

NIRF Rankings to be Impacted by Research Retractions: Mild Penalty in 2024, Stricter from 2025

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NIRF Rankings Latest News

- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) will award negative scores to higher educational institutions for papers that have been retracted from journals.

Introduction

- In a significant move to promote academic integrity and research quality, the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) has announced that it will begin penalising institutions for retracted research papers.
- Starting with the 2024 ranking cycle, institutions will face a mild deduction in scores if they have research publications that were retracted in the previous year.
- A more stringent penalty system is planned for 2025 and beyond. This shift comes amid rising concerns over research misconduct and retraction trends within Indian academia.

Background on NIRF and Its Evolution

- Launched in 2016 by the Ministry of Education, the **National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)** has become India's premier system for evaluating higher education institutions. It assesses universities and colleges based on five core parameters:
 - Teaching, Learning and Resources
 - Research and Professional Practices
 - Graduation Outcomes
 - Outreach and Inclusivity
 - Perception
- Of these, **Research and Professional Practice (RP)** carries substantial weight, up to 40% for some categories, which includes publications, quality, IPR, and research projects.
- The growing number of retractions, especially in indexed journals, has raised alarm bells, prompting NIRF to evolve its methodology to uphold research credibility.

Research Retractions: A Rising Concern

- According to the NIRF 2024 brochure, **approximately 300 retractions were recorded in 2023** across Indian institutions, a noticeable increase from earlier years. Many of these retractions occurred in journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, which are the databases used by NIRF to assess research quality.
- Retractions generally stem from issues such as:
 - **Plagiarism or duplicate submissions**
 - **Manipulation of data or peer review**
 - **Ethical misconduct or authorship disputes**
- Such instances not only undermine academic integrity but also distort institutional rankings if left unaddressed.

Revised Methodology for Penalising Retractions

- Starting with the **2024 ranking cycle**, NIRF has outlined the following approach:
- **Mild Penalty in 2024 Rankings**
 - A small reduction in scores under the "Research and Professional Practice" category for institutions that had retracted papers in 2023.
 - The penalty will be **proportional to the number of retractions** and the nature of misconduct.
- **Harsh Penalty from 2025 Onwards**
 - In the 2025 rankings and beyond, the penalty will become stricter.
 - Institutions may lose a **larger share of RP marks**, especially if retractions are related to serious ethical violations or involve multiple authors from the same institution.
- This phased approach gives institutions time to reform their research practices and introduce robust quality checks.

Role of UGC CARE and Database Integration

- NIRF currently relies on Scopus and Web of Science for research output evaluation.

- However, **UGC CARE** (Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics) has also been tasked with maintaining a list of credible journals. A **triangulation approach**, involving Scopus, Web of Science, and UGC CARE, is expected to strengthen the assessment of quality and integrity in published work.
- This broader integration is aimed at filtering out predatory journals and ensuring only credible publications are considered in rankings.

Institutional Responsibility and Course Correction

- The inclusion of retraction penalties is intended not just as a punitive measure, but as a **catalyst for systemic reform**. Institutions are encouraged to:
 - Establish Research Integrity Offices or Committees
 - Strengthen peer-review oversight for in-house publications
 - Provide training on academic ethics to faculty and students
 - Enforce strict publication quality norms
- This move aligns with global best practices and is expected to elevate the credibility of Indian institutions on international platforms.

Broader Implications for Indian Academia

- Introducing penalties for retractions in national rankings sends a strong message about **accountability and quality in higher education**. It is also expected to:
 - Deter unethical research practices
 - Encourage internal audits of publication records
 - Improve India's global research image, especially as Indian institutions seek better positions in international rankings like QS and THE

Source : TH

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