

# THE IMPACT RANKINGS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS OF UNIVERSITIES IN VIETNAM

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## Article Info

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## Abstract

THE Impact Ranking reflects the impact and contribution of universities around the world, including Vietnam, to the community towards the 17 sustainable development goals of the United Nations. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the ranking results of Vietnamese universities in this ranking and the sustainable development goals that they are pursuing. The results show that from only one Vietnamese university among 467 global universities ranked in 2019, there are now 13 Vietnamese universities out of 1,936 global universities in the rankings. In addition to the mandatory SDG17, most Vietnamese universities mainly focus on the 8 SDGs related to economy, health, education, peace, equality and community (SDG1, SDG3, SDG4, SDG5, SDG8, SDG10, SDG11, SDG16). However, few universities focus on the goals related to poverty and environmental resources (SDG2, SDG6, SDG7, SDG9, SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, SDG15). This situation poses great responsibility and challenge for Vietnamese universities in accompanying the world in realizing the goal of sustainable development. This study is a reference resource for Vietnamese universities to identify sustainable development goals that should be prioritized in their short-term and long-term plans when participating in THE Impact rankings, in order to contribute to building a peaceful, just and prosperous society.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), THE Impact, University Rankings, Vietnamese University

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## 1. Introduction

University rankings have now become a popular trend globally. Since the first national university rankings in the United States, US News and World Reports, were published in 1983, the number of domestic and international university rankings has increased rapidly. *Currently*, it is estimated that there are at least 20 international rankings and more than 58 countries in the world have at least one national ranking, many of which have more than one ranking, such as the United States with at least 17 rankings (VNUR Implementation Group, 2023). Of these, the three rankings, QS, THE and ARWU, are recognized as the most prestigious in the world (Nhat Nam, n.d).

Times Higher Education (THE) is a British higher education magazine, renowned for its *rankings* of universities around the world. THE conducts its assessments based on the core missions of universities, using standard metrics to provide comprehensive and fair comparisons. As a result, THE rankings are trusted by students, scholars, higher education institutions, governments and academics. Starting with the first World University Rankings (WUR) in 2011, THE has gradually expanded and added other ranking products such as the Young University Rankings (YUR), Asian University Rankings (AUR), Emerging Economies University Rankings (EEUR) and Impact Rankings (Institute for Education Quality Assurance, n.d).

Vietnam began to pay attention to university rankings in the 2000s, but it has only really increased in recent decades. Participation in university rankings is considered an important tool to improve the quality and affirm the position of Vietnamese universities in the international arena, and is also a result of universities' compliance with the provisions of the Law on Higher Education. Universities in Vietnam participate in the five most popular ranking systems including ARWU (Shanghai Jiaotong University Ranking), QS World University Rankings, Webometrics, QS Asia and THE (Giao, 2021). In 2018, for the first time, two Vietnamese national universities entered the top 1,000 universities in the world according to the QS World University Rankings. After that, a number of major educational institutions, including the two national universities, continued to be included in more difficult rankings such as THE World University Rankings and Shanghai Jiaotong University rankings. In the following years, Vietnamese higher education will not only be ranked in general but also ranked in specific fields. According to the announcement of THE in 2024, Vietnam has 13 ranked universities in THE Impact Rankings (My Ha, 2024).

Times Higher Education (THE) has published the University Impact Rankings since 2019 to assess the contribution of universities to the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations issued since 2016. The goal of this ranking is to call for global action to build a peaceful, equitable and prosperous society. The rankings are based on 17 assessment criteria corresponding to 17 SDGs, including goals such as: No Poverty; Zero Hunger; Good health and well-being; Quality education; Gender equality; Clean water and sanitation; Affordable and clean energy; Decent work and economic growth; Industry, innovation and infrastructure; Reduced inequality; Sustainable cities and communities; Responsible consumption and production; Climate action; Life below water; Life on Land; Peace, justice and strong institutions; and Partnership for the goals. To conduct this ranking, THE uses analytical indicators based on 4 main factors: Research, Responsible governance, Outreach and Education (Times Higher Education, 2024).

