

ROLE OF LIBRARY SUPPORT SERVICES IN RANKING OF UNIVERSITIES: A STUDY

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Abstract :

This research explores the impact of library support services on the rankings of top world-class universities by evaluating the presence and quality of twenty essential research support services in top-ranked universities of major ranking systems, such as ARWU, QS, THE, NAAC, and NIRF. Conducting a systematic comparative review approach, the study analyses secondary data from reports and ranking publications using a binary coding system to assess service presence. Findings indicate a universal provision of core library services such as research support, citation management, and access to electronic resources across universities. But large inequalities are apparent in sophisticated services such as digital scholarship support, inter-library loans, plagiarism training, and library grants. These disparities bring opportunities for strategic improvement to align library services with changing academic and research needs. The research highlights how academic libraries are vital drivers of research productivity and academic excellence, with direct implications on the outcomes of university rankings. It also stresses the necessity for new-generation, digitally empowered, and user-focused library models, particularly in emerging higher education environments like those of Indian universities. By connecting the quality of library services with university assessment standards, this study bridges a critical research gap in the literature and provides insights that are beneficial to university administrators, librarians, and policymakers interested in advancing institutional competitiveness and promoting global academic excellence through improved library support services.

Key words : Library support services, University ranking, Research support, Academic libraries

Introduction :

The role of library support services in the ranking of universities has gained significant attention in recent years as academic libraries increasingly serve as critical hubs for learning, research, and knowledge dissemination. University rankings, which have an impact on reputation, funding, and admission, typically take into consideration multiple parameters such as output in research, quality of teaching, and quality of infrastructure—of which library services are important components of the academic landscape. The quality and accessibility of library support services directly affect students' and faculty members' ability to access information, engages in research activities, and succeed academically. As such, understanding how these services impact university rankings is essential for higher education

institutions striving to improve their global standing.

Academic libraries have transcended mere book lending to being vibrant hubs of extensive digital collections, research assistance, technology-rich facilities, and tailor-made services that meet varied user requirements. Improving library service quality and user satisfaction has been extensively researched, showing that good library services go a long way in yielding fruitful user experiences and academic achievement (Adam, 2017; Peng et al., 2022). Yet, issues like resource limitations, technology preparedness, and changing user expectations pose consistent challenges to library management (Aryee & Apronti Tetteh, 2024; Baidoo & Nwagwu, 2024). Resolution of these matters is important, as libraries have a strategic function in advancing the fundamental missions of universities, such as research productivity and educational quality, which are paramount indicators in international university rankings (Dimzov, Matošić, & Urem, 2021; Marcial, Costa, & González-Solar, 2016).

Frameworks for external quality and standards were put in place to direct academic libraries in developing and upholding their quality of service, thus guaranteeing their contribution supports institutional objectives (Atkinson & Walton, 2016; Library Association, 1979). Concurrently, incorporation of cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence and smart services into library operations further enhances the potential of academic libraries to serve users with effectiveness (Islam et al., 2025; Xu & Cheng, 2024). These technologies support effective knowledge management and user interaction, which are increasingly being acknowledged in academic ratings and rankings (Enakrire, 2025; O'Donnell & Anderson, 2021).

In contrast to the recognized significance of library services, very little empirical research has evaluated systematically the impact that library support services have on university ranking results specifically. This is particularly significant considering the diversity of methodologies and metrics applied across global ranking systems as well as the pivotal role that libraries have in facilitating research and learning activities contributing to these rankings (MacColl, 2010; Musa, Musa, & Musa, 2019; Snježana Dimzov et al., 2021). Moreover, the views of users and service provider evaluations are important indicators of service efficiency and areas for improvement, which are key drivers of enhancing library contributions to success within institutions (Mamta & Kumar, 2023; Mayende, Awuor, & Namande, 2021; Sanaz Soltani & Shahrokh Nikou, 2020).

The research in this paper aims at evaluating the library support services offered by the top ten universities featured in each of the global ranking systems covered in the study. By examining these pioneering institutions, the study attempts to shed light on the role and influence of library services in determining university rankings, examining the extent to which these services impacted users, facilitated research and learning, and were aligned with the best practices and future trends in academic librarianship. It is anticipated that the outcomes will add to the on-going debate regarding strengthening the strategic roles of academic libraries in higher education and guide policy and practice to ensure university

competitiveness in the world.

