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The Results of Arab Universities in World University Rankings During 2021-2023: Facts and Recommendations

Jamil Itmazi[1], Zuheir N Khlaif[2], Shahid Farid[3]
[1] Palestine Ahliya University (Palestine)
✉ j.itmazi@gmail.com
[2] An Najah National University (Palestine)
✉ zkhlaif@najah.edu
[3] Bahauddin Zakariya University (Pakistan)
✉ shahidfarid@bzu.edu.pk

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Abstract:

This paper examines the performance of Arab Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in World University Rankings (WURs), aiming to identify key areas for improvement in order to enhance their rankings. It focuses on four main domains: research, internationalization, educational environment, and information technology. The study employs a descriptive survey method, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and utilizes content analysis to scrutinize various ranking platforms. The findings highlight the current standings of Arab HEIs in prominent WURs and discuss essential areas that require attention, providing a roadmap for improvement in these domains. The research does not assess the validity or accuracy of the evaluation criteria and covers the period from 2021 to 2023. Practical implications of the study stress the need for administrators to adapt to changes in the HEI landscape and to commit to continuous institutional improvement for better rankings. This research contributes original insights by offering a strategic framework for enhancing the performance of Arab HEIs in global rankings, benefiting administrators seeking to improve their institutions' standings.

Keywords: *World Universities Rankings; Arab Universities; Information Technology; Scientific Research.*

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نتائج الجامعات العربية في تصنيفات الجامعات العالمية خلال الفترة 2021-2023: الحقائق والتوصيات

جميل إطميزي[1]، زهير خليف[2]، شهيد فريد[3]

[1] جامعة فلسطين الأهلية (فلسطين)
j.itmazi@gmail.com

[2] جامعة النجاح الوطنية (فلسطين)
zkhlaif@najah.edu

[3] جامعة بهاء الدين زكريا (باكستان)
shahidfarid@bzu.edu.pk

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ملخص:

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية أداء مؤسسات التعليم العالي العربية في تصنيفات الجامعات العالمية، بهدف تحديد المجالات الرئيسية التي يمكن تحسينها لتعزيز ترتيبها في هذه التصنيفات، إذ تُركّز الورقة على أربعة مجالات رئيسية: البحث العلمي، والتدويل، والبيئة التعليمية، وتكنولوجيا المعلومات. يعتمد البحث على منهج الاستقصاء الوصفي، ويجمع بين الأساليب الكمية والنوعية، ويستخدم تحليل المحتوى لفحص منصات التصنيف المختلفة. تشير النتائج إلى ترتيب مؤسسات التعليم العالي العربية في أبرز التصنيفات العالمية وتناقش المجالات الأساسية التي تتطلب تحسينًا، مقدمةً خارطة طريق لتحسين الأداء في هذه المجالات. لا يتناول البحث تقييم دقة أو صحة معايير التقييم، ويغطي الفترة الزمنية من 2021 إلى 2023. تشير الآثار العملية للبحث إلى ضرورة تكيّف المسؤولين مع التغيرات في مشهد التعليم العالي، وأهمية التحسين المستمر للمؤسسات الأكاديمية من أجل تحسين ترتيبها. تُسهم هذه الدراسة بتقديم إطار استراتيجي لتحسين أداء مؤسسات التعليم العالي العربية في التصنيفات العالمية، مما يساعد المسؤولين في هذه المؤسسات على تحسين ترتيبها في هذه التصنيفات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *تصنيفات الجامعات العالمية؛ الجامعات العربية؛ تكنولوجيا المعلومات؛ البحث العلمي.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Foreword

The first appearance of universities as scientific institutions was in the Arab-Islamic world, such as Ez-Zitouna University, founded in Tunisia in 737, and Cordoba University, founded in Andalusia in 796. Furthermore, the great mosques have been distinguished as universities, while the oldest university in Europe was the University of Bologna in Italy in 1088, followed by the University of Paris in France in 1113. Even so, the ranking of Arab HEIs remains modest.

Almost two decades ago, the idea of WURs began based on sets of criteria and indicators showing the location of a university in relation to the participating universities. Periodicals, newspapers, websites and academics carry out these rankings.

1.2 Introductory Statistics

In the current era, HEIs have proliferated, with more than 30,000 HEIs worldwide. Webometrics ranked 12,000 HEIs in 2022 (Webometrics 2022a). As for the current Arab HEIs, their number reached 473 universities (AARU B, 2021), although the actual figures are higher. According to 2018 statistics, the total number of HEIs in the ACs is about 1164 (Salameh, 2018). In 2022, Webometrics ranked 31,277 Arab HEIs (Webometrics, 2022b).

In recent years, WURs have become more prevalent. The question is, where do Arab HEIs stand within the world rankings?

1.3 The study

1.3.1 Research problem

WURs are based on easily quantifiable criteria such as citations and research publications, as well as more challenging qualitative indicators like teaching and academic reputation, and more complex alternatives to teaching quality. The research problem identified is the weak results of Arab HEIs in WURs.

The weak performance of Arab universities (AUs) in WURs as the central research problem and aims to uncover the reasons behind it and suggest improvement steps as well as propose strategies for Arab HEIs to improve their standing in WURs.

1.3.2 Study limitations

The study is discussing the results of Arab HEIs in WURs as well as Arab University Rankings (AURs) but will not delve into the validation and accuracy of rankings evaluations and criteria. The paper is studying the period during 2021/2023.

1.3.3 Study Methodology

The study is based on the descriptive survey method, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. It scrutinizes ranking platforms and employs content analysis techniques.

Data collection: The researchers conducted a quantitative information gathering process, collecting data from sixteen ranking websites in search of the results of Arab universities (AUs).

Analysis procedures: the data collected from the sixteen ranking websites is categorize into two groups: Ranking of Arab HEIs 1000 and Ranking of Arab HEIs 200

1.3.4 Previous studies

The theoretical literature includes a number of quite a few research and studies that have examined the results of Arab HEIs in WURs, with many survey studies. The previous studies that were consulted are summarized in Table No. 1 in terms of: Title of the study, Methodology, Procedures, Reference:

Table 1: Previous studies

Title	Methodology	Procedures	Scope	Reference
1)WURs: An Analytical Study of Universities in a Number of ACs for their Entry into (QS & THE) Rankings	Analytical study	Analysis of universities in ACs, particularly Egyptian ones, in global rankings (e.g., QS and THE). Exploration of criteria and indicators used in rankings and proposals to enhance competitiveness.	Assessment of AUs in global rankings, emphasizing the importance of global rankings in assessing university positions.	(Sayah et al., 2023)
2)The Reasons for the Decline of Egyptian Public Universities in International Ranking: Critical Analytical Study	Critical analytical study	Identification of reasons for the low ranking of Egyptian universities, such as language bias and research focus. Proposals to improve international standing.	Examination of key reasons for the low ranking of Egyptian universities and proposals for enhancing their international standing.	(Alsagheir, 2021)
3) International Rankings of Universities and the Location of Egyptian Universities	Descriptive study	Exploration of international rankings, types, criteria, and indicators, revealing challenges faced by Egyptian universities. Proposals to enhance global competitiveness.	Examination of international rankings and challenges faced by Egyptian universities, with proposals for improvement.	(Mohammed, 2020)
4)Indicators of Institutional and Program Ranking of Universities with Reference to the Arab World	Descriptive study	Discussion of biases in rankings favoring certain disciplines and languages, affecting AUs. Proposals for fostering competition and recognition.	Analysis of biases in rankings and proposals for fostering competition and recognition in AUs.	(Badran & Badran, 2019)
5) Improve the Ranking of AUs in the WURs	Descriptive study	Aimed to enhance Arab WURs by addressing weaknesses in scientific research output. Highlighted importance of increasing research publications and fostering partnerships.	Emphasis on enhancing Arab WURs by improving scientific research output through increased publications and partnerships.	(Ashour, 2019)
6) The Impact of International Publication and Academic Reputation on the Ranking of the Islamic University of Madinah in International Classifications	Exploration and proposal	Exploration of the impact of international publication and academic reputation on the ranking of a specific university. Recommendations to support scientific research and faculty development.	Investigation of the impact of international publication and academic reputation on the ranking of a specific university, with proposals for supporting scientific research and faculty development.	(Al-Najjar, 2019)
7) Analysing the Research Ranking of Universities in ACs	Research analysis	Focus on analyzing the research performance of academic institutes in ACs, particularly in terms of scientific disciplines and influential scholars.	Analysis of research performance in AC universities, focusing on scientific disciplines and influential scholars.	(El Shawi, 2017)
8) The Role of IT in Improving the Results of the International Rankings of AUs	Exploration and proposal	Exploration of the role of IT in improving the WURs of AUs. Overview, evaluation of IT performance in rankings, and proposed framework for enhancing IT usage.	Investigation of the role of IT in improving the WURs of AUs, including an overview, evaluation of IT performance, and proposed framework for enhancing IT usage.	(Itmazi, 2010a)

1.3.5 Critical studies and articles

There are several critical studies that have addressed university rankings and their role as indicators of quality. Some key points highlighted in these studies include:

- Bias in Criteria: Critics argue that certain criteria used in rankings may favor specific educational systems or disciplines over others.
- Reliance on Quantitative Data: Many rankings depend heavily on quantitative data, such as research outputs, which may not fully reflect the quality of education or the student experience.
- Imbalance: Some rankings tend to favor larger, well-known universities at the expense of smaller institutions, leading to a misleading picture of the overall quality of higher education.
- Focus on Reputation: Some rankings heavily rely on academic reputation, which can be sensitive to historical or cultural factors.
- Improvement Plans: Universities may focus on improving their rankings rather than enhancing the quality of education, which could negatively impact educational goals.

Here are some examples of critical studies and articles that challenge or expand upon the conclusions regarding the effectiveness of university rankings as indicators of educational quality:

1. Huan, D., & Li, J. (2021): Their research discusses the limitations of rankings in evaluating the educational quality of institutions in different cultural contexts, arguing for more contextualized assessment methods.
2. Hazelkorn, E. (2020): In "Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education," the author argues that rankings can distort institutional behaviors and priorities, often prioritizing metrics that do not necessarily correspond with educational quality.
3. Mok, K. H., & Baik, C. (2019): Their article "Impact of Global University Rankings on Higher Education System: Emerging Trends and Policy Responses" examines how the pressure to perform well in rankings can affect academic integrity and the quality of teaching and learning.
4. Marginson, S. (2016): His work, "Higher Education and the Common Good," critiques the impact of global rankings on university governance and the definition of success, emphasizing that ranking systems may lead institutions to focus on metrics over meaningful educational outcomes.
5. Perkins, R., & Neumayer, E. (2014): Their study, "Geographies of Educational Mobilities: Exploring the Uneven flows of International Students," critiques the reliance on rankings by showing how they can lead to geographical and institutional inequalities.

These studies provide a critical perspective on the effectiveness of university rankings, highlighting the potential negative consequences they may have on education systems. For deeper insights, consider accessing these articles through academic databases or university libraries.

1.3.6 This Study Vs. previous studies

This study discloses the domains for improving the performance of Arab HEIs in WURs and distinguishes itself by adopting a comprehensive approach. It analyzes four key domains: scientific research, international dimension, learning environment, and IT usage while providing a strategic roadmap for administrators.

Unlike previous studies that often focus on specific aspects like research output, this study integrates case studies and content analysis, contributing a qualitative dimension. Transparently acknowledging limitations, particularly in evaluating criteria validity, adds credibility. The emphasis on administrators' adaptation and continuous institutional improvement enhances the practical implications. Overall, this study contributes to the literature by providing a more holistic and

actionable guide for enhancing Arab HEIs' standings in WURs compared to the primarily research-focused approaches of previous studies.

The study domain is all universities in whole Arab countries while some of previous studies focuses in some Arab countries (Sayah et al., 2023; Alsagheir, 2021; Mohammed, 2020; Al-Najjar, 2019).

2. Categories

2.1 Introduction

University and college rankings can be seen as assessments of higher education institutions (HEIs) that are based on various factors, criteria, or indicators. These rankings serve as a way to compare and evaluate universities in relation to one another. In order to be included in a particular ranking, a university typically needs to meet certain requirements set by the ranking organization.

While rankings offer valuable information, they do not provide a comprehensive overview of an institution's strengths. This is because rankings typically focus on quantifiable characteristics and select specific criteria to base their evaluations on. As a result, certain aspects of a university's strengths or unique qualities may not be fully captured or adequately represented in the rankings.

Rankings also extend beyond evaluating entire institutions to assess specific programs, departments, or colleges within them. This allows students and researchers to assess the relative performance and reputation of individual academic units within a larger institution.

2.2 Benefits and Important of WURs

Benefits and important of WURs regarding Arab HEIs (Workshop, 2021, Ghazaleh, 2021):

1. Building the competitive capabilities of the universities.
2. Enhancing academic and research cooperation between Arab and international universities.
3. Marketing universities to various stakeholders, including students, faculty, and others.
4. Applying international best practices of development of scientific, academic and research.
5. Enhancing the reputation of these universities.

2.3 University rankings List

In the following section, we will list the most prominent WURs and AURs. The paper will focus on explaining how the rankings are determined and what factors are considered in the process, However, this paper will not delve into evaluating or discussing the reliability or trustworthiness of these rankings themselves.

