

Low Webometric Ranking of African Universities: Causes, Consequences and Cure

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Abstract

In the July 2017 Edition of the world webometric ranking , only eight (8) Universities in Africa place among the first one thousand (1000) and Twenty six (26) among the first two thousand (2000) Universities in the world. This is because of low visibility and activity of scholars, researchers and institutions in Africa. In most cases, institutional framework for effective activity is deficient and most research information does not go beyond the four walls of the institutions. Low webometric ranking could lead to lowering of the esteem of the university in the eyes of stakeholders, especially potential students and funding agencies. Also, academic exchange with reputable universities from other parts of the world for teaching and research may suffer. There are both institutional and personal imperatives for improving this situation. This paper is a review on the present position of African Universities in global ranking and what can be done to improve of it.

Keywords: *Webometric, Ranking, African universities, Cause, Consequences, Cure*

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Background to the Study

In the July 2017 Edition of the world webometric ranking, only eight (8) Universities in Africa place among the first one thousand (1000) and Twenty six (26) among the first two thousand (2000) Universities in the world. This is because of low visibility and activity of scholars, researchers and institutions in Africa. In most cases, institutional framework for effective activity is deficient and most research information does not go beyond the four walls of the institutions. Low webometric ranking could lead to lowering of the esteem of the university in the eyes of stakeholders, especially potential students and funding agencies. Also, academic exchange with reputable universities from other parts of the world for teaching and research may suffer. There are both institutional and personal imperatives for improving this situation. This paper is a review on the present position of African Universities in global ranking and what can be done to improve of it.

Today the worldwide web (web) is one of the main sources of information and the main showcase for everyone (institutions, business enterprises, individuals, etc.) who wants to be recognized on in the 'real world'. At the academic level, universities have a very important role as a means to communicate scientific and cultural achievements. Web publication by scholars is not only a tool for scholarly communication but it is also a means to reach larger audiences and in general a reflection of the performance of the institutions. There have been several efforts to develop web indicators that can ultimately lead to build a university's rankings. This paper presents the Webometric Ranking of World Universities.

There are several ranking bodies using different methodologies for their ranking. These include:

1. Academic Ranking of world Universities (ARWU), since 2003 [<http://www.shanghai ranking.com/>]. *Academic Ranking of World Universities* is the first world *university* ranking. It ranks the world's top 1000 colleges and *universities* based on objective indicators.
2. Centre for world Universities Ranking (CWUR), since 2012 [<http://cwur.org/>].
3. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) world Universities Ranking. Previously known as *Times Higher Education–QS World University Rankings*, the publisher had collaborated with *Times Higher Education magazine (THE)* to publish its international league tables from 2004 to 2009 before both started to announce their own versions. [<https://www.topuniversities.com/qs-world-university-rankings>]
4. Time Higher Education (THE) World Universities Rankings
6. Webometrics Ranking of world Universities (Webometrics). Since 2004. [<http://www.webometrics.info/en>]

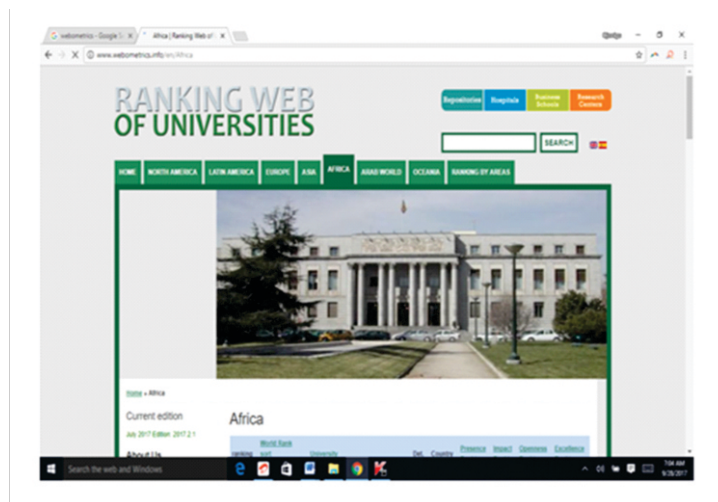
The Webometrics ranking, however, has a larger coverage than other similar rankings. The ranking is not only focused on research results but also on other indicators which may reflect the global quality of the scholar and research institutions worldwide. It is the largest classification of higher education institutions, 17,000+ universities. It is conducted by Cybermetrics Lab (CSIC) (Spanish National Research Council CSIC) in Madrid, Spain twice a year (January and July).

