

IMPROVING THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR IN IRAQ THROUGH STUDENT COLLABORATIONS

The purpose of this study is to focus on Improving the Higher Education Sector in Iraq through Student Collaborations. The study sheds light on the history of the Iraqi Higher Education Sector, its importance, and its decline due to political and social issues. The sector is centrally linked to the government and has faced many challenges such as the influence of Ba'ath party and Saddam's regime (1968 – 2003) on the leadership and class materials. These influences resulted in the isolation of the sector from the world's academia. Other challenges faced were the destruction of the Iraqi universities' buildings and labs due to the continuous wars, old teaching methods and outdated curriculum, and the lack of an accreditation system to evaluate the Iraqi degree and make it compliant with the world's educational standards. All of these reasons led to conducting this research which included several case studies, researching new developments, and interviews that recommend rebuilding the sector and improving it because it is a major social organization that serves the Iraqi citizens.

The research method was qualitative since the topic is newly discovered and there was no available data about it.

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The research findings yielded a new solution that benefits the main stakeholders, the Iraqi students, through implementing “Student Collaborations” in the university classes. This teaching method is not well-known in Iraq and it would be a successful model to implement while rebuilding the sector. The objective of this model is to deliver the class materials to the students in more interactive settings that enable the student to understand the materials and acquire new skills that can be utilized by the students in the real life. Also, these collaborations will change the old teaching style used by the professors into a modern one that can help the students to understand the course materials. Student Collaborations is a modern technique to deliver the class material and encourages the student to acquire knowledge through interaction. Student Collaborations encourage students to collaborate on class

Student Collaborations encourage students to collaborate on class discussions, case studies, and long term projects. All of these collaborations enrich the students’ learning experience and enhance their leadership qualities, communications and problem solving skills

discussions, case studies, and long term projects. All of these collaborations enrich the students’ learning experience and enhance their leadership qualities, communications and problem solving skills. This model will help create a new generation that will be the future leaders of Iraq.

Education in Iraq is compulsory and free of charge. It includes six years of elementary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. The high school is divided into two majors: Scientific in which graduates would be admitted to scientific majors in universities and Literary in which graduates would be admitted to humanity majors in the universities.¹

The students are admitted to universities through a central system, and the selection is based on their grades. The university study is for a four year degree, and its graduates will gain a bachelor’s degree. After finishing the bachelor’s degree, interested students may apply for a master’s degree which is a two year program. After a master’s degree, there is a doctorate degree for those who are interested in teaching. It is a four year degree program.²

According to the Iraqi Ministry of Higher

Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR), there are 19 Iraqi State Universities.³ As of 2004, the number of enrolled students was 251,175.⁴

The higher education sector in Iraq has declined and become outdated due to the social and political events of the last several decades. This decline of higher education in Iraq isolated the country and separated Iraq from ongoing development in the rest of the world. Iraqi universities were linked to the state in the 1970s, after the Ba'ath Party started to officially rule Iraq in 1968. All universities were linked to the central government represented by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. As a result, the Ba'ath party, which was the ruling party, started to influence the leadership of all Iraqi universities. This influence led to control the administration of Iraqi universities, the teaching methods, freedom of speech, class curriculum and student motivation.

In any country, the university is a major social organization that produces expertise in various fields. Ba'ath influence reduced the quality of the Iraqi university system by imposing its political will on this important social organization. In 1980, the regime

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started a large scale war against Iran that resulted in over a million dead between the two countries and led to decreased ethical values because of "a pattern of systematic abuse and corruption of higher education and scholarly research by the Ba'thist state apparatus; they also related anecdotes about acts of individual cronyism and the mental and physical abuse of professors by members of ruling elite".⁵

In 1990, the regime invaded Kuwait, which led to a massive war with the international community. This invasion resulted in the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council. After 1990, the Iraqi universities were segregated from the international higher education community. The authoritarian regime forced its political view on higher education. As the Ba'ath influence increased in the schools, class curriculum became outdated, the teachers were more restricted than before and student evaluations were manipulated by the Ba'ath. These severe conditions made the Iraqi university system

not qualified to be classified in the world's ranking for universities.

After 2003, the Iraqi government focused on the higher education sector along with the international community. The United States Embassy started scholarships and cultural exchange programs for the Iraqi students to study in the United States. The Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research established scholarship programs for advanced degrees as well. In 2008, the United States and Iraq signed the Strategic Framework Agreement in which the education was identified as one of the important sectors that should be improved. Education is considered one of the most important components of Iraqi infrastructure that needs to be rebuilt.

Problem Statement

The higher education sector declined in Iraq when the Ba'ath party took over the authority in 1968. The Ba'ath party started to influence this sector and impose the party's political ideologies on it. The higher education sector serves Iraq by providing its citizens advanced education in all fields of knowledge. The Ba'ath regime led by Saddam Hussein found this sector an effective channel to pass on the

ideology of the dictatorship, which resulted in isolating the nation from the world's advances.

The universities in Iraq suffered from centralization in which all universities are linked to the state. "The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research sets the budgetary framework of every university."⁶ The university leadership was restricted to teach the Ba'ath ideology by mandating the course of National Culture in all universities. "National Culture is an ideological subject and a reflection of the Regime's nation building aspirations."⁷ The class circulars became outdated as "the curriculum has remained basically the same for 20 years."⁸ As a result, the students lost their motivation in pursuing degrees.

The intended outcome of this study is to improve the higher education sector in Iraq by making every effort to apply student collaborations to each course in order to enhance students' leadership, team building, communications, and promote successful class projects.

Purpose of the Research

The intended purpose of this research is to explore the importance of the Higher

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Education Sector in Iraq and its role to build the new country. The concept of “Student Collaborations” was chosen as a model to be implemented in the Iraqi universities in order to enhance students’ leadership skills, team work, and communications.