3. The University rankings

3.1 Shanghai Ranking (ARWU):

3.1.1 Ranking Overview

ShanghaiRanking Consultancy is an independent organization, and it has been the publisher of this ranking since 2009. It publishes four main rankings:

1) ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities): is a yearly release that assesses WURs. It is renowned for its impartiality and rigorous methodology, yet it falls short in accounting for the size of the institutions being evaluated.
2) GRAS: Global Ranking of Academic Subjects since 2009. It contains 54 subjects, and 1,800 out of 4,000 universities across 93 countries are listed, with 1000 professors having participated in the survey (Shanghai, 2022).
3) Global Ranking about Sport Science Departments.
4) Ranking of Best China Universities.

3.1.2 ARWU Methodology:

ARWU employs six objective indicators annually to rank 1800 universities, with the top 1000 being publicly disclosed. ARWU uses its criteria with the following weights to assess and rank universities: Educational Quality (10%), Faculty Quality (40%), Research Productivity (40%), and Per Capita Performance (10%).

3.2 The Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE-WURs)

3.2.1 Ranking Overview

The Times Higher Education (THE), headquartered in London, UK, publishes an annual WUR. It was initially collaborated with several startups to release the annual THE–QS World University Rankings from 2004 to 2009. However, in 2010, the magazine shifted its partnership to collaborate with Thomson Reuters.

3.2.2 THE University Rankings

A) THE-WURs

1) Global Rankings: Compilation of the top universities worldwide. These rankings employ 13 carefully calibrated performance indicators to assess an institution's achievements in four key areas. The 2022 edition includes 1,600 universities across 99 countries.

2) Impact Rankings: Established in 2019, these are international ranking tables that evaluate universities in alignment with the UN' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3) Teaching rankings.

B) THE Regional University Rankings.

3.2.3 Global rankings:

THE-WURs are comprehensive international assessments that evaluate research-intensive universities based on their core purposes. These rankings rely on 13 performance indicators categorized into 5 key domains. The methodology and corresponding weights for these domains are as follows: Teaching and learning environment (30%), Research (30%), Citations (30%), International outlook (7.5%), and Industry income (2.5%).

3.3 THE Arab University Rankings (AURs)

3.3.1 The Methodology:

It uses the same framework as the Global Rankings, but some important adjustments have been made and some new metrics have been included to reflect the specificities of Arab HEIs. They use 16 performance indicators grouped into 5 areas. The areas of its methodology and Weights are: Teaching learning environment (33%), Research (33%), Citations (20%), Society (6%), and International outlook (8%).

3.4 QS University Rankings

3.4.1 Ranking Overview

It's an annual WUR publication released by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS). According to Alexa in 2020, it stands as the most globally recognized university ranking (Alexa, 2020). QS offers both global and subject-specific rankings, along with dedicated regional tables. Starting with the top 3% (800 universities), QS expanded its rankings to encompass 1,300 in 2022. Additionally, the Arab region rankings highlight the top 100 HEIs from a pool of over 1,000 universities.

3.4.2 List of QS University Rankings

QS, the owner of the ranking site (topuniversities.com), offer 13 ranking, e.g.

1) QS WURs 2023: Showcasing the world's top universities and allowing exploration of over 1,400 institutions with filters by location and region.

2) QS Subject Rankings: These rankings showcase the leading global universities in specific academic disciplines. They encompass 51 distinct fields of study, organized into 5 broad subject categories, with updates released on an annual basis.
3) QS Graduate Employability Ranking.

3.4.3 QS World University Rankings Methodology:

The latest version of these rankings (2023) comprises more than 1,400 universities worldwide, making it the most extensive university ranking to date. To comprehensively evaluate university performance, institutions are assessed across six distinct categories (or indicators). The indicators, along with their respective criteria and weights, are as follows: Academic Reputation (40%), Employer Reputation (10%), Faculty-Student Ratio (20%), Citations per Faculty (20%), International Faculty Ratio (5%), and International Student Ratio (5%).

3.5 QS Arab Region University Rankings

3.5.1 Ranking Overview

It is part of QS University Rankings, published in 2014, highlighting 180 leading universities ACs.

3.5.2 The methodology

Our methodology was meticulously crafted to effectively mirror the unique challenges and priorities faced by institutions in the region. It relies on a comprehensive set of 10 diverse indicators, encompassing both academic and employer perspectives. The Arab QS Ranking Criteria, along with their corresponding weights, are as follows: Academic Reputation (30%), Employer Reputation (20%), Faculty-to-Student Ratio (15%), Global Research Network (10%), Web Impact (5%), Percentage of Faculty with a Doctorate (5%), Citations per Research Paper (5%), Research Papers per Faculty Member (5%), International Faculty Composition (2.5%), and International Student Diversity (2.5%).

This approach is designed to provide a well-rounded assessment that aligns with the specific nuances and priorities of institutions in the Arab region.

3.6 Rankings of "U.S. News Best Colleges"

3.6.1 Ranking Overview

This is an annual WUR initiative launched in 2014. Its primary objective is to offer over 100 diverse ranking categories to help students in streamline their college selection process. The primary ranking, "Best Global," includes 1,750 leading institutions from 90 countries and relies on the analytical support of Clarivate™.

The ranking process unfolds in two steps: Firstly, a pool of 1,849 universities is assembled, from which the top 1,750 schools are selected for ranking. Subsequently, the rankings are computed using 13 distinct indicators and their corresponding weights.

3.6.2 The methodology.

The US NEWS Rankings employ a specific set of indicators and their corresponding weights, which are as follows(1) : Worldwide Research Esteem (12.5%), Regional Research Reputation (12.5%), Publications (10%), Books (2.5%), Conference Contributions (2.5%), Normalized Citation Influence (10%), Total Citations (7.5%), Quantity of Scholarly Publications (12.5%), Proportion of Total Publications (10%), Global Collaboration (Relative to Home Country) (5%), International Collaboration (5%), Highly Cited Research Papers (5%), and Proportion of Total Publications (5%).

This methodology has been designed to comprehensively evaluate and rank institutions based on these diverse factors and their respective weights.

(1): See www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/articles/methodology

3.7 The "Webometrics Ranking of World Universities"

3.7.1 Ranking Overview

Webometrics is a project conducted by the Cybermetrics Lab, a research team associated with the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). Comprising 126 centers and institutes in Spain, this initiative was launched in 2004 with the objective of providing comprehensive coverage of HEIs worldwide, regardless of their country or academic discipline. The Webometrics ranking, updated every six months, is the largest academic ranking of HEIs.

Unlike traditional website rankings, Webometrics focuses on ranking universities themselves. It utilizes a combination of webometric (covering all missions) and bibliometric (emphasizing research) indicators to evaluate universities. Promoting Open Access to the knowledge produced by universities stands as a fundamental objective of the Webometrics ranking.

In its 2022 version, the Webometrics ranking assessed approximately 31,000 HEIs from over 200 countries. It offers a comprehensive and regularly updated assessment of HEIs worldwide.