The webometrics indicators considered are the total size of electronic publications in the university main webdomain and the visibility of such webpages according to the number of

external inlinks they received from other websites. The key point of the model is both variables maintain a ratio 1:1 (size: impact) and other aspects like design, accessibility or specially popularity (number of visits and visitors) are excluded. In order to increase the weighting of “quality” academic material, the size component is splitted in three variables: number of webpages (20%), number of documents in rich files formats: pdf, doc, ps & ppt (15%) and number of papers in the citation database Google Scholar (15%). Obviously the other 50% according to the model is assigned to the number of “sitations” (site link citations). (Isidro F. Aguillo - [http://www.enid-europe.org/conference/abstracts/Aguillo%20\(Higher%20Education\).pdf](http://www.enid-europe.org/conference/abstracts/Aguillo%20(Higher%20Education).pdf))

Classification of African Universities on the Webometrics Scale

The webometrics ranking of African universities, July 2017 edition is in Plate 1 (<http://www.webometrics.info/en/Africa>). No African university came within the first 300 in the world, only eight (8) came within the first 1000 and twenty (26) in the first 2000. This shows that much still needs to be desired from the universities.



Africa

ranking	World Rank sort descending	University	Det.	Country	Presence Rank*	Impact Rank*	Openness Rank*	Excellence Rank*
1	303	University of Cape Town	🇿🇦	🇿🇦	409	467	257	204
2	471	University of the Witwatersrand	🇿🇦	🇿🇦	1111	865	489	393
3	475	Stellenbosch University	🇿🇦	🇿🇦	581	761	504	465
4	545	University of Pretoria	🇿🇦	🇿🇦	349	828	552	542
5	675	University of KwaZulu Natal	🇿🇦	🇿🇦	962	1564	646	495
6	743	Cairo University	🇿🇦	🇪🇬	1028	1655	997	557
7	930	University of the Western Cape	🇿🇦	🇿🇦	1621	1196	1089	1058
8	970	University of Johannesburg	🇿🇦	🇿🇦	3543	2680	669	708
9	1032	University of Ibadan	🇿🇦	🇳🇮	2200	502	1767	1727
10	1130	Alexandria University	🇿🇦	🇪🇬	5125	2247	1432	886

11	1152	Rhodes University		1823	1507	1050	1351
12	1234	North West University		1218	2727	1122	1017
13	1355	American University in Cairo		3565	1213	1314	1847
14	1368	University of South Africa		1986	1854	1495	1536
15	1413	Mansoura University		1749	4064	1345	952
16	1486	Makerere University		99999	1929	2388	910
17	1589	Ain Shams University		3658	6533	1523	792
18	1602	University of the Free State		4021	4119	1379	1266
19	1755	Moi University		1331	1241	4032	2408
20	1827	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University		5592	3835	1746	1680
21	1828	Assiut University		3521	5994	1458	1264
22	1857	Benha University		1193	4333	1955	1657
23	1871	Egerton University		4803	991	4014	2759

24	1899	Universidad Eduardo Mondlane		421	978	7125	2504
25	1903	Zagazig University		3795	6216	2184	1217
26	1994	Université Cadi Ayyad Marrakech		2370	8389	1849	1033
27	2037	Covenant University Ota		2145	2279	2403	2602
28	2063	University of Ghana		99999	3782	1826	1385
29	2098	University of Dar Es Salaam		460	4533	1830	2119
30	2164	University of Tanta		5698	7858	1327	1424
31	2221	University of Nigeria		1986	3066	1416	2807
32	2231	Tshwane University of Technology		3241	6216	2137	1768
33	2239	Okafele Awolowo University		6089	3825	2586	2285
34	2253	Addis Ababa University		99999	5007	1816	1361
35	2285	Kafrelsheikh University		6485	7268	2295	1542
36	2315	Al Azhar University		10467	7518	2727	1402
37	2324	Jimma University		4077	3171	3074	2615

Causes of Low Webometrics Ranking of African Universities

The low performance of African Universities in webometrics ranking is because of certain Institutional and individual imperatives that are neglected. Institutionally, many African Institutions have not built the necessary ICT infrastructure to encourage robust web presence. Sometimes this is due to low funding of Universities by government or individual proprietors or a lack of commitment on the part of management of those Institutions to providing the necessary ICT infrastructure. Sometimes the reason for the low ranking is due to bad web practices. According to Aguillo,

“there are examples of Universities changing their webdomains, but maintaining older ones or even organizations with two or more webdomains. These practices not only penalize their web ranks but most important decrease the visibility of their contents in the search engines.”

Most universities do not have existing web policy and where they exist, little is done to enforce them. As an administrator in a few Nigerian universities, my experience has shown that promotion of Faculty is based on certain criteria that negate effective web activity.

The Nigerian University Commission listed the following as factors responsible for Nigerian universities' poor performance:

- i. Scant attention paid to presenting findings of research conducted by scholars in Nigerian universities in a web-searchable form which manifests in publishing in low impact local journals without Internet links; and non-publishing in electronic journals
- ii. Absence of Nigerian universities on the Internet in a form that can be picked by the radar of Cybermetric Research Group.
- iii. Lack of up-to-date and scanty content of the websites of Nigerian universities.

