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Strategic Pathways for Young Universities to Accelerate The Ranking Success

Mamajonova Mukhlisakhon Muzaffar kizi, mukhlisamamajonova0080@gmail.com, (1)

New Uzbekistan University, Uzbekistan

⁽¹⁾ Corresponding author

Abstract

General Background: University rankings have become influential benchmarks for assessing institutional quality and competitiveness in global higher education. **Specific Background:** Young universities in developing countries face unique challenges in gaining international recognition due to limited historical prestige and resource constraints. **Knowledge Gap:** Existing literature rarely addresses how such institutions can strategically align their internal strengths with ranking methodologies to accelerate global visibility. **Aims:** This study explores how New Uzbekistan University (NUU) can leverage the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings methodology to achieve rapid advancement. **Results:** Through comparative analysis of THE and QS rankings, case studies of high-performing young universities (e.g., Paris-Saclay, PSL Paris, NTU Singapore), and strategic mapping, the research reveals that NUU's partnerships with MIT and TUM, along with government support via Presidential Decree PQ-151, align with THE's research-focused criteria (59% weighting). **Novelty:** The study introduces a three-phase roadmap enabling young universities to achieve THE Young University Rankings entry within five years and main rankings placement within ten years—5-7 years faster than traditional models. **Implications:** This framework offers the first evidence-based strategy for young institutions to convert structural advantages into measurable ranking outcomes while ensuring educational quality and long-term sustainability.

Highlights:

- Highlights how NUU leverages MIT and TUM partnerships for rapid advancement.
- Emphasizes THE's research-focused methodology as optimal for young institutions.
- Introduces a 3-phase roadmap for achieving global ranking within a decade.

Keywords: The Rankings, Young Universities, Strategic Partnerships, Research Metrics, Higher Education Strategy

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Introduction

The global higher education landscape has undergone profound transformation in the 21st century, with international university rankings emerging as powerful forces shaping institutional strategies, resource allocation, and competitive positioning. For young universities in developing countries, these ranking systems present both unprecedented opportunities and formidable challenges, requiring sophisticated strategic approaches that leverage unique institutional advantages while navigating complex methodological requirements. This study examines how emerging institutions can effectively engage with ranking systems, focusing specifically on New Uzbekistan University (NUU) as a paradigmatic case of a young university with distinctive strategic assets.

The impact of rankings on institutional outcomes extends far beyond reputational considerations. According to recent data from Times Higher Education, universities positioned in the top 100 of international rankings demonstrate measurable performance advantages: 35% higher student enrollment, 42% increased research output, 55% growth in international collaboration projects, and 63% expansion in research funding compared to unranked institutions [1]. These performance differentials create powerful incentives for universities worldwide to prioritize ranking advancement as a strategic imperative. However, the pathways to ranking success vary considerably depending on institutional characteristics, national contexts, and the specific methodologies employed by different ranking systems.

For young universities—defined as institutions established within the past 50 years—the challenge of achieving ranking recognition is particularly acute. Unlike established institutions with centuries of accumulated reputation and extensive alumni networks, young universities must build visibility and credibility simultaneously while competing against institutions with significant historical advantages. This challenge is further compounded for universities in developing countries, where resource constraints, limited international visibility, and emerging research ecosystems create additional barriers to ranking advancement. Yet evidence from rapid-rising institutions such as Paris-Saclay (achieving top-20 status within 5 years), PSL Paris (reaching excellence recognition in 14 years), and Nanyang Technological University Singapore (attaining global prominence in 33 years) demonstrates that strategic approaches can dramatically accelerate ranking trajectories [2].

New Uzbekistan University represents a unique case study in this context. Established in 2021 by presidential decree as Uzbekistan's first autonomous public university, NUU embodies a new model of higher education development in Central Asia. The university's founding charter grants unprecedented autonomy in academic and financial management, positioning it as a flagship institution for the country's higher education modernization efforts. Most significantly, NUU has established strategic partnerships with two globally renowned institutions: the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) through the J-WEL (Jameel World Education Lab) initiative for human skills development and curriculum innovation, and the Technical University of Munich (TUM) for technical excellence and engineering education. These partnerships, unique among Central Asian universities, provide NUU with direct access to world-class expertise, research networks, and reputational capital.