3.7.2 The methodology:

The primary objective of the Webometrics ranking is to inspire both universities and researchers to cultivate a strong online presence that authentically mirrors their academic endeavors. Data collection takes place in either January or July for publication every six months. The Webometrics ranking encompasses the following indicators, each assigned specific weights: Presence, Discontinued, Visibility (50%), Transparency / Openness (10%), and Excellence / Scholar (40%).

3.8 uniRank - University Ranking

3.8.1 Ranking Overview

This is a WUR like Webometrics, focusing on assessing the popularity of university websites. This particular non-academic university ranking has been consistently published since 2005. uniRank™, a leading international Higher Education directory and search engine, offers reviews and rankings for over 13,800 HEIs across 200 countries. It releases rankings twice a year, in January and July.

uniRank™ includes HEIs that meet the following criteria:

- Official recognition, licensing, and accreditation by national or regional authorities.
- Authorization to offer Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degree programs.
- Primarily offer courses through on-campus face-to-face learning.

Its primary objective is to deliver a WUR based on the strength of university web presence and popularity, as determined by factors such as estimated web traffic, trustworthiness/authority, and the quality of link popularity.

3.8.2 The methodology:

The ranking methodology relies on an algorithm that incorporates five impartial and autonomous web metrics. Each HEI is required to regularly update their data on a monthly basis to maintain accuracy.

3.9 NTU World University Rankings

3.9.1 Ranking Overview

The "Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for World Universities," presented by National Taiwan University (known as NTU Rankings), has been in publication since 2007. Its purpose is to assess the accomplishments of research universities in scientific research. In the year 2021, the WURs ranked the top 800 universities and included performance assessments in 6 fields and 27 subjects.

3.9.2 The methodology:

The performance assessments for 2021 encompass a set of 8 indicators, which in turn encompass 3 distinct criteria for assessing the performance of scientific papers. These criteria, along with their

respective indicators and weightings, are as follows for use in the NTU-WUR: Research Productivity (25%), Research Impact (35%), and Research Excellence (40%).

3.10 The Aggregate Ranking of Top Universities (ARTU)

3.10.1 Ranking Overview

ARTU is a ranking system that combine the annual WURs provided by THE, QS, and ARWU. It amalgamates university performance data from these 3 rankings to account for discrepancies in performance caused by methodological differences among them. The ARTU ranking for a university is determined by summing its individual ranks from each of the 3 rankings.

In the 2021 edition, a total of 3,000 universities were included. The processed ranking datasets are harmonized, and the sum of ranks is calculated for all universities that are ranked in both THE and ARWU, as well as the top-ranked institutions in QS. In 2021, ARTU ranked a total of 426 universities, and the results for the top 400 were made available online.

3.11 The Center for World University Rankings (CWUR)

3.11.1 Ranking Overview

Starting from 2012, CWUR has been releasing a WUR aimed at evaluating aspects such as the quality of education, employability, faculty quality, and research excellence. In 2019, the ranking expanded its scope to include the top 2,000 universities from a pool of 20,000 world institutions. It has been headquartered in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since 2016.

3.11.2 The methodology

It assesses HEIs based on criteria related to education, employability, faculty quality, and research achievements. For their WUR, CWUR utilizes 7 specific objectives and indicators, categorized into 4 distinct areas, as referenced by both Mahassen in 2022 and CWUR in 2022. The areas considered for CWUR rankings, along with their respective weightings, include: Education (25%), Employability (25%), Faculty (10%), and Research (40%).

Additionally, CWUR also provides rankings by subject, evaluating universities worldwide in 227 subject categories based on their research article contributions.

3.12 CWTS Leiden Ranking

3.12.1 Ranking Overview

Established in 2007, the CWTS Leiden Ranking is an annual WUR that uses an online platform that offers important insights into the scientific performance of over 1300 universities. The users can select their preferred indicators, generate results, and explore the performance of universities. This ranking is produced by the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) at Leiden University in Netherlands.

3.12.2 The methodology

It relies on bibliographic data sourced from the Web of Science to rank universities based on the quantity of academic publications. It takes into consideration factors such as language, discipline, and institutional size to ensure fairness. The 2022 version comprises 1,318 universities, evaluating their performance within the 2017–2020 timeframe, encompassing 69 countries. Notably, each university included in this ranking has produced a minimum of 800 Web of Science indexed publications during the same period, out of a total of approximately 30,000 universities worldwide. The Leiden ranking covers the following areas:

- Size-Dependent versus Size-Independent Assessment
- Scientific Influence
- Open Access and Collaborative Collaboration
- Publication Output

– Diversity in Gender Representation

3.13 RUR World University Rankings

3.13.1 Ranking Overview

RUR represents a WURs system that assesses the performance of 1,100 top-tier universities spanning 82 countries. It employs a set of 20 distinctive indicators and focuses on 4 pivotal facets of university activities: teaching, research, international diversity, and financial sustainability.

3.13.2 RUR Data

All source data is coming from Thomson Reuters through an annual data survey conducted in the spring season. This survey encompasses approximately 700-800 higher education institutions (HEIs) from around the world.

RUR comprises 4 primary ranking categories:

1. RUR Overall Rankings: These rankings gauge institutional performance through the utilization of 20 distinct indicators, categorized into 4 dimensions. Each dimension within the Overall ranking subsequently generates a separate ranking, consisting of 5 metrics from each of the 4 groups.
2. RUR Subject Rankings: Employing an identical methodology to the Overall rankings, this category assesses universities across 6 broad subject areas. It leverages the same set of 20 indicators, which are organized into 4-dimension areas. Within each ranking, there are 5 sub-rankings: an overall ranking (utilizing all 20 indicators) and 4-dimension rankings (each employing five indicators).
3. RUR Reputation Rankings: Focused on assessing institutional reputation.
4. RUR Research Performance Ranking: This category specifically evaluates research performance.

3.13.2 The methodology

The RUR ranking uses a unique methodology to evaluate HEI performance through 20 separate indicators as shown in Table No. 2.

Table 2: RUR Rankings Indicators

Teaching Indicators	40%	Research Indicators	40%
Academic staff per students	8%	Citations per academic-research staff	8%
Academic staff per bachelor degrees	8%	Doctoral degrees per admitted PhD	8%
PhD per academic staff	8%	Normalized citation impact	8%
PhD per bachelor degrees	8%	Papers per Academic and research staff	8%
Teaching reputation	8%	Research reputation	8%
International Diversity indicators	10%	Financial Sustainability indicators	10%
International academic staff	2%	Institutional income per academic staff	2%
International students	2%	Institutional income per students	2%
International co-authored papers	2%	Papers per million research income	2%
International reputation	2%	Research income per Academic staff	2%
International level	2%	Research income per institutional income	2%

3.14 Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR)

3.14.1. Ranking Overview

Established in 2009, SIR categorizes academic and research institutions through a composite indicator based on three distinct sets of indicators. The SIR is the developed by SCImago Research Group, a research organization headquartered in Spain with members from CSIC. This ranking system is subdivided into six sectors, including an Overall Ranking and University Rankings, where

it evaluates key attributes like research output, international collaboration, normalized impact, and publication rate for each of these sectors.

