

Peer Review

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

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The paper deals with an interesting topic, although unfortunately, university rankings are now mainstreamed to the point where the more interesting question would be 'do they have an impact any more?'. That being said, the French case may be interesting because so little information is available about the international standing of French universities. In fact, the initial absence of French universities from the rankings was a point of concern in France to begin with. I mention this because the rationale for the empirical focus on France is not well argued in this version of the paper. Further, more attention needs to be given to what potential value information about French universities' experience with rankings could add to the corpus of knowledge about rankings and higher education.

A second point related to the empirics is the peculiarity of the French case vis-à-vis universities outside of France. Most, if not all, of the universities in the top 100 of the rankings are spaces where higher education and research are institutionally co-located. Rankings are rather sensitive to research performance. The French situation with the CNRS implies that universities are primarily doing education. This may make the French case interesting in one aspect and the comparison different in another.

The methods section of the paper needs to be further elaborated and reorganised. The total number of interviews and a breakdown of the number of interviews per university should be added to the information already in the article. The amount of time per interview, the time when the interviews were conducted (e.g., 2023, 2024, etc.). The nature of the study institutions relative to the other French universities. Does each type of university chosen represent an instance of a type of French university? Are all types represented in the sample? If not, what is the sample a sample of?

Analytically, the causal relation asserted among the codes from the interview data needs to be explained.

Some of the local references made in the interviews need to be contextualised and explained for the sake of international readers. For instance, the excellence initiative needs to be explained. In fact, it may be usefully added to the contextualisation of how rankings have impacted French universities, as this was to some extent a result of political concern with the performance of French universities in the rankings.

Generally, the paper needs sound language proofing. ‘To identify how international university rankings **interfere** with universities,’ Interfere is not a good synonym for influence or affect.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.