Significance of the Study :

The significance of this study lies in its focused exploration of the role that library support services play in the global ranking of universities, an area that remains underexplored despite the critical function academic libraries serve in higher education institutions. The rankings of universities now serve as an important determinant of policy and strategies for a given country, choice of apprenticeship for students, and a myriad of other institutional strategies around the globe. As gatekeepers of information, libraries as centre of learning resources, support research, teaching, learning and therefore, influence the rankings of the universities by providing information resources, encouraging research productivity, as well as enriching students' academic experiences. Although other researchers have explored different dimensions of a library's service quality and its correlated user satisfaction (see, for example, Adam, 2017; Peng et al., 2022), almost none have explored the impact of the quality of library support services on university rankings, which this study seeks to address.

The existing body of literature reiterates the relationship between the effectiveness of library services provided and the success of an academic institution as well as its standing in the global ranking systems. For instance, the availability of resources, academic and technological, as well as the participation of the users within the library system, library services, and the overall satisfaction level of the users has together been discussed in some of the library science literature (Aryee & Apronti Tetteh, 2024; Baidoo & Nwagwu, 2024; Mamta & Kumar, 2023). In addition, more and more advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence, as well as a more acute evaluation of smart service quality, are being integrated to enhance the operations of the library and, as a result, the academic performance and research outputs (Islam et al., 2025; Xu & Cheng, 2024). Such developments are transforming the traditional role of libraries as resource centres to more dynamic participants and enablers for achieving academic success. Nonetheless, few attempts have been made to systematically examine the impact of such factors on the performance of the universities in the global ranking systems.

Previous studies explored the institutional role of libraries within the context of university research assessment and knowledge management (MacColl, 2010; Enakrire, 2025; Click, Wiley, & Houlihan, 2017; Mayende, Awuor, & Namande, 2021). However, we noticed a gap in the research about the lack of comparative analyses of branch libraries in top-ranked universities within and across several global ranking frameworks in relation to the influence and support services libraries provided to these institutions. The multifaceted criteria that come with university ranking systems demand thorough evaluation of libraries' tactical role within these frameworks, an area that has been flagged as a gap in the literature but remains under-researched (Dimzov, Matošić, & Urem, 2021; Musa, Musa, & Musa, 2019).

This study's novelty illustrates how it has incorporated the leading global ranking systems of various universities with the comprehensive evaluation of library support services, thus offering a holistic multidisciplinary perspective which is lacking in prior research. It

attempts to find library service gaps in the recent ranking of global libraries servicing academic institutions and responding to the calls in the literature on the need for in-depth studies on the relationship between academic libraries and the universities' library services reputation (Marcial, Costa, & González-Solar, 2016; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2023). Also, the study captures the dual roles of the service provider and the user and thus broadens the understanding of the effectiveness of service and improvement gaps sharpening the focus with the recent shifts in academic libraries to user-centered frameworks (Mayende et al., 2021; Soltani & Nikou, 2020).

Overall, this study enhances the academic library and the literature on higher education by addressing a critical gap and providing valuable recommendations for university leaders, librarians, and policy advocates. It underscores the strategic value of library support services not only in the advancement of scholarly work but also in the intensely competitive pursuit of global ranking supremacy. It is hoped the results will shape proactive library management strategies, stimulate the integrated use of new technologies, and cultivate service excellence in libraries designed to meet the new realities of university communities, thereby improving the institutions' international standing.

Objectives of the Study :

- To assess the library support services provided by the top ten universities listed in each of the global ranking systems included in the study.
- To find out various library support services provided by the top ten universities.

Methodology :

This research uses a systematic comparative review approach to evaluate library support services in respect to university ranking criteria for the top-ranked universities worldwide. The research uses the top ten institutions ranked in major ranking systems, such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education (THE), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), and National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF). Data were gathered using random sampling of secondary sources like institutional reports, ranking publications, and literature pertaining to the availability of twenty core library research support services. A binary coding scheme was used to identify service availability, allowing quantitative and qualitative analysis of primary and advanced library services. Moreover, the research explored the evaluation processes and methodologies behind every ranking system through official reports and scholarly studies to discern their indicators and weightings. This is done both ways to allow for integrated comparison and demonstrate how library support services correlate with ranking frameworks and contribute to excellence in universities.

Analysis & Interpretation :

Table 1- Comparative Distribution of Library Research Support Services across top 10 Institutes at Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU).