3.14.2 The methodology

The indicators are categorized into 3 groups aimed at capturing the scientific, economic, and social attributes of institutions. Within the SIR, you'll find both size-dependent and size-independent indicators. The SIR employs the following factors and weights: Research (50%), Innovation (30%), and Societal: 20%.

3.15 University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP)

3.15.1 A bout Ranking

URAP, a non-profit organization established at Middle East Technical University in Turkey in 2009, is dedicated to developing WUR grounded in academic performance indicators. the current edition of URAP encompasses a vast array of 3,000 HEIs worldwide, alongside evaluations in 61 specialized subject areas. This comprehensive database encompasses 3,000 HEIs, with the top 2,500 of them receiving scores. It's important to note that the URAP ranking system relies entirely on objective data sourced from reputable open-access platforms.

3.15.2 The methodology

URAP for the 2020-2021 period is based on 6 academic performance indicators. As a ranking system centered on academic performance, publications are central to its methodology. Both the quality and quantity of publications, in addition to international research collaboration, are employed as key indicators.

URAP aggregates information from established databases such as Web of Science and InCites. Only the 2,000 are included in the official report. When it comes to subject-specific rankings, URAP employs 23 distinct fields. In the assessment of academic performance, URAP employs 6 fundamental indicators, which include: Article (21%), Total Document (10%), Citation (21%), Article Impact Total (18%), Citation Impact Total (15%), International Collaboration (15%).

3.16 U-Multirank

3.16.1 Ranking Overview

U-Multirank, introduced in 2014, represents a multifaceted and user-driven approach to the international ranking of HEIs. It undertakes a comprehensive assessment of HEIs across 5 distinct dimensions of university activity, which encompass (1) teaching and learning, (2) research, (3) knowledge transfer, (4) international orientation, and (5) regional engagement. The U-Multirank web tool facilitates comparisons both at the university-wide level and specific programs

In its 2022 edition, U-Multirank encompasses a broad spectrum of 2,202 institutions hailing from 96 different countries. Additionally, it offers a series of 30 subject-specific rankings. Detailed information regarding the methodology employed in this ranking can be accessed directly from the U-Multirank website (Umultirank, 2022).

3.17 Arab University Ranking of the Association of Arab Universities (AArU)

3.17.1 Ranking Overview

The AArU's Secretary-General, announced the upcoming beta launch of the AUR and Classification Project in the early part of the upcoming year (Petra, 2021). He highlighted the significant influence of WURs on the strategic plans and institutional policies of HEIs. He also underscored limitations in current rankings, noting their tendency to present an inaccurate representation of universities' true quality due to specific research focus, limited attention to engineering and social science research, and a disregard for humanities publications unless in English. Additionally, he revealed the successful

conclusion of the final phases of the AUR project (AARU A, 2021). However, I did not find any evidence of the launching of AARU-AUR until July 20, 2022.

4.0 The Results

4.1 Summary of Arab HEIs results

In the following tables, the results obtained by Arab HEIs in WURs & AURs will be summarized.

4.2 About WURs and AURs

It is noted that US universities are at the top of these rankings, along with a variety of English, German, Chinese, Japanese, Australian, and Canadian universities. The Arab HEIs have had poor results. Table No. 3 summarizes these rankings, listing their number, acronym, version year, key points, and statistics

Table 3: Overview of Mentioned Rankings: Year, comments and statistics.

#	Acronym	Year	Comments and statistics
1	ARWU	2022	- More than 2500 universities were ranked.
2-3	THE	2022	- 1662 universities were ranked across 99 countries. - The total count of participating universities globally was 2100. - The total count of Arab participating universities was 155.
4-5	QS world QS Arab	2022	- Ranked universities globally = 1300. - Participating of Arab HEIs = 180.
6	US NEWS	2022	- The number of globally ranked universities was 1300. - The participation of Arab Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) was 180.
7	Webometrics	2022	- The total count of globally ranked universities during that period was 11,998.
8	uniRank	2021	- The total count of officially recognized HEIs in 200 countries, which were ranked globally, was 14,000.
9	NTU	2021	- 1510 universities were selected for ranking.
10	ARTU	2021	- 2052 international universities were analyzed. - 426 of them met the criteria for this ranking. - The first 400 were announced.
11	CWUR	2022/23	- A total of 19,788 institutions were ranked. - The list included the top 2000 global institutions.
12	CWTS Leiden	2022	- Type of indicators: Scientific Impact: - It included 1318 universities worldwide.
13	RUR	2022	- 1150 international universities were evaluated.
14	SCImago	2022	- A total of 8,084 universities were ranked globally.
15	URAP	2021/22	- 3002 international universities were ranked.
16	U-Multibank	-	- The rating methodology was based on comparison.
17	AArU	-	- No results were published.

4.3 Results of Arab HEIs in WURs

Table No. 4 shows the ranking of Arab HEIs within the top 1000, while Table No. 5 focuses on those within the top 200

Note 1: The (U-Multibank) Ranking was excluded because its results are not subjective, but rather are comparisons taken from other Rankings as well as AARU-AUR because it has not been launched yet.

Note 2: The tables are sorted in descending order upon which mean the total rankings the country participated in, and in case of equality, it is sorted according to the name.

Table 4: Ranking of Arab HEIs 1000

#	Arab country	1 ARWU	2,3 THE	4,5 QS	6 US NEWS	7 Webometrics	8 uniRank	9 NTU	10 ARTU	11 CWUR	12 CWTS Leiden	13 RUR	14 SCImago	15 URAP	Total universities	Total Rankings
1.	KSA	7	11	14	4	4	2	5	3	4	5	4	3	7	73	15
2.	Egypt	7	12	10	12	3	1	6		4	7	10	1	11	84	14
3.	Lebanon	1	2	9	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2		1	22	14
4.	Qatar	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	15	15
5.	UAE	1	5	13	3	1		3		1	1	2	1	2	33	13
6.	Jordan	1	3	6	2	2					1	2		1	18	8
7.	Iraq		1	3								44			48	4
8.	Morocco		1		4					1		1		1	8	5
9.	Oman	1	1	1	1									1	5	5
10.	Palestine		1	3								1			5	3
11.	Kuwait		1	3								1			5	3
12.	Bahrain			3											3	1
13.	Algeria		2												2	1
14.	Sudan			1											1	1
15.	Tunisia			1	1					1	3	4			10	5
The total		19	41	68	30	12	5	16	5	13	0	72	7	25	**332**	-

Other Arab states do not have any HEIs in the WURs.

