

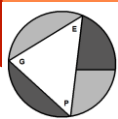
Main Article

Turkmen Mother-Tongue Education in Iraq: Structural Challenges, Violations and Shortfalls

Sheth Jerjis

Abstract This study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the trajectory of mother-tongue education among the Turkmen in Iraq by tracing its historical development from the Ottoman period, through the monarchical era and the Ba'ath Party rule, up to the post-2003 period. It also aims to explore the structural challenges facing this form of education in the current stage, whether under the central administration in Baghdad or within the framework of the Kurdish administration in the Kurdish Region. Furthermore, the study aspires to contribute to filling a knowledge gap in the literature on minority education in Iraq by offering an academic reading that enables a deeper understanding of the reality of Turkmen-language education. It further lays the groundwork for formulating more effective approaches to support it as one of the pillars of preserving cultural and linguistic identity.

The study reveals the persistence of linguistic and cultural marginalisation of the Iraqi Turkmen community, despite the constitutional and legal recognition of the right to education in the mother tongue. This is manifested in the absence of a supreme and organised institutional reference for the Turkmen education sector for a period approaching a decade, prior to the establishment of the Directorate of Turkmen Studies within the Iraqi Ministry of Education. However, this directorate continued

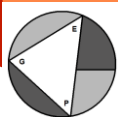


to suffer from structural imbalances, most notably ambiguity and instability in funding foundations, as well as linking recruitment mechanisms to bodies not directly related to the nature of this community or its educational needs.

This situation has contributed to the accumulation of a set of structural constraints that have undermined the foundations of Turkmen education, most notably the shortage of teaching staff, the state's failure to pay the salaries of a large segment of teachers, and the failure to provide textbooks for periods approaching two decades. Added to this are the low quality of curricula and weak translation processes, which have led to distortion of educational content and weakening of its coherence. Political factors and nationalist tendencies are also analysed, as these have further deepened aforementioned problems and shortfalls, and hindered the development of a stable and effective mother-tongue education system.

As a result of this deterioration, enrollment in Turkmen schools has witnessed a continuous and noticeable decline, reflected in the decrease in both the number of schools and students. The findings show that only a very limited proportion of Turkmen students—no more than 1.1%—receive education in their mother tongue in basic education schools, noting that this figure has not increased since the launch of the Turkmen education experience in the Safe Haven in 1993. In addition, a larger segment of students relies on the so-called “comprehensive schools” model, which does not meet the minimum requirements of mother-tongue education. The study also reveals a continuous decline in Turkmen students' achievement levels.

In light of this, the study aims to contribute in a substantive manner to filling a knowledge gap in the literature on minority mother-tongue

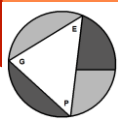


education in Iraq, and indeed at the broader level of minority studies in general, by providing an objective, grounded reading of the reality of Turkmen education.

In this regard, the study emphasises that addressing these challenges requires the adoption of comprehensive structural reforms, foremost among which is the reintroduction of the draft Law on the Regulation of Turkmen Rights, along with the allocation of an independent budget commensurate with the demographic weight of this component. It also indicates that any approaches that do not stem from these structural foundations and do not aim at addressing deep institutional problems in a comprehensive manner, will remain of limited impact and be incapable of bringing about substantive change, as has been evident from the experience over the past few decades.

Introduction

The issue of education in the mother tongue is considered one of the central topics in contemporary educational literature, due to its impact on strengthening national identity and developing the learner's cognitive abilities, particularly in the areas of comprehension, understanding, thinking and communication. This form of education contributes to establishing a cognitive and linguistic foundation that enables the learner to progress toward more complex stages of education. On this basis, international organisations, foremost among them the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), emphasise the importance of adopting the mother tongue in the educational process, as it constitutes a

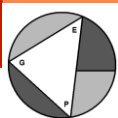


fundamental right of the child and a key entry point for achieving inclusive, equitable and quality education.

Despite this theoretical consensus, the implementation of mother tongue education faces structural challenges, especially in societies lacking a democratic culture and human rights frameworks, being characterised by ethnic and linguistic diversity at the same time, where political and national considerations intersect with educational policies. These challenges are clearly manifested in the conditions of linguistic minorities, which often suffer from institutional constraints that limit the exercise of this right, particularly in contexts characterised by institutional fragility and political conflicts, as is the case in Iraq.

Within this framework, the importance of studying education in the Turkmen language in Iraq becomes evident, being a central characteristic of an ancient ethnic community that constitutes the third-largest ethnic group in the country, with a broad and deep historical and cultural roots. This case also derives its particularity from the geographical dispersion of the Turkmen across multiple regions and from the impact of national and regional conflicts on their educational conditions. The historical experience of Turkmen education reveals a fluctuating trajectory between recognition and restriction, as periods of support were often linked to contingent political considerations that soon receded in the face of dominant central or national policies.

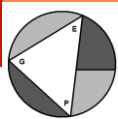
The transformations that followed 2003 have produced a new reality characterised by a relative constitutional recognition of the rights of communities with their own languages and linguistic traits; however, this has been accompanied by structural challenges, including administrative duality between the central government and the



Kurdistan Region, divergence in educational policies, institutional weakness—and shortages in human and material resources, in addition to the continued influence of political and nationalist factors in shaping this sector.

Contemporary academic style and ‘correctness’ tends to privilege moderation and to avoid expressions that carry critical connotations, while adopting a soft and diplomatic language that is viewed as an indicator of commitment to objectivity, nuance and avoidance of ‘strong statements’. However, this approach may limit the clarity of presenting issues and naming these precisely as these are and manifest themselves, which negatively affects the ability of research to diagnose the true nature and extent of problems and address these effectively. This shortcoming becomes more pronounced in countries and contexts where democratic culture is weak or where sensitivities related to national, religious and sectarian issues are high, as such environments impose restrictions on freedom of expression and expose the researcher to pressures or criticisms that all too often lead to greater, indeed to much caution and self-censorship.

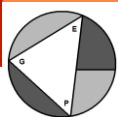
Thus, overreliance on so-called moderation in academic practice may turn into a defensive mechanism that weakens cognitive value and validity of analysis and findings. Given that the problems and manifestations of such shortcomings are publicly visible in the context case and topic addressed in this study and occur in plain sight, as well as the clear identification of the related actors, the facts have been recorded in a more explicit manner here.



Demographic and historical context

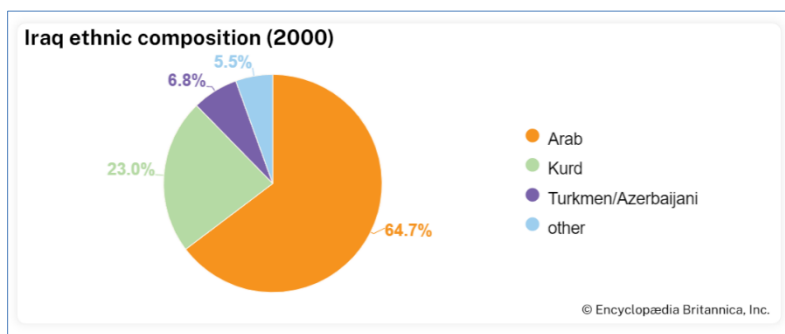
Iraq is known for its ethnic and religious diversity, as Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Chaldean-Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabak and Mandaeans form a rich cultural mosaic that constitutes Iraqi society. Today, the Turkmen constitute the third-largest ethnic group in Iraq after the Arabs and the Kurds. During the Buyid period, they represented the second-largest component of Iraq's population (al-Duri 1970: 120) and they appear to have retained this demographic position for many centuries thereafter, extending into the more recent period. However, a series of geopolitical developments—particularly those following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and during the subsequent dispute over sovereignty over the Mosul Vilayet (commonly referred to as the Mosul Question)—between Turkey on the one hand and British-mandated Iraq on the other, contributed to their marginalisation. This marginalisation was manifested primarily through policies aimed at deliberately reducing their population size in Iraq. These trends continued under successive Iraqi governments, particularly within a political environment dominated by nationalism and lacking democratic foundations.

The estimates provided by the British Mandate government—particularly the estimate dating to 1921, in addition to what later came to be known as the population census for the years 1922–1924, which was organised jointly by the British Mandate authorities and the Iraqi government—indicated that the proportion of Turkmen amounted to approximately 2% of the total population of Iraq (League of Nations 1924: 31). However, the committee of the League of Nations concluded in 1924 that these estimates, as well as the so-called population census, lacked the most basic methodological standards required for census



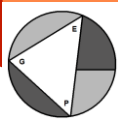
operations. The Iraqi state later officially acknowledged the failure of these estimates (Mohsin 2015: 535).

Image 1: Estimated ethnic distribution in Iraq according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2000



- Source: Kennedy, H. & Chambers, R. L., 'Iraq, section: Ethnic groups', eds., *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last updated 25 August 2024; website accessed on 30 March 2026, www.britannica.com/place/Iraq.
- A clear exaggeration can be observed in the estimation of the Kurdish population in this statistic; the 1957 census, conducted by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior under the leadership of Minister Saeed Qazzaz (a Kurd from the Sulaymaniyah governorate), is considered one of the most reliable sources in this context according to several Western references, despite its rejection by the Turkmen themselves, as it estimated the Kurdish population at approximately 13% of the total population (Ibid: Knights 2004: 262; Shah, 2003: 4).

In a later period and context, this demographic proportion estimate of the Turkmen population in Iraq was subjected to critical reassessment



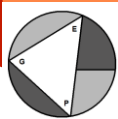
and skepticism by a number of Western sources after nearly eight decades. For example, the Encyclopaedia Britannica estimated the proportion of Iraqi Turkmen at around 6.8% in 2000 (Image 1; Kennedy, 2024), while other estimates raised this figure to approximately 9% (Knights 2004: 262; Shah 2003: 4).

Iraqi Turkmen primarily reside in a wide geographical area extending for about one thousand kilometers, from the city of Tal Afar in Nineveh Governorate in northwestern Iraq to the cities of Badra and Al-Aziziyah in Wasit Governorate (Kut) in east-central Iraq.

This area, which may be defined as the Turkmen Diagonal Line (see Map 1), was under Turkmen administration historically for more than a thousand years, during which the Turkmen constituted the historical majority of its population. However, this region was later exposed to increasing Arab and Kurdish migrations, and in the twentieth century witnessed systematic Arabisation and Kurdification processes that led to clear demographic changes in its population structure. The Iraqi Turkmen population is concentrated in the following governorates: Kirkuk, Nineveh (Mosul), Erbil, Salah al-Din, Diyala, Wasit and Baghdad.

History of mother-tongue education among Iraqi Turkmen

Education in the Turkmen language has faced significant challenges that have hindered its continuity in a regular manner over successive decades. These challenges have been closely linked to political and administrative transformations from the Ottoman era to the modern period, reflecting an ongoing tension between the official recognition of



the rights of national groups, on the one hand, and centralising nationalist policies that have sought to entrench the dominance of the Arabic language, and later the Kurdish language, on the other hand.

Iraqi Turkmen have accorded notable attention to education in general, and to mother-tongue education in particular, as they held a considerable presence in administrative and technocratic positions following the end of Ottoman rule, in addition to relatively high educational attainment rates compared to some other communities. This interest was reflected in their continuous efforts to promote education in the Turkmen language and to invest available opportunities for its development, particularly during prominent historical junctures such as the period around 1970, the phase following the establishment of the “Safe Haven” primarily for the Kurds in the early 1990s, and the period subsequent to the fall of the Ba’ath regime in 2003.

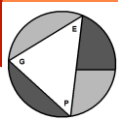
One of the most prominent historical milestones indicative of the Turkmen community’s adherence to its language of instruction is the widespread reaction to the Ba’ath regime’s decision to abolish education in the Turkmen language in 1971. This collective response is considered exceptional in the Iraqi context prior to 2003, as no other community dared to adopt a similar position for fear of catastrophic consequences under a dictatorial regime.