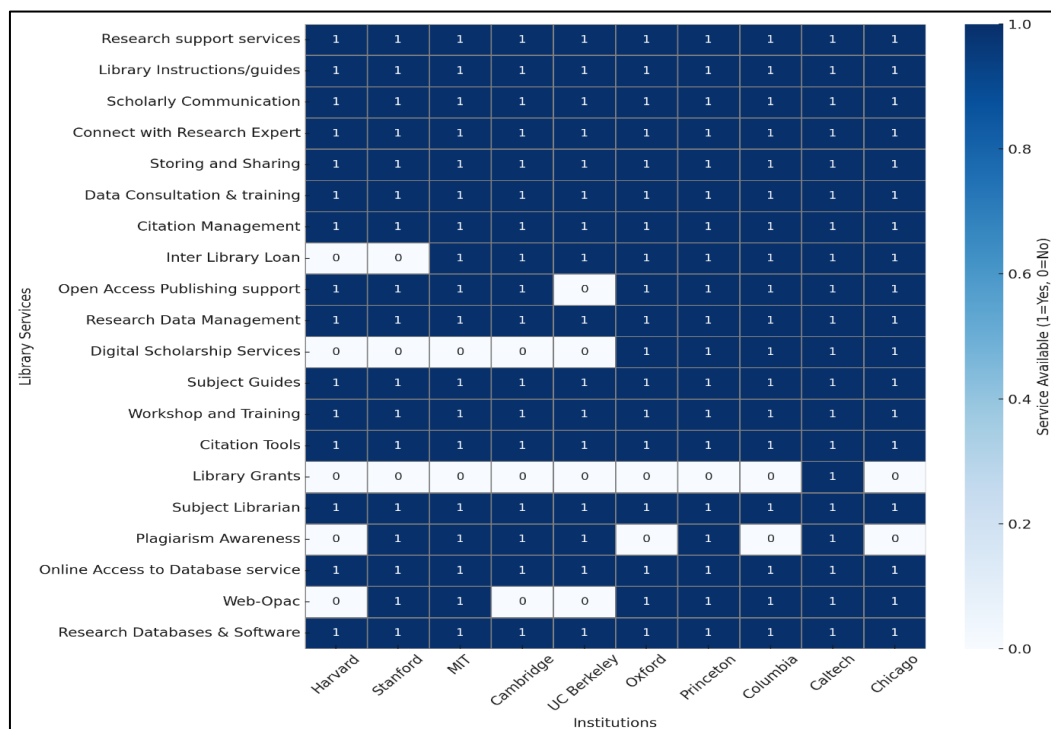


Table 1 shows a comprehensive comparative analysis of library research support services provided by the top ten universities ranked according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). It investigates the availability of twenty critical library services in institutions such as Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Cambridge, Oxford, Princeton, Columbia, UC Berkeley, Caltech, and the University of Chicago. The statistics indicate a high level of standardization in core services like research assistance, library guides, scholarly communication, data consultation, citation management, subject librarians, online database access, and research software. Such uniformity indicates the technological leadership of libraries in promoting research excellence across the world. Though, there is substantial difference in advanced services: inter-library loans do not exist in Harvard and Stanford; digital scholarship support does not exist in five institutions; plagiarism awareness is sporadically applied; and library grants are seldom provided except by Caltech. Such differences indicate the possibility of strategic improvement. As a whole, the review highlights the necessity for libraries to transform with collaborative, digitally enabled, and researcher-focused services to respond to new academic requirements.

Table 2 Comparative Distribution of Library Research Support Services across top 10 institutes at QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World University Rankings.