Student Collaborations are the engagement of students in class based activities in which the students are given in class discussions, activities, and projects by their instructor. The purpose of these collaborations is to promote team work, enhance interpersonal skills and problem solving, and to encourage learning of the class concepts and objectives.

The objective of this study is to create a model for a class based on the U.S universities’ models that encourage student collaborations and treat it as an essential part of the learning process. The questions I examine here are the following: What is the current condition of the higher education sector in Iraq? What historical social, political, and economic factors contributed to the current condition of the higher education sector in Iraq? What current initiatives, innovations, and trends are affecting the higher education sector in Iraq? And finally, what are the recommendations for future improvement of the higher education

sector in Iraq?

This research is about adopting the modern student collaborations in the class that will result in the development of student collaborations to encourage team work, the development of class projects (papers, reflections, presentations), and the presentation of real world scenarios in the class.

The research answers this question along with identifying the current issues and making recommendations to overcome these issues. Improving this sector will lead to the development of the Iraqi nation. The focus will be on student collaborations in the Iraqi universities as it is a focal topic that will improve the quality of higher education. It will improve students’ leadership skills, encourage team work, and enhance communications. Additionally, it will motivate students to search and explore in their fields of knowledge.

When properly implemented, student collaborations will help produce a new

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generation that believes in serving the community and participates in leading the country. It is a simple technique yet has broad benefits to the Iraqi universities as educational organizations and to the society as its citizens receive new education that motivates them to be leaders.

Student Collaboration is a nearly cost free technique. With the new technology available through internet search engines like Google, there would be countless student collaboration ideas that can be used in the class. Using this technology, there will be no need for high implementation costs like hiring consultants or foreign institutions to perform the work.

Literature Review

The higher education sector in Iraq is suffering from major problems as a result of political and social circumstances the country has experienced. Its infrastructure is destroyed because of wars, lack of government services and civil unrest. The sector is still linked to the central government through Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHSER) which is a remnant of the previous regime. The teaching methods and course designs are outdated and there is a continuing lack of

funding. The topic of this study is “Improving the Higher Education in Iraq through Student Collaborations”. This is an examination of the literature that was reviewed about this sector and the findings.

The literature on the subject of Higher Education in Iraq approaches the issue from various directions since the decline of education after 1990. The Ba’ath party started to influence all government sectors but especially the education sector, because it was the direct link between the Iraqis and the regime. The regime controlled and centralized the education sector in general in order to enforce the Ba’ath’s ideology. The Ba’ath imposed a course on National Culture in all university departments and also prevented the university teachers from pursuing new methods of teaching or updating the class curriculum. After 1990, Iraq was isolated from the world’s advances which led to the

In 2004, Mary Gary reflected on the decline of the Iraqi universities in her article, “Iraqi Universities Struggle to Rebuild the ‘House of Knowledge.’” She pointed out the previous regime’s control and the lack of funding

decrease of in the quality and quantity of graduates in the country.

The lack of funding during this period is another important factor. Iraqi universities suffered greatly due to the lack of new publications, updated curriculum, labs and various required technologies for learning. The salaries of instructors and faculty staff were extremely low. Additionally, the authoritarian nature of the leadership and the coercion in treating both faculty and students caused a lack of motivation for both instructors and students to be creative in the academia.

The decline of the higher education sector in Iraq became a main concern of the international community because its development leads to building the country's future leaders and development of intellectual property. Improving higher education leads to the development of the Iraqi society which suffered from decades of dictatorship. Also, it will be a solid base to spread peace and democracy in the country. The development of this sector will result in building the country with Iraqi manpower, which

eliminates the unemployment rates in the country.

Case Studies

A useful reference, titled «Higher Education in Iraq,» illustrates the higher education in Iraq during the 1990s. It was produced by the National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden, in 2003. The reason for conducting this study was the number of Iraqi university graduates immigrating to Sweden. «The National Agency for Higher Education evaluates higher education programs for employment purposes in Sweden. Of the 3,000 applications that the Agency receives annually, there are approximately 500 degrees from Iraq, making it the single largest country represented among the applicants.»⁹ This report sheds the light on two important parts: «Education in Iraq» and «Forged Documents.»¹⁰ It explained the education system in Iraq in detail, the influence of the authoritarian regime on the education and the severe conditions of this sector in Iraq. Also, it focused on the obvious inadequacy

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of the transcripts released by Iraqi universities, which were not aligned with the international community legal requirements. This report presented the situation of this sector during the former regime's time without any intention to reform this sector. Its observations are useful to focus on when implementing improvements in this sector.

In 2004, Mary Gary reflected on the decline of the Iraqi universities in her article, "Iraqi Universities Struggle to Rebuild the 'House of Knowledge.'" She pointed out the previous regime's control and the lack of funding. She conducted interviews with the higher education community and concluded that "they wanted help to introduce new teaching methodology and to become more substantively up to date".¹¹ This article discussed the difficulties and did not have any recommendations for the future of the higher education in the country.

Another important article is titled «Sanctions, War, Occupation and the De-Development of Education in Iraq,» by Agustin Verlloso De Santisteban, published in 2005. It presented important facts and figures about the education sector in Iraq before the Kuwait invasion in 1990, the regime and the Ba'ath influences after 1990 and post-2003

Iraq. It concluded «that qualitative damage is far more difficult to assess than quantitative damage.»¹² This is, by now, an old study about the education in Iraq that did not offer any recommendations to reform the sector.

Eric Davis wrote about the role of democracy in the education system and how it would lead to the development of the Iraqi society. In his 2005 report, "Strategies for Promoting Democracy in Iraq", in which he discussed the role of social justice and democracy to promote the Iraqi society, he

All Iraqi universities suffer from the "lack of resources", "the lack of an accreditation body" and "the lack of properly designed credit system

recommended implementing a plan, through the education channels, "to introduce courses and materials in conflict resolution and peace education into university curricula throughout the country."¹³ The report emphasized on community activities that can be implemented by the Iraqi ministries that lead to the prosperity of the Iraqi society.

