

The Challenges of Adopting AI as an Educational Tool in Iraqi Schools: Infrastructure, Training, and Cultural Barriers

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Abstract

The Iraqi government's plan to include AI technology in Iraq's education system is vital. This study tries to present the reasons that prevent the use of AI in Iraqi schools as well as address infrastructure, teacher training, and social and cultural limitations. The sample of the study consists of 108 teachers in the Babylon Governorate; data were gathered using a mixed-method questionnaire that included open-ended items. The questionnaire findings state that there were real infrastructure limitations; thus, 80% of teachers agreed that internet service was unstable, and the same ratio of teachers showed that students face difficulties with access to devices. Another 61.7% of teachers stated that they suffer from electricity shortages. Teachers' concerns about AI include 88.8% of the teachers lacking sufficient knowledge. Also, 50.5% of teachers did not believe that AI can improve education—an opinion shaped largely by mistrust of poor infrastructure. Therefore, the study determined that we should implement a phased holistic approach, starting with the infrastructural base, and then proceed with teacher training and attitude interventions.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, educational technology, infrastructure, teacher training, cultural barriers.

الخلاصة

يُعدّ سعي الحكومة العراقية لدمج تقنيات الذكاء الاصطناعي في النظام التعليمي خطوة ضرورية وفي الوقت المناسب. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد أبرز المعوقات التي تحول دون تبني الذكاء الاصطناعي في المدارس العراقية، مع التركيز على التحديات المتعلقة بالبنية التحتية وتدريب المعلمين والقيود الاجتماعية والثقافية. تألفت عينة الدراسة من ١٠٨ معلم في محافظة بابل، وجمعت البيانات باستخدام استبانة ذات منهج مختلط تضمنت أسئلة مفتوحة. أظهرت النتائج وجود تحديات حقيقة في البنية التحتية؛ إذ أشار ٨٠٪ من المعلمين إلى عدم استقرار خدمة الإنترنت، كما أكدّ النسبة نفسها أن الطلاب يواجهون صعوبة في الحصول على الأجهزة الالازمة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ذكر ٦١.٧٪ من المعلمين أنهم يعانون من انقطاعات الكهرباء المتكررة. كما عبر المعلمون عن مخاوف تتعلق بالذكاء الاصطناعي، حيث أوضح ٨٨.٨٪ منهم نقص

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معرفتهم الكافية بهذا المجال، بينما لم يعتقد ٥٠.٥% أن الذكاء الاصطناعي قادر على تحسين العملية التعليمية—وهو رأي تأثر بشكل كبير بعدم الثقة بالبنية التحتية الحالية. وخلص الدراسة إلى ضرورة اعتماد نهج شامل تدريجي يبدأ بمعالجة الأساس البنوي، ثم الانتقال إلى تدريب المعلمين وتغيير اتجاهاتهم نحو التكنولوجي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذكاء الاصطناعي، التقنية التعليمية، البنية التحتية، تدريب المعلمين، الحاجز الثقافي.

1. Introduction

1.1 Artificial Intelligence in Iraqi Education

The global implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in education has facilitated personalized learning, increased teaching efficiency, and reduced the administrative burden (Luckin et al., 2022). The United Arab Emirates (Mubadala Investment Company, 2023) and Saudi Arabia (NEOM, 2022) have started considerable artificial intelligence projects, while Iraq is lagging even though they made public statements on the policy platform from which to establish an AI infrastructure. The National Strategy for Education and Higher Education 2022-2031 states the importance of technology in the curriculum (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2022), and the White Paper on Digital Transformation (Ministry of Communications [MoC], 2023) elaborates on the continuing barriers listed below:

- Infrastructure weakness is highlighted, with only 32% of schools having reliable electricity and 37% having access to the internet. (World Bank, 2023).
- Teachers don't have enough training in AI literacy (UNESCO Iraq Office, 2022).
- General doubts: 61% of Baghdad educators question AI's ability to teach, per Al-Furaiji and Kadhim (2023).

