

# The Role of the University of Baghdad in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: An Analytical Study

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to investigate the role of the University of Baghdad in improving its academic standing and international rankings by considering the requirements of sustainable development. Sustainable development has become a priority for local and academic universities to enhance their societal, international, and global role by incorporating sustainable development principles.

**Design/Methodology/ approach:** Current research adopted a checklist tool by examining the current gap analysis and what the University of Baghdad, as a community, the sample of study, aspires to achieve, six of the seventeen sustainable development goals indicators (Partnerships for Goals, No Poverty, Gender Equality, Quality Education, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, and Sustainable Cities and Communities) from 2014 to 2025.

**Findings:** The results revealed the weakness of partnerships in innovation and performance evaluation within the industrial context.

**Originality/ value:** The research results, with indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals, reinforce the University of Baghdad's efforts to improve its rankings among other peer universities. It also establishes a clear vision and a solid course of action for the University of Baghdad's position in terms of its scientific and academic role in community, local, and global engagement, which contributes to enhancing its standing and reputation and achieving outstanding performance from a sustainability perspective in higher education.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Sustainable Development Indicators; Education and Innovation.; University of Baghdad (UB); Quality education; Sustainable cities and communities.*

## Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) receive special attention from organizations providing various services, due to their local and global impact in enhancing their scientific and academic status. Interest in the SDGs reflects the strengths and weaknesses of public and private sector organizations, as well as the need to improve their operations and performance in line with contemporary developments. Adequate attention to the 17 SDGs, particularly from universities, reflects their rise in local and global rankings, enhances their organizational image, and makes them attractive to investors, professors, and students. These universities possess the

academic capabilities and potential to create a conducive environment for acquiring the skills and expertise needed to solve problems and meet the actual needs of the labor market. The widespread dissemination of SDGs standards makes them a real opportunity for individuals and institutions to leverage them and build partnerships to achieve shared goals while fulfilling their social responsibilities to society (Fallah Shayan,2022). Achieving the SDGs requires concerted and escalating support for all efforts at all levels of any organization (Moallemi *et al.*, 2020). The presence of diverse and unforeseen situations and problems prompts decision-makers to review current frameworks seeking to advance sustainable development (Bellantuono *et al.*, 2022). The pressures that accompanied managers and employees as they tried to adapt their work methods and implementation methods to the escalating challenges created by the SDGs prompted them to find different ways and methods to perform their tasks (Magliacani, 2022). What helps countries noticeably change the lifestyles of their populations is creating the appropriate environment for high-quality education, which contributes to addressing and reducing poverty rates and breaking the barriers that prevent the effective exploitation of available economic opportunities (Rosa, 2017)—understanding how the SDGs were designed aids in addressing the fundamental differences between them.

Therefore, understanding the design of the SDGs helps organizations achieve their goals (Mustajoki, 2022). Universities have begun to change their administrative structures by establishing the foundations for learning content and objectives using modern methods to develop learners' skills, serving the interests of sustainability policies and strategies (UNESCO, 2017). Achieving the SDGs requires thinking outside the box and developing learning methods and approaches to bring about the necessary change (Wamsler, 2020). This research will highlight SDGs: Partnerships for Goals, No Poverty, Gender Equality, Quality Education, Industry, Innovation, Infrastructure, Sustainable Cities and Communities. These goals represent the basic criteria that will be addressed to understand the University of Baghdad's (UB) role in achieving them. These six dimensions will be reviewed to serve the current research's objectives in arriving at its results and identifying the strengths and weaknesses in achieving these dimensions. This research will also present recommendations that will encourage the UB to improve the achievement of the SDGs to achieve high indicators and performance that serve the community for which it provides its various services. Accordingly, SDGs seek to improve academic success by creating a comfortable learning environment for students, contributing to their long-term well-being (Wang *et al.*, 2025).