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Another significant report was written by Imad Harb in 2008, addressing «Education and Conflict», titled «Higher Education and the Future of Iraq». It emphasized the need to separate the state from the university, noting that «The sector was centralized in 1970 under the control of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR), in the process of losing any semblance of academic independence.»¹⁴ This situation led to the Ba'ath control over the sector. «The higher education sector quickly found itself obligated to dedicate its research and talents to the political agenda of the Ba'ath party.»¹⁵ It also presented how Saddam Hussein deformed the education for his own agendas. «During the Saddam years, the higher education sector became a venue for political correctness, cronyism, corruption, and manipulation of resources to advance the regime's ideology and politics.»¹⁶

Then, it discussed the higher education in Iraq since 2003, in which he presented the funding obstacles and the violence in the Iraqi universities. The report also presented the «International Assistance» in which there were several programs offered by US Department of State, US Department of Defense, US Agency

for International Development (USAID) and other non-governmental organizations.¹⁷ These programs are not enough to cover what the sector needs. «The international community has made a variety of efforts to support the rejuvenation of Iraq's universities by donating funds, providing expertise, and launching cooperative initiatives.»¹⁸ There was a set of recommendations to reform the higher education that suggested the country's stability before implementing any initiative: «No effort to reform the higher education system in Iraq will succeed without addressing the dire security situation on campuses.»¹⁹ Implementing the reform should be an ongoing process to embrace the change in the higher education regardless of the political situation.

All Iraqi universities suffer from the «lack

The British Universities Iraq Consortium (BUIC): is a consortium of 21 UK universities, and serves as a key intermediary with Iraqi institutions. BUIC, which closely works with the British Council and Universities UK, aims to facilitate the constructive engagement between the UK and Iraqi higher education sectors, and has facilitated the funding of a number of projects

of resources», «the lack of an accreditation body» and «the lack of properly designed credit system.»²⁰ A good example is the medical education in Iraq which Aamir Al Mosawi mentioned in his article «Medical Education and the Physician Workforce of Iraq» in 2008. Al Mosawi defined the reasons behind the failure of the Medical System in Iraq because of the continuous wars and the lack of educational exchange. This article was specific in its view and chosen as an example.

One of the articles focused on the role of adult learners in the class and supported student collaborations noting that «presently, instruction is not engaging students in dialogue to facilitate problem solving of immediacy to adult learners.»²¹ It criticized the teaching methods and described them as authoritative: «In other words, rather than a large

authoritarian/teacher and/or passive/learning environment, we instead construct a climate of collaborative and active learning.»²² This article intended to reform one single aspect of the higher education in the country.

All of these articles shed the light on the current situation of the Iraqi universities. Each discussed a different problem and some of them recommended solutions. The higher education sector in Iraq has suffered a great deal of mass destruction in all its fields. It requires improvements in all fields. All organizations and authors discussed the centralization of the Iraqi institutions, old teaching methods, outdated curriculum, the lack of funds to rebuild the infrastructure for Iraqi universities, and the lack of compliance with International Accreditation System.

It is obvious that the Iraqi universities require change in their infrastructure, leadership, technology, and a lot more to improve the quality of higher education necessary to enable the Iraqi citizens to build their country.

The goal of this research is to explore the importance of the higher education sector in Iraq and its role to build the new country.

The research focuses on the concept of “Student Collaborations” as a model to be implemented in the Iraqi universities in order to enhance students’ leadership skills, team work, and communications

Agreements and Initiatives

United States of America and Republic of Iraq entered into “The Strategic Framework Agreement for a Relationship of Friendship and

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Cooperation between the United States and the Republic of Iraq". Under this Agreement United States and Iraq created "Section IV: Cultural Cooperation" that states "The Parties share the conviction that connections between their citizens, forged through cultural exchanges, educational links and the exploration of their common archeological heritage will forge strong, long lasting bonds of friendship and mutual respect."²³ As a result of that, this Agreement addressed Improving the Higher Education in Iraq "The USG and the GOI are working together to build a strong Iraqi higher education system. Our efforts aim to establish an English language institute hosted by the Iraqi Higher Committee on Educational Development, form an Iraq chapter of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) International, and foster faculty development."²⁴

In 2009, Mr. Noori Al Maliki Prime Minister of Iraq established The Higher Committee for Education Development in Iraq (HCED). The Prime Minister launched "Iraq Education Initiative", its main goal being "that Iraq regains its real status among the nations of the world, and to fill the gap between the standard of education in Iraq and that of the world, his Excellency Prime Minister Noori Al Malki

There are ongoing efforts to improve the higher education sector in Iraq especially in the "Strategic Framework Agreement" (SFA) that was signed by the United States and Iraq in 2008, in which both countries agreed to expand their relations and aimed to improve several sectors in the new Iraq, including higher education

launched the educational Initiative in Iraq of sending, over 5 period of years, 10 thousand students to study in all research areas at the world best accredited universities."²⁵

The US Embassy – Iraq established "Exchange Programs and Scholarships" that "support many educational programs, scholarships and other opportunities throughout the year for Iraqi scholars, students and professionals. These scholarships include various major like "communications and journalism, law, human rights, economic development, science and technology, teaching English, and other disciplines."²⁶

Private Institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

There are several International Organizations that have been participating in rebuilding the higher education sector in

Iraq after 2003. Their main goal is to restore the infrastructure of the sector that would enable the Iraqi citizens to receive high quality education. Here are some of these NGOs:

United Nations, Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Office For Iraq (UNESCO) observes the lack of infrastructure in the Higher Education sector in Iraq and “In February 2005, UNESCO organized in Paris a round table on the revitalization of higher education in Iraq, aimed to assess the Iraqi’s needs and priorities and to strengthen the international cooperation and intellectual dimensions of the International Fund.”²⁷ UNESCO has ongoing project titled “Rehabilitation of the Higher Education System”²⁸ that aim to improve many aspects in the sector. “In 2003, the World Bank and the United Nations created the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI)

in close consultation with the Iraqi authorities in response to international requests to create a mechanism to enable donors to channel their resources and coordinate their support for reconstruction and development activities in Iraq. So far, 25 donors have committed about \$1.85b to the facility.”²⁹

