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MANAGING REPUTATION THROUGH RANKING: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

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Abstract: *Being recognized as one of the best universities in the world has become a priority for all academic institutions. In a range of strategic and operational decision-making scenarios, the ranking's performance serves as a proxy for educational quality, reflecting the university's standing. The measures taken by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) to unleash all its alternatives to establish itself as a leading provider of higher education using ranking outcomes are shared in this article. It will discuss the challenges and constraints that UiTM must face to meet the ranking requirement. Ranking metrics correlations to the improvement was presented particularly on indicators which focused on UiTM visibility efforts. The UiTM2025 blueprint, which leveraging on excellence, synergy, and integrity (ESI) principles supposed to transform UiTM into a top-tier global academic institution by the year 2025, includes ranking-related objectives as part of the strategies.*

Keywords: *Reputation Management, University Ranking, Global Positioning, Quality Education, Strategic Planning, Academic Excellent*

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Introduction

University's reputation is becoming more crucial nowadays. A higher reputation means the university will be able to attract more students, faculty, and funding, as well as for forming partnerships and collaborations (Ebzeeva & Dugalich, 2022; Hossler, D., Braxton, J. and Coopersmith, G., 1989). It also plays a role in the overall standing and influence of the university in the academic community (Khoi, 2020). Looking back on the function of Institute of Higher Learning (IHL) and university reason for existence, they indeed create a huge impact not only to the education advancement offered to the students but more importantly, served as the catalyst center to boost the social and economic development for the nation.

With such a significant reputation, there should be a way to evaluate their performance as part of the continual improvement process (Ressler & Abratt, 2009; Ruff et al., 2021). Traditionally, the education quality was concentrated mainly on the teaching and learning (T&L) aspect (Bornmann et al., 2023; Mejía-Manzano et al., 2023; Peris-Ortiz et al., 2023; Zangoueinezhad & Moshabaki, 2011) but with the recent adaptation of university ranking, the assessment become more comprehensive and extensive (Ayhan & Özdemir, 2022; Estrada-Real & Cantu-Ortiz, 2022; Olcay & Bulu, 2017). The element not only covers T&L but has expends in the research output and their engagement with stakeholders from both community and industry.

Despite various methodologies used by different ranking bodies, there is not a single ranking that able to measure accurately the university performance (Hauptman Komotar, 2019) . Most of the time, the ranking indicators used in the assessment reflects the specific ranking provider concept of quality rather than the actual education quality that should be measured creating a dispute among academicians on the validity and accuracy of the instrument in determining the ranking of the university (Shahjahan et al., 2017). Nevertheless, it is often assumed that highly ranked institutions are more productive, have higher quality teaching and research, and contribute more to society than lower ranked institutions (Harman, 2011; Shin et al., 2011). Therefore, utilizing the ranking performance as a measurement tool help IHL's and universities to identify their area of concern hence the management will work on mitigation and long-term countermeasures to improve their performance (Bilous, 2015; Shin et al., 2011).

Thus, being recognized as one of the top universities in the world has become an increasingly important goal for academic institutions to strive for in the contemporary international system of higher education. These rankings serve as a significant performance indicator, representing the level of education provided as well as the reputation of the university in the eyes of the public.

We present in this manuscript the steps that the largest institution of socially responsible education, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), took to position itself as a top supplier of higher education by making use of ranking systems. Because of the nature set-up of this unique university, UiTM is struggling to meet high weightage indicators including faculty to staff ratio (FSR) and number of international students. Instead of being demotivated by these limitations, UiTM strives on the other indicators that are centered on the visibility efforts which in turn improved the branding and engagement which lead to better perception by academic and industry partners.

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Research Methodology

This is quantitative research which analyzed data related to ranking indicators and scoring published by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) from their official website (https://www.topuniversities.com/). The analysis was conducted to determine the performance of universities in QS World University Ranking up to 2023 from general perspective of universities around the world, Malaysian context as well as specific result for UiTM. The individual indicators and element for specific ranking methodology been investigated to establish the performance over the years in determine the limitations and challenges before intervention and mitigation can be strategically defined for both short term and long-term planning.