## **Literature review**

The success and implementation of the SDGs depend on the institution's priorities, nature, and context, so that they do not conflict with the national policies of any country. Furthermore, comparing an organization's position with its regional or global counterparts through SDGs criteria naturally results in data attractive to diverse segments of society, including decision-makers in government institutions (Mustajoki, 2022). Bellantuono *et al.* (2022) used a network-based approach to understand the complex relationships among the 17 SDGs. According to social network data, the study found a strong relationship between perception and communication, and the similarity patterns involved in achieving the SDGs. Moallemi *et al.* (2020) studied some obstacles to implementing the SDGs at the local level. The study concluded that some reasons are the lack of local consensus among stakeholders on priorities and the problems that future uncertainty can generate. Saxena *et al.* (2021) emphasized the importance of building partnerships with the private sector and nonprofit organizations to

provide accurate data maps on the performance of government institutions regarding the SDGs. Wamsler (2020) highlighted the importance of paying attention to the inner dimensions represented by the cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions to create a learning environment that encourages critical thinking, improves the quality of education, and brings about the required social changes. These aspects have not received sufficient exploration. Asadikia *et al.* (2024) stressed that academic and governmental institutions should focus on goals that have not achieved high scores in the SDGs criteria or have not yet been achieved. The study also found that academic institutions seek to achieve SDGs by linking their priorities to the goals they achieve, high performance levels, and their relationship to the actual situation. In contrast, governmental institutions rely on the level of indicators by linking them to the alignment and importance of the achieved goals. Bexell *et al.* (2023) investigated the need for state institutions to be transparent in presenting information related to the SDGs and providing citizens with opportunities to participate in decision-making, which would reduce violations or avoid damage to the organization's reputation. Pradhan *et al.* (2017) stated that it is important to work to prepare society to become an active agent in what is called "societal transformation" through clear policies in order to implement programs related to the SDGs successfully. Thajb (2025) mentioned that the Iraqi economy faces economic, environmental, social, and institutional barriers hindering development and impacting policies toward sustainable and social development. Accordingly, this research will explore the role played by the UB, one of the largest universities in Iraq, in improving its overall performance by meeting the requirements of the SDGs standards, through its administrative, academic, and professional skills.

Dimensions of SDGs are explained below in order, based on their importance for the research:

- 1- Partnerships for Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (Goal 17) (Skalkos, 2024).
- 2- No Poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere (Goal 1) (Anderson & Gough, 2021).
- 3- Gender Equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5) (Anderson & Gough, 2021).
- 4- Quality Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4).
- 5- Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation (Goal 9) (Anderson & Gough, 2021).
- 6- Sustainable Cities and Communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (Goal 11).

## **Methodology**

The researchers used a checklist to determine the extent of implementation of the six Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on a seven-point scale (1- fully implemented, fully documented, 7- not implemented, not documented), based on the indicators adopted by the United Nations for the SDGs (THE 17 GOALS). Indicators were developed for each dimension in line with the objectives of the dimensions that have been selected (Partnerships for Goals, No Poverty, Gender Equality, Quality Education, Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, Sustainable Cities and Communities). The checklist is a statistical tool used to determine the gap between the required percentage standards and the actual reality of the organization. This

is to diagnose dimensions that need correction, identify causes and reasons, and provide results to improve the future situation. The checklist also ensures the credibility and validity of the research and enhances its results (Kerschbaumer, 2025).

The current research will discuss the issues by answering the main question: What is the UB's role in achieving SDGs? From this, the following sub-questions are derived:

1. What is the role of the University of Baghdad in achieving the Partnerships for Goals dimension?
2. What is the role of the University of Baghdad in achieving the No Poverty dimension?
3. What is the role of the University of Baghdad in achieving the Gender Equality dimension?
4. What is the role of the University of Baghdad in achieving the Quality Education dimension?
5. What is the role of the University of Baghdad in achieving the Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure dimension?
6. What is the role of the University of Baghdad in achieving the Sustainable Cities and Communities dimension?

