



مركز المنصة للتنمية المستدامة
PLATFORM CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Highlights of the National Education and Teaching Strategy in Iraq 2022-2031

Roundtable





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About the center:

Platform for Sustainable Development is a center registered at NGO Department under the registration number(1S2106012) It is platform for knowledge exchange and dialogue that seeks to nurture positive change.

Vision

We seek to establish a platform for dialogue and policies to contribute to achieving sustainable development goals in Iraq.

Mission

Bridging the gap between the state and society in a way that ensures the realization of the essence of democracy represented by the participation of citizens in the decision-making processes, through training, monitoring, analyzing, researching, raising awareness, and conducting advocacy campaigns.

Strategic Goals

- Preparing Youth to fulfill their societal obligations by analyzing root causes of problems, proposing feasible and desirable policy alternatives and advocating for their implementation.

- Presenting statistics and issues that occupy the political and societal scene to reflect a deeper understanding of Iraq's realities

- Encouraging youth to work towards achieving sustainable development goals

- Establishing a network of active, informed, and committed citizens towards Iraq's state-building project

Introduction

A discussion session titled "Highlights of the National Education and Teaching Strategy in Iraq 2022-2031" was held in the government building of Al-Zakura Palace. This session was organized in collaboration between the Policy and Public Relations Department of the Office of the Prime Minister and the Platform Center for Sustainable Development (PSDIraq).

Mr. Abdulmataleb Ali Yousef, Advisor to the Prime Minister for Administration and Public Policy Affairs, opened the session by welcoming the attendees and highlighting the importance of the discussion. He also emphasized the significance of the National Education and Teaching Strategy (2022-2031), which was approved by the Council of Ministers. The strategy was developed in collaboration with various local and international institutions. Mr. Yousef underscored the importance of cooperation with governmental and non-governmental think tanks, citing the ongoing collaboration with the Sustainable Development Platform Center in organizing these dialogue sessions.

The session was attended by Dr. Hamed Khalaf, Executive Director of the Higher Committee for Education Development in Iraq, Mr. Adnan Al-Sirraj, Advisor to the Prime Minister for Education, and Dr. Mazahim Al-Khayyat, chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee for Higher Education and Scientific Research, in addition to several officials from executive institutions responsible for the subject matter. The discussion covered the following three main topics:

1. Mechanisms for implementing the strategy and the role of governmental sectors in achieving its goals.
2. The role of the strategy in realizing the objectives of education and teaching outlined in the government curriculum.
3. The scholarship program and its implications for the development of education and teaching in Iraq.



■ Dr. Hamed Khalaf – Executive Director of the Higher Committee for Education Development in Iraq

A previous strategy was developed for the years (2012-2022), which was Iraq's first national education and Teaching Strategy encompassing both the central and regional levels. This strategy provided valuable experience and lessons that were applied in preparing the new strategy. It aims to be realistic, taking into account the current Iraqi situation, away from overly ambitious goals. The state is considering political and security stability, and once this stability is achieved, the strategies will be implemented.

Proper planning for the required resources is essential, and reliance on weak budgets should be avoided. Universities should have funds that enable them to implement their programs, as outlined in the strategy. Additionally, there is a need for operational resources. Currently, some programs are implemented using the budgets of the Ministries of Education. The strategy should also include planning scenarios that align with various circumstances and emergencies, as seen in 2014 and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the strategy should consider all surrounding conditions.

The existence of an executive team to monitor the implementation of the strategy in collaboration with international organizations, including representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education, Education, Planning, and other ministries, is crucial. Additionally, the parliament is actively seeking to make amendments to legislation that will contribute to the development of education in Iraq.

