

Investigating Educational Research in Libya

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Abstract

At an important time for Libyan education reform, there are relatively few publications providing the evidence-based research for informed decision-making. As countries across the Arab world seek to improve their knowledge-based economies, Libya faces increasing pressure to expand its education research in order to support schools and universities in delivering quality provision.

Existing literature shows that research output in developing and post-conflict contexts is often uneven, and in Libya, where education reform is a clear priority, there is still limited understanding of the scale and focus of research activity in this field. This study addresses that gap through a bibliometric analysis of education-related research associated with Libya, providing insight into the current evidence base and its alignment with national needs.

This paper examines the evidence-based research supporting the national education provision in Libya. Analysis of Libya-related publications over a five-year period identified 551 outputs associated with education-related keywords. However, a large proportion of these were classified within biomedical and health-related fields. When education-specific categories ('Education' and 'Education Systems') were isolated, approximately 206 publications were identified. This indicates that, although education is visible as a research theme, it is not consistently developed as a distinct field. In addition, when considered within the parameters of overall publication volume in Libya, the overall volume of education-focused research remains modest. This is particularly concerning in the Libyan context as it has clear implications for evidence-based decision-making and the long-term development of the education system.

Key Words: Libya education, academic publications, evidence-based research

1. Introduction

Education systems play a critical role in national development, given their contribution to economic growth, social cohesion, and the development of human capital. There has been increasing recognition of how educational reform is shaped by evidence-based research, which

has shown how teaching, learning and institutions can be more effective (UNESCO, 2021). In many countries, education research also forms the foundation for developing policy, designing curriculum, and professional development for teaching staff, ensuring that any reforms of the education sector are informed by evidence.

In Libya the need for evidence-based reform is particularly important, given the challenges the education system has faced, which include political instability, disruption to schooling, and constraints on institutional capacity (World Bank, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). There is a clear need to strengthen teaching quality and to develop more resilient and inclusive learning environments. To achieve such goals requires a strong and locally relevant research base to inform decision-making and guide reform efforts. Yet, there is limited understanding of the extent to which such research is being produced within Libya. Existing literature suggests that research output in developing and post-conflict contexts is often unevenly distributed across disciplines. Greater emphasis is placed on fields such as health and engineering, which are perceived to have more immediate practical impact and which are also more likely to attract international funding (Altbach and Salmi, 2011; UNESCO, 2021). This raises questions about whether education, as a field of research, is receiving sufficient attention to support national development priorities.

Furthermore, education research is not always clearly defined as a distinct field. In many cases, it is located within other disciplines, particularly in professional contexts such as healthcare, where training and education are integral to practice (Frenk et al., 2010). Consequently, it may be difficult to provide any meaningful assessment of education research without systematic analysis. This paper addresses that gap by examining the volume and distribution of education-related research associated with Libya over a recent five-year period. Using a bibliometric approach, the study analyses research outputs to determine the extent to which education is represented as a distinct field, and how it compares to other areas of research activity. In doing so, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent is education represented within Libya-related research output?
- How is education research distributed across disciplinary categories?
- To what extent is research on education embedded within other fields, particularly health-related disciplines?

By providing a systematic analysis of academic output, this paper contributes to a clearer understanding of the current evidence base supporting education in Libya.

2. Literature Review

Academic output in developing and post-conflict countries is often characterised by uneven distribution across disciplines, with a strong concentration in health, engineering, and applied sciences. This is frequently linked to funding priorities, international collaboration, and the perceived immediate impact in areas such as healthcare and infrastructure (UNESCO, 2021). Altbach and Salmi's (2011) study found structural constraints in developing countries, where restricted funding, constrained access to international publishing networks, and insufficient institutional support for research activity limit research capacity. In post-conflict contexts,

political instability, disruption to academic institutions, and the loss of skilled personnel intensify the barriers. Therefore, research systems may find certain fields receiving disproportionate attention as funding may be channelled in specific directions. Bibliometric studies used to provide insights into national research productivity and disciplinary trends have consistently demonstrated that research output is shaped not only by academic priorities but also by broader socio-economic and political factors (Donthu et al., 2021).

