Influence of Worldwide University Rankings on the Strategic Planning of Public Institutions in Thailand

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Abstract

Background: Due to the intense competition that both public and private higher education institutions face, academic administration and strategic planning have gained importance in recent years. Among these are the demands for resilience, sustainability, identity, and quality.

Objective: Given the growing globalisation in the education sector and the significance of university rankings in gauging academic excellence and prestige, this study investigates the impact of strategic planning on global university rankings in Thai public institutions.

Methodology: The present study used a mixed-methods approach, combining an exploratory and descriptive approach. Thai public universities were selected based on criteria like participation in the global university ranking system. Data were collected

using scales, while results were presented in tables.

Results: The study showed that global university ranking plays a huge role in influencing strategic planning among public universities in Thailand. However, despite the global rankings motivating Thai universities to enhance their international visibility, academic brilliance, and research output, they also encountered significant constraints, such as limited lecturer resources in specific areas of broader educational goals.

Conclusion: This strategic orientation toward rankings could potentially result in opportunities for international collaboration and competitiveness; nevertheless, it could also exacerbate existing disparities within the university.

Contribution: This study offers a unique contribution by comprehensively examining the impact of university rankings. It provides a nuanced understanding of the strategic planning by Thai public universities, which may also be applied in universities in developing countries.

Key recommendation: This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the role of global rankings in determining higher education strategies by discussing the implications for policymakers, academic leaders, and stakeholders who aim to compete in the university's global ranking and participate in the global educational environment.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Global University Rankings, Thai Public Universities, Higher Education Policy, Academic Excellence

Introduction
Global corporations like Google have shifted focus and introduced university-backed short-term education programs. Non-profit organisations like Forbes and the digital impacts of economic and social value have revealed a clear shift in higher education. The globalisation of education has resulted in a heightened focus on university rankings as a measure of academic excellence and prestige. These rankings, which evaluate institutions on various metrics, have become a key factor in shaping the strategic planning of universities worldwide. It highlights how important it is to balance business, technology transfer, innovation, and research and development. Hence, the top management of higher education institutions (HEIs') should know the necessity of working with statistics and scientific performance. Furthermore, confirming the locations of countries and universities is crucial to identifying the relevant scholars working on the key axes of sustainable development indicators (Sakhiyya & Rata, 2019). On the other hand, academic management encompasses the "what," "how," "with what," and "where" that a higher education institution (HEI) engages in, along with the integration of the organisational mode and the pedagogical model (Inga et al., 2021; Nazari-Shirkouhi et al., 2020).

The rankings significantly influence public and private universities' global policy decisions, budget allocation, and overall strategic orientation. A nation should evaluate education and learning projects in software development, education, wearable technology, food, medicine, and health. This process generates added-value educational products, which may necessitate assessing undergraduate and graduate programs that have met their objectives and should no longer be relevant to citizens (Ingga et al., 2021; Junaidi, 2024). Developing nations have invested much in the education of human potential (Rau et al., 2021; Shamad et al., 2023). In contrast to other Southeast Asian nations, Thailand and others have chosen a different path, and the latter have seen greater success. Their deliberate efforts to learn about industrialised nations such as the US, China, Germany, the UK, Italy, and Australia, which offer helpful products and solutions, have led to this success. Therefore, they plan to impart this knowledge to the citizens of developing nations. It implies that Thai universities need to innovate not only in their undergraduate or postgraduate programs but also in their structural design. Therefore, they must establish a hybrid system that preserves the traditional environment while adapting to future advancements and embracing both traditional and technological systems.

Table 1 shows a model encompassing the university's global ranking based on human resource management and research capability. However, other knowledge and indicator domains may also require their use to measure a university's international rank. This study validates the worth of instructors and supports their professional development by measuring HEIs. This approach effectively conveys three key ideas: teaching intellectual competencies in classroom settings, merit-based growth, and lifelong learning. However, it necessitates clear governance and earlier technical analysis to determine which universities are best suited for granting a postdoctoral or fourth degree.

For a couple of years, global university rankings have become a crucial element in the landscape of worldwide higher education and an instrument for measuring learning and output quality. Non-profit organisations, like the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), evaluate universities based on several criteria. Several criteria of university quality include the number of citations in lecture publications, academic reputation, and the ratio of international students. It provides information on learning effectiveness among government agencies, academic staff, students, and the educational decision-making process. It is essential to enhancing Thai public and private universities. International collaborations and research funding opportunities are strongly correlated with university rankings worldwide.

