



Libyan Universities: Navigating the Global Ranking Maze

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Libyan Int Medical Univ J 2025;10:64–71.

Abstract

Keywords

- Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)
- Arab universities
- International university rankings
- Libya
- Libyan universities
- QS World University Rankings
- Times Higher Education (THE)
- Webometrics Ranking of World Universities

Most Libyan universities are ranked very low—or are entirely absent—from international university rankings. This review article explores the multifaceted causes of this disappointing status along two main lines: systemic biases inherent in most international ranking frameworks and major internal challenges within the Libyan higher education system. We demonstrate how international ranking criteria tend to favor well-established Western institutions while disadvantaging counterparts in developing nations. At the same time, the article highlights specific internal issues within Libyan higher education that hinder performance and limit international competitiveness. There is, in fact, a continuous and synergistic interaction between these external biases and internal deficiencies, which together exacerbate the poor global standing of Libyan universities. Ultimately, the article concludes with a mission-level set of specific recommendations aimed at helping policymakers and university administrators implement strategic improvements to strengthen the core competencies of Libyan universities and, consequently, enhance their global rankings.

ملخص المقال باللغة العربية

الجامعات الليبية: الإبحار في متاهة التصنيف العالمي.

المؤلفون: سارة غلصة، رفيق المهدي، مصطفى الفاخري. كلية الطب، جامعة بنغازي، الجامعة الليبية الدولية¹ بنغازي، ليبيا.

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تُصنّف معظم الجامعات الليبية في مراتب منخفضة جدًا، أو أنها غير مدرجة على الإطلاق ضمن التصنيفات الجامعية الدولية. تستعرض هذه المقالة التحليلية الأسباب المتعددة لهذا الوضع المحيط من خلال محورين رئيسيين: التحيزات المنهجية المتأصلة في معظم أطر التصنيف الدولي، والتحديات الداخلية الكبرى التي تواجه نظام التعليم العالي في ليبيا. تُبين في هذه المقالة كيف تميل معايير التصنيف الدولي إلى تفضيل المؤسسات الغربية الراسخة، في حين تضعف من مكانة نظيراتها في الدول النامية. في الوقت نفسه، تُبرز المقالة قضايا داخلية محددة ضمن التعليم العالي الليبي تعيق الأداء وتحدّ من القدرة التنافسية على المستوى الدولي. في الواقع، هناك تفاعل مستمر وتآزري بين هذه الانحيازات الخارجية والقصور الداخلي، مما يؤدي إلى تفاقم الوضع العالمي المتدني للجامعات الليبية. في الختام، تقدم المقالة مجموعة من التوصيات المحددة التي تهدف إلى مساعدة صناع السياسات وإدارات الجامعات على تنفيذ تحسينات استراتيجية تعزز الكفاءات الأساسية في الجامعات الليبية، وبالتالي ترفع من تصنيفها العالمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التصنيف الأكاديمي للجامعات العالمية (ARWU)، الجامعات العربية، التصنيفات الجامعية الدولية، ليبيا، الجامعات الليبية، تصنيف QS العالمي للجامعات، تصنيف تايمز للتعليم العالي (THE)، تصنيف Webometrics للجامعات العالمية.

received
July 30, 2025
accepted after revision
October 5, 2025

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0045-1813022>.
ISSN 2519-139X.

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Thieme Medical and Scientific Publishers Pvt. Ltd., A-12, 2nd Floor, Sector 2, Noida-201301 UP, India

Introduction

International university rankings, such as the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings, Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), and Webometrics Ranking of World Universities, play a crucial role in shaping global perceptions of higher education institutions (►Table 1). These rankings assess universities based on various criteria, including research output, teaching quality, internationalization, industry collaboration, and web presence.^{1–3} However, Libyan universities are either absent or ranked very low in these global indices.

Based on the latest published editions of the major international university rankings, no Libyan universities appear in the ranked lists of THE (ranking >2,000 institutions), or ARWU (ranking 500 institutions), and only one Libyan university (University of Tripoli) appears in the ranked lists of QS (ranking >1,500 institutions).^{4–6} Only Webometrics (ranking >31,000 institutions) includes Libyan institutions, reflecting their focus on web presence rather than traditional research/output metrics, but they still rank in the bottom tiers globally (►Table 2).

