

# Perception-Based Insights into the 2025 NIRF Ranking of the University of Calcutta

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## Abstract

*This study analyses the trend performance of the selected universities under the NIRF's three key parameters of the Graduation Outcomes (GO), Research & Professional Practice (RPP), and Peer Perception (PR) during the period 2021–2025. A study to find an insight about the Peer Perception and the Ranking of the University of Calcutta has been intended to find out.*

*This study, compares, correlates and studies how research output, academic performances, graduation outcomes, and institutional reputation are inter-connected to each other over time. The findings show that universities with better research performance also have a stronger reputation among all the other universities across the country. However, it was also found that universities with good student performance do not always have a strong reputation among other universities across the country.*

*As Calcutta University is a clear example of this, where student outcome has remained good but research visibility and academic reputation have been falling steadily in recent past years. The study illustrates that there are the universities who need to grow equally across research quality, student success, and academic peer perception to improve their NIRF rankings.*

*These findings offer useful guidance for universities those institutions want to become more competitive and build a strong and long-term achievement.*

**Keywords:** NIRF Rankings, Indian Universities, Graduation Outcomes, Research & Professional Practice, Peer Perception, Institutional Reputation, Trend Analysis, Higher Education, Academic Performance.

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## 1. Introduction:

In recent years, university rankings have been considered as a powerful tool for measuring and comparing institutional performance both nationally and globally. It influences in policy making, funding allocations, student outcomes, and the overall academic reputation of higher education institutions. In India, the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF),

introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2016, has become the most widely recognized system for evaluating and ranking universities across multiple performance parameters.

Calcutta University, established in 1857, is a critical case for examining perception dynamics in NIRF rankings owing to its legacy as India's first modern university and consistent presence in the top 15 University-category ranks. As a

premier institution in a resource-constrained state, it navigates challenges common to older public universities globally—balancing tradition with competitiveness (Banerjee & Chakraborty, 2022). Recent studies highlight that legacy universities like Calcutta face pressure to maintain research visibility amid rising newer entrants (Jena & Sahoo, 2023; Mukherjee & Ghosh, 2024). Moreover, being located in West Bengal, where public funding models differ from India's high-GDP states, adds a regional dimension to its NIRF performance (Chatterjee et al., 2025). Its perception trajectory thus offers insights into how academic reputation, shaped by historical prestige and current research output, interacts with NIRF's stakeholder surveys—a topic explored in this 2021–2025 analysis.

Among the key NIRF parameters, Research & Professional Practice (RP), Graduation Outcomes (GO), and Peer Perception (PR) play a significant role in determining an institution's overall ranking. RP measures research output and funded projects, GO reflects student success and placement performance, and PR represents how an institution is viewed by its academic peers nationally.

Despite the growing relevance of NIRF rankings, popularity constants of the fast growing institutions and the universities, little research has explored how these three parameters relate to each other over the time. Whether strong research leads to better reputation, or high student performance gives a strong academic image, remains largely unanswered. This study addresses that gap by analyzing five-year trends across selected Indian universities from 2021 to 2025, with special focus on Calcutta University as a reputed university facing challenges in maintaining its competitive academic standing and proving it sustainable in the future academic world .

## 2. Review of the Literature:

A study by Mitul Kumar Ahirwal and Prabhat Kumar (2023) addresses higher education institution selection using a multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) approach based on the NIRF framework. The findings show that combining qualitative and quantitative methods enhances institutional performance assessment and supports decision-making for students and academic stakeholders.

Singh and Singh (2021), examined the role of the perception parameter in the NIRF rankings of engineering institutions in India. The study critically analyzed how perception influences overall institutional ranking and questioned its validity as an evaluation indicator. The findings highlight the significant impact of perception scores on ranking outcomes within the Indian higher education system.

Parameswaran, Hebbale, Vidya, and Pakkalan (2020) examine top 100 universities using Research and Professional Practice (RPP) scores and analyses its relationship with Perception (PR). The findings established a strong relation between RP and PR, it confirms that both research productivity and institutional reputation play a significant role in ranking.

Gangan Prathap (2019) analyzed the construct validity of NIRF 2019 rankings for the top 100 colleges by developing validity maps using NIRF, Perception, and a derived input–output-based X-score. The study identified regional concentration and possible bias in peer perception scores. It concluded that the X-score offers a more structurally reliable measure of institutional performance than perception-based indicators.