The strategic importance of university rankings in Uzbekistan's national development agenda cannot be overstated. The «Concept for Development of Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030,» approved by presidential decree in October 2019, establishes an ambitious goal: positioning at least 10 Uzbek universities within the top 1000 of THE and QS World University Rankings by 2030 [3]. This national commitment reflects growing recognition that international visibility and competitiveness in higher education are essential components of economic modernization and innovation capacity building. The recent Presidential Decree PQ-151 (April 2025) further strengthens this commitment by establishing new governance and funding mechanisms specifically designed to enhance research quality and international competitiveness.

Understanding the methodological nuances of different ranking systems becomes crucial in this context. Times Higher Education World University Rankings employ 18 performance indicators across five pillars: teaching (29.5%), research environment (29%), research quality (30%), international outlook (7.5%), and industry income (2.5%). This methodology allocates 59% of the total weight to research-related metrics, making research excellence the primary driver of ranking success. In contrast, QS World University Rankings utilize a more streamlined approach with six indicators, placing substantial emphasis on academic reputation (30%) and employer reputation (15%), which together account for 45% of the total score. These methodological differences create varied strategic implications for young universities seeking ranking advancement.

For NUU, several factors suggest that THE rankings may offer a more favorable pathway than QS. First, THE's balanced weighting across multiple indicators provides more opportunities for strategic improvement compared to QS's heavy reliance on reputation metrics, which typically require decades to build. Second, THE's use of purchasing power parity (PPP) adjustments for financial metrics provides significant advantages for institutions in developing countries, effectively multiplying the impact of research investments. Third, THE's dedicated Young University Rankings, which evaluate institutions under 50 years old, offer an additional recognition pathway that acknowledges the unique challenges and achievements of emerging institutions. Fourth, the emphasis on research quality metrics (30%) in THE's methodology aligns well with NUU's strategy of leveraging high-impact partnerships for research excellence rather than volume.

The recent establishment of NUU's Strategic Development Council, mandated by Presidential Decree PQ-151, creates additional alignment with THE's methodology. The Council, chaired by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, includes leaders from major industrial enterprises and international education experts. This governance structure directly supports THE's industry income metrics while enhancing institutional visibility among academic and industry leaders who participate in reputation surveys. Moreover, the decree's requirement for international expert validation of major research projects (exceeding 5 billion soums) ensures quality standards that align with THE's research excellence indicators.

The unique research funding mechanism introduced by the decree deserves particular attention. By establishing a co-funding structure where the government provides 60% of research project costs while requiring 40% from other sources, the policy incentivizes industry partnerships and international collaboration—both key factors in THE rankings. The requirement that major projects must involve at least 3 doctoral and 10 master's students creates a direct link between research funding and human capital development, supporting both research productivity metrics and teaching quality indicators. Furthermore, the customs exemptions for research equipment imports until 2027 reduce the effective cost of research infrastructure development, providing additional PPP-adjusted advantages in THE's methodology.

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature on strategic ranking advancement for young universities in developing contexts. While extensive research exists on ranking methodologies and their impacts on established institutions, limited attention has been paid to how emerging universities can leverage unique institutional advantages for rapid ranking advancement. The case of NUU is particularly instructive because it combines several distinctive elements: world-class strategic partnerships, unprecedented government support mechanisms, institutional autonomy, and focused excellence in specific disciplines. Understanding how these elements can be strategically aligned with ranking methodologies provides valuable insights for other emerging institutions seeking similar advancement.

The primary research questions guiding this study are: First, how can young universities like NUU effectively leverage strategic partnerships with world-renowned institutions to accelerate ranking advancement, particularly within THE's methodology? Second, what lessons from successful young university models (Paris-Saclay, PSL Paris, NTU Singapore) are most applicable to NUU's specific context and development stage? Third, how do recent policy innovations in Uzbekistan, particularly the governance and funding mechanisms established by Presidential Decree PQ-151, create strategic advantages for ranking advancement? Fourth, what is the optimal strategic framework for NUU to achieve THE ranking recognition within its first decade of operation?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to provide both theoretical insights and practical guidance for strategic ranking advancement. The analysis combines methodological examination of ranking systems, comparative case studies of successful young universities, and strategic assessment of NUU's unique position to develop an evidence-based framework for ranking success. This framework is intended not only to guide NUU's strategic development but also to offer transferable insights for other young universities in developing countries seeking to enhance their international competitiveness while maintaining focus on substantive educational quality and regional relevance.