The Role of Education Research

Educational studies play a central role in supporting evidence-based policy and practice, particularly in curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional reform. Effective education systems rely on a strong research base to inform decision-making, improve teaching quality, and respond to changing social and economic demands (UNESCO, 2021). However, education research is often less visible than other fields due to its interdisciplinary nature. In many contexts, it is found in other domains, where training and learning are integral to practice (Frenk et al., 2010). While this integration can strengthen applied learning, it may also obscure the development of education as a distinct field of inquiry, particularly in systems where research capacity is limited. Furthermore, the development of research on education is closely linked to the professional roles of teachers and the capacity of the institution. Without sustained investment in research related to pedagogy, assessment, and educational leadership, it is difficult to support long-term improvements in educational quality.

Education and Research in Libya

The Libyan education system has experienced significant challenges over the past decade, including political instability, economic constraints, and institutional disruption. Reports from international organisations tend to highlight issues including declining educational quality, limited teacher training opportunities, and the need for curriculum reform (World Bank, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). At the same time, the capacity of Libyan higher education institutions to produce research has been affected by relatively low funding for research activities, reduced access to international academic networks and challenges in maintaining institutional stability. While some research related to Libya is produced through international collaboration, there are concerns regarding the extent to which locally generated research is sufficient to support national policy and reform efforts. In other words, research conducted outside Libya may not fully reflect the local educational context.

Existing literature on Libyan educational studies is limited, and the main focus is on specific disciplines, namely in the health and medical sciences. There is relatively little systematic analysis of education research as a distinct area of study, and even less attention to how it compares with other fields within the national academic output.

Research Gap

Although global and regional studies have highlighted the importance of research on education for development, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on the scale and distribution of education-related research in Libya. As discussed, there is limited understanding of how education research compares to other fields in terms of output. We are not even sure whether

current research activity aligns with national education priorities. This gap is significant given the central role of education in post-conflict reconstruction and long-term development, which is the Libyan context. Without a clear understanding of the existing research base, it is difficult to assess whether education systems are supported by sufficient evidence to guide reform as we do not know the extent of relevant education research. In practice, this limits how far evidence can inform reform.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts a quantitative bibliometric research design to analyse the volume and distribution of academic publications associated with Libya over a five-year period (2022–2026). Bibliometric analysis is widely used to evaluate research productivity, identify disciplinary trends, and assess the relative contribution of specific fields within a national or institutional context (Donthu et al., 2021). The primary aim is to compare the proportion of education-related research with overall publication volume and with other major subject areas.

The study utilises Dimensions as the primary data source, which was selected due to access limitations. While this may affect absolute counts, it does not significantly impact proportional comparisons across subject areas. A structured search query was developed to capture publications associated with a Libyan university. The following filter was initially used:

Research Country: Libya; Publication years: 2022 – 2026.

This approach meant that all publications linked to Libyan institutions were included and is consistent with established bibliometric methodologies for analysing national research output (Falagas et al., 2008). The time frame (2022–2026) was selected to provide a contemporary overview of research activity over the past five years as it is recognised that more Libyan academics have now had experience through overseas scholarship programmes to understand the requirements for publishing their research.

A further keyword of education was then used to identify publications related to educational research, including teaching practices, curriculum development, and learning processes. All studies were focused on Libya and conducted entirely by researchers based in Libya, thereby ensuring accurate attribution of national research output.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in three stages. Firstly, a descriptive analysis gave the total number of publications per year and overall academic output across the study period. Secondly, publications were categorised according to subject classifications (e.g. Medicine, Engineering, Social Sciences). This enabled identification of dominant research fields and comparison across disciplines. Finally, education-related publications were analysed as a percentage of total research output and a proportion of Social Sciences output. This allowed for a comparison of the extent of research on education within the broader academic output.

Although using a single, well-established database such as Dimensions can provide data consistency and reliability, there may also be some limitations, including database coverage bias and indexing inconsistencies (Mongeon and Paul-Hus, 2016). Libyan researchers currently

working or studying abroad may not be included as they are not currently affiliated with their university. Locally published Libyan journals are not all indexed in Dimensions and this may potentially under-represent the amount of education research. Despite these limitations, the approach taken still provides a robust and widely accepted method for analysing national research output.