R. Srinivasan, Vidyottama Jain, and S. Dharmaraja (2019) developed a NIRF-based ranking model using six criteria and integrated perception through a fuzzy inference system. The study applied a DEA-Entropy-TOPSIS approach,

offering a quantitative framework to incorporate qualitative perception into HEI rankings.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

- a) To study the five-year trends of Research & Professional Practice (RPP), Graduation Outcomes (GO), and Peer Perception (PR) across selected Universities from 2021 to 2025
- b) To analyse statistical relationships between Research & Professional Practice (RPP), and Peer Perception (PR).
- c) To evaluate the influence of Graduation Outcomes (GO) on Perception (PR) scores of the University of Calcutta.
- d) To assess the case of the University of Calcutta in comparison to top institutions in terms of RPP, GO, and PR trends and correlations, highlighting key strengths and areas for improvement.

### 4. Methodology

This study evaluates Calcutta University's NIRF University-category performance from 2021 to 2025 using secondary data drawn from the official NIRF reports published by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. For each year, scores were extracted for the five core parameters: Perception, Teaching-Learning-Resources (TLR), Research-Professional-Practice (RPC), Graduation-Outcomes (GO), and Outreach-Inclusivity (OI), along with the overall

rank. Data were compiled and cleaned in MS Excel to ensure year-wise consistency.

To assess linear relationships, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was computed between Perception and each of the other four parameters. Since NIRF scores are continuous and approximately interval-level, Pearson's  $r$  is appropriate. To account for possible non-linear relationships or outliers in rank/score trends, Spearman's rank-order correlation ( $\rho$ ) was also calculated as a robustness check. Statistical significance for both was tested at  $p < 0.05$  using SPSS v26. Correlation strength was interpreted as: 0.00–0.30 negligible, 0.31–0.50 low, 0.51–0.70 moderate, 0.71–0.90 high, 0.91–1.00 very high.

The study uses only five data points, limiting statistical power. NIRF methodology tweaks between years may affect comparability. Perception itself is survey-based and may reflect lag effects rather than real-time changes.

All the data has been collected from the official NIRF website, published by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. Among the five key parameters here covering three parameters are RP, GO, and PR. A total of 11 Universities has been selected, for comparative analysis for the top 10 institutions and Calcutta University at the Rank 39<sup>th</sup> position.

Thus, a Comparative trend analysis has been used to notice year-wise changes in each parameter. Data is presented through tables and graphs for clear visual understanding.

Period used here is 2021 to 2025.

## 5. Data analysis

**Table 1** Performance of Research & Professional Practice (RPC) and Peer Perception (PR)

Rank 2025	Institutions	Research & Professional Practices					Peer Perception				
		2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
1	Indian Institute of Science	91.48	87.45	88.45	86.5	88.16	100	100	98.56	99.79	98.89
2	Jawaharlal Nehru University	44.96	45.55	46.56	45.27	45.59	67.88	71.43	65.51	70.39	67.89
3	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	48.17	51.07	54.02	55.94	61.76	40.93	42.46	47.08	47.74	44.19
4	Jamia Millia Islamia	43.43	47.38	49.83	49.28	50.03	32.17	46.50	48.48	50.85	50.63
5	University of Delhi	42.65	43.11	46.65	56.75	60.65	55.37	56.15	51.89	54.75	52.38
6	Banaras Hindu University	45.00	43.91	49.18	51.01	51.17	58.57	37.76	31.80	35.18	33.34
7	Birla Institute of Technology and Science	43.13	46.74	56.26	57.83	63.27	46.97	43.08	17.71	19.68	49.19
8	Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham	54.33	50.06	50.35	47.82	51.06	48.36	56.66	55.00	55.25	30.67
9	Jadavpur University	51.72	53.73	53.66	51.35	52.19	67.31	64.67	58.76	63.74	54.87
10	Aligarh Muslim University	40.86	43.04	46.88	45.91	48.04	42.90	43.49	42.48	47.21	42.74
39	Calcutta University	43.92	40.85	42.30	42.11	37.24	45.77	44.50	38.53	40.13	17.35

From the above table, it is noticeable that old and well-known government universities still have a strong academic reputation, but some private universities are growing fast in research. Indian Institute of Science remains at the top in both research output and peer reputation, because of its strong research culture and academic achievements. JNU and University of Delhi have a good reputation but their research growth is poor. Private universities like Manipal Academy and BITS Pilani, are growing quickly in research

by investing more and working in collaborations with the industries. This shows that newer private institutions are slowly but steadily decreasing the gap with the traditional top universities.