## **Checklist Results**

### **Dimension One: Partnerships for Goals**

Indicator 1: The international partnerships gap was 46.7%, which indicates weak international cooperation or a lack of formal documentation. Indicator 2: The national partnership gap was 29.2%, which explains the inadequate partnerships with local industrial sectors and their contribution to innovation and entrepreneurship. Indicator 3: The resources and funding gap was 54.2%, demonstrating the absence of accurate mechanisms to monitor the impact of partnerships or weak reporting for comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of partnerships. The Times Higher Education rankings (2025) also indicated that the University of Baghdad's ranking in 2024 and 2020 was (801st-1000th and 401st-600th), respectively, with the same level of improvement.

### **Dimension Two: No Poverty**

Indicator 1: The student financial support gap was 33.3%, showing a lack of transparency and documentation of fairness and accessibility services. Indicator 2: The student housing gap was 50%, which reflects inadequate facilities, weak exemptions, and documentation. Indicator 3: The community initiatives gap was 33.3%, which means there is a need to expand community programs, especially in poorer areas. Indicator 4: The equal opportunity in Admission gap was 45.8%, reflecting the absence of impact measurement reports, which leads to weak monitoring of inclusion of equity indicators in official sustainability reports. The Times Higher Education rankings (2025) also showed that the University of Baghdad's ranking in 2025 and 2024 was (601st-800th and 301st-400th), respectively, with a decline in improvements during 2025.

### **Dimension Three: Gender Equality**

Indicator 1: The administrative representation of the women's gap was 30%, meaning that female participation exists, but it is insufficient, especially in empowering women administratively. Indicator 2: The academic participation gap was 33.3%, reflecting girls' weak

guidance towards scientific disciplines and the absence of dedicated support programs. Indicator 3: The Women's Affairs Centers' gap was 40%, which shows weak activity and documentation related to programs that clearly outline their objectives. Indicator 4: The policies and anti-discrimination gap were 50%, which indicates the absence of explicit policies and effective mechanisms to combat discrimination and harassment. Indicator 5: The gender monitoring and evaluation gap was 54.2%, which indicates a lack of a database and periodic reports on equality, and weakens ongoing oversight and monitoring.

#### **Dimension Four: Quality Education**

Indicator 1: The gap in quality of academic programs was 25%, which reflects a relative commitment to academic standards, with a lack of documentation and periodic evaluation mechanisms. Indicator 2: The equitable access to education gap was 33.3%, meaning that social inclusion policies and equal educational opportunities are inadequate. Indicator 3: The lifelong learning gap was 41.7%, which shows weakness in community and continuing education. Indicator 4: The gap in technology employment was 37.5%, which explains the moderate use of digital resources. Indicator 5: The academic assessment and reporting gap was 45.8%, which indicates a lack of systems for assessing learning outcomes and analyzing academic performance. The Times Higher Education rankings (2025) also indicated that the University of Baghdad's ranking in 2025 and 2021 was (801st-1000th and 401st-600th), respectively, with outstanding improvements during 2025.

#### **Dimension Five: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure**

Indicator 1: The technical infrastructure gap was 40%, which means that laboratories need to be updated and equipped to meet the requirements of applied research. Indicator 2: The supporting innovation and entrepreneurship gap was 45%, which means the current initiatives are limited to supporting student projects. Indicator 3: The developing technical curricula gap was 37.5%, showing poor alignment between curricula and labor market requirements, especially in technical fields. Indicator 4: The operational sustainability gap was 50%, which explains that the absence of clear energy, water, and waste management policies has led to a significant gap. Indicator 5: The research and industry collaboration gap was 45.8%, which indicates research partnerships with the industrial sector remain weak. Indicator 6: The evaluation and innovation gap was 54.2%, which reveals the weakness of partnerships in innovation and performance evaluation within the industrial context. The Times Higher Education rankings (2025) also indicated that the University of Baghdad's ranking in 2025 and 2021 was (201st-300th and 401st-600th), respectively.

