

# Preface to the new edition

In the 15 years since the first edition of the book on the “educational revolution in the Gulf” was published, the networks of university cooperation between the Gulf states and Germany have deepened further and found a broader response. Above all, however, it has become clear that research-intensive universities – an originally German educational concept that was only taken up and professionalized by Anglo-Saxon universities – do not pursue world-class knowledge generation as an end in itself. As the motto of Khalifa University in Abu Dhabi, representative of many universities in the Middle East, states, the aim is to “develop tomorrow’s leaders. Grow the knowledge-based economy.”

The all-important step is the one that leads from universities into industry. For talented university graduates, it is a matter of acquiring sound knowledge and then entering a future-oriented profession in which they can apply their knowledge in the industrial dynamics of a rapidly changing society and help shape it.

While the first edition focused on developments at the universities in the Gulf itself and their cooperation with leading German universities, the focus has now shifted toward their proximity to industry. Employability has become the decisive criterion by which a university’s reputation is measured alongside its academic excellence. The THE Times Higher Education Ranking places particular emphasis on this criterion of a university’s proximity to industry. Since 2021, the Arab University Ranking has also been measured according to this standard, which we therefore use as the basis for our presentation of the universities in the Gulf.

The new edition on the “education revolution in the Gulf” therefore considers two things: On the one hand, the significant developments at the universities of the eight Gulf states. The pace of development has increased once again over the last decade. On the other hand, it also presents the universities’ relationships with industry, in particular with German companies. This development is also reflected in the new book title, which has been expanded to “The Education Revolution in the Gulf and German Industry.”

The key to market entry and business development in the Gulf states lies in the top universities, which in turn are measured by the quality of their education in terms of how well they prepare students for the transition to industry through market-oriented and forward-looking knowledge.

German companies are beginning to understand that their opportunities for their own development in the Gulf lie in how they consciously accept and shape the connection between universities and business.

This handbook breaks new ground and is the result of reading, intensive desk research, personal interviews, and thousands of kilometers of travel through the countries around the Gulf. The authors particularly appreciate traveling in the Middle East and the personal and cordial encounters with people from this cultural circle.

Our thanks go to the publishers Dr. h.c. mult. W. Georg Olms and Dietrich Olms, whose own dedication to the Orient has found a lasting echo in the controversial topic of the educational revolution in the Gulf. The Hadiths of Riyad von Salihin say: "Whoever teaches ten people knowledge will enter paradise" – that would not be the worst prospect.

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# Abstract

## Addressing needs of the future through academic transformation and industry cooperation in Higher Education in the Gulf Region

As the Gulf states accelerate their transition from oil-dependence to diversified knowledge economies and industrial powerhouses – driven by strategic frameworks such as We the UAE 2031, Saudi Vision 2030 or the Qatar National Vision 2030 – the role of higher education has shifted from purely academic & religious instruction to becoming a critical engine for industrial prowess. This book investigates the symbiotic relationship between German multinationals and Gulf universities, analyzing how educational partnerships have evolved and reached crucial importance beyond academia.

The university has become a strategic partner for industrial companies operating in four key areas:

1. in the recruitment of talent and further training
2. as a vehicle for market entry and expansion
3. as an engine of innovation
4. in reducing the pressure to comply with regulatory requirements, e.g. in the nationalization of the workforce.

The first section provides a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the current academic landscape, leveraging data from the *Times Higher Education (THE) University Ranking 2026* and other renowned global ranking institutions. By isolating the “Industry Income/cooperation” pillar from overall academic scores, the analysis reveals the key institutions that drive industrial progress and technology integration. While elite “All-Rounder” institutions like Saudi King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) and Emirati Khalifa University dominate top-tier rankings, the study identifies a second tier of “Hidden Champion” – universities that may rank lower globally but exhibit leading industry scores. The authors argue that these institutions, often overlooked by international observers, form a crucial part in the backbone of German-Gulf industrial cooperation and act as key business facilitators. The UAE highlight the crucial role of industry co-

operation even further by having established their own guidance to evaluate their universities prowess in the so called OBF – Outcome based Framework.