Consequences of Low Webometrics Ranking of African Universities

The ranking of universities has a role to play in the way a university is viewed in the global academic community. Primarily, webometrics ranking is a measure of the Quality of: Instruction or teaching, Quality of research, Infrastructure and Publication and helps in marketing and PR purposes. Those universities that rank top, presumably, are those that have integrated the web into their research, teaching and learning culture. They tend to have more resources in the web, and also tend to have more links to and from other sites and perceived to be more globalized. This increases their perceived impact, improves their visibility and makes stakeholders perception about them positive.

The implication of low web ranking is reflected in the:

1. Lowering of the esteem of the University staff in the eyes of stakeholders, especially potential students and funding agencies.
2. Low staff reputation among academic peers
3. Academic exchange with reputable Universities from other parts of the world for teaching and research may suffer.
4. No patronage in the global market for academic positions.

Cure for Low Webometrics Ranking of African Universities

The cure for poor webometrics ranking requires institutional and individual imperatives to achieve. The universities should provide a strong institutional ICT infrastructure and encourage the effective utilization of web services by staff. This can be achieved through:

a. Policy Issues

- i. Formulation of an ICT Policy document specifying minimum benchmarks in the utilization of ICT services in the University
- ii. Acceptable CV format during end of session appraisal should be printout from staff profile page of staff (this ensures prompt update of information)
- iii. Setting Standards for Originality Checks for Thesis and Dissertations prior to their upload to our repositories (to guide against plagiarism)
- iv. Policy to make provision and availability of pdf copies of abstract and complete thesis uploaded to the universities repository before release of statement of result to all students.

b. Administrative Issues

- i. Subscription of the University to turn-it-in for originality checks
- ii. Improvement of network access on campus (take-off and permanent site)

Concrete steps should be taken to increase:

a) Visibility

- i. Transfer of more university activities online (staff fellowship, leave management, staff documentation, etc)
- ii. Improved publicity of university activities online.
- iii. Engaging in activities that impact the immediate community, the country and the world at large. This will increase our external links (trainings, consultancy, external collaborations etc).

All these will increase the number of inbound links to the Academy's domain. If your unit, centre, department or faculty has any partnerships or agreements with other universities or any organizations, associations or companies, ask them to place a link to the Academy's site on their website.

b) Size

- i. Transfer of more Academy services online to increase number of available links.
- ii. Involvement of the entire university staff and students in growing content on the university's domain.
- iii. Activation of the online staff profiles and advertisement of such profiles on linked In, facebook and other social media.
- iv. Website should be updated constantly with input coming from all Deans, HOD's, Directors and Heads of Unit.
- v. Publishing of Research Activities on the website.
- vi. Website facelift to provide additional information (Governing Council, Principal Officers, Faculties, Departments, Units as a starting point).
- vii. Update of the University's wikipedia Page.
- viii. Often upload news stories and notices. Also don't delete old pages, but rather make them inactive so that they are "archived" instead of disappearing. You can even add a heading at the top to say "Archived page" to clear up any confusion if the page is still picked up by Search Engines.
- ix. Use keywords in the content on your pages, to make it easy for Google to index your pages and rank them high. For example, include the name of your faculty, department, centre or unit in the text, instead of just in the heading, and use other keywords or keyword phrases that people would typically search for.
- x. Use hyperlinks as an opportunity to emphasize keywords. Rather than saying: "Click here to view our academic programmes" rather say: "View our academic programmes".

c) Rich Files

- i. Involvement of the entire university in content generation via the use of e-learning platform for upload of lectures (approved lecture note standard)

- ii. Activation of University's Repository for collection of all theses and dissertations and its enforced use.
- iii. Online availability of all abstracts of thesis and dissertations carried out in the university.
- iv. Make more use of multimedia on your site:
 - i. Create photo galleries of events
 - ii. Upload photos and pdf documents with research articles and news stories
 - iii. Upload pdf documents or ppt files of presentations done at conferences
 - iv. Upload pdf or image files of invitations to seminars and other events
 - v. Make use of sound clips and videos – it is easy to take them with your cell phone

d) Scholar

- i. Compulsory registration of all Teaching staff on google scholar (points should be earned during APER)
- ii. Encouragement of all staff to publish as old articles not scored
- iii. Policy to make it compulsory for copies of all staff publications to be in the repository.
- iv. All academics should be encouraged to place all their articles on Academy's open source research repository (if it exists).
- v. Write some articles about the research that is being done in your faculty and link to the minisite for the research group as well as to the articles that is located in the repository. Also refer to and place links to the articles located in repository, on your minisite in the general content. Very importantly, remind all the researchers to ask for inbound links from other universities and collaborators, and even sponsors.

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