“The British Universities Iraq Consortium (BUIC): is a consortium of 21 UK universities, and serves as a key intermediary with Iraqi institutions. BUIC, which closely works with the British Council and Universities UK, aims to facilitate the constructive engagement between the UK and Iraqi higher education sectors, and has facilitated the funding of a number of projects”³⁰

Research Problem

After reviewing the literature on Higher Education in Iraq, there were significant points that require further research:

1. Outdated Curriculum: Bright & Mahdi addressed this issue in their article titled “Out of Crisis: Reflections of an Iraqi and an American on Advocacy for Andragogy” in which they stated that “In Iraq, higher education for adults

The Ba’ath party (1963- 2003) presented false information to the international community showing that the country was on track and progressing yet it was the only authority that allowed data collection in the country and the citizens of the country were not allowed to reveal the truth

requires introduction to new reforms such as curriculum development, faculty training, and administrative leadership”³¹.

2. **Authoritarian Teaching:** Mary Gary noted in her article “Iraqi Universities Struggle to Rebuild the House of Knowledge” that “Iraq tends to rely heavily on an instructor-centered lecture method.”³²
3. **Current Political Environment Discourages Diversity:** Eric Davis noted in his report “Strategies for Promoting Democracy in Iraq” that “One of the main impediments to promoting democracy in Iraq is the ongoing insurgency. The insurgency is supported and funded by many elements who were part of, or had close ties to, the former regime of Saddam Hussein.”³³

All of these observations led to the topic “Student Collaborations”, which means active participation of students in the class through collaborations like group discussions, group projects, and many other activities that enhance students’ leadership, teamwork, and communications.

The goal of this research is to explore the

The interviewees expressed their interest in “Student Collaborations” topic because it has broad benefits to the Iraqi students and encourages them to build trust, collaborate to seek knowledge and solve problems, communicate effectively, and finally be part of a team

importance of the higher education sector in Iraq and its role to build the new country. The research focuses on the concept of “Student Collaborations” as a model to be implemented in the Iraqi universities in order to enhance students’ leadership skills, team work, and communications.

As it was stated above, Student Collaborations are the engagement of students in class based activities in which the students are given in class discussions, activities, and projects by their instructor. The goal of these collaborations is to promote team work, enhance interpersonal skills and problem solving, and to encourage learning of the class concepts and objectives.

This research creates a model for a class based on the US universities’ model that encourages student collaborations and treats it as an essential part of the learning process.

Research Questions

1. What is the current condition of the higher education sector in Iraq?

The higher education sector in Iraq is suffering from major problems as a result of political and social circumstances the country passed through. Its infrastructure is destroyed because of wars, lack of government services and civil unrest. The sector is still linked to the central government through Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHSER) which is a remnant of the previous regime. The teaching methods and courses' designs are outdated and there is a continuing lack of funding.

2. What historical social, political, and economic factors contributed to the current condition of the higher education

Student Collaborations may take place in the class, library, or learning center. The required resources like books, databases, and internet are available to the students. The students may use emails or cell phones to communicate with each other while they are working on class assignments

sector in Iraq?

Higher education in Iraq has declined and become outdated due to the social and political aspects of the last several decades. The decline of higher education in Iraq results in separating Iraq from the world's development. Iraqi universities were linked to the state in the 1970s, after the Ba'ath Party started to rule Iraq in 1968. All universities were linked to the central government represented by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. As a result, the Ba'ath party, which was the ruling party, started to influence the leadership of all Iraqi universities. This influence led to control the administration of Iraqi universities, the teaching methods, freedom of speech, class curriculum and student motivation.

3. What current initiatives, innovations, and trends are affecting the higher education sector in Iraq?

After 2003, the Iraqi government focused on the higher education sector along with the international community. The United States Embassy started

The teacher's role shifts from being a deliverer of material to a designer and facilitator of learning experiences. The new role for teachers is more creative and more demanding than the earlier one

scholarships and cultural exchange programs for the Iraqi students to study in the United States.

The Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research established scholarship programs for advanced degrees as well. In 2008, the United States and Iraq signed the Strategic Framework Agreement in which the education was identified as one of the important sectors that should be improved. Education is considered one of the most important components of Iraqi infrastructure that needs to be rebuilt.

4. What are the recommendations for future improvement for the higher education sector in Iraq?

All organizations and authors discussed the centralization of the Iraqi institutions, old teaching methods, outdated

curriculum, the lack of funds to rebuild the infrastructure for Iraqi universities, and the lack of compliance with international accreditation systems.

It is obvious that the Iraqi universities require change in their infrastructure, leadership, technology, and more to improve the quality of higher education that enables the Iraqi citizens to build their country.

Research Design and Rationale

The research methodology that has been used in the study is a Qualitative Method, “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants’ setting; analyzing data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible writing structure”³⁴. The research discusses the political and social impacts on the higher education sector in Iraq, its current condition, and what are the most important needs to rebuild it.

The use of qualitative method illustrates the importance of the topic and examines the efforts that have been employed so far to improve this sector. It showed the interest of

Collaboration is the social process that supports learners' development of capabilities in which they learn to do without assistance things that they could initially do only with assistance. If learning really is a social process, then collaboration is required

private and public organizations to participate in rebuilding the higher education sector as well as witnessing its progress.

The use of qualitative methodology was employed in various data collection strategies like case studies, reports, interviews, news and trends. All of these strategies led to one conclusion which is rebuilding the higher education sector in Iraq will lead its citizens to having modern education that enables them to build their country.

The qualitative method was the best research method to show the social and political issues that impacted the higher

education sector and the progress of change since 2003.

