Peer Review Report

Review Report on A new model for ranking schools of Public Health: The Public Health Academic Ranking -The PHAR

Original Article, Int J Public Health

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EVALUATION

Q 1 **Please summarize the main findings of the study.**

The study introduces the Public Health Academic Ranking (PHAR), the first international university bibliometric ranking designed for schools of public health. The methodology involves using InCites Benchmarking and Analytics™ software and the Web of Science™ Core Collection database to collect bibliometric data on 26 schools of public health worldwide. The ranking is based on 11 bibliometric indicators, covering four categories (productivity, quality, accessibility for readers, international collaboration) for the period 2017–2021.

The top five schools in the PHAR are reported as the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Public Health Foundation of India, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Swiss School of Public Health (SSPH+), and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The study emphasizes the global representation of top-ranking schools, including institutions from the USA, India, Thailand, South Africa, and Singapore. Notably, the PHAR is presented as a pilot project, and the authors caution that the results should be interpreted with care. The article aims to stimulate discussion on the methodology and potential future improvements, highlighting the need for a valid ranking system to assess and enhance the performance of schools of public health worldwide.

Q 2 **Please highlight the limitations and strengths.**

The study presents several notable strengths. Firstly, it introduces the Public Health Academic Ranking (PHAR), an innovative and much-needed bibliometric system designed specifically for schools of public health. The transparency in methodology is commendable, providing a clear and replicable approach for future evaluations. The global representation of schools from diverse continents, including non-high-income countries, adds a valuable dimension to the rankings. The focus on bibliometric indicators enhances objectivity and comparability, with the inclusion of unique schools like the Swiss School of Public Health (SSPH+) contributing to increased visibility for institutions often overlooked by traditional rankings. Additionally, the study openly acknowledges the need for future improvements, showcasing a commitment to refining the ranking system over time.

However, the study is not without limitations. Its exclusive reliance on bibliometric criteria may present an incomplete picture of a school's overall performance, neglecting aspects such as teaching quality and societal impact. The potential bias introduced by the choice of the Web of Science database, which primarily includes English-language publications, raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings globally. The limited number of schools included in this pilot project may affect the representativeness of the rankings and potentially overlook prestigious institutions. The use of research queries for schools not listed in the software introduces a potential source of error, and the study could benefit from a more in-depth discussion on the implications of this methodological choice. These limitations collectively underscore the need for caution when interpreting the PHAR results and highlight areas for further refinement in future iterations of the ranking system.

Q 3 **Please provide your detailed review report to the authors. The editors prefer to receive your review structured in major and minor comments. Please consider in your review the methods (statistical methods valid and correctly applied (e.g. sample size, choice of test), is the study replicable based on the method description?), results, data interpretation and references. If there are any objective errors, or if the conclusions are not supported, you should detail your concerns.**

The study under consideration presents a commendable effort in the creation of the Public Health Academic Ranking (PHAR), an innovative bibliometric system designed specifically for schools of public health. The methodological transparency exhibited is noteworthy, providing a comprehensive and lucid account of the processes employed. The inclusion of global representation from diverse continents, particularly incorporating schools from non-high-income countries, augments the study's significance in addressing the global landscape of public health education. The deliberate focus on bibliometric indicators adds a layer of objectivity and comparability, accentuating its potential utility in reshaping perceptions of institutional excellence. Moreover, the incorporation of schools often marginalized by traditional rankings, such as the Swiss School of Public Health (SSPH+), contributes to the study's broader impact. The study's explicit acknowledgment of its pilot nature and the commitment to future refinement and expansion is a testament to its iterative approach and commitment to continuous improvement.

However, despite these strengths, the study is not without its limitations. The exclusive reliance on bibliometric criteria for the evaluation of schools may engender an incomplete assessment, neglecting critical dimensions such as teaching quality and societal impact. The potential bias introduced by the use of the Web of Science database, predominantly housing English-language publications, raises concerns about the generalizability of the study's findings on a global scale. Additionally, the limited number of schools included in the pilot project may engender questions about the representativeness of the rankings, potentially overlooking institutions of high prestige. The utilization of research queries for schools not initially listed in the software introduces an element of uncertainty, necessitating a more nuanced discussion on the implications of this methodological choice. These limitations collectively underscore the need for cautious interpretation of the PHAR results and signal areas for meticulous refinement in future iterations.

