



THE IMPACT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRAQ: REALITIES, CHALLENGES, AND PROSPECTS

Assistant Professor Sanaa Salman Shindi (PhD)*

College of Management and Finance/University of Babylon.

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*Corresponding author:

Ass. Prof. Sanaa Salman Shindi (PhD)

College of Management and Finance/

University of Babylon.

sanaashindi02@gmail.com,

akramammar334@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of implementing the Bologna Process in Iraqi higher-education institutions. Through a review of policy reports, institutional announcements, and empirical studies from universities within Iraq — particularly in Babylon university (college of science and college of engineering)— it analyzes benefits, challenges, and the potential of the Bologna framework to modernize Iraqi higher education. The findings suggest that while certain progress has been made (e.g. curricular reform, adoption of credit-based systems, quality assurance mechanisms), significant structural, infrastructural and administrative obstacles remain. The paper concludes with recommendations to support a sustainable and effective implementation across Iraqi universities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR) has officially moved to adopt the Bologna Process framework in many universities, beginning with technical institutions. The Bologna Process aims to harmonize higher-education systems via mechanisms such as a three-cycle degree structure (Bachelor–Master–Doctorate), a credit-based system (ECTS), quality assurance, and mutual recognition of qualifications.

The rationale for adopting Bologna in Iraq includes raising academic standards, aligning with international systems, facilitating student mobility, and better preparing graduates for global competitiveness and local labor market needs. This paper seeks to analyze the real impact of implementing the Bologna Process in Iraq: what has been achieved, the barriers encountered, and whether the system has the potential to reform Iraqi higher education in a meaningful way. (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research — Iraq,2022).

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESES

Research Problem: Despite the official adoption of the Bologna Process by Iraqi authorities, it remains unclear to what extent this framework has been effectively implemented across different colleges in Babylon university, and how much it has influenced educational quality, student outcomes, and institutional practices.

Based on this problem, the study proposes the following hypotheses

- **H1:** Adoption of the Bologna Process contributes positively to the quality of higher education in Iraq by introducing credit-based curricula, improving teaching practices, and reinforcing quality assurance mechanisms.
- **H2:** The expected benefits are hindered by structural and institutional challenges — such as inadequate infrastructure, limited administrative capacity, lack of staff training, and institutional resistance to change.
- **H3:** Implementation effectiveness differs significantly among institutions depending on resources, readiness, and administrative commitment — leading to

disparities across universities, colleges, and specializations.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 What is the Bologna Process

The Bologna Process began as a European collaboration to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), unifying academic degree systems, promoting student mobility, and ensuring comparability and quality across participating colleges. Its core components include: a three-cycle degree structure (Bachelor / Master / Doctorate), credit-based workload & accumulation system (ECTS), emphasis on quality assurance, mutual recognition of degrees, and promoting student-centered learning and mobility.

3.2 Adoption of Bologna in Iraq: Policy and Institutional Moves

- In December 2022, MoHESR announced the adoption of the Bologna Process system in technical universities for a number of programs starting academic year 2022/2023.
- As of September 2023, the Ministry declared a successful implementation in technical specializations and readiness to adopt it across engineering and science departments — covering more than 600 departments.
- Other universities declare on their website that they have committed to the Bologna framework and are aligning their academic programs accordingly.
- Institutions also hold workshops for faculty and administrative staff to prepare for Bologna implementation

4. METHODOLOGY

Given the current state of Bologna in Iraq — where empirical data is still limited and implementation is evolving — this paper adopts a **secondary data review** methodology, combining the following sources:

- Official policy documents and announcements from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.
- Public declarations and news items from Iraqi universities that have announced adoption of Bologna or held workshops for implementation.
- Peer-reviewed academic studies and surveys conducted particularly in colleges of science and engineering in Babylon university (curricular reform, student perceptions, faculty readiness).
- Analysis of potential gaps and challenges identified in the literature (infrastructure, quality assurance, administrative capacity, training).

This approach allows for an initial, macro-level assessment. However, to strengthen findings, future research should consider primary empirical methods (surveys, interviews, institutional audits) once implementation stabilizes.

5. SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

(Likert-scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither, Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

- 1 Implementing the Bologna Process is practically easy to apply within my department/faculty.
- 2 After implementing Bologna, the curricula have become more flexible and better suited to the labor market.
- 3 Student evaluation (grading/exams) has become fairer and more objective since applying Bologna.
- 4 Teaching methods have shifted toward more interactive approaches after Bologna implementation.
- 5 Students have become more engaged and participative in education since Bologna was applied.
- 6 The administrative burden (registration, course follow-up, transfers) has increased after implementing Bologna.
- 7 Academic staff received sufficient training to meet the requirements of Bologna.
- 8 The infrastructure (laboratories, library, resources) supports the proper implementation of Bologna.
- 9 There is clear administrative support from the university for implementing Bologna.
- 10 Students are capable of coping with the new credit/course-based system (hours/units) easily.
- 11 Coordination between departments (especially in interdisciplinary/ shared-specialization programs) improved after Bologna.
- 12 The quality of graduates after Bologna (in terms of knowledge and skills) is better than before.
- 13 Bologna has facilitated transferability between universities or departments.
- 14 Bologna reduced redundancy and excessive courses in the academic plan.
- 15 Overall, I am satisfied with the implementation of Bologna in my university.