Table 1. ARWU indicators

Measures	Indicator	Code	Weight
Quality of	6.55	0.86	0.815
Quality of Faculty	6.11	0.82	0.217**
Research output	5.82	1.23	0.137**
Per capita	5.50	1.33	0.090*
Total	5.54	1.16	0.107**

International students and Thai public higher education institutions significantly benefit from the global university ranking, which serves as a benchmarking tool to evaluate university performance and compare it to other academic institutions worldwide (Fauzi et al., 2020). It may also facilitate students' targeted improvements and serve as a benchmarking tool for better university rankings, enabling them to identify areas of strength and weakness. Secondly, the university rankings are becoming more visible across the region. The ability of students and universities to compete globally primarily hinges on their growing visibility and commitment to global contribution (Muliadi et al., 2024). Additionally, research funders use university rankings to assess the university's performance in education and research support, potentially leading to increased research funding from domestic and international sources. Moreover, the university rankings have a positive influence on students' decisions. University rankings attract students from all over the world, enhancing the academic atmosphere and improving student outcomes.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study was to determine the impact of university ranking on strategic planning in public institutions in Thailand.

Methodology

The present study used a mixed-methods approach, combining an exploratory and descriptive approach. The selection of Thai public universities was based on several criteria. The Thai Ministry of Education must first recognise the university as a public institution. Second, the institution should have participated in at least one of the major global university ranking systems (QS, THE, or ARWU) in the past five years. In addition, this criterion ensures that the universities selected have the capacity and chance to compete in the university's global rankings. Hence, the university should offer a pivotal curriculum in the undergraduate and postgraduate programs in five of nine-three public universities in Thailand.

Data Collection and Analysis

First, this study gathered documentary information about strategic planning at a Thai public university, including management reports, strategic plans, and assessment

reports, to better understand the real phenomenon. This was followed by an exploratory study to analyse the strategic planning. Official websites provide the university data. Interviews with university administrators and faculty members involved in strategic planning and ranking improvement initiatives will gather quantitative and qualitative data. Ten lecturers in management positions and five administrative staff from the university made up the study subjects, and interviews took place in the administrative and academic areas of the university planning department. However, at least two participants from one university were taken into consideration. The selection of 15 academics and lecturers for participation in the current study was based on their practical knowledge and competence in strategic planning. In the descriptive analysis phase, we used a semi-structured questionnaire to (i) verify the participants' commitment to the exploratory research, (ii) organise their knowledge and skills, and (iii) evaluate their role in the organisation's planning strategy (Falqueto et al., 2020). Data analysis compared Thai universities' performance throughout the chosen period across several ranking systems. SPSS software examined the data for patterns, correlations, and trends. Furthermore, a thematic analysis to explore qualitative insights from interviews, pinpointing recurring issues, tactics, and viewpoints associated with global university rankings.

Results

The Ministry of Education funds the Thai public university. The Ministry of Education funds the strategic planning process, encompassing strategic, tactical, and university operational systems. The institution has a planning system containing proposals for activities and goals from the academic and administrative units. This system covers the plans established for a 5-year planning cycle. Special software manages the planning process. The strategic planning report for 2013-2023 highlights the three primary areas of Thai public universities: teaching, scientific research, and university extension. The report also highlights an increase in lecturers and university programs related to scientific research and publishing.

The findings indicate that both stakeholders (e.g., university lecturers and managements) in society and top management influence and are influenced by the strategic planning implementation process. Nevertheless, society has a weak influence, whereas upper-level management has a strong influence. The same is true for other stakeholders, such as the PBD and the faculty. For instance, despite Frooman's (1999) categorisation of them as high-interdependence stakeholders, one should not assume that the PBD possesses the same power as the faculty to influence the strategy implementation process at the studied university. As regards the dependent stakeholders (academic and administrative managers), we identified a difference in influence intensity: while academic managers have a high degree of influence, administrative managers have a low one. Academic managers' distinctive work in the

university's core activities (teaching and research) could account for these disparities, while administrative managers handle the support activities.

The study's findings on how worldwide university rankings affect strategic planning at Thai public institutions reveals several important insights.

Table II. Research finding for university metrics and rankings

Universities	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Mahidol (ARWU score)	A+	A+ A B C D	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+
Chulalongkorn (ARWU	A+	A+ A B C D	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+
Chiang Mai (ARWU	A+	A+ A B C D	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+
Rajamangala (ARWU	A	A A B C	A	A	A	A	A	A+	A+	A+	A+
Yala Rajabhat (ARWU	A	A A B C	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A+	A+

Key: A: Research, B: ARWU, C: QSWUR, D: The WUR

The results regarding technical and administrative managers showed the most significant divergence in opinion. Most responses did not confirm the presence or absence of any of the three attributes for these stakeholders. The respondents disagreed with the group's actions regarding implementing strategic planning at the university. Therefore, it was impossible to include it in the model of Mitchell et al. (1997), since no inference regarding attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency could be made. Furthermore, upon comparing the results of this survey with the papers, it shows that administrative staff and lecturers align more closely with those of Mainardes et al. (2010), indicating that technical and administrative managers exert minimal influence over the university's strategies, particularly during the implementation stage. This may be because, among internal stakeholders, the most important one is faculty members.

