

● NIRF 2019

Can NIRF shake up the B-school world?

To improve, B-schools have to address the parameters highlighted in the NIRF

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ANXIETY AND EXCITEMENT surrounded the recent release of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2019, the fourth on higher education institutions since 2016. NIRF results show that barring a few institutions that have established credentials, the rest need to focus on creating value through relevant curriculum, good teaching-learning process, rich intellectual pool with good research, and investing in resources, while keeping students at the centre of the entire process. Ironically, the priority of many institutions in the past decade has been on creating hollow branding to attract students. This trend, in part, has been encouraged by the spurt of private ranking agencies.

In the management education category, IIM Ahmedabad got dethroned from the first place it had secured in NIRF 2018, by IIM Bangalore. Among the top 10, there are six IIMs and three IITs, with XLRI



Jamshedpur as the only private institute.

NIRF has evolved as an objective measure over the years. In the management education category, it incorporates in its ranking methodology the parameters of Teaching, Learning & Resources (TLR), Research and Professional Practice (RPP), Graduation Outcomes (GO), Outreach and Inclusivity (OI), and Perception. These parameters are quite different from those of other ranking agencies that have numerous categories under each stream, unlike NIRF where every type of institution is clubbed under one stream only.

NIRF 2019 ranking of 75 business schools clearly brings out three clusters. First, the top three IIMs (Bangalore, Ahmedabad and Calcutta, with overall scores of 81.34, 80.61 and 79.05, respectively) that have a narrow score range and are tipped for high order competition across parameters with global aspirations. The second cluster can be considered as all other IIMs and a few private business schools in the rank band of 4-31, where the scores lie between 50 and 70 (there is a wide variation), and these institutes need to focus on RPP, Perception, TLR, GO and OI, in that sequence, indicating the order of their priority for future efforts. The third cluster can be identified as that of private business schools, both autonomous and private university-run, which fall below the 30th rank and their score range is 40-50 (the score differences between these schools are in decimals). This cluster typically characterises low RPP, low Perception, relatively low TLR, GO and OI. At the same time, it's astonishing that some of the institutions from the above-mentioned third and second cluster find place amongst the list of top business schools ranked by other ranking bodies, hence raising a question mark on the objectivity and neutrality of such rankings.

It is not to say the NIRF methodology is perfect. For instance, NIRF combines government-supported and private schools, institutions that have huge differences in both age and scale, and institutions that are standalone or part of a university are also clubbed together. A university-linked school or a 50-year-old institution would have its own impact on rankings as compared to a standalone or a younger institution. Similarly, too much focus on research and neglect of other parameters isn't a tell-all about the true quality of an institution. Aspects like the value system institutions inculcate in their students, their long-term and global intent, their best practices, internationalisation, rural immersion and industry connect are a few important elements that are missing from the NIRF parameters, and should be considered.

But the moot question is: Will bottom ranked or unranked business schools in the country wake up to the NIRF standards, focusing on the core issues of value creation, or will they continue to remain on the fringe (for brand building out of nothing), addressing to the needs of certain rankings and vying for certain accreditations while remaining hollow in teaching-learning, skill development, industry readiness, placements, etc?

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