Research Methodology

I. Comparative Studies

There were nine case studies reviewed about the current condition of the higher education sector in Iraq. These studies grasped the main obstacles that the sector has faced and worked on overcoming in the recent years. The authors of these works focused on the Higher Education Sector from the 1970s through 2003. Their data collection methods and findings were almost the same since they focused on the main problems that faced the Iraqi universities.

These studies became essential official documents for every scholar because they were considered as baseline for follow on studies. In these studies, the writers focused on the centralization of the Iraqi universities through Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific research, the limited funding for the sector, the influence of Ba'ath regime (1963 – 2003) on the sector along with wars in the region that led to the separation of the Iraqi Academia from the international community,

the lack of resources, outdated curriculum, and old teaching methods.

II. Recent Developments and Trends

Since 2003, there has been considerable focus on the higher education sector in Iraq. The U.S. Department of State along with International Agencies and the newly formed Iraqi government worked on assessing the situation, allocated funds, initiated programs to build the infrastructure (buildings, labs, etc), train the faculty leadership & staff, and established scholarship programs through the U.S. Embassy and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Prime Minister Office.

International Agencies like United Nations (UN), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) along with Local and International partners held conferences, allocated funds and donations, and set up training programs for leaders and the faculty members of the Iraqi universities as well.

There are ongoing efforts to improve the higher education sector in Iraq especially in the “Strategic Framework Agreement” (SFA) that was signed by the United States

and Iraq in 2008, in which both countries agreed to expand their relations and aimed to improve several sectors in the new Iraq, including higher education. The SFA led to establishing collaborations between the U.S. and Iraqi universities, increasing the number of scholarship opportunities, and set new initiatives as well.

III. Interviews

There were eleven interviews conducted that discussed the higher education sector in Iraq, teaching methods, curriculum, and the overall rating of the students experience. The interviews were conducted with Iraqi citizens who finished their undergraduate studies in Iraq in the period of (1967 – 2007), and were classified according to their background as Iraqi citizens who graduated from Iraqi universities and are pursuing different careers.

The following is the interviewees’ classification:

- a) Students who have studied in both Iraqi

The recommendations are based on low cost, ease of implementation, and potential impact on Iraqi students, universities and society

and U.S. institutions

Interviews were conducted with Iraqi people who graduated from Iraqi universities and are currently studying in U.S. universities. All of them are impressed with the methods of teaching and student collaborations in the American universities and how their leadership skills were enhanced due to that, while they did not have the opportunity to have the same quality of education in their home country.

- b) Educators who have studied in Iraqi and US institutions and currently have experience teaching in U.S. institutions

Interviews were conducted with Iraqi scholars who finished their graduate studies in the United States and are currently teaching in U.S universities.

Iraqi teachers and students would welcome the idea of Student Collaborations and readily adopt new learning methods that enhance their knowledge and enrich their experience. This would create highly qualified leaders who are ready to start their career and will be ready to rebuild their Democratic and Free Iraq

They emphasized on changing the higher education sector in Iraq to a modern one and adapting the U.S universities' model in the Iraqi universities as well as encouraged collaborations between the Iraqi and U.S universities.

- c) Iraqi government officials included:

- Office of Iraqi Prime Minister, Citizen's Affairs Division
- Embassy of Iraq to United States, Cultural Affairs Division

Interviews were conducted with Iraqi government officials who expressed the urgent need of the higher education sector in Iraq to collaborate with the U.S institutions in order to rebuild this important sector in the country.

IV. Comparative review of U.S. educational models

The researcher chose Georgia State University Model for Student Collaborations³⁵. It shows the importance of student collaborations, the methods of implementing these collaborations, and the results. It is a good example that encourages student collaborations and its uses a bottom

up approach that will benefit the students and create a new generation with enhanced leadership skills, a spirit of teamwork, and improved communications and problem solving skills.

This model will help the Iraqi students to collaborate and work in teams. In addition to that it is effective way to gain knowledge and achieve the course objectives.

V. Problems and challenges to research encountered

In the course of this research, there were several challenges encountered due to the lack of data:

a) Lack of data pre-2003 (the Ba'ath period)

The Ba'ath party (1963-2003-) intended to falsify the data and its data was documented by Ba'ath members who are loyal to their party.

1- Isolation of Iraqi higher education sector by the former regime

The regime and its Ba'ath party intended to separate the Iraqi universities from the world's academia by keeping the old methods of teaching with any update, and keeping the curriculum without any updates.

2- Lack of opportunities to study abroad for some students

In early 1970s, the regime started to award the scholarship opportunities to Ba'ath members and the ruling regime which led to depriving many Iraqi students from studying abroad.

3- Inaccurate information presented by the former regime as part of overall propaganda campaign

The Ba'ath party (1963-2003) presented false information to the international community showing that the country was on track and progressing yet it was the only authority that allowed data collection in the country and the citizens of the country were not allowed to reveal the truth. Anyone speaking against the Ba'ath party could be charged for betraying the regime and punished with death penalty.

b) Lack of data post 2003 (post Ba'ath period)

The lack of data after 2003 has its own reasons as well. Primarily, there were higher priorities than the development of the higher education sector. The

The Ba'ath imposed a course on National Culture in all university departments and also prevented the university teachers from pursuing new methods of teaching or updating the class curriculum

Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) led by the U.S Forces set the goal to establish the new Iraq after discovering that there was no solid infrastructure in the country due to the wars led by the Ba'ath regime in the course of past 40 years (1963 – 2003).

1- Formation of new centralized government

Since the formation of the new democratic government took place in 2005, the major focus was writing the new constitution and conducting the elections which took both time and resources to get that done in spite of the violence.

2- Civil unrest

It was hard for international organizations and educational institutions to go to the field and collect data due to the violence that took place when terrorism groups started to kill thousands of people by

setting suicide bombs, assassination, and burning government buildings. In addition to that, the civil war took place that kept the country dangerous for very long time. All of these led to preventing these organizations from sending their personnel to the field to work.

