



## Higher Education in Iraq: Problems of Central Administration, Privatization, and the Need for Development

Al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue RCD held its seminar entitled "Higher Education in Iraq: Problems of Central Administration, Privatization, and the Need for Development" on Friday, February 26, 2021 on the electronic platform (ZOOM), in which an important group of academics and professors in Iraqi public and private universities lectured at. It was managed by the Director of the Research and Development Department, Prof. Ahmed Al Mamouri. The seminar opened with a speech by the President of Al-Rafidain Center for Dialogue, Prof. Hassan Latif Al-Zubaidi, who expressed his pleasure to hold this important discussion seminar with the participation of a group of figures of higher education in Iraq. After extending his thanks and gratitude to this group of professors, the President of the Center touched upon the importance of delving into this topic (the topic of the seminar), in order to shed light on its aspects, diagnose problems, develop solutions and reform visions. He also explained the crisis experienced by education in the world due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and the sudden interruption that affected this sector in the professional and technical field. Iraq is not immune from all of this, as it is also buffeted by complex crises at the health, economic, and political levels, in addition to the population increase that is offset by a lack of resources and investment. All of this was reflected, in one way or another, on the educational system in Iraq; as many problems have surfaced that await immediate, medium, and long-term solutions to fix what can be fixed in this important and vital sector.





Below are the themes that formed the panel discussion and the most prominent conclusions and recommendations it reached:

- **The Crisis of Higher Education in Iraq / Prof. Dr. Mohsen Abdul-Hussein Al-Zalmi / Former President of the University of Kufa.**
- **Features and Prospects of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Iraq / Experienced Professor Dr. Abdul Amir Kazem Zahid / Director of Law Department / Imam Al-Sadiq College.**
- **Stages of reforming Higher Education in Iraq / Prof. Dr. Kamel Allawi Kazem / academic and economic expert.**
- **The Experience of Private University Education: Problems and Paths / Assistant Professor Dr. Ammar Abbas Al-Husseini / Teaching at Al-Mustaqbal University College.**
- **Attracting foreign universities: Possibilities of a solution from abroad / Associate Professor Dr. Aqil Abbas Noman / Professor of Political Science / American University – Sulaymaniyah.**





## Conclusions:

1. The importance of Higher Education comes from its necessity for economic development, and human development (building human capacities to develop the educational process in preparation for comprehensive reform); because human resources are responsible for social and economic planning in order to achieve sustainable development. Higher Education is also considered one of the pillars of comprehensive national security and a basis for revival and development.
2. It may seem to many that the crises of higher education in Iraq have multiplied because of the sabotage of its institutions, and the killing and displacement that befell Iraqi academics, especially after the fall of the previous regime in 2003. However, the crises of this type of education go back to forty years ago when the latter was a tool in the hands of that regime as a result of its policies, and the international isolation in which it was. Moreover, the crises of higher education come in the context of the general crises that have befallen, and are befalling, in this country at various levels.
3. The regressing of higher education in Iraq is due in part to the increased demand for it because of several reasons. Perhaps the most prominent reasons are the increase in the population, the increase in the number of secondary school outputs, and the reluctance of students to study abroad for reasons related to costs, especially in developed countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and others.





4. The prevailing culture in society played a major role in increasing the demand for university education. This is reflected in the prevailing belief that a university degree is the only guarantee for obtaining a job at its various levels, as well as legislation that has established, in one way or another, this culture or belief. This made people embark on human studies or those in which the appointment is central, neglecting scientific, technical, and professional disciplines, and then we have outputs that do not match the labor market and the needs of society or employers.
5. Acquiring the certificate has become for the sake of financial gain or doubling it, or to obtain a good job position, and not to develop scientific and professional capabilities, especially since some legislations help in this. An example of that is the legislation and application of Law No. 20 of 2020, which was known as the “Law on Foundations of Equivalence of Arab and Foreign Certificates and Degrees”. In addition to that, there is the standard that has become applicable in the demand for specializations, which is the standard of the rate, and not the standard of desire to practice the specialty. (For example, we find a student with a grade of 96 going to a medical institute who accepted a grade of 65 just to ensure his appointment). This is, of course, a reversal of standards detrimental to the quality of higher education.
6. There is a noticeable expansion in public and private universities and colleges, both horizontally and vertically, especially after 2003, and the absence of a clear policy to cancel or reduce those numbers that are mostly useless. Added to this is the weakness in the infrastructure







of those universities, especially government ones, such as: the lack of scientific laboratories, ideal classrooms, student clubs, sports stadiums, and even university buildings.