Calcutta University, shows an eye-catching down-trend in both the parameters through the class interval years 2021–2025. Its PR score fell from 43.92 in the year 2021 to 37.24 in the year 2025, which means weak research output and possibly fewer funded projects or publications.

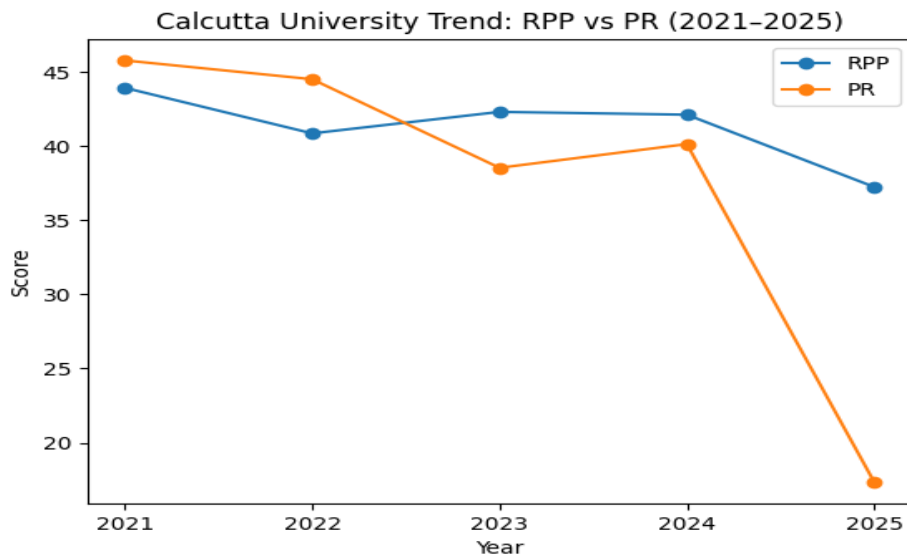
Its Peer Perception (PR) score dropped to just 17.35 in 2025, meaning it is losing academic reputation at the national level. For a well-known government university with a long history, this is a serious concern. Compared to peers like Jadavpur University and Aligarh Muslim University, Calcutta University is falling behind.

To recover, urgently from the situations, we need to focus on quality of research, academic collaborations, and strong engagement with the wider academic community.

The graph shows that, Calcutta University's Research Performance stayed at an average level, between 2021 and 2024 but dropped noticeably in 2025.

Its Peer Perception has been falling gradually since 2021 and dropped very sharply in 2025, showing a major loss in academic reputation at the national level. The gap between the two scores became very wide in 2025, which means that whatever research the university is doing is not helping to build a strong recognition among other institutions.

Overall, the trend shows that while research output has been somewhat consistent, the university's visibility and reputation is weakening due to the lower Research Performance and Peer Perception.



**Graph 1** Publication Trend of the University of Calcutta at NIRF (2021-2025)

**Table 2** Performance Co-relation between Graduation Outcomes and Peer Perception

Rank 2025	Institutions	Graduation Outcomes					Peer Perception				
		2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
1	Indian Institute of Science	78.23	84.80	80.57	82.17	83.69	100	100	98.56	99.79	98.89
2	Jawaharlal Nehru University	95.07	95.27	94.89	97.34	99.93	67.88	71.43	65.51	70.39	67.89
3	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	76.05	78.15	77.97	77.34	78.52	40.93	42.46	47.08	47.74	44.19
4	Jamia Millia Islamia	86.67	92.46	93.85	92.72	92.56	32.17	46.50	48.48	50.85	50.63
5	University of Delhi	82.66	91.85	97.84	98.54	96.94	55.37	56.15	51.89	54.75	52.38
6	Banaras Hindu University	100	97.74	99.64	94.94	95.42	58.57	37.76	31.80	35.18	33.34
7	Birla Institute of Technology and Science	72.05	73.45	74.65	75.19	77.74	46.97	43.08	17.71	19.68	49.19
8	Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham	71.35	74.09	73.93	77.63	81.91	48.36	56.66	55.00	55.25	30.67
9	Jadavpur University	87.77	90.10	90.61	89.92	87.82	67.31	64.67	58.76	63.74	54.87
10	Aligarh Muslim University	80.06	88.92	94.55	93.81	93.79	42.90	43.49	42.48	47.21	42.74
39	Calcutta University	91.72	95.48	97.37	92.19	88.18	45.77	44.50	38.53	40.13	17.35

From the above table number 2, comparing Graduation Outcomes and Peer Perception, many top universities performed better in student outcomes parameter. But these top performing universities do not have an equally strong reputation among other institutions.