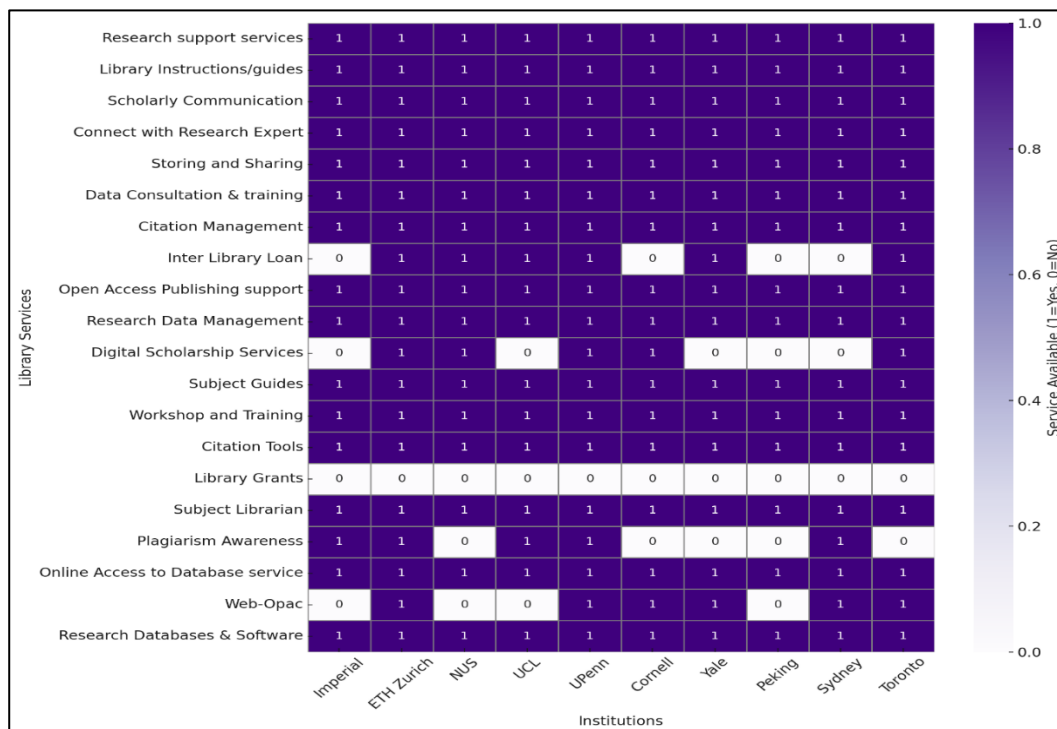


Table 2 provides a comprehensive comparative examination of library research support services at the top ten universities in the QS World University Rankings, which include ETH Zurich, UPenn, University of Toronto, NUS, UCL, Cornell, Yale, Sydney, Imperial College, and Peking University. Twenty core services are measured against availability using a binary coding scale, showing a high level of basic support such as research consultation, citation management, open access, data advisory services, and access to online databases. Gaps in advanced services are evident; inter-library loans and digital scholarship assistance are absent in many institutions, which indicates movement toward consortia-based resources and the risk of limited capabilities to support research that is data-intensive. None of the universities offer library grants, reflecting a global lack of direct funding. ETH Zurich and U Penn are at the forefront with 19 services, a prime example of holistic support, whereas Peking University offers the least at 15. These results underscore the urgent necessity for QS-ranked universities to transform their library services towards more innovative, digital, and researcher-focused models.

Table 3 Comparative Distribution of Library Research Support Services across top 10 institutes at THE (Times Higher Education) World University Rankings.