Methods

A. Research Design

This study employed a documentary analysis approach using publicly available data and official publications to examine how young universities can strategically engage with international ranking systems. The research focused on analyzing existing ranking methodologies, published performance data, and official policy documents, with specific application to New Uzbekistan University's strategic positioning.

B. Data Sources

1 . Ranking Methodology Documentation

The primary sources for understanding ranking methodologies were the official methodology guides published by Times Higher Education and QS World University Rankings for 2023-2025. These publicly available documents provided detailed information on performance indicators, weightings, and calculation methods. THE's methodology documentation explained their 18 indicators across five pillars [4], while QS materials detailed their six core indicators and recent methodological updates [5].

2. University Performance Data

Performance data for the case study universities were obtained from publicly available sources including:

THE and QS ranking databases showing institutional scores and positions from 2019-2025

University annual reports and strategic plans available on institutional websites

Scopus database metrics for publication and citation data

Official university websites for student and faculty statistics

For New Uzbekistan University, data were gathered from the official university website (newuu.uz), published reports, and Ministry of Higher Education public documents.

3 . Policy Documents

Key policy documents analyzed included:

Presidential Decree PQ-151 (April 2025) available on lex.uz [6]

«Concept for Development of Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030» [3]

Published partnership announcements between NUU and international institutions

Official press releases and public statements regarding university development

C . Analytical Approach

1 . Comparative Analysis

A systematic comparison of THE and QS methodologies was conducted by creating a detailed matrix of their indicators, weightings, and measurement approaches. This analysis identified key differences in how each system evaluates universities and the strategic implications for young institutions. Special attention was paid to provisions that favor or disadvantage developing country universities, such as THE's purchasing power parity adjustments.

2. Case Study Analysis

Three young universities with exceptional ranking performance were selected for comparative analysis based on publicly available data:

Paris-Saclay University (merged 2019, reached THE rank 58 by 2024)

Paris Sciences et Lettres (established 2010, THE rank 41 in 2024)

Nanyang Technological University (established 1991, THE rank 32 in 2024)

For each case, publicly available strategic plans, annual reports, and ranking performance data were analyzed to identify success factors and strategic approaches.

3. Document Analysis

Policy documents and official publications were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify:

Specific mechanisms supporting research quality improvement

Funding structures that align with ranking indicators

Governance arrangements enhancing institutional visibility

Partnership frameworks enabling international collaboration

D . Data Analysis Methods

1 . Ranking Performance Analysis

Using publicly available ranking data, correlation analysis examined the relationship between THE and QS rankings for universities at different performance levels. This analysis used published ranking positions for the top 1000 universities to identify where methodological differences have the greatest impact on institutional positioning.

2. Indicator Mapping

Each THE ranking indicator was mapped against NUU's publicly stated capabilities and strategic advantages as described in official documents. This mapping identified areas where NUU's partnerships with MIT and TUM, combined with government support mechanisms, could provide competitive advantages.

3 . Comparative Trajectory Analysis

Based on the documented experiences of successful young universities, potential development pathways for NUU were analyzed by examining the publicly reported progress of comparable institutions. For example, Paris-Saclay improved 120 positions in 4 years (from 178th to 58th), while PSL Paris improved 31 positions over 7 years. NTU Singapore's journey from establishment to top 50 took approximately 30 years.

This simple comparative analysis revealed common patterns: universities with strong government support and international partnerships typically achieve THE top 200 within 5-7 years of serious ranking engagement, initial entry often occurs in the 500-1000 range, and research output must exceed 1,000 annual Scopus publications for THE eligibility. These patterns, combined with NUU's specific advantages (MIT/TUM partnerships, government funding mechanisms, strategic focus areas), provided a basis for projecting realistic development timelines.

E. Limitations

This study relied entirely on publicly available data and documents, which presents certain limitations. First, internal strategic documents and detailed financial data were not accessible, potentially limiting understanding of resource allocation strategies. Second, the study could not verify all claims made in public documents through independent means. Third, ranking methodologies contain some proprietary elements not fully disclosed publicly. Despite these limitations, the use of multiple public sources and official documents provides a solid foundation for strategic analysis and recommendations [7].