Literature Search Strategy

This review adopted a narrative synthesis approach to explore the dual challenges facing Libyan universities in global rankings. The literature search was conducted across multi-

ple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Google Scholar, and institutional repositories, focusing on publications from 2003 (the inception of ARWU) to 2025. Key search terms included combinations of: “university rankings,” “Libyan higher education,” “Arab universities,” “ranking biases,” “Scopus indexing,” “Webometrics,” “academic quality assurance Libya,” “impact of instability on research,” and “sanctions higher education.” The search prioritized peer-reviewed articles, scholarly reports, and official documentation from ranking agencies (QS, THE, ARWU, Webometrics). Inclusion criteria focused on (1) publications directly analyzing international university ranking methodologies or biases; (2) articles discussing challenges specific to higher education in the Middle East and North Africa region or fragile states; and (3) official ranking data or analysis reports for 2024–2026 editions. Exclusion criteria involved opinion pieces without empirical support and publications not directly relevant to the themes of ranking performance or systemic bias. The analysis primarily relied on synthesis and critique of established academic literature and publicly available ranking data.

Nevertheless, understanding the factors that caused this poor performance of Libyan universities in global rankings is essential for policymakers and university administrators to implement strategic improvements. Broadly, these factors can be divided into two major categories. The first includes issues that are internal to the global ranking systems themselves, which tend to have indicators and specific methodologies that disfavor institutions in developing countries. Second, there are

Table 1 Top 10 universities according to four international university rankings

	THE ⁴	ARWU ⁵	Qs ⁶	Webometrics 2025 ⁷
1	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	University of Oxford	Harvard University	Harvard University
2	Imperial College London	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Stanford University	Stanford University
3	Stanford University	Harvard University	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
4	University of Oxford	Princeton University	University of Cambridge	University of Oxford
5	Harvard University	University of Cambridge	University of California Berkeley	University of California Berkeley
6	University of Cambridge	Stanford University	University of Oxford	Cornell University
7	ETH Zurich	California Institute of Technology (Caltech)	Princeton University	University of Washington
8	National University of Singapore (NUS)	University of California Berkeley	California Institute of Technology (Caltech)	Columbia University New York
9	UCL	Imperial College London	Columbia University	University of Pennsylvania
10	California Institute of Technology (Caltech)	Yale University	University of Chicago	University of Cambridge

Table 2 Libyan universities' rankings in Webometrics as of January 2025⁷

University	Global rank
University of Tripoli	3,827
University of Benghazi	4,005
Misurata University	4,704
Omar Al Mukhtar University	4,818
Sebha University	5,329
University of Zawia	5,520
Libyan International Medical University (LIMU)	5,944
Sirte University	7,507
Tobruk University	8,658
Libyan Academy for Postgraduate Studies	14,446
University of Zintan	20,970
University of Derna	26,690
Open University Libya	26,899

actual shortcomings as well as systemic problems in the Libyan higher education system, which hinder its performance and international competitiveness. Addressing these two external biases and internal deficiencies would be quite important for any significant development.

International University Rankings: Framework and Critiques

Evolution and Significance

Historical Background

International university rankings emerged in the early 2000s as tools to quantify institutional prestige amid globalization, student mobility, and heightened competition in higher education. The ARWU, launched by Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 2003, pioneered this movement by exclusively emphasizing research excellence through Nobel Prizes, high-impact publications, and citation counts. This spurred rapid methodological diversification: Spain's Webometrics Ranking (2004) introduced digital footprint as a core metric (web size, visibility, scholarly output), THE and QS jointly published the "THE-QS World University Rankings" starting in 2004 (first edition) until 2009. The THE-QS World University Rankings (2005) incorporated subjective academic surveys (40%), teaching ratios, and internationalization metrics.¹ In 2009, the two organizations parted ways to produce independent university rankings, the QS World University Rankings and *THE* World University Rankings. *THE* cited an asserted weakness in the methodology of the original rankings,⁸ along with a sensed bias in the current approach that favors science over the humanities,⁸ as two of the key reasons for the decision to split with QS. *THE* created a new methodology with Thomson Reuters, and

published the first *THE* World University Rankings in September 2010.