4. Results

Analysis of publications over the past five years identified a total of 551 research papers associated with Libya and education-related search terms. These publications were distributed across multiple disciplinary categories within Dimensions, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of research connected to education. The largest proportions of publications were classified within health-related fields, as noted in Table 1. In contrast, publications explicitly classified within education-focused categories were Education and Education Systems. When combined, these categories represent approximately 206 publications, accounting for around 37% of the Libya-related education dataset.

Table 1- Research publications related to Education

Biomedical and Clinical Sciences	183
Health Science	139
Education	136
Health Services and Systems	82
Education Systems	70

The findings show that education-related research associated with Libya is not concentrated solely within traditional education disciplines but is instead distributed across a range of subject areas, with a notable dominance of health-related fields.

While 206 publications were identified under “Education” and “Education Systems,” a substantial proportion of the remaining publications, particularly those within biomedical and health sciences, also relate to educational practices, such as medical and clinical training, professional development in healthcare and curriculum development within health disciplines. A significant share of education-related research may be embedded within applied professional fields, rather than situated within general education, pedagogy, or school-based research.

When considered alongside the broader dataset of research output, education-focused research represents a small share of overall academic activity. Although education is present within Libya-related research, it remains relatively low when compared to dominant fields such as biomedical sciences, engineering and political science. This imbalance highlights a concentration of research activity in applied and technical disciplines.

Over the period of 5 years, however, it can be seen that more research is being carried out on education-focused activity (Table 2). In 2022 there were 72 publications but by 2025 there were 198 publications. In the first three months of 2026 there were 64 publications, so all this represents an upward trend in Libyans publishing papers related to education.

Table 2 Education publications over 5 years

Year	Number of papers
2022	72
2023	93
2024	123
2025	198
2026 (1 st 3 months)	64

Over the same period of time, the Libyan output can be put in context with education publications in general where there was more focused on education as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 Comparison of Libyan and all publications in education

Topic	All papers	Libyan papers
Education	1,054,264	188
Curriculum and pedagogy	642,988	107
Education Systems	410,640	79
Specialist Studies in Education	164,565	22
Education Policy, Sociology and Philosophy	154,488	34

5. Discussion

The findings reveal a clear disciplinary imbalance in Libya-related academic output, with educational studies significantly overshadowed by biomedical and health-related fields. It highlights the possibility of specific factors driving research production in Libya. The dominance of health-related research is often attributed to its immediate societal relevance and stronger access to international funding streams (UNESCO, 2021). However, it may also reflect greater integration of Libyan researchers into international medical research networks, stronger publication pathways in health sciences and external funding priorities that shape national research agendas. Education research, particularly related to pedagogy and school systems, may lack equivalent funding, institutional support, or international visibility. The imbalance may be not just a reflection of national priorities, but also of global factors that benefit certain disciplines over others.

A key finding of this study is that much of the education-related research is located mainly within professional training contexts, rather than existing as a distinct field. While interdisciplinary research can be valuable, this lack of visibility raises concerns about the marginalisation of general education research. As there is a limited amount of research focused on classroom practice, teacher professional development, curriculum design and school leadership, the core aspects of the education system may be under-researched and under-theorised. This has important implications because, without a strong body of research in these areas, educational reform risks being policy-driven rather than evidence-driven. It is then reliant on imported models that may not reflect local needs and is consequently constrained in its ability to respond to systemic challenges. Thus, the issue is not only the quantity of education research, but also its scope and focus. This gap matters. It directly affects how reform is designed and implemented in practice.

A further issue is the apparent misalignment between research activity and national education priorities. The national education provision in Libya faces well-documented challenges, including declining quality of teaching and learning and limited teacher training and professional development (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010). Curriculum reform and modernisation are needed, yet the relatively small proportion of research focused on these areas suggests that the evidence base required to support reform remains underdeveloped. This misalignment questions the extent to which research is informing policy in Libya and whether research priorities are being driven by national needs, or rather by external funding and collaboration opportunities. There is a need for research on education to be strengthened to support system-level improvement and for a more strategic alignment between research production and policy development, particularly in the education sector.