Results and Discussion

A . Results

1 . Comparative Analysis of THE and QS Methodologies

a. Fundamental Methodological Differences

The analysis revealed significant differences in how THE and QS conceptualize and measure university quality, with direct implications for young universities' strategic options. Table 1 presents the comparative weighting structures of both ranking systems.

Performance Area	THE Weight (%)	QS Weight (%)	Strategic Implications for Young Universities
Research Quality/Citations	30.0	20.0	THE's higher weight favors quality-focused strategies
Research Environment	29.0	-	THE provides multiple pathways for research recognition
Teaching	29.5	20.0	THE's comprehensive teaching metrics offer more opportunities
Academic Reputation	15.0*	30.0	QS's heavy reputation weight disadvantages young institutions
Employer Reputation	-	15.0	Additional reputational barrier in QS
International Outlook	7.5	15.0	Both systems reward internationalization
Industry Income	2.5	5.0	QS places higher value on industry engagement

Table 1. Comparative Indicator Weightings in THE and QS Rankings (2025)

*Within THE's teaching pillar

The most striking difference lies in the treatment of reputation metrics. QS allocates 45% of its total weight to

reputation surveys (30% academic, 15% employer), while THE incorporates only 18% reputation weighting distributed across teaching and research pillars. This fundamental difference creates a significant advantage for young universities in THE's system, where performance-based metrics provide more immediate improvement opportunities.

b. Purchasing Power Parity Adjustments

Analysis of THE's PPP adjustment methodology revealed substantial advantages for universities in developing countries. For Uzbekistan, the PPP conversion factor of 0.43 (compared to UK baseline of 1.0) effectively multiplies the value of research investments by 2.3x when calculating research income metrics [8]. This adjustment applies to both the research income indicator (2.5% weight) and industry income indicator (2.5% weight), creating a combined 5% advantage in the overall score calculation.

2. Young University Success Patterns

a. Trajectory Analysis of Rapid Risers

Examination of three successful young universities revealed distinct patterns of ranking advancement:

Paris-Saclay University achieved the fastest ascent, reaching THE rank 58 within 5 years of its 2019 merger. Key success factors included:

1. Consolidation of 14 institutions creating immediate critical mass (65,000 students, 10,500 researchers)
2. Inherited research infrastructure and publication history from constituent institutions
3. Annual research output exceeding 13,000 Scopus publications by 2024
4. Strategic focus on STEM disciplines with high citation impact

Paris Sciences et Lettres (PSL) demonstrated steady progression from establishment in 2010 to THE rank 41 by 2024. Success elements included:

1. Selective federation model maintaining institutional identities while pooling resources
2. Concentration on research excellence with 28 Nobel laureates across member institutions
3. High faculty-to-student ratio (1:5) supporting teaching quality metrics
4. 35% international student body enhancing outlook indicators

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) represented the long-term development model, progressing from establishment in 1991 to consistent top-35 ranking. Critical factors included:

1. Sustained government investment averaging \$500 million annually for research
2. Strategic recruitment of international faculty (65% from overseas)
3. Industry partnership model generating 8% of total budget from enterprise collaboration
4. Focus on engineering and technology aligning with national economic priorities

b. Common Success Factors

Despite different contexts and strategies, analysis identified five common factors among successful young universities:

1. Government backing: All three received substantial, sustained public investment
2. International orientation: Minimum 30% international faculty and 20% international students
3. Research concentration: Focus on 3-5 areas of excellence rather than comprehensive coverage
4. Partnership leverage: Strategic alliances with established institutions for reputation transfer
5. Publication threshold: Minimum 1,000 annual Scopus publications for THE visibility

3. NUU 's Strategic Position and Advantages

a. Unique Institutional Assets

Analysis of NUU's documented characteristics against THE ranking criteria revealed several distinctive advantages:

Partnership Capital: NUU's collaborations with MIT and TUM provide unprecedented advantages for a 4-year-old institution [9]. MIT's J-WEL partnership focuses on curriculum development and pedagogical innovation, directly supporting THE's teaching metrics. TUM's collaboration in engineering and applied sciences creates research co-authorship opportunities with a THE top-30 institution. Analysis of similar partnerships at other universities suggests potential for 3-5x citation impact through co-publication.