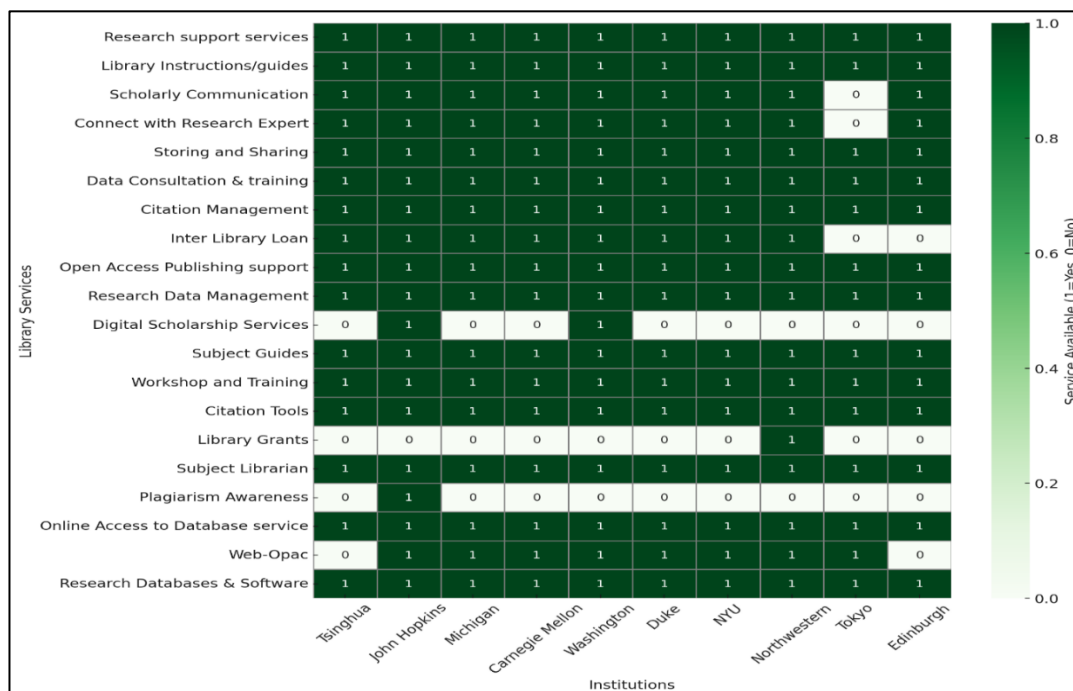


Table 3 summarizes a systematic assessment of top research support services at the top ten THE-ranked universities. Twenty key services exhibited binary availability, with high presence of core research-academic facilitation services like research advice, library training, scholarly communication, and access to research databases indicating an institutional consensus on sustaining traditional library functions. But there are critical gaps in advanced services: digital scholarship support is lacking in seven, including Tokyo, Edinburgh, and Duke, indicating pressing needs for innovation. Library grants are practically non-existent, suggesting minimal direct funding facilitation, and plagiarism awareness is unevenly provided, particularly lacking at Tsinghua, Duke, and NYU. The service range differs, ranging from 19 services at Johns Hopkins to 14 for Tokyo. These differences highlight the importance of academic libraries going beyond conventional roles by incorporating digital, ethical, and financial support frameworks, hence becoming active collaborators in the development of innovation and integrity within international research settings.

Table 4 Comparative Distribution of Library Research Support Services across top 10 institutes at National Assessment and Accreditation council (NAAC) ranking.

