

BUSINESS
LANDSCAPE

Iraqi Education

Sector Overview



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Iraqi Education Sector Overview

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**KAPITA's Research team deeply thanks and appreciates
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Introduction

The development of an educational system that meets the need of modern times directly relates to the growth of a nation. Education extends beyond the mere addition of vocabulary to one's thesaurus, it shapes personality, thoughts, and social skill, if and when delivered properly.

Iraq (also called Mesopotamia; the land between two rivers) was known as the cradle of civilization, the place where the first letter was written and complex urban centers grew. Schools were established and children went through a form of formal education that is now demanded of every individual all around the world. The oldest school in Iraq was the original Mustansiriyah school in Baghdad, established in 1227 by the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mustansir.

The Iraqi society in 1958 was very much affected by the political and social awareness in that period, which in turn focused on the importance and spread of education, initiating scholarship programs by inviting and sending students to different European countries and America. Throughout the 1960s, the governmental expenditure on education kept increasing with multiple universities established in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, and Al-Sulaimaniyah.

Education was, by law, free in Iraq, and in 1974, laws abolished private education. The control of the government on the educational sector kept growing as more laws were issued, until the year 1987, allowing the government supervision over kindergartens and formulation of educational policies. By 1985, Iraq was free from illiteracy. The 1984 governmental expenditure on education reached 6% of Gross National Product (GNP) and the average government spending per student for education was approximately \$620.

The gulf war, the consequential sanctions on Iraq, and the later Oil For Food Programme (OFFP) in 1995, decreased the expenditure on the educational sector greatly, reaching as low as \$47 government spending per student, as the resources obtained from the OFFP barely covered the social sectors that included health, education, water, and sanitation, with the education sector having the lowest share. Teaching staff's salaries dropped significantly as the program did not cover it. This led to massive waves of teachers leaving their profession or traveling abroad. As education was one of the most affected sectors, the post-2003 government considered education reform a major task in the rebuilding of Iraq.

Introduction

Present day Iraq ensures the right to free education for all, compulsory education at the primary level, and eradication of illiteracy as stated in Article 34 of the constitution of 2005. The Ministry of Education runs a strongly centralized national system according to the principle of centralization of planning and decentralization of implementation. In 2016, Iraq spent 6.8 trillion IQD (around 5.7 billion USD) on education for central Iraq, a 44.2% increase from 4.7 trillion IQD in 2010-11. This translates to Iraq (except for KRI) spending approximately 1.3 million IQD (around 1,000 USD) per student.

Two ministries are responsible for the education system in Iraq. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is in charge of pre-school, primary and secondary education, in addition to vocational training institutes. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) is responsible for all post-secondary education, including technical education, and research centers alongside the scientific policy of the country.

COVID-19 was the stop button for normal daily activities and education was one of the first sectors to halt all activities, albeit it had to continue regardless of the COVID-19 situation. The first means of remote education was introduced to students by the government in 2003 via a governmental TV channel, with the aid from UNESCO, dedicated to broadcasting the curriculum to students.

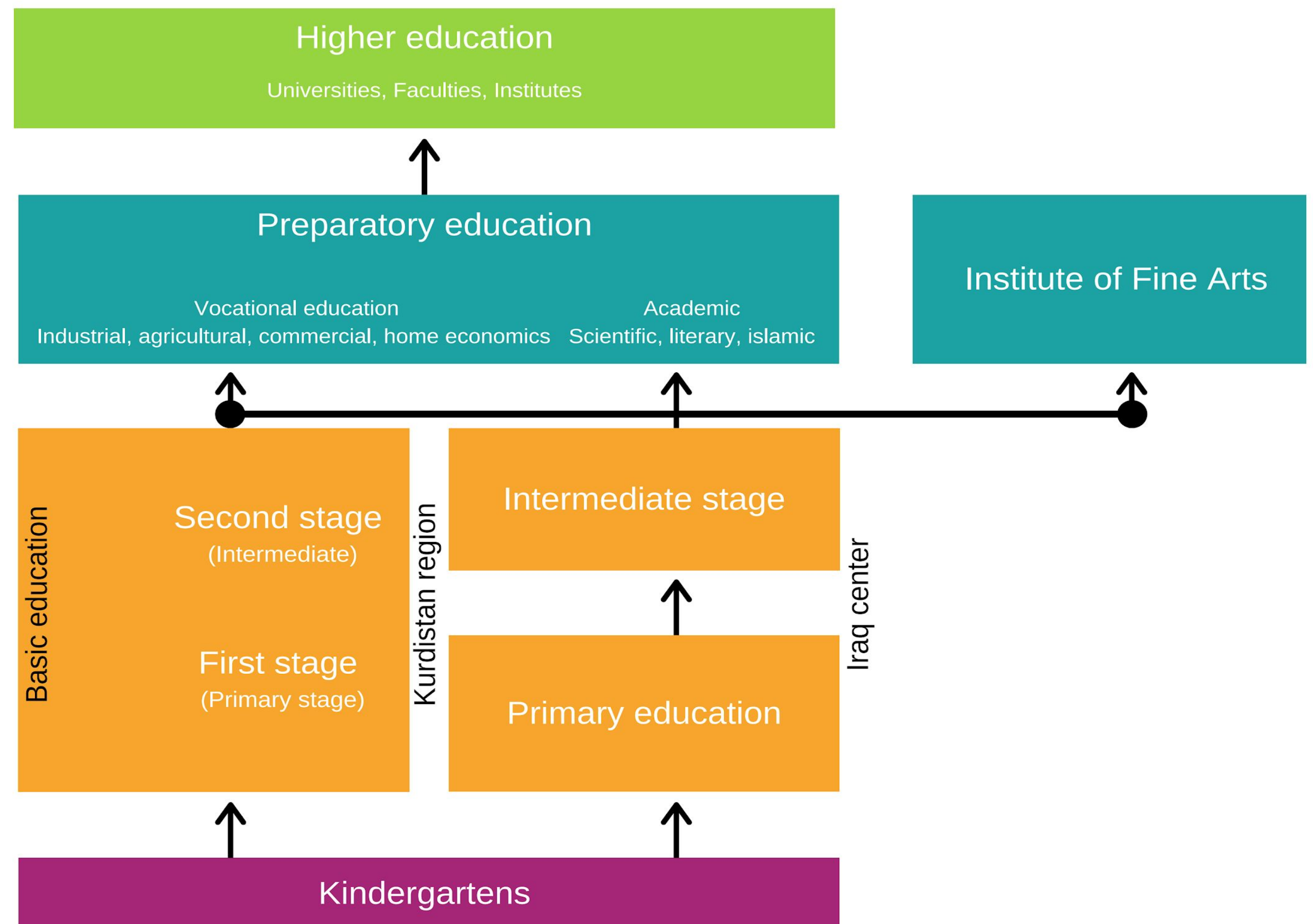
In the face of the COVID crisis, the federal MoE and the Ministry of Education in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI MoE) were set with digital platforms available for students and educators to use. Google Classroom is one of the most commonly used across Iraq. Newton (The MoE Federal online platform) was developed by the federal government, mainly for the internally displaced and refugee learners, it included classes and courses in Arabic.

This report aims to present an overview of the current situation of the education sector in Iraq. It provides a brief of the structure of the Iraqi education system throughout all different levels and tracks as well as follow its latest developments. It also covers the main issues of this sector and the current initiatives tackling these problems. In addition, it sheds light on the rising startups in this sector and what solutions they offer. It concludes with recommendations and suggestions to further improve this essential sector.

Iraqi Education System Structure

The structure of the Iraqi Education system starts with the mandatory primary education which involves 6 years of schooling, followed by secondary education consisting of an intermediate level (3 years) and a preparatory level (3 years). Preparatory education has an academic stream with two tracks, literary and scientific, and a vocational stream.

Higher education constitutes of colleges and institutes, both are yearly programs. Most institutes require 2 years to acquire their degrees while most university programs take around four years. Architecture, Pharmacy, and Dentistry degrees take 5 years while Medicine takes 6 years.



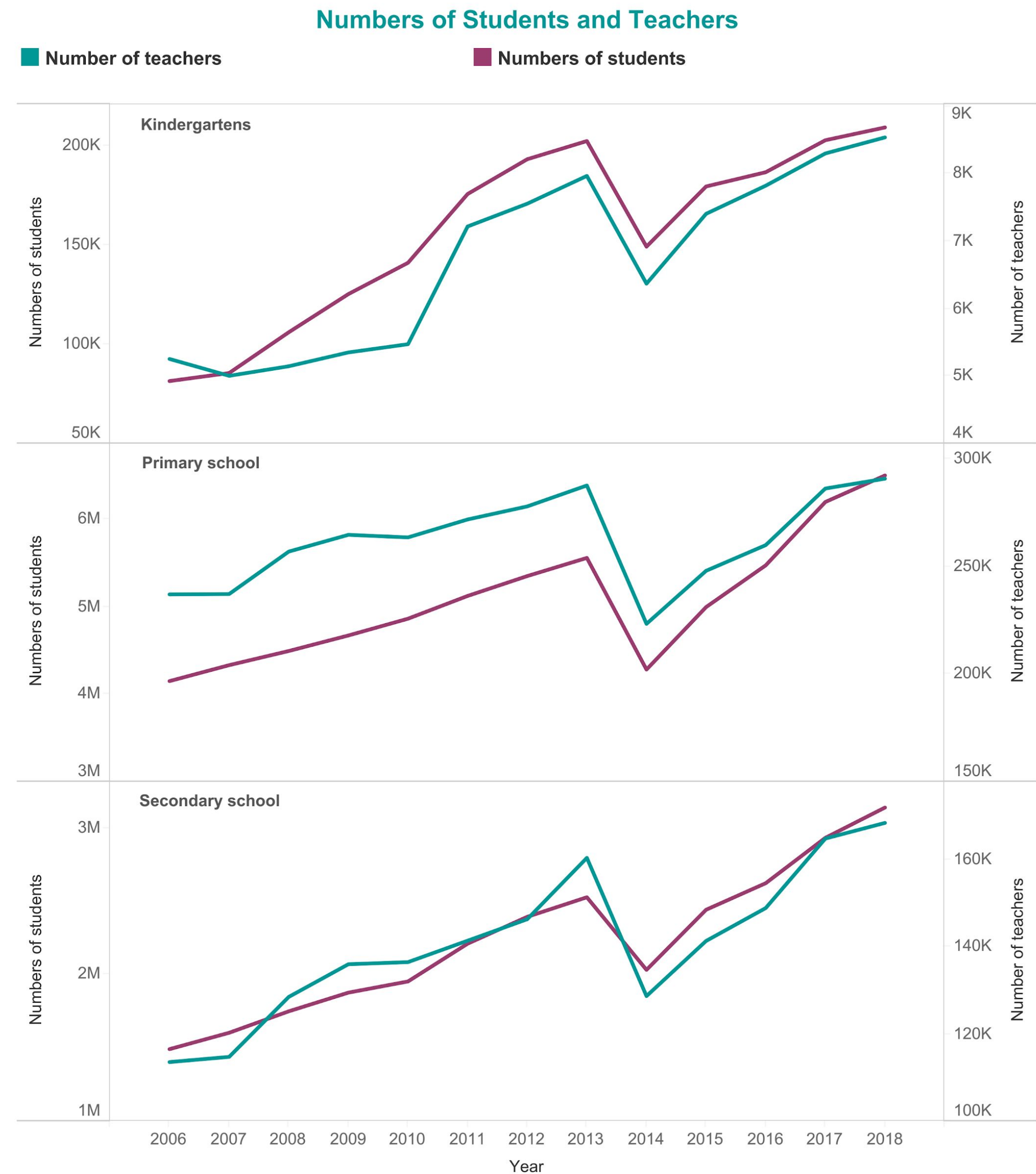
Iraqi Education System Structure

As expected, since 2003, the number of teachers and students kept increasing. The rough outline of the graphs shows the increase in both staff and students albeit upon taking a closer look, some comments are worthy of mentioning.

In 2005, kindergarten students were around 130,000 with a notable lack of teachers, later on, we see a relatively mild increase in the number of students but a steady steep increase of teachers which peaks in 2013.

The greatest peak in the number of primary school teachers and students was witnessed just before the war on terrorism in 2014 and is just reaching the same levels in the 2017/2018 academic year. In 2019, we find that primary school students reached 6.5 million students with 290,000 teachers tending to their education; with the rate at 22 students per teacher.

As for preparatory school, the number of teachers and students have been on a steady increase. In 2018/2019, we have one teacher for every 18.6 students.



