

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

22 September 2015

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

David, Matthew (2016) 'Fabricated world class : global university league tables, status differentiation and myths of global competition.', *British journal of sociology of education.*, 37 (1). pp. 169-189.

Further information on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1096190>

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor Francis Group in *British Journal of Sociology of Education* on 23/12/2015, available online at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/01425692.2015.1096190>.

Additional information:

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

**Fabricating World Class: Global university league tables,
status differentiation strategies and myths of global
competition**

Journal:	<i>British Journal of Sociology of Education</i>
Manuscript ID:	CBSE-2015-0007.R2
Manuscript Type:	Special Issue
Keywords:	League tables, thematic analysis, universities, media, globalisation, discursive mechanisms

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

View Only

Fabricated World Class: Global university league tables, status differentiation and myths of global competition

Abstract

United Kingdom (UK) media coverage of global university league tables shows systematic bias towards the Russell Group, though also highlighting tensions within its membership. Coverage positions UK 'elite' institutions between United States superiority and Asian ascent. Coverage claims league table results warrant UK university funding reform. However, league table data for all years to 2012 (when major funding reforms were implemented – most radically in England) does not show either US superiority or Asian ascent. Citation bias defines media content. Text itself is structured by three discursive 'ratchets'; highlighting US successes but never failures, rising Asian institutions but never falls, and claiming UK results warrant the same policy irrespective of whether results improve or worsen. These combine with selective doubt by 'elites' who question but are not questioned. These four discursive mechanisms fabricate an illusory threat of global competition. This threat is then used to warrant neo-liberal policies at home.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 **Keywords**
8
9

10 **League Tables, Universities, Media, Globalisation, Thematic Analysis,**
11

12
13 **Discursive Mechanisms**
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

For Peer Review Only

Global University Leagues and UK Funding Reform

Global university league tables emerged in the early 2000s (Bowden 2000, Federkeil 2008). The United States (US) has always had more entries at the top of all such leagues. It is by far the largest wealthy English speaking nation.

Domination in league tables is routinely said to reflect its differentiated funding arrangements and the very high fees charged to students by its most prestigious institutions; not just its size, wealth and language (Hazelkorn, 2011). In the UK mass media, attention to global league tables has been modest but significant in framing policy debates (Stacka 2013). However, coverage increased in the run up to the 2012 removal of almost all central government funding for university teaching.

Government funding cuts were replaced by raising the £3000 annual 'home' student tuition fee 'cap' to £9000. For Welsh students the Welsh government pays the difference between the old 'cap' (index linked) and what universities can now charge. The Northern Irish government does the same for students remaining in Northern Ireland. The Scottish government pays the full fee for 'Scottish' undergraduates in Scotland. English undergraduates (over 80% of the UK total) are fully liable for 'their' fees. League table results are interpreted by those cited in media coverage as warranting this 'Americanized' policy in

1
2
3 England of partial deregulation, full privatization and radical escalation of fees.
4

5
6 This article evaluates the relationship between such claims and the data on
7
8 which such claims are supposedly based.
9

10
11
12 Two qualifications need to be made. Firstly, it is not being claimed here that
13
14 world university league tables are 'true' measures of 'quality' (for discussion of
15
16 validity and inconsistency problems, see Bergseth, Petocz and Abrandt
17
18 Dahlgrena 2014, Bowden 2000, David 2012, Turnera 2005, Usher and Savino
19
20 2007). The research focus here is upon whether global league table results
21
22 correspond with claims supposedly based upon them. This research is about
23
24 'claims making'. Secondly, this article does not address the significant issue of
25
26 what universities are for. Appearance in league tables is not the only/best
27
28 measure of quality. Quality in serving local, national and global economic
29
30 cultural, political and educational needs may not be best measured in citations,
31
32 reputation indexes, grant income, Nobel prizes etc. (Collini 2012, Delanty
33
34 2001).
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44

45
46 Despite such problems, 'global profile' in terms of league table success is
47
48 increasingly seen as 'the' measure of quality. France's 'Sorbonne League'
49
50 attempts to create elite institutions, visible on a world stage, in distinction to
51
52 the relatively egalitarian structure of French Universities and the non-research
53
54 orientation of its elite écoles (Grove 2011). Germany's 'Exzellenz-initiative',
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 seeks to create a top tier of institutions with a 'worldwide' profile in the style
4
5 of 'the elite Oxbridge and Ivy League institutions of the Anglophone world'
6
7
8 (Mechan-Schmidt 2012, 22). China's 'Project 211' (Brown et al. 2011, 33), of
9
10
11 which the Shanghai Index is itself a part, also evidences the growing power of
12
13
14 global ranking in status competition. These initiatives, and others in Saudi
15
16
17 Arabia, Russia, and Brazil, alongside UK policy reforms, are equally misguided if
18
19
20 US 'success' claims are illusory, as this article suggests.
21
22
23
24
25
26

27 **Research Questions and Design; Data Collection and Analysis Techniques**

28
29
30
31
32

33
34 Thematic analysis (Guest et al. 2012) combines the comprehensive character of
35
36 content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) with the depth and detail achieved in
37
38 discourse analysis (Potter 1996; and Silverman 2006). Using various terms and
39
40 synonyms, Lexus/Nexus and BBC archive searches were carried out for all UK
41
42 news coverage of global university league tables. For the period since such
43
44 league tables were initiated (in 2003), until 2012 (when radical HE funding
45
46 reform was implemented), 52 items were identified in seven outlets. An
47
48 inductive content analysis was carried out to address the first research
49
50
51 question: *What are the recurrent themes, objects and actors in media text?*
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 This was followed by thematic analysis of media text to address a second
4
5
6 research question: *What are the dominant frames within the textual data?* Key
7
8
9 themes identified were: US superiority (linked to fees and spending), Asian
10
11 ascent, and 'selective doubt' over league table results.
12

13
14
15 The next step was to compare media representation with the results of league
16
17
18 tables themselves regarding US superiority and Asian ascent. The top 200
19
20
21 results for the three leading world university league tables (Shanghai, QS and
22
23 Times Higher Education (THE)) were collected for all years to 2012 (with the
24
25
26 exception of QS's first two years as this data was corrupted). Only analysing
27
28
29 the top 200 results is to sample on the dependent variable (King et al. 1994),
30
31
32 and would therefore be a source of bias if this research sought to make claims
33
34
35 about higher education based on league table results. It does not. Rather it
36
37
38 seeks to evaluate media claims that are said to be based on such results. The
39
40
41 third and fourth research questions are then addressed: *Do league table*
42
43
44 *results show US superiority and/or Asian ascent?* 'Selective doubt' is then
45
46
47 addressed.
48

49
50 'US superiority' (relative to the UK) was measured by comparing English
51
52 speaking countries only, and the number of entries within league tables was
53
54
55 then correlated with population size (see Lia, Shankara and Ki Tanga 2011a and
56
57
58 2001b for earlier work controlling for language, size and wealth). A measure of
59
60

1
2
3 placement within tables was also calculated. In addition, the sum of all ranked
4
5
6 positions was then correlated with population size (again controlling for
7
8 language).