Limitation and Challenges

Unlike other universities, UiTM establishment is uniquely design to carry the huge responsibility in helping to reduce the social and economic gap between Bumiputra and other races in Malaysia (Hussin, 2019) . It started from the working paper outlining the establishment of Rural and Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) upon a study visit to Ceylon in 1951 ("Universiti Teknologi MARA," 2023) . Since then, this training center has undergone few phases of transformation until the Universiti Teknologi MARA Act 173 was drafted in conjunction with the establishment of UiTM (Shaari, 2011; "Universiti Teknologi MARA," 2023) which was placed directly under the Ministry of Education announced in 1999.

With the philosophy that every individual could attain excellence through the transfer of knowledge and assimilation of moral values, UiTM has set its vision to become a premier university of outstanding scholarship and academic excellence capable of providing leadership to Bumiputera's dynamic involvement in all professional fields of world-class standards. This is achievable by enhancing the knowledge and expertise of Bumiputera in all fields of study through professional programs, research work and community service based on moral values and professional ethics.

Bearing such special existence mission, the business model and governance of UiTM is unique and difference form other Higher Learning Institution elsewhere in the world. This led to limitations and challenges for UiTM to score well in certain university ranking assessment indicators particularly involving the ratio between the academic staff and students as well as the number of international student's enrolment.

QS Ranking Performance

Figure 1 is the exhibit of ranking position for UiTM in QS WUR for 10 years from 2014 to 2023. Note that QS performance reporting is always named advanced a year from the announcement year. For example, the result announced in 2020 is regarded as QS WUR 2021 cycle. This is because these ranking reports are supposed to be the guidance for the potential student in determine their institution of their choice when they enroll to the university program the next year.

From the graph in Figure 1, UiTM performance is rather cyclic in nature. In 2015, the ranking position was improved from position 729 to position 676 but it drastically went down to 757 positions in the next year until the lowest position of 798th place in 2017. We can associate this to the initial participating period for UiTM where the submitted was according to the methodology without specific target, focus or action plan in place.

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However, the establishment of Ranking and Achievement unit under the Institute of Quality and Knowledge Advancement (InQKA) in 2017 is an important milestone for the ranking journey of UiTM. It is evidence that management has become seriously considering the importance of ranking because it reflects how the stakeholder and global academic perceive on the quality of UiTM to perform its function as a university. By collaborating with relevant internal departments and units including Office of International Affairs, Academic Affairs Department, University Transformation Unit and mobilizing all the faculty members, this unit starts to drive for the ranking excellence of the university. The steady improvement trend from 2018 to date shown in Figure 1 proved that the initiatives and programs related to ranking begin to impact the performance of the university.

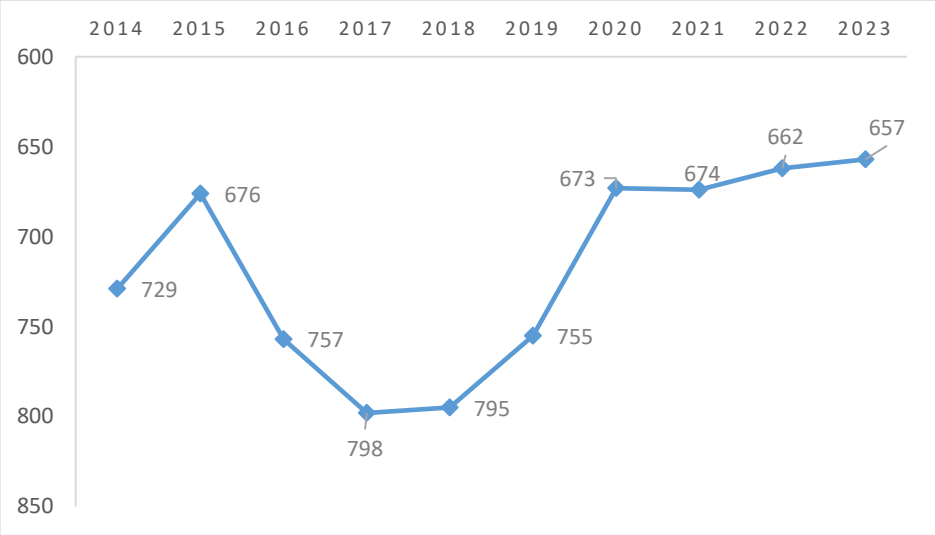

Figure 1: UiTM QS WUR position from 2018-2023 (source : QS analytics)

QS Ranking Indicators

To develop the ranking road map and strategy, the indicators of each of the ranking participated must be analyzed to determine the specific area that must be given sufficient focus to achieve better ranking performance. Different rankings were established to cater for specific performance measurement of the university. Even for single ranking bodies such as Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), they developed different metrics to cater for the variety of assessment methodology that they conducted as shown in Figure 2. The difference can be a complete set of indicators as well as similar indicators used but at different weightage values biased to the objective of the ranking measurement.