#### **Dimension Six: Sustainable Cities and Communities**

Indicator 1: The Campus Development gap was 37.5%, reflecting less effort to develop sustainability-related projects and future expansion. Indicator 2: The cultural heritage preservation gap was 33.3%, which means insufficient financial support for adequate documentation. Indicator 3: The documentation of the local language and community gap was 45.8%, which means weak research outputs related to cultural identity and intangible heritage. Indicator 4: The sustainable environmental policy gap was 50%, which indicates that the absence of declared policies for reducing emissions and managing waste represents a significant environmental challenge. Indicator 5: The urban community engagement gap was

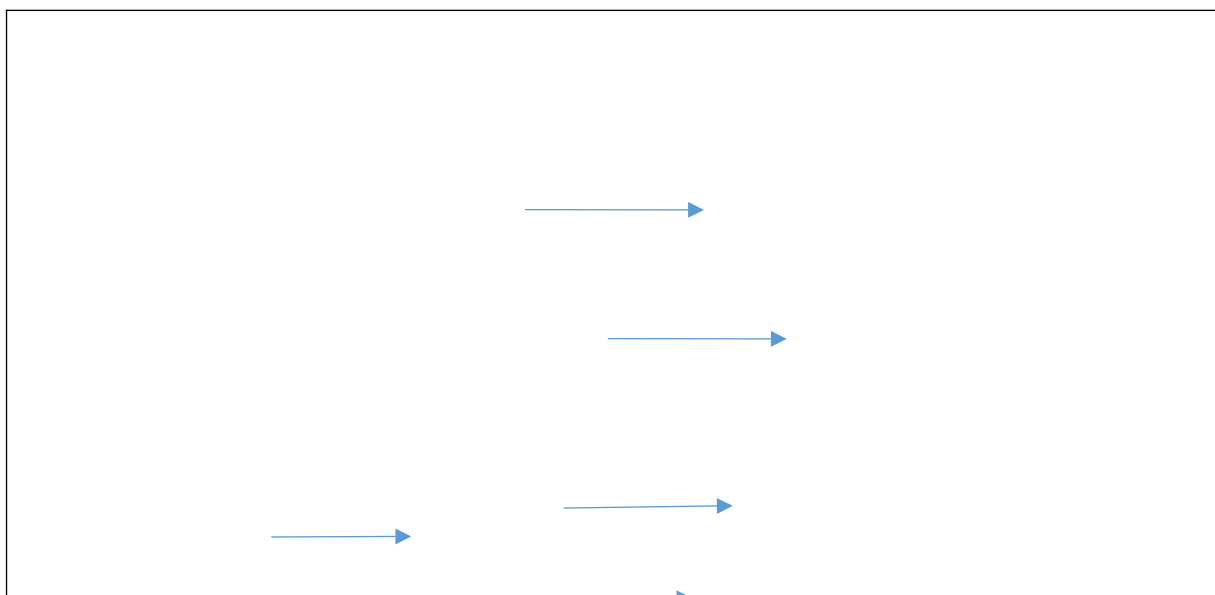
41.7%, showing a moderate effort related to the relationship between the university and the surrounding urban community. Indicator 6: The documentation and publication of the achievement gap was 54.2%, explaining that a lack of formal documentation and publication of the university's achievements has reduced the visibility of its development impact to external parties (See Table 1 and Figure 1). The Times Higher Education rankings (2025) also showed that the University of Baghdad's ranking in 2025 and 2020 was (401st-600th and 201st-300th), respectively, with the same level of improvement.