Several studies on the THE Impact rankings have been conducted, including an article by author Pham Thi Thanh Thao on the participation of Southeast Asian universities in the THE Impact rankings (Thao, 2022). In addition, the group of authors also conducted research on the THE Impact rankings and implementation experiences of universities around the world in 2022. However, the assessment of the current status of rankings and the SDGs that universities in Vietnam are aiming for has not been fully studied. Therefore, this study was conducted with the aim of providing an overview of the reality of the THE Impact rankings of Universities in Vietnam, and at the same time guiding universities in identifying SDGs to focus on in the short-term and long-term roadmap when participating in the THE Impact rankings.

## 2. Research methods

### 2.1. Data collection

Data on the impact rankings of domestic universities is collected from 2019-2024 from the Times Higher Education website <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/impactrankings>

### 2.2. Data processing statistics

From the collected data, the study processed the data to produce the necessary information for the study, including the following information:

- Number of universities in Vietnam listed in the THE Impact Ranking in the period 2019-2024;
- Statistics on SDGs that universities in Vietnam have participated in and scored in the THE Impact Ranking.

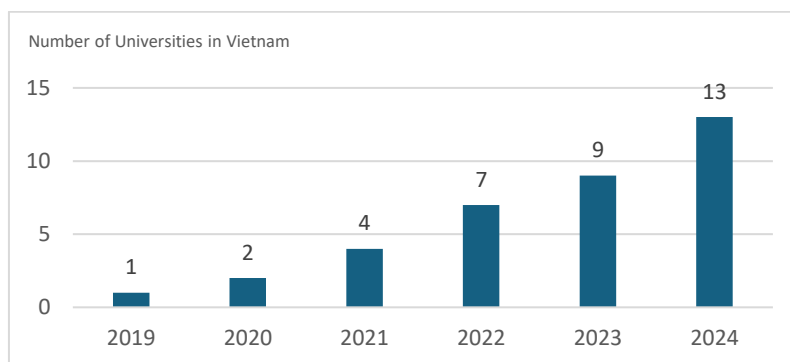
## 3. Research results

### 3.1. THE Impact Ranking of Universities in Vietnam for the period 2019-2024

The statistics of the number of Universities in Vietnam ranked in THE Impact Rankings for the period 2019-2024 are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The number of Universities in Vietnam ranked in THE Impact Rankings for the period 2019-2024

Items	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of Universities in Vietnam	1	2	4	7	9	13
Number of Universities in the world	467	768	1117	1410	1591	1963
Ratio (%)	0.21	0.26	0.36	0.50	0.57	0.66