7. Higher education institutions suffer from an “absence” in the philosophy of scientific research. Also, despite the presence of a number of research centers and units (48 research centers and 60 research units) affiliated to higher education institutions, these centers and units, so far, have not produced the required type and quantity that can develop and enrich the fields of knowledge in Iraq.
8. The defect in the elements of higher education can be diagnosed by probing the most prominent of them:
  - A. Legal Systems: They are represented by the lack of independence of universities, the severity of the centralization of the ministry, the lack of stability of ministerial instructions and the speed of their change, the stagnation of the laws in force and the lack of updates to them. Not allowing universities to conclude agreements or memoranda of understanding except by referring to the ministry, sometimes even to the Prime Minister, the absence of instructions to dismiss the incompetents, and 70% of the evening study revenues go as operating expenses, while 30% go as a budget for the development of universities.
  - B. Education and Teaching: The central admission does not match the actual intake of universities and colleges, and reliance on the average, and not according to the desire and capabilities of the student. Weak higher education inputs, and the lack of motivation





- for the student to learn due to the lack of job opportunities within his specialization in the future.
- C. Research and Development: The small number of research units and centers, the unwillingness of the teaching staff to join them, and not approving of the Scientific Research Commission Law and the freezing of development. The absence of a separate research budget for the Ministry of Higher Education or other ministries, and the suspension of funding from the private sector or public companies.
9. There is a noticeable and significant expansion in admission to postgraduate studies, especially through expansions of academic seats, as there is a first, second, and even third and fourth expansion sometimes. This is at the expense of kind and need, in addition to the lack of solid controls by accepting some students who did not pass the 10% mark in the competitive test.
  10. The exact specialization of the instructor does not match the subject he is assigned to teach, as well as the research topics he is charged with supervising. As well as the mechanisms for selecting committees and procedures for scientific discussions in graduate studies.
  11. The lack of modern research projects, in addition to the lack of research dealing with the problems of society, as well as the neglect of technical institutes, which are now absorbing only secondary outputs with low rates.
  12. The mechanism of changing curricula to keep pace with the modern era is a complex and difficult mechanism, going through several





- episodes. In addition, there are some teachers, especially in the scientific disciplines, who are reluctant to such a change, because it forces him to develop himself, reconsider his experiences and adapt him to the new curricula. Even teachers who wish to change the curriculum are entitled to do so only by no more than 20%.
13. Not every holder of a higher degree is fit to be a teacher, as their selection is supposed to be according to special criteria, and many of them need to be admitted to special courses inside and outside Iraq.
14. The interference of some politicians in the scientific affairs of higher education is no secret to anyone. This is evident in the adoption of the “Law on Foundations of Equivalence of Arab and Foreign Certificates and Degrees” which was subject to political considerations rather than scientific ones. In addition to this, the Chamber of Deputies clearly intervened in the issue of expanding the seats of graduate studies (second and third expansions).
15. Some legislations have become a reason for the deterioration of Iraqi scientific journals, such as the legislation of Law (167) of 2017, which is concerned with scientific promotions, which led to the "death" of these journals, as these journals were dominated by scientific research aimed at obtaining a promotion without achieving scientific or practical benefit to society and the state.
16. There are no foreign universities operating in Iraq, and the American universities in Sulaymaniyah and Baghdad are Iraqi universities that follow a foreign (American) educational system. This type of education became possible after the amendment of a law in this





regard in 2016. The importance of this type of university lies in the fact that it provides a model that helps focus on developing skills (understanding, application, analysis, evaluation, creativity, etc.) and not only instruction or information gathering.

17. Private colleges follow instructions from the Ministry of Higher Education and are now imposed on them, such as: subjecting their students to central admission, a competitive sobriety test, instructions for promoting their professors, and others. It is a double-edged sword that made it, from one point of view, subject to the Ministry of Higher Education, and made it lose its independence and freedom in generalizing educational programs and contributed to improving its reality and preventing it from continuing to focus on the market.