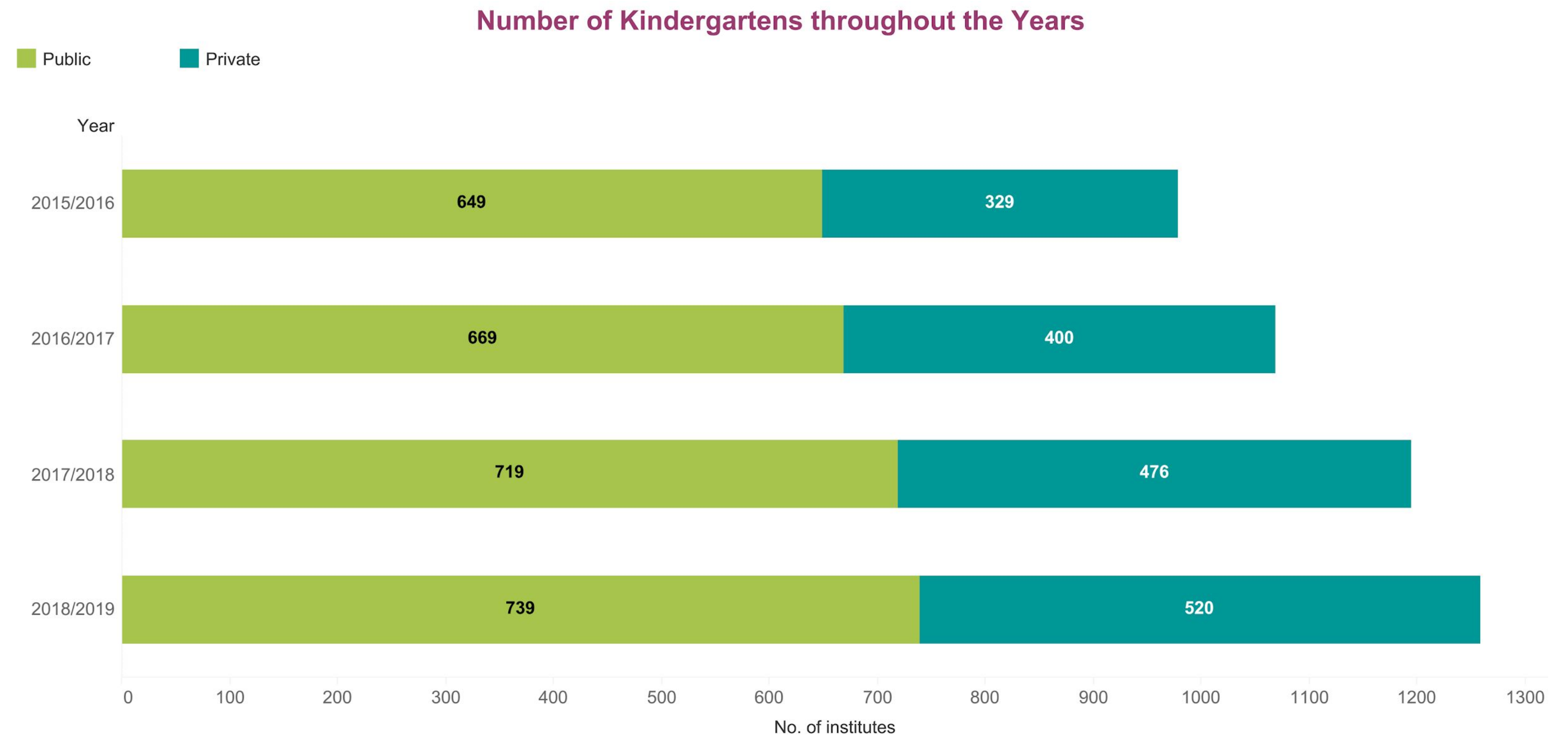
Source: COSIT, 2019



Iraqi Education System Structure - Kindergartens

Albeit the great need for pre-school education, the MoE has not allocated enough attention to it or to preschool children. In the academic year 2001/2002, only 54,000 children attended preschools, that accounts for less than 7% of children aged 4-5 years. In a 2004 report, pre-primary education was still being neglected in Iraq compared to neighboring countries, with only 53,499 students. According to the UNESCO report in 2008, the ratio of children-to-teacher was 19:1 and the average number of children per class was 44. In 2019, the number of public preschools was 739, and the number of private preschools was 520, both attending to the care of around 209,000 children across Iraq (except KRI).

There has been an increase in both sectors, however, the increase was more dramatic in the private sector. Since 2015, and for four academic years, the number of public kindergartens has increased by around 100 kindergartens, which accounts for a 12% increase. While, for the same period, private kindergartens have increased by almost 200 in number, that accounts for an astounding 36.7% increase.



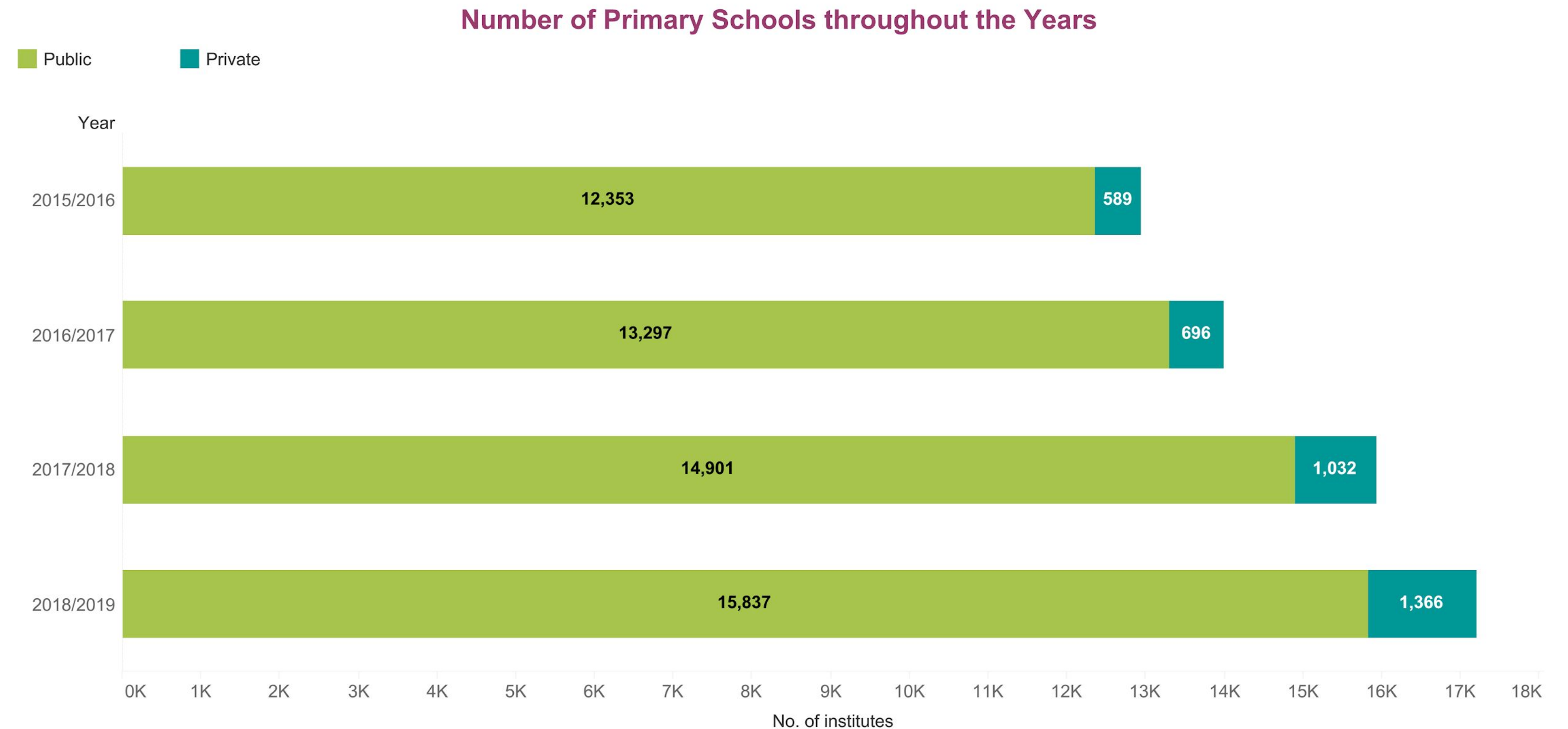
Source: COSIT, 2019

Iraqi Education System Structure - Primary Education

Primary education is compulsory and encompasses six years. Most primary schools co-educational, however, some school management separate the sexes for sport activities and might have some form of classroom alignment method to separate the sexes, although not very common nowadays. There is a standardized national exam that the students must pass, this will qualify them to register in Intermediate school.

In a 2004 report, 4,280,602 students attended primary school with 44.5% girls and 59.5% boys. In 2019, that number increased to 6,501,053 students, of which 52.8% are male students. Private primary schools reached 1,366 schools in 2019, and had 262,371 students across Iraq (except KRI), with around one-third (64%) of the students being male.

According to the Central Statistical Organization, in 2019, 92.6% of primary schools are public and only 7.3% of them were private. Private schools in 2019 are 56% more than they were in 2016, while public primary schools only increased by around 22% when comparing between 2019 and 2015.

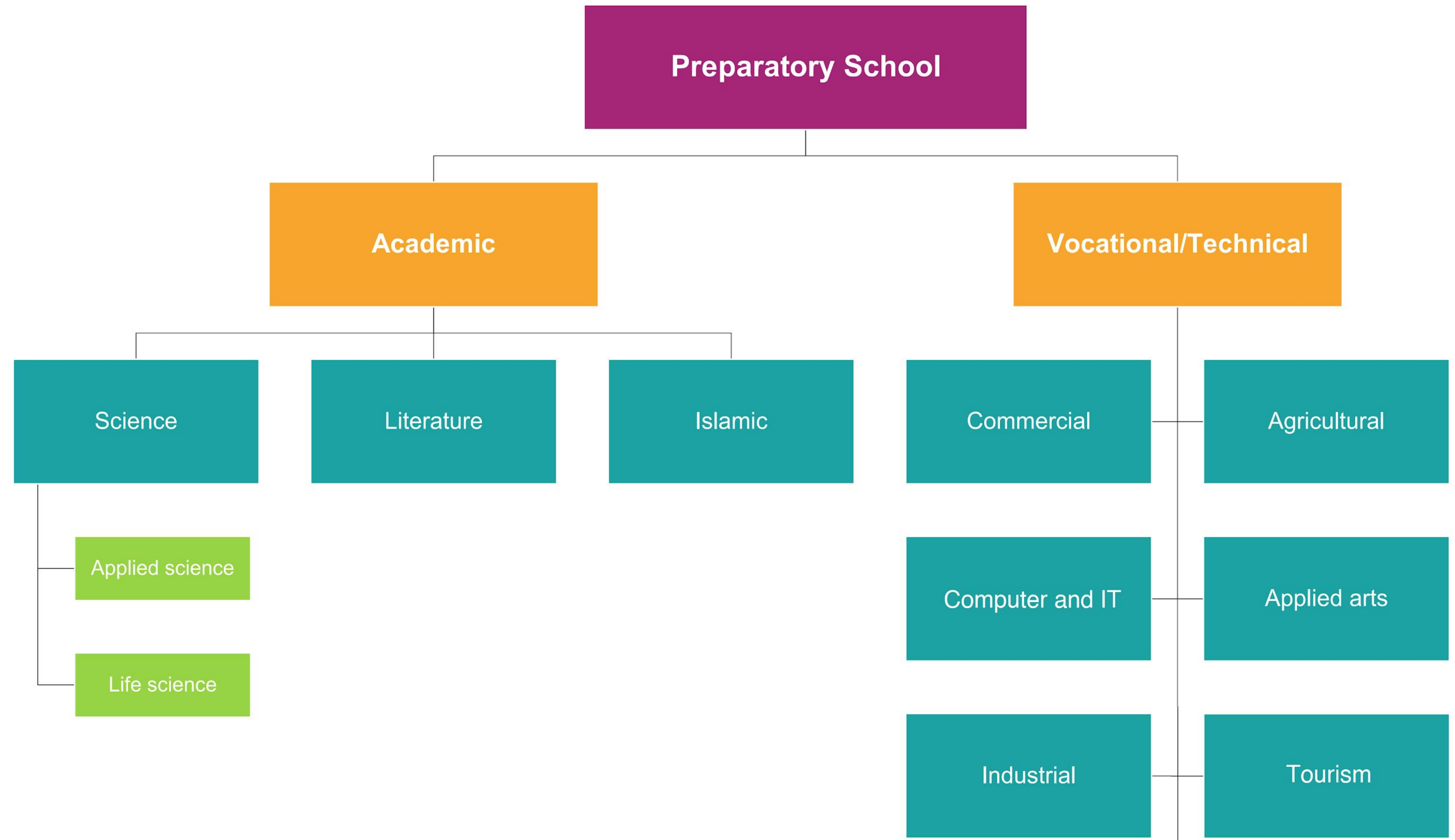


Source: COSIT, 2019

Iraqi Education System Structure - Secondary Education

Secondary education consists of Intermediate and preparatory education, usually sharing the same school buildings. All schools separate sexes; i.e. girls-only and boys-only intermediate schools. Intermediate education consists of 3 years. Subjects covered include English, Arabic, Maths, Sciences and Social studies with some schools offering more courses. Similar to primary schools, there is a standardized national exam that the students must pass at the end of year 3, passing will qualify them to register in Preparatory school.