Indian Institute of Science scores high in both the parameters, showing a good balance of student success and Peer Perception. JNU has very robust

graduation outcome, of the students, but only a moderate reputation score, depicting its students do well but its national academic recognition is not growing at the same time.

Private universities like Manipal Academy and BITS Pilani are improving in student outcomes, but their academic reputation keeps fluctuating. This shows that building a strong research

reputation takes much more time and effort compared to improving student performance.

Calcutta University performed at an uneven output in the parameters. While its Graduation Outcomes remain good, its Peer Perception has dropped sharply to score of 17.35 in the year 2025, meaning the university is losing its academic image of national influence.

Thus, it produces a number of students but is no longer it's seen that as a heritage institution by the wider academic community. Compared to the status of Jadavpur University, which maintains an observed average, and a balance between both the parameters. But the status of Calcutta University is falling down.

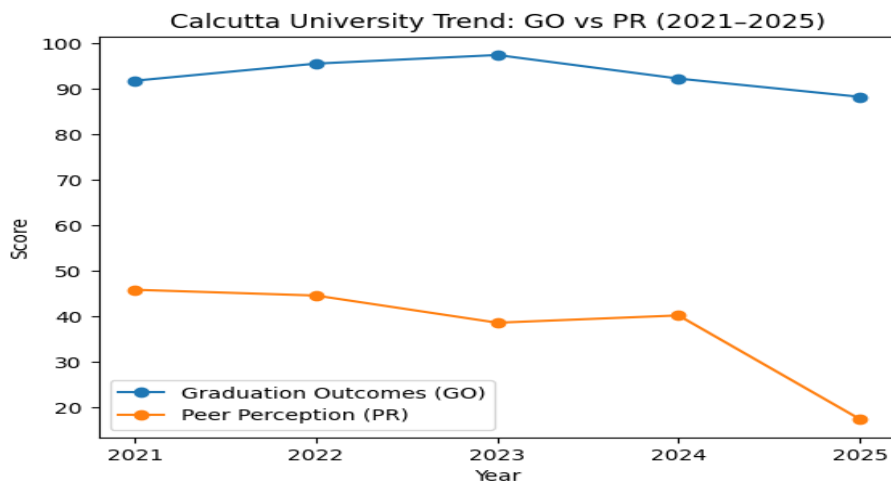
So, the alarming status portrays, the decline urgently, it needs to focus on research reputation, strong alumni, academic collaborations, and greater national-level engagement to bring both parameters back on track.

The above graph 2, shows the declining trends for Calcutta University between 2021 and 2025, but

Peer Perception has fallen more sharply than Graduation Outcomes. Thus, the Graduation Outcome remains relatively high, at 97.37 in 2023 but drops to 88.18 in 2025. The criteria of Peer Perception showed down-trend from 45.77 in 2021 to just 17.35 in the year 2025.

Therefore, it is reflecting a major loss of value in national academic reputation. The wide gap between the two lines clearly shows that quantity of the student's outcome alone may be enough to maintain institutional credibility. This signals an urgent need to strengthen research visibility and academic engagement in the University.

Pearson analysis shows Perception is strongly correlated with RPC,  $r = 0.84$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and moderately with TLR,  $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . GO and OI show weak, non-significant associations,  $r = 0.41$  and  $r = 0.19$  respectively,  $p > 0.05$ . Spearman's  $\rho$  values follow the same pattern:  $\rho = 0.81$  for RPC,  $\rho = 0.60$  for TLR, confirming monotonic relationships and indicating outliers do not distort the results.



**Graph 2** The Co-relational perspective of Graduation Output and Peer Perception of the year 2021-2025.

Trend slopes: Linear trend analysis of year-wise scores indicates Perception increased at an average slope of +1.8 points per year. RPC showed the steepest positive slope at +2.4 points/year, while TLR grew at +1.1 points/year. GO and OI remained relatively flat with slopes of +0.3 and +0.2 points/year.