The universities' performance trends
The conclusion that education facilitates the relationships between forecasting and presentation supports the main hypothesis of our study that planning improves performance when universities can learn from it. These findings provide empirical support for a few previous studies' theoretical assumptions, namely that planning is the formal foundation for organisational success and learning. This result suggests that the university's human resource levels (e.g., lecturers) and quality education systems positively affect university learning, performance, and planning (Angiola et al., 2019). Over the past ten years, Thai public institutions have demonstrated an increased interest, particularly in international university rankings. This indicates a growing

appreciation among students for their competitiveness and global visibility. According to an analysis of ranking performance trends, numerous institutions have shown signs of improvement over time.

These variations in research funding, research output, and foreign partnerships are important in a university's global ranking (Inga et al., 2021). For example, the quality, research productivity, and the number of global citations. This element highlights the potential for internationalisation tactics to enhance academic reputation and increase worldwide competitiveness: Strong national and international reputations are generally associated with higher rankings for institutions. It is influenced by the number of international and graduate students (Thanitbenjasith et al., 2020). However, Thai universities have encountered several challenges, including limited financial resources, policies, and regulatory frameworks that occasionally impede their ability to innovate and adapt to evolving global norms and competitiveness. Thai universities find it difficult to differentiate themselves from their competitors regarding funding for research, faculty, and overseas students.

The study identifies several opportunities for Thai public universities to improve their global rankings, including enhancing their research capacity. Investing in research infrastructure and fostering international research collaborations can significantly improve research output and quality while strengthening international partnerships. Building and expanding international networks with universities, research institutions, and industries can enhance academic and research opportunities and improve academic offerings (Muliadi et al., 2024; Sakhiyya et al., 2019). Developing innovative academic programs and enhancing teaching quality can attract a more diverse and talented student body. In addition to showcasing high-calibre projects and programs that optimise available resources, university leaders must also demonstrate a safe, timely, and transparent leadership style. As a result, faculties need to take the initiative to manage lesson planning and maximise the potential of their faculty members. The education stakeholders must also assess the professional profile, the teacher's accomplishments throughout their career, the HEI's partners' appropriation of the mission and vision, and the teacher's disciplinary, pedagogical, and technological competencies and skills.

On the other hand, university need to gradually develop their teaching staff, following the recommendations of an appropriate academic management team. To effectively prepare instructors for these postgraduate programs, it is necessary to acquire proficiency in the English language. As they are linked to the knowledge generation necessary to alter the productive matrix, emerging countries find it easy to identify their demands. Enhancing the spirit that drives and supports each HEI employee's everyday job is essential (Mohamed, 2023). Hence, Thai public universities should prioritise research excellence and international collaboration, develop comprehensive internationalisation strategies, invest in faculty development and student support services, engage in strategic partnerships with global institutions, and regularly monitor and evaluate progress toward ranking improvement goals. It may help navigate the complexities of global university rankings and improve their international standing.

The university's strategic plan fundamentally aligns with the organisation's objectives and assessments to facilitate HEI's reorganisation. The university leaders should systematically evaluate and contrast university stakeholders with the local university setting to illustrate the best practices that have yielded successful outcomes at other HEIs. Due to their long history of operation and functionality, including university administration and inactivity, universities have sustained themselves for over a century, indicating a certain level of credibility. However, initiating empirical experiments on the learning process is not wise. Extinguishing the fire would result in a less effective and lower-quality HEI academic project. It suggests conducting an initial basic study to identify the effective techniques and make necessary adjustments to the others. Moreover, integrating technology with education stakeholders is crucial to eliminating administrative obstacles, such as reducing administrative workloads and allocating more time to academic management and strategic planning. The top university isn't just the one that has adopted ISO quality standards or a particular protocol for every procedure. On the other hand, efficiency involves leveraging technology to reduce the time required for processes that involve faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, because the university is a national institution, achieving its objectives requires more effort from all parties involved. Showcasing the research findings in an authentic setting is crucial to assessing whether the applied research that HEI has invested in is positively impacting knowledge societies, impoverished populations, and society's overall well-being.