Similarly to intermediate education, preparatory school encompasses 3 years. Students must choose the track most suitable for them out of the three presented tracks: the Scientific Track, Literary Track, and Vocational Track based on their grade in the standardized national exam. A Baccalaureate is the preparatory school diploma which allows the student access to university education and does not receive it unless they pass a comprehensive standardized national examination.



Iraqi Education System Structure - Secondary Education

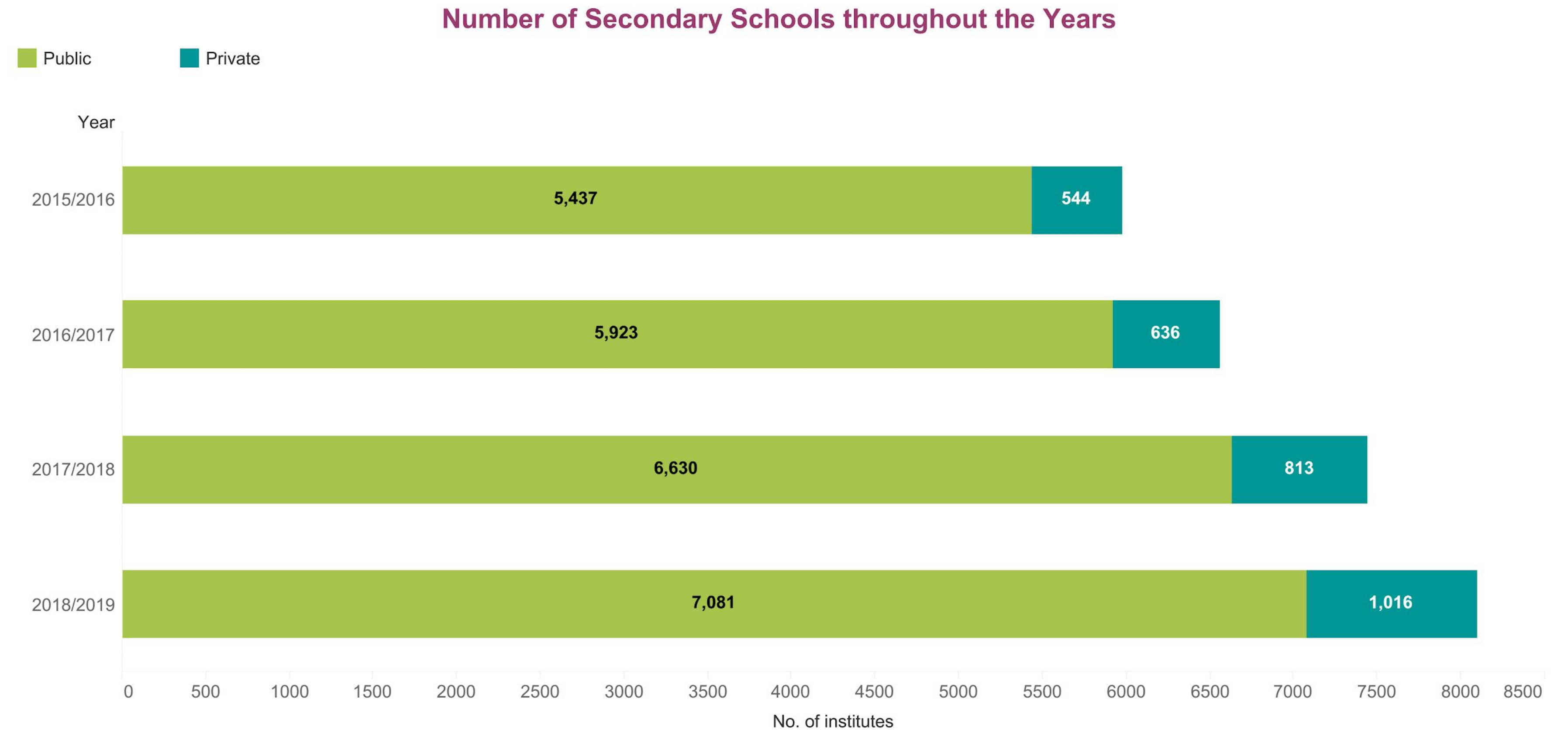
The secondary education in Iraq involves a number of prestigious schools for overachieving students. The students are qualified to sit for the admission exam based on their general point average (GPA) in the national exam for primary education. This average varied throughout the years and usually was above 90%. In 2020, the required GPA reached 97%. The students are admitted into those schools based on their performance in an admission exam that includes an IQ test and a subject test in Maths, Science, Arabic, and English. Once the students are enrolled in those schools, they are required to achieve a good academic record and maintain a GPA above 75%.

- **Baghdad College High Schools:** was established as a Catholic secondary school for boys in 1932 in Baghdad by American Jesuits and was later nationalized in 1969. The school involves both intermediate and preparatory stages. The curriculum is unique to those schools and conducted in English for science courses, it also includes French language courses. There are currently four of those schools, located exclusively in Baghdad, and only one of them is for girls. Many well-known Iraqi figures have attended this school.
- **Distinguished Students Schools:** the first secondary school of this type has been founded in Baghdad in 1990. These schools involve both intermediate and preparatory stages and are single-gendered. There now exists 56 of these schools, 28 of which located in Baghdad. These schools also include a French language course in their curriculum. The curriculum is similar to other secondary schools in Iraq, however, the scientific courses have been conducted in English since the 2016/2017 academic year.
- **Gifted Students Schools:** this secondary school was founded in Baghdad in 1998, it admitted boys only for a couple of years then became mix-gendered. Later, similar schools were also founded in Najaf, Basra, Maysan, Anbar, and Nineveh. In 2019, there is a total on 6 schools around Iraq. Only high achieving students with merits are enrolled through an admission exam. The students also go through an interview phase once they pass these exams. The quota is extremely limited. Moreover, the curriculum is unique to those schools and is conducted in English. Classes are conducted in lecture format, and the instructors are often academics not teachers, holding at least a master's degree. The curriculum included French but it was removed in 2017. These schools expanded to primary education in 2017, students can go through the admission process after passing the third grade. These schools also qualify their students to enroll in Iraqi higher education based on their choice of preference regardless of their scores in the national exam for preparatory education.

Iraqi Education System Structure - Secondary Education

Private and Public schools have been increasing to accompany the growing number of students.

According to Central of Statistical Organization, when comparing the difference between academic year 2015/2016 and academic year 2018/2019, public schools increased by 22.5% while private schools increased by double that percentage, specifically 46.4%.

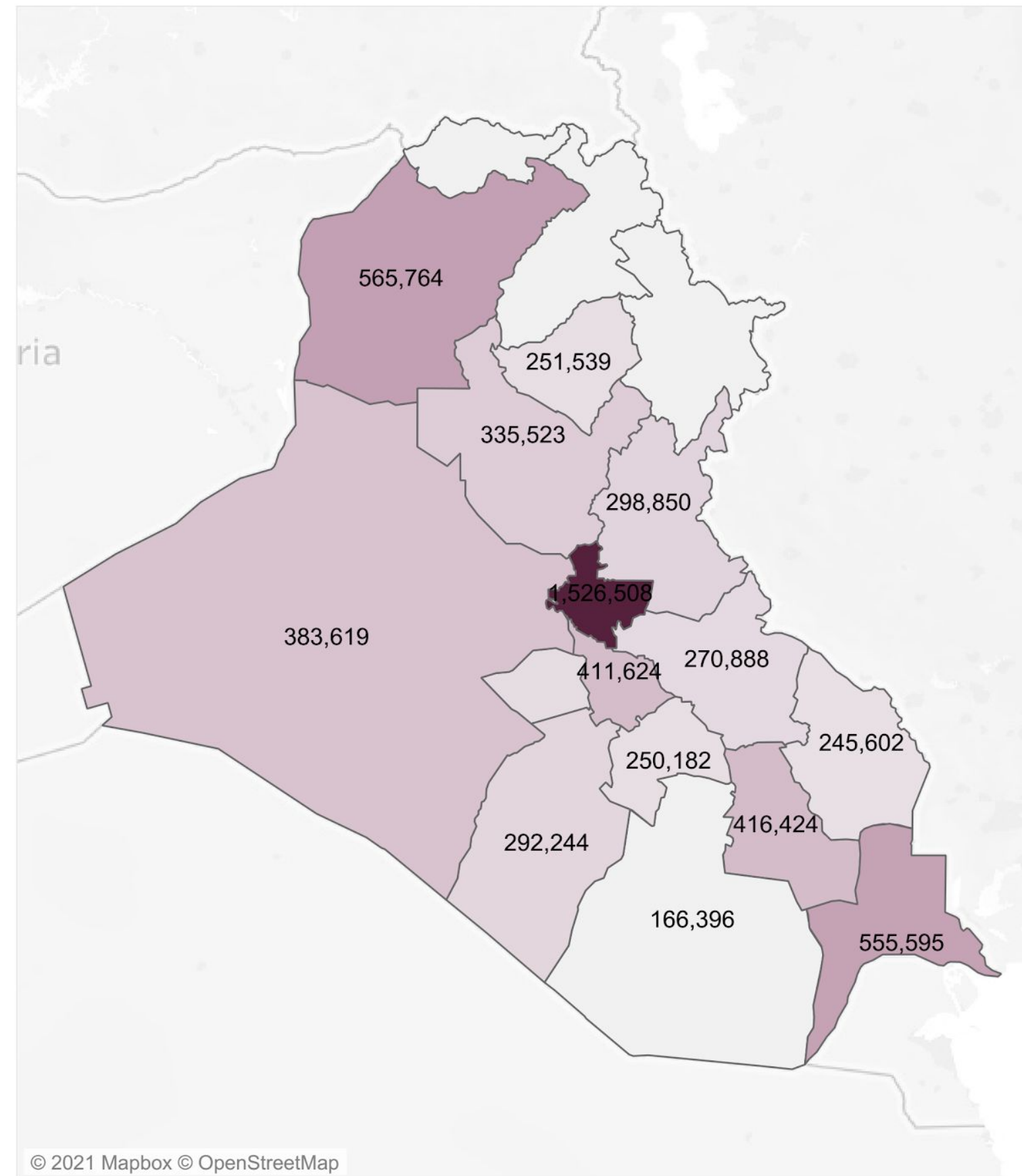


Source: COSIT, 2019

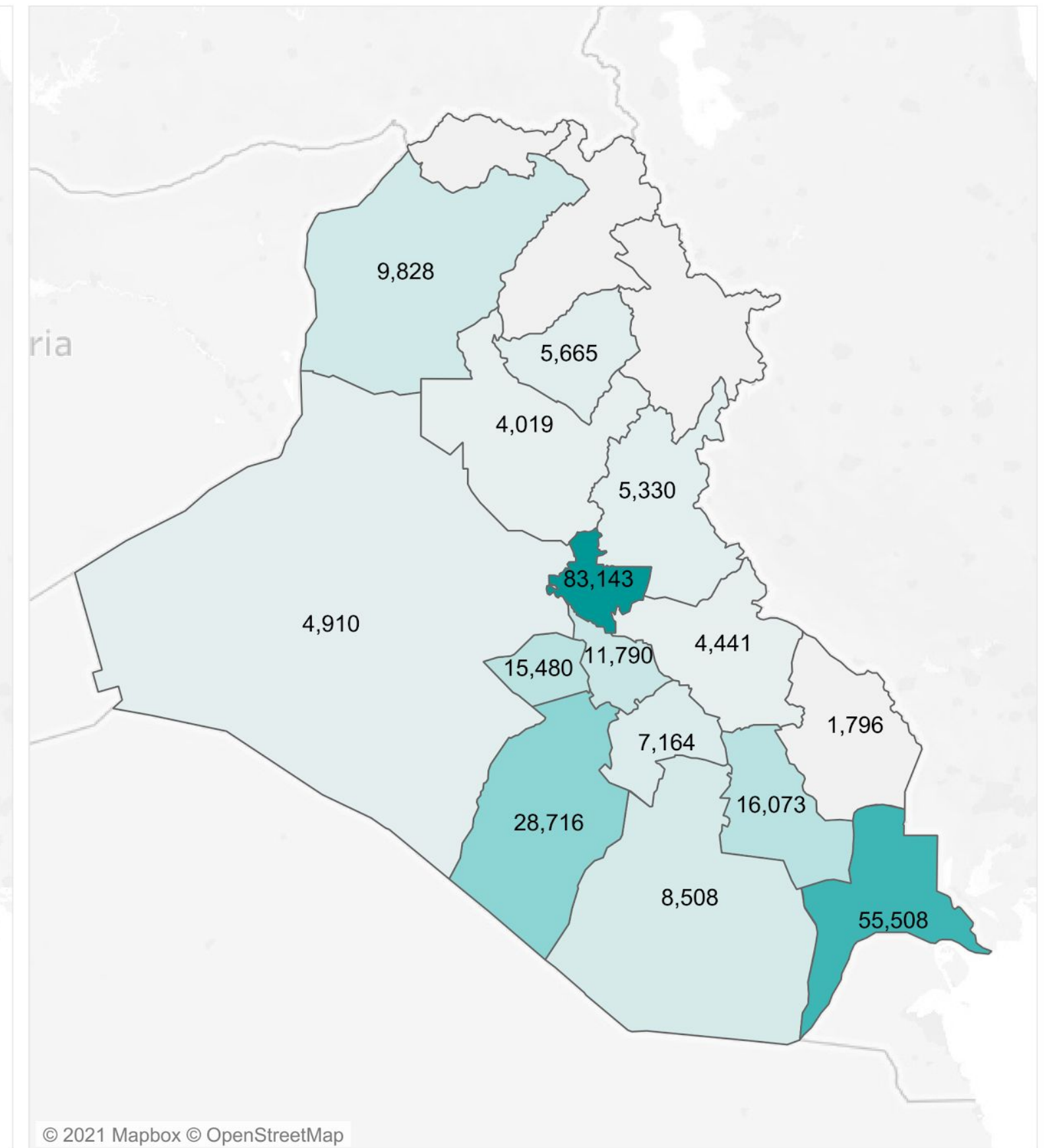
Iraqi Education System - Private vs. Public Schools

As expected, Baghdad had the highest density of students in both private and public sectors. Nineveh and Basra come in second and third places, respectively, having the largest number of students attending public schools. The northern governorates have more students attending public schools when compared to the south as Al-Muthanna governorate had the least number of students enrolled in public schools. Meanwhile, the opposite is true for the private institutions as the southern governorates seem to be more pro-private institutions than northern governorates.