The vision of the strategy aligns with what is outlined in the government program (an educational system committed to values, sustainable and innovative learning opportunities, high quality, and the promotion of a knowledge-based society, in accordance with international standards). The mission includes enhancing educational institutions, community partnerships, and building systems to promote scientific and creative thinking, as well as ensuring the quality of education outcomes that align with the job market to create a knowledge-based economy, moving away from reliance on depleted natural resources. Some countries have advanced knowledge-based economies, such as Japan, which appointed a minister for knowledge economy, a crucial sector in advanced economies. Moreover, some countries invest their funds in line with rapid scientific and technological advancements. For example, the United Arab Emirates has a minister of artificial intelligence.

Several references were considered when preparing the strategy, including the National Development Plan (2013-2022), Iraq's Vision for Sustainable Development (2030), and Iraq's international commitments in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, which Iraq has committed to during the tenure of this government and previous ones.

The strategy emphasizes equal access to quality and comprehensive education, equipping young people with the necessary skills for a knowledge-based society, as well as making economic and social contributions. The strategy consists of seven chapters:

1. Assessing achievements and overcoming challenges faced by the previous strategy (2012-2022).
2. The general context of the strategy.
3. An analysis of the current state of education in Iraq.
4. Vision, mission, and strategic directions.
5. Policy priorities, strategic objectives, and priority programs within the government program.
6. The cost and financing of the strategy.
7. Frameworks for coordinating the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the National Education and Teaching Strategy in Iraq (2022-2031).

The strategy addresses three fundamental issues: basic education, technical and vocational education, and higher education. It is expected that within ten years of implementing the strategy, with consultation from the World Bank, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will increase through investment in this knowledge sector, which forms the foundation of society and the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.

We have set ambitious goals. In the strategy, we have focused on early childhood education. For example, in Tunisia, the enrollment rate in preschools is 95%, while in Italy, it is 90%. In contrast, the enrollment rate in preschools in Iraq is only 9%. Therefore, we have set an ambitious goal in this strategy to increase the enrollment rate to 30%. Hence, there is a need to invest in developing the capacities of these children. We also aspire to see an increase in enrollment in vocational schools, from 1% to 14%.

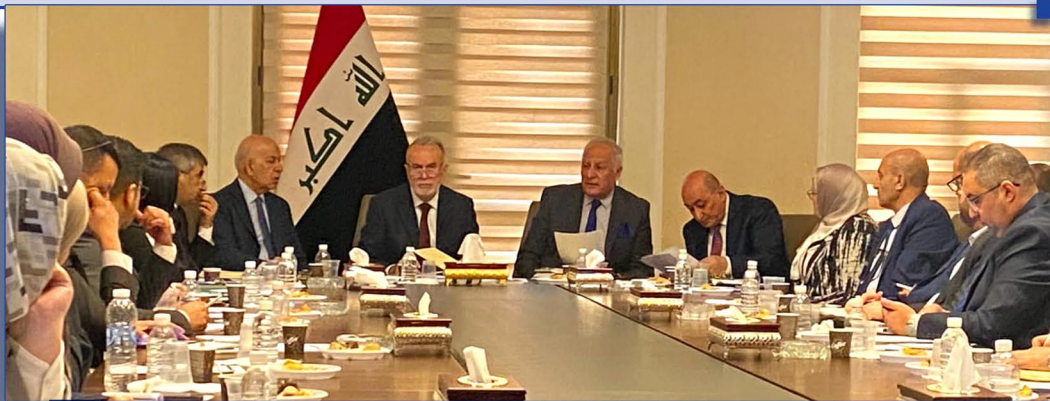


■ Dr. Mazahem Al-Khayat - Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee for Higher Education and Scientific Research:

I propose launching research fellowships for Ph.D. holders exclusively for a period of three months or more in reputable international universities. In the Committee for Higher Education, we have established high professional standards for selecting university presidents and are working on getting these standards approved by the parliament. Furthermore, we suggest increasing the number of Ph.D. seats, not just master's degrees, and this should apply to rare specializations because opportunities for Ph.D. studies in Iraq are limited. This would be subject to the availability of funding for these studies and subsequent employment opportunities.

