universities (4icu). According to QS's World University Rankings 2019, for the first time Vietnam has a representative in the top 1,000 world schools, noticeably Vietnam National University,Hanoi (group 701-750) and Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City (group 801-1000).
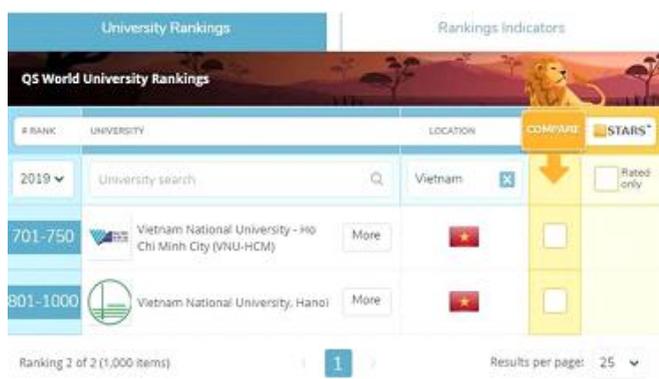
For QS Asia's ranking of universities, Vietnam has 7 universities, namely Vietnam National University, Hanoi (ranked 124th), Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City (144th), Hanoi University of Technology (from 261st to 270th), Ton Duc Thang University (291st-300th), Can Tho University (351st-400th), Hue University, and Da Nang University (451st-500th).


According to the announcement of THE (Times Higher Education - UK) at 22:00 Vietnam time, April 3, 2019 about the ranking results of the most influential universities on sustainable economic and social development, at the top of the global scale, Ton Duc Thang University of Vietnam ranked among the top 101-200 in the ranking of 2019.

Especially, the criteria for quality of education is ranked at 48th-58th, city and sustainable communities, global partnerships, and climate protection ranked at 60th-70th. Webometrics ranks based on four criteria, including Presence, Visibility or Impact, Transparency or Openness, Excellence or Ethics (Scholar). Presence is defined as the number of websites belonging to the primary domain name of the higher education institution; this includes all sub-domains that share the main domain and all file types (both .DOC, .PDF); determined by Google (with 5% weight). Visibility or Impact is the number of external networks that have back links to higher education institutions' websites; determined by Ahrefs and Majestic (with 50% weight). Transparency or Openness is the number of citations from leading authors, determined by Google Scholar (with 10% weight). Excellence or Academic refers to the number of articles in the top 10% cited most in 26 fields; data for 5 years (2012-2016); defined by Scimago (35% weight). The ranking results of Webometrics in 2018 show an increase of Vietnamese universities.

Unirank is an international higher education ranking system that evaluates and ranks over 13,600 officially recognized universities in 200 countries and territories. Criteria for selecting subjects to assess the rating of uniRank include: (1) universities/ higher education institutions accredited and licensed by the Ministry of Education or the Government management agency; (2) can issue a university degree (at least 04 years) or a postgraduate degree (masters/ doctorate); (3) provide face to face learning courses. In 2019, uniRank announced the publication of Vietnam's ranking of 67 universities/ higher education institutions that met the selection criteria for ranking.
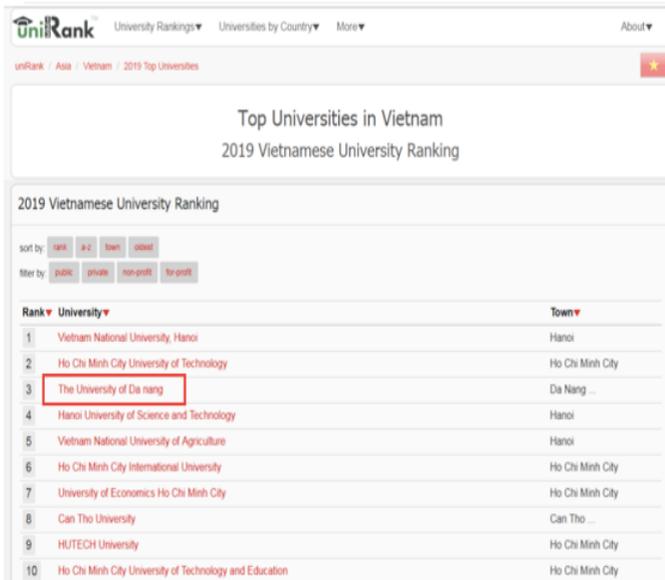
On September 6, 2017, the 6-member independent expert team implemented a project to rank Vietnamese universities within 3 years with the objectives of developing a ranking suitable to Vietnamese circumstances which is quantitative, credible, objective and towards international standards. It is worth noting that this is the first published general university ranking in Vietnam by a group of independent experts. The expert team determined the rate of quantifying the criteria for ranking universities in Vietnam as follows 40% (scientific research), 40% (education and training) and 20% (facilities and administration).