Number of Students in Public Schools



Number of Students in Private Schools



No. of students (Public)
166,396

No. of students (Private)
1,796

Source: Ministry of Planning, 2018/2019

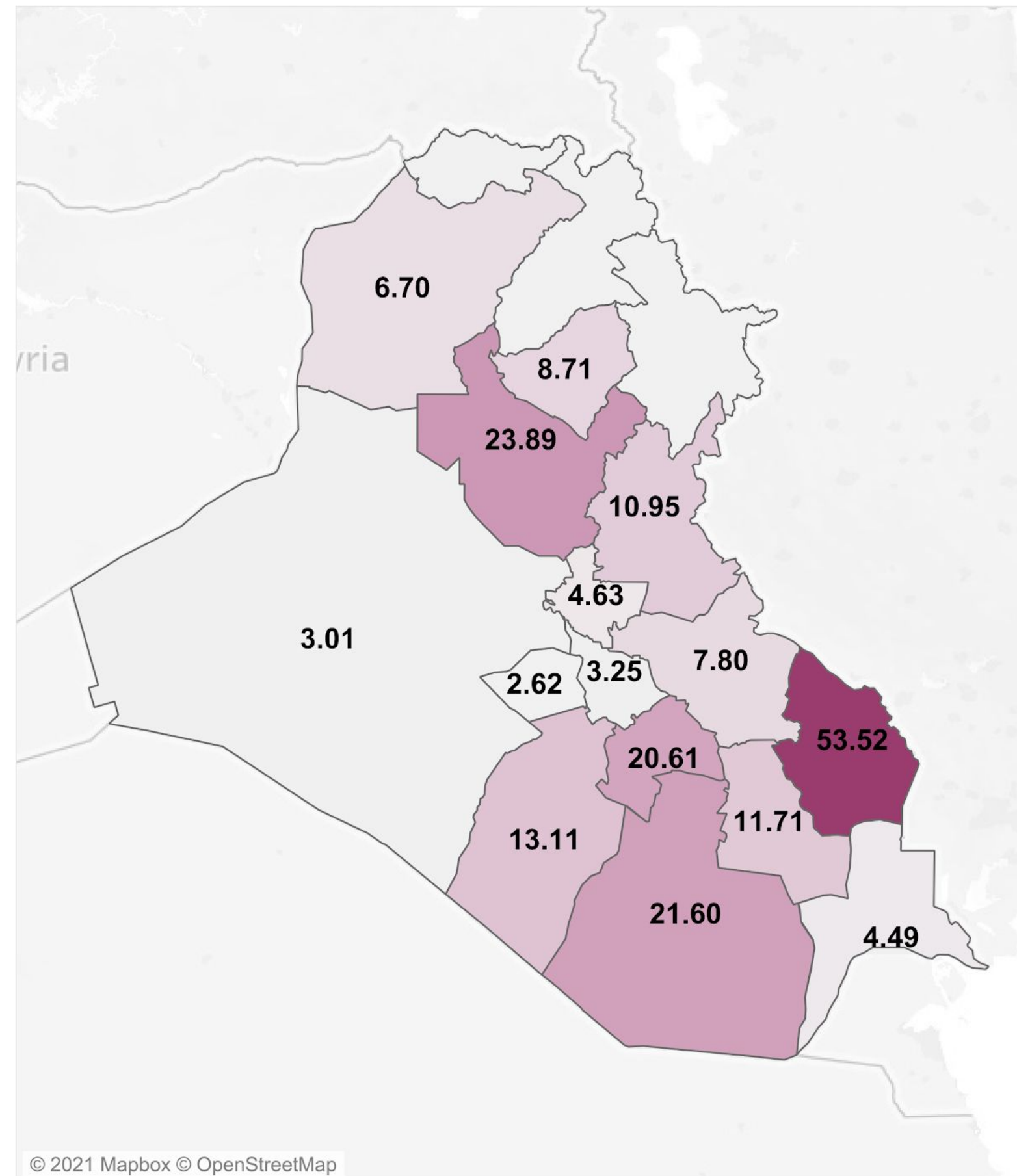
Iraqi Education System - Private vs. Public Schools

The previous heat maps showed the number of students as crude numbers but for a closer look on the real inclusion of students in private schools we calculated the ratio of public students to one private student across all levels of education in Iraq.

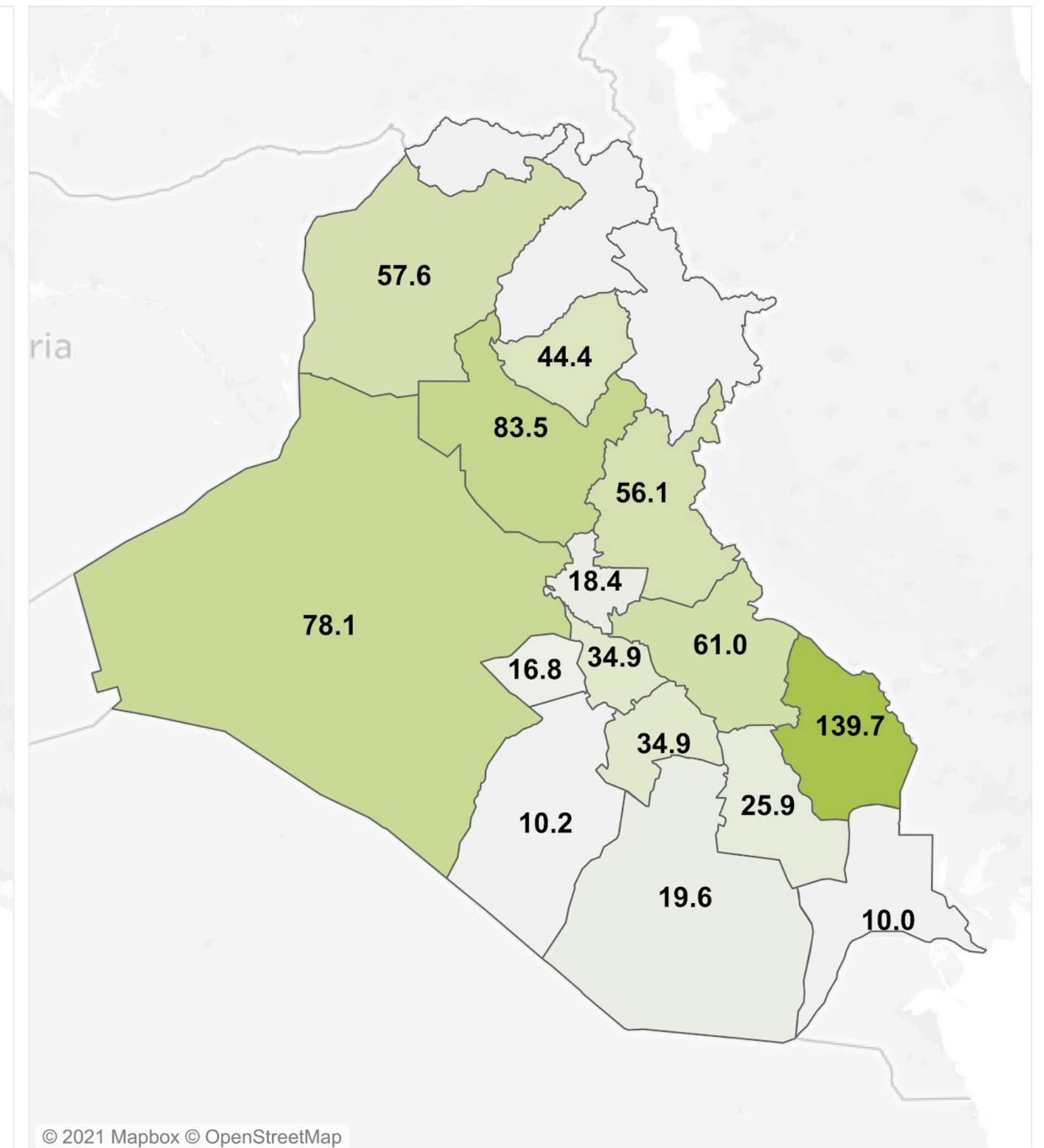
For kindergartens, the governorates in need for more private kindergartens are Missan, Salah Al-deen, Al-Muthanna, and Al-Qadysia, as they have at least 20 public kindergarten students to each kindergarten student in the private sector. While, we can see that Baghdad, Al-Basra, Babylon, Al-Anbar and Kerbala are heavily dependent on private kindergartens with almost one in five children attending a private kindergarten facility.

As for primary schools, more than 50 students attend public schools to each student attending a private school. Kirkuk, Diyala, Nineveh, Wasit, Al-Anbar, Salah Al-deen, and Missan. However, for every 10 students in the public sector there is one attending a private school in Al-Basrah and Al-Najaf.

Numbers of public:private students (Kindergartens)



Numbers of public:private students (Primary school)