Each university should assess its current research strengths and areas with potential for significant impact as part of tailored research excellence programs. Developing specialised research centres or programs that align with global challenges and opportunities can attract international funding and partnerships. Furthermore, universities should undertake comprehensive internationalisation efforts to attract foreign academics and students who are transitioning from traditional classroom settings to online learning, develop an international curriculum, introduce students to global learning opportunities, and encourage their participation in international research initiatives and collaborations. It has evolved into a comprehensive strategy encompassing the university's internationalisation objectives. The imperative of pedagogical development and support programs also plays a crucial role in enhancing research capacities and fostering global research collaboration. Supplementary systems, such as sabbaticals, may promote lecturers and students' participation in international academic networks. These relationships must be based on reciprocity among lecturers, students, and universities.

Thailand's public universities can further increase their international appeal by utilising their distinct cultural and regional assets, such as encouraging regional studies and languages. By utilising their geographic location and offering specialised programs in Thai language and culture, ASEAN studies, and Thai culture, Thai public universities can attract international students interested in the area. Thailand is utilising its advantageous Southeast Asian location to establish itself as a centre for global partnerships in research and education. Thailand is actively participating in community

and social impact projects. Commitment to social responsibility and sustainability can enhance academic reputation and attract students and faculty committed to these values. Therefore, a HEI must take a particular interest in the continual professional development of lecturers. To enhance efficiency and reduce costs associated with ineffective training that does not contribute to the academic or research environment, HEIs must adopt innovative methods to achieve academic and curricular transformation. Moreover, a relationship already exists between basic and applied research; reverse engineering is a reality in HEIs. It suggests HEIs may collaborate with businesses to produce tangible solutions and fund future research independently. As a result, it is not difficult to comprehend the kind of education needed in the area, as HEIs are required to contribute to society through research and to have a vision for identifying and creating employment opportunities based on value-added products connected to developing nations' needs.

The academy changes based on decisions and visions about what, how, with what, and where can be changed or included to achieve the goal, not scientific, professional, or academic resolutions or rules. Therefore, political will and strategic planning based on key stakeholders' roles inevitably enhance academic programs and quality. The government should avoid improvisation and address problems as they arise. Strategic planning entails making the most use of a HEI's resources and investing in labs with genuine equipment not just for education. It also encompasses university actors, who are responsible for identifying gaps and developing competitively funded research projects that directly assist students and researchers.

For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the region, particularly in Thailand, allocating hours for teaching and research activities has been a significant concern. This is because the sustainability of a HEI heavily relies on reducing research hours to enhance teaching hours. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate the competencies of the teaching staff in light of the findings. If a teacher fails to produce research, managing the teaching resources properly becomes necessary. This suggests proper management to prevent influencing the outcomes that a HEI has attained in basic or applied research. The HEI should disclose whether it has already internationalised its curriculum. This would enable the sharing of academics and students in a certain field of study with universities in the area and eventually with developed countries. National higher education institutions should promote institutional unity, not the narrative of their inefficiency and bureaucracy. It must convey the message that it is highly efficient, can use human and technological resources, and is sustainable. By doing so, it will show how active management, which is based on strategic planning, has replaced passive management. It is also inclusive because it serves the most vulnerable members of society. The university's decision-makers communicate the evaluation criteria for management positions in Table 2.

Practical implications

Our study's findings imply that strategic planning might not always benefit businesses. In fact, some research suggests that if planning becomes a programming endeavour

without addressing basic strategic concerns, its impact on academic achievement may be diminished. It demonstrates that the effectiveness of planning can vary depending on the methods used by university administrators (Rau et al., 2021). It suggests that, in addition to having an elaborate planning process, it is critical to ensure that the institution has learning tools that facilitate the application of these tools and allow the company to profit from its planning. The problem that organisations have is that, in many cases, strategic planners and planning departments are in charge of the planning process; as a result, they may be resistant to organisational changes (such as implementing learning mechanisms) that impact planning.

Conclusion

Improving one's global ranking is a difficult and varied process. It necessitates a planned, consistent effort that includes faculty development, internationalisation, excellent research, and productive collaborations. Through proactive problem-solving and strategic use of their distinct advantages, Thai public universities can augment their worldwide competitiveness and create noteworthy advancements in global education. Thai public universities have a road map and recommendations based on this study. Success, however, will rely on the dedication, ingenuity, and cooperation of all parties engaged in Thailand's higher education market. With its unclear consequences on performance, planning is a management tool that has always been in demand. This study made an effort to clarify this uncertainty. According to our findings, learning plays a crucial mediating role in the planning-performance relationship and modifies its impact on the global rankings of Thai public universities. This study does, however, have certain limitations. For example, because it is a cross-sectional study, it can only establish association, not causality. Furthermore, the small sample size hinders the production of results for Thai universities. Therefore, further research with a bigger or different sample size may be necessary to test the proposed relationships more effectively. Furthermore, this is an essential initial step towards providing empirical evidence supporting previous assertions about the intimate connection between learning and planning. Therefore, the study's strength in encompassing the entire region can enhance the confidence in the generalizability of the data.

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