A significant point that should be noted is the fourth paragraph of the government curriculum that mentions amending the Private Education Law to maintain scientific integrity and develop the scientific level, as well as establishing a Private Education Council to supervise private education in coordination with the Ministry of Higher Education. We are in communication with the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research regarding this matter. It is essential to establish a legislative environment conducive to the implementation of the strategy, especially since the government submits few legislative projects that do not cover the legislative environment. Therefore, we have worked on proposing amendments through the committee and are working on amending five laws: the Ministry Law, University Service Law, Equivalency of Degrees Foundations Law, Consultancy Offices Law, and Private Education Law.

Infrastructure for newly established government universities, especially scientific laboratories and other important infrastructure, should be completed to meet the requirements. I propose launching a private sector council in higher education to work with universities in building the laboratories and infrastructure needed by universities. These proposals and tasks constitute a roadmap for the development of Iraqi education, once they are translated into executive measures, with an emphasis on ensuring quality.



■ Adnan Al-Siraj - Advisor to the Prime Minister for Education and Higher Education:

It is crucial to understand the role of the Prime Minister's advisor in coordinating and evaluating the roles and intersections between national strategies and public policies of the ministries outlined in the government program. We have presented an operational policy-level plan in the field of education, including the topic of curriculum update. Additionally, I have noticed discrepancies between some of the figures in the strategy and the data from the Ministry of Planning, suggesting a need for periodic evaluations of the National Education and Teaching Strategy in Iraq (2022-2031), even if they are short-term assessments, such as every nine months, to address any deviations that may occur.



■ Mr. Yassin Al-Aithawi - Member of the Parliamentary Committee for Higher Education and Scientific Research:

Shining a light on the National Education and Teaching Strategy is essential and a top priority. The positive step is linking education with higher education to produce individuals with the capabilities and skills needed to contribute to both the government and private sectors. The same applies to education, as we must pay close attention to the outputs of the Ministry of Education, as they serve as inputs for the Ministry of Higher Education. Focusing on higher education is essential as it is connected to all other sectors. Therefore, we are very interested in the success of this strategy, and we are pleased to be a part of it regardless of titles and positions we hold. However, it is crucial to have a legislative environment that supports the implementation of the strategy, especially since legislative projects from the government are scarce and do not cover the legislative environment. Consequently, we have worked on proposing amendments through the committee, aiming to amend five laws: the Ministry Law, University Service Law, Equivalency of Degrees Foundations Law, Consultancy Offices Law, and Private Education Law.

The issue of scientific research in Iraq is restricted or stalled, lacking impact or effectiveness on state institutions. Therefore, the second part of the ministry's name, "Scientific Research," is not activated. Private education will be the real partner of public education, especially given the limited capacity of public universities.

Approximately 480,000 students are redirected to universities annually, with more than half of them being accommodated by private universities. Therefore, it is necessary to support the university environment. There are specific challenges facing the strategy, with one of the most critical being university leadership, where some leaders are affiliated with political entities, which tends to sideline academic and professional figures within universities. I propose developing a plan to qualify postgraduate degree holders, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as their scientific potential differs from their peers from other graduating years. Regarding the outputs of the Faculty of Basic Education and the College of Education, graduates become teachers in the Ministry of Education. We aim to increase admission rates in these colleges and then enhance their curricula. Subsequently, faculty members in these universities should be qualified before they work in the Ministry of Education, which is part of the goals of this strategy. As for scholarships for degree holders, there are rare and specialized fields that need attention. Therefore, we should focus on both admission and placement.

■ Hashem Al-Rikabi - President of the Platform for Sustainable Development Center:

We appreciate the Policy and Public Relations Department's openness to civil society, which signifies a new approach in the government's direction by engaging with stakeholders, which is at the core of democracy. I also extend my thanks to the High Committee for Education Development in Iraq. As a graduate of the educational initiative, I believe it is the only successful initiative in Iraq. When I studied in the United States, my fellow students came from various provinces based on their qualifications and meeting the criteria and requirements.