Ranking Indicator	Ranking Weight	Criteria Code	Ranking Criteria	Ranking Weight	Evaluating Index	Unit
Scientific Research	40%	A1	Scale and quality of research	20%	Number of annual ISI articles	Number of articles
		A2	Impact in Science	10%	The number of citations for these papers	The number of citations
		A3	Research productivity	10%	Number of ISI articles per a lecturer	Number of articles per a lecturer
Education and Training	40%	B1	Training scale	10%	Number of undergraduate and graduate students studying	Number of students
		B2	Teaching team	10%	The current number of lecturers with PhD and above	The number of lecturers
		B3	Teaching quality	10%	The ratio of the number of lecturers per student	The number of lecturers/ student
		B4	Student quality	10%	Ranking of students based on the entrance exam scores	The entrance exam scores
Facilities and Administration	20%	C1	Lecture hall	5%	The ratio of lecture halls per student	Number of square meters/ student
		C2	Library	5%	Percentage of books per student	Number of books/ student
		C3	Administrative quality	10%	Information transparency index	Scores

However, the ranking group of Vietnamese universities admitted that they faced obstacles. These are inconsistent university models, lack of data and especially inconsistent, reliable and updated data. In fact, Vietnamese higher education has many different types of universities depending on the classification such as national universities, regional universities, public universities and private universities. Regarding ranking data, the expert group said that data collection of higher education institutions has been carried out in 2016. If the 2016 data is missing, they use the data from the previous year. For some criteria, due to the lack of data from schools, the expert team expanded the data collected for 2015, 2014 and 2013 and tried to propose some acceptable estimates. For universities that lack data on an indicator for a certain year, the expert group also applies the same method: calculating the relative position of the school compared to other schools in the years with data, after that interpolates to get the value of the year to be searched. For schools that lack data with certain indicators at all years, the group ranked at the bottom of the table, using the data of the nearest school with the data above. Therefore, from 100 universities that have collected data, the team shortened to only 49 universities. It is because of the difficulties in collecting data and verifying the reliability of the data, so the report that ranked 49th of universities of Vietnam met many conflicting opinions of educational researchers and from universities especially from traditional universities which are ranked in a low position. In addition, educational researchers argue that if data is collected only through three public reports of universities, the data does not guarantee reliability.

According to the independent expert group, most of the popular rankings in the world today are not suitable for Vietnam. For example, up to 60% to 70% of the criteria of Shanghai Jiaotong University rankings and QS rankings or THE rankings are completely impossible in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the efforts to rank Vietnam University are only in one aspect, not the overall rankings, such as Webometrics only based on website ranking. Therefore, the implementation of higher education rankings in Vietnam by an independent expert group or an independent assessment organization is extremely necessary.

4. Proposals for implementing higher education rankings in Vietnam

4.1. For Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)

- Develop and deploy the special software so that universities can publish the information of them annually and be responsible for publicly available data.
- Apply the sanction to universities that do not publish the data (the qualifications of lecturers, scientific research projects, results of survey of graduates, facilities, materials, financial,…) every year or publish the incorrect information.
- Specify the scopes, purposes, meanings and methods of using the results of educational quality testing and ranking results.
- Issue the legal documents on the operation of independent rating organizations, independent expert groups on university ranking in Vietnam.
- Apply the policies to universities in Vietnam as well as encourage them in participating in ranking in a real way to avoid ranking or participating due to the formalism.

4.2. For independent organizations participating in university rankings in Vietnam

- Develop a set of standards, criteria that are quantitative, credible, and objective and towards the international standards.
- Ensure an independent expert team who are knowledgeable and experienced experts in education, evaluation and measurement management in education.
- Build the evaluation method, process of ranking scientifically; Evaluating and ranking must be objective, fair and nonprofit.
- Make the timely annually public announcement about ranking results so that the government, parents and students can refer to the quality of universities.

4.3. For universities in Vietnam

- Suppose specific policies and plans for participating in the university ranking.
- Build the internal quality assurance system for the sustainable development of the school quality as well as serving university rankings.
- Arrange the departments and staff in charge of the school's ranking.
- Build an improvement plan, devote the resources and implement the measures to improve the status of the school.
- Build a unified, updated, transparent and annual database system to strictly and promptly implement the school's data disclosure, including the publish reports.

5. Conclusion

University rankings appeared very early and one of the first rankings was initiated by US News Magazine (USA) in 1983, in which the main motivation of the ranking trend is more demanding. the quality and transparency of higher education institutions in the context of a rapidly changing and competitive world. In Vietnam, university ranking receives the attention of the government, universities and the society. University ranking in Vietnam is an approach to promote universities to improve the quality, publicize the resources and output products of schools to the society. In the condition and context of higher education in Vietnam today, beside encouraging universities in participating in ranking according to the rankings of international universities, building the standards of university ranking in Vietnam are essential. In order to implement university ranking in Vietnam scientifically with the reliability and the self-discipline and positiveness of universities, it is necessary to synchronously apply the solutions from the Ministry of Education. Education. Education and Training (MOET), independent organizations participating in ranking universities in Vietnam and universities in Vietnam.

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Acknowledgement