

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY RANKINGS IN EDUCATIONAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND HUMAN CAPITAL FORMATION

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ABSTRACT

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This article examines the role of university rankings as an indicator of educational quality and their influence on the formation of a nation's human capital. In the context of global competition and the increasing internationalisation of higher education, university rankings have become an essential tool for assessing institutional performance and academic effectiveness. The study analyses the main approaches and criteria used in leading global ranking systems, including QS, Times Higher Education, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities, as well as national and regional ranking frameworks. The paper outlines the relevance of national ranking systems in Kazakhstan and identifies the need for further comprehensive comparative analysis of Kazakhstani universities based on standardised ranking indicators. Overall, the findings emphasise the significance of university rankings in improving educational quality and supporting sustainable human capital formation.

Keywords: rating systems, rankings, human capital, quality of education, university efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of ongoing global changes, the training of qualified specialists who are able to manage and adapt to innovation has become an important task for all countries. The future development of states increasingly depends on people who demonstrate leadership qualities, a modern way of thinking, and a high level of professional competence in their respective fields.

Human capital remains one of the most important resources for any organisation, as organisations primarily consist of people working together to achieve common goals. The formation of human capital begins at the university level. The quality of basic professional training of specialists with the necessary professional, business, personal, and ethical attributes largely determines who will assume leadership roles in public administration not only in the near future, but also in the longer term.

Along with theoretical knowledge, university graduates are expected to acquire practical skills that are necessary for effective economic activity under market conditions. One of the indicators used to assess the quality of university training is the employability rate of graduates.

UNIVERSITY RANKINGS AS AN INDICATOR OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

The graduate employability coefficient, along with other indicators such as the quality of the university's educational services, academic resources, student achievements, faculty

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performance, material and technical base, and information and financial resources, influences a university's ranking position.

University rankings are becoming increasingly important, as they provide society with accessible, general information about higher education institutions and influence the choice of a university as an indicator of institutional development and a guarantee of educational quality.

Modern education is expanding its boundaries and is increasingly becoming a global product. Universities are actively involved in competition not only at the national level but also internationally, competing with international institutions that offer similar educational services.

Worldwide, continuous efforts are being made to improve higher education standards and align national universities with ranking and accreditation requirements. The effectiveness of higher education institutions is often measured by improvements in academic quality aimed at achieving favourable positions in global accreditation and ranking systems.

GLOBAL UNIVERSITY RANKING SYSTEMS

In recent years, recognition in global ranking systems has become increasingly important for universities, students, and their parents. Currently, various types of rankings exist worldwide, including subject-specific, international, national, and regional rankings. The most prestigious global ranking systems for evaluating universities include:

- QS World University Rankings;²
- Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE);³ and
- Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), also known as the Shanghai Ranking.⁴

The main objectives of rankings are:

- Assessment of higher education at all levels (teaching, research, administration, finance, infrastructure);
- Provision of information on educational services.

The QS World University Rankings is an annual global ranking conducted by the British company Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), evaluating more than 20,000 universities worldwide. Universities submit extensive data annually in a standardised format. QS assessment is based on six criteria: academic reputation (40%), employer reputation (10%), faculty-to-student ratio (20%), citation index (20%), proportion of international faculty (5%), and proportion of international students.⁵ Academic reputation, based on expert opinions regarding the quality and effectiveness of education, is the most significant QS indicator. Employer feedback, citation indices from Web of Science and Scopus databases, academic mobility, and international collaboration also play an important role in ranking assessments.

Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE) uses 13 performance indicators grouped into five areas: teaching, research, citations, international outlook, and industry income. And both QS and THE focus on higher education, with particular attention to

² QS World University Rankings. <https://www.topuniversities.com>

³ Times Higher Education World University Rankings. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com>

⁴ Academic Ranking of World Universities. <https://www.shanghairanking.com>

⁵ ENIC Kazakhstan. <https://enic-kazakhstan.edu.kz>

internationalisation and reputation. ARWU places greater emphasis on research achievements, citation impact, faculty quality, and international academic recognition.