3- Challenges to national infrastructure and economy

The new Iraqi government is in the process of rebuilding the country after long years of war. This process takes significant time and resources to enable the most appropriate model for the country. In addition, Iraq's economy is still in an uncertain condition due to the previous regime's war debt (e.g. Kuwait invasion) which makes it hard for the Iraqi government to focus on developing the data of the higher education sector.

Data Analysis and Results

The research focused on the many aspects of the topic "Improving the Higher Education Sector in Iraq" and varied recommendations to rebuild this important sector have been made. One important but missing recommendation

was “Student Collaborations” which is “an individual’s acquisition of knowledge to a socially enabled developmental process. Collaboration is the social process that supports learners’ development of capabilities in which they learn to do without assistance things that they could initially do only with assistance. If learning really is a social process, then collaboration is required. The assistance that learners require may be provided by experts such as teachers and by peers, who collectively have expertise distributed among them.”³⁶

The research findings are based on case studies, interviews, and review of new developments. There is some missing information due to the lack of data collection in the field about the higher education sector in Iraq as discussed in Chapter 3.

Case Studies

Several case studies were found that focused on the history of the higher education sector in Iraq, its importance to building the society, its collapse due to social and political reasons, and recommendations to improve it as development will lead to rebuilding Iraq eventually.

There are some interesting points that changed the direction of the research and led to the “Student Collaborations” topic. These findings are:

1. **Outdated Curriculum:** Bright & Mahdi addressed this issue in their article titled “Out of Crisis: Reflections of an Iraqi and an American on Advocacy for Andragogy” in which they stated that “In Iraq, higher education for adults requires introduction to new reforms such as curriculum development, faculty training, and administrative leadership”³⁷
2. **Authoritarian Teaching:** Mary Gary noted in her article “Iraqi Universities Struggle to Rebuild the House of Knowledge” that “Iraq tends to rely heavily on an instructor-centered lecture method”³⁸
3. **Current Political Environment**

The universities in Iraq suffered from centralization in which all universities are linked to the state. “The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research sets the budgetary framework of every university

discourages Diversity: Eric Davis noted in his report “Strategies for Promoting Democracy in Iraq” that “One of the main impediments to promoting democracy in Iraq is the ongoing insurgency. The insurgency is supported and funded by many elements who were part of, or had close ties to, the former regime of Saddam Hussein”³⁹

Interviews

The interviews are a very interesting part of the research and have collective ideas because of the interviewees’ backgrounds, education, and professions. The researcher conducted 11 interviews with Iraqi citizens who received their undergraduate degrees in Iraq between 1967 and 2007. All of them expressed their desire to witness a solid higher education sector that serves the citizens of Iraq by decentralizing the sector, implementing modern technology on campuses, applying new teaching methods, updating the curriculum, and implementing student collaborations.

The interviewees expressed their interest in “Student Collaborations” topic because it has broad benefits to the Iraqi students and

The Iraq Education Initiative launched by the Prime Minister Noori Al Maliki has a definitive target of “sending, over a period of five years, ten thousand students to study in all research areas at the world’s best accredited universities

encourages them to build trust, collaborate to seek knowledge and solve problems, communicate effectively, and finally be part of a team.

Some of the interviewees have finished their graduate courses in the United States and, due to their education experience, they encouraged “Students Collaborations” to improve the quality of the education and the students’ knowledge and skills.

New Developments

The results of the case studies and new developments were almost the same. They focused on similar aspects like rebuilding the infrastructure (Buildings, Labs), decentralizing the higher education sector, training faculty members and teachers, and creating scholarship opportunities for Iraqi students.

The results were outstanding despite the challenges that faced the Iraqi government,

In 2009, Mr. Noori Al Maliki Prime Minister of Iraq established The Higher Committee for Education Development in Iraq (HCED). The Prime Minister launched “Iraq Education Initiative

US Embassy, and the Non-Governmental Organizations. All of these organizations have participated to change the current conditions of the higher education sector and created the pathway for rebuilding the sector.

The Strategic Framework Agreement between the United State and Iraq in 2008 accomplishments in the education field were “The USG and GOI have established seven University Linkages; have increased support for educational advising, which contributed to a 45 percent rise in the number of Iraqi students studying in the United States in the 20102011- academic year; and co-hosted the first-ever EducationUSA college fair in Erbil in October 2011. The USG will provide two years of English classes to 1,500 disadvantaged youth this year, an increase of 50 percent over last year.”⁴⁰

The Iraq Education Initiative launched by the Prime Minister Noori Al Maliki has a definitive target of “sending, over a period of

five years, ten thousand students to study in all research areas at the world’s best accredited universities.”⁴¹

Non-Governmental Organizations have an important role as well by assessing the current conditions of the higher education sector, holding International Conferences, and initiating projects. For example, UNESCO has an ongoing project titled “Rehabilitation of the Higher Education System”⁴² that aims to improve many aspects in the sector.

The British Universities Iraq Consortium (BUIC) has worked closely with the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to increase collaborations between Iraqi and UK universities.⁴³

All of these findings led to generate a new topic in the research of “Student Collaborations” which is a new concept that needs to be implemented in classes of the Iraqi universities.

The Results

The findings of the research led to a new strategic plan with outcomes, benchmarks, and evaluation.

The Plan

The plan is to implement the concept of

“Student Collaborations” in the classes of Iraqi universities to promote students’ learning experience. This plan is based on Georgia State University, The Center of Teaching and Learning model titled “Enabling Student Collaboration for Learning” dated on October 23, 2003⁴⁴

The Scope

The scope of the plan is to assist both teachers and students to achieve the course objectives by creating a collaborative atmosphere represented in conversations, short-term class collaborations, and long-term class collaborations. At the end of the course, the teacher, faculty members, and the university leadership will assess the results and move forward to implement this model in the university colleges and centers.