Allow me to share some observations about the strategy. Strategies often attempt to address entire sectors, and policies are supposed to be followed to address the specifics related to these sectors. It's challenging to address the challenges of an entire sector within a limited time frame because there are accumulated issues, necessitating a focus on some aspects while neglecting others. For example, infrastructure was mentioned, which is crucial but requires time, funding, and can lead to missed opportunities. From my perspective, focusing on human resources is more important. Having a grand building with a weak content and staff limits opportunities for continuous improvement.

When analyzing the strategy, I identify three types of shortcomings. The first relates to procedures. While opening scholarships is vital, some of its conditions will restrict it to previous scholarship recipients since it requires language proficiency, which many qualified individuals within Iraq lack. The announcement period for scholarships was also very short, leading many of my colleagues to miss the opportunity. Extending the announcement period and involving stakeholders to ensure maximum reach was crucial.

The second shortcoming is in employment. The Ministry of Education has ambitious goals, such as accreditation and enhancing research capabilities, but there's a flaw in employment. For example, in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, there are scholarship recipients who are well-versed in accreditation and scientific research like in Western countries. It would have been ideal to form a committee or council from these scholarship students to work on meaningful and specific files that align with their expertise in accreditation and scientific research, transferring this knowledge to their universities and allowing them to work partially instead of bureaucratic routines, which are often unproductive.

The third shortcoming is in approach. All successful Western experiences have created competition. Competition cannot be created solely within the public sector, but mainly by engaging the private sector. Another flaw in the approach is considering higher education as a luxury rather than a necessity. Hence, allocating funds for other sectors in the budget should not overshadow education allocations.

I believe education's advantage is its ability to change individuals, and Iraqis naturally aspire to change and seize opportunities. Therefore, any change in education will be well-received, unlike structural changes, which often face bureaucratic resistance.



■ **Yaser Muttalq - President of Fawasil Foundation for Research and Studies in international experiences**

challenges act as motivators for responses. I will discuss Singapore's experience, where they realized they had the ability to develop any product but lacked the ability to innovate.

When analyzing the reasons, they found that the problem was in their curricula, which lacked philosophical substance. Hence, I believe that the education system in Iraq, both at the elementary and university levels, is underdeveloped. Universities still do not adequately develop the graduating workforce except for a few exceptions. There are over a thousand organizations that should collaborate with universities to implement programs in response to the challenges faced by the required changes.

Dr. Maha Abdul-Karim Hamoud - Director General of the Human Development Department at the Ministry of Planning:

The Ministry of Planning had a significant role in collaboration with the Ministries of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Education. There was mention of the replacement and exemption of leadership positions in ministries, and there should be stability for the work to continue. The relevant departments in the Ministry of Educational Planning should be serious about implementing and monitoring the strategy. However, there wasn't adequate coordination between the Educational Planning Department and the working team in preparing and implementing the strategy.

Regarding legislative alignment for strategy implementation, it's essential to coordinate with the Ministry of Planning regarding amending the Private Education Law and the University Service Law. We requested to be part of this effort, but there was no coordination with the Ministry of Planning, despite our involvement in matters related to establishing private colleges, collaborative programs with universities, and postgraduate studies.

As for consultancy offices in universities, it's important to involve experts from the industry and employers to create a comprehensive link.

The Bologna Process has been expanded to include academic education, not just vocational education. We participated in identifying the required specializations in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

The participants in the discussion highlighted various challenges and issues related to education and development in Iraq. Here are some of the key points raised by each participant





■ Dr. Alaa Abdul Khaleq Hussein - Director of the Iraqi Cultural and Development Foundation

Diagnosing problems is half the solution, but the focus should be on the solutions. We initiated efforts years ago, especially in training employees in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. The issue of infrastructure is always mentioned, while the superstructure is equally important, such as buildings, labs, providing halls, etc. Everything discussed can be applied in all countries except Iraq due to a major problem, the human resources scarcity. There are three criteria for selecting leadership positions in universities, seniority, election, and nomination based on competence and experience. The Ministry of Higher Education relies on the first criterion (years of service) which does not allow distinguished and productive professors the opportunity.