The SCImago Institutions Ranking, launched in late 2009, later supplemented these using Scopus data. Collectively, by 2010, these systems—spanning research (ARWU), reputation (THE-QS), and digital engagement (Webometrics)—had evolved into influential global benchmarks, driving institutional strategies and policy decisions through their contested yet standardized definitions of excellence.^{1,2,7,9,10}

Significance

International university rankings have become dominant mediators of global higher education prestige, profoundly influencing institutional strategies, student mobility, and national policy.^{2,7,9–11} Their perceived objectivity—despite methodological flaws—makes them powerful arbiters of institutional reputation^{2,9–14} (►Table 3). Rankings exert unprecedented influence across stakeholders:

- Students: guide international enrollment choices.
- Universities: shape strategic investments and branding.
- Governments: inform funding allocations and policy reforms.
- Employers: signal graduate quality.

Methodology and Systemic Biases

International university rankings utilize different and often disputed methodologies that convert complex institutional qualities into easily quantifiable metrics, which, in turn, significantly affect the worldview of academic excellence.⁹ Ranking systems such as QS, THE, ARWU, and Webometrics differ in their prioritization of dimensions—some of which are: research citations (THE, ARWU), reputation surveys (QS), or digital visibility (Webometrics)—all of which have biases that engage in systematic favoritism toward resource-rich, English-oriented institutions and adverse toward universities in contexts like Libya.^{9,15} These methodological choices are, unfortunately, not only technical or objective decisions but also cultural and geopolitical impositions, as could be seen from ARWU perspectives toward the Nobel Prize, which disregard economic constraints,^{10,11} and Webometrics penalizing regions with limited digital infrastructure.¹⁶ Knowledge of these systems is a key to diagnosing the reasons these institutions, such as Libyan universities, are rendered invisible in global hierarchies—not because they were not meritorious in any sense, but also for the reason that the rules of measuring them are structurally misaligned with their realities. The next section dissects these methodologies to reveal how their design quietly reinforces inequity.

- QS World University Rankings:
 - Methodology⁶:
 - 30% academic reputation survey (global faculty opinions).
 - 20% citations per faculty (research impact).
 - 10% faculty/student ratio (teaching resources).
 - 15% employer reputation.
 - 5% international faculty/students each.

Table 3 Impacts on universities: a double-edged sword

Positive impacts	Negative impacts
Fosters competition and improvement: Drives institutions to enhance research output, faculty qualifications, and infrastructure. ^{2,13}	Methodological biases: Eurocentric metrics (e.g., Nobel Prizes in ARWU, English publications in THE/QS) marginalize Global South universities. ^{2,7,10,11}
Promotes transparency: Publicly available data enable benchmarking and accountability. ^{2,7}	Homogenization: Universities prioritize ranking-aligned activities (e.g., STEM research) over local missions like social sciences or humanities. ^{2,9}
Enhances internationalization: Incentivizes recruitment of global talent and cross-border collaborations (QS/THE "international outlook" metrics). ^{2,3}	Resource Distortion: Heavy investment in ranking metrics (e.g., citation databases) diverts funds from teaching or regional needs. ¹⁴
Digital engagement (Webometrics): Encourages open-access publishing and digital infrastructure. ²	Structural inequity: Institutions in unstable regions (e.g., Libya) face compounded disadvantages: sanctions limit collaborations, while internet outages cripple Webometrics scores.

Abbreviations: ARWU, Academic Ranking of World Universities; QS, Quacquarelli Symonds; THE, Times Higher Education.

- Critique: heavy reliance on subjective reputation surveys dominated by Western respondents marginalizes Global South institutions.^{1,2}
- THE World University Rankings:
 - Methodology⁴:
 - 29.5% teaching (teaching reputation survey, staff-to-student ratio).
 - 29% research environment (productivity, income, reputation).
 - 30% research quality (citation impact, research influence, strength, and excellence).
 - 7.5% international outlook.
 - 4% industry income.
 - Critique: Bibliometric emphasis disadvantages non-English publications.^{2,10}
- ARWU:
 - Methodology⁵:
 - 30% alumni/staff Nobel/Fields medals.
 - 20% highly cited researchers.
 - 20% *Nature/Science* publications.
 - 20% research output (Scopus/WoS).
 - Critique: Nobel-centric metrics ignore economic constraints in developing regions.^{2,10}
- Webometrics ranking:
 - Methodology (7):
 - 50% visibility (external backlinks).
 - 40% excellence (top-cited publications).
 - 10% transparency openness (publicly accessible research).
 - Critique: digital infrastructure gaps penalize universities in unstable regions.¹⁶