9
10
11 A parallel set of counts was carried out for the number Asian universities
12
13 ranked in each league for each year to evaluate evidence regarding 'Asian
14
15 ascent'. As with the data for English language countries, so with Asian
16
17 countries (Singapore and Hong Kong being in both sets), a sum of all ranked
18
19 positions, average rankings and a count of numbers of entries were calculated.
20
21
22
23
24

25
26 With media claims regarding US superiority and Asian ascent not being
27
28 supported by league table data, a fifth (and final) research question is then
29
30 addressed: *How is such misrepresentation constructed, firstly through the*
31
32 *selection of people cited and objects sighted; and secondly through discursive*
33
34 *mechanisms at work within the text?*
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44

45 **Research Question One: What are the recurrent themes, objects and actors in**
46
47 **media text?**
48
49
50
51
52
53

54 [Table 1]
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 A LexusNexus and BBC archive search using terms associated with university
8
9 world or global league tables and their compilers generated 52 articles (Table
10
11 1). Coverage rises gradually from 2004 onwards. Systematic inductive 'invivo
12
13 coding' (Miles and Huberman 1994) identified 505 significant terms. Inductive
14
15 coding using 'constant comparison' in NVivo enabled subsequent thematic
16
17 selection (Glaser and Strauss 1967).
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26

27 [Table 2]
28
29
30
31
32
33

34 Of actors referred to or quoted (see Table 2), the self-selecting 'elite' Russell
35
36 Group is cited seventeen times, it's now disbanded challenger, the 1994
37
38 Group, is cited only once, Universities UK (UUK) seven times, the University
39
40 and College Union (UCU) four times, and the National Union of Students (NUS)
41
42 twice. Across 24 articles, eighteen people are cited in their capacity as
43
44 university heads and their names are mentioned 37 times. Apart from
45
46 Aberdeen and St. Andrews all these led Russell Group universities. Whilst Steve
47
48 Smith was head of a then 1994 Group university, he is only ever cited as UUK
49
50 chair. 'Professor' is used 34 times. Professors are always named. 'Student'
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 occurred 326 times. Only 14 are named. 'Lecturers' are referred to 30 times
4
5
6 but only one is cited. Lecturers and students are often discussed but rarely
7
8
9 speak.

10
11
12 A coding for verbs revealed 54 cases of competing or competition and twelve
13
14 cases of rivalry, with no references to cooperation and only five to collaborat(-
15
16 ion/ing). A coding for proper nouns found UK synonyms occurred 359 times.
17
18
19 UK universities receive 519 mentions. The US equivalents are 128 and 280.
20
21
22 Next is mainland China, mentioned 32 times, but Chinese universities receive
23
24 only four mentions. Hong Kong adds 23 and its universities 17 references.
25
26
27 Japan adds 12 and nine respectively. Korea (15), Taiwan (7), Singapore (6),
28
29
30 Bombay and Delhi (once each), Asia (29) and 'Far East' (twice) add to this. With
31
32
33 408 US and 157 Asian references, 'Europe' receives only 30 mentions. The UK
34
35
36 is framed between named US stars and a more general Asian ascendance.
37
38
39

40
41 As can be seen in Table 2, all sources bar the Sun cite multiple university
42
43 heads; all bar the Sun and Independent cite the Russell group; whilst only the
44
45 Independent cites the NUS. Only the BBC cites the 1994 Group (once) but cites
46
47 the Russell Group six times. UCU leader Sally Hunt is cited by three sources.
48
49
50
51 BBC 'balance' within elite pluralism, Times and Telegraph elitism, Independent
52
53 mild anti-elitism, Sun (scantily evidenced) populism, and Mail/Guardian elite
54
55
56 orientation with a wink to class conflict (if with different eyes) accords with the
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 'folk wisdom' of British media 'bias' (Curran and Seaton 2009). Nonetheless,
4
5
6 citing 'elites' and highlighting successful institutions characterised most
7
8
9 coverage. Yet, 19 articles express some doubt concerning the validity of league
10
11 table data.
12

13
14
15
16
17
18 **Research Question Two: What are the dominant frames within the textual**
19
20 **data?**
21
22

23
24
25
26
27
28 Content analysis shows the predominance of elite voices, and the UK framed
29
30 between US superiority and Asian ascent. Positive and negative descriptors,
31
32 and the categories of places, universities, cities and countries cluster around
33
34 the theme of geographical comparison, and this is dominated by comparisons
35
36 between the UK and either the US or Asia. 'Europe' is mentioned more
37
38 negatively than positively, and is not therefore constructed as a 'threat'. The
39
40 textual constructions of US superiority and Asian ascent are now addressed,
41
42 but are followed by discussion of the important subsidiary theme of 'selective
43
44 doubt' about the data itself. Such doubt, whilst recurrent, never challenges the
45
46 two dominant themes.
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

US Superiority?

[Table 3]

As shown in Table 3, 76 of 120 UK/other comparisons favoured the other. Only 27 favoured the UK. Half the UK comparisons were with the US, overwhelmingly favouring America. Of 63 comparisons 48 favoured the US, six were neutral, with only nine favouring the UK. Overwhelmingly, attention was paid to particular US successes, i.e. its most prestigious institutions.

Over half the sampled articles compare spending levels (Mail 80%, Guardian and BBC 75%, Telegraph 50%, Times 38%, Independent once, Sun none). 'Other countries invest more', 'the UK must invest more' is the repeated message. Harvard University's endowment was referred to by the Times, Telegraph, BBC, Mail, and Guardian. Initially cited without source on November 4th 2004, the Times associated Harvard's number one position in the then new QS/THE league with its \$23bl endowment. On November 9th 2007 the Telegraph estimated this endowment to be greater than the total UK higher education budget. On October 8th 2008 this comparison (now the endowment was said to be greater than the UK's total public sector university budget) was

1
2
3 attributed to Ann Mroz (editor of THE) in the Telegraph and without source in
4
5
6 the Times. The next day the same 'factoid' was attributed to Ann Mroz by the
7
8
9 Mail and BBC, and to Russell Group Executive Director Wendy Piatt in the
10
11
12 Guardian.