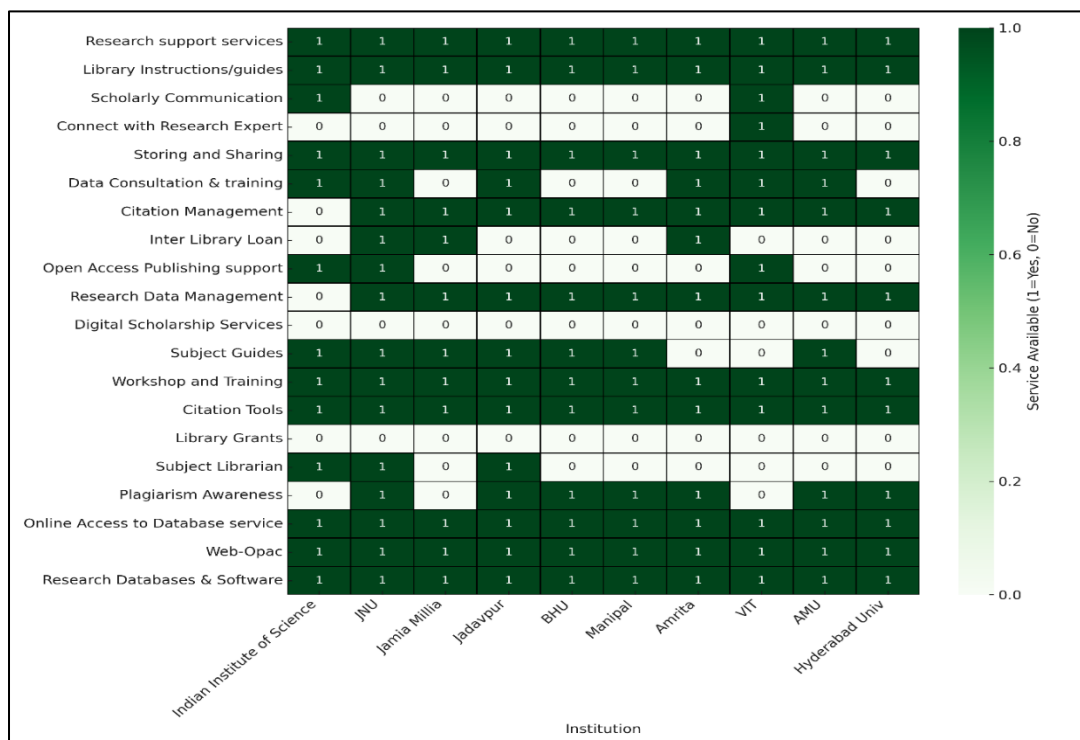


Table 4 captures a detailed evaluation of research support services within ten leading Indian universities with high NAAC accreditation. The figures show a baseline consistency in fundamental services like research assistance, library tutorials, citation guides, research databases, and web access, reflecting baseline investment in digital infrastructure. But gaps are wide in sophisticated services like open access publishing, digital scholarship, subject guides, subject librarian assistance, and library grants. Many universities, such as Savitribai Phule Pune University and Madurai Kamaraj University, provide fewer than half of the services evaluated, an indication of underutilization of innovative academic library features. Imperative services encouraging academic integrity and teamwork—such as research expert linkages, scholarly communication, plagiarism education, and inter-library lending—are aslant. Bharathidasan University, Maharshi Dayanand University, and Alagappa University take the lead with 13 services, whereas others fall far behind. This gap indicates the pressing need for focused policy intervention and strategic investment to upgrade Indian academic libraries, developing digital scholarship, user-oriented services, and increased research productivity that correspond to changing global benchmarks.

Table 5 Comparative Distribution of Library Research Support Services across top 10 institutes at National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) ranking.

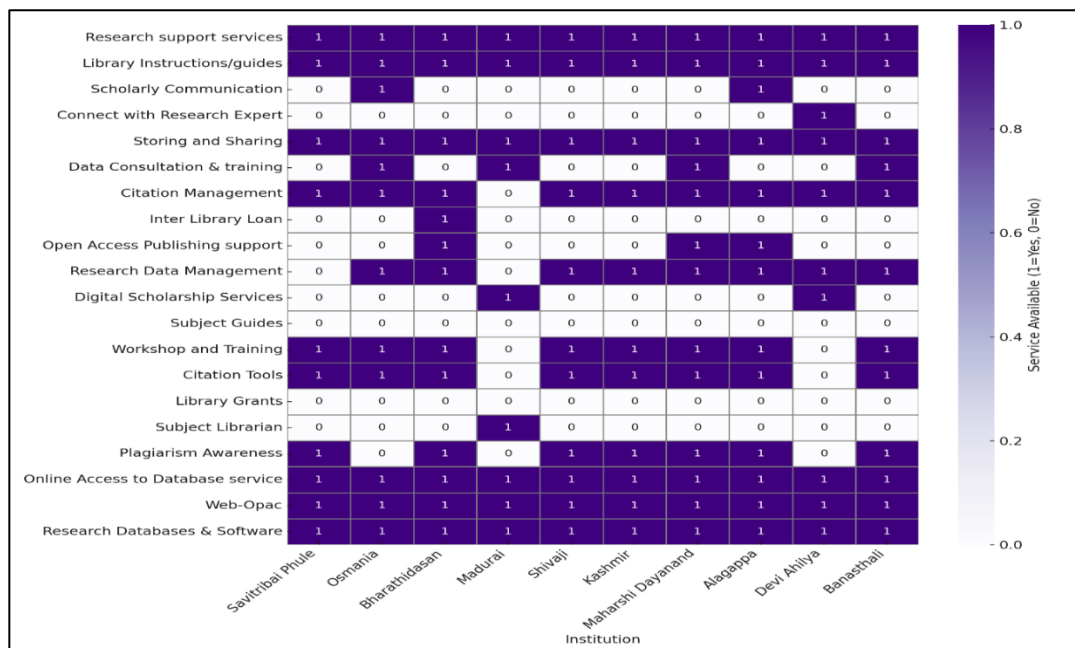


Table 5 presents a comparative picture of research support services in the top ten Indian universities ranked according to the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF). It emphasizes a robust focus on core services—like research assistance, library guides, citation management tools, Web-OPAC, and access to online databases—widely available in the majority of institutions, indicating conformity to international academic standards. Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) are at the forefront with 17 and 18 services each, reflecting total research excellence support, integration of digital resources, and guidance. But sophisticated services such as digital scholarship, access to research specialists, library grants, and subject librarian assistance are unevenly available and usually wanting in places like BHU, Hyderabad University, and AMU. Such imbalance hinders cross-disciplinary collaboration and active research involvement, especially in new fields of research. The results necessitate policy convergence, strategic digital expenditure, and increased institutional attention to changing researcher demands to improve service quality, raise NIRF scores, and advance India's national research capability.