Global Influence and Systemic Biases

Rankings incentivize universities to prioritize ranking-aligned activities, often at the expense of local relevance.^{9,12} However, they exhibit structural biases:

- *Linguistic exclusion*: most of indexed research relies on English, erasing scholarship in other languages. For example, while Ulrichs's repository lists 9,857 scholarly journals in Chinese, only 42 of which are in WoS. This illustrates how non-English scholarship (including Arabic) is systematically excluded.¹⁷
- *Reputation inequity*: only 10% of QS Global Employer Survey respondents were from "Africa and Middle East."¹⁸
- *Resource disparity*: metrics like "industry income" ignore Libya's sanctions-limited economy.
- *Contextual blindness*: rankings undervalue community-focused missions.⁹

Global Ranking Biases Against Arab Universities

Global university ranking systems systematically disadvantage Arab universities due to deeply embedded methodological Eurocentrism,^{9–11} pervasive linguistic barriers,¹¹ and profound resource inequity.¹⁹ These structural disadvantages manifest in several key ways, with the ranking metrics often reflecting systemic inequities in the global higher education landscape rather than a simple lack of institutional quality or effort.

The methodology of global rankings creates inherent biases that are challenging for Arab institutions to overcome.⁹ Methodological Eurocentrism is evident in several metrics, for example:

- Reputation surveys^{9–11,18} are often Western-centric, leading to low visibility and undervaluation of Arab universities in academic opinion polls (→ **Table 4**).
- Metrics like the Nobel/high-impact focus in rankings such as ARWU⁶ inherently favor historically wealthy Western institutions with established research traditions over Arab universities.¹⁹
- An industry income bias often penalizes universities in regions with less developed private R&D sectors.^{9,11}

Linguistic barriers are a major structural issue.¹¹ The dominance of English in bibliometric databases like Scopus

Table 4 Global ranking biases against Arab universities

Bias factor	Impact on Arab universities	Supporting evidence
English-language dominance	Non-English research rarely indexed in Scopus/WoS, reducing citation counts	Most of QS/THE criteria rely on English publications ¹¹
Reputation surveys	Arab universities receive low visibility in Western-dominated academic opinion polls	Only 10% of QS survey respondents are from Africa and Middle East and North Africa ¹⁸
Web presence metrics	Limited digital infrastructure impacts visibility in Webometrics rankings	Most Arab universities rank lower in Webometrics than peer institutions ¹⁶
Faculty/student internationalization	Visa restrictions, political instability, and lower salaries limit inbound mobility	United States hosted 21% of all international students in OECD countries in 2023. ²⁰
Funding and Nobel metrics	Heavy weightings on Nobel Prizes (ARWU) and industry income ignore regional economic constraints	Universities in developing countries often operate with significantly lower funding, less access to state-of-the-art equipment, and fewer opportunities for their researchers to compete on a global scale for Nobel-level achievements or large-scale industry partnerships. ⁹

Abbreviations: ARWU, Academic Ranking of World Universities; MENA, Middle East and North Africa; OECD, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; QS, Quacquarelli Symonds; THE, Times Higher Education.

and WoS severely underrepresents research published in Arabic or other regional languages, drastically reducing measured research output and citation impact.¹¹ Additionally, a publication culture that prioritizes English-language journals further sidelines regionally relevant research.¹¹

Resource inequity is another critical factor.¹⁹ Chronic underfunding limits investment in infrastructure and support, favoring historically wealthy institutions.¹⁹ Furthermore, the digital divide disadvantages institutions in regions with unreliable internet and limited digital resources.¹⁶ Finally, political and economic constraints directly impact universities:

- Restricted mobility due to instability, visa issues, or uncompetitive salaries hinders universities from attracting global talent, affecting “international outlook” metrics.¹⁹
- Sanctions and instability, such as those in post-2011 Libya, severely disrupt research, funding, and academic continuity, making it exceptionally difficult to meet ranking criteria.²¹

Consequently, this combination of methodological bias, linguistic exclusion, and resource disparity means Arab universities, despite potentially excelling in locally relevant teaching, research, and community engagement, are structurally positioned at a severe disadvantage within the dominant global ranking frameworks. Their absence or low rank often reflects systemic inequities in the global higher education landscape rather than a simple lack of institutional quality or effort.