On 2 November 1971, the majority of schools in Turkmen areas—primarily in Kirkuk Governorate—closed their doors with locks, and the overwhelming majority of Turkmen students refrained from attending school, a clear sign of a boycott. Turkmen students at the University of



Map 1: Turkmen regions in Iraq on the Turkmen Diagonal Line

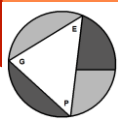




This uprising lasted for nearly a full week, until security forces violently suppressed it by arresting a large number of students, teachers and some Turkmen student leaders, who were subjected to various forms of physical torture. The events concluded with the killing of the well-known Turkmen teacher and actor Hussein Demirci, whose body was found lying on the pavement near his home, bearing clear signs of torture. It should also be noted that Turkmen teachers who insisted on teaching in their mother tongue were targeted by the Iraqi government in earlier periods of repressions, particularly in 1936 and 1941 (al-Hirmizi A. 2003: 66, 114-119).

The monarchical period (1921–1958)

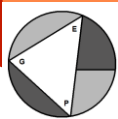
The official language of the Ottoman Empire was known as Ottoman Turkish, a language with a Turkic base that incorporated a substantial number of Arabic and Persian vocabulary and syntactic structures, while fundamentally relying on Turkish grammatical structure, while it was written in the Arabic script. Education during the Ottoman period was characterised by a religious nature, as schools were mostly administered within mosques or their annexes, focusing on the teaching of Islamic religious curricula. This pattern continued until the introduction of modern primary education in the mid-nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, as part of the modernisation process of Ottoman education, the first *Rüştiye* school was established in Kirkuk, representing an intermediate educational stage between primary and secondary education. In 1910, a Sultani (secondary) school was also established in Mosul (Shakur 2022: 15–17).



This was followed by the establishment of primary schools, which were mostly named after the neighbourhoods in which these were located, such as Korya School, Al-Qalaa School, and Jisr Bashi (Head of the Bridge) School. In the Erbil region, which was then a district affiliated with Kirkuk, the Khanqah School was established. By 1914, there were seven primary schools in Kirkuk and five in Erbil, while this number increased to 18 schools after the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921. It is noted that by the end of 1919, there were 75 primary schools in Iraq, of which 56 taught in Arabic, 11 schools in Turkmen regions extending from Mandali to Erbil and Tal Afar provided education in Turkish, and 6 schools taught in Kurdish (Shakur 2022: 15–17).

In 1922, the government issued a decision stipulating the continuation of education in the mother tongue, ensuring each ethnic group the right to receive education in its own language. However, Turkmen education remained limited to the first four grades, while continuation in the fifth and sixth grades was conducted in Arabic, which created significant difficulties in the continuity of the educational process in the Turkmen language (Al-Hirmizi, H. 2017). In this context, the principal of a secondary school in Kirkuk wrote on 10 August 1927 to the Director of Education in the Northern Region, stating the following:

“Since a long time ago, instruction in the schools of Kirkuk has been conducted in Turkish as it is a local language; however, students of the secondary levels and the upper primary grades lag behind their peers and fail in the examinations conducted in the capital, particularly the baccalaureate examination, which is essential for the continuation of their studies, despite their efforts and diligence. It is evident to me that the obstacle they face lies in

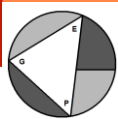


their weakness in the use of the Arabic language, as there is no fundamental difference between the curricula, and their teachers are highly qualified. Their weakness in the Arabic language has prevented them from benefiting from higher education (after the fourth primary grade)” (Al-Hirmizi, A., 2005: 29).

It is worth noting in this context that King Faisal I, then King of Iraq, affirmed the freedom of education in the mother tongue, as well as the right to litigate before the courts in that language, even as late as 1935 (al-Hirmizi, A. 2003: 24). Despite these obstacles, mother-tongue education in Turkmen areas continued at the primary level, albeit in a limited form. Under the “Local Languages Law” issued in 1931, education in the Turkmen language was permitted in Kirkuk Central District and the Kifri district, as well as in some districts of Mosul and Erbil. Furthermore, the Iraqi Parliament, following the end of the British Mandate in 1932, confirmed Iraq’s commitment to the League of Nations, which included official recognition of the Turkmen language alongside other languages and its inclusion in school instruction. Accordingly, Turkmen-language education began in two main regions: Kirkuk and Kifri. However, the government of Yasin al-Hashimi (1935–1936) abolished Turkmen-language education in most regions, while initially retaining a single weekly lesson for Turkish language instruction in Kirkuk, before this right was later completely abolished (Al-Hirmizi, A. 2003: 114-119; Al-Samanci 1999: 112).

The Ba’athist regime period (1968-2003)

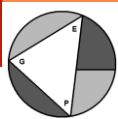
Within the context of the political transformations witnessed by Iraq at the beginning of the 1970s, the Iraqi government issued, on 24 January



1970, a decision granting the Turkmen the right to education in their mother tongue. This decision came within the framework of internal political balances aimed at confronting attempts by Kurdish parties to annex vast Iraqi territories to the autonomous region over which they were then conducting negotiations with the Iraqi state, including Kirkuk Governorate, with the objective of establishing a Kurdish national state.

Pursuant to this decision, official institutions concerned with Turkmen education and culture were established, including the Directorate of Turkmen Education and the Directorate of Turkmen Culture within the relevant ministries. It also permitted the establishment of a Union of Turkmen Writers and the publication of periodicals in their language, including a weekly newspaper and a monthly magazine. Subsequently, 124 schools were opened in Kirkuk, and 104 schools in each of Tuz Khurmatu, Kifri, and Altun Kopri, in addition to other areas with significant Turkmen population density (Shakur 2022: 18; Al-Hirmizi, A. 2003: 114–119).

However, these policies were not grounded in a stable institutional framework; rather, these remained subject to contingent political considerations. This was reflected in the abolition of education in the Turkmen language less than two years after its approval, without any official clarification of the reasons. Turkmen schools were closed, and the educational institutions that had been established lost their autonomy, as these came under the dominance of the ruling party apparatus. Their administration was entrusted to individuals affiliated with the Ba'ath Party, which led to their instrumentalisation in serving the regime's political and propagandistic agenda, instead of fulfilling their educational and cultural role (Al-Hirmizi, A. 2003: 114–119).

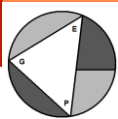


Over time, the policies of the regime underwent a fundamental shift toward greater rigidity, as strict restrictions were imposed on the use of the Turkmen language in educational institutions and state offices. Its use in the public sphere became fraught with risk due to potential penalties, which led many members of the Turkmen community to avoid speaking their mother tongue in public and even in private during daily life.

The regime also adopted a systematic policy aimed at altering the cultural character of Turkmen regions, which was manifested in the replacement of Turkmen names of villages, districts, sub-districts, and cities, as well as the changing of the names of schools, streets and commercial establishments bearing Turkmen connotations. These measures extended to include restrictions imposed on naming newborns with Turkmen names, within the framework of a broader policy aimed at reshaping cultural and linguistic identity of the Turkmen in Iraq (Radio Free Europe 2000; Al-Salihi 2025; Al-Hirmizi, H. 2017).

Turkmen Education in the Safe Haven

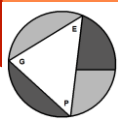
Despite the multiple setbacks faced by Iraq, two pivotal historical phases—the establishment of the Safe Haven in northern Iraq following the Second Gulf War in 1991 and the fall of the Ba'ath Party regime in 2003—constituted decisive turning points in modern Iraqi history, and indeed in the broader regional context. These two phases contributed to the restructuring of the political structure of the Iraqi state and the initiation of building a political system with a democratic character, in



an environment that lacked, and continues to lack, the most basic requirements of democratic culture.

In the first phase, the Safe Haven was established in the eastern part of northern Iraq, which had and still has a Kurdish majority, under United States guarantees for its protection. This area faced an administrative vacuum for several years, during which state institutions were rebuilt under the supervision of Kurdish parties, whose policies were characterised by a clear nationalist orientation and a pursuit of consolidating a Kurdish national entity. Within this phase of the Safe Area, the Turkmen were granted a relative space of freedom that enabled them to revive mother-tongue education and establish their own educational institutions. This development represented an important turning point, as it came after decades of policies pursued by successive Iraqi governments, which were characterised either by restricting the teaching of the Turkmen language or by allowing it in a temporary, limited, and one-time manner, as in the 1970 experience, within the framework of immediate and contingent political considerations.

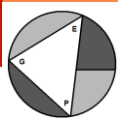
With the collapse of central state institutions in northern Iraq, an administrative vacuum emerged in the eastern part of the region (Kurdish region) that persisted for several years. During this period, which was characterised by a considerable degree of political freedom for the Turkmen, the Iraqi Turkmen National Party initiated its political activities from the Shaqlawa area in Erbil Governorate, operating alongside Kurdish, Sunni Arab, Shiite, Christian and other opposition political forces. Over time, however, the principal Kurdish political parties—the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union



of Kurdistan (PUK)—gradually consolidated their dominance over the administration of the region.

A few years later, administrative structures were reshaped, and state institutions were re-established under the supervision of these parties, which were characterised by strong nationalist orientations and a pronounced aspiration to establish an independent Kurdish state within the framework of what became known as the Safe Haven in northern Iraq. During this administrative process, a large number of Turkmen employees lost their jobs, and many were compelled to face two alternatives with no third option: either dismissal from their positions or joining Kurdish parties (Ozmen 2004: 197–203). Shortly thereafter, the main Kurdish parties established several Turkmen parties affiliated with them, operating according to their national agendas and supporting their projects. These affiliated Turkmen parties were used as representatives of the Turkmen in the Iraqi political arena and in international fora. Prominent examples include the Turkmen Brotherhood Party headed by Walid Sharika in 1990, and the Iraqi Turkmen Union Party headed by Sayf al-Din Damirci (Al-Zawiti 2004).

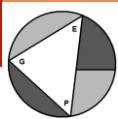
During this phase, the Safe Haven included two historically Turkmen regions: the city of Erbil and the district of Kifri. Erbil and Kifri are considered among the historically Turkmen areas in Iraq under Kurdish administration. Although Turkmen constituted the majority of the population in both areas in the first half of the twentieth century, their proportions have significantly declined today in each area, reaching approximately one-third in Erbil city and one-fifth in Kifri. This decline is attributed to the transfer of the region to Kurdish parties and



continuous Kurdish migration waves over decades, especially in the second half of the twentieth century and after 2003.

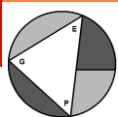
In 1992, the Turkmen National party opened an office in Erbil city under the supervision of Sabah Aziz, the official responsible for northern Iraq, and his deputy Jamal Shan. Through the initiative of these political leaders, efforts to reestablish Turkmen schools began. In 1993, amid administrative instability in the “Safe Haven” region and in cooperation with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Turkmen schools were established in Kifri and subsequently in the city of Erbil. An educational committee was also established under the supervision of Mustafa Kamal Yaychili, a member of the party’s executive board. The committee, chaired by Salah Mardan, included Bahaa al-Din Turkmen, Diyar Erbil, Mahmoud Kassap Oglu, Saad al-Din Ilhanli, Nihad Ilhanli, Azad Kureci and Basil Sebzeci. Kara Oglan Primary School was established on 17 October 1993 in the city of Kifri, with 150 students distributed across six classrooms, within the framework of the comprehensive education system. After a short period, it was converted into a basic education school, whereby all subjects came to be taught in the Turkmen language, before the intermediate level, with its three stages, was subsequently added.

Similarly, Dogan Intermediate School was established in 1995 with its three stages, and after a few years, the secondary level was added, bringing the total number of its students to approximately 100. In its early years, the school included classes operating under both the basic and comprehensive education systems; however, it was later fully transformed into a basic education institution. (TEBA Agency 2024).



In this context, the establishment of Turkmen schools in Erbil began in the same year in 2003, and others in Duhok and Sulaymaniya. The number of Turkmen schools in Erbil reached eight in the same year, later increasing to thirteen schools and five kindergartens across the Safe Haven by 2003. In Kifri, these included one kindergarten, two primary schools, and one secondary school, all of which taught the Turkmen language as a mother tongue prior to the fall of the Ba'ath regime (Shukur, 2025: 501). According to another source, by 1996, the total number of Turkmen schools in the Safe Haven had reached nineteen, including fifteen in Erbil, three in Kifri, and one in Sulaymaniyah, with approximately 12,800 students enrolled (ORSAM 2012: 13–14). However, this expansion occurred within a turbulent political and administrative context marked by intense party competition and the dominance of nationalist considerations, particularly amid increasing Kurdish aspirations to consolidate an independent political entity and strengthen administrative control (Duman 2003: 16–18).