As some Libya-related education research is produced outside Libyan institutions, it suggests a degree of external research dependency. While international collaboration can enhance research quality and visibility, it may also create imbalances in knowledge production. Reliance on externally produced research may result in limited local ownership of educational knowledge and reduced capacity for context-specific analysis. There is also the potential for misalignment between research findings and local implementation. This reflects broader concerns in the literature concerning knowledge dependency in developing contexts, where research agendas are often influenced by external factors (Altbach and Salmi, 2011). Strengthening domestic research capacity is therefore essential, not only to increase output, but to ensure that research is locally relevant, contextually grounded and aligned with Libyan national priorities.

The data indicates a clear increase in education-related publications over the five-year period studied in this paper. While this upward trend is encouraging, it requires cautious interpretation as the growth in publication numbers may reflect increased access to publishing platforms and a general expansion of international collaboration. However, it does not necessarily indicate improved research quality and there is no clear evidence that it is having a stronger impact on educational practice or whether there is an increased focus on core education issues. There is therefore a risk of equating quantity with progress, without considering the nature and impact of the research being produced. Future research should examine not only the number of papers published but also the quality of the research and its influence on policy.

The relatively low volume of research in general education suggests that the field remains weakly established and there is insufficient focus on general pedagogy, school education, teacher development and educational systems research. **Most research activity is concentrated elsewhere.** It is particularly significant in the Libyan context, where education systems have faced prolonged disruption due to political instability and conflict (World Bank, 2020). It does, however, align with trends observed in developing and post-conflict contexts, where research funding and capacity are frequently directed toward health and technical fields due to immediate societal needs.

It is acknowledged that subject classifications within Dimensions are not mutually exclusive, and some overlap between categories is likely. The combined figure for education-related

publications should be interpreted as an approximate measure rather than an exact count. Additionally, the reliance on keyword-based searches may have excluded relevant studies that do not explicitly reference education-related terms, while some included publications may only partially address educational themes. These findings should be regarded as indicative rather than definitive and future research should endeavour to complement bibliometric analysis with qualitative approaches.

The findings do, however, suggest that strengthening education research in Libya requires a systemic approach, including investment in research capacity within universities and support for teacher-led and practitioner research. Development of national research priorities should be aligned with education reform and educational studies need to be integrated into policy processes. Without such measures, there is a risk that education reform will continue to be implemented without a sufficiently robust evidence base.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the extent and nature of education-related research associated with Libya, with particular attention to its position within the broader national research landscape. Using a bibliometric approach, the findings provide a clear and, in some respects, concerning picture of the current evidence base supporting education in Libya.

While education-related research is present and shows signs of growth over the past five years, it remains limited in both scale and scope. A significant proportion of this research is concentrated within health and biomedical disciplines, indicating that education is frequently approached as a subsidiary component of professional training rather than as a distinct field of inquiry. Core areas of education research, such as pedagogy, teacher development, curriculum design, and system-level reform, appear comparatively underrepresented. This imbalance reflects broader structural patterns in research production, where funding priorities, international collaboration networks, and publication opportunities tend to favour applied and technical fields. However, in the Libyan context, this raises critical concerns regarding the alignment between research activity and national education needs. At a time when the education system faces significant challenges and requires sustained reform, the limited volume of dedicated education research suggests that policy and practice may not be sufficiently supported by a robust, locally grounded evidence base.

The findings also point to issues of research capacity and knowledge production, with indications that a proportion of Libya-related research is generated outside domestic institutions. While international collaboration offers clear benefits, an over-reliance on external research risks limiting the development of contextually relevant knowledge and reducing local ownership of educational reform processes. Although the study finds publication numbers are increasing year-on-year, such increases in academic output do not necessarily correspond to improvements in research quality, relevance, or impact. Future work should therefore move beyond quantitative measures to examine the influence of research on educational policy, practice, and outcomes.

Overall, this study contributes to the limited body of literature examining research production in Libya by providing a systematic analysis of education-related output. It identifies a clear need for a more balanced and strategically developed research agenda, one that places greater emphasis on education as a critical driver of national development. To support this, greater investment in education research is needed, along with strengthened research capacity within Libyan institutions, closer alignment between research priorities and policy needs and greater support for locally grounded and practitioner-led research. Without such developments, there is a risk that education reform efforts will continue to operate in the absence of a sufficiently robust evidence base. Strengthening education research is therefore not only an academic concern, but a strategic priority for Libya's long-term social and economic development.

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