13
14
15 Eighteen articles address UK funding reform in relation to league tables. On
16
17
18 October 5th 2006 the Mail claimed: 'The pole positions of Oxford and
19
20
21 Cambridge are likely to strengthen their case in pressing the Government for
22
23 an increase in tuition fees after 2009... On Tuesday, Oxford's vice chancellor Dr
24
25
26 John Hood said it was 'inevitable' the £3,000 a-year charges introduced last
27
28
29 month would increase'. That year's QS/THE results saw Oxford and Cambridge
30
31
32 rise one place each to third and second, after Harvard, with a jump from 23 to
33
34
35 29 UK institutions in the top 200, the paper reported.

36
37
38 On November 8th 2007 this message was repeated after UK institutions in the
39
40
41 QS/THE top 200 rose to 31. The Mail claimed: 'Vice chancellors are now likely
42
43
44 to seize on their strong showing to press the case for the £3,000 a-year cap on
45
46
47 tuition fees to be lifted when it is reviewed in 2009'. The telegraph agreed:
48
49
50 'This improved performance is likely to strengthen the universities' case for
51
52
53 lifting the cap on student tuition fees ahead of a review in 2009. Many want to
54
55
56 charge more than the existing £3,000 limit to enable them to compete with
57
58
59 those in the US'.
60

1
2
3 When UK results dipped, the Times reported on October 8th 2008: 'Vice-
4
5
6 chancellors and commentators voiced concern that, without an increase in
7
8
9 investment, Britain's standing as a first-class destination for higher education
10
11 could be under threat'. Piatt was cited reinforcing this view, whilst Ann Mroz
12
13 claimed: "'As a percentage of gross domestic product the US spends more than
14
15 twice as much on its universities as the UK does".' That same day, the
16
17
18 Telegraph reported: 'The findings come amid warnings that British universities
19
20 will lose their world-class position unless ministers increase vital funding levels.
21
22
23 Last week, Lord Patten, the Oxford chancellor, called for the "intolerable"
24
25
26 £3,000-a-year cap on tuition fees to be lifted to allow Britain to retain "its
27
28
29 international standing in higher education"
30
31
32

33
34 Other titles concurred the following day: 'The results could put more pressure
35
36 on the Government to raise the £3,000-a-year cap on students' tuition fees
37
38 when it is reviewed next year. Many British vice-chancellors say they do not
39
40 receive enough funds to cover the costs of teaching their courses and as a
41
42 result cannot compete internationally. Last week, Oxford Chancellor Lord
43
44
45 Patten said middle-class students should be prepared to pay higher tuition
46
47
48 fees' (Mail). 'This [rising Asian competition] is a good reason to uphold the
49
50
51 higher education sector in this country. The funding settlement will not hold
52
53
54 for long. The cap on fees will have to be lifted' (Times). '[V]ice-chancellors
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 claimed it [fewer UK entries] showed they were in need of more money to
4
5
6 cement their position' (Guardian). This same call is repeated in later years,
7
8
9 whether results went up or down.

10
11
12 League tables were overwhelmingly interpreted as showing US superiority, and
13
14
15 it's most successful institutions were to be copied. Whether or not putting all
16
17
18 one's eggs in one basket did increase overall success (which league table
19
20
21 results do not suggest – see below) is never asked. The US model of a highly
22
23
24 differentiated higher education is never questioned, and such a system of
25
26
27 'competition' rather than collaboration between academics, institutions and
28
29
30 countries is taken as necessary and good. Competition is 'brutal' (Times),
31
32
33 'aggressive' (BBC), 'fierce' (Mail, Guardian, Telegraph and BBC), at
34
35
36 'unprecedented' levels (BBC), 'challenging' BBC), 'increasing' (Mail and BBC),
37
38
39 'ever harder' (Times), and 'growing' Telegraph, BBC and Times).

40
41
42 Competition is generic; collaboration is competitive, particular and temporary;
43
44
45 and cooperation unheard of. The UK is 'struggling' (BBC) to 'punch above our
46
47
48 weight' (Guardian, BBC and Times) in a 'global market' (BBC and Times) or
49
50
51 'world market' (BBC). 'Elite' UK institutions need to 'match the ambition' (BBC)
52
53
54 of 'global super brands' (Telegraph and BBC), or face 'losing out to American
55
56
57 rivals' (Mail, Guardian, BBC and Times) and Asian threats 'snapping at our
58
59
60

1
2
3 heals' (Guardian and BBC). Yale's international collaborators recruited harder
4
5
6 (Times). THE and QS stopped collaborating (BBC).
7
8
9

10 11 12 13 **Asian ascent**

14
15
16
17
18
19
20 [Table 4]
21
22
23
24
25
26

27 Asia was favourably compared directly with the UK ten times, and negatively
28
29 only once. Twenty articles referred to Asia rising (see Table 4). None claimed
30
31 'Asian dissent' or stasis. On November 4th 2004, the Times noted the 'highest-
32
33 ranked institution in Asia' being Tokyo in 12th place (QS/THE), with Beijing
34
35 17th. On November 8th 2007 the BBC asserted: 'Asian universities improve
36
37 their position.' On October 8th 2008, in the Telegraph: 'Wendy Piatt... warned
38
39 Britain faced fierce competition from China' amongst others; repeating the
40
41 warning that day in the Times.
42
43
44
45
46
47

48
49 The next day the BBC cited Piatt claiming: '...“China already looks set to
50
51 overtake the UK very soon in terms of total research publications [meaning
52
53 little], and its universities have been steadily climbing up international league
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 tables [incorrect]". On the same day the Guardian claimed, developing
4
5 countries are 'challenging our position', whilst in the Times Piatt; '...warned
6
7 that rivals China were coming up fast...', and in the Mail that: 'China was
8
9 looming as a major academic rival'.
10
11
12

13
14 On October 7th 2009, Piatt was reported by the BBC claiming; '... "countries like
15
16 China and Korea, which are investing massively in their best institutions, are
17
18 snapping at our heels"'. The article heralded Tokyo, the highest (QS) Asian
19
20 institution that year, coming 22nd, omitting to recall Tokyo came 12th in 2004.
21
22 The broadcaster highlighted that the University of Hong Kong (HKU) had risen
23
24 two places. On October 8th the Guardian claimed results showed '...advances
25
26 of academia in Asia, which will pose a challenge to the Ivy League and
27
28 Oxbridge'; adding: 'Leading UK universities said institutions in Japan, South
29
30 Korea and Hong Kong were "snapping at the heels" of Western institutions,
31
32 arguing that they needed more funding to compete on the global stage.' It
33
34 then quoted Piatt saying '... "countries like China and Korea are snapping at our
35
36 heels" ...', with THE's Phil Baty adding: "'Spending on higher education in Asia is
37
38 phenomenal and that's why you see their results going up"'. On the same day
39
40 the Times claimed the; '...growing presence and impact of Asian and European
41
42 institutions'.
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Asian rises in 2010 and 2011 were reported by the BBC and Telegraph
4
5
6 respectively. Falls were not. On September 16th 2010, the Guardian reported
7
8
9 'Peking' as mainland China's highest ranked institution in 37th place. It failed to
10
11 recall 'Beijing's' 17th place six years earlier.
12