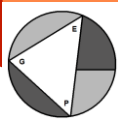
These challenges intensified after the Kurdistan Democratic Party gained control of Erbil in 1996, following the entry of the Iraqi army into the city and the end of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan influence there. This political shift negatively affected Turkmen education and created structural, administrative and political obstacles that limited its development and continuity. In the same context, the dominance of Kurdish parties contributed to reshaping educational policies in line with prevailing nationalist orientations, which led to the limited integration of Turkmen education into the official educational system, the absence of clear institutional recognition, and the failure to establish



a dedicated directorate to manage it, thereby weakening curriculum development and teacher training (SOITM Foundation 2009).

Turkmen education also faced challenges related to limited funding and administrative support, as it was dependent on external Turkish funding that dominated the political and organisational structures of the Turkmen (Jerjis 2021: 166). In addition, there was a shortage of qualified teachers, alongside increasing use of the Kurdish language as the primary medium of instruction, which contributed to the marginalisation of the Turkmen language within educational institutions (U.S. Department of State Report 2003).

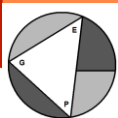
This marginalisation was reflected in the imposition of Kurdish symbols and language within Turkmen schools. This included the mandatory hoisting of the flag of the Kurdistan Regional Government over these schools, as well as the introduction of the Kurdish language in the early stages of education, particularly from the first grade of primary school. This policy was further reinforced through the appointment of administrative and teaching staff who were either non-Turkmen speakers, lacked proficiency in the Turkmen language, or were closely affiliated with the Kurdish administration. In some cases, individuals who had completed specialised training courses in Turkmen language instruction were excluded or sidelined (U.S. Department of State Report 2003; SOITM Foundation 2009). Furthermore, these schools remained under Kurdish supervision without an independent Turkmen educational authority, resulting in disparities in appointments, unequal resource distribution and shortages of educational materials.



In 1996, Turkmen schools suffered a major setback following the entry of Iraqi forces into Erbil, in coordination with Masoud Barzani, whereby some schools were subjected to raids, vandalism and looting, which caused severe material damage. These events also included the arrest of a number of Turkmen personnel as part of approximately sixty individuals from various sectors; the fate of many of them remains unknown to this day (Al-Samanci 1999: 277). These developments necessitated the reorganisation of the entire Turkmen educational process under more complex and difficult conditions (Bakkal 2018).

Despite the difficult circumstances surrounding the Turkmen educational experience, Turkmen schools—supported by the Turkish civil and military presence in the Safe Haven and backed by the Iraqi Turkmen Front—were able to continue their educational activities with a considerable degree of relative freedom between 1993 and 2003, maintaining their existence and continuity despite the multiple challenges they faced. In this context, the prominent Turkmen global figure Dr. İhsan Doğramacı (1915–2010), born in Erbil and of Iraqi Turkmen origin, played a pivotal role as one of the most important supporters of Turkmen education during this period. Doğramacı, a distinguished figure in the fields of education, medicine, and institutional development, provided material, moral and logistical support that significantly contributed to the sustainability of Turkmen educational institutions.

Doğramacı's contributions included sending computers and modern educational tools to Turkmen schools; organising annual summer training courses for Turkmen teachers; supplying schools with educational materials on a regular basis; establishing a Turkmen

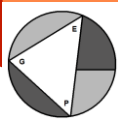


student folklore group; carrying out maintenance and renovation works in schools; converting Seljuk School into a semi-private system to improve educational quality—serving as an important model in this regard—covering the needs of three Turkmen schools for a period of time (Qara Qoyunlu, Sultan Muzaffar, and Seljuk) including partial contributions to teachers' salaries; providing regular financial support to specialised teachers, as well as establishing the Doğramacı Foundation, a clinic to meet students' health needs, and the Doğramacı Cultural Center and Bilkent College (a private or foundation-affiliated school that focuses on teaching foreign languages and provides education) from the first to the twelfth grade in the city of Erbil, all of which provided important support for Turkmen education. Last but not least, the Ihsan Dogramaci Foundation in Erbil came to own nine service vehicles serving Turkmen schools in Erbil, with each vehicle serving two to three schools (ORSAM 2012: 14).

Turkmen education after the fall of the Ba'ath regime in 2003

Minority rights in the draft Iraqi Constitution

The Iraqi Constitution of 2005 stipulates the guarantee of the right of all Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue, in accordance with educational regulations, whether in public educational institutions or private ones (Iraqi Council of Representatives 2024). This constitutional framework reflects Iraq's commitments under international treaties, particularly those related to ensuring accessible and affordable education, incorporating cultural considerations into



curricula, and recognising the right of indigenous peoples to establish and manage their own educational systems.

However, the constitutional formulation was characterised by a notable degree of generality and ambiguity, which created practical difficulties in its application to ethnic and linguistic communities, and opened the door to selective political interpretations and its instrumentalisation in ways that serve ethnic or partisan interests to the detriment of others. These constitutional commitments have remained limited in their practical implementation. The state of political and security instability that followed the 2003 occupation in Iraq led to multiple human rights violations affecting many communities, including the Turkmen. These violations included displacement, marginalisation, and demographic change in their traditional areas (Human Rights Watch 2004; Fadel 2008; Paley 2008; Amnesty International 2016; Smith 2017).

The first paragraph of the Article 4 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution reveals a clear distinction between the two official languages (Arabic and Kurdish) on the one hand, and other indigenous languages, including Turkmen and Syriac, on the other. Paragraph One of Article 4 guarantees Iraqis the right to educate their children in their mother tongue, such as Turkmen, Syriac and Armenian, in public institutions according to educational guidelines, or in any language in private institutions. However, it does not impose equivalent obligations regarding Arabic and Kurdish, reflecting an unequal constitutional status among languages. The text of Paragraph One of Article 4 of the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 reads as follows:

“Arabic and Kurdish are the official languages of Iraq. The right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue, such as



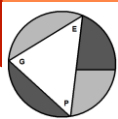
Turkmen, Syriac, and Armenian, shall be guaranteed in public educational institutions in accordance with educational guidelines, or in any other language in private educational institutions”.

This constitutional arrangement clearly privileges the two main official languages at the level of symbolism and institutional function, while recognition of minority languages remains conditional upon demographic and territorial criteria, without equivalent institutional guarantees. The fourth paragraph of the same article states the following: “Turkmen and Syriac shall be considered two other official languages in the administrative units in which they constitute population density”.

So, this fourth paragraph includes Turkmen and Syriac as “additional official languages” in administrative units where these communities constitute a significant population density, without providing clear implementation mechanisms or a comprehensive institutional framework to operationalise this recognition. This, in turn, limits its practical effectiveness and renders it susceptible to political instrumentalisation and manipulation in contexts of tension and conflict.

Kurdish dominance and its implications

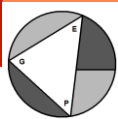
The political and administrative environment that emerged after the US-led occupation of Iraq in 2003 contributed to strengthening the influence of Kurdish parties within Iraqi state institutions, which in turn was reflected in the trajectories of the constitutional process and the



drafting of legislation. It also led to the emergence of a governance model based on ethnic and sectarian balances, known in Iraqi political discourse as the Muhasasa system, which states power and government positions are distributed among ethnosectarian groups.

Iraqi state institutions witnessed a near-total collapse following the fall of Saddam Hussein, with the exception of the northern regions of Iraq, which remained under the control of Kurdish parties. These parties, supported by the Peshmerga forces and under the supervision of the international coalition forces, exploited the security and administrative vacuum to extend their influence over state institutions and the political arena for several years. This control extended to encompass the entirety of northern Iraq at the administrative, security and military levels. As a result, the overwhelming majority of the historical Turkmen regions, including Turkmen educational institutions, came under the direct control of Kurdish parties and Peshmerga forces, within the context of restructuring the administrative and political frameworks of the new Iraqi state. This situation persisted for approximately fourteen years, until 2017, when the Iraqi government regained control over most of these areas, with the exception of the three governorates (Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk), which the constitution stipulates as part of the Kurdistan Region.

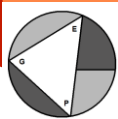
A set of overlapping factors contributed to the consolidation of this Kurdish dominance, while simultaneously leading to the weakening of the position of other Iraqi communities. Among the most prominent of these factors were: the Kurdish nationalist aspiration for the establishment of an independent Kurdish entity and their claims over most of the Iraq's northern regions; the *de facto* control over key



administrative structures of the emerging Iraqi state, with direct and full support from the Coalition Provisional Authority led by the United States, amid an almost complete absence of state institutions and the rule of law; the near-total administrative, security and military control over all areas of northern Iraq, as well as large parts of the governorates of Diyala and Salah al-Din; and the almost complete control over the Turkmen areas as a result. This situation was further reinforced by the tribal nature of Kurdish parties, the harshness of the Peshmerga militias resulting from their mountainous environment and consequent culture, as well as their long history of armed confrontation with the Iraqi state over more than half a century.

Under these conditions, other Iraqi communities—including the Turkmen—faced multiple forms of political and administrative marginalisation, in addition to exposure to human rights violations, recurring acts of violence, and demographic changes in their traditional areas. This occurred within a broader context characterised by the collapse of state institutions, weak rule of law, and the proliferation of sectarian conflicts (Human Rights Watch 2004; Fadel 2008; Paley 2008; Amnesty International 2016; Smith 2017).

This dominance became particularly evident in the process of drafting the permanent Iraqi Constitution of 2005. The Kurdish pursuit of consolidating their dominant ethnic and political presence, alongside opening the door to their own separatist tendencies, contributed to the inclusion of clear biases in favour of Kurdish nationalism in several constitutional provisions, thereby creating numerous legal gaps that limited the constitution's effectiveness in terms of practical applicability and equitable rights of autonomy in education, cultural

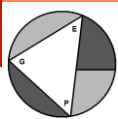


expression and political and socio-economic rights for all ethnic and religious communities in Iraq.

One of the most prominent constitutional issues is the incorporation of Article 140, which outlines a process to resolve the status of so-called disputed territories, especially Kirkuk, through normalization, a census, and a referendum, in a transitional and temporary form within the text of a permanent constitution, which raised profound legal and constitutional concerns. This inclusion led to serious questions regarding the legal status and 'Iraqiness' of vast areas in northern Iraq inhabited by minority groups, particularly the historically Turkmen regions, which were significantly affected by the provisions of this article and its practical implications.

As for the implications of this Kurdish dominance on mother-tongue education, these are clearly manifested in the refusal of the Kurdish authorities to recognise the Turkmen language as an official language in Kirkuk governorate, despite its constitutional acknowledgment and the historically authentic Turkmen character of the city. It took four years for the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court to issue its decision in 2008, confirming that Turkmen and Syriac speakers in Kirkuk fall within the concept of 'population density', thereby making their languages additional official languages. Nevertheless, the implementation of this ruling remained significantly limited (Federal supreme Court 2008).

Some recent studies indicate that language in Kirkuk was not treated merely as a means of communication but was closely linked to Kurdish political dynamics and considerations of Kurdish national security. This reflects how the Kurdish political reality in the city embodied broader

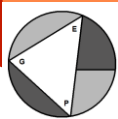


fears within Kurdish society, contributing to the politicisation of the language issue and its connection to power struggles (Muhi al-Din 2025). With regard to granting official status to the Turkmen language in Kirkuk, the 2005 Iraqi Constitution provided for this within Article 4, but its practical implementation was delayed for many years due to political and administrative complexities resulting from nationalist Kurdish extremism. The Kurds controlled the administration of the governorate from 2003 to 2017, followed by the Arabs, until the Iraqi Council of Ministers issued a decision in January 2023 stipulating the activation of the use of the Turkmen language in official institutions within the governorate (Shafaq News 2023).

Turkmen education under the central administration in Baghdad

This phase, however, produced complex structural challenges, most notably the emergence of two semi-independent administrations within a single state framework: the federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdish regional government. This situation contributed to the complexity of managing the education sector in general, and Turkmen education in particular, due to differences in educational policies within the framework of ethnic-national policy, variations in administrative and organisational structures, and overlapping authorities between the two sides. In this context, Turkmen education in the Safe Haven began ten years before its commencement in areas under central Iraqi control.