The text introduces a strategic matrix comparing “Academic Excellence” with “Industrial Relevance,” demonstrating that German companies – unlike their American or Chinese counterparts – prioritize partnerships that focus on the implementation of vocational standards and deploy a proven “Dual Education” model. This section establishes that for German companies, the university is not merely a recruitment ground, but a strategic mechanism to establish a “technical lock-in,” ensuring long-term adherence to German industrial standards, software and supply chains. This stands in stark contrast to other global players in the region such as the American “Top-Down” approach focused on elite management training or the Chinese “Infrastructure-First” model driven by project-specific speed.

The second section, comprising Chapters A and B, contextualizes these findings through a historical and comparative deep dive into the eight states of the Gulf region. It traces the evolution of the educational infrastructure from early nation-building efforts to the current era of “Mega-Projects” and highlights key examples of recent industry collaborations. Through detailed country profiles, this section illustrates how the German approach specifically addresses the region’s most pressing socio-economic challenge: the “Skills Gap” and the urgent need for the nationalization of the workforce (*Saudization, Emiratization*). By correlating historical educational policies with modern industrial needs, the book concludes that the German model of industry-university cooperation offers the most sustainable pathway for the Gulf states to achieve their vision of a locally educated, technically skilled workforce, thereby securing Germany’s position as a preferred technology partner in the post-oil era.

# The ranking for Gulf universities

## Methodology and weightings

Since 2004, THE Times Higher Education has been providing reliable data on the world rankings of leading universities. The global THE University Ranking 2026 of the world's best universities lists 2,191 institutions from 115 countries. The ranking comprises five areas, from which an overall score is calculated using different weightings, which is decisive for the university's absolute position in the ranking. In addition to the criteria of teaching, academic research quality and environment, and international outlook, the ranking also places particular emphasis on the criterion of industry relevance. With the realignment of the methodology, the key figures and data for the evaluation are brought into line with the renowned world rankings of universities. With the distinguishing criterion of proximity to industry, which differs from other university rankings such as the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World University Ranking and the classification of the Spanish research institute CSIC to the connectivity of education to industry. The universities are thus also be assessed in terms of market opportunities in the transition to industry, i.e., the extent to which the education provided at university actually prepares students for their future careers.

Career preparation and industry relevance are decisive criteria for the Gulf States in particular criterion for the knowledge imparted to young students at university. As part of the revision of its methodology for 2023/2024, the THE ranking has assigned a greater role to the topic of industry and increased its weighting within the overall ranking from 2.5% to 4.0%.

This reflects the growing importance of industrial cooperation for universities and the role of universities in accelerating innovation together with industry and putting it into practice.

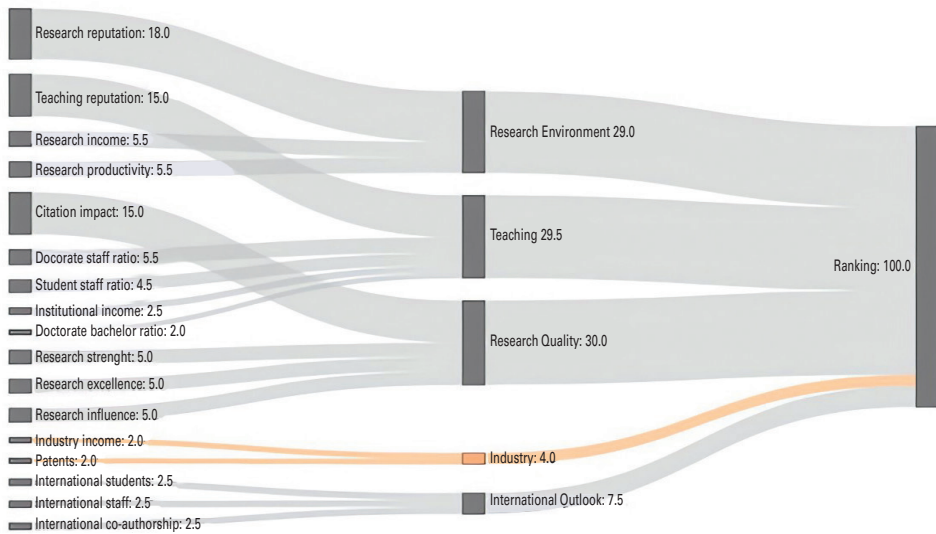
The industry score is composed of two metrics: industry income and patents.