Public: 1 in private



Public: 1 in private



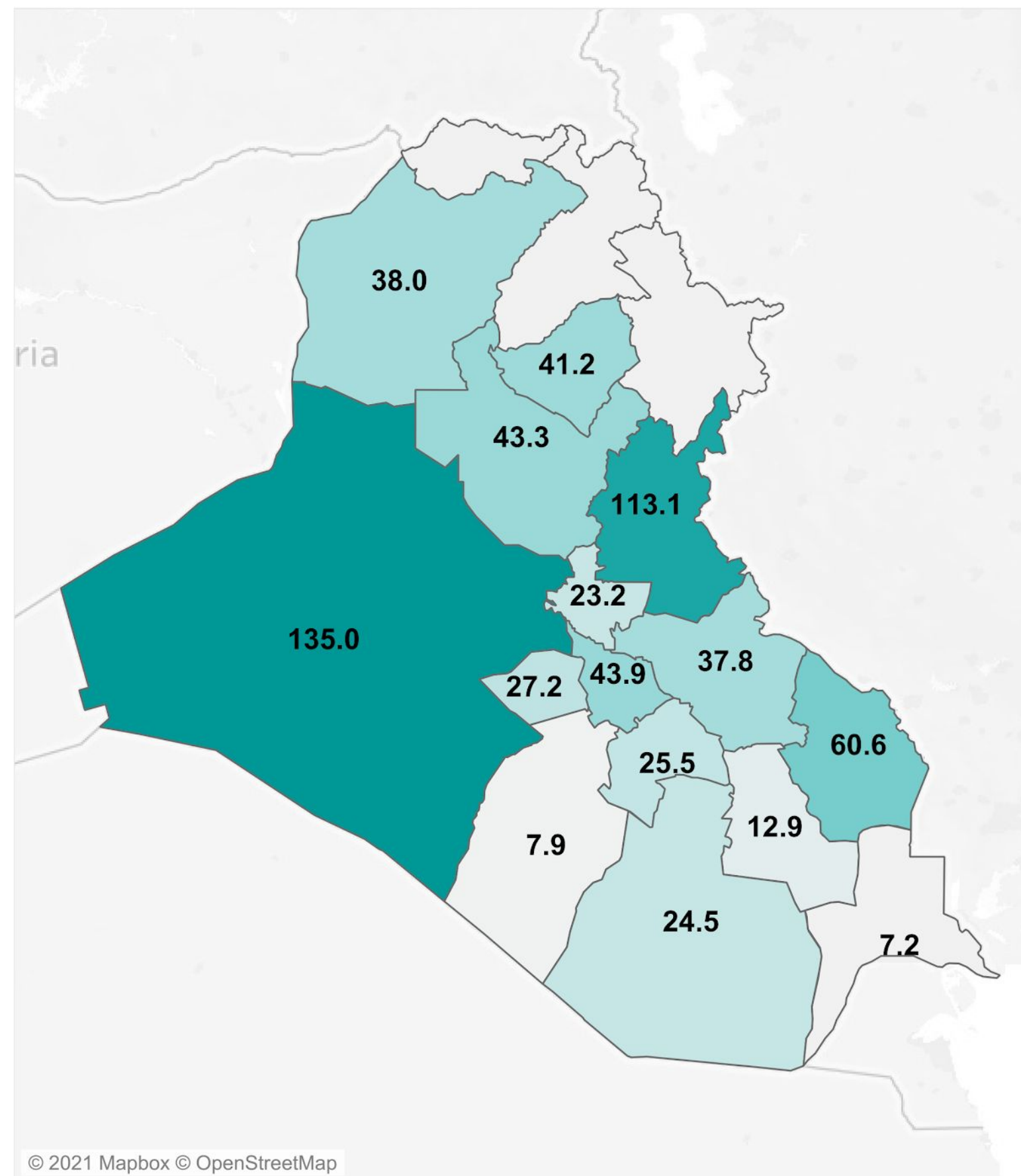
Source: COSIT, 2019

Iraqi Education System - Private vs. Public Schools

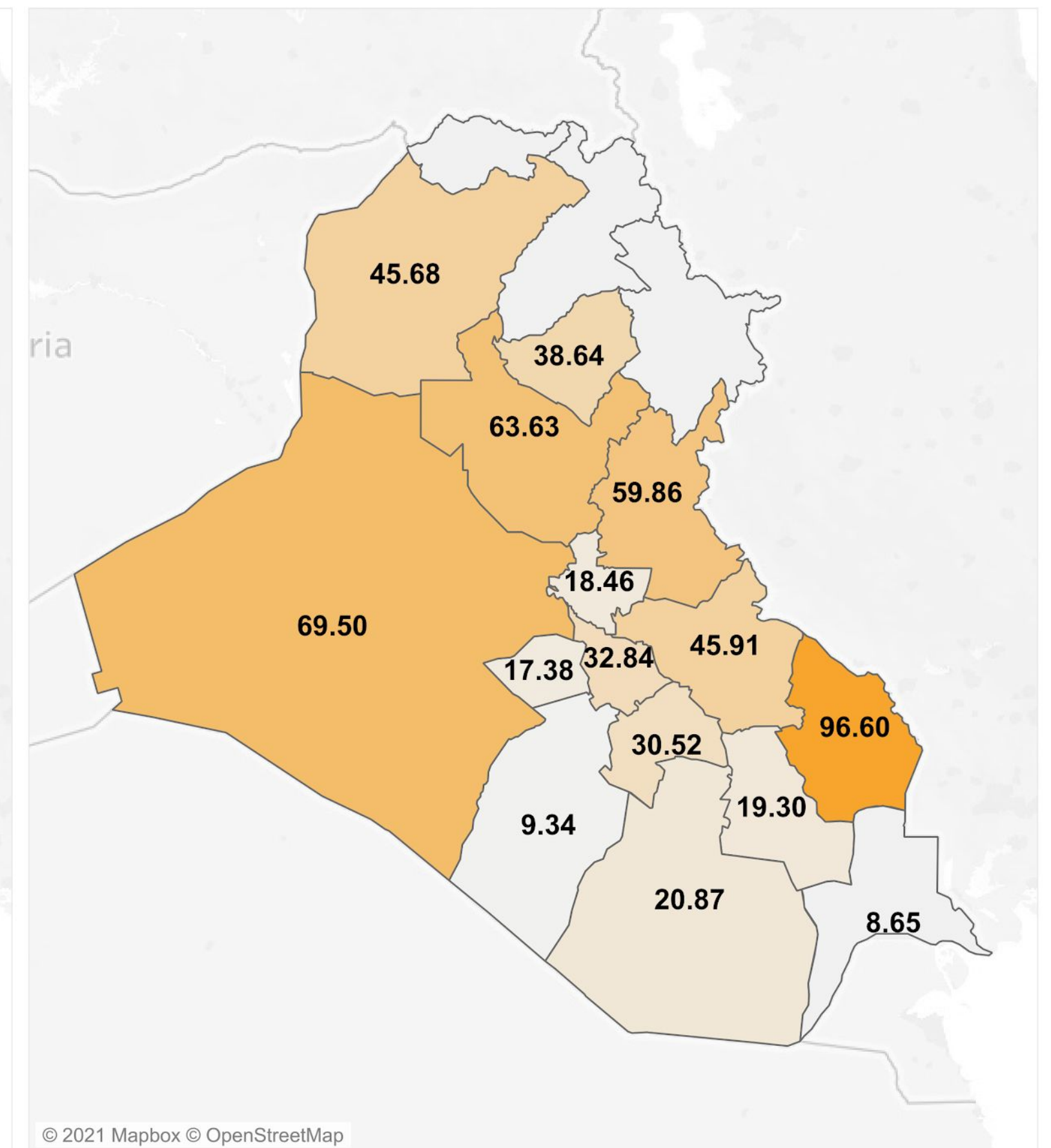
Meanwhile in secondary education, the governorates least dependent on private education are Al-Anbar and Diyala, with more than 100 public students to each student in the private sector. On the other hand, the governorates most dependent on private education are Al-Basra and Al-Najaf with around 1 private student to every 7 public students.

Generally, 21 public students to every private institute across Iraq which means private education is on high demand. Some governorates like Nineveh, Wasit, Diyala, Salah Al-deen, Al-Anbar, and Missan are in need for more private education institutes as they have at least 45 students attending a public school for each private school student, meanwhile, Al-Basrah and Al-Najaf have 1 student attending a private school for every 8 and 9 students attending a public school, respectively.

Numbers of public:private students (Secondary school)



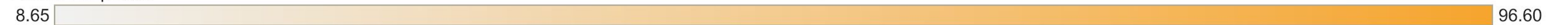
Numbers of public:private students (Total)



Public: 1 in private



Public: 1 in private



Source: COSIT, 2019

Iraqi Education System Structure - Higher Education

Public Iraqi Higher Education

Iraq's higher education system comprises 31 universities, 17 technical colleges, and 29 technical institutes. First and largest was the University of Baghdad, founded 1957. With 250,000 students enrolled in 2013 (50% of them enrolled in one of the universities in Baghdad), according to the ministry of planning. However, the number of enrolled students in 2018 was around 740,000.

The language of instruction in higher education depends on the faculty. For example, the language of instruction is English in faculties of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Biological Sciences, and Engineering, whereas, the language of instruction is Arabic in faculties of Law, Business Administration, Finance, Economics, Journalism, and Languages. University studies range from 4-6 years in duration. The admission process into universities (private and public) are controlled by MoHESR through an application form, which is filled based on the applicant's scores and the corresponding college preferences. Average length of the school year 32 five-day weeks (160 working days).

Private Iraqi Higher Education

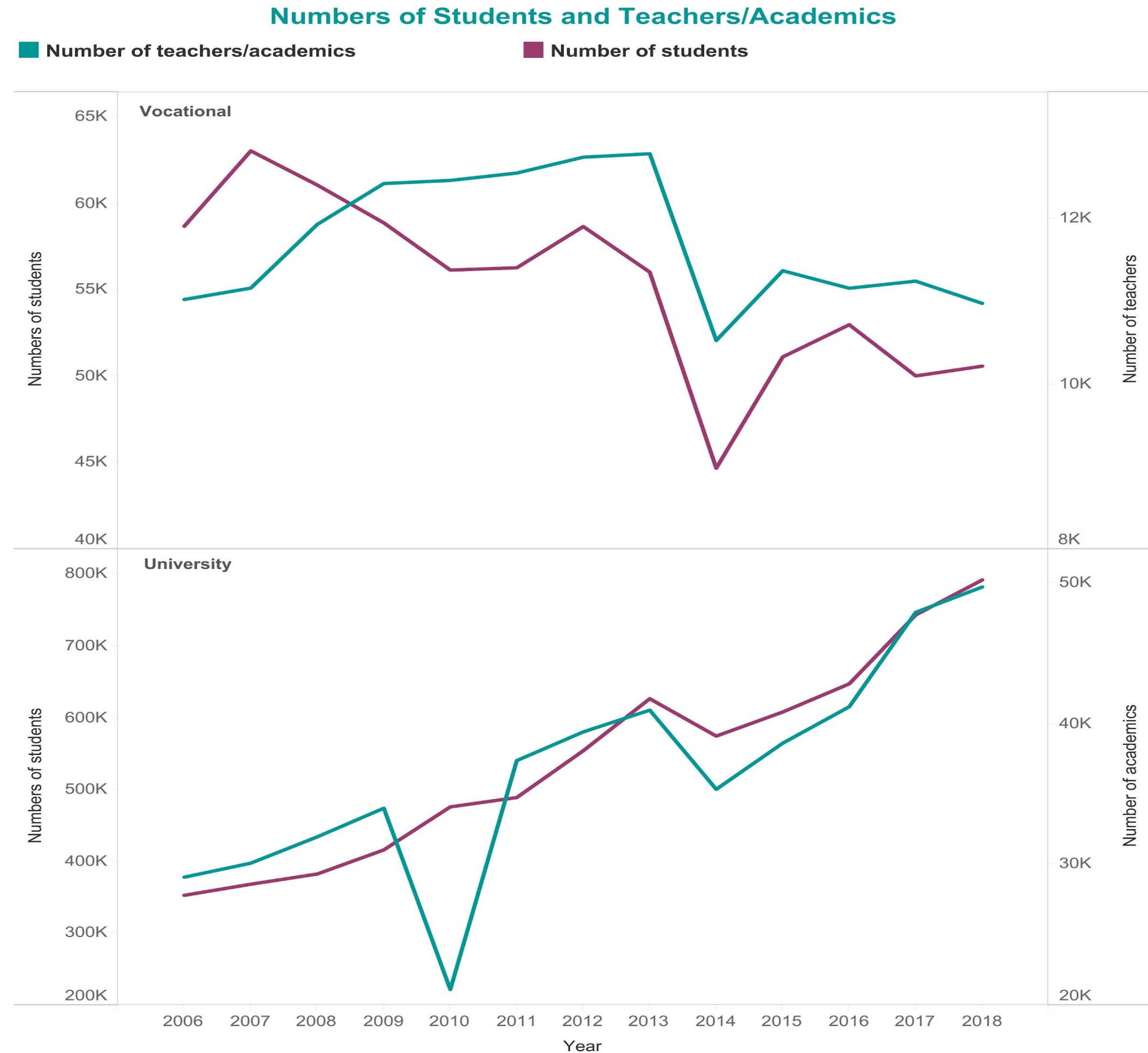
The first established private university was Turath university college in 1988 in Baghdad. In 2019, the Central of Statistical Organization states the number of private colleges as 160, 75 of which are recognized by the MOHESR (including 11 private colleges in KRI). Based on the MoHESR national assessment of the quality of private colleges' educational laboratories of 2019, Al-Rasheed university colleges scored the best results. In 2018, based on MoP data, private universities absorb around 25% of all university students.

Iraqi Education System Structure - Higher Education

The following graph shows the number of students and teachers in vocational schools and universities for the past 15 years.

Apparently, the need for a university degree has overshadowed vocational studies. As we see a decline followed by a plateau in the number of students pursuing vocational studies. And that is also reflected in the number of teachers attending to the education of those students.

Meanwhile, the opposite is true for university education. The number of university students and academics has doubled since 2006. In the academic year of 2018/2019, Iraq has a university academic for every 15.9 students.