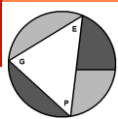
Within these profound political and constitutional transformations, the right to education in the mother tongue—including education in the Turkmen language—witnessed significant development and increasing attention. This was reflected in the incorporation of this right into legal



and constitutional frameworks, and in the expansion of educational practices associated with it, indicating its transition from the margins of public policy to a more established and stable position. Accordingly, it can be said that this right has reached a level of institutional consolidation that makes its reversal extremely difficult in contemporary legal and political contexts.

Furthermore, this period witnessed the near-total collapse of Iraqi state institutions in the north of the country, which necessitated their reconstruction from the ground up. This process was accompanied by the emergence of new administrative and educational cadres whose professional competence remained uncertain, coupled with a lack of institutional experience and accumulated administrative practice. This situation had a particularly profound impact on the education sector, given its reliance on professional expertise and institutional stability, making it one of the most affected sectors during the phase of institutional rebuilding and the accompanying structural and organisational disruptions.

The scope of Turkmen education under the supervision of the Iraq's central administration came to extend across a broad geographical expanse, encompassing regions with a Turkmen majority as well as areas characterised by a significant Turkmen population density. These regions are distributed across several Iraqi governorates, including Nineveh (Mosul), Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Diyala and Baghdad, in addition to Turkmen communities with an Arabised character in Wasit Governorate (Kut).

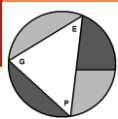


Following the fall of the Ba'ath regime in April 2003, the right to mother-tongue education among Iraqi communities shifted from a phase characterized by repression, prohibition and the exclusive imposition of the Arabic language to one of formal recognition; however, it has remained influenced by ethno-national conflicts—particularly the Arab–Kurdish conflict—which have affected its practical implementation on the ground.

In this regard, the testimony of a Turkmen educator highlights some of the institutional challenges that has accompanied this transition at the time. He states the following:

“After the fall of Kirkuk on 9 April 2003, a Kurdish individual assumed the leadership of the General Directorate of Education in Kirkuk. During my routine visits to the directorate, I noticed a clear sense of unease among those in charge of the administration, as the directorate had effectively become an institution whose services were limited to the Kurds, with the marginalisation of other components. In this context, an idea that had been on my mind for decades emerged, concerning the initiation of a program for Turkmen-language education” (Note 2).

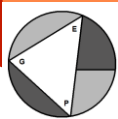
Within the framework of these initiatives, and through the efforts of the Turkmen educator and teacher Khalil Imamoglu, a committee of Turkmen educators was formed in April 2003, comprising a number of specialists, with the aim of benefiting from the experiences of Turkmen schools in Erbil. Imamoglu also was included as a representative of the Turkmen community in the Education Committee of Kirkuk Governorate established by the coalition forces representing the US-led temporary central administration in Baghdad.



During the first month following the fall of the Ba'ath regime, approval was granted by the American authorities to continue education in the mother tongue, which enabled the initiation of practical steps toward implementing Turkmen-language education. In coordination with the Ministry of Education in Baghdad, 88 schools in Kirkuk Governorate were designated to implement Turkmen-language education at the primary, intermediate and secondary levels. More than half of these were basic schools in which all subjects were taught in the Turkmen language using the Latin alphabet. Given that the majority of teaching staff and students in these schools were of Turkmen ethnicity, the transition from Arabic-language education to Turkmen-language education did not encounter major difficulties, as the teaching staff were subjected to training courses in teaching in the Turkmen language.

In the first phase, the Ministry of Education appointed 200 additional teachers to work in these schools, followed in the subsequent school year by a second cohort of approximately 60 teachers. In the same year, 2004, the establishment of Turkmen schools expanded to include other areas with significant Turkmen population density, such as Nineveh Governorate and the Tuz Khurmatu district. A number of retired teachers also contributed to supporting this experience by rejoining the teaching profession in Turkmen schools as volunteers.

However, additional teaching cadres were prepared through the inclusion of a large number of Turkmen teachers in Turkish language training courses, where they were referred to as 'lecturers'. The salaries of these individuals, along with those of several other workers and logistical requirements, were secured through funding sources linked to

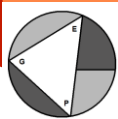


the Iraqi Turkmen Front, which is solely dependent on Turkish funding. As for Nineveh Governorate, in August 2003 twelve teachers from the cities of Mosul and Tal Afar were sent to Turkey to participate in specialised language teaching training courses. In 2004, the relevant authorities dispatched training personnel to organise educational programs and courses targeting Turkmen educational staff in the governorate.

On 21 December 2004, approval was issued by the Ministry of Education to open schools operating in the Turkmen language in Nineveh Governorate (Appendix 1), on the conditions that the proportion of Turkmen students in these schools exceed 25%, and the curriculum include two weekly lessons for teaching the Turkmen language at all educational levels. The number of these schools reached fifteen, thereby increasing the total number, including the schools of Tal Afar, to 175 primary and secondary schools across the governorate within a few years.

However, the establishment of the Kurdish Studies Directorate within the Iraqi Ministry of Education dates back to 1972, in the context of the Kurdish autonomy arrangements at that time, when it was administered by Kurdish cadres loyal to the former regime. After 2003, Kurdish nationalists assumed control of this directorate, and Turkmen education was attached to it, meaning that it was placed administratively under the supervision of a Kurdish director.

In 2011, basic schools were opened in Nineveh Governorate, totaling eleven primary schools, in addition to four kindergartens. Nevertheless, Turkmen education suffered a major setback following the control of

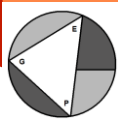


Nineveh Governorate by the Islamic state (IS), as Turkmen schools were closed and tens of thousands of Turkmen were displaced to other governorates. In this context, a number of schools for displaced persons were opened with the support of the Iraqi Turkmen Front. After the liberation of Mosul from ISIS control, Turkmen schools were reopened again in 2018, resulting in the establishment of only eight basic schools, in addition to the resumption of operations in nearly all 'comprehensive schools'.

Given the magnitude of the task of educating a community estimated at several million people, which had been disconnected from the use of its mother tongue for extended periods, as well as the profound structural challenges faced by this community and its mother-tongue education since the establishment of the Iraqi state, two main models of Turkmen schools in terms of the language of instruction have emerged in Iraq, whereby the second clearly diverges from the core objectives of mother-tongue education:

- Basic schools: in which all subjects are taught in the Turkmen language, in addition to lessons in Arabic language and literature, as well as in the Islamic religion.
- Comprehensive schools: in which only one lesson is allocated to the teaching of the Turkmen language and its literature, while the remaining subjects are taught in Arabic.

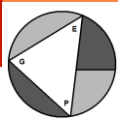
Noteworthy is the fact that the curriculum adopted in all Turkmen schools is identical to the curriculum applied in Iraqi schools, which is prepared by the Iraqi Ministry of Education, with the exception of the curriculum of the Turkmen language and its literature, which is



determined by the Turkmen Department within the Iraqi Ministry of Education.

In the early years following the fall of the Ba'ath Party regime in 2003, a special department for the Turkmen language was established within the Directorate of Education in Kirkuk Governorate. In 2012, this structure evolved into the General Directorate of Turkmen Studies affiliated with the Iraqi Ministry of Education. Ministerial Order No. (3832), dated 3/2/2012, was issued based on the provisions of Paragraph (5) of Ministry of Education Law No. (22), approximately nine years after the official commencement of Turkmen language instruction in the 2003–2004 academic year. Prior to the issuance of this order, responsibility for Turkmen educational affairs was managed through a specialised unit affiliated with the Kurdish Education Directorate within the Iraqi Ministry of Education (Jafar 2022: 40).

At the time of its establishment, the General Directorate of Turkmen Studies consisted of a Director-General and several deputy directors, in addition to three main departments: inspection, curricula and printing, and administration. It employed fourteen staff members, with a decision to establish branches in the governorates of Mosul, Kirkuk, Salahaddin, Diyala, and Baghdad. Staff members of the Turkmen education sections were appointed in these branches, with the Kirkuk branch comprising four employees, while only one employee was assigned to each of the other branches. The responsibilities of these branches were defined to include the supervision of training courses, external education and scholarships. In addition, the appointment of Turkmen teachers became the responsibility of the General Directorate (ORSAM 2012: 12). Over time, these branches witnessed a relative



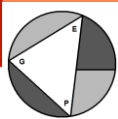
expansion in their staffing levels, with the number of employees in each branch currently in more recent years increased to between seven and ten.

Subsequently, the Official Languages Law No. (7) of 2014—which was debated and approved by the Iraqi Council of Representatives in 2013—provided an additional legal and constitutional affirmation of the right of all Iraqi communities to education in their mother tongue. The law explicitly stipulates that the Turkmen language is an official language in administrative units where Turkmen constitute a population concentration, while also permitting the establishment of public and private schools that provide education in the Turkmen language in accordance with approved educational regulations.

However, under the influence of the Arab–Kurdish national conflict, in addition to the repercussions of Turkish control of the political will of the Turkmen of Iraq, the Iraqi Council of Representatives in 2014 failed to pass one of the most important pieces of legislation related to the Iraqi Turkmen, namely the draft Law on the Regulation of Turkmen Rights. This draft aimed to develop the administrative and legal framework governing Turkmen affairs in Iraq, including the promotion of Turkmen education and cultural and administrative rights. The Council voted in principle to reject the draft following its first reading, thereby preventing further legislative progress in this field (Duman 2014).

Turkmen education under Kurdish administration

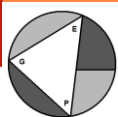
In the aftermath of the geopolitical transformations that followed the fall of the Ba’ath regime in 2003, and with the increasing influence of



Kurdish parties and their dominance over the administrative structures of the Iraqi state as well as the overall political landscape, a growing nationalist orientation emerged in the policies of the Kurdish administration within the region. Despite the recognition by the Iraqi state, within its constitutional frameworks, of the right to education in the mother tongue, the Kurdish administration-initiated attempts to assert control over Turkmen institutions, including the education sector, its administration and its schools. The incident of the takeover of Turkmen institutions in the Kurdish region in 2005 constitutes a pivotal turning point in this process, and it will be examined in detail in this study. These policies had a negative impact on the reality of Turkmen education. Accordingly, the number of Turkmen schools declined to fifteen in 2008 and further to thirteen in 2012 (Shukur 2025: 502 ; ORSAM 2012: 13; TEBA Agency 2024).

Despite this decline, the second half of the past decade witnessed a limited improvement in student numbers within the Kurdish region, in the context of a general deterioration in the characteristics of mother-tongue education. The factors underlying this increase are discussed elsewhere in this article. In 2020, the number of Turkmen schools in Erbil and Kifri reached 18 schools, distributed as follows: three kindergartens, ten primary schools, and five preparatory schools (Acar 2024: 1693–1694).

As for the current situation, the status of Turkmen schools in the Kurdish regions—in Erbil city and Kifri district—can be described as follows: two kindergartens (one in Erbil and one in Kifri), eleven primary schools (ten in Erbil and one in Kifri), and four intermediate/preparatory schools (two intermediate and two

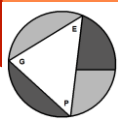


preparatory in Erbil, and one preparatory school in Kifri). The number of teaching staff in these schools is estimated at approximately 250 teachers, while the number of enrolled students is around 2,000.

An analysis of the statistics related to Turkmen education since its establishment in 1993

In the context of studying the reality of Turkmen education in the post-2003 period, three Turkish studies have addressed this subject (see Table 1). The first study was published in the Kirkuk University Journal for Human Sciences under the title “Teachers’ views on Turkish Education in Iraq (The Case of Kirkuk)’ by the researcher Najat Ayoob Shakur (Shukur 2025). The second study was issued by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (ORSAM) under the title ‘The Situation of Turkmen Education in Iraq’ (ORSAM 2012). The third study was published in the Korkut Ata Journal of Turkish Studies under the title ‘The Efforts of Iraqi Turkmen to Preserve the Turkmen Language and Culture’ by the researcher Özlem Acar (Acar 2024).

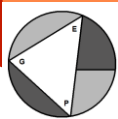
Taken together, these studies constitute a solid knowledge and data base regarding the state of Turkmen education in Iraq. These are characterised by providing detailed information on the number of Turkmen schools, their types and their geographical distribution in Turkmen-majority areas, in addition to offering analytical data on the nature of the educational process—particularly with regard to the extent and actual implementation of mother-tongue (Turkmen) instruction.