13 14 15 16 17 18 **Selective Doubt** 19

20
21
22
23
24
25 Most BBC and Guardian articles contained limited questioning of league table
26
27 validity. The Times, Telegraph and Mail doubted once each. The Sun and
28
29 Independent do not question the 'data'. However, 'questioning' was always by
30
31 elites, never of them. On October 9th 2008 the BBC reported: 'The director
32
33 general of the Russell Group of leading UK universities, Dr Wendy Piatt, said it
34
35 had reservations about the use and accuracy of "league tables" but the group
36
37 was pleased that its member universities were continuing to perform well
38
39 against major global competitors'.
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47

48 On October 7th 2009 the BBC reported Piatt repeating this combination of
49
50 scepticism with undiluted acceptance that results supported her organisation's
51
52 agenda: "The broad message of these tables is clear - the leading UK research
53
54 universities are held in high esteem internationally... But countries like China
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 and Korea, which are investing massively in their best institutions, are snapping
4
5
6 at our heels... The precise accuracy of league tables like this can be debated,
7
8
9 but there is no mistaking the alarm bell warning that our success is at risk if we
10
11 as a nation don't take action to fight off such fierce competition”.’
12

13
14 Cited the next day, by the BBC, Times, Telegraph and Guardian, an Oxford
15
16 spokesman claimed Oxford's fall behind three other UK universities was
17
18 questionable as Oxford had come first in other tables. Alongside Piatt and the
19
20 Russell Group (questioning three more times in 2011), Oxford has the status to
21
22 question any questioning of its status.
23
24
25
26
27

28
29 Similarly, Steve Smith is quoted by the BBC on September 16th 2010: “Clearly,
30
31 league tables must always come with a health warning as they never tell the
32
33 whole story, but these rankings provide a useful indicator of international
34
35 trends”.’ Phil Baty (same piece) pointed out that ‘...“a change to the way the
36
37 tables had been compiled made comparisons over time difficult”.’ In a second
38
39 BBC piece that day Baty elaborated: “Because of the change to the
40
41 methodology, any movement up or down since 2009 cannot be seen as a
42
43 change in performance by an individual country or institution”.’ Smith, ‘post-
44
45 positivist’ social scientist (1996), Vice-Chancellor and former UUK head, shows
46
47 no such methodological inhibition.
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 On September 16th 2010 the BBC mentioned a European Commission report
4
5 where: 'Experts have expressed "serious reservations" about the
6
7 methodologies used by global ranking organisations', but then listed US/UK
8
9 successes, thus framing European reservations as sour grapes. On October 6th
10
11 2011 the broadcaster again cited 'elite university' leaders questioning methods
12
13 only to claim results supported elite-prioritizing proposals.
14
15
16
17
18

19
20 On June 9th 2011 the BBC (citing Oxford University Professor Howard Hotson)
21
22 noted bigger English speaking countries did better. On March 15th 2012 the
23
24 BBC observed; 'responses have put 44 US universities in the top 100 - and 44%
25
26 of responses came from academics in US universities', but continued to draw
27
28 the standard conclusion of US superiority. The Russell Group, Oxford
29
30 University, UUK and league table constructors occupy the space for doubt, but
31
32 never doubt themselves.
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43

44 **Research Questions Three and Four: Do league tables show US superiority**
45
46 **and/or Asian ascent?**
47
48

49
50
51
52
53
54 **US Superiority?**
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Given the significance of the English language in citations and reputation
4
5
6 measures, and given this third research question addresses the UK's position
7
8
9 relative to the US, comparison here is between English speaking countries. US
10
11 institutions predominate in all leagues for all years. US institutions have
12
13 occupied between 87 and 93 of the top 200 places in the Shanghai Index since
14
15 its inception, between 53 and 58 top 200 places in QS tables; and between 72
16
17 and 75 top 200 entries in THE results. However, the number of top 200 entries
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

correlates almost entirely with population size.

[Table 5]

The population of English speaking countries (US 310million, UK 62m, South Africa 50m, Canada 34m, Australia 22.3m, Hong Kong 7m, Singapore 5m, Ireland 4.5m, and New Zealand 4.4m) was correlated with each country's number of top 200 institutions for each league table for each year of that table's existence. Alternative calculations were made to remove first language French speaking Canadians, Cantonese only speakers in Hong Kong, and the non-English speaking majority in South Africa, but none altered the

1
2
3 correlations beyond the range noted below and so are not elaborated upon
4
5 here.
6
7

8
9 As table 5 shows, population size correlates with numbers of universities in
10
11 league tables at values from 0.914-0.988. There is therefore only negligible
12
13 variation between English speaking countries over and above that predicted by
14
15 the size of each country's population. Ranked highest to lowest a country's
16
17 population size and number of top 200 institutions associates absolutely for all
18
19 years and leagues barring QS in 2006, when Australia marginally overtook the
20
21 slightly larger Canada before falling back into rank order again thereafter.
22
23

24
25 Variation between English speaking countries with top 200 entries matches
26
27 population size. However, amongst English speaking countries only OECD
28
29 members have top 200 entries. Wealth is a necessary condition. Population
30
31 only then explains entry variations. Table 6's 'Entries per million of population'
32
33 column shows the United States performing less well than most other English
34
35 speaking countries, only outperforming South Africa and matching New
36
37 Zealand. The United States only outperforms South Africa when South Africa's
38
39 total population is used. If only South Africa's 3.7 million first language English
40
41 speakers were counted South Africa would outperform the US on ranked
42
43 institutions per capita, as do all other English speaking countries barring New
44
45 Zealand. That population size does not correlate perfectly with the number of
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 institutions ranked is the result of the relative failure of the US and, in even
4
5 more extreme terms, South Africa.
6
7
8
9