Source: COSIT, 2019

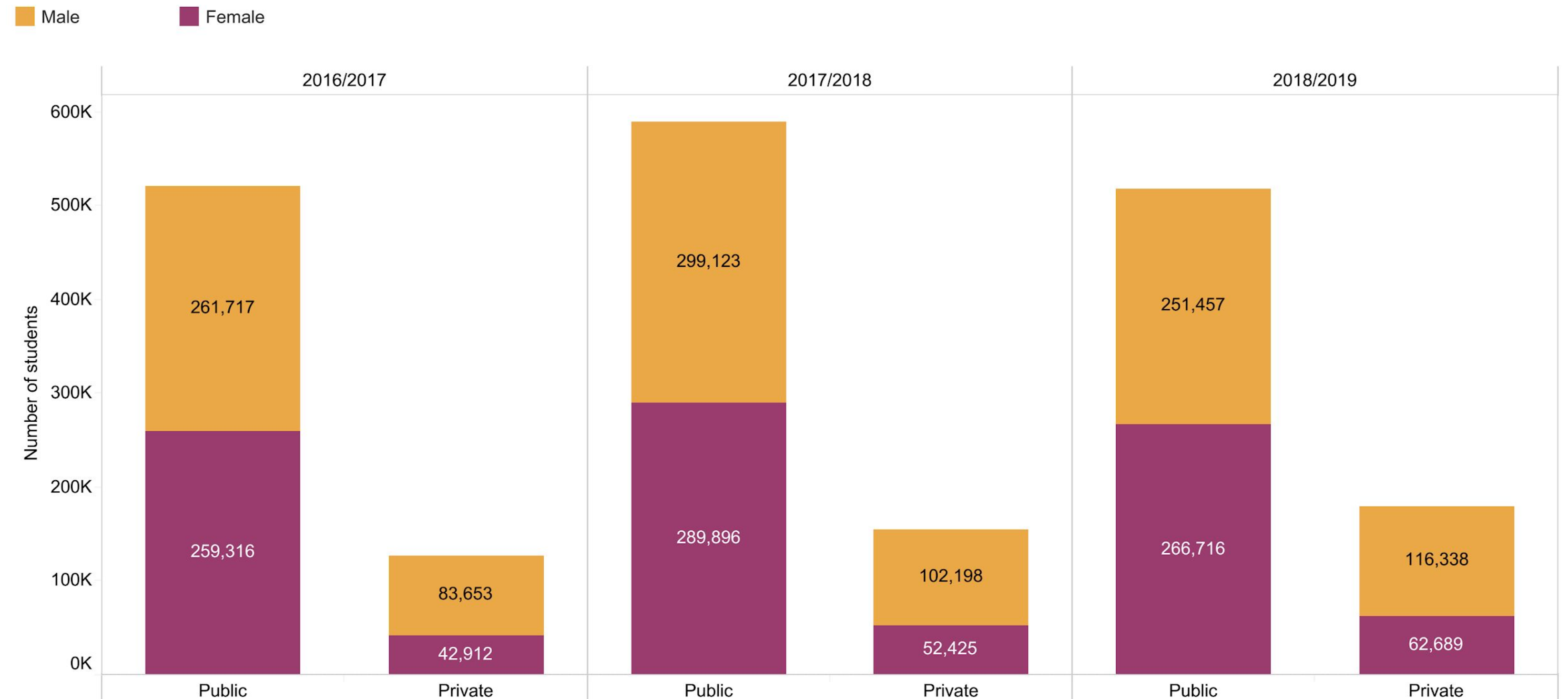


Iraqi Education System Structure - Higher Education

The figure shows the increase in the number of students attending public and private universities in the past 3 academic years. Private universities are admitting larger number of students every year. The pressure put on the public sector paved the way for the private sector to absorb students and widen overall access which could be attributed to the dire need for the development of public universities.

A notable fluctuation is seen in the number of enrolled students in the public sector with an increase in 2017/2018 numbers and a great drop of 47,000 students in 2018/2019 numbers. On the contrary to the situation in private universities, as they have been able to enroll more than 18,000 additional students in the academic year of 2017/2018 and more than 14,000 students in the academic year of 2018/2019.

Number of Students throughout the Years



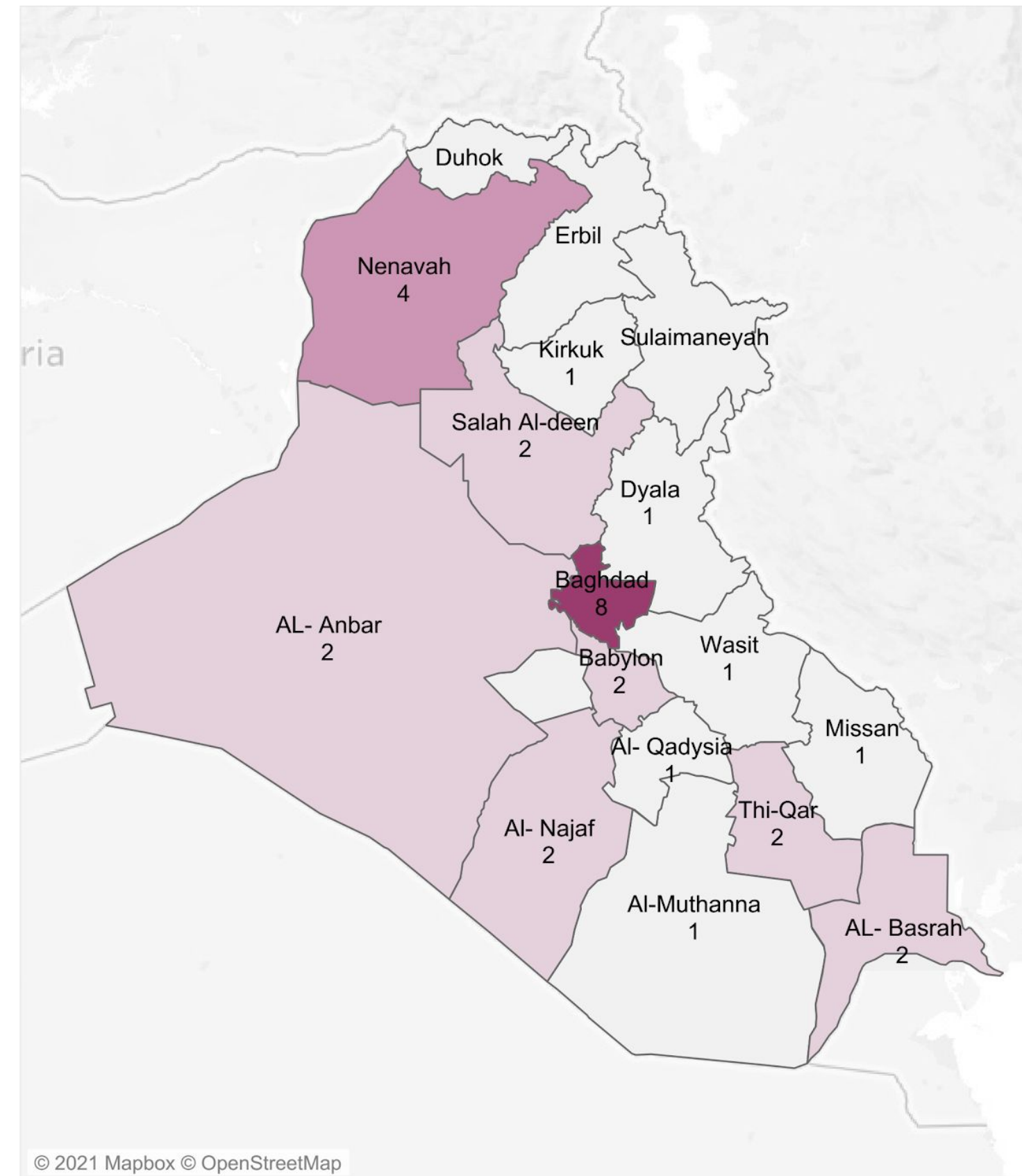
Source: Ministry of Planning, 2018/2019

Iraqi Education System Structure - Higher Education

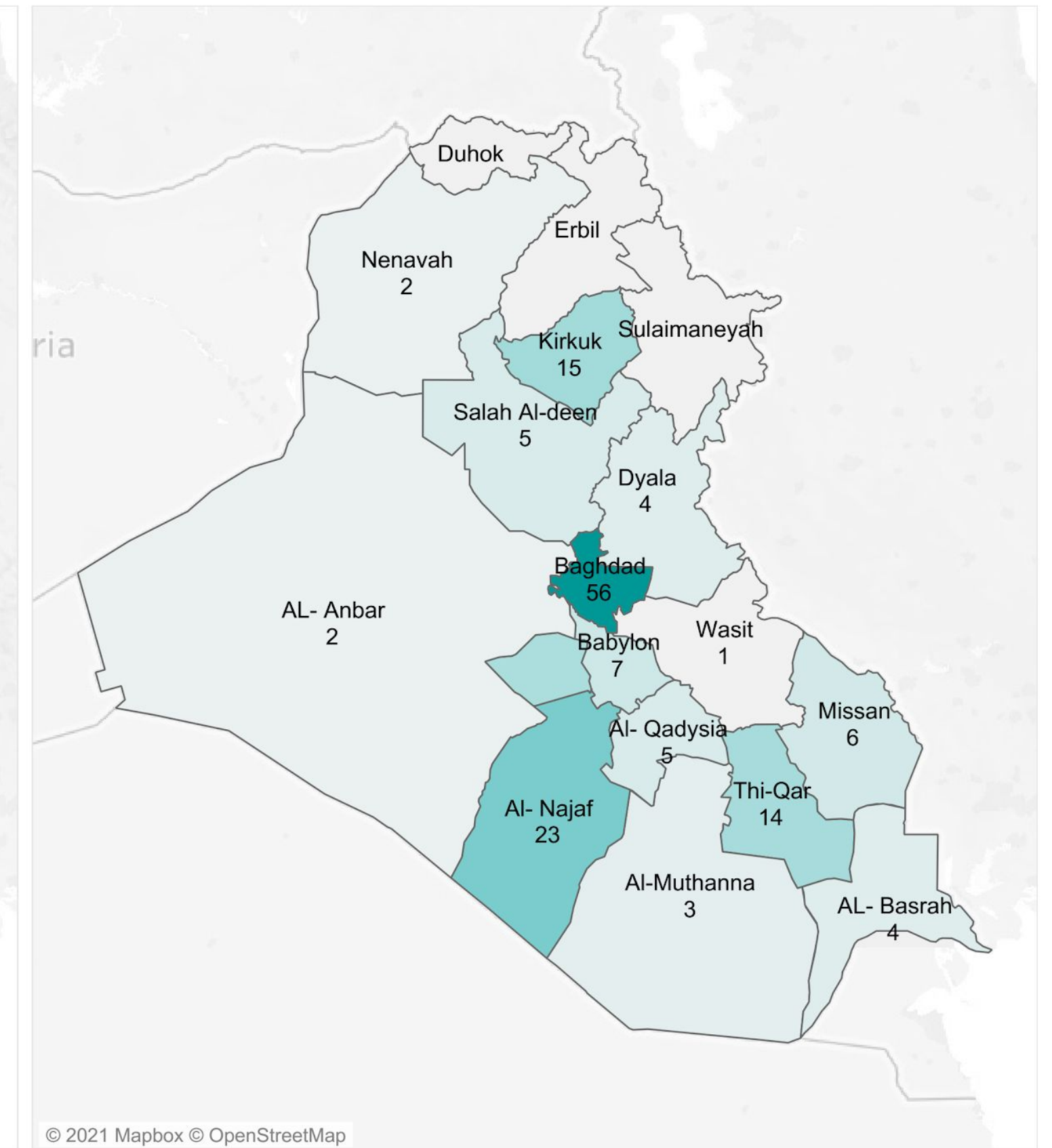
The heatmaps reveal the concentration of private and public universities throughout Iraq (except for KRI). In 2013, 43% of faculty were concentrated in Baghdad as Baghdad accounts for 37% of all higher education forces in the country. This trend has continued to 2019 with the majority of private and public universities still concentrated in Baghdad. Nineveh came in second after Baghdad in total number of public universities. It is interesting to note that the southern governorates have a higher number of private universities when compared to northern governorates, for example, both Thi-qar and Al-Najaf governorates have 37 registered private universities.

Private universities offer the same programs as public universities, and most times private universities ask teachers from the public sector to work as part-time. This fact, coupled with the fact that the score a student gets in high school baccalaureate is not as detrimental in choosing their preference for a major in college as it used to be, private universities are offering their programs to a wider variety of baccalaureate GPAs.

Number of Public Universities in Iraq



Number of Private Universities in Iraq

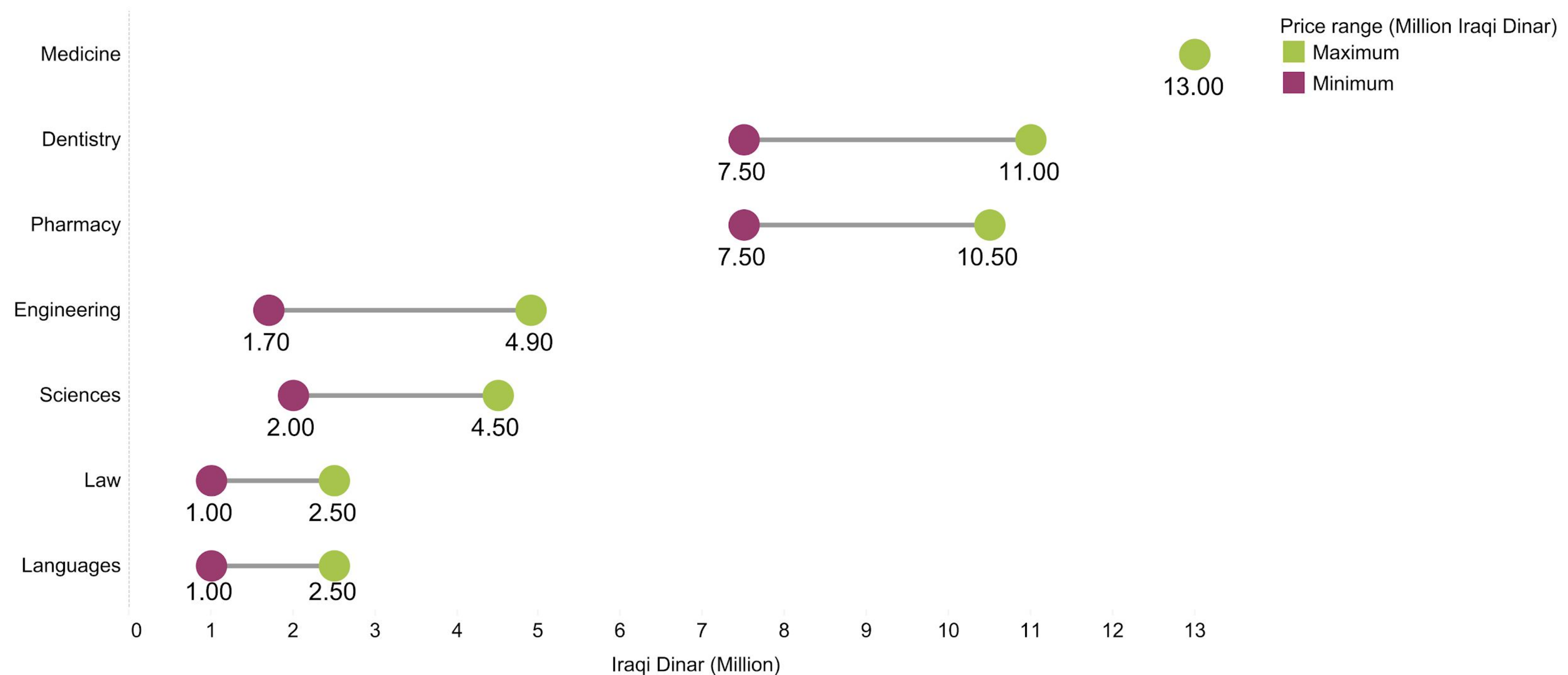


Source: Ministry of Planning, 2018/2019

Iraqi Education System Structure - Higher Education

The most expensive degrees in private education are Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy as the tuition fee per year could cost up to 13 million, 11 million and 7.5 million Iraqi dinars, respectively, with the most common cost being 10 million Iraqi Dinars for Dentistry and 8.5 million Iraqi Dinars for Pharmacy. On the other hand, most humanities degrees are quite affordable, starting from 1 Million Iraqi dinars. Most Law schools and Language degrees cost 2 million and 1.5 million Iraqi Dinars, respectively. Lastly, Science and Engineering degrees cost around 2 million to a maximum of 5 million Iraqi dinars, depending on the specialty, with colleges mostly charging 3 million and 2.5 million Iraqi Dinars, respectively.