Government Support Framework: Presidential Decree PQ-151 establishes mechanisms directly aligned with THE

indicators:

1. Strategic Development Council enhances visibility among ranking survey participants
2. 60/40 co-funding requirement incentivizes industry partnerships (supporting industry income metrics)
3. International expert review mandate ensures research quality standards
4. Requirement for 3 PhD and 10 Master's students per major project builds research capacity

Autonomy and Flexibility: As Uzbekistan's first autonomous public university, NUU possesses unusual flexibility in:

1. Faculty recruitment and compensation (supporting staff-to-student ratios)
2. Curriculum development (enabling innovative teaching approaches)
3. International partnership formation (facilitating collaboration metrics)
4. Resource allocation (allowing strategic concentration)

b. Comparative Advantages in THE Methodology

Mapping NUU's assets against THE's specific indicators revealed particular strengths in several areas:

THE Indicator	Weight	NUU Advantage	Potential Impact
Research Quality - Citations	15%	MIT/TUM co-authorship potential	High - 3x citation multiplier possible
Research Quality - Excellence	5%	Partnership networks access top journals	Medium-High - Quality over quantity approach
International Collaboration	2.5%	Built-in through partnerships	High - Automatic internationalization
Industry Income	2.5%	40% co-funding requirement	High - Structural advantage
Teaching - Reputation	15%	MIT/TUM association effect	Medium - Reputation transfer possible
Student-Staff Ratio	4.5%	Selective admission model	High - Can maintain favorable ratios

Table 2. NUU Strategic Advantages Mapped to THE Indicators

c. Current Performance Baseline

Based on publicly available data, NUU's current position includes:

1. Approximately 3,000 students across undergraduate and graduate programs
2. 300+ academic staff, creating 10:1 student-faculty ratio
3. 200+ Scopus publications annually (as of 2024)
4. 15% international faculty, primarily through partnership arrangements
5. 8% international students, mainly from Central Asian countries

While these metrics fall below THE ranking thresholds, the trajectory since 2021 shows consistent improvement, with publication output growing 45% annually and international collaboration increasing through partnership channels.

4 . Strategic Pathway Analysis

a. THE vs QS: Optimal Choice for NUU

Comparative analysis strongly indicates THE rankings offer a more favorable pathway for NUU:

1. Reputation Dependencies: QS's 45% reputation weighting would require 15-20 years to build meaningful scores, while THE's 18% reputation component can be partially addressed through partnership associations
2. Quality Metrics: THE's research quality indicators (30%) reward high-impact research achievable through partnerships, while QS's simpler citations-per-faculty metric provides less differentiation opportunity
3. PPP Advantages: THE's purchasing power adjustments provide 2.3x multiplier for Uzbek institutions, while QS offers no such accommodation
4. Young University Recognition: THE's dedicated Young University Rankings provide intermediate recognition opportunity, while QS Age Under 50 rankings have more limited visibility

b. Projected Development Timeline

Based on successful young university patterns and NUU's specific advantages, a realistic development pathway

emerges:

Phase 1 (Years 1-3, 2024-2027):

1. Achieve 500+ annual Scopus publications through partnership collaboration
2. Increase international faculty to 25% through visiting appointments
3. Establish 3-4 research centers in strategic focus areas
4. Build toward THE Young University Rankings eligibility

Phase 2 (Years 4-6, 2028-2030):

1. Reach 1,000+ annual publications threshold for THE main rankings
2. Enter THE Young University Rankings (projected 150-200 range)
3. Achieve 40% international collaboration rate on publications
4. Develop signature programs leveraging MIT/TUM expertise

Phase 3 (Years 7-10, 2031-2034):

1. Enter main THE rankings (projected 801-1000 band initially)
2. Establish regional research leadership in focus areas
3. Achieve sustainable positioning through embedded excellence
4. Target 601-800 band by year 10

This timeline aligns with observed patterns from comparable institutions while accounting for NUU's unique advantages and Uzbekistan's 2030 higher education goals [10].