Statistical data indicate that the total number of Turkmen schools in Iraq, including those in the Kurdish region, reached 428 schools in 2008, then declined to 410 schools in 2012, before rising again to 535 schools in 2020. Noteworthy that the study by ORSAM did not include the schools of Erbil and Kifri, which numbered 13 schools. Accordingly, the corrected total number of Turkmen schools in 2012 amounts to 423 schools, while the figures for 2008 and 2020 remain unchanged.

As for the number of basic schools that adopt full instruction in the Turkmen language, it reached 76 schools in 2008 and declined to 65 schools in 2012. With the addition of the 13 schools in Erbil, the corrected total becomes 78 schools in 2012, while the number increased to 92 schools in 2020. The most recent data indicate that the total number of Turkmen schools across various regions has reached 603 schools, including 98 basic schools (see Table 3).

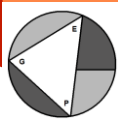
The statistical data reveal a clear and unequal disparity in the geographical distribution of Turkmen schools in Iraq, to some extent in accordance with the Turkmen population density in each area. The vast majority of these schools are concentrated in Kirkuk Governorate, followed by the district of Tal Afar, then the city of Mosul, then the district of Tuz Khurmatu, and subsequently Erbil Governorate. As for the district of Kifri, since the establishment of the first Turkmen school, the number of schools has remained limited to three institutions covering different educational stages, all of which were housed in a single building. However, student numbers have declined significantly over time (see Table 1).



It is observed that approximately half of the total Turkmen schools in Iraq, and a large proportion of basic schools that adopt full instruction in the Turkmen language, are located in Kirkuk Governorate. This reflects the historical and demographic particularity of the Turkmen presence in the city and its surroundings, as well as indicating the strength of national awareness and cultural cohesion in this region (Odisho 2002; Bet-Shlimon 2019:84). In Nineveh Governorate, relatively high numbers of Turkmen schools have been recorded, particularly in the district of Tal Afar, followed by the district of Mosul, which reflects the notable Turkmen population density in the governorate. The district of Tuz Khurmatu comes next in terms of the number of schools.

By contrast, in Diyala Governorate, despite the substantial Turkmen presence and the existence of historically recognised Turkmen-character areas, only seven Turkmen schools were recorded in the first two studies. The number of schools subsequently increased to 29 in 2020; however, all existing and newly added schools were of the comprehensive (*shumul*) type. Nevertheless, in many of these schools, Turkmen students constitute a majority, at times reaching 100%.

In both the city of Erbil and the district of Kifri, it is observed that the number of Turkmen schools declined by approximately one-third in 2012, before returning to its previous level by 2020, despite the significant structural challenges facing these schools. This is attributed to the multiple administrative restrictions imposed by the Kurdish administration on Turkmen institutions, including the Turkmen education sector.

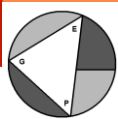


With regard to comprehensive schools in Kirkuk Governorate, a study published in the Journal of Kirkuk University for Human Sciences (Acar 2024) shows a decrease of 4,922 students during the period between 2019 and 2024. This occurred despite an increase in the number of teachers from 61 to 103 (a 41% increase), as well as an increase in the number of schools from 75 to 83 (a 15% increase) (see Table 2).

Table 3, which is pertinent to this study, provides a detailed distribution of Turkmen educational institutions in predominantly Turkmen-populated areas in Iraq, categorised by governorates and districts, as well as by educational stages (kindergarten, primary, intermediate/secondary), with a distinction between the two types of education: basic and comprehensive. The table also includes the total number of schools, students, and teaching staff in each area.

The data presented in this table (No. 3) are derived from fieldwork conducted across various Turkmen sources within Turkmen-populated regions. The Directorate of Turkmen Education within the Iraqi Ministry of Education did not provide the research team with any data, despite repeated attempts to establish contact. The table's data indicate that the total number of Turkmen schools offering both basic and comprehensive education amounted to 603 schools by 2026, while the total number of students reached 106,925. This figure excludes students enrolled in comprehensive schools in Kirkuk Governorate due to the lack of precise data, although the number of these schools is estimated at approximately 166.

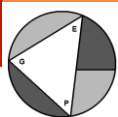
With regard to basic education schools, their total number across all Turkmen regions currently stands at 113 schools, enrolling 10,877



students. Kirkuk Governorate leads in this regard with 82 schools, followed by areas under Kurdish administration with 18 schools, where all schools are classified under the basic education system. However, this classification raises methodological and administrative issues, which will be addressed in detail in the section on challenges and violations facing Turkmen education under Kurdish administration following the fall of the Ba'ath regime. Nineveh Governorate, in the central district of Mosul and the district of Tal Afar, ranks next with 11 schools. There are also two basic education schools in the district of Tuz Khurmatu.

Regarding the distribution of students in basic education schools, the data indicate that Kirkuk Governorate includes 6,791 students, followed by Nineveh Governorate with 1,930 students, and then Erbil with approximately 2,000 students, while the lowest number is recorded in the district of Tuz Khurmatu, with only 44 students. As for the teaching staff, the total number in Turkmen educational institutions reaches 1,589 personnel, with the largest concentration in Kirkuk Governorate, followed by the district of Tal Afar, then Erbil, and the central district of Mosul. This distribution largely reflects the geographical distribution of the Turkmen population density.

The data presented in various studies, as shown in Table 1, indicate the development of the total number of schools across the studied time periods as follows: it amounted to 428 schools in 2008, then declined to 423 schools in 2012, before rising to 536 schools in 2020. With regard to Turkmen basic education schools, the data show a gradual upward trend, as their number reached 76 schools in 2008, increased to 78 schools in 2012, and then rose to 92 schools in 2020.



The data presented in the tables below indicate a clear upward trend in the number of comprehensive schools across various geographical regions in recent years, particularly in the governorates of Diyala and Baghdad. This expansion can sometimes be attributed to the increasing enrollment of non-Turkmen students—Arabs and Kurds—who join these schools, motivated by positive interaction with the Turkmen community, which constitutes a significant population in several regions of Iraq, including their own local areas. This is in addition to the desire to learn the Turkmen language as an additional language, as well as the pursuit of educational and professional opportunities available outside Iraq. Furthermore, the requests made by a number of Arabic schools to include Turkmen language and literature within the official curricula have contributed to reinforcing this expansionary trend.

Comprehensive schools, particularly in Diyala and Baghdad (Al-Iraqiya al-Turkmeniya TV 2025), reveal a notable demographic characteristic, namely the relatively high proportion of non-Turkmen students within classrooms in certain cases. Conversely, the opposite pattern is observed in areas with a Turkmen majority, where Turkmen students constitute the numerical majority, directly reflecting the ethnic composition of the population in those regions.

In Diyala Governorate, where all Turkmen schools operate under the comprehensive school model, the ethnic distribution of students shows considerable variation. In the district center of Qara Tapa, which comprises six schools, Turkmen students constitute approximately 70%, rising to 100% in some schools located in the Bayat villages.

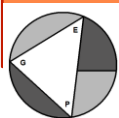


Table 1 Numerical distribution of Turkmen schools by educational stages (Kindergarten, Primary, Intermediate, Secondary/Preparatory) and Basic Schools in major Turkmen regions, based on three Studies by Shakur, ORSAM and Acar

Region	Researcher & Year	Kindergarten	Primary	Intermediate	Intermediate/ Secondary	High school	Total*	Basic schools
Kirkuk	Shakur 2008	14	91	46	32	9	199	63
	ORSAM 2012	14	89	46	32	9	197	61
	Acar 2020	19	144	—	92	—	255	63
Tal Afar	Shakur 2008	2	89	8	14	6	119	None
	ORSAM 2012	2	91	8	14	6	121	2
	Acar 2020	Included within Mosul school figures						
Mosul	Shakur 2008	1	33	4	3	4	45	None
	ORSAM 2012	1	33	4	3	4	45	None
	Acar 2020	3	103	—	40	—	146	4
Tuz	Shakur 2008	2	35	—	1	—	38	None
	ORSAM 2012	1	37	—	—	1	39	2
	Acar 2020	3	35	—	22	—	60	1
Erbil	Shakur 2008	2	9	2	—	2	15	11
	ORSAM 2012	—	—	—	—	—	13	13
	Acar 2020	2	9	—	4	—	15	11
Kifri	Shakur 2008	1	1	—	1	—	3	3
	ORSAM 2012	Included within Erbil school figures						
	Acar 2020	1	1	—	1	—	3	3
Diyala	Shakur 2008	1	6	—	—	—	7	None
	ORSAM 2012	1	6	—	—	—	7	None
	Acar 2020	1	25	3	—	—	29	None
Baghdad	Shakur 2008	1	—	—	—	—	1	None
	ORSAM 2012	1	—	—	—	—	1	None
	Acar 2020	1	25	—	—	—	26	None

Sources: Shukur 2025: 502; ORSAM 2012: 10; Acar 2024: 1693-1694.

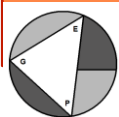


Table 2 Data on comprehensive intermediate, secondary & vocational Schools in Kirkuk Governorate (2021)

Year	Number of Turkish Language Teachers	Number of Students	Number of Volunteer Teachers	Number of schools			
				Intermediate	Secondary	Vocational	Total
2019	61	33,160	35	32	39	4	75
2020	61	31,371	35	35	43	4	82
2021	93	28,982	34	35	43	4	82
2022	93	28,479	34	35	43	4	82
2023	93	28,983	34	35	43	5	83
2024	103	28,231	34	35	43	5	83

Source: Shakur 2025: 503-508.

Table 3 Distribution of Turkmen schools and student numbers by type of education (basic & comprehensive) & educational stages across Turkmen regions in Iraq for 2026

Governorates & Districts	Kindergarte (Sch. / Stu.)		Primary (Sch. / Stu.)		Intermediate/ Secondary (Sch. / Stu.)		Total (Sch. / Stu.)	No. of Teaching Staff
	Basic	Comp.	Basic	Comp.	Basic	Comp.		
Kirkuk	12 / 1,871	6 / 936	46 / 2,113	77 / ?	24 / 2,807	83 / ?	248 / 7728?	695
Mosul	3 / 490	1 / 100	3	38	3	15	63	120
Tal Afar	—	1 / 150	1	590	1	850	39	11,339
Tuz	—	3 / 800	1 / 17	48 / 13,028	1 / 27	22 / 26,091	75 / 39,919	110
Diyala	—	1 / 275	—	28 / 5,763	—	3 / 1,148	32 / 7,186	28
Erbil	1 / 270	—	10 / 1,189	—	4 / 475	—	15 / 1,934	250
Kifri	1 / 64	—	1 / 87	—	1 / 27	—	3 / 178	28
Baghdad	—	3 / 500	—	27 / 12,500	—	—	30 / 13,000	53
Total	17 / 2,695	15/2,761	62 / 3,996	313/ 54,708	34 / 4,186	162/38,578	603 / 106,925	1,589

Comp. = Comprehensive Sch./Stu. = Schools/Students Tuz = Tuz Khurmatu

(?): These three question marks indicate the absence of precise data regarding the number of students in comprehensive schools for the primary and intermediate/secondary stages in Kirkuk Governorate. Accordingly, it should be noted that the total figures presented in the table, which include these data gaps, do not reflect the complete actual number of students, as these are incomplete due to the exclusion of the student numbers of comprehensive schools in Kirkuk Governorate for these stages.

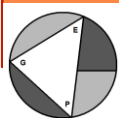


Table 4 Distribution of students in Turkmen schools in Kifri District across different time periods, indicating total number of students in each stage as well as newly enrolled students for 2025

Year	Konca Gul Kindergarten (Grades 1–2, ages 5–6)	Kere Oglan Supplementary School (Grades 1–9)	Martyr Muhammad Korkmaz Secondary School (Grades 5–6)
2015	45	135	58
2020	55	109	35
2025	64	87	27
New enrolment 2025	9	5	7

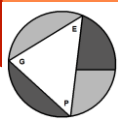
Table 5 Statistics on ministerial examination results for Turkmen schools in Kirkuk Governorate

Academic Year	Success rate at first round (%)	Success rate after three rounds (%)	Number of students	Number of succeed students	High average
2018–2019+	15.22	58.7	288	169	Very good
2019–2020	12.04	69.18	357	247	Good
2020–2021*	20.3	37	251	93	Good
2023–2024	4.58	33.23	349	116	Good

+ For the study years 2018–2019, 2019–2020, 2020–2021 (biological classes) and for the study year 2023–2024 (scientific classes).

