If Ranking Is the Disease, Is Benchmarking the Cure?

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Abstract

Preoccupations about university rankings reflect the general recognition that economic growth and global competitiveness are increasingly driven by knowledge and that universities play a key role in that context. However, attempts to measure and analyze what works at the tertiary education level have emphasized so far the performance of individual institutions for example in terms of the competitiveness of admissions, research output, and employability of graduates among other factors. While rankings may provide information about individual institutions in comparison to others, they do not provide an adequate measure of the overall strength of a country’s tertiary education system. This article explores, therefore, the appropriateness of rankings as a measure of performance of tertiary education systems. After looking at the uses and abuses of rankings, it explains the difference between rankings and benchmarking methodologies. Finally it presents the World Bank’s benchmarking tool under construction.

Keyword: Rankings; Benchmarking; System Performance; System Health; Drivers of Performance

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