- The industry income metric describes the income (adjusted for purchasing power and size) that a university receives through cooperation with industrial companies.

- The patents metric is defined as the number of patents from any source that cite research conducted by the university.

However, the THE overall ranking of universities is determined by the areas of teaching, research quality, and research environment, each with a weighting of 29–30%. The international outlook, with a weighting of 7.5%, rounds off the ranking.

University Ranking Metrics Flow



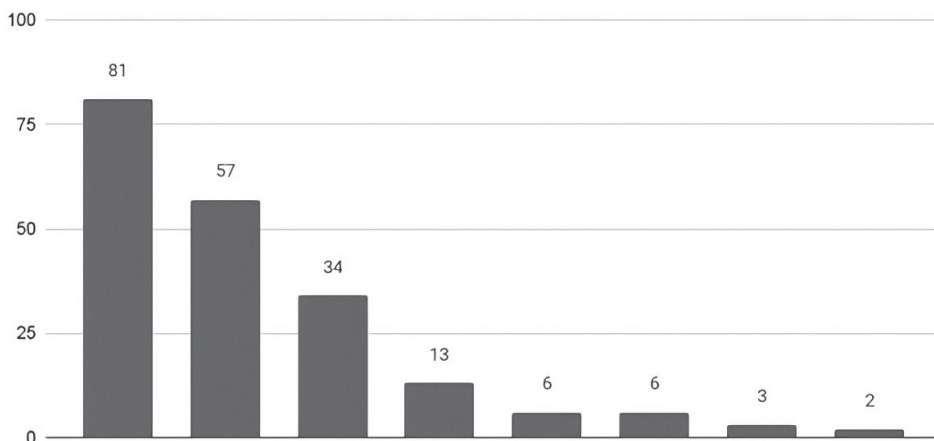
Sankey diagram with an overview of the various metrics and weightings in the THE 2026 ranking. The weighting of industry was increased to 4.0% in the last ranking update. Source: THE website<sup>1</sup>.

## The scope of the THE ranking for the Gulf states

The THE ranking for Arab universities comprises 268 institutions from 18 countries. Of these, 121 universities are listed for the Arab Gulf states. The Gulf states account for 45 percent of all Arab universities (excluding Iran, which is counted among the Asian universities in the ranking).

Other universities from other Arab countries are listed in the THE ranking for Egypt (the largest representative with 47 universities), Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and, for the first time, Syria with two universities.

A highlight for higher education in the Gulf states is that Iran, with 81 listed universities, leads the number of leading universities in the Gulf rankings:

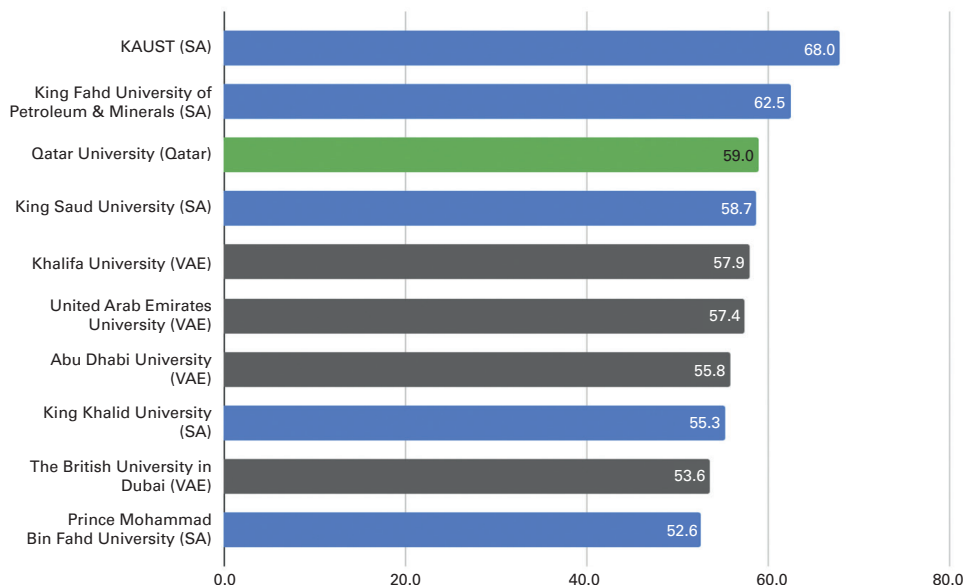


Overview of the total number of THE-listed universities in the Gulf. Source: THE ranking 2026.

The total number of universities listed should be considered in relation to the population figures of the respective countries.

### The top golf universities according to THE rankings, HCR Awards, and number of citations

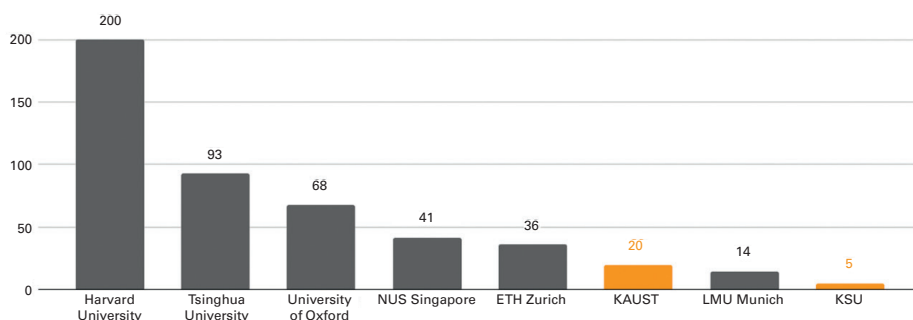
However, looking at the order in the overall ranking, a different picture emerges, which points to the dominance of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the field of education. In the top 10 Arab universities, Saudi Arabia is listed 5 times, the UAE 4 times, and Qatar 1 time.



Overview of the top 10 Gulf universities with their THE ranking overall score (maximum 100 points). Color legend: blue – Saudi Arabia (SA), green – Qatar, gray – UAE. Source: THE ranking 2026<sup>2</sup>.

The two Saudi universities KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology) and King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals clearly lead the ranking by some distance.

KAUST in particular is in a similar league to top international universities. This is reflected in the number of total citations as well as the number of HCR (Highly Cited Researcher) awards. Both indicators are decisive for determining international university significance.