■ Riyadh Karim Al-Omari - Director General of the Curriculum Department at the Ministry of Education:

I'll start with what the previous speaker mentioned about the financial allocations for education in Iraq. In 2017, I was part of a government delegation to Malaysia, and we reviewed the budget allocations with the delegation. Education and Higher Education were at the top with a 20% allocation, while the Ministry of Education's allocation was only 1.8%. When it came to implementing the government program, education had zero allocations, and now we have 280,000 teachers and educators in need of training and development through training programs, but there are no allocations in the budget for training.

Political interference should be kept away from educational institutions, as it represents a significant part of the problem and poses obstacles and challenges to the implementation of strategies.





■ **Dr. Muhammad Wannan Al-Ghazi - Academic at the People's University**

I wonder if this strategy has considered the subject of learning, not just teaching. I suggest that the Ministry of Education establish a school for the children of ministries and institutions using the buildings owned by these ministries, providing only the teaching staff. The term "private" is not suitable for education and should be changed to "independent".

■ **Dr. Ehsan Omar Al-Hadithi - Education Policy Expert**

Reforming higher education in Iraq needs to address some challenges. The first challenge is the lack of alignment between national indicators and international ones. The second challenge is the traditional educational philosophy and the lag in production. The third challenge is funding. The fourth challenge is the scarcity of competent human resources which governs and determines the effectiveness of the education system.

■ **Dr. Falah Thwani - Professor and Head of the Department of Economic Studies at Beit Al-Hikma**

I would like to thank the Sustainable Development Platform and the Policy Department for organizing these activities and dialogues, especially as we are at the heart of the government and discussing such vital topics. I'd like to say that having a vision without action is a dream, and having action without a vision is a waste of time. Our problem lies in the execution of strategies, and with a simple glance at the strategy and the budget, in the 2023 budget allocated to education (15 trillion IQD, both investment and operational) out of a total expenditure of 199 trillion IQD, which is about 7.5% of the total expenditure. Within this budget, there are over a million beneficiaries, and most of these funds are allocated for operational expenses.



When it comes to policy implementation, we find that a set of implementation methods has been put in place, and allocation disrupts implementation. One of the reasons for the failure of the previous strategy is the lack of allocations. Most strategies without comprehensive financial allocations have a higher rate of failure. Therefore, we call on the Ministries of Higher Education and Education to coordinate with the Ministry of Finance to obtain the necessary allocations for implementation that align with the ambitious plans and strategies intended to be implemented.

■ Mahdi Bahr Al-Ulum - Al-Alamein Institute for Higher Studies

I wonder about the flexibility in this strategy to respond to emerging challenges during the extended period until 2031. In the 2023 budget allocated to education (15 trillion IQD, investment and operational) out of a total expenditure of 199 trillion IQD, which is about 7.5% of the total expenditure. When it comes to policy implementation, it is found that a set of implementation methods has been put in place, and allocation disrupts implementation. One of the reasons for the failure of the previous strategy is the lack of allocations. Most strategies without comprehensive financial allocations have a higher rate of failure. Therefore, we call on the Ministries of Higher Education and Education to coordinate with the Ministry of Finance to obtain the necessary allocations for implementation that align with the ambitious plans and strategies intended to be implemented.

■ Ghada Mohammed Hameed - The World Bank

representing the World Bank, expressed their readiness to provide technical and financial support for the implementation of the strategy. She mentioned receiving an official request from the Ministry of Planning for support, and she noted the enthusiasm of the government for strategy implementation. The World Bank is willing to offer technological expertise and cultural exchange opportunities with countries in the Middle East and North Africa. They are particularly interested in supporting short-term plans within the ministries to ensure strategy implementation.