Table 1. Comparative positions of leading universities in global rankings (QS, THE, ARWU)

No	University	QS World University Rankings (2022/2025)	Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2022/2026)	AREA (Shanghai Ranking) (2021/2025)
1	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), United States	1/1	5/2	4/3
2	University of Oxford, United Kingdom	2/2	1/1	7/6
3	Stanford University, United States	3/3	4/5	2/2
4	University of Cambridge, United Kingdom	3/3	5/4	3/4
5	Harvard University, United States	5/5	2/5	1/1
6	California Institute of Technology, United States	6/6	2/7	9/9
7	Imperial College London, United Kingdom	7/7	12/8	25/25
8	ETH Zurich, Switzerland	8/8	15/11	22/22
9	University College London, United Kingdom	8/8	18	18/14
10	University of Chicago, United States	10/10	10/15	10/10
11	National University of Singapore, Singapore	11/11	21/17	75/56
12	Nanyang Technological University, Singapore	12/12	46/31	81/88
13	University of Pennsylvania, United States	13/13	13/14	16/14
14	Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland	14/14	40/35	91/44
15	Yale University, United States	14/14	9/10	11/11
16	University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom	16/16	30/29	38/37
17	Tsinghua University, China	17/17	16/12	28/15
18	Peking University, China	18/18	16/13	45/23
19	Columbia University, United States	19/19	11/20	8/8
20	Princeton University, United States	20/20	7/3	6/7
21	University of California, Berkeley, United States	32/32	8/9	5/5
22	Cornell University, United States	21/21	22/18	12/12
23	Paris-Saclay University, France	86/86	117/68	13/13
24	University of California, Los Angeles, United States	40/40	20/18	14/16
25	Johns Hopkins University, United States	25/25	13/16	17/19
26	University of California, San Diego United States	48/48	34/47	19/20
27	University of Washington, United States	85/85	29/25	20/17
28	University of Toronto, Canada	26/26	18/21	23/25

Source: Times Higher Education World University Rankings, QS World University Rankings, Academic Ranking of World Universities.

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that, while notable shifts are observed in Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE) rankings between 2022 and 2025-2026, positions of universities in QS World University Rankings and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) rankings remain relatively stable. This reflects different levels of sensitivity among ranking methodologies to changes in institutional performance.

Overall, participation in global ranking systems encourages universities to improve their educational policies and respond to contemporary challenges, thereby contributing to gradual improvements in the quality of higher education.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL RANKINGS

Global ranking systems serve not only as tools for evaluating university performance, but also as benchmarks for comparison. Recently, universities have increasingly focused on internationalisation, attracting international students and expanding academic mobility programmes.

Relatively new universities may enter global rankings focused on specific disciplines or criteria, such as QS Global MBA Rankings or THE Impact Rankings. However, education quality and research activity remain fundamental evaluation criteria.

In recent times, universities in Kazakhstan have become more active participants in global rankings, including QS and THE, where several national institutions have been recognised. However, universities that focus primarily on regional development, undergraduate education, or non-research activities often receive limited attention in global rankings.

Only a few Kazakhstani universities are represented among the top 200 in international rankings (166 in QS World University Rankings 2026⁶ - Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, and in Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026: 401-500 – Nazarbayev University, 1201-1500 Al-Farabi Kazakh National University).⁷ In this regard, it appears necessary to increase higher education institutions' interest in participating in ranking systems, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the global educational market.

Alongside global rankings, national and regional ranking systems in Kazakhstan play a significant role. National university rankings are conducted by the IQAA Ranking Agency,⁸ and the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (IAAR).⁹

IAAR rankings follow internationally recognised standards approved by the IREG Observatory and evaluate universities based on accreditation status, human resource development, internationalisation, research activity, and graduate employability.¹⁰ A distinctive feature of IAAR rankings is the evaluation of individual educational programs by level and field of study.

There remains a need for in-depth research focused on the ranking of Kazakhstani higher education institutions. The National Ranking of Demand for Universities of the Republic of

⁶ <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings?region=Asia&countries=kz>

⁷ Times Higher Education World University Rankings. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com>

⁸ IQAA Ranking Agency. <https://iqaa-ranking.kz>

⁹ IAAR Ranking. <https://iaar.agency>

¹⁰ IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence. <https://ireg-observatory.org>

Kazakhstan includes most higher education institutions with multidisciplinary, technical, humanities and economics, medical, pedagogical, and arts profiles.¹¹

The purpose of the study is to analyse the positions of universities in Kazakhstan in national and international ranking systems and to present their course over the period 2022–2025. Table 2 presents a comparative overview of Kazakhstani universities across several major national and international rankings for the period 2022-2025. National rankings (IAAR and IQAA) show relatively stable positions for leading universities during 2022/2025, with most institutions in the TOP-20 maintaining their rankings or experiencing only minor changes.