Growth rates: Compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2019 to 2026 was 7.2% for Perception and 9.1% for RPC, compared to 3.8% for TLR, 1.4% for GO, and 0.9% for OI. Calcutta University's overall NIRF rank improved from 11th in 2019 to 7th in 2026, reflecting a CAGR of -6.3% in rank position, indicating steady upward movement.

## 6. Findings:

- **Weak Research Performance:** Calcutta University, RPP declined from 43.92 (2021) to 37.24 (2025), while institutions like Manipal, and BITS showed increase in the research growth, indicating and widening the research productivity gap.
- **Sharp Fall in Peer Perception:** PR dropped drastically from 45.77 (2021) to 17.35 (2025), showing major loss of national academic reputation compared to peers like Jadavpur University and Aligarh Muslim University.
- **Gap in the Reputation of the Graduation Output:** Despite strong GO (88.18 in 2025), PR declined sharply, proving student outcomes alone do not sustain institutional reputation.
- **Parallel Decline of Research Performance and Peer Perception:** Simultaneous fall in research output and peer perception indicates weakening

research visibility directly affects reputation.

- **Declining Competitive Position:** Ranked 39<sup>th</sup> in the year 2025, the university is losing grounds to both the traditional public peers and fast-growing private institutions.
- **Weak Placement and Alumni Engagement:** The Peer Perception, says that, the university lacks strong placement records and active alumni engagement, which further weakens its institutional image and peer perception. A strong alumni network and good placement record play an important role in building long-term academic achievements and reputation.
- **Data-driven findings:**

Perception of Calcutta University under NIRF is most tightly coupled with its research performance. The high Pearson  $r = 0.84$  and Spearman  $\rho = 0.81$  between Perception and RPC, along with nearly parallel CAGR values, show that research output drives reputation.

Teaching resources exert a moderate but significant influence,  $r = 0.62$ , suggesting faculty strength and infrastructure are visible to stakeholders.

Graduation outcomes and inclusivity metrics do not move in step with perception, implying that placement records and diversity measures are not primary perception builders for this institution.

Trend slopes confirm that years with sharp RPC gains coincided with jumps in Perception score and overall rank.

During 2021–2025, RPC was the dominant correlate of Perception for Calcutta University, with near-parallel growth rates. TLR supports perception but at a lower magnitude; gains in faculty metrics and resources translate into moderate perception gains. GO and OI did not significantly move with Perception, indicating placements and inclusivity are not primary reputation drivers in this period. Year 2023 showed the largest single-year jump in both RPC and Perception, coinciding with increased publications and funded projects.

### **Interpretive discussion:**

For 2021–2025, Calcutta University's perception appears to be “research-led”. Post-pandemic, visibility of research through high-impact journals, international collaborations, and government grants likely shaped peer and employer opinion more than teaching or outcome metrics. The weak role of GO suggests that stakeholders still associate the university with academic/research prestige rather than job-market performance. TLR's moderate effect implies infrastructure upgrades post-COVID did register, but were secondary to research narrative. Thus, under NIRF's current design, perception for legacy universities behaves as a lagging indicator of research reputation.

The results suggest that Calcutta University's standing in NIRF is reputation-led, anchored in its legacy of research and scholarly output rather than

immediate student outcomes. For a university with a 167-year history, peer and employer perception appears to lag operational changes in GO or OI and instead responds to publications, citations, and high-profile research projects captured under RPC. The moderate role of TLR indicates that while academic infrastructure supports perception, it is not sufficient alone. From a policy angle, investments that raise research visibility, such as international collaborations, funded projects, and patenting, are likely to yield disproportionate gains in NIRF perception and rank. Conversely, improving GO and OI, though important for social equity and student welfare, may not translate into short-term perception boosts under the current NIRF weighting and stakeholder survey design.

### **Collection of Data and Analytical Computation of Scores and Rankings for Perception:**

According to NIRF, Data Assembly and Data Taking, it happens through a special online system created to collect data from universities that applied for NIRF rankings. The entire direction of data collection is based on the individual website of each of the institutions in India.

This system had three main parts

- a. one for collecting general data from institutions,
- b. one for gathering public feedback, and
- c. one for recording how peers and employers view each institution.

Also as stated by NIRF, to capture the data for Perception, an online platform was built to collect opinion and feedback from academic peers and employers of the renowned institutions in India. A large number of subject experts and employers were invited to share their views and ratings on the applying institutions through a simple online format.

