

Promoting multilingualism through university rankings

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Language(s) and the construction of knowledge in European HE

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1 University rankings and the “internationalisation” of higher education

- "Bologna Process" in 1999. Harmonisation of university programmes and promotion of international mobility of students and researchers.
- Rationale: Attracting the most talented students and researchers, stimulating competition between universities and **increasing the quality** of research and teaching activities.
- Measuring this quality, however, is not easy. The EU has been unable to quickly provide **reliable**, **valid** and above all **shared** indicators that can properly inform students and allow a methodologically sound comparison between European universities.

University rankings (cont.)

- This vacuum has been progressively filled by indicators and rankings published by private institutions. The **QS** Quacquarelli Symonds rankings, the **World University Ranking (WUR)**, Times Higher Education, and the Shanghai ranking today dominate the market.
- These rankings are not going to disappear.
- University education is a considerable investment of time and money for students and their families, and rankings promise to provide them with information on the quality of universities to guide their choices.
- But market. In 2018, 5.6 million tertiary students worldwide had crossed a border to study (OCSE). It was 4.2m in 2010

The *World University Ranking* - WUR

The Times Higher Education's [*World University Ranking*](#) is the weighted sum of 13 indicators divided into 5 areas:

1. Teaching - the learning environment (30% of the overall score);
2. Research - volume, income and reputation (30%);
3. Citations of scientific articles published by academic staff (30%); Scopus database - research influence
4. **International outlook** (7.5%);
 - Proportion of foreign students: 2.5%
 - Proportion of international staff: 2.5%
 - Proportion of a university's total relevant publications with at least one international co-author: 2.5%
5. Industry income -knowledge transfer (2.5%).

The *QS* ranking

The QS ranking is the weighted sum of 6 indicators

1. Academic Reputation (40%)
2. Employer Reputation (10%);
3. Faculty/Student Ratio (20%);
4. Citations per faculty (obtained from the Scopus database
- 20% of the final score);
5. **International Faculty Ratio** (5%)
6. **International Student Ratio** (5%).

2. The influence of rankings on the choices of universities and research agencies

- “Rankings are valuable both to prospective international students and to universities. They allow us to benchmark and differentiate HEIs based on their **performance**. While the criteria in the World University Ranking represent different aspects of the academic world, **one of the most important is found in the university international dimension**. Internationalisation is both a requisite for improving rankings positions and an outcome of being highly ranked and more visible to international students and professors” (British Council, 2021).
- In France, a survey commissioned by the Senate and carried out among 106 directors of French higher education institutions studied their feelings on international university rankings. The results show that 83 % of these directors have taken concrete steps to improve their institution's rank in international rankings (Bourdin 2008: 99).

The influence of rankings on the choices of universities and research agencies (cont.)

- In Italy, the President of ANVUR (Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes), and its former President, wrote that
- “We ask ourselves what can be done to improve the positioning of our universities in [the QS and WUR rankings].... an important issue that is often neglected and not too conditioned by investment is that of **internationalisation**, which is **always highly valued in the ranking systems**. In this area, more can be done: indeed, Italy ends up not shining in this parameter, and not only because **of language-related problems** ». (Checchi, Miccoli, Uricchio, 2020, my translation)

The influence of rankings on the choices of universities and research agencies (cont.)

« It is necessary to work on the construction of a larger and more articulated number of indicators within the funding mechanisms of our education system, **in order to align the funding of institutions more closely with the international competition which is materialised by the use of rankings.** These indicators, used to determine the premium share in national funding, should be closer to the parameters used in the ranking systems we have analysed, and thus, in parallel with the internationalisation »
(Checchi, Miccoli, Uricchio, 2020, my translation).

3. Outcomes and issues

- The most important outcome on linguistic diversity of the use of rankings has been “The Englishization of Higher Education in Europe” (Wilkinson, Robert and René Gabriels 2021), a process in which programmes taught entirely in English (ETP) have often displaced (as opposed to supplemented) existing programmes in other languages.
- “A major driver of internationalisation has been the increasing offer of English-taught programmes (ETPs). Once the unique value proposition of the Big Four study destinations (United Kingdom, United States, Australia and Canada), English-taught programmes are now widely available in locations from Europe to Asia, South America, and Africa” (British Council 2021).

Outcomes and issues (cont.)