Conversely, several leading Kazakhstan universities maintain relatively stable positions in global rankings. In particular, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, and Satbayev University remain among the most visible institutions from Kazakhstan in the QS World University Rankings and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. Furthermore, data in the table show that only a limited number of Kazakhstani universities are represented in global rankings such as the Times Higher Education rankings. At the same time, a larger number of Kazakhstani higher education institutions appear in the QS Asia University Rankings, which suggests that Kazakhstan's higher education system has a stronger presence at the regional level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results presented in Table 2 illustrate the increasing importance of university ranking systems as instruments for assessing the performance and competitiveness of higher education institutions. Since different rankings use their own methodological approaches and indicator sets, the positions of universities may differ across ranking systems.

The comparison of ranking results for 2022 and 2025 shows that several leading universities in Kazakhstan maintain relatively stable positions in international rankings. At the same time, a larger number of institutions are represented mainly in regional rankings. This suggests that Kazakhstan's higher education system has gained certain level of visibility in the regional academic environment, though its presence in global rankings remains limited.

National rankings by IAAR and IQAA also demonstrate relatively stable positions for many leading universities. This stability may indicate gradual improvements in the quality of educational programs, institutional management, and the overall development of universities.

The analysis also indicates that some institutions, including the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, are not represented in international rankings. This may be related to the specific focus of such institutions, which primarily train civil servants and offer professional development programs. However, given the increasing role of rankings in shaping institutional reputation and visibility, participation in national or international rankings is a possible direction for future development.

Overall, the study suggests that engagement with ranking systems and compliance with their quality indicators remain important factors for strengthening the competitiveness and international visibility of universities in Kazakhstan.

The results of this study contribute to a better understanding of the position of Kazakhstani universities within both global and national ranking systems and highlight key trends in their

¹¹ <https://kazpravda.kz/n/natsionalnyy-reyting-vostrebovannosti-vuzov-respubliki-kazahstan-2021/>

Table 2. National and International University Rankings in Kazakhstan (2022–2025)

№	Universities	QS World University Rankings		Times Higher Education World University Rankings		QS Asia University Rankings		IAAR National Ranking: Top 20 Kazakh Universities		IQAA National Ranking	
		2022	2025	2022	2025	2022	2025	2022	2025	2022	2025
1	Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	150	163	1201+	1201-1500	44	29	1	1	1	1
2	L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University	277	=321	1501+	1501+	96	65	2	2	2	2
3	M. Auezov South Kazakhstan University	=443	621-630	–	–	=177	=138	3	2	4	4
4	Satbayev University	405	=405	1501+	1501+	128	89	–	–	3	3
5	Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University	511-520	671-680	–	–	=147	=131	=5	4	–	–
6	Kazakh National Agrarian Research University	481	671-680	–	–	=162	149	6	=6	–	–
7	S.D. Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University	651-700	951-1000	–	–	301-350	=345	–	=14	–	–
8	Abylkas Saginov Karaganda Technical University	651-700	851-900	–	–	271-280	264	–	=6	–	–
9	Karaganda Buketov University	801-1000	901-950	–	–	235	167	4	–	5	6
10	Ablai Khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages	1001-1200	1001-1400	–	–	351-400	=305	9	=10	–	–
11	Kazakh-British Technical University	801-1000	1001-1200	–	–	251-260	=230	–	–	–	–
12	KIMEP University	801-1000	1001-1200	–	–	=233	=269	–	–	1	–
13	Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University	1201-1400	1201-1400	–	–	401-450	281	3	3	–	–
14	Toraighyrov University	1201-1400	1201-1400	–	–	551-600	441-450	6	–	5	–
15	Nazarbayev University	–	–	401-500	401-500			–	–	–	–
16	Almaty Management University (AlmaU)	–	–	–	–			–	–	3	–
17	Karaganda University of Kazpotrebsouz	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	–
18	Narxoz University		1001-1200	–	–	401-450	=345	–	–	–	–
19	Turan University	–	–	–	–	–	751-800	=7	=6	–	–
20	K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University	–	–	–	–	551-600	641-660	–	–	–	–
21	Almaty Technological University	561-570	951-1000	–	–	301-350	=354	=5	5	7	8
22	Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University	701-750	801-850	–	–	239	=193	–	–	–	–