10
11
12 [Table 6]
13
14
15
16
17
18
19

20 However, number of entries alone does not tell the whole story. Higher ranked
21
22 entries have scored better than those lower down. An overall measure of
23
24 rankings within tables might then redeem the claim that league tables show US
25
26 superiority. US institutions routinely occupy many of the top slots. Giving each
27
28 ranked institution a reverse score (200 points for 1st place, one point for 200th
29
30 place) measures this. Applied to the THE 2011-12 data a calculation of this kind
31
32 offers some support to the US superiority thesis (see Table 6). The average US
33
34 institution in the top 200 is seven places higher than the average UK entry, four
35
36 points above Canada's, six above Australia's etc.. However, whilst the US has
37
38 higher mean scores for those universities ranked, it has fewer institutions
39
40 ranked per capita than other English speaking countries bar (almost identical)
41
42 New Zealand and (much weaker) South Africa.
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51

52
53 A Pearson's correlation between the sum of all ranked positions and national
54
55 population size shows an association of 0.967. Whilst the US scores higher on
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 average for those institutions ranked, this is cancelled out by having fewer
4
5
6 entries per capita. Having a ten percent lower average position relative to the
7
8
9 US, the UK has 100 percent more top 200 entries per capita. Putting one's eggs
10
11 in fewer baskets does not improve overall performance. This outcome is nearly
12
13 identical for all other league tables in all other years. Calculating this was
14
15 marginally more complex for the Shanghai data as institutions 101-150 and
16
17 151-200 were presented in blocks. As such, those placed in the 101-150 block
18
19 were assigned a value of 75, and those in the 151-200 block the value 25.
20
21
22 Overall results were not altered. There is no evidence in any league table for
23
24
25 any year to support the view that the US university system is superior, size for
26
27
28 size, to any other English speaking country bar South Africa.
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38

Asian Ascent?

39
40
41
42
43
44

[Table 7]
45
46
47
48
49
50
51

52 What of the claim that league tables herald the ascent of Asian universities to
53
54 challenge the UK? In terms of numbers ranked results fluctuated in all tables
55
56
57 (see Table 7). There is very limited fluctuation in the Shanghai data, and an
58
59
60

1
2
3 even weaker fluctuation in the QS results. Neither movement produces
4
5 statistically significant change ($p. = 0.142$ and 0.152 respectively). For the THE
6
7 data the methods used between the two years changed, so the sharp decline
8
9 in Asian universities ranked by THE between 2010-11 and 2011-12 cannot be
10
11 interpreted. Overall, there is no evidence for Asian ascent but rather more
12
13 suggestion of stability.
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23

24 [Table 8]
25
26
27
28
29
30

31 What then of the possibility that higher rankings, rather than just overall
32
33 numbers ranked, show an improved performance by Asian universities? Giving
34
35 each ranked institution a reverse score (as conducted for English speaking
36
37 countries above) was repeated for all Asian universities for all league tables for
38
39 all years (see table 8). In the Shanghai data the overall sum of ranked scores
40
41 fluctuated around a very similar level, and showed no statistically significant
42
43 change over time ($p. = 0.300$).
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51 The QS data did show a statistically significant rise in the overall sum of ranked
52
53 scores over time at the 5% level of confidence, though the result was not
54
55 significant at the 1% level ($p. = 0.019$). However, this rise is explained by one
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 country. South Korea's entries in the QS top 200 rose from three to five. The
4
5
6 position of institutions ranked also rose. Excluding South Korea, the overall
7
8
9 performance of Asian countries saw no statistically significant change ($p =$
10
11
12 0.155).

13
14
15 Once again, the radical drop in the number of Asian institutions ranked and in
16
17
18 the positions of those ranked in the THE table between 2010-11 and 2011-12
19
20
21 cannot be interpreted due to its methodological changes.

22
23
24 There is support in the QS league table for the claim that South Korea has
25
26
27 improved its standing in world league tables. However, overall, the results for
28
29
30 Asian Universities simply fluctuated, with no evidence of any systematic or
31
32
33 statistically significant improvement relative to the rest of the world. Different
34
35
36 leagues suggest that Japan is either improving or falling back, and that Taiwan
37
38
39 is either improving or slipping. Likewise China is either marginally up or down
40
41
42 depending of which method is applied. Even including the success (by one
43
44
45 index) of South Korea, overall fluctuation cancels out year on year changes.

46
47
48 Japan was and remains the predominant contributor to Asian success in league
49
50
51 tables, China remains far behind, Singapore and Hong Kong remain successful
52
53
54 relative to their size, whilst Malaysia, India and Thailand remain very much
55
56
57 behind. The claim that league tables show Asian ascent is false. South Korea's
58
59
60 improved QS results are roughly equal to those of Scotland (which has just

1
2
3 over a tenth of its population). Asia's overall ranking began and remains the
4
5 same as or just below that of the UK (which has fifty times fewer people).
6
7
8
9

10 11 12 13 **The Gap**

14
15
16
17
18
19
20 In league tables the US performs no better than the UK (size for size) and Asia
21
22 is not catching up. Media coverage of world university league tables suggests
23
24 otherwise. Asian ascent (understood as catching/overtaking the UK) is a myth
25
26 based on misinterpreting international rankings. Asian universities may be
27
28 improving, but only in line with improvements elsewhere. South Korea's
29
30 improvement in QS rankings is interesting, but being in only one of the three
31
32 leagues is not a secure pattern, and being only one country cannot be said to
33
34 show overall Asian ascent. South Korea's parallel with Scotland is particularly
35
36 challenging to any attempt to deduce the merits or otherwise of UK funding
37
38 reforms from league table results. South Korea has high fees and fee
39
40 differentiation. Scotland has neither. The fifth research question arises: how is
41
42 media misrepresentation 'achieved' at the level of content and discourse?
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57

58 **Research Question Five: How is textual misrepresentation constructed?**
59
60

Content Bias – Who is cited/what is sighted

Russell Group director Wendy Piatt; representatives and heads of specific Russell Group universities; and in particular those from Oxford University, occupy most of the discursive space. The 1994 Group's Paul Marshall was cited only once. This was on October 6th 2011, by the BBC: 'UK universities are facing budget cuts, despite the new fee regime. The sweeping reductions to capital grants will make it harder to invest in the facilities that make our universities world leaders.' Marshall's comment is located between comments from Piatt and then Oxford vice-chancellor Andrew Hamilton. Piatt and Hamilton frame debate over just who 'our' world class universities are. Marshall does not.