Tuition Fees of Different Faculties



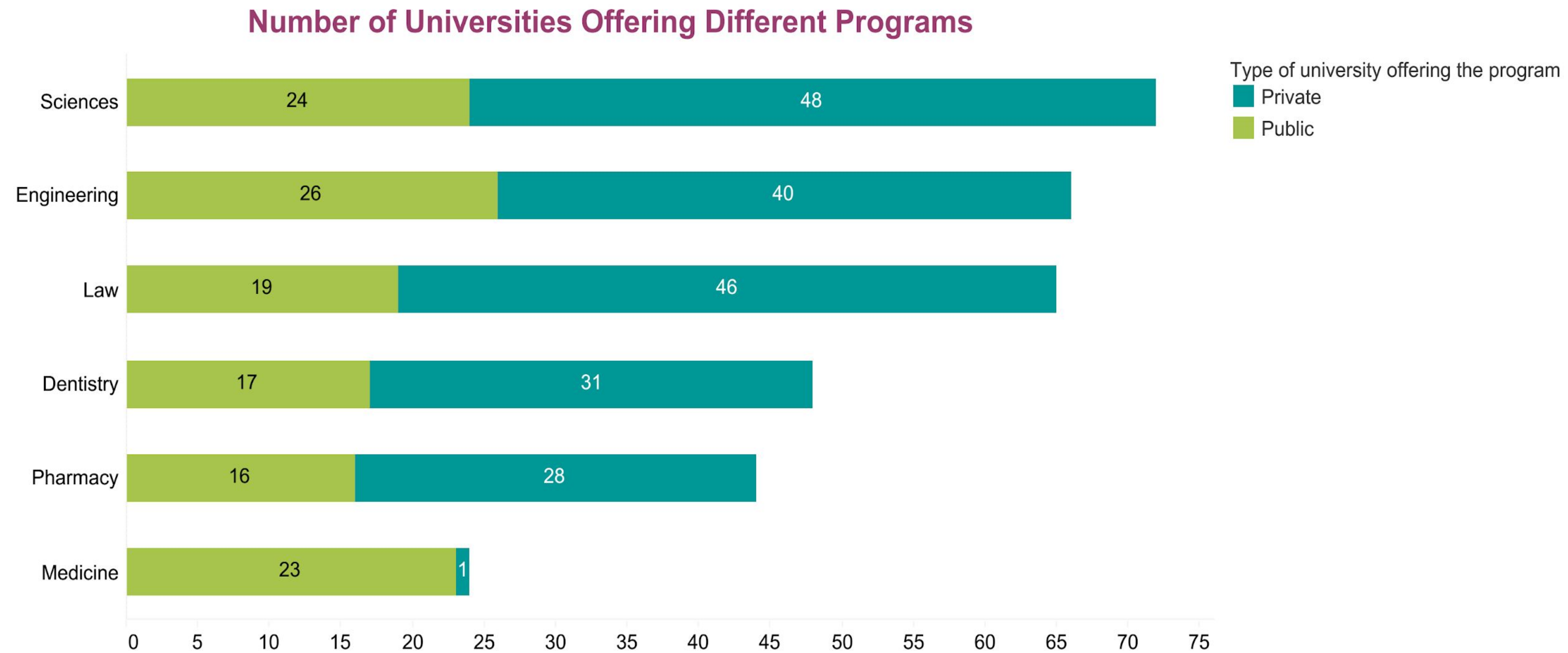
Source: Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2020/2021



Iraqi Education System Structure - Higher Education

Most private universities offer the following bachelor degrees:

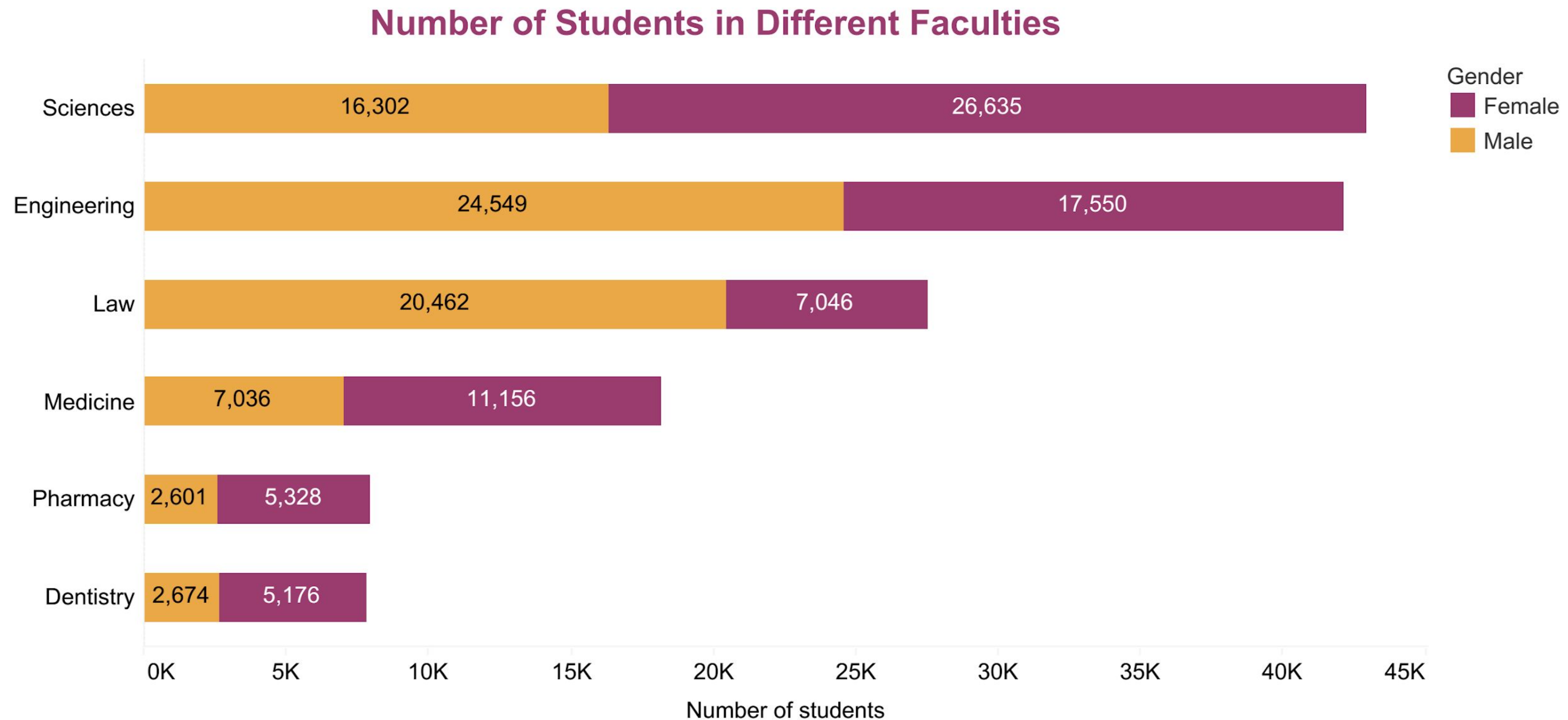
- Medical Schools: Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursing, Laboratory sciences, Biology, Physical therapy, Ophthalmology technician.
- Engineering Schools: Electrical, Computer, Civil, Communication, Air-conditioning and Refrigeration, Architecture, Petroleum.
- Schools of Information Technology and Computer Sciences.
- Schools of Commerce: Accounting, Banking, Finance.
- School of Management: Business Administration.
- Schools of Humanities: English language, Arabic language and literature, Journalism, Translation, Law, Geography, History, Islamic sciences, Political sciences, Islamic tourism.



Source: Ministry of Planning, 2018/2019

Iraqi Education System Structure - Higher Education

When looking further into the public college enrollment of females and males, a preference pattern emerged. Male enrollment in Law and Engineering are 2.7 and 1.39 times higher than that of female enrollment. Meanwhile, the female enrollment in the medical fields (Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences, and Dentistry) is 1.68 times higher than that of their male counterparts.



Source: Ministry of Planning, 2018/2019

Iraqi Educators and Teachers

Teachers in Primary and Secondary Education

- The Institute Of Educational Training And Development was established in 1984. More than 35,000 secondary teachers have attended this institute from 1998 to 2003.
- Teachers and educators have faced a lot of hardships as their salaries fell from US\$ 500-1000 per month before 1990 to values as low as US\$ 5 in 2002/2003 as well as facing threats on their lives in the 2006 civil war.
- In 2016, Iraq had 510,686 teachers across all education sectors, of which 115,803 teachers in KRI.
- In 2017, data showed an increase by 8.5% in the number of qualified preschool teachers and a drop by 4% in the number of primary school teachers. This is considered a cause for concern as the already strained teachers will face more challenges with the total enrolment in primary schools increasing by 7.6% in 2016.
- In the academic year of 2018/2019, the total number of teachers in Iraq (not including KRI) was 248,276 teachers, 70% of which were female teachers. Teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher consisted of 33% of the total number of teachers.
- Teachers Institute was the fourth track offered for students graduating from intermediate education. Students get accepted into teachers' institute as students of the preparatory level. They were trained for a minimum of two years and graduate to become teachers for primary school children. Due to the high number of graduates from university programs, the MoE preferred university graduates to those from the institute, this led to the decision of closing Teachers Institute in 2018.

Academics in Higher Education

As for higher education, the MoHESR set a master's degree as the minimum educational qualification for a teaching post in higher education with a preference for Ph.D. holders. The public sector prefers higher education graduates as the salary system favors those with higher degrees.

Fifteen years prior to the 2003 war, the country had one of the best education systems in the Arab world with 84% of teachers holding a diploma and 16% of teachers holding a university certificate. In 2004, the academic teaching staff numbered about 19,000. In the academic year of 2017/2018, the total number of educators in the public sector was 42,907 while the private sector number was 5,206 faculty members.

EDTech Startups in MENA

After the introduction into the educational system in Iraq, we come upon the business aspect of this sector, dwelling into startups in Iraq and the MENA region as well as global initiatives tending to the improvement of the sector in Iraq. The year 2020 was a major year for edtech, as the pandemic forced the closure of schools in 190 countries, the world had to turn to online education. The following are the most prominent and distinguished companies in the education business, in the MENA region and in Iraq.



Noon Academy

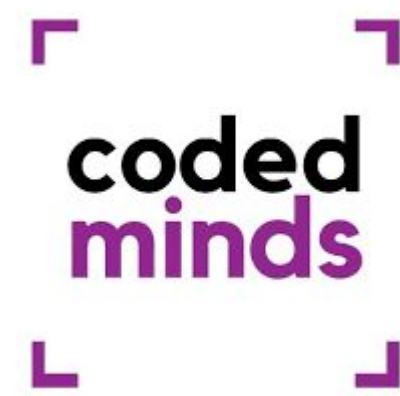
Noon Academy is an E-learning platform that was founded in 2013 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Edtech startup expanded to become one of the biggest educational startups in the Middle East, today it has over 8 million registered students. The platform connects teachers with students and provides a comprehensive learning experience through virtual classrooms, digital tools, test preparations, interactive quizzes, and study groups. Noon Academy was able to raise \$13 million in pre-B funding as of 2020.