To deal with these concerns, this study checks the perspectives of teachers. By connecting Iraq's future digital strategy with the classroom facilities, it plans to offer insights required for an equal transformation of education.

1.2 The Transformative Potential of AI in Iraqi Education

Iraq has a good opportunity to make good use of AI to update its educational system, which continues to be troubled by decades of war and a lack of resources.

There are potential advantages related to the potential reduction in inequities and supporting student access to high-quality education in the teacher profession with some of the more supportive environments through modified work processes or capacity building in professional learning activities. There are potential opportunities for better updating relevant digital skills and modernizing education to support more effectively action or a lower-cost solution based on data, support national interests, and support the Iraq Education Strategy 2031 and relevant interests. AI will modernize the educational system, improve student learning experiences, and equalize access—this implementation can align Iraq's educational system with the reality of the 21st century.

1.3 Study Objectives and Question

Objectives

This study tends to:

1. Identify the infrastructural, pedagogical, and socio-cultural barriers to including artificial intelligence (AI) in Iraqi schools.
2. Study teachers' readiness and what they need for integrating AI into their teaching practice.
3. Provide practical recommendations for AI carrying out matching the Iraq Education Strategy 2031.

Study Question

According to teachers' opinions, what are the main challenges that prevent Iraqi schools from adopting AI?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global Trends in Developed Contexts

In high-income countries, AI is reinventing the educational landscape in several ways such as allowing for administrative processes to be automated, personalizing students' learning experiences, and using predictive analytics. The evidence from the literature reported learning outcomes of 20-30% based on the use of AI-supported learning systems (OECD, 2023). This is made possible with a strong technological infrastructure in place, on-going investment, and structured professional development for teachers.

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2.2 Infrastructure: The Foundational Divide

For developing countries, infrastructure is the greatest barrier. UNESCO (2023) estimates that only 35% of schools in low-income countries have access to reliable electricity relative to 89% in Gulf countries (GSMA 2023). Iraq has especially significant challenges. The World Bank (2023) estimates very few schools in Iraq (only a minority of schools) have reliable electricity and access to the internet, so the ability to support any sustainable digital initiative is, quite simply, impossible.

2.3 Teacher Training and Readiness

Educators' readiness is another obstacle to AI adoption. Worldwide, more than 60% of teachers say they do not feel ready to engage with AI tools (Brookings Institution, 2022). In Iraq, this percentage is even higher at 78%, revealing many teachers claim they do not feel prepared for AI integration (Al-Hassnawi, 2023). The skill gap is also exacerbated by the lack of professional development on AI.

2.4 Cultural and Social Perceptions

Cultural beliefs also play an important role in technology usage. A study in Iraq demonstrated strong doubt in the use of AI — the researchers found that 65% of parents would like to avoid having their children engage in AI programming, and cross-country studies demonstrate greater doubt in Iraq compared to neighboring Jordan (Al-Furaiji & Kadhim, 2023; RAND Corporation, 2023). This doubt is affected not only by limited awareness in Iraq but also by unemployment and ethical issues.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature and This Study's Contribution

Though the National Education Strategy 2031 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2022) submits a plan for digital transformation in Iraq, progress has been either slow or experimental. Prior research has been able to articulate the benefits of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in either higher education (Al-Taie & Mohammed, 2023) or humanitarian learning contexts (UNICEF, 2023), but has little coverage

of the barriers experienced in K-12 schools. This study will begin the process of filling that gap by looking at teachers' perspectives in relation to issues pertaining to infrastructure, training, and culture. Therefore, this study, according to the Iraqi teachers' opinions, submits important suggestions for sustainable and real reforms.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This study used a descriptive, multi-sectional mixed-methods design to gather teacher opinions. This design provides a means of gathering wide-ranging quantitative data and qualitative, open-ended responses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). After analyzing the data statistically, the study provides an understanding of AI challenges.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The study included 108 teachers from public schools in the Babil Governorate. The participants took part through the arrangement with their school administrations within the Directorate of Education in Babil. After taking schools' and teachers' agreement to participate, a sampling method was used. The participation criteria required participants to be full-time employed in a public primary, intermediate, or preparatory school. They have at least one year of teaching experience and are willing to complete the questionnaire voluntarily. The sample covered multiple teaching levels. This helps to provide a full view of AI challenges across different levels. However, future research could focus on a single specialty (e.g., English teachers) or one educational stage to allow for more controlled comparison.