Libya-Specific Barriers

To contextualize Libya’s severe underperformance, a brief comparison with regional counterparts is essential. According to the Webometrics 2025 ranking, 19 Arab universities across 6 countries rank within the world’s top

1,000.⁷ This group is led by institutions from resource-rich and politically stable nations like Saudi Arabia (7 in the top 1,000), Egypt,⁵ and the United Arab Emirates.³ This demonstrates that Arab universities can achieve global visibility by leveraging significant state investment and a stable research environment, as illustrated in ►Fig. 1.

In stark contrast, no Libyan university ranks within the global top 3,000, with the highest-ranked institution, the University of Tripoli, positioned at 3,827. This gap is not solely due to the general biases facing all Arab institutions but is exacerbated by Libya-specific barriers—chronic instability, sanctions, and resource devastation—which are not faced by its top-performing regional peers.

This clearly demonstrates the severe underperformance of Libyan universities in global rankings. While we acknowledge the well-documented biases favoring Western institutions (wealthy, English-speaking, and historically established), internal factors within Libya remain decisive in explaining this decline (►Fig. 1).

Chronic Instability Disrupting Academic Foundations

Infrastructure and resource devastation: the protracted political and security crisis following the 2011 revolution led to severe degradation of critical research infrastructure.²¹ This directly cripples the capacity to produce high-impact research measured by QS, THE, and ARWU.

Brain drain and faculty depletion: instability triggered a significant brain drain, leading to the migration of experienced academics and researchers seeking safety and better resourced environments abroad.²¹ While precise, unified statistics on academic migration rates are challenging to obtain due to the conflict, the loss of high-caliber faculty directly cripples the pool of researchers capable of producing high-impact, internationally indexed publications, which is central to QS, THE, and ARWU scores.