* The study year 2020–2021 is considered exceptional due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In contrast, some schools in other areas record a fully Arab majority (100%), reflecting parental preferences, as is the case in several schools in Qara Tapa, Khan Bani Saad and the Baquba district center. In other locations, such as Adana Koy (Mansuriyat al-Jabal) and Ash Token, Turkmen students reach 100%, while their proportion is around 70% in

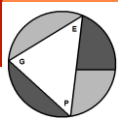


Jalawla and Qizil Ribat, and approximately 60% in Mandali subdistrict. This variation reflects on the one hand, the presence of cohesive Turkmen population concentrations, and on the other hand, ethnic intermixing, family choices, and linguistic and social factors that shape school enrollment patterns.

In Nineveh Governorate, a similar pattern emerges in terms of variation in the proportion of Turkmen students across different areas. In the schools of Al-Rashidiya, which comprise 28 comprehensive schools, the proportion of Turkmen students ranges between 40% and 50%, with higher rates reaching approximately 85% in certain schools. In Shirikhan, this proportion stands at around 90%, while it has reached approximately 75% in Kere Koyun and about 80% in Al-Mahlabiya. By contrast, it has declined to roughly 50% in the schools of the Nineveh Plains.

It is noteworthy, however, that the city of Tal Afar and the center of Ayadiyah—both of which are considered almost exclusively Turkmen-majority areas—contain 44 and 13 schools, respectively, with all students belonging to the Turkmen ethnic group. This distribution indicates a broad geographical spread of the Turkmen population within the governorate (see Map 1).

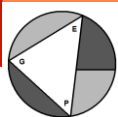
In Kirkuk Governorate, comprehensive schools are concentrated in Turkmen-majority areas, where these record relatively high proportions of Turkmen students, not falling below 50% in the lowest cases, and reaching significantly higher levels in many schools. This distribution clearly reflects the demographic density of Turkmen in these areas, while also indicating transformations in the governorate's demographic



structure. These areas include, for example, al-Musalla district, Korya, Shatorlu, Arafa, Tasen, Baghdad Yolu, Wasiti, Shukak Gaz, 1 March, al-Askari and al-Asra we al-Mafqoodin—in addition to Tawuq district and the subdistricts of Kopri, Taze and Yaychi, as well as the villages of Tirkalan, Blawa, Kumbetler and Chardagli. This pattern confirms that comprehensive schools in these areas largely reflect the local demographic structure, with the continued predominance of Turkmen students there.

The distribution of students in Turkmen comprehensive schools in the Tuz Khurmatu district also indicates the significant Turkmen population density in the district. Most of these schools are concentrated within Tuz city, while there are three schools in each of the villages of Chardagli, Yengice and Bir Awchili, and two schools in each of the villages of Hasa Darli and Kokos. There is also one school in each of Abboud, Bastamli and Kere Naz villages, where almost all students are of Turkmen ethnicity. In contrast, there are three comprehensive schools in which the majority of students are Kurdish, namely Al-Farabi female school, Al-Jumhuriya male school, and Al-Amin female school. In addition, there are three schools within Tuz city in which the majority of students are Arab, namely Shams Al-Iraq male school, Shams Al-Iraq female school, and Al-Surur female school.

In general, this variation in the ethnic distribution of students within Turkmen comprehensive schools reveals the notable demographic concentration of Turkmen in these regions, which are considered historically Turkmen-inhabited areas. This is also confirmed by a range of Western sources, including the League of Nations report of 1924 (League of Nations 1924: 55; McDowall 1996: 144). Moreover, these

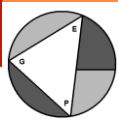


schools represent a mirror of the demographic structure and ethnic diversity of Iraq, as well as an indicator of the demographic transformations that these regions have undergone over the past centuries.

Challenges and violations

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that Turkmen education is administered under two distinct governing authorities: the central government and the administration of the Kurdistan Region, both of which differ fundamentally in their political and nationalist orientations. From an ideological perspective, the central administration is predominantly characterised by a sectarian religious orientation, followed by a national one, whereas the Kurdish administration is primarily dominated by an extreme nationalist orientation.

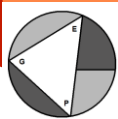
The complexity of this divergence is further exacerbated by the historical context of state institution-building in both regions within a relatively short period of time. The Kurdish Region underwent a process of institutional restructuring following the Gulf War, while the post-2003 period witnessed a comprehensive reconfiguration of state institutions following the collapse of the previous political regime. These accelerated transformations led to the emergence of institutional challenges, manifested in the inexperience of administrative personnel and the lack of accumulated expertise, which in turn negatively affected institutional efficiency and the quality of services provided within the state administrative structure.



In addition to the foregoing, an important external factor is represented by Turkish influence, whereby the Turkish state has controlled almost all Turkmen political and non-political institutions since their establishment and subjected them to its exclusive funding, in line with its negative policies toward its internal minorities. Consequently, Turkey has maintained a state of political and administrative paralysing control over Turkmen institutions, including educational institutions, for more than thirty-five years (Jerjis 2020; SOITM foundation 2020). Moreover, the Turkmen population is considerable, exceeding three million individuals, and is distributed across an extensive geographical area, with Turkmen-inhabited regions located throughout most governorates of northern and central Iraq.

The reality of Turkmen education cannot be adequately understood apart from the broader context of the Turkmen's status as a minority, which has been marked by various forms of marginalisation and violations, particularly within the cultural and linguistic spheres, as discussed above. These conditions have adversely affected the continuity of knowledge production in the Turkmen language (SOITM Foundation 2011; UNPO, SOITM & ALDE 2007; Jerjis 2010). Furthermore, the fragmentation of centers of influence within the Turkmen community, the limitation of its economic resources, the weakness of their political cohesion, and the constraints imposed on its participation in governance have all contributed to deepening the challenges facing the development and sustainability of Turkmen education.

Accordingly, internal challenges—represented by administrative dualism and ideological divergence—intersect with historical and

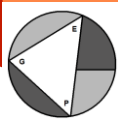


external factors to form a complex structure of constraints impeding the development of the Turkmen educational system in general. Given the fundamental differences between the two administrative contexts governing Iraqi territories, the problems facing Turkmen education can be classified according to these two authorities: those related to the central administration and those related to the Kurdish administration.

First: in regions administered by the central government

Turkmen educational cadres have exerted significant efforts characterised by a high level of professionalism, which coincided with a notable societal demand for mother-tongue education. This facilitated the immediate initiation of establishing Turkmen schools following the fall of Ba'ath regime in 2003, indeed within the very month of its collapse. The cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Turkmen educators, in the context of the Arab–Kurdish national conflict—particularly in Kirkuk Governorate—contributed to the opening of a large number of Turkmen schools within a short period of time.

Kurdish parties had already consolidated their control over most areas with a Turkmen presence in administrative, security and military terms. This implies that Turkmen education remained, to a large extent, influenced by Kurdish administrative dominance. Moreover, Turkmen education was also administratively linked to a directorate known as the 'Kurdish Studies and Other Studies' within the structure of the Ministry of Education in Baghdad, which was headed by an official of Kurdish ethnicity. As a result, Turkmen education, like most Turkmen affairs, remained under the effective control of Kurdish parties. Within these



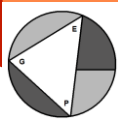
circles, all Turkmen regions are regarded as historically Kurdish areas, with the Ottoman state considered to have settled the Turkmen there. Despite Iraqi Turkmen's historical commitment to the unity of the Iraqi state, Turkmen affairs—including Turkmen education—continued to face significant and multidimensional challenges from the central government even after the occupation in 2003.

The general political and administrative context in Iraq after 2003, in addition to placing Turkmen education under the Directorate of Kurdish Studies within the ministry, negatively affected the level of support provided by the Iraqi government for education in the Turkmen language as a mother tongue. Alongside the significant shortcomings of this directorate in meeting the needs of Turkmen education in its various aspects, some of its administrative practices were characterised by a focus on diagnosing deficiencies and challenges rather than adopting effective policies and practical programs to address these. This contributed to entrenching a state of chronic structural weakness in the Turkmen educational sector.

Although the changes in the size and performance of Turkmen education between the two phases were limited, its trajectory can be divided into two main stages: the period before the establishment of a dedicated Turkmen Education Department or General Directorate within the Ministry of Education, and the period following its establishment in 2012.

Phase prior to the establishment of the Directorate

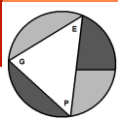
Turkmen educators in Kirkuk Governorate, who initiated Turkmen education from the first month following the fall of Ba'ath regime,



assumed responsibility for managing this sector across all Turkmen-inhabited areas. During the initial months, they also worked to expand its scope to include these various regions. The administration of this sector remained centered in Kirkuk for approximately nine years, prior to the establishment of the Turkmen Education Department within the Ministry of Education in 2012. This administration was led by a group of educators, most notably Khalil Imamoglu, who headed the Turkmen Studies Branch within the Kirkuk Directorate of Education, while the position of Director General of Education in the governorate was held by a Turkmen figure.

In this context, there emerged a clear absence of an independent and sustainable Turkmen educational authority, indicating the lack of a specialised and professional administrative body responsible for organising and directing this sector as an educational system serving hundreds of thousands of students. Such a form of education required an integrated institutional structure, including efficient administrative departments, qualified educational personnel and sufficient financial resources. Ideally, this would have been embodied in the establishment of a General Directorate for Turkmen Education, with all its departments and organisational structures, including specialised bodies for supervision and inspection, in addition to sub-directorates in governorates and districts—and a wide network of schools covering all educational levels to serve approximately one million Turkmen students.

Furthermore, these necessitated thousands of school buildings and a large number of qualified teaching staff proficient in the Turkmen language, commensurate with the nature of this emerging educational

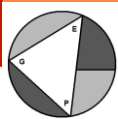


project. However, the appointment of teaching staff in Turkmen schools remained under the authority of the Directorate of Kurdish Studies, in the absence of a specialised reference body responsible for developing curricula in the Turkmen language and literature, formulating study plans, and accurately translating textbooks across different educational stages—particularly in scientific subjects such as chemistry, physics and biology. Added to this are challenges related to the preparation, printing, and distribution of textbooks, as well as the need to organize continuous training and development programs for teaching and administrative staff, including principals, supervisors and inspectors.

The institutional work extends to a range of parallel activities that support the educational process, such as organising student seminars and scientific festivals, as well as addressing students' psychological and social needs through the establishment of specialised units for educational guidance and social research. A number of logistical challenges did also emerge, including the distance between students' places of residence and educational institutions—particularly at the primary level, with resulting negative impact on school attendance and academic achievement.

Phase following the establishment of the Directorate

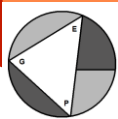
Language is considered one of the fundamental pillars of ethnic cultural identity, and mother-tongue education enjoys broad consensus among United Nations institutions, linguists, educational psychologists and educational sciences scholars, due to its decisive role in enhancing learners' cognitive development, facilitating comprehension and understanding, and deepening academic achievement. This, in turn,



necessitates its delivery within an integrated and independent ethnic institutional framework that reflects the cultural specificity of the concerned community.

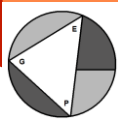
In light of these two premises, the Turkmen Department within the Iraqi Ministry of Education was not established within a coherent ethnic institutional framework. Its creation came approximately nine years late and outside the scope of direct and independent Turkmen educational supervision. This has constrained its financial capabilities and limited the autonomy of its core decisions, rendering it subject to the influence of non-Turkmen entities and departments within the Ministry (Shanks 2018: 151).

The requests for appointing teaching staff to address shortages in Turkmen schools were and are often not positively responded to, whereas similar requests from Arab departments regarding teaching staff are typically fulfilled (Shakur 2022: 20). This discrepancy reflects to this day a fundamental structural imbalance in the organisation and authority of the Turkmen Department within the Ministry. Appointment mechanisms within the directorate have also been affected by political interventions and patronage patterns prevalent in the Iraqi context, as these have, on multiple occasions, been subject to the influence of power centers within the Turkmen political arena or to non-institutional relationships, particularly in matters of appointment and the transfer of teaching staff. This has, at times, resulted in the assignment of administrative positions to individuals outside the field of education or outside the Turkmen educational context.



