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**WEBOMETRICS RANKING AND REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES:  
ANALYSING RESULTS OF BUNIN YELETS STATE UNIVERSITY**

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**Abstract**

This study analyses the results of Bunin Yelets State University (BYSU) in the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities. The university is among three leading educational institutions in the Lipetsk region but ranks number 3. So, taking into account these results, the research question can be formulated as follows: what can BYSU do to improve positions in Webometrics ranking both on regional and national levels? Many institutions of higher education in different countries acknowledge the important role that various world rankings play nowadays. Webometrics ranking is studied in this work as it ranks not only top universities but also gives a chance to regional and local institutions to present themselves to the world. It analyses more than 30 000 higher educational institutions from different countries. In this work we give recommendations on what can be exactly done in each of key indicator (Visibility, Transparency and Excellence) to rank higher. The results of the study are significant not only for Bunin Yelets State University but also for any regional institution as if implemented, they will help to improve ranking positions and this way the university will become more attractive to potential entrants. As this ranking is carried out twice a year and it is very dynamic, it is necessary to monitor the results on a regular basis and adjust taken steps.

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## 1. Introduction

Today, many countries and their educational institutions are becoming increasingly interested in international university rankings (Anyira & Idubor, 2020; Forster, 2018). As a result, the number of both international and national rankings is growing, and more and more various conferences and round tables are being held to discuss the results.

The attractiveness of these studies can be explained by the fact that in the era of globalization there is an active competition for economic and human resources at the international level. World rankings allow universities to take an active part in this process. The better the university's results, the more chances it has to show its research and educational potential (Das et al., 2019; Puzatykh, 2019). It should be noted that the audience of the sites that publish rankings is several million people a year. The results of these studies are used by many young people as a guide for choosing an educational institution (especially a foreign one).

Dill and Soo (2005) note that data of international rankings can be used by educational institutions to obtain funding and attract highly skilled researchers. All this will significantly improve the chances of a university in the educational services market. From the scientific perspective, educational institutions need such rankings if they intend to boost the efficiency of their research activities by taking part in projects which are organized on international level as well as by inviting doctoral students and researchers (Cantú-Ortiz, 2017).

In the 21st century, the Internet is the main means of attracting applicants and scientists from different countries. It is actively used as a means of promoting various competencies of universities, such as academic, scientific and educational ones. This way, educational institutions can spread their knowledge beyond their physical boundaries. All this provoked active competition among universities on the Internet.

## 2. Problem Statement

Why is it so important for educational organizations to have a well-ranked website or, in other words, a competitive website? It is the most important form of the presence of a university on the Internet as a reflection of the style of work, activity and reputation of an educational institution.

As for Russia, the need for Russian universities to participate in various international rankings is declared at the state level. In 2013 Russian government launched a program which aimed at increasing the competitiveness of domestic universities and bringing 5 universities to the Top 100 in leading rankings.

Unlike two other world rankings (QS World University Rankings and Academic Ranking of World Universities which is done by Shanghai University) which cover only 1000 universities in the world with the distribution of places among the Top 500, further, universities are located in clusters, the Webometrics ranking is an excellent alternative.

The main advantage of this ranking is that it analyses more than 30 000 higher education institutions around the world, thereby allowing regional universities, for which it is very difficult to get into the QS and ARWU rankings, to present their activities to the world. Besides, it ranks not only universities but also individual scientists, libraries (Davydova et al., 2020) etc. That is why it is gaining

huge popularity, including Russia (Kosyakov et al., 2016, 2017; Kuznetsova et al., 2017). The initial goal of this ranking was to encourage academic activity on the Internet and support the open access initiative. However, it soon began to be successfully used to rank universities in the world.

In this regard, in our work we consider the results of a regional university - Bunin Yelets State University, which is located in the Lipetsk region, and make an attempt on the basis of these results to give recommendations that will improve the position in this ranking

Before we continue, it should be noted that despite the popularity of the Webometrics ranking, there are some drawbacks in its methodology. They must be taken into account when developing the policy of action:

- ranking indicators change quite often. This may have an impact on the correct analysis of data reflecting the dynamics of the university movement in this ranking;
- educational institutions are not distributed here into separate categories, i.e., universities of different directions are listed all together;
- the ranking does not take into account the data of the Russian search engine Yandex, which is the main one for Russian universities.

### **3. Research Questions**

Our work analyses the results of Bunin Yelets State University in The Web Ranking of Universities. Hence, the research question is as follows: What can be done by regional universities, in particular by Bunin Yelets State University, to improve the position in the Webometrics ranking?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to give exact recommendations that will help to improve the positions of the university in Webometrics ranking according to the following indicators: Visibility, Transparency, Excellence.

### **5. Research Methods**

The comparative method is used as a basic one which makes it possible to compare the parameters of causality and expediency of forming a ranking for the educational sphere.

The Webometrics Ranking of World Universities (WRWU) is the most dynamic of all existing university rankings (Aguillo et al., 2008; Galynsky, 2016).