B . Discussion

1 . Strategic Implications of Methodological Differences

The comparative analysis of THE and QS methodologies reveals profound implications for strategic planning at young universities. The fundamental difference in reputation weighting—45% in QS versus 18% in THE—creates dramatically different development pathways. For established universities with decades or centuries of accumulated prestige, this distinction may be less critical. However, for a 4-year-old institution like NUU, this methodological difference essentially determines the feasibility of achieving meaningful ranking recognition within a reasonable timeframe.

The dominance of reputation metrics in QS rankings reflects what Marginson [11] describes as the «prestige economy» in higher education, where historical accumulation of symbolic capital outweighs contemporary performance measures. This creates what might be termed a «reputation trap» for young universities: they need high rankings to build reputation, but need established reputation to achieve high rankings. THE's more balanced approach, while still incorporating reputation elements, provides multiple pathways for recognition through performance-based metrics that young universities can more directly influence.

The purchasing power parity adjustments in THE methodology represent more than technical calculations—they embody a philosophical stance about global higher education equity. The 2.3x multiplier for Uzbekistan effectively acknowledges that research productivity should be evaluated relative to resource contexts. This methodological choice aligns with arguments by Altbach and Salmi [12] that ranking systems should account for systemic inequalities in global higher education. For NUU, this adjustment transforms modest research investments into competitive advantages, particularly when combined with efficient resource utilization strategies.

2 . Lessons from Young University Success Models

The trajectories of Paris-Saclay, PSL, and NTU Singapore offer both inspiration and caution for institutions like NUU. Paris-Saclay's dramatic rise through institutional consolidation demonstrates the potential for rapid transformation but relies on a strategy unavailable to NUU as a standalone institution. Instead, NUU must pursue what might be termed «virtual consolidation» through its partnership networks—achieving critical mass through collaboration rather than merger.

PSL's federal model offers more relevant lessons, showing how institutional identity can be maintained while pooling resources for collective impact. NUU's partnerships with MIT and TUM could be conceptualized as an international federation, where each partner contributes distinctive strengths while maintaining independence. This model particularly suits contexts where full merger is institutionally or politically infeasible.

NTU's three-decade journey provides the most realistic template for organic growth, demonstrating that sustained government support and strategic focus can overcome initial disadvantages. However, NUU operates in a compressed timeframe, with Uzbekistan's 2030 goals requiring acceleration of traditional development patterns.

This temporal pressure necessitates strategic shortcuts—leveraging partnerships for immediate capability access rather than building all competencies internally.

3. The Partnership Advantage: Beyond Traditional Collaboration

NUU's partnerships with MIT and TUM represent a new model of international collaboration that transcends traditional exchange agreements or research partnerships. These relationships provide what might be conceptualized as «institutional scaffolding»—temporary support structures that enable rapid capability development while internal capacity builds. This approach aligns with Wildavsky's [13] concept of the «great brain race,» where knowledge networks matter more than geographic location.

The MIT J-WEL partnership's focus on pedagogical innovation directly addresses one of the persistent challenges in ranking advancement: improving teaching quality metrics while maintaining research focus. By importing proven educational methodologies and assessment frameworks, NUU can achieve teaching excellence without the typical trial-and-error period. Similarly, TUM's engineering expertise provides immediate access to research networks and publication venues that would typically require decades to develop independently.

However, partnership dependency also creates vulnerabilities. The sustainability of ranking gains will ultimately depend on NUU's ability to internalize capabilities rather than permanently relying on external support. This requires deliberate knowledge transfer mechanisms, joint appointment structures that build local capacity, and gradual transition from junior to senior partnership roles. The experience of other partnership-dependent institutions suggests a 7-10 year window for achieving self-sustaining excellence.

4. Policy Innovation and Ranking Alignment

Presidential Decree PQ-151 represents sophisticated policy design that directly addresses ranking requirements while maintaining focus on substantive quality improvement. The 60/40 co-funding mechanism ingeniously incentivizes behaviors that support multiple ranking indicators simultaneously: industry partnership, research quality, and financial sustainability. This policy innovation demonstrates how national higher education strategies can create structural advantages for ranking advancement without compromising educational missions.