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Indicators	WUR	ASIA	by Subjects (Broad Subject)				
			Arts & Humanity	Engineering & Technology	Life Sciences & Medicine	Natural Sciences	Social Sciences & Management
Academic reputation (AR)	40	30	60	40	40	40	50
Employer reputation (ER)	10	20	20	30	10	20	30
Faculty/student ratio (FSR)	20	10					
Citations per faculty (CF)	20						
International student ratio (IS)	5	2.5					
International faculty ratio (IF)	5	2.5					
Staff with PhD (SP)		5					
Citations per paper (CP)		10	7.5	10	20	15	7.5
Papers per Faculty (PF)		5					
International Research Network (IRN)		10	5	10	10	5	5
Inbound Exchange Student (IBS)		2.5					
Outbound Exchange Student (OBS)		2.5					
H-Index (HI)			7.5	10	20	15	7.5

Figure 2: QS Weightage Indicator Breakdown by Ranking Types

For example, QS World University Rankings (QS WUR) measures six (6) indicators as compared to QS Asia University Ranking (QS AUR) which have extra five (5) indicators. However, these two rankings share six (6) common indicators in their methodology which includes Academic Reputation (AR), Employer Reputation (ER), Faculty Student Ratio (FSR), International Student (IS), and International Faculty (IF) and but the weightage value are slightly different.

From Figure 2 also we can see that AR and ER indicators were used across WUR, ASIA and Subject ranking but again their weightage were adjusted accordingly. Note that even for by Subject ranking methodology, they have a different ratio of five (5) common indicators between five (5) broad area defined by QS. Therefore, special care needs to be taken to ensure when the performance analysis is conducted, it should address the specific indicators for specific ranking otherwise the initiatives and strategy will not address the challenges accordingly.

UiTM QS WUR Performance

In this section, the performance of QS WUR for UiTM from 2018 to 2023 will be discussed in greater detail based on Figure 3. As far as indicator scoring value is concerned, UiTM scores the best for Employer reputation (ER). Starting at 28.1 in year 2018, the score has consistently increased up to 47.4 in 2023. The second-best indicator is Academic Reputation (AR) that shows a steady increase of about 9% on average per year. These two indicators encouraging performance can be associated with rigorous visibility initiatives driven by management all these years. This includes the efforts in promoting UiTM via participating in various high impact international conferences, branding strategy, advertisement campaign, collaborative MoA/MoU with international partners as well as attention and focus given in increasing the publication and citations among the academic staff.

From Figure 3, we can see that the other three (3) indicators, namely Citations per Faculty (CF), International Students (IS) and International Faculty (IF) have not changed that much since 2018. However, the Faculty Student Ratio (FSR) indicator shows a negative trend over the years which is consistent with the increasing enrollment rate of the students while the number of academics remains constant.

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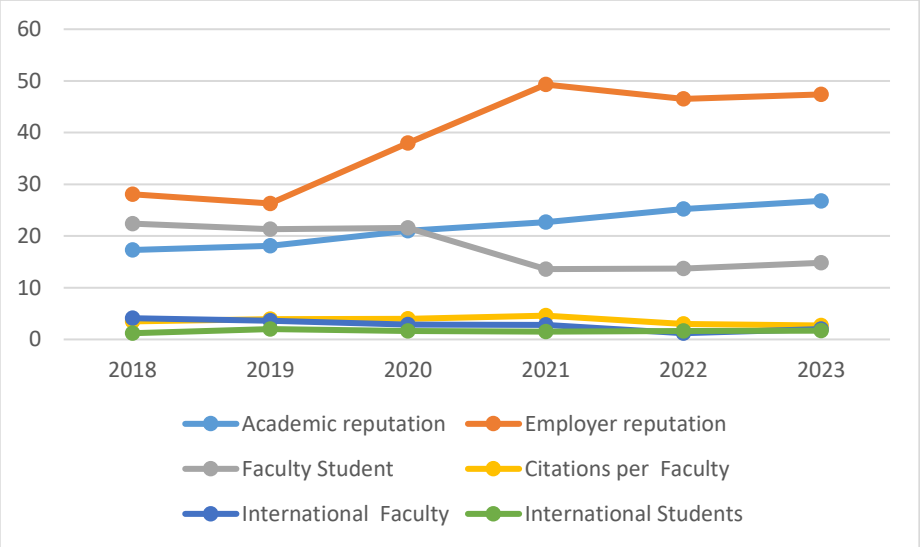