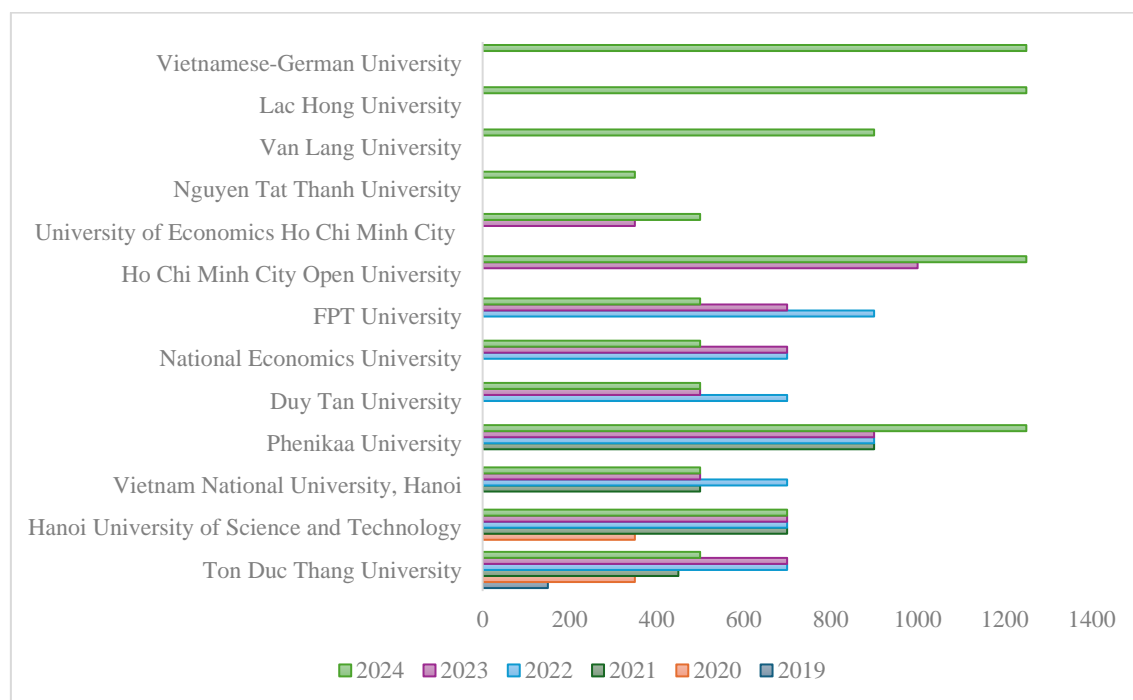
**Figure 1.** Number of Universities in Vietnam ranked in THE Impact Rankings

Since the THE Impact Ranking was launched in 2019, the number of Vietnamese universities listed in the THE Impact Ranking has increased significantly, from one university in 2019 to 13 universities in 2024. Although the number of Vietnamese universities participating is still small compared to the world (from 467 in 2019 to 1,963 in 2024), this still reflects the efforts of universities in affirming their position in the international arena. This reality also poses great responsibility and challenge for Vietnamese universities in accompanying the world in implementing SDGs.

Detailed results of THE impact rankings of universities in Vietnam for the period 2019-2024 are as follows:

**Table 2.** Detailed results of THE impact rankings of universities in Vietnam for the period 2019-2024

No.	Universities	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1	Ton Duc Thang University	101-200	301-400	401-600	601-800	601-800	401-600
2	Hanoi University of Science and Technology		301-400	601-800	601-800	601-800	601-800
3	Vietnam National University, Hanoi			401-600	601-800	401-600	401-600
4	Phenikaa University			801-1000	801-1000	801-1000	1001-1500
5	Duy Tan University				601-800	401-600	401-600
6	National Economics University				601-800	601-800	401-600
7	FPT University				801-1000	601-800	401-600
8	Ho Chi Minh City Open University					1001+	1001-1500
9	University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City					301-400	401-600
10	Nguyen Tat Thanh University						301-400
11	Van Lang University						801-1000
12	Lac Hong University						1001-1500
13	Vietnamese-German University						1500+

**Figure 2.** THE Impact Ranking results of Universities in Vietnam

In 2019: Ton Duc Thang University is the first and only university in Vietnam to be listed in the rankings, ranked in the Top 101-200 out of 467 ranked universities worldwide.

In 2020: Ton Duc Thang University ranked in the Top 301-400, and Hanoi University of Science and Technology was listed for the first time, ranked in the Top 301-400 out of 768 ranked universities.

In 2021: besides Ton Duc Thang University ranked 401-600 and Hanoi University of Science and Technology ranked 601-800, there were two more Universities in Vietnam listed in the rank, including Vietnam National University, Hanoi ranked 401-600 and Phenikaa University ranked 801-1000 among 1117 ranked universities.

In 2022: Vietnam has 3 more Universities joining the rankings, including Duy Tan University, National Economics University and FPT University. Of which, 5/7 Universities are in the Top 601-800, and 2/7 Universities are in the Top 801-1000 out of 1410 Universities ranked worldwide.