**Table 1: Summary of gaps in sustainability dimensions at the UB**

Sequence	Main Variables	Average Gap Percentage	Main Reasons for the Gap
1	Partnerships for Goals	43.40%	Weak international documentation, ineffective partnerships, and a lack of impact measurement
2	No Poverty	40.60%	Undocumented support, poor student housing, lack of opportunity, and assessment reports
3	Gender Equality	41.50%	Weak female representation, lack of anti-discrimination policies, and lack of gender monitoring
4	Quality Education	36.70%	Weak continuing education, incomplete evaluation, and limited use of technology
5	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	45.40%	Lack of sustainability policies, lack of industrial collaboration, and weak technical curricula
6	Sustainable Cities and Communities	43.80%	Weak cultural documentation, lack of environmental policies, and lack of community engagement

**Source:** Prepared by researchers based on the checklist outputs through using a seven-point scale (1- fully implemented, fully documented, 7- not implemented, not documented See Appendix A).

Figure 1 shows the gaps in sustainable development at the UB, as in an Ishikawa diagram.



Source: Prepared by researchers based on the checklist outputs.

## Results Discussion

1. Weak international and national partnerships: The high gaps indicate limited international and national interaction, particularly in terms of documentation and activating relationships with academic and industrial institutions, which limits the achievement of the SDGs. (Prohic, 2014) stressed that achieving the SDGs requires a role for all societal and international minds, from technologists and development scientists to politicians, business people, and even civil society organizations, within a cohesive and collaborative framework, based on a clear strategy to formulate policies and find solutions to complex problems together through the exchange of expertise and skills.

2. Deficiencies in documentation and monitoring systems: The frequent reference to the absence of periodic reports or databases confirms the weakness of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, which hinders performance improvement and transparency. Researchers confirm what a study (Long *et al.*, 2023) has shown regarding the importance of soft governance in supporting the SDGs, as it provides illustrative criteria to facilitate understanding of the role of targets and indicators.

3. Inadequate efforts to combat poverty and inequality: There are still significant gaps in providing financial and housing support to students, empowering women, and achieving gender justice, reflecting challenges in the social dimension of sustainability. This is confirmed by the annual report of the SDGs (2024) in Iraq and the study of Ordonez-Ponce (2023), which shows that the poverty goal is still below the required level and at a moderate level of improvement. This indicates that the definitions of this dimension remain without realistic, tangible solutions.

4. Average level of application of quality education concepts: Despite positive indicators regarding the quality of programs, there are apparent shortcomings in supporting lifelong learning and modern technology, and a lack of integrated academic evaluation. This is consistent with the findings of a study (Mohammed *et al.*, 2025) regarding a gap in communication with students regarding the SDGs, which requires a real push for strategic communication with them to serve sustainability requirements.

5. Weak link between the university and industrial innovation: The university suffers from weak technical infrastructure and a lack of support for entrepreneurship, which limits its contribution to industry and innovation. These results are consistent with the findings of a study (Medina-Hernández *et al.*, 2024) regarding the additional efforts required to enhance environmental awareness and encourage production and consumption that preserve a sustainable environment.

6. The Need to Activate Environmental and Urban Sustainability: The university suffers from an apparent lack of declared environmental policies and insufficient documentation efforts for cultural and community heritage, which reduces its local and national impact. This aligns with the findings of a study (Forouzi *et al.*, 2024) that found that the support organizations receive from the government has a positive impact on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly on business performance in a resilient economy (the blue economy) that considers the Sustainable Development Goals.