Objectives

The objectives of this plan are is to create an educational model where “students can develop their potential for learning. Specifically, students can learn to approach and solve new problems so that they develop the capability to solve problems that do not exist at the moment of learning. Rather than simply absorbing material, learning rules, and displaying the material and rules on demand,

students learn to develop capabilities that they first experience in assisted or collaborative learning situations.”⁴⁵

Settings

Student Collaborations may take place in the class, library, or learning center. The required resources like books, databases, and internet are available to the students. The students may use emails or cell phones to communicate with each other while they are working on class assignments.

Implementing the Plan

The first step to implement the plan is setting the stage for student collaborations. The university leadership along with teachers should adopt the change and implement it and deliver the concept of student collaborations to the students.

The second step is to make internet research for projects that align with current class material such as short class projects, questions for discussion, and large scale projects.

The third step, which is the real start of implementing the plan, is when the teacher starts engaging the students in discussions

Student Collaborations is a good start that will change the main stakeholders who are the students. When the students learn new problem solving techniques, reviewing case studies, and participating in real life scenarios, they will apply their learning to their future careers and to their community

to gain their trust and encourage them to interact with each other so they can be ready for the next step which is to “Shift course situations and reward structures to encourage students to view interactions with peers as indispensable learning resources”⁴⁶

The fourth step is to lay out initial class projects, “Instant ones, e.g., those requiring 15 minutes, the collaboration for which could occur in class”⁴⁷ for groups of three and at the end of the activities, the teacher will ask about the results or findings of the groups on the topic. This is very important stage in the execution because it enables the students to interact with each other while acquiring knowledge in the class and it will help them to enhance their strategic thinking in a short period of time.

The fifth step is to request the student to be in group of three and assign to them long-term

projects, “Ones with several days to several weeks’ duration”⁴⁸ that has a case related to the class main topic. The students will then choose four or five case studies that discussed this topic, and create an in class presentation. This step will enhance student’s teamwork and communication skills.

Guidelines for Teachers:

At this stage, the teacher will play the role of the facilitator. “The teacher’s role shifts from being a deliverer of material to a designer and facilitator of learning experiences. The new role for teachers is more creative and more demanding than the earlier one.”⁴⁹. The teacher will follow guidelines that make the student collaborations process effective. Mr. Robert King, the author of “5 Keys to Successful Student Collaboration”⁵⁰ in www.thoughtfullearning.com recommends the following 5 steps:

1. Define group success: The first key to successful student collaboration is to make sure the group members have a common goal. They need to work together to accomplish a specific task. They will either succeed together or fail together

2. Define individual success. The whole group succeeds or fails together, yes, but you should also establish expectations for individual contributions.
3. Teach students how to plan. Help students learn that planning involves setting a goal, listing tasks that need to be done, scheduling tasks, dividing labor, and gathering tools.
4. Teach students to self-evaluate. The group's plan helps the members stay on task.
5. Assess collaborative skills. When you assess group work, don't grade just the final product. Also grade the process that groups used to reach that outcome.

Guidelines for Students:

The students are the main stakeholders in the whole process of "Student Collaborations". This is the communications plan based on Georgia State University, The Center of Teaching and Learning model titled "Enabling Student Collaboration for Learning" dated on October 23, 2003⁵¹:

Communications Plan:

Some ways to communicate in collaboration are:

- Spoken words uttered in person, in real-time audio on the telephone or streamed over the Internet
- Written words represented on paper, on a fax, in an email, in a file, on the Web
- Visual representations of thought, such as figures, drawings, charts, and graphs, conveyed in person or through mediating technologies
- Combinations of the above ways offered in person or through mediating technologies

The results

The results are based on implementing "Student Collaborations" in the class. The students and the teachers are accountable for the success of this model. The students will learn "The Four Cs"⁵² these four Cs are "critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity."⁵³

The students will be able to have "Critical

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Thinking”⁵⁴ skill that enables them to “compare evidence, evaluate competing claims, and make sensible decisions” (NEA, 2012, p.8).

The students will have “Problem Solving”⁵⁵ skill that enables them to “solve different kinds of unfamiliar problems in both conventional and innovative ways”⁵⁶

The other skill is “Communication”⁵⁷, the students will be able to “Communicate Clearly”⁵⁸, it is the ability to do the following:

- Articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written, and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts
 - Listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes, and intentions
 - Use communication for a range of purposes (e.g. to inform, instruct, motivate, and persuade)
 - Use multiple media and technologies, and know how to assess impact and their effectiveness a priori
 - Communicate effectively in diverse environments (including multilingual and multicultural)
- And finally, the students will be able to collaborate in diverse teams to acquire knowledge and achieve class objectives. This will enable the students to “Collaborate with Others”⁵⁹, which is critical to empowering the students to be future leaders in a democratic Iraq.
 - Demonstrate ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams.
 - Exercise flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal.
 - Assume shared responsibility for collaborative work, and value the individual contributions made by each team member.

All of these skills will enrich the students’ learning experience, enhance their leadership, and encourage them to have the spirit of teamwork. These are critical skills that create Iraqi young leaders who believe in their unity, serve their society, and will be able to rebuild the new democratic Iraq.

Conclusion

The topic of “Improving the Higher

Education in Iraq” covers many aspects of the issue and the research contained varied recommendations to rebuild this important sector. One of the missing recommendations was “Student Collaborations” which is “an individual’s acquisition of knowledge to a socially-enabled developmental process. Collaboration is the social process that supports learners’ development of capabilities in which they learn to do without assistance things that they could initially do only with assistance. If learning really is a social process, then collaboration is required. The assistance that learners require may be provided by experts such as teachers and by peers, who collectively have expertise distributed among them.”⁶⁰. The research questions are:

1. What is the current condition of the higher education sector in Iraq?
2. What historical social, political, and economic factors contributed to the current condition of the higher education sector in Iraq?
3. What current initiatives, innovations, and trends are affecting the higher education sector in Iraq?
4. What are the recommendations for future improvement for the higher

education sector in Iraq?