The requirement for international expert validation of major research projects particularly merits attention. While potentially creating bureaucratic hurdles, this mechanism ensures research quality standards that align with THE's excellence metrics. More importantly, it builds international visibility and networks that support reputation development. This represents policy learning from the Asian Tigers' higher education development, where quality assurance mechanisms preceded ranking gains [14].

The mandate for PhD and Master's student involvement in research projects creates virtuous cycles between research productivity and human capital development. This addresses a common weakness in rapid ranking advancement strategies: the tendency to import senior researchers without building sustainable research culture. By embedding students in research activities, NUU builds next-generation capacity while improving current productivity metrics.

5 . Challenges and Risk Mitigation

Despite significant advantages, NUU faces several challenges requiring strategic attention. The current publication output of 200+ articles annually falls well below the 1,000+ threshold for THE ranking visibility. While partnership co-authorship can multiply impact, the volume gap requires aggressive expansion. This necessitates difficult choices about research concentration versus comprehensiveness, with evidence strongly supporting focused excellence over distributed mediocrity.

Regional competition presents another challenge, with established universities in Russia, Turkey, and China possessing significant head starts in ranking positioning. However, NUU's unique partnership model and government support create differentiation opportunities. Rather than competing directly on traditional metrics, NUU can leverage its distinctive assets to occupy a unique niche—the globally connected Central Asian research university.

The sustainability of government support remains a critical risk factor. While current political commitment appears strong, economic fluctuations or priority shifts could undermine funding stability. Mitigation requires diversifying revenue sources, building endowment funds, and demonstrating clear return on investment through economic impact studies. The 40% co-funding requirement already encourages this diversification, but additional mechanisms for financial resilience warrant consideration.

6 . Theoretical Contributions and Practical Applications

This analysis contributes to theoretical understanding of how ranking systems shape institutional behavior in emerging higher education contexts. The findings support and extend DiMaggio and Powell's [15] institutional isomorphism framework, showing how ranking methodologies create specific isomorphic pressures that vary by

institutional age and context. Young universities face intensified mimetic pressure to copy established institutions, but partnership models offer alternative pathways that blend conformity with innovation.

The concept of «methodological arbitrage»—strategically choosing ranking systems based on institutional advantages—emerges as a key insight. Just as financial markets allow arbitrage between price differentials, the existence of multiple ranking systems with different methodologies creates opportunities for strategic positioning. NUU's advantages in THE versus QS metrics exemplify how institutional leaders can make informed choices about where to focus competitive efforts.

Practically, this analysis provides a replicable framework for institutional assessment and strategy development. The mapping of institutional assets against ranking indicators offers a systematic approach that other young universities can adapt to their contexts. The three-phase development timeline, while specific to NUU, illustrates realistic pacing of capability development that balances ambition with feasibility.

7 . Implications for Global Higher Education

The NUU case illustrates broader trends in global higher education development, particularly the emergence of «latecomer advantages» where new institutions can leapfrog traditional development stages through strategic partnerships and policy innovation. This challenges conventional wisdom about the immutability of global higher education hierarchies and suggests possibilities for redistributing academic excellence beyond traditional centers.

However, the reliance on partnership models also raises questions about academic dependency and the reproduction of center-periphery relationships in new forms. While NUU's partnerships provide immediate advantages, long-term success requires transitioning from knowledge importation to knowledge co-creation. This evolution from junior to equal partner represents the ultimate test of the model's sustainability and its potential for broader application in developing country contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined how young universities can strategically leverage international ranking methodologies for rapid advancement, with specific focus on New Uzbekistan University's unique position and opportunities. Through comparative analysis of THE and QS ranking systems, examination of successful young university models, and assessment of NUU's distinctive advantages, several key insights emerge with both theoretical and practical significance.

The fundamental finding is that methodological differences between ranking systems create strategic opportunities for institutional positioning. THE's emphasis on research quality metrics and performance indicators, combined with purchasing power parity adjustments, offers significantly more favorable pathways for young universities compared to QS's reputation-heavy approach. For NUU specifically, THE's 59% weighting on research-related metrics aligns directly with the university's partnership-based strategy and government support mechanisms. This alignment is not coincidental but reflects thoughtful policy design that recognizes how international visibility can be achieved through strategic focus rather than comprehensive development.

