

Webometrics Ranking: Change in Methodology & January 2021 Results at a Glance

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The new year 2021 brings new hopes and possibilities, beside vaccine for covid19 and new president for USA, webometric ranking also published their result in January 2021, with key changes in their methodology.

Previous year was a nightmare for the world at large, however, fight still not over against the pandemic, although we are equipped with vaccine to combat with covid19. Beyond doubt pandemic effect every course of our life, and education system is not the exception.

Online education or E-learning is the new normal, unlike before many of us were skeptical about online education, currently, many universities and education institutions are adjusting towards this new normal. Same is the case with ranking agencies, webometrics ranking has brought various key changes to other methodology, now it is due to pandemic or not will discuss in next article. In this article, I would like to cast light over the changes in their methodology and the result of January 2021.

As we all are aware that, since 2004, webometrics (Ranking Web of World Universities) ranking is publishing their ranking results, every six months (January & July). Their results are based on academic web presence, although their objective is not to evaluate websites, their design or usability or the popularity of their contents according to the number of visits or visitors. They infact uses link analysis for quality evaluation as it is a far more powerful tool than citation analysis or global surveys.

MAPPING THE CHANGES IN WEBOMETRICS METHODOLOGY (July 2020 to January 2021 results)

#	CRITERIA	INDICATORS	SOURCE	Result July, 2020		Result January, 2021	
				July, 2020.2.1 Update	WEIGHT	January, 2021.1.0	WEIGHT
1	PRESENCE	Public knowledge shared	Google	Total No. of rich files in webdomain of the institution	5%	This indicator has been discontinued	0
2	VISIBILITY (Impact)	Web contents Impact	Ahrefs or Majestic	Number of external networks (subnets) linking to the institution's webpages	50%	Number of external networks (subnets) linking to the institution's webpages	50%
3	TRANSPARENCY (OPENNESS)	Top cited researchers	Google Scholar Profiles	Number of citations from Top 110 authors (excluding top 10 outliers)	10%	Number of citations from Top 210 authors (excluding top 20 outliers)	10%
4	EXCELLENCE (SCHOLAR)	Top cited papers	Scimago	Number of papers amongst the top 10% most cited in each one of 26 disciplines. Data for last five year	35%	Number of papers amongst the top 10% most cited in each one of the all 27 disciplines. Data for last five year	40%

In the current year webometrics adopted various key changes to their methodology due to technical issues as they mentioned, in January 2021 results, these key changes are highlighted in the table above and detailed as: -

1. The *presence criterion/rank* is discontinued, and 5% weightage has been transferred to excellence (scholar) criteria making it 40% from 35% previously.
2. Visibility (impact) criteria/rank remain intact, where they still calculate the total number of external networks (subnets) originating backlinks to the institutions

webpages by normalizing the maximum value between the two sources (Majestic & AHREFS)

3. In the third *criterion i.e.*, transparency, webometrics has increased the number of citations to be included, from 110 authors to 210 authors in 2021, in addition, exclusion of top performer/outliers were also increased to 20 from 10 authors. However, weightage remains the same as 10%
4. Finally, another important criterion excellence (scholar) rank also saw a change in number of papers amongst the top 10% most cited in each one of the 26 disciplines has been increased to 27 disciplines, in addition, the weightage also increases to 40%, out of which 5% is transferred from presence rank criterion.

Impact of the Changes in Webometrics Rankings Methodology,

The recent changes in the methodology of webometrics ranking, clearly implies that it is getting more inclined towards research, by dropping presence rank which only count the embedded rich files on the websites. While its score of 5% is added to excellence criterion increasing its weightage to 40% all together. While excellence rank is based on the top cited papers, hence webometric ranking started to give more value to the quality of research of the institutions.

Webometric Ranking Result Analysis January 2021

- ❖ Webometrics is the largest ranking by number of HEIs analyzed, but there is no classification of the different institutional types, so research-intensive universities are listed together with community colleges or theological seminaries.
- ❖ For January 2021 ranking results total 31,000 Higher Education Institutions were included world over out of which about 1,216 were from Arab World (24 countries) and 69 institutions from Saudi Arabia.
- ❖ The data was collected between 1 and 20 of January. And each variable is obtained at least two times during that period and the maximum value is chosen for discarding mistakes or errors.

Top 20 institutions: World

Same as previous year, US universities dominates with 15 universities under top 20, followed by Australia two and rest of the countries like Canada, Switzerland and UK has one each. The top five ranks are dominated by American universities, University of Washington at the top while University of Toronto from Canada at 6th position.

Top 20 institutions: Arab World

Eight Arab countries have representation in top 20 institutions of Arab world. Egypt has 6 universities followed by 5 universities from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan & Qatar has two each while Lebanon, Morocco, and Oman have one each.

Same as previous year, Saudi universities occupies top three positions with improved world ranks. However, KFUPM slips to 6th position from 4th as compare to July results but improved its world rank from 817 to 710th position. Cairo University & American university from Beirut place on 4th & 5th positions.

Top 20 institutions: Saudi Arabia

There are 69 institutions qualified as compared to 70 last result. Top 20 positions are dominated by public universities, and only three private universities make it to top 20 positions which are as: Alfaisal University at 16th rank, followed by Prince Sultan University at 18th while Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University at 20th rank.

Same as previous, top 7 positions of Saudi universities shows no change in ranking order, however, their score & ranks improved from previous year.

Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University jumps from 13th position to 8th position, it is a remarkable improvement in IAU's position. In last many years this the best position IAU has reached its World Ranking is 1841 as compare to 2284 in July 2020, and Arab Rank is 36th as compare to 57th

As quoted by **Webometrics** "We intend to motivate both institutions and scholars to have a web presence that reflect accurately their activities. If the web performance of an institution is below the expected position according to their academic excellence, university authorities should reconsider their web, open access and transparency policy, promoting substantial increases of the volume and quality of their electronic publications."