Table 1: Demographic and Professional Profile of Participants (N=108)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	64	59.3%
	Female	44	40.7%
School Location	Urban	63	58.3%
	Rural	45	41.7%

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Characteristic	Category	n	%
Age	Under 30 years	30	27.8%
	30-40 years	37	34.3%
	41-50 years	24	22.2%
	Over 50 years	17	15.7%
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	49	45.4%
	5-10 years	28	25.9%
	More than 10 years	31	28.7%
School Level (n=105)	Primary	58	55.2%
	Intermediate	31	29.5%
	Preparatory	16	15.2%
Subject Specialization (n=90)	Languages	27	25.0%
	Mathematics	13	12.0%
	Science	12	11.1%
	Combined / General Subjects	13	12.0%
	Other Specializations	35	39.9%

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a bilingual questionnaire (in Arabic and English) developed based on AI in education. The questionnaire included 20 items distributed in five sections: 1) Demographic Information, 2) Infrastructure and Technology Access, 3) AI Awareness and Training, 4) Cultural and Social Perceptions, and 5) Open-Ended Feedback. Answers to closed-ended items were analyzed using either nominal options (Yes/No) or a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1) for questions based on teachers' attitude. The pilot study was implemented two weeks before the main data collection; 15 teachers participated in it. Feedback from the pilot led to simple amends concerning clarity and translation accuracy. The final instrument showed strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84). The full bilingual questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.

3.4 Data Analysis

Table 2 presented items 6-8 of the questionnaire. These items represent the measures of infrastructure readiness, which include covering electricity, internet stability, and device access. This direct relation explains the relationship between questionnaire items and their quantitative representation.

3.5 Limitations

There are two primary restrictions that exist in this study. First, one sample from one governorate is used, which limits the generalizability. Although multiple school levels and subject specialties are included, and that enriches the understanding of general barriers, focusing on one specialization could lead to deeper insight in future studies. Second, the cross-sectional design measured teacher responses at a limited time; thus, changes in teacher responses according to infrastructure

4. Findings

4.1 Infrastructure Challenges

The gaps in infrastructure were reported to be the most significant barrier. As illustrated in table 2, the majority of teachers reported lack of devices for students (77.4%), lack of consistent electricity (60.4%), and lack of access to internet (54.7%) as their most pressing barriers. The cost of AI software (46.2%) was noted but apparently not as pressing as fixing infrastructure issues.

Table 2: Infrastructure Readiness for AI Tools (n=108)

Question	Responses	Percentage
Q6. Stable electricity?	No	60.4%
	Sometimes	25.9%
	Yes	13.7%
Q7. Stable internet?	No	54.7%
	Occasionally	32.4%
	Yes	12.9%
Q8. Computers/tablets for students?	No	77.4%
	Yes, but limited	19.4%
	Yes, sufficient	3.2%

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Table 3 (Q9.): Biggest Technical Challenges (Multiple Responses, n=106)

Lack of devices (computers, smart boards)	82 (77.4%)
Unstable electricity	64 (60.4%)
Poor internet service	58 (54.7%)
High cost of AI software	49 (46.2%)
Other	24 (22.6%)

4.2 Teacher Training and Preparedness

Table 4 demonstrates an obvious lack of preparedness. Most teachers reported little familiarity with AI, and had little interest in training (75.7%). However, those who were interested in training were able to note some specific needs, especially using AI software (60.4%) and planning lessons (54.7%). It shows that teachers would prefer practical skills related directly to classroom use instead of broad digital literacy knowledge.