Figure 5. Change of ETPs outside the Big Four across study levels

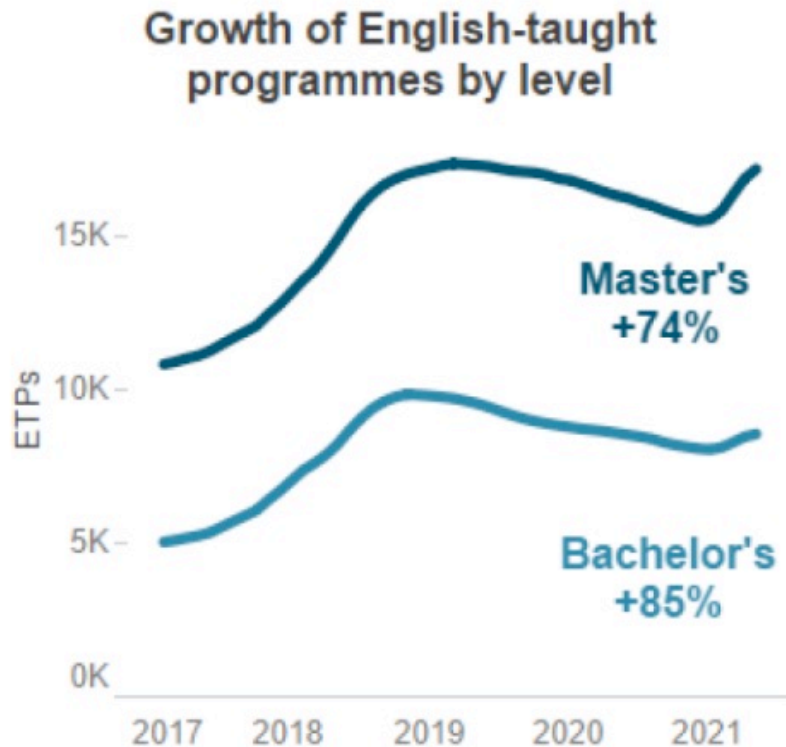
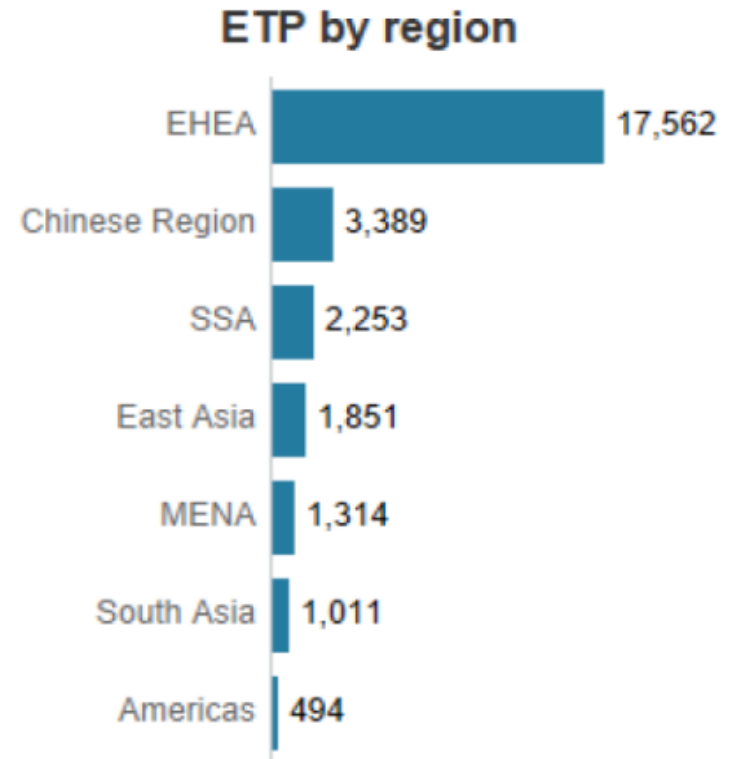


Figure 6: ETPs per region



Source: British Council 2021. The report covers English-taught full degree programmes at the Bachelor's and Master's level across non-anglophone countries. The main data source is represented by Studyportals' database of over 207,000 English-taught programmes globally across over 3,750 higher education institutions (HEIs).

English takes over at Dutch universities, just 40% of courses still in Dutch

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A survey by the newspaper de Volkskrant of 1,632 university programmes offered by the 13 Dutch universities shows that 60% of the educational offerings in 2016 were now in English. At master's level, 70%.

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Outcomes and issues (cont.)

1 Learning effectiveness, ETPs reduce the quality of teaching and learning:

- Experiment in Austria: The understanding of the lecture content was qualitatively better through the teaching translated into German by a professional interpreter, compared to the understanding achieved by listening directly to the original in English as an L2 (Reithofer 2013)
- Experiment at the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano: taking an exam in a second language leads to a loss in grade points of approximately 8.3% (Bernhofer and Tonin 2013)

Outcomes and issues (cont.)

2 Social issues/fairness:

- Private benefits and social costs (who pays for HE?). Only 34% of international students who followed ETP remained in Germany after finishing their studies (Priegnitz 2014). Netherlands 27% (Dutch Ministry of Education, 2016). Most frequent reason? They did not learn German/Dutch. Need to *retain* talent, not just to attract it!
- Brain drain. Study in Italy: English-taught degrees increase an individual's probability of working abroad by 11.3% (Nocito, 2021)

4. Complex Language Policy

- Tension between the goals and incentives of society and those of HE institutions.
 1. Society (macro): preserve the use of the national language, retain talent after bearing the costs of its training
 2. HE institutions (meso): improve their positions in rankings
- The complexity stems from the fact that the incentives and constraints faced by actors at the macro and meso levels are not aligned, and indeed they clearly diverge (Grin 2022).
- Need for complex language policy, where “complex” refers to understanding the problems arising from misalignment of incentives at the meso and macro level

5. Rethinking indicators and rankings

- Incentives to promote monolingualism in higher education are built-in the QS and WUR.
- Need to move beyond QS and WUR with a new EU ranking that factors in the promotion of multilingualism.
- Linking EU funding to universities to this ranking so that incentives at the macro and meso levels are better aligned.
- Linguistic diversity could be supported by new indicators in the new EU ranking, for example,
 1. Replace "percentage of foreign students" with "percentage of foreign students who reach a C1 level of knowledge of the local language at the end of the study programme".
 2. Bibliometric indicators calculated by language. Link a share of public funding to citations of articles in languages other than English

Thank you for your attention

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