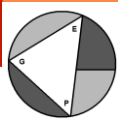
Many Turkmen educators believe that the establishment of the Turkmen Studies Directorate within the Ministry of Education contributed, to a very limited extent, to organising and facilitating certain administrative procedures; however, it did not provide fundamental solutions to any of the existing problems across various fields of Turkmen education (Acar 2024: 1694). For instance, decisions concerning the Turkmen department have been and continue to be made by the Arab Studies Directorate, whereas Kurdish education has maintained an independent administrative structure that enables it to make decisions and address its problems without referring to the Arab Studies section (Shakur 2022: 20). Accordingly, this central directorate has remained a limited administrative framework with restricted authority, as the educational process in many of its aspects is managed directly through local education directorates. In addition, there exists a widespread perception among Turkmen teaching staff that the Turkmen Department Directorate in the Ministry of Education suffers from deficiencies in its database and statistical information related to Turkmen education, including student numbers and teaching personnel in certain Turkmen-inhabited areas.

In a master's thesis on Turkmen education in Iraq (2022), the researcher Najat Ayoob Shukur indicates the absence of an effective administrative authority within the Turkmen Studies Directorate capable of decision-making, as the administrative apparatus remains limited to the technical department, which lacks the necessary authority to issue educational or organisational decisions. Consequently, the Turkmen educational system is unable to implement development initiatives or systematically address existing problems, leading to a weakening of supervision and inspection functions over the educational process.



The study further reveals the absence of a written internal regulation governing the directorate's work, rendering the fulfillment of educational needs dependent on personal and ideological considerations, which at times are not aligned with the essence, interest and improvement of the Turkmen educational process, particularly within the Turkmen Education Directorate in Kirkuk Governorate. In contrast, the Kurdish section within the Kurdish Education Directorate enjoys full autonomy and responds swiftly and effectively to all requirements of Kurdish education (Shakur 2022: 19–20). This administrative fragility is directly reflected in the overall components of the Turkmen educational system. The following sections will further demonstrate that the Turkmen Department Directorate is even ineffective in organising and providing basic technical requirements.

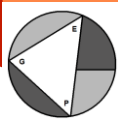
With regard to the teaching staff, the initial phase of the introduction of Turkmen-language education witnessed the engagement of government teachers and instructors who were already working in state schools that were subsequently converted to instruction in the Turkmen language. The Iraqi Ministry of Education also initiated the appointment of a number of teaching personnel for these schools. However, the scale of these appointments remained highly limited and did not correspond to the requirements of mother-tongue education for a broad community such as the Turkmen of Iraq. For instance, during the period extending from 2003 to approximately 2021, the state did not pay salaries of more than half of the teaching staff in Turkmen schools in general. By way of illustration, in one basic intermediate school in Kirkuk Governorate in 2021, the total number of teachers reached 23, of whom 17 did not receive their salaries from the state (Note 2).



Furthermore, the current shortage in Nineveh Governorate is estimated at around 15% at the primary level, rising to between 40% and 50% at the intermediate level, indicating a widening gap as students progress through educational stages.

The data also reveal a clear limitation in the number of teaching staff relative to the number of educational institutions in Diyala Governorate. The number of what are classified as Turkmen schools is approximately 32; however, this classification does not accurately reflect reality, as these are in fact classes within comprehensive schools. In other words, instruction in the Turkmen language is confined solely to the Turkmen language within these classes. At the same time, the number of Turkmen-language teachers does not exceed 28, reflecting a significant gap between the scope of educational provision and the availability of qualified personnel. Moreover, a shortage estimated at around 15 male and female teachers in the specialization of the Turkmen language is recorded in Tuz Khurmatu District, in addition to further deficits in certain specialised scientific subjects, particularly chemistry and physics.

The fragility of this situation is further evident in another context; the data indicate that 37 teaching staff members out of approximately 700 in Kirkuk Governorate are currently not receiving salaries from the state. In the same context, Martyr Ali Hashim Mukhtaroglu School in Tuz Khurmatu District includes nine teaching staff members, particularly at the intermediate level, who do not receive salaries from the state, instead these are funded through the Turkmeneli Endowment. It is also notable that their salaries have been suspended for four months, which places them at risk of leaving work at any time. Similarly,

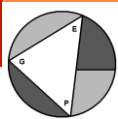


in the central Mosul District (the city of Mosul and its suburbs), there are 23 teaching staff members out of 269 who do not receive salaries from the state, while their number is 9 out of 165 in Tal Afar District. This reflects the continued disparity in the mechanisms of funding and managing teaching staff across different regions.

In a study on comprehensive schools in Kirkuk Governorate, it is noted that in 2019 the teacher-to-student ratio reached 947 students per teacher, while the average number of students per school stood at 442. In 2024, the number of students per teacher decreased to 274, and the average number of students per school declined to 340 (Table 2; Shakur 2025: 502–505).

The impact of this shortage becomes more complex and profound due to the wide geographical distribution of Turkmen schools. As a result, some teachers are compelled to commute between distant locations to compensate for the shortage, a process that may sometimes require up to one hour of tadditional ravel per working day. Moreover, emergency absences of teaching staff, whether due to health or other reasons, may extend for days or weeks, given the difficulty of providing suitable replacements due to the existing deficit.

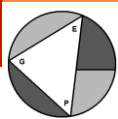
There is a clear shortage in the field of the specialised teachers in Turkmen language itself. For instance, the number of graduates from Turkmen language institutes does not exceed four out of 28 teaching staff in this specialization in Diyala Governorate, while the remaining staff come from other disciplines and have been briefly trained through instructional courses to teach the Turkmen language.



It has also been observed in the field that some teachers attend a school in Kirkuk during a given month, then are compelled, due to the existing staff shortage, to transfer in the following month to another school, or they teach in Mosul for a specific period and subsequently move to Tal Afar in the following month. This situation leads to a disruption in educational continuity and weakens the pedagogical and psychological relationship between teacher and student.

The challenges related to curricula are no less severe than those concerning teaching staff. For nearly two decades, the Iraqi state failed to provide one of the fundamental pillars of any effective educational system, namely textbooks for Turkmen schools. These schools only began to be supplied with textbooks by the state approximately five years ago, as a result of the efforts of the Turkmen MP Khadija al-Turkmany within the Education Committee of the Council of Representatives (fourth term), who contributed to urging the Ministry of Education to gradually commence the provision of textbooks to Turkmen schools.

Another shortcoming in the management of Turkmen education is evident in the issue of curriculum preparation in the Turkmen language. All subjects—except for Turkmen language and literature—are based on unified curricula implemented in the areas under the federal government in Arabic—and in the Kurdistan Region in Kurdish, such as physics, chemistry, history and others—and are delivered through translation into the Turkmen language. However, this process requires a high level of scientific and linguistic accuracy, while the quality of translation suffers from a significant decline, as it is characterised by

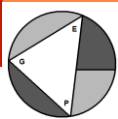


clear weakness and is affected by multiple errors at the semantic, informational and orthographic levels.

Furthermore, the significant shortage and delays in delivering textbooks to schools and students constitute an additional issue that undermines the effectiveness of the educational process and continues to affect Turkmen education to this day, as textbooks are consistently delivered late and for prolonged periods—and in many cases students do not receive their books until shortly before final examinations. Although the problem of textbook shortages has relatively declined in recent years, it has remained severe and persistent for many years. For example, in 2008, students in Tal Afar District received only 4,000 textbooks out of 35,000 required books (SOITM Foundation 2009).

Turkmen education in various Turkmen-populated areas suffers from structural problems related to school buildings, whether in terms of their limited number, the poor quality of their facilities or the absence of necessary regular maintenance works. Collectively, these factors have contributed to depriving large numbers of Turkmen students of access to education in their mother tongue in all Turkmen regions.

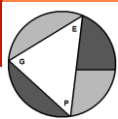
Current data indicate that the Turkmen education sector needs the construction of dozens of new school buildings in order to accommodate the current number of students and to curb the growing phenomenon of declining enrolment in Turkmen education. It also highlights the necessity of addressing the conditions of a large proportion of existing school buildings, which suffer from deterioration and a lack of regular maintenance, negatively affecting the safety of the educational environment. In addition, Turkmen schools face multiple service-related challenges, particularly with regard to the shortage of



rooms allocated for administrators and school activities, as well as the weakness of air-conditioning, heating, ventilation systems and cleaning services.

The seriousness of this situation is evident in certain field cases. For example, the supplementary school building housing Intisar School and Ali Hashim Mukhtaroglu School, is in a severely deteriorated structural condition that poses a risk of collapse, prompting the Directorate of Education to request its evacuation. Nevertheless, approximately 750 students continue to attend classes in this building under conditions that lack the minimum safety standards (see Image 2 below). With increasing student overcrowding, some schools resort to using caravans as classrooms; for instance, this solution is adopted in a school in Tuz Khurmatu District, where students of three classes receive instruction inside caravans, indicating the extent of the shortage in educational infrastructure.

A clear limitation is also observed in professional development programs for educational personnel, including administrators, supervisors and inspectors, as well as teaching staff, particularly newly recruited personnel who lack sufficient experience. This challenge is further amplified in the context of mother-tongue education, as teaching—especially at the intermediate and secondary levels—requires two essential conditions for teachers: first, precise command of the language of instruction in terms of its scientific and pedagogical terminology within the educational context, not merely in general usage; and second, possession of adequate subject-matter expertise in the discipline being taught.



In this regard, it is noted that the overwhelming majority of teaching staff in Turkmen education completed their studies in Arabic, while a portion studied in Kurdish in areas under Kurdish administration, compared to a very limited proportion who studied at institutes or colleges in the Turkmen or Turkish language. This results in an additional challenge in teaching subjects in the Turkmen language, particularly in the natural sciences, which require specialised training and advanced linguistic and scientific practice. Moreover, a large number of teachers, especially at the primary level, have been trained through short courses and often lack sufficient pedagogical qualifications.

Turkmen education continues to face a shortage of resources and instructional tools, including scientific laboratories, computers, internet services and photocopying machines. In addition, there is a lack of supporting administrative structures dedicated to the development of this educational system, such as committees or specialised offices concerned with the education of children and youth, which could play a role in enhancing enrolment in Turkmen education through the preparation of guidance and awareness materials, such as booklets, supplements and educational journals. Furthermore, Turkmen education lacks two fundamental domains that are indispensable. The first is the absence of higher education pathways in the Turkmen language at the post-secondary level, which constitutes a structural obstacle limiting the continuity of this educational system and undermining its future academic and professional prospects. This is despite the availability of potential within the Turkmen community to establish various post-secondary institutions, including institutes and universities; however, external political factors have undermined initiatives aimed at their establishment.

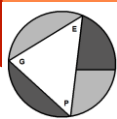
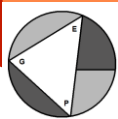


Image 2 A Turkmen supplementary school building in Tuz Khurmatu District*



*: At this Turkmen supplementary school building approximately 750 student study, distributed between two schools: Al-Intisar School and Martyr Ali Hashim Mukhtaroglu School. The instructional system in both schools is based on a double-shift system, whereby the two schools alternate between morning and afternoon shifts.

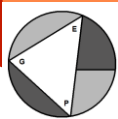


The second domain is the absence of Turkmen representation in school textbooks, particularly in the subjects of history, geography and civics, where the history and geography of the Turkmen are excluded from the curricula in Turkmen schools, despite being essential components in the formation of cultural and ethnic identity. In some cases, certain content even includes historically negative portrayals of the Turkmen community (Shanks 2018: 155). Moreover, periods of Turkmen rule in Iraq are not mentioned at all, despite the fact that Iraq was governed and administered by states and governments of a Turkmen character for nearly one thousand years. From a geographical perspective, there are no clear references to the historical Turkmen regions that extend across large areas of Iraq. On the contrary, in some curricula—particularly those adopted in the Kurdish region—all historical Turkmen areas are depicted as historically Kurdish regions, even within materials taught in Turkmen education itself.

Nationalist and sectarian tendencies

An unpublished study prepared in 2020 by a senior member of the Turkmen educational staff, whose identity remains undisclosed, and characterised by a notably candid assessment of the challenges confronting this sector, draws attention—alongside a series of methodological observations concerning structural deficiencies—to the influence of prevailing ethnonational and sectarian dynamics in Iraq on shaping the reality of the Turkmen educational system.