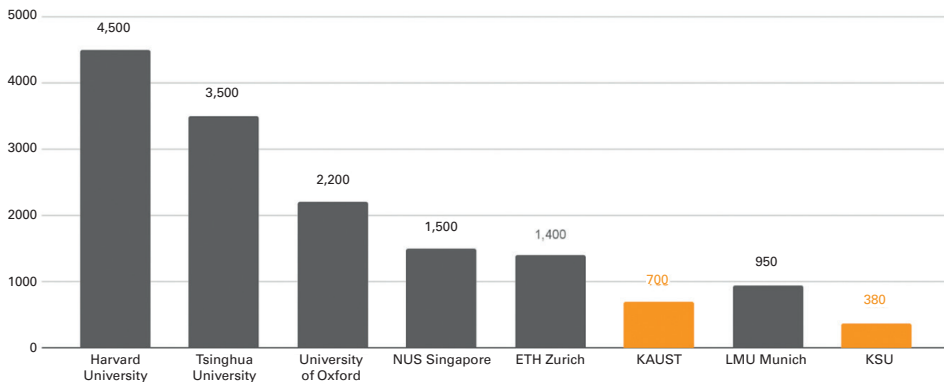


Number of HCR (Highly Cited Researcher) awards in 2025 for selected top universities. Source: Clarivate HCR 2025<sup>3</sup>.

KAUST received 20 HCR awards in 2025, which is more than one of the best German universities, LMU Munich.

In recent years, significantly more HCR Awards have been given to KAUST researchers. KSU (King Saud University) is the second strongest Arab university with five HCR Awards.

The total number of citations is an indicator of academic productivity and reputation. Once again, we see a similar picture of the high importance of KAUST, as well as the expansion of KSU.



Number of citations (rounded) over the past five years [in thousands] for selected top universities. Source: Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) Leiden Ranking / Web of Science (Clarivate).

With around 700,000 citations, KAUST ranks in a class comparable to top European universities, such as LMU Munich with around 950,000 citations and ETH Zurich with 1.4 million citations.

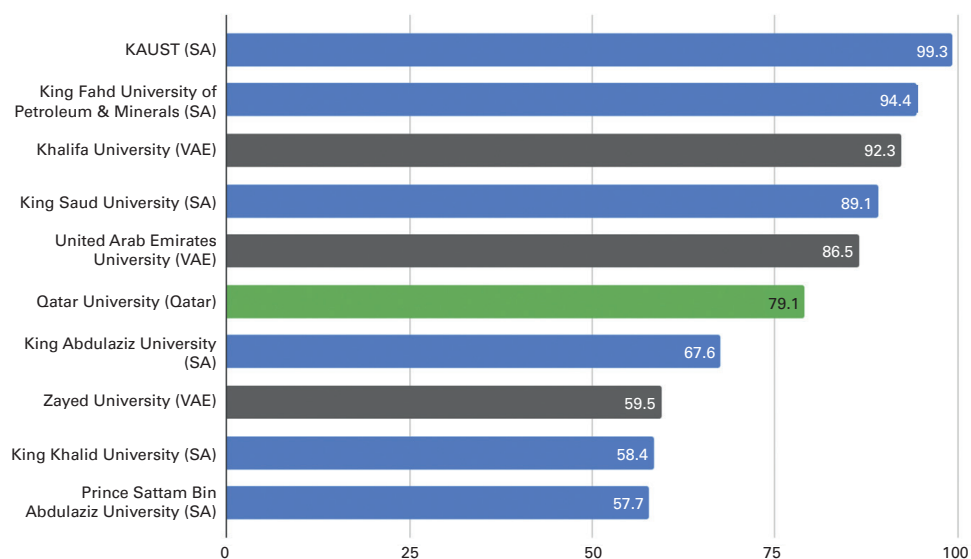
By comparison, KSU has just under half the number of citations as KAUST.

# Focus on industry

As described in the chapter “The THE Ranking,” the global ranking of top universities also takes into account the extent of industry cooperation and has been included in the ranking with a weighting of 4% since 2023/24 (up from 2.5% previously).

The assessment of industry cooperation is available for viewing and is rated on a scale of 0 (minimum) to 100 (maximum).

Accordingly, if the industry score is viewed in isolation, conclusions can be drawn as to which universities are leaders in this area. Looking at the isolated industry ranking of Gulf universities, a picture emerges of renewed leadership by Saudi and Emirati universities:



Overview of the top 10 Arab universities with their industry scores (maximum 100 points). Color legend: blue – Saudi Arabia, green – Qatar, gray – UAE. Source: THE Ranking 2026<sup>6</sup>.