

ARAB UNIVERSITIES: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR BETTER WORLD RANKING

THE POLICY IS: WRITING RIGHT FOR YOUR WEBSITE

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Abstract

World class universities are dedicated to develop academic, scientific and education competences of a university beyond the physical boundaries. The World Wide Web has been a critical tool for attracting students and scholars from other places, and for spreading the prestige of educational activities all over the world. Ranking web of World Universities has been considered a good measurement for the activity and visibility of the institution and a good indicator of impact of universities. This paper discusses the ranking web of world Universities reported in January 2010 and critically assesses the ranking of Arab universities. It also presents some suggestions that can improve the position of Arab universities in search engine results and promote substantial increases of the volume and quality of electronic publications that may reflect the real picture of educational and scientific activities undertaken by universities.

Key words: Arab Universities, ranking, Website, webometrics

1. INTRODUCTION

It is essential for any university that seriously aspires to be considered world class to build key strengths in research quality, teaching quality, graduate employability and internationalization. World class universities are dedicated to develop academic, scientific and education competences of a university beyond the physical boundaries. The World Wide Web has been a critical tool for attracting students and scholars from other places, and for spreading the prestige of educational activities all over the world [1]. There has been a demanding competition between universities to achieve an advantageous visibility on the Web and to improve their position in search engine results.

Ranking web of World Universities has been considered a good measurement for the activity and visibility of the institution and a good indicator of impact of universities [2]. It summarizes the global performance of the universities, provides information for candidate students and scholars, and reflects the commitment to the dissemination of scientific knowledge. This paper discusses the ranking web of world Universities reported in January 2010 and critically assesses the ranking of Arab universities.

The paper also illustrates some suggestions that can be adopted to achieve an advantageous visibility on the Web, improve the position in search engine results, promote substantial increases of the volume and quality of electronic publications and consequently help reflecting the real picture of educational and scientific activities undertaken by Arab universities.

2. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RANKING OF ARAB UNIVERSITIES

2. A. Webometrics indicators

Ranking web of World Universities is published twice a year [2]. It is based on four indicators that mainly consider:

- The total number of a university's web pages (size20%), that presents the structure and activities of the university which can attract students and scholar worldwide and consequently reflect the internationalization of the university.
- The numbers of effective in-links (visibility 50%) that receive more traffic and reflect visibility and impact of the published materials.
- Rich files (15%) and Scholar data (15%) which can be stored and made available for research and education and they reflect success in self-archiving and good documentation of academic activities.

In the light of the latest webometrics research undertaken in January 2010, a critical assessment to the webs of some Arab universities has been performed. Out of 555 universities located in Arab region, only one Arab university (King Saud University) listed among the top 200, more 2 universities (King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, King Abdulaziz University) placed among the top 500 universities and one more university (Imam Muhammad bin Saud University) listed among the world's top 1000 universities.

The websites of some selected Arab universities, from Qatar [3], Jordan [4], Syria [5] Egypt[6] Sudan[7] and Morocco[8] were searched and assessed. Websites of the first top universities in the USA [9] Europe [10] and Arabic World [11] were also searched for comparison. The findings are presented in Table 1. The assessment was based on both what data were feasible that can be collected on a global level and their relative appropriateness to measure the important indicators (Size, visibility, rich files and scholars).

Data were mainly extracted from the homepage and subpages (if needed) for each websites related to the selected university. The number and quality of the webpages indexed in university domain were also assessed together with the language of the websites.

Table 1: Ranking web of some Universities with main indicators used.

| World Rank | Arab rank | Name | Country | Size | visibility | Rich files | Scholar |
|------------|-----------|-------------------------------|--------------|------|------------|------------|---------|
| 1 | - | Harvard University | USA | 2 | 3 | 20 | 1 |
| 27 | - | University of Cambridge | UK | 28 | 20 | 61 | 123 |
| 199 | 1 | King Saud University | Saudi Arabia | 775 | 162 | 230 | 121 |
| 1886 | 14 | Qatar university | Qatar | 3769 | 2020 | 2058 | 1435 |
| 3246 | 26 | University of Jordan | Jordan | 3616 | 4055 | 2811 | 3266 |
| 3416 | 29 | Al Akhawayn University Ifrane | Moroko | 4057 | 4131 | 2484 | 3909 |
| 4941 | 49 | University of Khartoum | Sudan | 4622 | 6002 | 6213 | 3688 |
| 6582 | 83 | Damascus University | Syria | 6483 | 8112 | 6246 | 4587 |
| 7323 | 96 | Nile University | Egypt | 5261 | 8830 | 7507 | 6042 |

2. B. Additional indicators

A search strategy was followed to assess the presence and documentation of more indicators that could reflect education, scientific activities, employability and achievement of the university. They are presented in Table 2, and include:

- Mission, vision and strategic plan of the university.
- Quality assurance and accreditation system.
- Scientific research activities and related publications.
- E-Library and electronic databases.
- Student's activities and voluntary works.

- Alumni details and activities.
- Voluntary activities and campaigns that can link university to communities.

Not all universities reported information about the presence of quality assurance and accreditation system. However, King Saud and Qatar Universities have provided information about programs seeking accreditation. Damascus University has also recently published 12 strategic plans for assuring quality in higher education. Electronic reports about students are mainly related to admission requirements, fees, registration programs and examination results. Activities of students and alumni are not fully documented in some Arab universities and may not reflect the real picture of activities already undertaken. Nevertheless, Qatar and Al Akhawayn universities have offered a good environment for Alumni and students in which career guidance, personal development workshops with educational, cultural, athletic and artistic activities can be provided. Furthermore, Electronic publications related to voluntary activities and campaigns were mostly absent in all Arab universities investigated except in King Saud University (Blood Bank, volunteer services, dental services) and university of Jordan(community development program).