The head of a 1994 Group institution until 2012, Steve Smith's concerns about the concentration of funding within the Russell Group receive no coverage. As head of UUK he is cited suggesting results showed the need for more money in general. Similarly, Sally Hunt of the University and College Union is cited suggesting league table results show the need for more funding, but her and her union's campaigns for a more egalitarian distribution of funds is never

1
2
3 cited. Only Russell Group representatives can speak on where funding should
4
5
6 be focused (on themselves).
7

8
9
10 However, the Russell Group is not an internally homogeneous, nor an
11
12 externally discrete, cluster of 'research intensive' universities. Oxbridge stands
13
14 apart and many non-Russell Group institutions score just as well if not better
15
16 than members of this self-appointed 'elite' when subject specific funding
17
18 differences are controlled for (Boliver 2015). Outsiders (UCU, UUK and the
19
20 1994 Group), when cited, are only given space to agree with the 'global
21
22 competition' frame presented by Russell group representatives. Yet, internal
23
24 divisions exist in Russell Group commentary on world university league tables.
25
26 As noted above, Wendy Piatt routinely claims the supposed success of the US
27
28 university system, and 'Asian ascent', are due to concentrating funding on elite
29
30 institutions, something she wishes the UK to emulate in favour of her
31
32 members. On the other hand, Oxford University explicitly advocates removing
33
34 the tuition fee cap as the means to increase resources and to concentrate
35
36 them at the top, something Piatt does not openly advocate, at least in
37
38 coverage of global university league tables.
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51
52 League table results do not suggest the more differentiated and private fee
53
54 funded US system performs better than the less differentiated and mainly
55
56 state funded (pre 2012) UK system. Differentiation simply produces higher
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 highs that are cancelled out by lower lows. Yet, this 'overall' effect of
4
5
6 differentiation is not a shared experience. Winners win and losers lose. When
7
8 those that do or believe they will benefit from a revised and more uneven
9
10 distribution of resources are asked, they claim (and perhaps believe) that what
11
12 may benefit them is also for the common good. If others are given no space to
13
14 question the self-evidence of success, the self-interest of the successful will be
15
16 presented as unquestionably right and true.
17
18
19
20
21
22

23 Closure in terms of who gets cited makes it very easy for self-interest to stand
24
25 as self-evident. Such closure may explain why media representations reflect
26
27 the interests and beliefs of 'elites', even when their claims contradict the data
28
29 the claims are allegedly based upon. However, the question still remains how
30
31 such misrepresentation is constructed.
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41

42 **Discursive Mechanisms: Three Ratchets and Selective Doubt**

43
44
45
46
47

48 The Oxford English Dictionary (1996) defines a ratchet as; 'a set of teeth on the
49
50 edge of a bar or wheel in which a device engages to ensure motion in one
51
52 direction only'. A discursive 'ratchet' occurs when all evidence provided is
53
54 either selected or interpreted to move an argument in one direction only. The
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 first manifestation of this discursive mechanism is in selecting only successful
4
5 US institutions, and taking their success as evidence that the US system itself is
6
7 superior. Differentiated systems have higher highs and lower lows, so
8
9 highlighting one type of outcome (success) is misleading.
10
11
12

13
14 A second discursive ratchet is achieved in relation to Asian ascent by citing
15
16 rises and new entries, but not falls and exits, enabling a constant ascent
17
18 narrative. Ascending cases are reported. In 2008 China's only prior Shanghai
19
20 entry (2005-7) dropped out. This was not reported. However, QS saw three
21
22 Asian re-entries, which were reported. It was not reported that 2007 had the
23
24 lowest number of Asian entries in QS to date. 2008's improvement on 2007
25
26 was reported in five sources. That there were still fewer Asian institutions
27
28 ranked in 2008 than in 2006 was not reported. A new THE methodology in
29
30 2010 saw China gain more entries than Japan. On September 16th 2010, this
31
32 was reported by the BBC and Guardian as evidence of China's rise (though,
33
34 given the new methodology there was no past to compare with). Further
35
36 reformulation of THE methods in 2011 saw China, South Korea and Taiwan fall
37
38 back. This was not reported.
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49

50
51 Singapore remained constant in all tables for all years and so was rarely
52
53 reported. Hong Kong institutions fluctuated in different years/tables. Only rises
54
55 were reported. Despite stability in the number of Asian entries in QS's 2011
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 table, the BBC reported on September 5th; ‘...the main up-and-coming region is
4
5 East Asia, particularly Hong Kong, China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore,
6
7
8 said [QS’s] Mr Sowter’. Of these six only South Korea actually saw rankings
9
10 improve. Declines went unrecorded. The BBC’s March 15th 2012 description of
11
12 ‘the rise of Asian countries as the new education superpowers’ was, again,
13
14 simply based upon highlighting rises whilst ignoring falls.
15
16
17
18

19
20 Tuition fee coverage, when set against league table results year on year,
21
22 highlights a third form of discursive ‘ratchet’. When UK universities improved
23
24 their position in league tables, coverage suggested success warranted
25
26 increased fees. Years with fewer UK entries saw the same conclusion drawn.
27
28 Success strengthens the case to raise tuition fees. Failure puts more pressure
29
30 on government to do the same. Removing the fee’s cap was said to be justified
31
32 by whatever the actual outcomes were. In the case of US superiority and Asian
33
34 ascent, the ratchet effect of always reaching the same conclusion is achieved
35
36 by selecting only cases that support the pre-established frame. In the case of
37
38 UK results and fees the discursive ratchet is achieved by interpreting divergent
39
40 findings year of year to support the established frame.
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49

50
51 It might be objected that highlighting the discursive mechanisms above
52
53 suggests media coverage offers an uncritical acceptance of league table data,
54
55 when there is much criticism and doubt expressed in reporting. However, such
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 doubt is only ever selective, reserved for dominant actors, and always
4
5 contained within continued acceptance of dominant interpretations of results.
6
7

8
9 Selectively 'sighting' only results that confirm an established frame (US
10
11 superiority) and narrative (Asian ascent), drawing the same conclusions
12
13 irrespective of the results themselves, and selective doubt by those authorized
14
15 to speak, combine to construct a reading of global university league tables that
16
17 confirms the assumptions and interests of those given predominant space to
18
19 speak.
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29