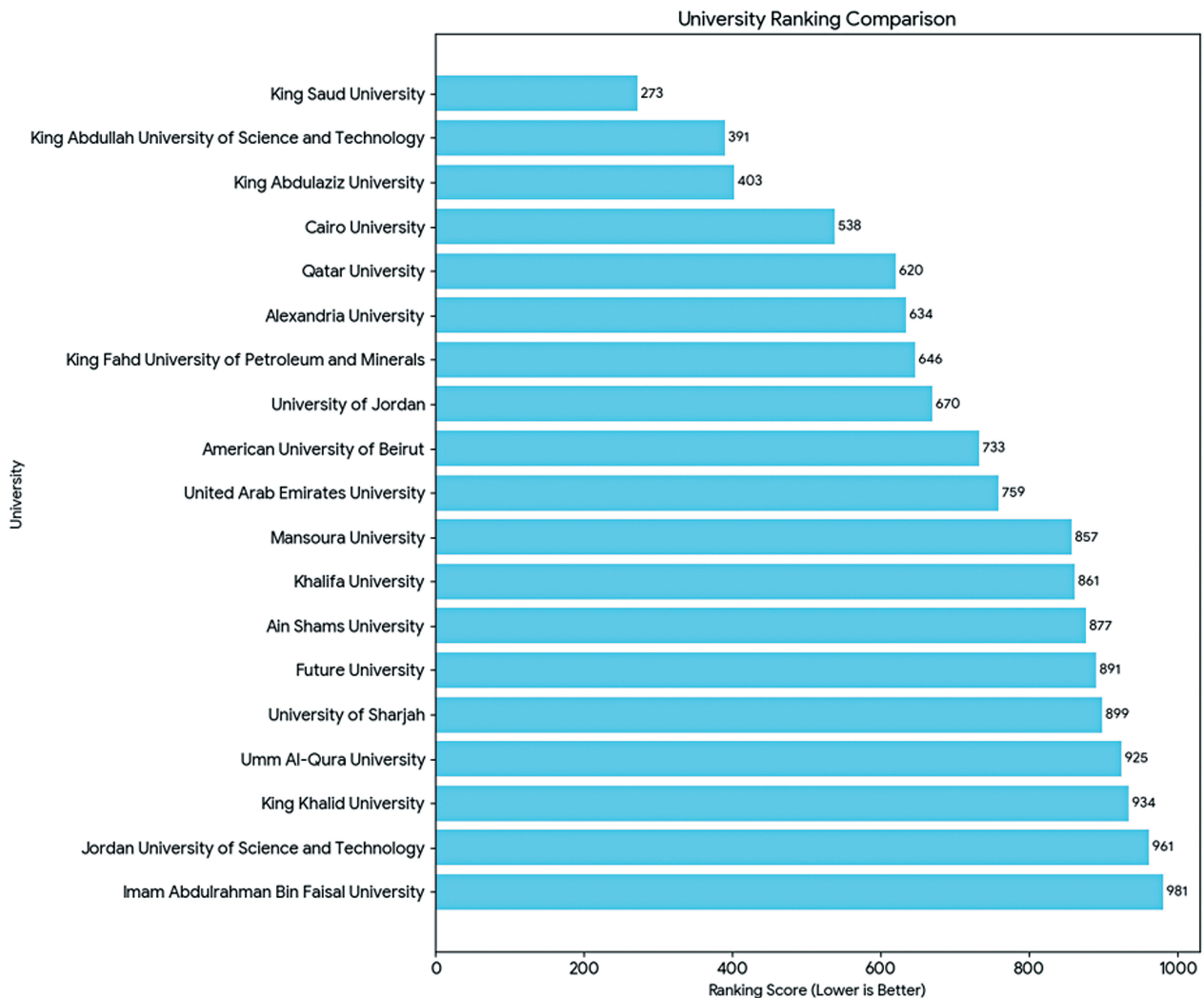


Fig. 1 Global ranking according to Webometrics (2025), showing performance metrics for Middle Eastern universities.

Funding diversion and institutional paralysis: government resources were overwhelmingly diverted towards security and basic services, leading to chronic underfunding of universities. Gross Domestic Expenditure on Research and Development metrics are systemically unreported to international bodies, signifying a fundamental governmental de-prioritization of the science, technology, and innovation sector. Granular budgetary data confirm that education and research centers operate predominantly as “payroll institutions,” where salary obligations consume 75% to over 90% of total spending, leaving negligible resources for core scientific activity.^{22,23} Budgets for research grants, journal subscriptions, equipment, and even basic operational costs were slashed.^{19,21,24} Furthermore, frequent administrative changes and institutional paralysis hindered long-term research planning and strategic development necessary for improving ranking metrics.

This environment establishes an accumulative self-reinforcing cycle that sustains the scene of academic disadvantage.

Digital Isolation and Web Presence Deficits

Infrastructure fragility: Libya suffers from frequent and prolonged internet outages due to damaged infrastructure

and power grid failures.^{19,24} This infrastructure fragility is a fundamental barrier, directly resulting in the low Webometrics scores for Libyan institutions (e.g., University of Tripoli Global Rank: 3,827). The lack of continuous, reliable connectivity prevents the universities from maintaining the up-to-date web presence, accessible scholarly outputs, and external visibility necessary to improve in the ranking’s “Visibility” and “Openness” pillars.⁶

Beyond Webometrics: digital isolation also hampers participation in online international collaborations, access to cloud-based research tools and databases (like Scopus/WoS, crucial for other rankings), and the capacity to attract international students and faculty who rely on robust digital infrastructure. Furthermore, it restricts the ability of Libyan researchers to disseminate their research findings globally or engage in virtual conferences, further reducing visibility and impact.^{24,25}

Sanctions: Strangling International Engagement

Collaboration chokehold: international sanctions, particularly financial and travel restrictions, severely limit Libyan universities’ ability to engage in international research

collaborations.²⁶ Accordingly, securing joint grants, co-authoring publications with international partners, organizing or attending international conferences, and participating in global academic networks become immensely difficult or impossible.

Resource blockades: sanctions can restrict the importation of specialized scientific equipment, software, and reagents essential for advanced research in fields like Medicine. They can also block access to international funding streams and complicate financial transactions for paying publication fees or subscription costs.²⁷

Mobility restrictions: travel bans or severe visa restrictions prevent Libyan academics from visiting partner institutions abroad for research or training and deter international scholars and students from coming to Libya, directly impacting the “International Outlook” metrics in THE and QS rankings (faculty/student ratios, collaboration).

Reputational damage: being under sanctions can create a stigma or perceived risk, making potential international partners hesitant to collaborate, which further isolates Libyan institutions.

Excessive Centralization and Lack of Autonomy

Libyan universities are managed as governmental entities, subjecting them to uniform policies. This restricts their ability to efficiently respond to market needs or adapt innovative programs. The weak administrative and academic autonomy negatively correlates with the quality of education and scientific research.