Obviously, an appropriate policy is essential to promote substantial increase of the volume and quality of electronic publications that considers those indicators.

Table 2: Critical analysis of additional indicators that could reflect education, scientific activities, employability and achievement of the university.

| university | language | E- Library And databases | Mission, vision and strategic plan for university | Quality assurance & accreditation | Scientific research activities &publications | Student activities | Alumni activities | WebPages indexed in university domain | Voluntary activities, campaign Community- university link |
|--|--------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|-----------------------|----------------------|--|--|
| Harvard University | Eng | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ |
| University of Cambridge | Eng | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ |
| King Saud University | Eng | ++ | ++ | ++ | + | ++ | - | ++ | ++ |
| Qatar university | Eng | ++ | ++ | ++ | + | + | ++ | + | - |
| University of Jordan | Eng/Arab | + | + | - | + | + | + | + | + |
| Al Akhawayn University Ifrane | Eng | ++ | - | - | + | + | ++ | + | - |
| University of Khartoum | Eng/ Arab | ± | - | - | - | - | - | ± | - |
| Damascus University | Eng/Arab | ± | + | ± | ± | - | - | ± | - |
| Nile University | Eng | - | ± | - | - | - | - | + | - |

++ present with high quality
+ present with good quality
± under construction
- Not reported.

3. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POSITION OF ARABIC UNIVERSITIES IN THE WEB

The critical analysis has also involved the assessment of the URL address of the universities investigated, the presence of autonomous web subdomains, the presence of site map or quick link, and the assessment of the results of search engine.

Table. 3 shows that some Arab universities have long, complex URL addresses. Some have different naming for the university. Others do not have country identification, or complete name of the university in their web address. Interlink between other Arab universities were absent. Some universities showed subdomains with different designs and were different in volume and quality at faculty level. Some presented at local language with few pages in English. Clearly, this would affect the position of universities in the results of search engine.

4. SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE WEB WORLD RANKING OF ARAB UNIVERSITIES

The Policy is: "Write Right for Your Website".

Several simple tools can be urgently utilized and adopted to improve the web ranking of Arab universities and these include:

1. Enrich University site with useful information in Arabic and English.
2. Upload all information to university website regarding the mission, aims, strategic plan of the university together with the plan for quality assurance and accreditation.
3. Upload information and publications related to scientific research activities undertaken (articles in referred journals, working papers, books, contribution to books, reports, studies, periodicals, master and PhD theses, conferences, workshops, symposia).
4. Upload educational materials and slides for students.
5. Encourage personal pages(CVs, full text papers, funding agencies, softwares).
6. Provide access to full text articles through electronic library and several databases.
7. Establish distance learning programs.
8. Establish the alumni association which can link graduates around the world with their beloved University.
9. Document students' activities.

10. Document all university community activities and voluntary campaigns.
11. Train some members in faculties to be webmasters so they can upload their own information and formulate their own website according to their needs.
12. Effectively use key words in page content and do not repeat them.
13. Increase the number and quality of web pages indexed in University domain (For example, website at faculties' level).
14. Select short and simple URL with complete identification of country and university[12]
15. Standardize naming of your university in all languages used.
16. Increase links to good, main, updated pages[12].

In conclusion, the analysis of webometrics ranking of Arab universities provided evidence that some universities lack some essential information and publications that could be critical for increasing ranking. This paper did not raise question about validity and utility of webometrics ranking. The focus was on some elements that can be considered in future and have good impact on Arab universities ranking. In addition, the critical analysis in the present paper did not aim to involve webs of all Arab universities. It aimed to provide evidence, in some pilot universities, about the need for considering the web as a critical tool that reflects the educational and scientific activities of Arab universities and to emphasize the importance of increasing the volume and quality of electronic publications. Future work will take into consideration the other webs for Arab universities and will assess the points of weakness and enhance the points of strength to help universities to improve their ranking.

It is worth to mention that Damascus University is dedicated to develop academic, scientific and education competency. The university has adopted the suggested the present new policy, assessed the Web ranking reported in July 2009 and performed several steps to improve the ranking.

Table 3: the position of Arab universities in the web

| University | URL Address(university, country) | Domain Naming (full) | URL Address Short & simple | Balance between institution (Autonomous web subdomains) | Site map/ Quick link | Links | Search engine results |
|---|---|----------------------|----------------------------|---|----------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| Harvard University | http://www.harvard.edu/ | + | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ |
| University of Cambridge | http://www.cam.ac.uk/ | + | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | ++ |
| King Saud University | http://www.ksu.edu.sa/Pages/default.aspx | - | - | ++ | - | + | ++ |
| Qatar university | http://www.qu.edu.qa/ | - | ++ | ++ | - | - | ++ |
| University of Jordan | http://www.ju.edu.jo/home.aspx | - | + | + | ++ | ++ | variable |
| Al Akhawayn University Ifrane | http://www.aui.ma/ | - | ++ | ++ | - | + | variable |
| University of Khartoum | http://www.uofk.edu/ | - | - | - | - | - | variable |
| Damascus University | http://www.damascusuniversity.edu.sy/ | + | + | - | + | + | variable |
| Nile University | http://www.nileu.edu.eg/ | + | + | - | - | - | variable |
| ++ Present with high quality. + Present with good quality - Absent. | | | | | | | |

As a result of 3 months extensive work, Damascus University marked a huge leap (1072 spots), according to Webometrics research reported in January 2010.

It is hoped that the suggested new policy would be adopted by Arab universities to reflect their scientific and educational activities and consequently improve their ranking

5. REFERENCES

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