30 **Discussion**

31
32
33
34
35
36

37 This article assesses whether league table data shows US superiority and/or
38
39 Asian ascent. It does not. Claims that league table results show the superiority
40
41 of the deregulated and higher student fee based arrangements seen in the US,
42
43 relative to the more regulated and state funded arrangements in place across
44
45 the UK prior to 2012, are false. As such this paper supports critiques of 'neo-
46
47 liberalization' in higher education (Amsler and Bolsmann 2012, Olssen and
48
49 Peters 2005) by debunking claims that league table results show the
50
51 superiority of market deregulated systems.
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 The article has not directly addressed other significant critical questions
4
5 regarding neo-liberal reforms in university funding; those of access and the
6
7 ethics of repayment. These questions have been addressed elsewhere, and can
8
9 be summarised briefly. Student self-funding reduces fiscal (state) limits on
10
11 university access (Barr 2004), but self-funding does not actually increase levels
12
13 of access and participation (David 2012). Graduates on average earn more than
14
15 non-graduates (Barr 2004). However, this differential is itself class, race and
16
17 gender dependent (Egerton and Savage 1997, Green and Zhu 2007, Meister
18
19 2011, McGettigan 2012). As graduate earnings are so unequal, it is wrong,
20
21 even above a repayment threshold, that graduates should re-pay the flat cost
22
23 of their education in addition to general taxation, if, by general progressive
24
25 taxation, they will pay more *if* they earn more anyway (Brown et al. 2011).
26
27
28 Prior research challenges neo-liberal reform on access and ethical grounds.
29
30
31 This article challenges the claim that neo-liberal policies deliver 'success' even
32
33 in neo-liberalism's own terms (i.e. in relation to 'global competition'
34
35 indicators).
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 competition and market globalization, suggests league tables both legitimate
4
5 reputational competition and intensify it. 'Despite continued dispute about the
6
7 validity of the choice of indicators and/or their weightings, rankings have
8
9 acquired legitimacy because the methodology appears statistically rigorous'
10
11
12 (2011, 28).
13

14
15
16
17 Media assertions as to the 'reality' and 'benefits' of differentiation,
18
19 competition and global marketization claim to draw on statistical (league table)
20
21 data, even when such data does not warrant these claims. That the legitimacy
22
23 of statistical rankings is used to support policies even when ranking data does
24
25 not evidence the success of such policies requires further explanation than
26
27 simply 'faith' in numbers (however misguided).
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37

38 **Conclusions**

39
40
41
42
43
44
45 Attention to global university league tables has risen in recent years. Results
46
47 are interpreted to justify increased de-regulation, privatization and escalation
48
49 in 'user' fees. It is claimed that results show such neo-liberal reforms 'work' in
50
51 enabling US success and Asian ascent. Emulation of this 'model', it is claimed,
52
53 will enable 'elite' UK universities to compete. Yet, neither US superiority nor
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Asian ascent is evidenced in league tables. Media accounts suggesting
4
5 otherwise are explained in terms of who gets cited and the discursive
6
7 mechanisms deployed by them. However, 'elite' university representatives are
8
9 not fully at one regarding what form such emulation should take. The Russell
10
11 Group calls for more spending and greater concentration at the top. Oxford
12
13 University more explicitly advocates fee deregulation and escalation to achieve
14
15 this end.
16
17
18
19
20
21

22
23 Media citation is overwhelmingly biased in favour of dominant institutional
24
25 representatives. These actors frame debate. Other voices are only ever aligned
26
27 with the dominant frame. Drawing attention only to US successes, rather than
28
29 the weaknesses generated by its more differentiated system; and noting rises
30
31 but never falls by Asian institutions, perform discursive 'ratchets' enabling the
32
33 same frame to be 'evidenced' irrespective of results to the contrary. Claiming
34
35 UK success and UK failure evidence the necessity of funding reform is another
36
37 discursive 'ratchet' operating in media coverage. The discursive mechanism of
38
39 selective doubt further immunises challenge by including partial reflexivity
40
41 rather than any genuinely alternative perspectives.
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49

50
51 Numbers cannot speak. They can only be interpreted. When discursive space is
52
53 predominantly occupied by one powerful lobby it is not surprising media
54
55 accounts conform to their agenda, irrespective of whether the data under
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 discussion actually confirms their claims. The claim that 'global competition'
4
5 warrants policy reform at home is fabricated through discursive mechanisms,
6
7
8 not faith in numbers. Policy change was certainly not justified by the numbers
9
10 themselves.
11

12
13
14 However, for all its success, the Russell Group fundamentally failed. Whether
15
16 paid by students or devolved governments, higher fees simply replaced central
17
18 government funding. Government underwriting of loans turned the £9000
19
20 'cap' into the standard tariff; replacing central funds, not adding new money,
21
22 and certainly not boosting 'elite' institutions' resources. Fee escalation and
23
24 privatization were achieved in England, but sectarian lobbying merely aided
25
26 the government in cutting funding. Calls for further privatization, fee
27
28 escalation and differentiation to address this 'failure' have already been raised.
29
30
31 Given the unreliability of claims-making to date, such calls will require ongoing
32
33 critical scrutiny.
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

References

Amsler, Sarah and, Chris Bolsmann. 2012. "University Ranking as Social Exclusion." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 33 (2): 283-301.

Barr, Nicholas. 2004. "Higher Education Funding." *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 20 (2): 264-283.

Bergseth, Brita, Peter Petocz, and Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgrena. 2014. "Ranking quality in higher education: guiding and misleading?" *Quality in Higher Education* 20(3): 330-347

Boliver, V. (2015). Are there distinctive clusters of higher and lower status universities in the UK?. *Oxford Review of Education*... forthcoming

Bowden, Rachel. 2000. "Fantasy Higher Education: University and College League Tables." *Quality in Higher Education* 6 (1): 41-60.

Brown, Phillip. 2000. "The Globalization of Positional Competition". *Sociology* 34 (4): 633-653.

Brown, Phil, Hugh Lauder, and David Ashton. 2011. *The Global Auction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Collini, Stefan. 2012. *What are Universities for?* London: Penguin.

1
2
3 Curran, James, and Jean Seaton. 2005. *Power without Responsibility: the press,*
4
5
6 *broadcasting and the new media in Britain* (sixth edition). London: Routledge.
7

8
9 David, Matthew. 2012. *Fabricating 'World Class': The Social Construction and*
10
11
12 *Use of a Status Hierarchy*. Thesis submitted for the Degree of MSc in Sociology:
13
14 University of Oxford.
15

16
17
18 Delanty, Gerard. 2001. *Challenging Knowledge: The University in the*
19
20
21 *Knowledge Society*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
22

23
24
25 Egerton, Muriel, Mike Savage. 1997. "Social mobility, individual mobility and
26
27 the inheritance of class inequality". *Sociology* 31(4): 645-672.
28

29
30
31 Federkeil, Gero. 2008. "Ranking and Quality Assurance in Higher Education."
32
33
34 *Higher Education in Europe* 33 (2-3): 219-231.
35

36
37
38 Glaser, Barney, and Anselm Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory:*
39
40
41 *Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago IL.: Aldine.
42