Table 4: Teacher Familiarity, Training, and Perceived Skill Needs in AI

Aspect	Findings	Percentage
Familiarity (Q10)	No knowledge	58.5%
Training Received (Q11)	No training received	88.8%
Training Interest (Q13)	Not interested	75.7%
Perceived Skill Needs (Q14)	Training on AI software	60.4%
	Lesson planning using AI	54.7%

Aspect	Findings	Percentage
	Student assessment using AI	49.1%
	Basic digital skills	37.7%

4.3 Cultural and Social Barriers

As shown in Table 5, despite many teachers showing uncertainties regarding the potential of AI to serve education positively, with 50.5% of teachers saying they did not believe AI would benefit education in a useful way, the qualitative responses stated that their concern looked to be warranted if justified on the basis of structural issues such as broken systems, fear for the reliability of AI, and the concern of students accessing or even misusing and abusing AI in their classrooms. As a summary of these results in general terms, the cultural resistance to innovations such as AI does not appear to be ideologically technico-scientific; rather, it is contextual and depends on broken systems.

Table 5: Cultural Attitudes Toward AI (n=107)

Question	Response Options	Percentage
Q15. Can AI improve education?	Strongly Agree/Agree	24.3%
	Neutral	25.2%
	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	50.5%
Q16. Concerns about AI?	Lack of trust in AI accuracy	58.9%
	Student over-dependence	15.0%
	Fear of replacing teachers	14.0%
	Technical/religious obstacles	9.3%
Q17. Support from parents/administrators?	Yes	16.8%
	Somewhat	30.8%
	No	52.3%

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4.4. Concluding Insights and Suggestions (Q18, Q19, Q20)

Analysis of the final open-ended questions showed three main topics from teachers:

Cultural Barriers (Q18):

- **Knowledge Gap:** Wide lack of AI understanding among teachers and students
- **Trust Lack:** Noticeable concerns about AI's accuracy and its negative effects

Implementation

Framework

(Q19):

Teachers recommended following a practical three-step plan:

1. **Infrastructure Foundation:** Fix electricity, internet, and device limits first.
2. **Capacity Building:** Build trust through practical training.
3. **Step-by-step Expansion:** Begin with specific schools before implementing the program widely.

Final Perspectives (Q20):

- Teachers showed their gratefulness for asking them in planning processes.
- Assured the need for careful, balanced implementation of the National Strategy for Education and Higher Education, 2022-203.

- Supported gradual adoption, taking into consideration current facts that the Iraqi schools suffer from.

These visions assure that AI adoption requires facing serious systemic challenges through an inspired and enlightened approach for teachers.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Primacy of Infrastructure

According to the teachers' responses, poor infrastructure was the basic barrier. They regularly confirmed that they suffered from the lack of devices or stable electricity and good connectivity. The findings about poor electricity and connectivity are the same as the findings of previous studies that highlight their need for digital learning in developing contexts (Unwin et al., 2020). The discussion about AI is a waste of time if the teachers work in a circumstance without basic infrastructure in place, as the AI would not have any practical effect.

5.2 Teacher Training: Low Interest but Clear Needs

The concept of teacher readiness is paradoxical in nature. While the majority of teachers showed little interest in training related to AI, reflecting what Sharples (2022) calls "innovation fatigue," which occurs when teachers' previous experiences with training and educational change process did not result in positive change in the system, there were a contingent of teachers who expressed the need for practices and skills that could be learned in training. These practices were primarily focused on using AI software tools and planning lessons. In this sense, professional development that results in meaningful learning experiences for teachers must exemplify real connections to an enabling infrastructures as well as to teaching practice.

5.3 Cultural Resistance as Rational Doubt

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The majority of teachers expressed a resistance to using AIs, but much of this resistance was more pragmatic than ideological. Teachers connected their hesitation to factors related to systems failure (error) in AI reliability, distrust in the accuracy of the AI produced, or weak impositions of dishonesty in student use. This experience links to the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), as "perceived usefulness" shapes the degree to which an educator accepts the AI as a useful tool. In contexts characterized by unreliable access to electricity and the internet, simply using and/or accepting AI seems nonsensical. In this sense, cultural resistance exemplified a reasonable response to the structural barriers, not a staunch opposition to innovation.