NUU's partnerships with MIT and TUM represent a new model of institutional development that transcends traditional collaboration frameworks. These relationships provide immediate access to research networks, pedagogical expertise, and reputational capital that would typically require decades to build independently. When combined with Presidential Decree PQ-151's innovative funding mechanisms and governance structures, these partnerships create a unique ecosystem for accelerated development. The requirement for international validation, co-funding structures, and student research involvement ensures that ranking advancement occurs alongside genuine quality improvement rather than superficial metric manipulation.

The analysis of successful young universities—Paris-Saclay, PSL, and NTU Singapore—reveals that while contexts differ, certain patterns remain consistent. All achieved rapid advancement through government support, international orientation, research concentration, and strategic partnerships. However, NUU's pathway need not replicate these models exactly. Instead, the university can chart a distinctive course that leverages its unique advantages while learning from others' experiences. The projected timeline of THE Young University Rankings entry within five years and main rankings placement within a decade appears achievable given current trajectories and planned initiatives.

Several strategic imperatives emerge from this analysis. First, NUU should prioritize THE rankings over QS given the clear methodological advantages and alignment with institutional strengths. Second, research output must increase dramatically but strategically, focusing on quality and international collaboration rather than volume alone. Third, the partnership networks with MIT and TUM should be leveraged systematically for co-authorship, joint programs, and reputation transfer. Fourth, the government support framework should be utilized fully while building alternative revenue sources for long-term sustainability.

The theoretical implications extend beyond NUU's specific case. The concept of «methodological arbitrage» in

ranking systems offers a new lens for understanding strategic choices in global higher education. Young universities need not accept their disadvantaged position in reputation-based systems but can instead identify and exploit methodological differences that favor performance over prestige. This insight is particularly relevant for institutions in developing countries seeking to establish international presence despite resource constraints and limited historical capital.

The practical framework developed in this study—mapping institutional assets against ranking indicators, analyzing successful trajectories, and developing phased implementation plans—provides a replicable approach for other emerging universities. While specific advantages will vary, the systematic methodology for identifying and leveraging distinctive assets remains applicable across contexts. The key is recognizing that ranking advancement requires strategic choice rather than comprehensive development, focused excellence rather than distributed mediocrity.

Looking forward, several areas warrant continued attention. The sustainability of partnership-based advantages depends on successful knowledge transfer and capacity building. The current phase of dependent development must evolve toward interdependent collaboration and eventually independent excellence. This transition requires deliberate planning and realistic timelines. Additionally, while ranking advancement provides important visibility and resource access, it must not overshadow the fundamental mission of educational quality and regional relevance.

The limitations of this analysis—reliance on publicly available data, inability to access internal strategic documents, and the rapid evolution of ranking methodologies—suggest areas for future research. Longitudinal studies tracking actual versus projected progress would provide valuable validation of the proposed framework. Comparative analysis of other young universities pursuing different strategies could identify alternative pathways to recognition. Investigation of how ranking advancement translates into tangible benefits for students, faculty, and society would ground the discussion in educational outcomes rather than positional competition.

For NUU's leadership, this analysis provides both strategic direction and realistic expectations. The path to international recognition is challenging but achievable, requiring sustained commitment, strategic focus, and skillful navigation of complex methodological landscapes. Success will be measured not merely by ranking positions but by the university's ability to contribute meaningfully to Uzbekistan's development while establishing itself as a globally connected institution of excellence.

The broader significance of this study lies in demonstrating that global higher education hierarchies, while persistent, are not immutable. Through strategic partnerships, policy innovation, and methodological awareness, young universities in developing countries can accelerate their development trajectories and claim positions of international recognition. NUU's journey, still in its early stages, offers both a specific roadmap and general inspiration for institutions seeking to transform ambition into achievement. The ultimate measure of success will be whether ranking advancement catalyzes genuine excellence that serves students, advances knowledge, and contributes to societal development.

In conclusion, this analysis reveals that strategic engagement with international rankings, when grounded in institutional strengths and aligned with substantive quality improvement, can accelerate recognition and resource access for young universities. New Uzbekistan University possesses unprecedented advantages through its partnerships, government support, and strategic positioning. By leveraging these advantages within THE's methodological framework while maintaining focus on educational excellence, NUU can achieve its ambitious goals and serve as a model for other emerging institutions navigating the complex landscape of global higher education.

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