43
44
45 Green, Francis, and Yu Zhu. 2007. *Overqualification, Job Dissatisfaction, and*
46
47 *Increasing Dispersion in the Returns to Graduate Education*. Manpower Human
48
49 Resources Lab Centre for Economic Performance Report. London School of
50
51
52 Economics: London.
53

1
2
3 Grove, Jack. 2011. "In race to top, France bids adieu to égalite." *Times Higher*
4
5
6 *Education*, October 6, p. 10.
7

8
9
10 Guest, Greg, Kathleen MacQueen, and Emily Namey. 2012. *Applied Thematic*
11
12 *Analysis*. London: Sage.
13

14
15
16 Hazelkorn, Ellen. 2011. *Ranking and the Reshaping of Higher Education: The*
17
18 *Battle for World Class Excellence*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
19

20
21
22 Hirsch, Fred. 1977. *The Social Limits to Growth*. London: Routledge.
23

24
25
26 King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social*
27
28 *Enquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
29

30
31
32 Krippendorff, Klaus. 2004. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its*
33
34 *Methodology*. London: Sage.
35

36
37
38 Lia, Mei, Sriram Shankara, and Kam Ki Tanga. 2011a. "Catching up with
39
40 Harvard: results from regression analysis of world university league tables."
41
42 *Cambridge Journal of Education* 41 (2): 121-37.
43
44

45
46
47 Lia, Mei, Sriram Shankara, and Kam Ki Tanga. 2011b. "Why do the USA
48
49 dominate university league tables?" *Studies in Higher Education* 36 (8): 923-37.
50

51
52
53 McGettigan, Andrew. 2012. *False Accounting? Why Higher Education Reforms*
54
55 *Don't Add Up*. Intergenerational Foundation: London.
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Mehan-Schmidt, Frances. 2012. "Excellence – but those missing out don't see
4 it that way." *Times Higher Education*, March 1, p. 22.
5
6
7

8
9 Meister, Robert (2011) Debt and Taxes: Can the Financial Industry Save Public
10 Universities? *Representations* 116 (1) Fall: 128-155.
11
12

13
14
15 Miles, Matthew, and Michael Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An
16 Expanded Sourcebook*. London: Sage.
17
18

19
20
21
22 Olssen, Mark, and Michael Peters. 2007 "Neo-liberalism, higher education and
23 the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism."
24
25
26
27 *Journal of Education Policy* 20 (3): 313-345.
28

29
30
31 Oxford English Dictionary (1996) The Oxford Compact English Dictionary.
32
33
34 Oxford. Oxford University Press.
35

36
37
38 Potter, Jonathan. 1996. *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social
39 Construction*. London: Sage.
40
41

42
43
44 Silverman, David. 2006. *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (3rd Edition). London:
45
46
47 Sage.
48

49
50 Smith, Steve. 1996. "Positivism and Beyond", in *International Theory:
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60* *Positivism and Beyond*, edited by Smith, Steve, Ken Booth, and Marysia
Zalewski, 1-45. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1
2
3 Stacka, Michelle. 2013 "The Times Higher Education ranking project: visualising
4
5
6 excellence through media." *Globalisation, Societies and Media* 11 (4): 560-582.
7

8
9 Turnera, David. 2005. "Benchmarking in universities: league tables revisited."
10
11
12 *Oxford Review of Education* 31 (3): 353-371.
13

14
15 Usher, Alex, and Massimo Savino. 2007. "Higher Education Ranking and its
16
17
18 Ascending Impact on Higher Education." *Higher Education in Europe* 32 (1): 5-
19
20
21 15.
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Table 1: World league table reference by source and year 2004-2012

Year/ Source	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
BBC				1	1	2	4	6	3	17
Mail			1	2	1		1			5
Sun						1				1
Independent		1					2	2	1	6
Times	1			3	4	2	1	2		13
Guardian					1	1	1	1		4
Telegraph				1	1	1		3		6
Total	1	1	1	7	8	7	9	14	4	52

NB Data for 2012 ended in Mid-March

Table 2: Reference to academic actors by source

Reference /Source	Word Total	Russe-ll Group	1994 Group	Sally Hunt	U K	N S	Stud-ent	Lect -urer	Prof	Chancellor (& VC or PVC)
BBC	10200	6	1	2	5		45	2	10	5
Mail	2200	2		1	1		11	1	2	5
Sun	100						2			
Independ-ent	6000					2	81	5	10	2
Times	11750	5					141	23	10	6
Guardian	2200	3		1			12			3
Telegraph	5000	1			1		34		2	3
Total		17	1	4	7	2	326	31	34	24

Table 3: Positive or negative comparisons

	Other better/risen	Other worse/fallen	Parallel/equal	Total
US	48	9	6	63
Europe	9	14	7	30
Asia (East)	10	1	3	14
Australia	3	3	1	7
Canada	2			2
Latin America	2			2
Middle East	1			1
India	1			1
Total	76	27	17	120

Table 4: Articles referring to Asian ascent

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
Times	1				3	1				5/13
BBC				1	1	1	2	2	1	8/17
Mail					1					1/5
Telegraph					1			1		2/6
Guardian					1	1	1			3/4
Independent								1		1/6
Sun										0/1
Total	1			1	7	3	3	4	1	20/52

Table 5: Pearson's Test for entries by population in English speaking countries

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Shanghai	.987	.988	.987	.984	.984	.985	.984	.987	.987
QS				.920	.924	.934	.928	.916	.914
THE								.962	.957

Note: All results have p values of .000, except for QS 2010 and 2011, which have p values of .001.

Table 6: Mean scores, number ranked and sum of scores for English speaking countries (THE2011-12)

Country	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	N*M	Entries per million of population
US	63.6	75	15.8	4770	0.24
UK	56.6	32	14.7	1811.2	0.5
Canada	59.4	9	15.3	534.3	0.27
Australia	57.5	7	11.8	402.7	0.32
Hong Kong	55.8	4	13.7	223.2	0.57
Singapore	58	2	18.3	115.9	0.4
Rep. of Ireland	48.5	2	3.7	97	0.44
South Africa	53.2	1	0	53.2	0.02
New Zealand	44.6	1	0	44.6	0.23

Table 7: Shanghai, QS and THE results –Asian countries – number of top 200 entries

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Shanghai	12	12	13	14	13	12	12	15	14
QS				30	26	29	33	32	32
THE								25	18

For Peer Review Only

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Table 8: Asian sum of scores for all years in Shanghai, QS and THE Indexes

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Shanghai	1196	1175	1160	1236	1153	1015	1049	1173	1159
QS				2675	2770	2777	3139	2980	3157
THE								2406	1765

For Peer Review Only