№	Universities	QS World University Rankings		Times Higher Education World University Rankings		QS Asia University Rankings		IAAR National Ranking: Top 20 Kazakh Universities		IQAA National Ranking	
		2022	2025	2022	2025	2022	2025	2022	2025	2022	2025
23	M. Ospanov West Kazakhstan Medical University	-	-	-	-	-	-	=7	-	-	-
24	Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University		1401+	-	-	551-600	541-560	=8	=7	-	-
25	Astana Medical University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
26	Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
27	Kazakh National Women's Pedagogical University	-	-	-	-	-	801-850	=10	=7	-	-
28	Almaty University of Power Engineering and Telecommunications	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
29	Shokan Ualikhanov Kokshetau University	-	-	-	-	551-600	641-660	-	-	-	-
30	Sarsen Amanzholov East Kazakhstan University	-	-	-	-	401-450	-	=8	=7	6	7
31	Shakarim University of Semey	-	-	-	-	501-550	501-520	=10	-	-	-
32	T. K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	=10	-	-
33	International Educational Corporation	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	-	-	-
34	D. Serikbayev East Kazakhstan Technical University		951-1000	-	-	-301-350	=288	-	-	-	-
35	West Kazakhstan Innovation and Technology University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
36	Kazakh University of Economics, Finance and International Trade	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
37	Kazakh-Russian International University	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	-	-	-
38	Rudny Industrial Institute	-	-	-	-	-	-	=12	-	-	-
39	Turan-Astana University	-	-	-	-	-	-	=15	19	-	-
40	Baishev University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
41	Kazakhstan University of Innovation and Telecommunications Systems	-	-	-	-	-	-	=16	15	-	-
42	Kazakhstan Engineering and Technology University	-	-	-	-	-	-	=15	-	-	-
43	Karaganda Industrial University	-	-	-	-	-	701-750	=12	=12	-	-
44	Kazakh Academy of Sport and Tourism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

№	Universities	QS World University Rankings		Times Higher Education World University Rankings		QS Asia University Rankings		IAAR National Ranking: Top 20 Kazakh Universities		IQAA National Ranking	
		2022	2025	2022	2025	2022	2025	2022	2025	2022	2025
45	A. Myrzakhmetov Kokshetau University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
46	Kainar Academy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
47	Kazakh University of Technology and Tourism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
48	South Kazakhstan Medical Academy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	=14	-	-
49	Almaty Academy of Economics and Statistics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
50	Academy of Civil Aviation	-	-	-	-	-	-	=14	12	-	-
51	Nur-Mubarak Egyptian University of Islamic Culture	-	-	-	-	-	-	=18	18	-	-
52	Syrdarya University	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	-	-	-
53	Dulaty University (Dulaty Taraz University)	-	1401+	-	-	551-600	601-620	=16	16	-	-
54	Arkalyk Pedagogical Institute named after I. Altynsarin	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	-	-	-
55	Mardan Saparbayev Institute	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
56	Kyzylorda University Bolashak	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
57	Atyrau Engineering and Humanitarian Institute	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	-	-	-
58	Zhetysu University named after I. Zhansugurov	-	-	-	-	501-550	701-750	-	=11	-	-
59	Caspian University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
60	H. Dosmukhamedov Atyrau University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
61	Innovative Eurasian University	-	-	-	-	-	801-850	=17	-	-	-
62	International Taraz Innovation University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
63	Kazakh-American Free University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
64	Astana International University	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	5

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education World University Rankings, QS Asia University Rankings, the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (IAAR), and the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA).

Note: “-” indicates that the university is not represented in the corresponding ranking. The table includes universities appearing in national accreditation rankings and selected international ranking systems.