■ Hajar Hussein Abbas - Founder of "Our Youth Are Initiators"

representing a youth volunteer group, mentioned that they observed complex problems that require years to address. They decided to establish an educational institution focusing on life skills and technology. She suggested the creation of a national learning institute to support educational development, similar to the Judicial Institute. This institute would help in retraining the educational sector and provide detailed proposals for its establishment.

■ **Dr. Ahmed Sabih - Dean of the College of Administration and Economics / Mustansiriya University**

Dr. Ahmed Sabih expressed his gratitude to the Platform Center for Sustainable Development and the Department of Policy and Public Relations for addressing such important topics that affect key sectors in the country. He emphasized the need to improve the perception of educators and teachers and highlighted the potential of Iraqi educators, mentioning that they possess capabilities on par with those in neighboring countries. He supported the idea presented by Dr. Mazahim Al-Khayyat regarding the establishment of a Private Education Council to identify weaknesses in the sector and make it an equal partner with the public sector. Dr. Ahmed Sabih also stressed the importance of ensuring that standards and criteria are symmetrical between the two sectors to create healthy competition.



■ **Dr. Abdul Jalil Manshid - Dean of the College of Imam Al-Kadhum Islamic University**

Dr. Abdul Jalil Manshid began by emphasizing the importance of aligning educational goals with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He pointed out that Malaysia is an example of a country that prioritizes education, allocating 20% of its budget to the sector. Malaysia's education system focuses on ethics, values, and spreading love, in addition to academic subjects. Dr. Abdul Jalil Manshid suggested that Iraq should establish an educational system that supports life skills and technology. He also advocated for the creation of support schools that focus on skills.

He questioned why Iraqi students are primarily sent for scholarships to Western universities when there are advanced educational fields in neighboring countries, such as vocational education in the UAE. He proposed a shift in scholarship destinations to include these countries.

■ **Dr. Mohammed Abdul Hassan Naser - Center for Educational Research and Studies**

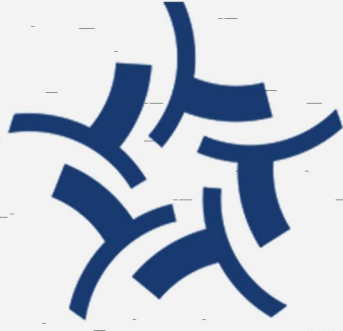
Dr. Mohammed Abdul Hassan Naser emphasized that the Ministry of Education has around 7,000 employees with higher degrees. Every year, hundreds of research papers are submitted on the problems facing the ministry. These researchers provide valuable insights into the challenges and issues within the education sector.

■ **Mariam Halou Hussein Al-Awadi - Ministry of Education Employee and Graduate Student**

Mariam Halou Hussein Al-Awadi emphasized the need to focus on human resource development within the Ministry of Education. She proposed the establishment of a National Learning Institute to retrain the educational sector and submitted a detailed proposal for consideration.

■ **Recommendations for the session:**

1. Expedite the establishment of an Education Quality Council responsible for formulating policies and procedures for obtaining local and international academic and institutional accreditation for universities. This council should also focus on enhancing scientific rigor and promoting continuous improvement and development.
2. Form a Private Education Sector Council within higher education to shape education policies in the private sector and encourage collaboration among universities to build various labs and infrastructure.
3. Open up scholarship programs to a wider range of target groups beyond the current ones. Improve the dissemination and duration of program announcements to allow more applicants to participate.
4. Task scholarship recipients with broader responsibilities, such as participation in committees within the Ministry of Education or university teams. This would enable them to leverage their experiences acquired from foreign universities for research, consultancy, and infrastructure development, aligning with global requirements.
5. Create opportunities for experts and private sector employers to join advisory boards within universities to form a comprehensive pool of expertise and a holistic vision.
6. Allocate the necessary resources to the education sector, making it a top priority to meet its development and improvement needs.
7. Support the establishment of non-profit educational institutions that focus on supplementary skills within the education process.



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