

Peer Review

Review of: "Influence of International Rankings on Public Universities: Exploratory Research"

Rajanala Nirmala¹

1. Management Studies, Goa University, India

The paper addresses a timely and important issue, given the growing prominence of evaluation, quality assurance, and international rankings in higher education systems. The topic is clearly relevant beyond the French context, and several of the dimensions identified in the study echo developments observed in universities elsewhere. While the number of cases examined is limited, the authors demonstrate careful engagement with the field and provide a detailed account of the experiences and perceptions of academics within the selected institutions.

The literature review is generally sound and reflects a good command of existing work, particularly the critical scholarship on university rankings and their methodological limitations. The discussion of how rankings privilege certain institutional models—large, research-intensive, and often Anglo-Saxon universities—is well grounded. The findings are, for the most part, situated appropriately within this literature. However, at times the discussion reiterates well-established critiques of rankings without sufficiently clarifying how the present study advances these debates in conceptual or theoretical terms.

The case study approach allows for in-depth analysis at national, organisational, and individual levels, which is a clear strength of the paper. That said, the rationale for selecting the three universities remains underdeveloped. Greater transparency regarding the criteria guiding case selection would have strengthened the credibility of the comparative claims. In addition, although the authors acknowledge the limited generalisability of their findings, the implications for other French universities or for higher education systems elsewhere are not sufficiently explored in the main discussion.

The analysis of the impact of rankings on academic work, particularly the reinforcement of a “publish or perish” culture and increased competition among faculty, aligns with prior research and is convincingly illustrated through interview data. However, the contribution here is largely confirmatory. The more

original aspect of the paper lies in the identification of ambivalent or positive faculty attitudes toward rankings in well-positioned institutions. While this finding is interesting, it would benefit from deeper analytical development, particularly in relation to power, stratification, and intra-system inequalities within French higher education.

The conclusion appropriately acknowledges the study's limitations and outlines directions for future research, including the need for comparative and quantitative approaches. Nonetheless, these avenues could have been more explicitly connected to the empirical findings, rather than presented as general recommendations. The paper's predictive claims regarding the future acceptance of ranking norms by French universities, while plausible, remain speculative and would benefit from a more cautious framing.

Overall, the paper offers a solid empirical contribution to discussions on the influence of international rankings, particularly within the French higher education context. However, clearer justification of case selection, a stronger articulation of the study's original contribution, and a more critical engagement with the broader implications of rankings would enhance its significance for an international scholarly audience.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.