Table 5: Ranking of Arab HEIs 200

#	Arab country	1 ARWU	2,3 THE	4,5 QS	6 US NEWS	7 Webometrics	8 uniRank	9 NTU	10 ARTU	11 CWUR	12 CWTS Leiden	13 RUR	14 SCImago	15 URAP	Total universities	Total Rankings
1.	KSA	2	1	1	2		1	3	1		1			2	**14**	**9**
2.	UAE			1											**1**	**1**
The total		2	1	2	2	0	1	3	1	0	1	0	0	2	**15**	-

4.3 Reading the results

The results of these global rankings usually cause contradictory reactions between acceptance, rejection and cautious acceptance. A careful and professional reading reveals the following:

- Some AURs used “best” universities to indicate the higher or the first such university based on certain criteria.
- Most of the criteria for these ratings are "objective", regardless of their comprehensiveness, depth, or validity.
- It is true that factors such as size of the university, financial capabilities, and research universities will affect the evaluation.
- The Arab HEIs need a critical review of their affairs in light of their modest results.

- University leadership should recognize that publishing open data within their university's websites is their interface to the world, students and citizens.
- The argument that Arab HEIs lack financial support is true for some. Some countries have high financial capabilities although it is noted a weakness in the exploitation of what is available.
- The argument that Arab HEIs lack financial support is true for some, while others have high financial capabilities. However, there is a noted weakness in the exploitation of what is available.

5.0 Improvement Domains

5.1 The Weak Performance of Arab HEIs

The term "domains" here refers to sets of interrelated criteria within specific fields. Identifying the main domains responsible for the weak results of Arab HEIs in WURs is challenging, as these rankings do not publish the specific data underlying their criteria and scores. Our analysis is based solely on the published criteria and overall rankings for each university.

However, we have determined the most important domains in descending order according to the number of WURs that rely on these interrelated criteria. Table 6 identifies four key domains. In subsequent sections, we examine the reality of each domain within Arab HEIs and provide evidence indicating areas for improvement.

5.2 The Main Improvement Domains

In this section, the main items are related to the four domains to improve the results of Arab HEIs were summarized, and the ranking targeted for improvement was mentioned in the Table No. 5:

Table 6: Domains of improvement

Targeted Ranking	Foundational Elements	Domain
All rankings in Table No. 2	Over a 2-year and 5-year timeframe, the following fundamental aspects will be assessed: − Research Outputs: Quantity of published papers − Research Impact: Including citation metrics − International Research Collaboration − Search Quality − Integration of Additional AURs (e.g., conferences like US NEWS) − Open Access Publications: Count and percentage (e.g., CWTS Leiden Ranking)	Research And Studies
ARWU ARWU QS WUR US NEWS	− International Academic Awards − International cooperation and international outlook (ratio of international students and staff to the rest)	International Dimension
THE WUR THE AUR QS WUR THE WUR THE AUR QS WUR CWUR QS WUR CWUR	− Learning environment: the university's teaching reputation − Employee to Student Ratio and Teacher Grade Ratio − Graduate employment or distinction	Learning Environment: Employee, Student and Graduate
Webometrics uniRank	− Publication activities (open data) of the university website − University Website Popularity: Evaluation of web presence	IT

5.3 The Scientific Research domain

5.3.1 The reality of Scientific Research in Arab HEIs

Examining the landscape of scientific research in Arab HEIs demands substantial effort; nevertheless, we will provide a broad overview in the following sections:

- The AArU website, a primary source of information about Arab HEIs, lacks any information or statistics about scientific research in these universities (AARU B, 2021).
- The total production of research, studies, and related works by Arab countries (ACs) in all subjects on the Scimago website for the years 1996-2021 amounted to 1,343,332 units. In comparison, Britain's production exceeds that of all ACs combined by more than three times, reaching 4,235,739 units. As of April 2022, the total production of all ACs amounted to less than 2% of the world's production (Scimago, 2022).
- The weakness of Arab output is further evident in the number of scientific journals issued by institutions in ACs and included in the Scopus database (most of them in English). As of April 2022, the total number of scientific Scopus journals issued in ACs was 275.
- Most Arab researchers tend to cite foreign sources, highlighting the potential value of citing Arab sources when available (Itmazi, 2010a).

Sayed, (2018) summarized the features of the scientific research crisis in Arab HEIs as follows:

1. The general state of poverty in most Arab societies.
2. A lack of well-defined science and technology policies in most ACs.
3. Weak infrastructure for theoretical and applied research, such as laboratories and libraries.
4. Weakness in spending on scientific research by ACs (1.1% of their national income).
5. Low spending on scientific research by ACs (1.1% of their national income)
6. The Arab brain drains.
7. Dependence of funding for scientific research on the government sector.
8. Weakness of basic education.
9. A negative view of scientific research within Arab communities.
10. Political tyranny and a loss of freedom of opinion.

5.3.2 Areas for Improvement:

Each university can conduct a study to assess its scientific research according to the following domains and then clarify short-term (2 years) and long-term (5 years) actions to improve its research performance. The basic items for assessment include:

- Research outputs: quantity of published papers.
- Research impact, including the number of citations.
- International research Collaboration.
- Search quality.
- Conferences held at the university.
- Number and percentage of open access publications.

5.4 International Dimension Domain

5.4.1 The reality of the international dimension in Arab HEIs

The reality of the international dimension in Arab HEIs revolves around 3 items:

- International cooperation (the ratio of international students to total students),
- International cooperation (the ratio of international staff to total staff),
- International academic awards,

A) International students: The available statistics reveal that, on average, only 2.9% of students in AUs originate from other ACs, while 0.8% come from non-Arab nations. This yields a total inward mobility rate (comprising both Arab and international students pursuing full-degree programs in AUs) of 3.7% (UNESCO, 2009). Assuming a consistently average rate of inward mobility over the past decade, this percentage accounts for 2.5% of global student mobility (Varghese, 2008).

In stark contrast, North America and Western Europe boast an estimated 65% of global student mobility. Evidently, recent issues and instabilities in the region have significantly impacted inward mobility, which remains notably low in AUs. Conversely, outgoing students from ACs show a relatively high rate. According to Varghese (2008), outward mobility from the Arab region is estimated at 7.2% of global mobility. UNESCO (2009) indicates that postgraduate-level outward mobility is estimated at 53%, predominantly in doctoral programs, with 80% occurring in North America and Western Europe, as noted by Varghese (2008). Consequently, the flow is predominantly one-directional, giving rise to a foreign cultural pattern in the Arab regional context (Al-Agtash & Khadra, 2019).

B) International staff: The average mobility rate of faculty between universities in the Arab world is relatively low compared to the global average. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the average mobility rate for faculty in the Arab world in 2022 was 2.3%. This means that only 2.3% of all faculty in the Arab world were employed in a university outside of their home country. In contrast, the global average mobility rate for faculty in 2022 was 7.3%. This means that 7.3% of all faculty in the world were employed in a university outside of their home country. There are a number of factors that contribute to the low mobility rate of faculty in the Arab world. These include (bard, 2023):

- Financial Constraints: Faculty in the Arab world often earn lower salaries than their counterparts in other parts of the world. This can make it difficult for them to afford to move to another country for a job.
- Administrative Barriers: There are often administrative barriers that make it difficult for faculty to move to another country, such as the need to obtain a visa or work permit.
- Cultural and Language Barriers: Cultural and language differences can make it difficult for faculty to adjust to a new country.