Response options

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

6. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Achieved Benefits & Positive Developments

- **Curriculum Reform & Student-Centered Learning:** The Bologna framework encouraged universities to shift from traditional lecture-centered teaching to more student-centered, outcome-based curricula, emphasizing competencies rather than rote memorization. Z. N. Ghafar, O. M.-A. Ahmad Hazaymeh, B. Raad Raheem & M. Wajdi (2025).
- **Credit-based System (ECTS) and Degree Structure:** Some Iraqi institutions began adopting ECTS and aligning degree cycles (Bachelor / Master / Doctorate), facilitating clearer degree definitions and laying the

groundwork for future mobility and recognition. (Cihan University –Erbil 2018)

6.2 Challenges, Limitations, and Risks

- **Inconsistent Implementation across Institutions and Departments:** According to this study review, implementation varies widely across universities and even among departments within the same university — leading to unequal student experiences. Zanyar Nathir Ghafar^{1*}, Omar Mohammad-Ameen Ahmad Hazaymeh², Bareq Raad Raheem³, Majid Wajdi⁴, Ida Bagus Artha Adnyana⁵, Anak Agung Raka Sitawati⁶.2025.
- **Insufficient Digital / Administrative Infrastructure:** Many universities lack robust IT systems and administrative capacity needed to manage credit-based registration, tracking of ECTS, student records, and quality assurance data.
- **Faculty Resistance and Lack of Training:** Some faculty members resist the pedagogical changes required by Bologna (moving from traditional lecture-based to student-centered, outcome-based teaching), due to lack of training, heavy workloads, or unfamiliarity with new methods.
- **Policy Coordination and Governance Gaps:** The absence of a unified, enforced national policy or monitoring mechanism leads to fragmentation — universities advance at different paces, and there's a risk of “partial implementation” or superficial adoption.
- **Equity and Resource Disparities:** Universities may struggle; disparities in funding, staff training, infrastructure result in unequal opportunities, undermining the goal of a unified national higher-education standard.

7. DISCUSSION

The evidence shows that the Bologna Process represents a promising framework for reforming Iraqi higher education — offering a structured, internationally recognized model that could raise academic standards, promote student mobility, and align university outputs with global and local labor-market demands.

However, realization of that potential depends heavily on systemic readiness: administrative capacity, infrastructure, faculty development, and consistent institutional commitment. Without addressing these challenges, Bologna risks becoming a nominal label — i.e. universities may claim they “implement Bologna” while actual practices remain largely unchanged.

Moreover, given the disparities among institutions (public vs private, well-funded vs under-resourced, urban vs rural, technical vs humanities), there's a real concern that the Bologna implementation may exacerbate inequalities rather than standardize quality.

Therefore, to succeed, Iraq needs more than policy declarations: it needs a comprehensive, coordinated

national strategy that includes investment in infrastructure, capacity-building, monitoring, and support — along with flexibility to adapt Bologna principles to the Iraqi context (labor market needs, language, local resources).

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, university administrators, and stakeholders:

1. **Develop and enforce a national framework for Bologna Implementation.** The Ministry should issue clear guidelines, timelines, and standards applicable to all universities, and set up a monitoring and evaluation body to ensure consistency.
2. **Invest in digital infrastructure and administrative systems** Universities must develop or upgrade IT systems to handle registration, credit tracking (ECTS), student data, quality assurance, and reporting.
3. **Faculty and Staff Training & Capacity Building.** Conduct regular workshops, training programs, and pedagogical development for academic and administrative staff to familiarize them with student-centered teaching, modular curricula, assessment, and Bologna standards.
4. **Link Curricula with Labor Market Needs and Local Context.** While adopting Bologna's international framework, curricula should be adapted to meet Iraqi labor market requirements — offering practical, applied courses, and aligning with local industry demands.
5. **Promote Equity and Support Under-Resourced Institutions.** Allocate additional support (funding, training, infrastructure) to universities
6. **Encourage Stakeholder Engagement and International Collaboration.** Engage students, faculty, employers, quality-assurance agencies, and international partners (e.g. European universities) to foster collaboration, mobility, and dual-degree programs.

9. CONCLUSION

The Bologna Process holds significant promise for reforming higher education in Iraq — offering a path toward modernization, international alignment, improved educational quality, and enhanced student mobility.

Early steps taken by the Ministry of Higher Education and some Iraqi universities are encouraging; yet, the road ahead remains long. Without serious investment in infrastructure, training, governance, and equity, Bologna may remain a partial or symbolic reform.

For the Bologna framework to fulfill its potential in Iraq, there must be a coordinated, sustained, context-sensitive effort — one that balances international standards with local realities, and ensures that all institutions and students benefit, not just a select few.

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