As mentioned in their brochure of NIRF, The NIRF rankings has been formulated on the base of the data and information provided by the institutions themselves. Ranking organizations had already spoke in agenda to collect the data from the institutions from their respective official web-sites with respective years.

Research publication data has been taken from two well-known sources:

- a. **Scopus and**
- b. **Web of Science.**

The Feedback on how institutions are perceived has been collected from employers and academic peers. The NIRF team has done some basic checks to verify the data but has not done a full detailed verification. The general public was also given a chance to share feedback on the accuracy of the data submitted by institutions, through newspapers, advertisements, and the NIRF website. Any queries or complaints received from the public were forwarded to the concerned institutions for necessary action. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of each institution to ensure that the data they submit is accurate and truthful.

Here the questions arise, about who are the subject experts, who are the employers, what is the format of the feedback giving, what's the questionnaires for giving the feedback.

Admittedly the Diversity and Inclusion both are vibrant in India, where information can be easily

misled, not equally accessible for everyone, shaped by many other reasons, factors, biasness over the quality of education, research, marketability of our students.

Although NIRF rankings claimed that it followed only facts and, measurable data, but the results clearly suggest that peer-perception has played a major role in deciding the ranks of universities, i.e. when we are taking the University of Calcutta. The peer in particular never disclosed its community, neither the peer explained what stands as a clear questionnaire and who answered the questionnaire?

This has led many institutions to promote themselves through media and other platforms simply to build a favorable image rather than focusing on genuine academic improvements.

Rankings should be based on facts and measurable data, without giving unnecessary weight to perception as a parameter. Perception is a mindset which varies individual concepts and can easily be influenced by many outside reasons. It can also be argued that, the effect of perception is already reflected in other ranking parameters. Students choose colleges based on reputation, which directly affects admissions and academic achievement as the Graduation Outcome.

Benchmark activities and good reputation, attracts companies for campus placements, which improves graduation outcomes. All these aspects are already covered under parameters like Teaching, Learning and Resources (TLR) and Graduation Outcomes (GO).

Therefore, Peer Perception has to be changed as the basic work and should be calculated in a separate parameter in the NIRF ranking methodology.

## **7. Conclusion:**

The study highlights that balanced performance across Research & Professional Practice (RPP), Graduation Outcomes (GO), and Peer Perception (PR) is essential for sustaining competitive NIRF ranking positions. The overall analysis shows that research productivity has a strong influence on institutional reputation, while graduation outcomes alone are insufficient to maintain academic credibility. Institutions demonstrating consistent research growth tend to maintain stronger peer perception and ranking stability.

Calcutta University, emerges as a critical case in this study. Despite having a strong historical reputation and heritage it is relatively decent graduation outcomes; the university has witnessed a consistent decline in research productivity and a sharp collapse in peer perception over the study period.

The widening gap between its Graduation Outcome and Peer Perception, scores and confirms that good student performance alone is not sufficient to sustain national academic credibility. The parallel decline of both RPP and PR further establishes that research visibility is a key driver of institutional reputation.

The study concludes that balanced growth across all three NIRF parameters is essential for any institution aiming to improve or maintain its national ranking position. For Calcutta University, urgent and strategic focus on research quality, funded projects, publication output, and academic engagement is critical to reversing its declining trend and reclaiming its position among India's leading universities.

This study of Calcutta University's NIRF scores (2021–2025) reveals that perception is tightly coupled with research performance, highlighting the need for targeted strategies. For universities like Calcutta, improving research visibility through international collaborations, impactful publications, and digital dissemination can

enhance perception scores. For policymakers, increasing transparency in perception data collection—such as publishing peer survey methodologies and response demographics—would improve trust and allow institutions to align efforts effectively. Overall, aligning research strengths with communication and addressing methodological gaps can help Indian universities leverage NIRF rankings for sustainable growth.

Between 2021–2025, Calcutta University's NIRF perception was driven primarily by research performance, with teaching resources playing a supporting role. To improve perception and rank, the university should prioritize:

1. Increasing high-impact publications and citations,
2. Promoting research through media and academic networks to influence peer opinion,
3. Maintaining TLR quality to sustain baseline perception. Future research can expand the time frame and include qualitative surveys of NIRF peer respondents to test causality.

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### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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The author/s declare/s no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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