## **Recommendations**

1. Strengthen international and national partnerships by developing a strategic plan to expand academic and research cooperation with international universities. Furthermore, partnerships with the public and private sectors should be activated to ensure the sustainability of resources and funding. Work to enhance research and academic cooperation by encouraging colleges to sign memoranda of understanding with the best private or public universities, locally or internationally, in various fields such as communications, oil, and information technology. Obtain research grants to align objectives with planned projects by providing training programs that enhance the skills of higher education staff and plan to create opportunities for long-term funding.
2. Improve monitoring and documentation systems by establishing a unit dedicated to monitoring sustainable development indicators within the university and developing comprehensive databases that include all university activities related to sustainability. Work to establish a Sustainable Development Unit to monitor activities and indicators related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This unit will provide periodic reports on the development of databases, curricula, and clean energy investment in projects.
3. Empower vulnerable groups and promote equality by reviewing admission and financial support policies to ensure equal opportunities, activating Women's Affairs Centers, and adopting a clear policy against discrimination and violence. Work to disseminate instructions and regulations on social media regarding discrimination, harassment, and violence, while providing training courses for staff and students to spread educational awareness.
4. Develop the quality of education and teaching technologies through approving periodic evaluations of academic programs, linking them to the labor market, investing in digital technology, and training academic and administrative staff. Provide a periodic external review every three years, for example, of labor market data, develop smart classrooms using artificial intelligence tools for learning management, and link graduation projects to practical applications in academia and industry.
5. Activating the infrastructure for innovation and entrepreneurship by establishing university business incubators, supporting innovative student projects, and upgrading laboratories and facilities to serve applied research and industrial partnerships, and working to develop infrastructure by creating opportunities for growth and innovation, and encouraging entrepreneurship-related projects by establishing a university innovation center with local and international support, and cooperating with government institutions and the private sector to manage and sustain annual innovations.
6. Implementing environmental policies and community engagement by formulating and adopting a comprehensive environmental policy that includes resource management and emissions reduction, and supporting programs and projects that connect the university to the local community and enhance its cultural identity. Encouraging and financially backing studies on environmental and social responsibility, such as carbon emissions reduction, waste separation, water conservation, green procurement, and production. Establishing partnerships with municipalities to enhance the university environment, increase green spaces, and promote a recycling culture among students.

7. Disseminating university achievements through issuing periodic reports documenting the university's contribution to sustainable development and enhancing media presence and electronic documentation of university activities and successes. Developing a digital newsroom with communications teams from diverse disciplines, fluent in multiple languages, to publish annual and quarterly reports on rankings, in addition to publishing the most important educational outcomes, successful projects, and patents globally and internationally.

## **Conclusion**

The current study examined the extent of the UB's implementation and its role in achieving the SDGs. The research addressed the importance of the SDGs in improving the academic and scientific reality and the regional and global ranking of universities. The research aimed to develop a methodological framework to diagnose shortcomings and weaknesses in applying the SDGs standards at the UB and its role in creating an appropriate academic and teaching environment for administrators, lecturers, and students. The Study reached some crucial results, such as weak partnerships that limit SDG progress, deficient documentation and monitoring systems that weaken evaluation and transparency, insufficient efforts to alleviate poverty and inequality, suitable quality education, inadequate support for innovation, industry collaboration, and cultural heritage documentation. The research also identified a clear gap in the gender equality criteria within the gender monitoring and evaluation indicator and innovation and infrastructure within the evaluation and innovation indicator, with relative percentages of 54.2%. This requires a genuine response and precise attention to these two dimensions, as they reflect weaknesses in important aspects to improve oversight and follow-up, and inform the public about the developmental impact that is not apparent to external parties. Studies conducted in this field show that the performance of developing countries is still weak according to the indicators of the SDGs (Ordonez-Ponce, 2023). Abidi & Aldhalemi (2024) stated that Iraq has to make more efforts regarding building human resilience and addressing decades of war, violence, and economic hardship, which are burdening vulnerable people and organizations. The research limitations show insufficient statistics for each sustainable development goal at the UB. Future researchers could conduct a benchmarking exercise among Iraqi major universities to obtain more comprehensive results regarding achieving the SDGs.

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Appendix A (A seven-point scale checklist used in the study)

Variables, Dimension s & Items	Level of implementation and documentation according to the Sustainable Development Goals standards						
	Fully implemented			Partially implemented			Not implemented Not documented
	Fully documented	Partially documented	Not documented	Fully documented	Partially documented	Not documented	