Lamsa World

Lamsa is an educational platform that was founded in 2013. Its content is catered towards kids aged 2-8 years old. The application provides a fun, safe, and interactive environment through educational and entertaining stories, videos, and games in Arabic for children across the world. Lamsa has raised funding of \$500,000 in a series A round. Furthermore, it secured investments from Mohammed Bin Rashid Innovation Fund in 2018.

EDTech Startups in MENA



Coded Minds

Coded Minds is a EdTech company that was founded in 2017 in the UAE. It strives to revolutionize education with interactive modern technology-based educational classes that target Pre-K until adulthood. Coded Minds offers classes in STEM, robotics, web development, coding, English, leadership skills, social app development, digital marketing, and countless others.

The company now operates in 6 different countries across the globe and are looking to expand. They raised funding estimated at \$2.7 million from Alarabi investments.

Their platforms include Hope Academy, EdgeMakers, TutorBooth, iSTEAM, Teacher's Training, and Early Learning Child Care (ELCC).



Praxilabs

Praxilabs is an e-learning platform that was founded in Cairo, Egypt in 2016. It offers interactive 3D virtual labs and simulations in the fields of biology, chemistry, and physics. On a mission to make science more fun and accessible, the laboratory experiments are available in both Arabic and English. The platform works on computers, tablets, and smartphones and can be integrated with the Learning Management System (LMS).



Abwab

Abwab is an EdTech startup that was established in 2019 in Jordan. The platform provides content prepared by professional tutors in different subjects like maths, physics, biology, and chemistry. The content was prepared for Jordanian secondary school students, providing them with an E-learning experience through animated short videos and performance assessments. Furthermore, they released content for the Palestinian and Egyptian secondary schools curricula and plan to expand in the MENA region. They are also employing artificial intelligence and machine learning power to personalize the learning path for each student to meet their needs and goals. The startup was able to raise \$2.4 million in a pre-seed round.

EDTech Startups in Iraq



Eduba

Eduba is an online education management platform based in Iraq, that was founded in 2019 and aims to digitalize the education process. The platform provides the educational institutions with a set of different features that include E-learning, course management, video conferencing, accounting, human resource management, and students affairs management. The platform also provides safety solutions features like school bus tracking and smart bracelet for younger students to assure their parents about their whereabouts. Educational institutions can choose the packages with the features that meet their needs.



Medresty

Medresty is an online school management system that was founded in 2015. The platform provides educational institutions with course management features including homework and grading, and live virtual classes. It also provides parents with access to connect with the teaching staff and each other and follow up on the educational process. The platform was acquired by Talabatey in 2020.



IoT KIDS

IoT Kids

IoT Kids is an EdTech company that was founded in Iraq in 2016. They seek to provide kids with the set of proper skills and knowledge needed in our modern day through animated interactive courses that help them discover their talents and add to their skills and abilities.

The educational platform provides online courses in many fields such as robotics, coding, game design, and electronics catered for kids ages 5-15. The company operates in 9 different cities across the country and has 8000 children on its platform.



Najeh Platform

Najeh is an educational online platform that was founded by the end of 2012. The platform targets school students and offers them free access to a wide range of courses and tutorials in different subjects like maths, physics, chemistry, biology, languages, and others. In 2020, the platform launched an application version that enables students to download the courses and lectures offline to overcome internet connectivity issues. The Najeh audience has grown significantly since the transition of schools to online learning due to the effects of COVID-19.

Initiatives in the Education Sector in Iraq

nuffic

- **Nuffic-Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP):** the development program is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and administered by the Dutch organization for internationalisation. It targets several themes and aims to achieve a long term impact in the agriculture sector and water management. It also aims to improve technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education through institutional programs in order to achieve sustainable social and economic development. This goal in the light of the framework of the program can be achieved through improving the curricula and including internships and training programmes, creating programs to help students acquire entrepreneurial and business skills, preparing graduates for the labor market. The first OKP institutional collaboration was launched in Erbil in January 2020, the collaboration involved 6 Iraqi universities; the University of Salah Al-Din, the University of Anbar, the University Mosul, the University of Kufa, the University of Kerbala.



- **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Reforms Program:** implemented by UNESCO and funded by the European Union, the budget exceeds 12.3 million euros. The reforms program directly contributes to the sustainable development goals especially concerning the acquisition of skills relevant for financial success, and equal access to affordable technical and vocational higher education. The program partnered with the Iraqi government and private sector to ensure people acquire the proper set of skills to match the labor market. The program aims to create a governance framework to ensure the quality of vocational qualification, improve the curricula in collaboration with the Central Statistical Organization, capacity development training of the teaching staff and instructors, support 13 career centers to ensure a smooth transition of the graduates into the labor market.

Initiatives in the Education Sector in Iraq



- **Accelerated Learning Program:** is a program implemented by UNICEF in 10 Iraqi governments initially since 2005. The program is tailored for children aged 12-18 who had to leave school due to conflict and violence, internal displacement, socio-economic reasons, and other issues. The program provides them with 3 years of primary education instead of 6 which allows them to transition into secondary education or vocational schools.
- **Public investments:** The National Investment Commission has released the investment map and included numerous investment opportunities in the education sector. The governorates of Thi-Qar, Karbala, Maysan, and Basra are willing to dedicate areas for the establishment of private universities.



- **Improving access to quality and inclusive education with gender equality for out-of-school children (OOSC) in Iraq:** implemented by UNESCO with a budget of 13.4 million euros, it started in 2018 and will end by September of 2021. The program aims to enroll around 150,000 OOSC including those who were internally displaced and rehabilitate educational facilities to provide them with a safe child-friendly environment. The program successfully helped the enrollment of 91,669 children by the end of 2019 in 7 provinces including Baghdad, Nineveh, Erbil, Thi Qar, Salah Al-Din, and Babylon. The UNESCO has also rehabilitated 22 schools in Baghdad and another 11 in Nineveh in cooperation with the Directorates of Education.

Initiatives in the Education Sector in Iraq



- **Newton Platform:** is an E-learning platform that was released in March 2020 by the Ministry of Education and is supported by UNICEF as a measure to combat the impact of COVID-19. The platform provides students with live classes for all levels and all different subjects. The content follows the official curricula of the Ministry of Education. Moreover, the platform allows teachers to register, host virtual classes and interact with their students, it also allows for parents to create an account through which they can follow up their children's education.

Main Issues in the Iraqi Education Sector

- **The Curriculum**

The obsolete curricula of the education system in Iraq despite many attempts to modernize it is still a major issue. The curriculum does not provide students with relevant skills and knowledge for our modern day and is mostly based on memorization ability which deters the creativity of students and their analytical skills. Also, subjects like arts, music, and physical education do not receive the proper attention and are often replaced by other subjects that are considered more important. Another issue is the lack of practical learning and inadequate laboratories that could enhance the learning experience of students. Moreover, extracurricular activities are often disregarded. Activities such as sports teams, volunteer work, student clubs in different fields of interests like art, music, technology, languages, chess, theatre, economics, and others could all contribute to better shaping the educational experience for children, helping them pursue their passions, and discovering their talents. This could also contribute to shifting the mindset of children when applying to universities, pursuing opportunities that fulfill their goals and passions.

- **Teaching Quality**

The quality of teaching is reflected in the poor learning output. The teaching methods are outdated and do not keep up with the developments in our modern day. The current teaching methods unfortunately do not equip students with the required skills, knowledge to meet the job market. The number of teachers does not meet the growth rate of students. For example, the primary school enrolment rate has increased by 7.6% while the teachers decreased by 0.1%. In addition to the recorded drop in the quality of teachers by 4% (UNICEF, 2017). The 2018-2022 development plan declares staff education and training as an issue to tackle stating that “Inadequate basic training has been compounded by the lack of systems of in-service training”. It later admits to the state having no opportunity or system to organize continuing education which led to a steady decline in teacher quality. The issue here is mainly with the supply-driven education system, which means that the quality of the education staff is second to fill the vacant position with the closest candidate.

Main Issues in the Iraqi Education Sector

- **Weak Infrastructure**

The public education sector shows no significant improvement in terms of infrastructure, supplies, and equipment. In addition to the fact that conflict and violence in recent years have severely impacted the school buildings leading a large number of students to drop out or to continue their education in poor environments. According to the data of the MoE, in 2016, over 40% of schools that are unfit and in dire need of rehabilitation and renovation while around 15% are unqualified altogether. The largest portion of these is primary schools. In 2019, the Ministry of planning has estimated that the number of total school buildings is 11075, 4898 in need of some sort of maintenance, and 1532 are unqualified for use, which makes around 58% of schools in need of rehabilitation or rebuilding.

- **The Multiple Shift Schools**

The multiple shift schools is one of the most common issues facing the educational sector, many schools run multiple shifts in order to contain the 6.5 million Iraqi students. According to UNESCO, around 35% of primary schools and 30% of secondary schools in Iraq run double shifts, sometimes even triple shifts. Data has shown that the pass rate of students attending the morning shift was 92% while those who attended the evening shift recorded a significantly lower rate of 72% (UNICEF, 2017). The issue with multiple-shift schools is not only due to the growth in student numbers, but it can be allocated to the impeded refurbishment and rebuilding of educational establishments. According to the Ministry of Planning (2019), multi-shift schools compose 45.6% of the total schools which amounts to 5737 schools.

Main Issues in the Iraqi Education Sector

- **Enrollment**

According to the Ministry of Planning, as of 2019, there were over 6 million students enrolled in schools. The growing number of students does not match the resources and supplies available. Despite the increase in enrolment, there is still a large number of students who are out of school. The rate of girls who are out of school is 11.4% double that of boys out of school 5.4%. Whereas the dropout rate is almost 2% with 63,779 boys and 62,844 girls. Moreover, repetition rates reached 13.2% in 2018/2019 which reflects the inefficiency of the education system. The out-of-school children are a vulnerable group that could suffer from child labor and poverty.

- **Drive towards Medical Education**

The medical field is overcrowded, in the academic year of 2020/2021, schools of medicine admitted 7106 students, the schools of dentistry admitted 3044 students, and the schools of pharmacy 3284 students. The MOHESR has been addressed by the syndicates in Iraq (medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry) to the various issues facing new graduates of these fields, as the numbers are growing exponentially each year while the “central hiring” policy is not keeping up with the aforementioned growth. The market is saturated with no new opportunities on the horizon and the only option the graduate is left with is the public sector’s “central policy” hiring. Despite all this, the number of students choosing the medical field is still growing and the concerns are getting more difficult to tackle. Students still choose this path for social status, family pressure, and the perception of other sectors lacking job security.

Main Issues in the Iraqi Education Sector

- **Vocational Education**

The vocational track in the Iraqi education structure is composed of 3 years in different fields of study, including industry, commerce, agriculture, arts, and technical education. This track, however, does not attract students nor does it receive the right attention. In 2018-2019, the number of students admitted into vocational schools has reached 16,881 students, of which 30% were females. The industrial education program alone admitted around 50% of the total number of students. This marks an increase of 16.2% since 2014-2015 in the number of admitted students and 45% in the number of females enrolled. This track suffers from the outdated curricula that do not provide the students with the proper set of skills to match the labor market demands, poor educational quality, inadequate teaching, lack of practical skills training, weak infrastructure and equipment. Developing and modernizing vocational education in Iraq would have a pronounced impact on future generations, preparing the youth for the modern day employment opportunities, especially those offered by the private sector, ultimately returning a positive impact on the economy. Especially Considering that the mismanagement of traditional educational track has led to the overpopulation of universities, the lack of public sector employment opportunities due to budgetary constraints.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Providing a safe and qualified environment for students is key to increasing the efficiency of the educational system. Hence, rehabilitating, rebuilding, renovating and refurbishing the physical infrastructure of school facilities that have been damaged ought to help contain the ever-growing number of students and eliminate double-shifts in school.
- Initiating a clear and realistic curriculum reform, one which suits the demands and needs of the market and current times shall contribute to better learning outcomes.
- Encourage and foster extracurricular activities in schools to better shape the learning experience of students and support their potentials, interests, and talents.
- MoE should utilize an Education Management Information System (EMIS), an automated, computerized system to help organize the educational efforts of both the private and public system, ease the processes of student transfer and registration, and organize the duties and responsibilities of the public employee. This would also help obtain data regarding the education sector, which could contribute to better analysis and development of the sector.
- Encourage EdTech startups and initiatives.
- MoE has to facilitate the private sector to respond to the increasing demand for education from the population.
- Collaboration between the public and private sectors to train educators on advanced methods of teaching and delivering information in order to increase the quality of education.
- The Iraqi government has to facilitate private educational institutions with offerings of grants, incentives, access to land, and support with infrastructure, among other offerings.
- Establishment of modern and up-to-date educational development centers to aid in rehabilitating teachers when they commence their services, thus keeping them aware of the latest teaching methods.
- Provide education, protection, psychological support to internally displaced children and those who have been affected by violence in conflict areas.
- Address the issue of distance and e-learning, and provide better means and a more organized framework to tackle it.
- Develop the quality of vocational education and technical training to increase the number of enrolled students in these institutions.

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