Weak Quality Assurance Mechanisms

Unlike many other countries, Libya lacks an independent accreditation body, as the National Center for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Educational and Training Institutes is an institution affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. This has led to the proliferation of universities operating below sufficient standards. The transition to an independent quality assurance/accreditation body, as proposed for the independent national accreditation council, has been a cornerstone of successful higher education reform in several countries. For instance, following the Bologna Process reforms, many European nations decentralized quality assurance, granting greater autonomy to universities while mandating rigorous, independent national accreditation and evaluation (e.g., the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education). This dual approach fostered competition and enhanced quality, which indirectly supported global ranking performance. Implementing a similar independent body in Libya will decouple academic quality from political flux, a necessary step toward institutional excellence.^{28,29}

Interconnected Impact

These barriers are not isolated; they reinforce each other. This synergistic effect creates an exceptionally challenging environment for Libyan universities to meet the standards set by global ranking systems, which often assume a baseline level of stability, connectivity, and international openness.

In conclusion, the absence of Libyan universities from top global rankings like QS, THE, and ARWU stems from a dual challenge: biases within the ranking systems themselves and significant weaknesses in Libya's higher education sector. Ranking methodologies disproportionately favor institutions with extensive English-language publications in indexed databases and high internationalization scores, thereby inherently disadvantaging universities from developing nations. Simultaneously, internal systemic issues—such as limited English research output, the disruptive impact of chronic political and administrative instability on academic productivity, and sanctions hindering international collaboration—severely impact the capacity of Libyan universities to meet these global standards. Even within the more accessible Webometrics ranking, Libyan institutions remain low due to local challenges like frequent internet outages and scarce online scholarly content. This persistent marginalization highlights how methodological biases and profound contextual limitations together keep Libyan higher education largely invisible on the global stage.

Recommendations

Given the resource limitations and political instability, the following recommendations are prioritized into three phases to maximize impact for minimal initial investment.

Phase 1: Foundational, Low-Cost Reforms (Immediate Action)

These focus on governance, data transparency, and leveraging existing resources.

- Establish a legally and functionally independent national accreditation council: this is the most critical first step. Establishing an autonomous, statutory quality body sets clear, internationally benchmarked standards and is a prerequisite for external confidence and long-term funding reform.
- Systematize data collection and transparency: create dedicated ranking task forces to accurately track and submit institutional data to ranking agencies (QS, THE, Webometrics). This is a low-cost, immediate-impact step to overcome “invisibility” in the rankings.
- Target “visible” research output for Webometrics: mandate open-access deposit of all faculty publications in institutional repositories and translate abstracts into English. This directly improves Webometrics’ “Openness” and “Visibility” metrics with minimal monetary cost.

Phase 2: Strategic Investment and Capacity Building (Short- to Mid-Term)

These require moderate, focused funding.

- Implement a phased university autonomy framework: gradually increase institutional autonomy, linking it to demonstrable performance improvements.
- Prioritize digital resilience: invest in backup power (solar generators) for campus networks and develop cloud-hosted mirror sites for research outputs. This combats

the Webometrics penalty imposed by infrastructure fragility.

- Strategic research initiatives: focus funding on rehabilitating one high-impact lab per university and developing niche research strengths aligned with the THE Impact Rankings (Sustainable Development Goals).

Phase 3: Large-Scale Structural Change (Long-Term)

- Advocate for methodological fairness and regional lobbying: join consortia to lobby ranking bodies for inclusion of Arabic-language journals and diversification of reputation surveys.
- Formalize regional and diaspora networks: establish robust partnerships with Arab League universities for joint degrees and faculty exchange to boost "international outlook" metrics.

Declaration of use of AI in the writing process

In preparing this manuscript, Gemini was utilized to enhance article structure, summarize and synthesize existing literature, and improve the clarity, conciseness, and grammatical correctness of the writing. Following the application of AI, the authors conducted a thorough review and editing process, assuming full responsibility for the final content. Recognizing the potential for AI to generate incorrect, incomplete, or biased information, the manuscript underwent rigorous human revision and judgment. Consistent with Elsevier's Authorship Policy, no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been designated as authors or co-authors, as the inherent responsibilities of authorship are exclusively human.

Conflict of Interest

R.R.E. reported holding the role of "Chair of Research Ethics Committee." All other authors reported no conflict of interest.

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