In 2023: There are 2 more Universities joining the rankings, including Ho Chi Minh City Open University and Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics. Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics achieved the highest ranking among Vietnamese Universities which in the Top 300-401, and 6/9 Universities are in the Top 401-800 out of 1591 ranked schools.

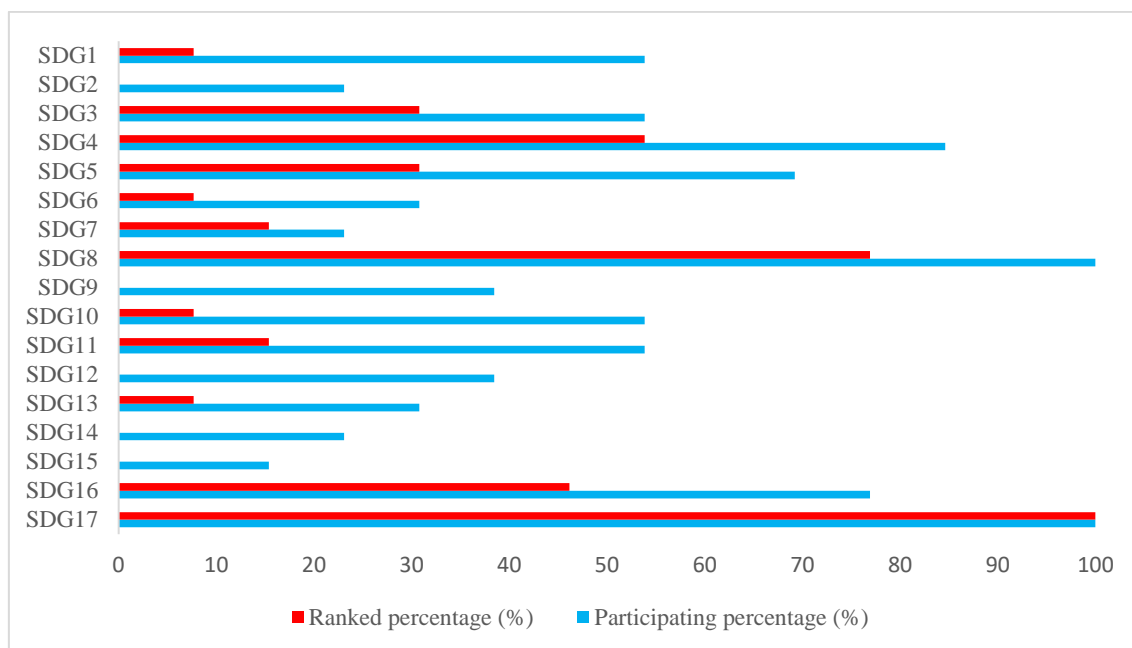
In 2024: Vietnam has 4 more Universities listed in the rankings: Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Van Lang University, Lac Hong University and Vietnam-Germany University. Nguyen Tat Thanh University achieved the highest ranking in the Top 301-400. Out of 1963 ranked Universities, 7/13 Vietnamese Universities are in the Top 401-800.

### ***3.2. The sustainable development goals that the ranked Universities in Vietnam are aiming for***

The statistical results of the SDGs that 13 universities in Vietnam participating in and ranked in 2024 are as follows:

**Table 3.** The statistical results of the SDGs that 13 universities in Vietnam participating in and ranked in 2024

SDGs	Participating rate	Participating percentage (%)	Ranked rate	Ranked percentage (%)
SDG1	7/13	53.8	1/13	7.7
SDG2	3/13	23.1	0/13	0.0
SDG3	7/13	53.8	4/13	30.8
SDG4	11/13	84.6	7/13	53.8
SDG5	9/13	69.2	4/13	30.8
SDG6	4/13	30.8	1/13	7.7
SDG7	3/13	23.1	2/13	15.4
SDG8	13/13	100.0	10/13	76.9
SDG9	5/13	38.5	0/13	0.0
SDG10	7/13	53.8	1/13	7.7
SDG11	7/13	53.8	2/13	15.4
SDG12	5/13	38.5	0/13	0.0
SDG13	4/13	30.8	1/13	7.7
SDG14	3/13	23.1	0/13	0.0
SDG15	2/13	15.4	0/13	0.0
SDG16	10/13	76.9	6/13	46.2
SDG17	13/13	100.0	13/13	100.0