5.4 Toward a Phased, Pragmatic Approach

The teachers suggested a staged approach: first, they would stabilize aspects of the structures; next, they would build trust with small-scale pilot projects; and finally, they would do professional learning. This coincides with widely recognized change management theorists who support gradual approaches and the involvement of stakeholders (Fullan, 2007). The teachers requesting practical professional learning instead of theoretical gives evidence that they knew their need for the necessary steps that would enhance sustainable engagement after the change. The teachers didn't refuse learning with improvements. They were ready to engage, with the condition that changes must be trusted and realistic.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study indicates that the integration of artificial intelligence in schools in Iraq is limited and complex and has many obstacles. Shortages of physical infrastructure, especially electricity that is unreliable, limited internet access, and limits students have on using devices contribute to a culture in which professional learning never seems relevant and culturally based distrust develops as an understandable response to those contextual factors. Findings suggest that no more than a patchwork or silo-related initiative is going to work. Professional learning that will integrate artificial intelligence is going to need to be whole, phased, and structured in a way to engage teachers in the process of implementation.

6.1 Recommendations

For Policymakers

- Support foundational infrastructure, including stable electricity, reliable internet, and device access before spending on software or larger trainings.
- Provide resources for pilot schools in the region supplying adequate infrastructure for future scale.
- Embed AI in national education policy and formally recognize the milestones along with Education Strategy 2031 members.

For School Administrators

- Launch awareness campaigns that help develop trust concerning AI, by highlighting the transparency around the benefits AI can have, for both teachers and students.
- Design and develop projects in selected schools where circumstances are favorable, allowing teachers to see AI tools in practice before the model is implemented more widely.
- Provide additional, reduced professional development for teachers who do engage in training supporting AI due to their extra workload, and develop better outcomes for students.

For Future Studies

- Broaden the study to include other Iraqi governorates through randomized sampling to gain wider applicability.
- Undertake longitudinal study to monitor teacher perceptions and consequences as infrastructure improves and pilot studies advance.
- Investigate AI usage from the student and parent perspectives for a richer understanding of cultural attitudes.

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Appendix A: Teacher Questionnaire (Bilingual)

Questionnaire for Teachers: Challenges of Adopting AI in Iraqi Schools

استبيان للمعلمين: تحديات تبني الذكاء الاصطناعي في المدارس العراقية

Section 1: Demographic Information

القسم الأول: المعلومات العامة

1. Gender / الجنس :

- Male / ذكر /
- Female / أنثى /

2. Age / العمر :

- Under 30 / أقل من ٣٠ سنة /
- 30-40 / ٣٠-٤٠ سنة /
- 41-50 / ٤١-٥٠ سنة /
- Over 50 / أكثر من ٥٠ سنة /

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3. Teaching Experience / الخبرة التدريسية:

- أقل من ٥ سنوات / Less than 5 years
- ٥-١٠ سنوات / 5-10 years
- أكثر من ١٠ سنوات / More than 10 years

4. School Level You Teach / المراحل التدريسية التي تدرسها:

- ابتدائي / Primary
- متوسط / Intermediate
- إعدادي / Preparatory

5. Subject(s) You Teach / المادة/المواد التي تدرسها:

Section 2: Infrastructure and Technology Access

القسم الثاني: البنية التحتية والتقنية

6. Does your school have reliable electricity to support AI tools? / هل تمتلك مدرستك كهرباء مستقرة لدعم أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي؟

- Yes / نعم
- No / لا
- Sometimes / أحياناً

7. Does your school have stable internet access? / هل يتوفر في مدرستك إنترنت مستقر؟

- Yes / نعم
- No / لا
- Occasionally / متقطع

8. Are there computers or smart devices available for students to use AI tools? / هل تتوفر أجهزة حاسوب أو أجهزة ذكية للطلاب لاستخدام أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي؟