### Recommendations:

1. The necessity of reconsidering the admission strategies in Iraqi universities, and designing the preparatory year for postgraduate studies. Competitive tests and their instructions do not necessarily diagnose those who are able to add quality to knowledge, as well as reconsidering the supervision of scientific research and the instructions for scientific discussions in universities. All this requires specialized committees to deal with these problems.
2. The selection of the Minister of Higher Education should be away from quotas or the so-called “electoral right”, and to be selected from a higher education environment and possess competence, integrity, and experience. The Chamber of Deputies should also be kept away from interfering in the scientific affairs of the ministry and its institutions, leaving them the right to question the minister or any official in the ministry, but without interfering in scientific affairs.
3. The independence of universities and the elimination of extreme centralization. This independence does not need to legislate a law, as Article (10) of the effective Ministry Law No. (40) of 1988, stipulates the independence of universities. Independence is important for universities, especially in developing countries, whether for public or private universities, provided that they have competent university leaders capable of managing this educational process under independence.
4. The independence of universities provides advantages, most notably institutional, financial, functional, and academic independence. Independence will lead to:





- A. Increasing productivity: The universities will graduate students who are needed by the labor market, and then there will be no unemployment for graduates.
  - B. Under independence, the university will have the power and complete control over the performance of its activities and curriculum, independent of government and therefore political influence, , because in the absence of independence, government funding will be associated with government interference in the educational process in one way or another.
  - C. It will have the freedom to accept students (in preliminary and postgraduate studies), receive unrestricted incentives, and independence in appointing and developing staff, establishing programs, and setting curricula. As well as setting the conditions for promotions, selection of administrative and teaching cadres, determining salaries and allowances, fairness in the distribution of assignments and others.
  - D. Freedom to conclude agreements and memoranda of understanding with relevant institutions, whether local or foreign. In addition, the freedom to close and create scientific departments and colleges.
  - E. Universities have the power to choose their strategy and planning, to choose their council members, to choose the method of dismissal, and to identify the bodies responsible for accountability.
5. The necessity of assigning teachers to institutions related to their precise specializations for two or three days, in order to gain practical experience and then pass it on to the student, thus preparing the latter





- for the labor market, and enabling him to harness his theoretical information for the benefit of practical reality.
6. Making courses and enhancing capabilities a standard and a condition for the continuation of work, whether for teaching or administrative cadres, in addition to the necessity of the teacher's interest in being a role model for the student in all respects.
  7. The development of private universities in Iraq requires the fulfillment of conditions, the most prominent of which is scientific twinning with sober international foreign universities. These international universities are supervising the development of the knowledge aspect of private universities, and everything related to achieving their sobriety in terms of tests and bringing efficient cadres and other requirements of sobriety. The current situation of private education should not be accepted simply because it intakes the huge numbers coming from preparatory education.
  8. Most public and private universities should be specialized; so we will have engineering universities, medical universities, economic universities, and others specialized in the humanities and so on. The confusion that we see in universities in Iraq is useless, and these universities, in light of the confusion between specializations, cannot provide us with excellent outputs that enrich the labor market and benefit society and the state.
  9. The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the consequent making of exams to be held electronically, made education poor, and if the pandemic is eliminated, a comprehensive ministerial test should be put





- in place for all academic levels in universities, whether government or private, through which the student is evaluated.
10. Submitting an annual memorandum by private universities to define curricula and train on new ones outside Iraq, and to conduct comparative studies in the private education experience with neighboring countries at least. Private education is the lever of public education, and it must be strong and positive.
  11. There should be a quality institution that is not affiliated with the Ministry of Higher Education, within specific standards, and has wide powers up to closing or opening scientific departments or colleges, and without any pressure from any party, as quality is very important to reach academic accreditation.
  12. Education should focus on teaching skills and how to use them in addressing topics in various fields. This helps creativity and enables the student to come up with something new that others have not. It also helps to develop the student's critical thinking and how to solve problems. The foreign education style can help with this, and it does not need a lot of money, but it needs a lot of determination and effort to become a reality.