C) International Academic Awards: The data show the weak results of International academic awards for AUs. During the year 2010–2019, the 100 prestigious awards went to 1,067 individuals in 46 countries for 1,451 awards. Regarding AUs, there are only 3 from 1,451 awards; 2 from Saudi Arabia and 1 from Jordan. (Lokmanm, 2020).

5.4.2 Areas for Improvement:

Each university can form a committee to study the reality of the international dimension in terms of international awards or the percentage of students and/or international staff in it. The improvement mainly relates to the university's sovereign decisions, including:

- Academic Staff and employees: Through the following Programs:
  - Visiting Professor (academic or research),
  - Fellowship,
  - Appointing and attracting international academic and research competencies.
- International students, Through the following Programs:
  - Scholarships and life facilities,
  - Opening appropriate programs for non-Arab students.

As for improving the item (International Academic Awards), this needs long-term plans with some improvement points:

- Attracting talents who are not sold on awards, excellence and innovation,
- Taking care of the creative people at the university,
- Publicize and celebrate the university's award-winning achievements.

5.5 Education Environment Domain

5.5.1 Reality of Environment Domain in Arab HEIs

This domain encompasses both students and employees, including the student-to-faculty ratio and teachers' grades ratio. It also considers the outcomes for graduates, such as their employment rates or achievements, as well as the university's overall teaching reputation.

The student-to-faculty ratio in AUs varies by country, but generally falls below the internationally recommended standards of 1:25 for science faculties and 1:50 for arts faculties. According to the 2022 International Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (IAAQAHE) report, the average ratio in AUs is 1:40. This ratio ranges from 1:50 or higher in countries like Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan to 1:30 or lower in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Lebanon. Several factors contribute to the lower student-to-faculty ratio in AUs, including (Bard, 2023):

- Rapid population growth in ACs leading to a surge in student enrollment.
- Insufficient investment in higher education impacting faculty recruitment.
- Weak educational planning causing an imbalance between student and faculty numbers.

5.5.2 Areas for improvement

Each university can establish a committee to assess the state of its education environment and identify potential improvement strategies.

5.6 The Use of IT Domain

5.6.1 Reality of IT Use in Arab HEIs

Evaluating the reality of IT use in Arab HEIs requires substantial effort. Here are some indicative findings:

- Available data shows that Arabic constitutes only 1.1% of all website content, indicating a relative scarcity of Arabic online resources. English dominates with 62% of published pages, followed by Russian and Spanish. Arabic doesn't rank among the top 10 languages with the highest online content, as per W3Techs (2022).
- Arab university websites have been observed to have inadequate content and poor-quality electronic resources (Itmazi, 2010b).
- Many universities lack functional e-portals to effectively serve diverse user needs (employees, lecturers, students, visitors).
- Government spending on university students shows significant disparity. Annual spending per student in Egypt, Morocco, Syria, and Jordan is under $800, whereas countries like Israel and France allocate over $10,000, and the United States exceeds $20,000 (Al-Fikr, 2008).

5.6.2 Areas for improvement

Itmazi (2010a) proposed developing plans for four key areas to enhance IT utilization:

1) Using IT in administrative work:
   - Implement e-mail communication for all internal university correspondence.
   - Automate and digitize administrative department operations.
   - Leverage computer archiving systems.
2) Using IT in the educational process:
   - Use presentation software in lectures and seminars.
   - Integrate e-books and electronic contents.
   - Enhance library capabilities by creating a searchable sub-website, subscribing to global online databases, and establishing an electronic repository for theses.
3) Using IT in the university portal:

- Publish comprehensive information about the university, including guides, plans, and periodic reports.
- Share open access information, including university publications, lecturer and student articles.
- Disseminate information about scientific research conducted by faculty members.
- Create individual sub-sites for each lecturer to showcase their profile, research, courses, and other desired information.
- Publicize announcements and university news.
- Implement electronic student registration.

4) Using e-learning solutions:
   - Develop a website dedicated to supporting e-learning for each course offered, where lecturers can upload relevant educational and training materials.
5) Using electronic tools for student-lecturer communication.

6. Roadmap

6.1 Strategic Plan

There are examples or case studies of successful strategies implemented by HEIs that have improved their rankings. (Al Kuwaiti, Downing, & Subbarayalu, 2019, Alhuthali, & Sayed, 2022). Also "countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar are not only enhancing their educational frameworks but are also aligning them with ambitious national visions". QS. (2024).

The effort to enhance the standing of any Arab university in global rankings necessitates the formulation of a long-term strategic plan and this requires the formation of a committee, led by the relevant authority.

Here's a roadmap for developing and implementing a strategic plan to enhance the standing of an Arab university in global rankings:

1. Formation of Strategic Planning Committee

- **Composition**: Representatives from Deanship of Scientific Research, Academic and Administrative Affairs, IT experts, Planning, Directing, and Development experts, Media and Public Relations experts.
- **Authority**: Empowered to utilize available resources and seek assistance from other university staff.

2. Vision and Objectives

- **Define Vision**: Establish an overarching goal for the project.
- **Set Objectives**: Determine specific outcomes the university aims to achieve.

3. Current and Desired State Analysis

- **Survey Study (Where are we?)**: Assess the present situation in key domains.
- **Project Requirements Study (What do we want?)**: Align with vision and objectives, utilize existing resources, identify new requirements.

4. Develop Plans for Improvement

- **Research and Studies:** Enhance research output and quality.
- **International Dimension:** Strengthen global collaborations and visibility.
- **Learning Environment:** Improve experiences for employees, students, and graduates.
- **IT Utilization:** Optimize technology for academic and administrative processes.

5. Determine Necessary Steps

- **Establish Timetable:** Set a timeline for achieving objectives in each plan.

6. Design Awareness and Training Plans

- **Awareness Campaign:** Execute a comprehensive awareness campaign across the university.
- **Training Program:** Develop a training plan for academics and staff to align with strategic objectives.

7. Develop Budget

- **Estimate Costs**: Determine financial resources required for project implementation.

8. Evaluation and Maintenance Plan

- **Continuous Evaluation:** Establish a feedback mechanism for ongoing assessment.
- **Maintenance and Modification:** Make adjustments based on evaluation findings to ensure continued progress.

9. Proposed Action Framework

- **Implement Strategies:** Execute plans according to the established framework.

This roadmap provides a structured approach for developing and implementing a strategic plan aimed at enhancing the standing of an Arab university in global rankings. Each step is crucial for success and should be carried out with careful consideration and collaboration among stakeholders.