**Figure 3.** Percentage results of the SDGs that 13 universities in Vietnam participating in and ranked in 2024

Among the 17 SDGs that THE Impact rankings target, except for SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) which is mandatory, universities are allowed to choose to participate in a minimum of 3 SDGs or a maximum of 16 SDGs out of the remaining 16 SDGs to be ranked in the impact rankings. If a university participating in more than 3 SDGs, THE will choose the 3 highest-scoring SDGs together with SDG17 to calculate the total score in the rankings. Therefore, statistics show that the participating percentage of Universities in the rankings in each SDG is much higher than the ranked percentage of Universities in the respective SDGs.

The SDGs with low participating percentage (<50%) are mainly related to hunger and environmental resource issues, including 08 SDGs: SDG2 (Zero hunger), SDG6 (Clean water and sanitation), SDG7 (Affordable and clean energy), SDG9 (Industries, Innovation and infrastructure), SDG12 (Responsible consumption and production), SDG13 (Climate action), SDG14 (Life below water), SDG15 (Life on land).

The SDGs that Universities in Vietnam choose to participate in the most are in the fields of economy, health, education, peace, equality and community, including 08 SDGs: SDG8 (Decent work and economic growth) with a participating percentage of 100%; SDG4 (Quality education): 84.6%; SDG16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions): 76.9%; SDG5 (Gender equality): 69.2%; SDG1 (No poverty): 53.8%, SDG3 (Good health and well-being): 53.8%, SDG10 (Reduced inequality): 53.8% and SDG11 (Sustainable cities and communities): 53.8%.

Among the SDGs that universities participate in the most, only 05 SDGs have a ranked percentage of over 30%, related to economy, health, education, peace and equality, specifically: SDG8, SDG4, SDG16, SDG3 and SDG5; 06 SDGs have a ranked ratio of less than 30%, related to poverty reduction, environmental resources, inequality and sustainable communities, including SDG1, SDG6, SDG7, SDG10, SDG11 and SDG13; 05 SDGs are not ranked, related to poverty, resources and environment: SDG2, SDG9, SDG12, SDG14 and SDG15.



The choice of which SDGs that a university aims to when participating in THE impact ranking depends on factors: objective conditions, actual situation, strengths and weaknesses of the university. However, this result also provides reference information for universities to have better choices in their short-term and long-term strategies of participating in THE impact rankings.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study was conducted to evaluate the ranking results of Universities in Vietnam in THE Impact ranking and the SDGs among the 17 SDGs of the United Nations that universities are aiming for. The research results show that since the ranking was announced in 2019, Vietnam has only had one university named in the ranking out of a total of 467 universities worldwide. However, in 2024, this number has increased and reached 13 universities out of a total of 1,936 universities worldwide named in the ranking. Of the remaining 16 SDGs, in addition to the SDG17 which is a mandatory goal, most universities in Vietnam focus on 08 SDGs related to the fields of economy, health, education, peace, equality and community (SDG1, SDG3, SDG4, SDG5, SDG8, SDG10, SDG11, SDG16). However, few universities pay attention to the remaining 08 SDGs related to poverty and environmental resources (SDG2, SDG6, SDG7, SDG9, SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, SDG15). The study has provided a reality of the efforts and endeavors of Universities in Vietnam to be ranked in THE impact ranking. It also poses great responsibilities and challenges for universities in accompanying the world in implementing SDGs. In addition, the study also provides information for universities to have better choices in identifying SDGs that need to be prioritized in the short-term and long-term roadmap when participating in the THE Impact rankings.

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