- Yes, sufficient / نعم، بشكل كاف
- Yes, but limited / نعم، ولكن محدودة
- No / لا

9. What are the biggest technical challenges in adopting AI at your school? (Select all that apply) / ما أكبر التحديات التقنية في تبني الذكاء الاصطناعي بمدرستك؟ (اختر جميع ما ينطبق)

- عدم استقرار الكهرباء / Unstable electricity
- ضعف خدمة الإنترنت / Poor internet connectivity
- نقص الأجهزة (هواتف، أجهزة ذكية) / Lack of devices (computers, tablets)
- ارتفاع تكلفة برامج الذكاء الاصطناعي / High cost of AI software
- Other: _____

Section 3: AI Awareness and Training

القسم الثالث: الوعي بالذكاء الاصطناعي والتدريب

10. How familiar are you with AI and its educational applications? / ما مدى معرفتك بالذكاء الاصطناعي وتطبيقاته التعليمية؟

- معرفة جيدة / Very familiar
- معرفة متوسطة / Somewhat familiar
- لا أعرف عنه / Not familiar at all

11. Have you received any training on using AI tools for teaching? / هل تلقيت أي تدريب على استخدام أدوات الذكاء الاصطناعي في التدريس؟

- نعم / Yes
- لا / No
- تدريب أساسي فقط / Only basic training

12. If yes, what kind of training did you receive? / إذا كانت الإجابة نعم، ما نوع التدريب الذي تلقيته؟

13. Would you be interested in AI training programs for teachers? / هل ترغب بالالتحاق ببرامج تدريبية عن الذكاء الاصطناعي للمعلمين؟

- نعم / Yes
- لا / No
- ربما / Maybe

14. What skills would you need to use AI in teaching? (Select all that apply) / ما المهارات التي اختر جميع ما ينطبق(تحتاجها لاستخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي في التدريس؟)

- مهارات رقمية أساسية / Basic digital literacy
- تدريب على برامج الذكاء الاصطناعي / AI software training
- تخطيط الدروس باستخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي / Lesson planning with AI
- تقييم الطلاب بالذكاء الاصطناعي / Student assessment using AI
- Other: _____

Section 4: Cultural and Social Perceptions

The Challenges of Adopting AI as an Educational Tool in Iraqi Schools: Infrastructure, Training, and Cultural Barriers

Amjad Jabbar Majeed
Zainab Jabbar Majeed

القسم الرابع: العوائق الثقافية والاجتماعية

هل تعتقد أن الذكاء الاصطناعي يمكنه تحسين /
التعليم في العراق؟

- أتفق بشدة / Strongly agree
- أتفق / Agree
- محايد / Neutral
- لا أتفق / Disagree
- لا أتفق بشدة / Strongly disagree

ما / ما هي مخاوفك حول استخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي في الفصول الدراسية؟
(اختر جميع ما ينطبق)

- الخوف من استبدال المعلمين / Fear of replacing teachers
- عدم الثقة في دقة الذكاء الاصطناعي / Lack of trust in AI accuracy
- إعتماد الطلاب المفرط على التكنولوجيا / Students may become too dependent on technology
- معوقات ثقافية/دينية / Cultural/religious resistance
- Other: _____

هل يدعم أولياء الأمور أو الإدارة المدرسية استخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي؟

- نعم / Yes
- لا / No
- إلى حد ما / Somewhat

ما أبرز العوائق / الثقافية لتبني الذكاء الاصطناعي في المدارس العراقية؟

Section 5: Open-Ended Feedback

القسم الخامس: ملاحظات مفتوحة

ما / اقتراحاتك لتنفيذ ناجح للذكاء الاصطناعي في المدارس العراقية؟

أي تعليقات أخرى حول الذكاء الاصطناعي في التعليم؟ / Any additional comments on AI in education?

Thank you for your participation!
شكراً لمشاركتك!