The main purpose of this ranking is to assess how universities present their activity on the Internet. To collect necessary data different sources are used such as: search engines (Ayu & Elgharabawy, 2013; Halibas et al., 2020), various scientific and commercial webometric databases.

It should be noted that the rules are regularly updated and starting from 2021, the criteria for assessing universities have changed, and at the same time the importance of some of them has also changed. In the 2021 edition of the ranking, the Presence indicator has been discontinued, and its weight is transferred to the Excellence indicator which estimates the number of works included in the top 10% most cited in the world in 27 disciplines.

## 6. Findings

Next, we will consider the positions of Bunin Yelets State University starting from 2018 (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Bunin Yelets State University results

Year	Domestic ranking	World ranking	Presence	Visibility	Transparency	Excellence
January 2018	347	11768	8816	9930	9593	5777
July 2018	353	12113	7189	10138	10778	6007
January 2019	365	12033	7171	9869	11470	6017
July 2019	341	11477	6963	10021	8601	6048
January 2020	344	11541	7552	10329	5819	6626
July 2020	337	11648	7008	10404	7356	6084
January 2021	364	12897	Discontinued	11281	5963	6683

In 2021, taking into account the new criteria, Bunin Yelets State University ranked 364 out of 1,071 Russian universities. In general, the position of the university is quite stable, despite the falling and upward movement depending on the year.

Visibility is among two most important metrics. As we can see, in 2021 there was a rather large drop which significantly influenced the place of BYSU, as this indicator weighs 50%. We can explain it by the fact that fewer other authoritative sites and networks are referring to the university website, or the posted links are no longer taken into account (Alsmadi & Taylor, 2018; Acosta-Vargas et al., 2020).

To calculate the Transparency criterion, the Google Scholar Citations (GSC) system is used, i.e. the ranking is based on the total number of links for the most cited profiles tied to a given university (from the second to the tenth) in the Google Academy system (<https://scholar.google.com>).

When analysing this system, we found only 3 profiles with the full name of the university. The rest of the profiles have a short version - BYSU. When searching, the system considers these two names to be not identical. In addition, in English the name of the university is only available in one profile. Thus, the Webometrics ranking may not take into account citations of the university staff whose profiles contain the short name of the university, and the name of the university in English is missing.

When searching for the titles of the articles, we noticed that the name of the university in English is given in different ways, and it differs from the official one. All this negatively affects the ranking indicators.

The system also requires employees to have e-mail addresses tied to the official domain of the university. Profiles that do not have verified addresses will not appear in the search.

However, we note that this figure has improved significantly compared to July 2020. Though, this criterion has the least weight among all the others.

Unfortunately, Bunin Yelets State University does not qualify for Excellence indicator. When searching the Scimago database, used in the ranking, we could not find the name of the university.

Having analysed the results of Bunin Yelets State University in the Webometrics ranking, we can propose a number of recommendations.

To get better Visibility positions, it is recommended to:

- 1) produce better content and publish it on the site;
- 2) translate the site into different languages;
- 3) add the university's website to various catalogues (particularly educational ones);
- 4) more actively reflect the activities of the university in different social networks such as VK, Odnoklassniki, Facebook etc. (Sarwar et al., 2021);
- 5) link to the site of the university from works that teaching staff publish in journals;

As part of the work on the Transparency indicator, it is important to:

- 1) register employees in the Google Scholar system with e-mails tied to the university domain and fill out profiles with a uniform indication of the name of the university in Russian and English, i.e. Bunin Yelets State University;
- 2) create special pages of scientific events held by the university such as conferences. If the university has a peer-reviewed journal, it is also very advisable to have a detailed page of this journal.

Excellence is a scientometric indicator. Here it is necessary to:

- 1) ensure that the works of the university staff can be accessed by anyone;
- 2) publish more works in international indexed databases such as Scopus and Web of Science.

Bunin Yelets State University is already undertaking steps in this direction. Every Associate Professor must have at least one publication per year in the Scopus or Web of Science journals. And professors - 2.

In our opinion, if the university follows the above mentioned recommendations, the positions in Webometrics ranking will improve. Though they are not obligatory.

## 7. Conclusion

In our study we analysed the results of the regional university Bunin Yelets State University. We identified weaknesses and suggested ways to increase ranking positions.

Global university rankings are already an integral part of many universities' life. A lot of countries take into account the results of such ranking when deciding on educational policy. Undoubtedly, universities should determine for themselves how important it is to participate in this or that ranking, and if so, decide what essential information the ranking can provide in addition to the publicly available information.

Therefore, to ensure the relevance of rankings, universities and consumers should use additional procedures: the comparison of ranking positions and key parameters available in open sources. It is with this approach that the significance of the ranking will increase, and there will be less distortions of the real situation at a university.

Webometrics ranking is becoming more and more attractive for Russian universities, especially regional ones, as universities are increasingly active on the Internet, reflecting their educational and scientific activities there. It is the Webometrics ranking that allows many regional universities to present themselves to the world.

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