Figure 3: UiTM QS WUR Indicators Individual Trend

As far as QS ranking methodology is concerned, low performance of FSR and IS can directly correlate to the constraints experienced by UiTM that carry huge social responsibility for the nation. The justification of as illustrated in Table 1 indeed refers to the aspiration by the Ministry of Education Malaysia which expecting UiTM to provide wide access of higher education to locals. With such expectation, the increase of student enrolment towards 200,00 students by 2025 (Bernama, 2023) will put UiTM at disadvantage situation for this particular indicator. To make matters difficult, UiTM was unable to proceed with increased staff employment because the present FSR ratio is still deemed enough for a teaching and learning-based university such as UiTM. These situations caused UiTM ratio is about 1:15 which is far higher as compared to < 1:5 ratio by top QS universities in the world (the smaller score the better) hence the low score for FSR indicator.

In terms of number of international students (IS), UiTM are depending entirely on their post-grad students from overseas to be counted because the undergraduate placement is strictly allocated for Bumiputra status students. This law restriction limits the opportunity for the international students to study in UiTM hence keeping the IS numbers at very low number.

Table 1: UiTM Constraints Related to QS WUR Indicators

QS WUR Indicator	Weightage (%)	Constraint
Faculty Student Ratio (FSR)	20	UiTM was given a specific enrolment projection number of students to facilitate the accessibility of Bumiputra to higher education.
International Student (IS)	5	UiTM was not allowed to admit bachelor students other than Bumiputra status.

When considering the weightage of FSR and IS indicators, the total aggregated weightage from was already 25% out of total marks which is very significant in determining the ranking position of UiTM. In other words, assuming all the other four (4) indicators achieved very high marks, these two indicators will be the 'determining' factor for the UiTM ranking position. To put this

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in perspective, Table 2 illustrates the comparison of FSR & IS score between UiTM and other universities which obtained about the same score of AR and better ER score. From the table, we can see clearly that the only reason for those universities obtained better ranking position compared to UiTM is due to their better mark on FSR and IS.

Table 2: Ranking Position by QS WUR Indicator Scoring

	Score by Indicator			
Ranking #	**AR (40%)**	**ER (10%)**	**FSR (20%)**	**IS (5%)**
238	22.5	13.2	73.1	39.1
260	22.4	8.40	49.3	8.7
317	22.5	17.4	28.0	23.5
321	22.5	13.1	87.0	17.7
403	22.0	14.2	32.8	20.1
439	22.6	14.7	27.4	32.3
454	22.6	19.7	19.5	24.1
651-700 (UiTM)	22.7	49.3	13.6	1.50

The FSR indicator clearly gives advantages for the institutions which were ranked higher than UiTM even though their score for AR is about the same as UiTM. In fact, the high score of ER indicator obtained by UiTM is not contributing that much since ER weightage is just 10% as compared to FSR indicator weightage at 20%. The difference of 5.9 score in FSR is enough to separate UiTM almost 200 positions away from the 454th ranking position.

Therefore, it is very clear that while for UiTM, AR and ER are the strengths that should continually be focused, FSR is one of the significant parameters which will dictate the ranking position of UiTM. This can be achieved in two ways; either to reduce the number of students or the academic staff need to be increased. Unfortunately, these two options are not something that can easily be implemented for UiTM because it contradicts its social responsibility mission.

Conclusion

The importance of university ranking is something that is inevitable. UiTM like other IHL and universities worldwide has indeed given its best effort to actively participate and use ranking as one of the tools for performance measure for continuous improvement. UiTM management translated their commitment towards achieving better ranking performance by specifically include clear ranking targets as the Key Performance Indicators in UiTM2025 master plan with aiming to positioned at Top 300 in QS WUR. By considering all the constraints, limitations, and opportunities, this will serve as the blueprint to guide all the stakeholder to come out with an explicit five (5) years action plan which was driven by excellence, synergy, and integrity (ESI) values and principles to position UiTM as a globally renowned university by year 2025. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to investigate the effectiveness of the ranking initiatives execution as well as cultural transformation aspect along the implementation of this comprehensive blueprint.

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