6.2 The proposed framework

The proposed framework for raising Arab HEI rankings is detailed in Figure No. 1:

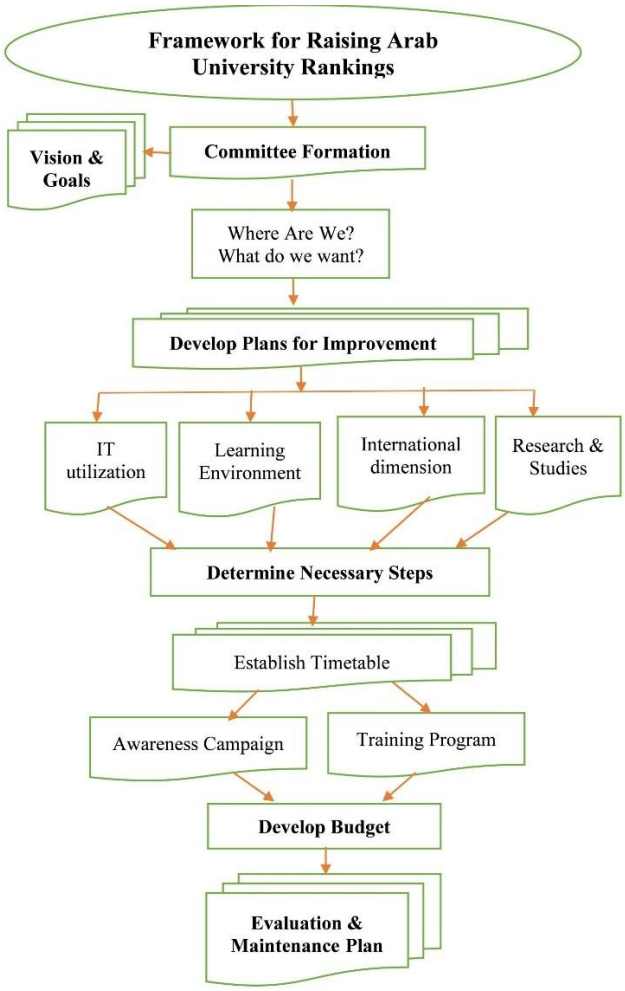

Figure 1: Strategic Plan Framework

7. Discussion:

The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the performance of AUs in WURs and highlights areas for improvement.

7.1 Key Points

- AUs consistently underperform in WURs compared to institutions from other regions.
- The study identifies four key domains for improvement: research, internationalization, learning environment, and information technology.
- The paper proposes a strategic roadmap for enhancing AUs' performance in WURs.

7.2 Discussion Points

7.2.1 Factors contributing to the weak performance of AUs:

- Limited research funding and infrastructure.
- Lack of emphasis on international collaboration and student mobility.
- Outdated teaching methodologies and learning environments.

7.2.2 Strategies for improvement:

- Increase investment in research and development.
- Foster international partnerships and collaborations.
- Modernize teaching methods and learning environments.
- Enhance the use of technology in research and teaching.
- Improve data collection and analysis to track progress and inform decision-making.

7.2.3 Challenges and opportunities:

- The need to address cultural and societal barriers to change.
- The potential for collaboration and knowledge sharing among AUs.
- The increasing importance of technology in higher education.

7.2.4 The role of stakeholders:

- Governments need to provide adequate funding and support.
- University leaders need to prioritize improvement efforts.
- Faculty and staff need to be actively involved in the implementation of change.
- Students need to be engaged in the process and provided with opportunities for feedback.

7.3 Additional Considerations

- The study focuses on quantitative data from WURs. Qualitative data on the quality of education and student satisfaction could provide valuable insights.
- The study acknowledges the limitations of WURs and the need for a more holistic approach to evaluating university performance.
- The proposed roadmap for improvement is comprehensive but requires further detailed planning and implementation strategies.

7.4 The political and economic implications in WURs

The WURs, while seemingly objective, has profound and often overlooked political and economic implications. A critical perspective reveals how these rankings are not simply neutral measures of quality, but rather powerful instruments shaping higher education policy and resource allocation globally.

- **Politically**: The global university ranking system prompts the status quo. Although American and British universities reign supreme over the rest of the worlds, this is not because they are the best but simply because they historically enjoyed the most ease in acquiring funding, infrastructure,

and networks. Thus, rankings and prestige reinforce the development of the existing hierarchy, which could block the growth of the universities in developing countries or the countries that have different education models. The infiltration of universities by the ideas of politics or the ambitions of reaching the targets of these rankings may cause erosion of educational heterogeneity and relevance. In addition, such rankings are targeted and used for political purposes to enhance the country's prestige and promote educational reforms, even when relevant internal educational issues are not resolved.

- **Economically**, the rankings fuel a very competitive market for higher education. The universities fiercely compete for top students, faculties, and research funding, often aligning their strategies to maximize their ranking scores. It would contribute to the arms race in which institutions would invest heavily in areas prioritized by rankings, like research output, possibly at the expense of other important matters that include teaching quality, student support, or community engagement. The financial consequences are considerable, not least because universities in developing countries will find it difficult to compete against the much larger resources brought to bear by well-established institutions. The pursuit of high rankings also distorts resource allocation within universities, as funds are likely to be siphoned away from important functions, such as student services and staff development for teaching, toward research activities favored by ranking algorithms. Induced by ranking systems, the unprecedented marketization of higher education may result in increased tuition fees, higher indebtedness of students, and greater inequity across different socioeconomic backgrounds in accessing quality higher education.

In a nutshell, such a critical review has demonstrated that university rankings are not merely neutral but influential elaborative tools of the political and economic dimensions in higher education worldwide. They reify the structures of power, feed economic competition, and might lead to inequitable consequences. The ability to understand such implications proves to be key to any attempt at imagining a more inclusive and equitable system of higher education.

7.5 Findings

The study emphasizes the need for Arab HEIs to improve their rankings in WURs and provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing their performance in key domains. It underscores the importance of continuous institutional improvement and adaptation to meet the evolving landscape of higher education.

The study offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for improving the performance of AUs in WURs. By addressing the identified weaknesses and implementing the proposed strategies, AUs can enhance their global competitiveness and contribute to the development of the region.

8. Conclusion:

The academic landscape is rapidly transforming, demanding adaptation from universities to ensure their relevance and long-term success. While Arab HEIs currently occupy modest positions in global rankings, immense potential lies in rededicating themselves to students, citizens, and visitors.

This paper proposes a pragmatic framework, inspired by successful strategies of leading universities worldwide, to propel Arab HEIs towards higher rankings. This framework doesn't require exceeding existing budgets, but rather, a strategic reallocation of resources towards initiatives like enhanced IT utilization, impactful research, and faculty development. By embracing this adaptable approach, Arab HEIs can not only climb the global ladder but also flourish in the ever-evolving academic landscape.

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