The research findings and results lead to creating a new field that may change the higher education sector by applying Student Collaborations to the class without any major cost of time and money. It is a good approach that can take place until the curriculums will be changed. Also, it will enrich the students’ learning experience, enhance their communication skills, and improve their creativity.

Student Collaborations is a good start that will change the main stakeholders who are the students. When the students learn new problem solving techniques, reviewing case studies, and participating in real life scenarios, they will apply their learning to their future careers and to their community.

Student Collaborations are the engagement of students in class based activities in which the students are given in class discussions, activities, and projects by their instructor. The purpose of these collaborations is to promote team work, enhance interpersonal skills and problem solving, and to encourage learning of the class concepts and objectives

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The topic of this research is crucial to be implemented in the higher education sector while rebuilding its infrastructure and updating its system. It will give the opportunity to the students to enjoy their learning process in a social context which would help diverse groups of the Iraq society to melt in the big pot of Iraq and be united.

Student Collaborations will give the opportunity to the Iraqi students to learn “The Four Cs”, these four Cs are “critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.”⁶¹

The final result of the research is the base to improve the higher education sector in Iraq through implementing Student Collaborations in the Iraqi universities.

This paper focuses on student collaborations in the Iraqi universities as it is a focal topic that will change and improve the quality of higher education. It will polish students’ leadership, encourage team work, and enhance communications and, additionally, it will motivate students to search and explore in the fields of knowledge.

When properly implemented, Student Collaborations will help produce a new generation that believes in serving the

community and participates in leading the country.

It is a simple technique yet has broad benefits to the Iraqi universities as educational organizations and to the society as its citizens receive new education that motivates them to be leaders.

The topic of “Improving the Higher Education Sector in Iraq through Student Collaborations” led to several recommendations for the Iraqi universities. The purpose of these recommendations, to implement Student Collaborations in the Iraqi universities, are to establish advanced education practices and connect the Iraqi citizens to world’s latest trends in academia. The recommendations are based on low cost, ease of implementation, and potential impact on Iraqi students, universities and society.

1. Based on the findings and results, there are several recommendations to the higher education sector in Iraq:

Recognize the importance of the “Student Collaborations” model to change the current centralized teaching methods in the universities’ classes.

2. Assess the literature review (books, case studies, online) about the “Student Collaborations” model and its impact on the education advancement in the world.
3. Introduce the “Student Collaborations” model to the teachers and the students, and encourage them to achieve success in this new experience.
4. Initiate a test project to implement student collaborations in the university classes by collecting examples from the internet, classify the project into short-term and long term ones, and assess the results.
5. Implement “Student Collaborations” in all universities classes and continue to monitor results and feedback.
6. Continuously improve the “Student Collaborations” model by adopting best practices and advanced technology (in class projector, internet connection, etc.)

The research method was qualitative method aimed toward social change. This research could be conducted in a quantitative method if there was more available data

regarding the topic. The research would have broader benefits if there were specific numbers, charts, or assessments.

The research yields new recommendations to the Higher Education Sector Leadership in Iraq:

- To identify the main goal behind improving the higher education sector that would be to establish good quality education to all Iraqi citizens equally.
- To welcome new ideas and embrace change.
- To adopt more international best practices, procedures, or policies.
- To link the education and community development.

All of these recommendations lead to one main goal which is improving the higher education sector in Iraq in order to provide better education opportunities to the Iraqi citizens and enable them to serve their country by applying their learning experience in the field. It is clear and conscience goal that will serve the new democratic Iraq through its well-educated citizens.

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The Masters of Organization and Strategic Leadership is a unique experience for me. This program makes me more curious about various fields of knowledge in the context of leadership, ethics, and management. It is a wide program that has uncountable concepts for learning various types of organizations, management theories, and leadership styles. When I was admitted to this program, my intention was to gain leadership best practices in any environment; I ended up learning many things about global topics and lessons learned from famous world known organizations and communities.

I chose my capstone topic after attending three classes in the program. My selected topic was based on the quality of the education that I have received in this program which motivated me to search and learn about the higher education sector in Iraq, its current condition, and its urgent need to be changed to a well-structured sector that serves the Iraqi citizens and helps them to rebuild their country.

“Improving the Higher Education in Iraq through Student Collaborations” focuses on the most important stakeholders in the Iraqi universities which are the students.

Implementing the concept of Student Collaborations in the university classes would help the Iraqi students to be united in their learning process as they acquire knowledge through team work and collaborations. These student collaborations will enhance the students’ leadership, students’ communications and encourage team work.

When the Iraqi students learn to work together in groups, this will lead them to melting in the big pot of Iraq as one nation. The Iraqi society needs to be rebuilt and be prosperous again. This can happen through implementing Student Collaborations in the Iraqi universities’ classes and the results will be phenomenal.

When these students learn working in teams, they will reflect that on their families, communities, and the society in general. They will be the generation that leads the change and builds the new country after long years of dictatorship.

It is crucial for the Iraqi higher education sector leadership to be aware of the importance of higher education receivers “the students” and encourage implementing the concept of Student Collaborations in the Iraqi universities without waiting for international or

local organizations to suggest this solution.

Finally, the Iraqi teachers and students would welcome the idea of Student Collaborations and readily adopt new learning methods that enhance their knowledge and enrich their experience. This would create highly qualified leaders who are ready to start their career and will be ready to rebuild their Democratic and Free Iraq.

Notes

- * Zena Faylee studied at Neumann University in Aston, PA and earned her master's degree in Organizational and Strategic Leadership in 2013. Her master thesis, titled "Improving the Higher Education Sector in Iraq through Student Collaborations," focused on how to improve this sector in Iraq through Student Collaboration which is cost-free, bottom-up approach that targets the main stakeholders, the Iraqi Students, and improves their skills while the major rebuilding projects are being implemented to improve the Higher Education Sector
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