In terms of methodological considerations, while the applied statistical methods are deemed appropriate, the absence of statistical tests or validation measures for the ranking algorithm constitutes a notable gap. Integration of statistical tests, particularly sensitivity analyses, would serve to bolster the methodological rigor. Moreover, the provision of specific examples of the research queries applied for schools do not present in the software would enhance the replicability and comprehensibility of the methodology. The exposition of the ranking algorithm is comprehensive; however, a more granular explication of how individual indicators contribute to the overall ranking score would add a layer of elucidation. Such granularity would facilitate a nuanced understanding of the weight and influence wielded by each factor in shaping the final rankings.

While the study predominantly employs quantitative bibliometric indicators, the incorporation of qualitative and descriptive methodologies could enrich the evaluative framework for schools of public health. Integration of case studies or narratives spotlighting exemplary programs would synergize with the quantitative findings, providing a more holistic evaluation.

The study's cautious conclusions regarding the pilot nature of the project are commendable. However, fortifying the conclusion with explicit articulation of potential limitations and uncertainties would serve to reinforce the need for circumspect interpretation.

Several minor comments warrant consideration. Expanding the introduction to encapsulate extant challenges in ranking public health schools and elucidating the rationale behind the chosen 5-year timeframe for bibliometric data would enhance contextual clarity. Further specificity regarding the initial number of schools considered before the final selection of 26 would lend transparency to the sampling process. A deeper contextualization of unexpected appearances in the top five ranks, particularly for the SSPH+ and PHFI, would enhance the interpretative depth. Additionally, delving into the potential implications of the rankings for public health policy within the discussion section would offer valuable insights. Emphasizing the need for ongoing refinement and expansion of the PHAR in the conclusion could underscore the study's dynamic nature. Ensuring clarity in language throughout the paper would address potential barriers to comprehensibility.

In conclusion, the study manifests both commendable strengths and discernible limitations. The constructive critique presented herein is intended to facilitate the authors' engagement in a scholarly discourse aimed at refining and augmenting the study's contributions to the discourse on public health education rankings.

Note: A notable caveat must be emphasized regarding the bibliography aspect of this review. As it falls outside my specific expertise, I refrain from offering commentary or critique on this particular dimension. I recommend that the authors, in consultation with subject-matter experts or disciplinary peers, thoroughly scrutinize and address any concerns or considerations pertaining to the bibliography. This acknowledgment underscores the importance of seeking specialized insights to ensure the bibliographic component aligns with established academic conventions and standards.

PLEASE COMMENT

Q 4 Is the title appropriate, concise, attractive?

The current title effectively communicates the study's primary focus and the introduction of the PHAR model. However, for greater conciseness and impact, it could benefit from a more streamlined version. Consider revising the title to succinctly capture the essence of the study, ensuring that it remains both informative and engaging for potential readers.

Q 5 Are the keywords appropriate?

The chosen keywords, including "Ranking systems, University rankings, Public Health, Schools of Public Health, Academia," appear generally appropriate for encapsulating the primary themes of the study. These keywords effectively convey the focus on developing a new ranking system for schools of public health, emphasizing academia and the broader context of university rankings. While these terms capture the overarching essence of the research, there could be a minor opportunity to enhance discoverability by incorporating additional keywords that directly relate to the distinctive methodology employed.

Q 6 Is the English language of sufficient quality?

The English language used in the manuscript is generally of high quality. The text is well-structured, and the ideas are communicated clearly. Sentences are mostly grammatically correct, and there is a coherent flow of information throughout the manuscript.

Q 7 Is the quality of the figures and tables satisfactory?

Yes.

Q 8 Does the reference list cover the relevant literature adequately and in an unbiased manner?)

I am not an expert in this particularly field.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Q 9	Originality	
Q 10	Rigor	
Q 11	Significance to the field	
Q 12	Interest to a general audience	
Q 13	Quality of the writing	

Q 14 Overall scientific quality of the study

REVISION LEVEL

Q 15 Please make a recommendation based on your comments:

Minor revisions.