Implications of the Study :

This research has important implications for academic library communities, university leaders, policymakers, and the wider higher education sector by explaining the critical relationship between library support services and university rankings. The comparison of library research support services at leading institutions in international and domestic ranking systems identifies strengths and important gaps that affect institutional performance and reputation. Results from top-ranked universities in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) confirm a high level of standardization in essential library services like research consultation, citation management, and access to digital collections, highlighting libraries' pivotal function in ensuring research excellence and academic achievement.

Nevertheless, significant gaps in advanced services—inter-library loans, digital scholarship assistance, plagiarism education initiatives, and library grants—point towards areas where strategic improvements would have a profound impact on research support structures and, indirectly, university reputation. Likewise, examination of the QS and Times Higher Education (THE) ranked universities verifies the predominance of core services but identifies widespread shortcomings in advanced, researcher-focused services. Such gaps can hinder the ability of universities to serve future research needs, especially those data-intensive and interdisciplinary fields, indicating libraries need to transform towards more innovative, digitally enabled, and collaborative models of services. The lack of library grants in numerous institutions also highlights a worldwide issue in the direct funding of research support, pointing to the potential for universities to innovate alternative financial support structures that enhance the role of the library as an engaged research partner. The analysis of Indian universities under the NAAC and NIRF paradigms highlights the immediate need for targeted policy measures and enhanced investments to fill gaps in advanced library services. While core digital infrastructure and rudimentary research support are continuously available, the paucity of offerings such as digital scholarship, researcher linkages, and ethical research support limits the scope of these universities to compete efficiently on international forums. Institutes that excel in service provision, like IISc and Jawaharlal Nehru University, illustrate how well-developed library support goes hand in hand with increased research productivity and institutional reputation, and they set an example for other institutes to follow. By emphasizing these differences and similarities, the research highlights the need for academic libraries around the globe to evolve beyond conventional functions, embracing more sophisticated digital resources, moral instruction, and explicit funding of research efforts. This change echoes the large-scale academic and technological transformations evidenced in recent research and addresses calls for customer and innovation-focussed library models to accommodate changing user demands. Furthermore, the research findings offer policymakers and university leadership practical recommendations for making library service improvement a strategic consideration that can impact world rankings, research output, and academic quality. Finally, this study fills a significant gap in literature by empirically associating library support services with university ranking results in different contexts. It promotes a comprehensive, researcher-centric, and digitally enabled library environment as indispensable for universities that wish to attain and maintain global academic excellence, hence contributing to the continuing debate of enhancing higher education quality and competitiveness through strategic library development.

Conclusion :

This research conclusively identifies the central role which library support services have in determining the ranking and overall academic performance of universities around the world. From a comprehensive comparative study of the top ten universities from leading global rankings like ARWU, QS, THE, and national systems like NAAC and NIRF, it is clear that although main library services are universally standardised and always available, large gaps persist in the delivery of sophisticated research support services. These higher-level services such as digital scholarship assistance, interlibrary loans, plagiarism sensitization

schemes, and in-lieu library grants are offered sporadically even in top schools, inviting possibilities for strategic development and innovation. The report emphasizes that academic libraries are more than just knowledge repositories but essential active collaborators in advancing research at the cutting-edge, academic integrity, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Libraries that effectively embed advanced tools, provide individualized research support, and participate actively in scholarly communication are likely better positioned to support the changing needs of research universities, thus favourably impacting their ranking results. The reverse is true for libraries with weaknesses in advanced service provision that can stifle the complete support of researchers, restrict inter-disciplinary cooperation, and eventually impact institutional reputation in international marketplaces. Indian institutions, as seen in NAAC and NIRF evaluations, indicate an urgent call for focused investment and policy intervention to enhance library services and close the gap between global and local realities. Players at the forefront of library service delivery under these paradigms show the way that holistic and innovative library assistance can meaningfully add to research output and academic profiles. Essentially, this research makes a new empirical contribution by connecting library support services in a direct relationship with university ranking indicators, and in doing so, contributes significantly to the academic literature gap. It pleads for a strategic reimagining of the academic library as a digitally enabled, user-centric, and funded organization that plays an intrinsic role in driving institutional greatness. University leaders, librarians, and policymakers need to identify and invest in these services as key drivers of global competitiveness, research innovation, and academic success. This integrated strategy is vital for universities that want to sustain and build on their stature in the rapidly competitive higher education universe.

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