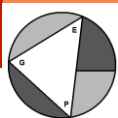
The report indicates that ethnic tensions and conflicts have been, and continue to be, among the most significant factors negatively affecting



and distorting the trajectory of Turkmen education. This form of education has faced both overt and covert resistance from Kurdish political parties and Kurdish administration in particular, which, as it is indicated before, exercised extensive administrative, security and military control over almost all the Turkmen areas; since 1990 in Erbil and Kifri, and from 2003 until 2017 in most Turkmen-inhabited areas of Iraq. This dominance manifested in various practices, including restrictions imposed on teachers, students and parents, as well as influence over decision-making bodies within relevant governmental institutions.

The unpublished study further highlights that Turkmen education has, in turn, faced additional challenges originating from Arab nationalist currents, which have also contributed to create further obstacles to its development and institutional stability.

In the same context, the study addresses the period during which Muhammad Tamim, originating from Kirkuk Governorate, held the position of Iraqi Minister of Education between 2010 and 2014. During this period, a series of administrative measures were taken that led to the restructuring of the Kirkuk Education Directorate, accompanied by a shift in its administrative balance towards Arabisation. The same period also witnessed attempts to appoint school administrations from outside the Turkmen community in Turkmen schools. It is noted that the position of Director General of the Kirkuk Directorate of Education had been occupied by representatives of the Turkmen community since 2003. Subsequently, Arab figures continued to be appointed not only to this position, but also to many key positions within the Kirkuk Directorate of Education.

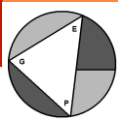


On another level, the same study indicates that Turkmen education has also been affected by sectarian-religious factors, manifested in the implications of political and ideological balances within the Iraqi state, within a context often described as Iranian influence over the political scene. One manifestation of this influence is the emergence of cautious or rejecting attitudes toward education conducted in scripts other than the traditional Arabic script, based on religious perceptions that associate the Arabic script with the Qur'anic text and its religious significance.

Given that Turkmen education, across all its stages, relies on the Latin script, this has contributed to a decline in its acceptance among some religious segments of the Turkmen community, particularly among Shiite. This issue is clearly manifested in the limited presence or absence of Turkmen education—particularly at the primary level—in some predominantly Shiite Turkmen areas such as Taza Khurmatu sub-district and Tawuq district, despite their Turkmen character. The study also indicates that the positions of some local Shiite armed actors (Popular Mobilisation Forces) have, in certain cases, contributed to obstructing the opening of Turkmen schools, particularly those of the basic education schools.

Second: in regions administered by the Kurdish regional government

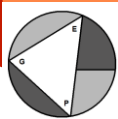
It has previously been noted that the contemporary Turkmen experience in the field of mother-tongue education emerged within the framework of the so-called Safe Haven established in northeastern Iraq



following the Second Gulf War in 1990. This experience initially began in the city of Kifri and subsequently extended to Erbil. This development coincided with the process of rebuilding state institutions under the control of Kurdish parties, whose policies were primarily directed toward consolidating a Kurdish national entity, in addition to being shaped by strained relations with the Turkmen community.

Following the fall of Ba'ath regime in 2003, three principal factors contributed to shaping the reality of Turkmen education in the Kurdish region of Iraq, and their impact extended to encompass Turkmen institutions as a whole, both political and civil. The first factor was the rapid expansion of Kurdish political influence, which came to dominate the administrative and political structure of the Iraqi state. The second factor relates to the decline of the Turkish role in these regions, particularly in the aftermath of Turkey's refusal to cooperate with the United States during the process of regime change. The third factor lies in Turkey's preoccupation with Turkmen issues outside the framework of the Safe Haven, which was reflected in a noticeable decline in the level of attention paid to the Turkmen of Erbil and to the institutions affiliated with the Iraqi Turkmen Front operating there.

In light of these transformations—after the fall of the Ba'ath regime—pressures exerted by the Kurdish authorities on the Turkmen in the Kurdish regions (formerly referred to as the Safe Haven) intensified, encompassing various administrative, political, security, and media dimensions. This situation was reflected in the behavior of Turkmen citizens who became increasingly hesitant to engage with, or even approach, Turkmen institutions. The education sector was not immune to these developments, as signs of Kurdish control over Turkmen

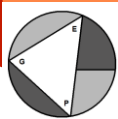


educational institutions began to emerge gradually, leading to a noticeable decline in the level of mother-tongue (Turkmen) education and a decrease in student enrollment in Turkmen schools.

Given these developments, a notable political incident emerged, represented by the defection of the head of the Iraqi Turkmen Front branch in the Safe Haven, Abdul Qadir Bezirgen, on 24 April 2005, and his subsequent alignment with Kurdish parties—an action that is likely to have been the result of a prior trajectory of cooperation. Shortly thereafter, he and his wife became members of the Kurdistan region parliament. Concurrently with this incident, the Kurdish authorities took control of all Turkmen schools, in addition to twelve other institutions affiliated with the Iraqi Turkmen Front, including a printing press, a daily newspaper, local television and radio stations, as well as a clinic. The printing press has remained closed since then, which has exacerbated the problem of shortages in school textbooks within Turkmen schools.

As a result of these developments, Turkmen education in the Kurdish region has faced a range of fundamental difficulties and challenges, the most prominent of which can be outlined as follows:

- The dissolution of the Turkmen Education Directorate affiliated with the Iraqi Turkmen Front and the integration of its administration into the educational institutions of the Kurdish authorities;
- The assignment of administrative control of Turkmen schools to Kurdish personnel lacking specialization and insufficiently proficient in the Turkmen language and culture;
- The imposition of the Kurdish language as a compulsory subject beginning from the first grade of primary school, alongside the

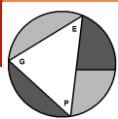


requirement for students to recite the Kurdish national anthem, while the Turkmen anthem was prohibited;

- The appointment of Kurdish principals to administer Turkmen schools, coupled with the maintenance of a deliberate shortage in teaching staff;
- The preparation of school curricula by Kurdish personnel;
- The predominant emphasis of curricula on Kurdish history;
- The subjection of curricula to supervision and oversight by Kurdish authorities;
- The failure to adequately consider the needs of Turkmen students;
- The clear predominance of Kurdish culture and heritage in curricular content and educational activities at the expense of Turkmen culture and heritage.

Over time, all of these Turkmen institutions—whether media, health-related or the printing press—were closed, while the Kurdish administration assumed control over Turkmen educational institutions (Note 3). The policies adopted by the Kurdish authorities toward Turkmen education led to a marked decline in the number of newly enrolled students; available data indicate that, for instance, by 2008, the number of students in some classes had dropped to as few as three or four students.

According to one study, the total number of students enrolled in Turkmen schools in the Kurdish region declined from approximately 13,000 prior to the fall of the Ba‘ath regime in 2003 to only 1,202 students in 2012. The number of schools also decreased to thirteen (ORSAM 2012: 13).

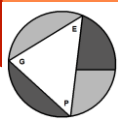


In the second half of the past decade, Turkmen education witnessed a modest increase limited to the number of schools and enrollment rates in the city of Erbil. This increase was partly driven by the enrollment of Kurdish students in these schools—particularly Kurds from Turkey residing in Iraqi Kurdish areas—with the aim of learning the Turkish language for use beyond Iraq. This trend may be attributed to the geographically limited scope of the Kurdish language within Iraq, which constrains opportunities for higher education and future prospects. It is worth noting that Turkmen schools in the so-called Safe Haven have been, and continue to be, basic schools, meaning that all subjects are taught in the Turkmen language.

Turkmen education in areas under Kurdish administration continues to suffer from challenges similar to those encountered in regions under central government control; however, these challenges appear more acute and complex, negatively affecting the foundations of Turkmen education and contributing to the erosion of its distinctiveness as a mother-tongue-based educational system.

Not all school curricula are translated into the Turkmen language, and those that are translated often lack a clear institutional framework or a specialised official body responsible for overseeing and regulating the translation process, in the absence of a scientific committee or linguistic authority dedicated to this task. As a result, these translations frequently exhibit deficiencies in both scientific accuracy and linguistic quality, falling short of established academic standards.

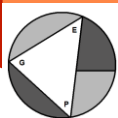
Moreover, some teachers are compelled to undertake both translation and instruction simultaneously. This further complicates the educational process. In addition, school curricula in areas under



Kurdish administration are subject to frequent revisions and updates, placing an additional burden on the translation process. Consequently, the distribution of textbooks to students is often delayed, or they may only receive these after a considerable period, in a manner similar to what occurs in certain areas under central government administration.

As regards educational infrastructure, clear problems are evident in relation to the shortage of school buildings and their inadequate maintenance, as well as the presence, in some cases, of teaching staff with limited qualifications, appointed by the supervising Kurdish administrative authority, which also affects the teaching of specialised subjects. In addition, the shortage of teaching staff has led to the recruitment of teachers from other regions, such as Kirkuk Governorate, to teach in Turkmen schools in Erbil and for years, without the existence of sustainable strategic plans to address and resolve these deficits.

In the context of the above, it is also noted that educational supervision and inspection systems are weak, which significantly limits the ability to monitor and evaluate educational performance in a systematic and effective manner. Overall, these indicators reveal a clear and multidimensional deficiency in the management of the Turkmen education file by the Kurdish administration, whether at the level of strategic planning, practical implementation, or monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. One may refer to the example of a major Turkmen school located in areas under Kurdish administration, which includes both primary and intermediate levels (from first to ninth grade), in order to provide an illustrative picture of the challenges facing Turkmen education under Kurdish administration.

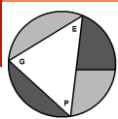


Regarding major factors undermining mother-language education, the case of the Turkmen Kere Koyunlu School in Erbil city reveals the following:

- Kurds constitute approximately one-third of the teaching staff, numbering 11 out of 31 members. It is also observed that some of these teachers lack sufficient proficiency in the Turkmen language;
- The vast majority of teachers—with one or two exceptions—use Kurdish during instruction;
- A significant percentage of students in Turkmen schools in Erbil are not Turkmen, but rather students of Turkish origin residing in northern Iraq for various reasons, in addition to Kurdish students. Some Turkmen sources in Erbil estimate that students from Turkey comprise approximately 40% of the total student body in some cases, while Kurdish students may reach around 30% in some schools.

This situation is attributed to a set of overall factors, most notably the policies pursued by the Kurdish administration toward the Turkmen, as well as the Kurdish ethnic affiliation of some members of the teaching staff. It also includes cases of teachers of Turkmen origin who adopt Kurdish identity or the Kurdish political project. Contributing factors further include the limited availability of translated textbooks or the low quality of those available, in addition to the weak proficiency of some members of the teaching staff in the Turkmen language as a medium of instruction.

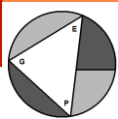
The district of Kifri is considered the second most prominent Turkmen area after the city of Erbil within the Kurdish-administered region, located approximately 286 kilometers to its south. Despite its formal administrative affiliation to the central government in Baghdad, it is in



practice administered within the Kurdish administrative framework as part of Sulaymaniya Governorate, although it has not historically been part of this governorate throughout different historical periods. The Kifri region is distinguished by being one of the earliest Turkmen areas to have experienced demographic transformations as a result of Kurdish migration during the last centuries. Historical sources indicate that the town, according to Rich's account in 1820, was located approximately 27 kilometers from the Kurdish frontier (Rich 1972: V1 23, V2 314), whereas by the 1830s that frontier had reached the vicinity of the town, as reported by Mignan during his passage there (Mignan 1939: 20–36).

As previously indicated, the first Turkmen school in the Safe Haven was established in the city of Kifri. It should be noted that the policy of Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, was—despite its limitations—characterised by certain positive stances toward the Turkmen; he is credited with granting approval for the opening of Turkmen schools within the framework of the 'Safe Haven'. Given that Kifri was under the full control of his party at the time, whereas Erbil was jointly administered with the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Turkmen schools were opened in Kifri prior to those in Erbil, despite the clear Turkmen character of the city, where the Turkmen constituted a majority of the population even after the mid-twentieth century.

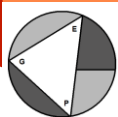
Despite this early beginning, Turkmen education in Kifri faced challenges similar to those encountered in Erbil, as it continued to experience persistent difficulties at various levels. This was not limited to obstacles hindering its expansion and its ability to accommodate all members of the Turkmen community in the region; rather, its scope remained limited to a narrow segment of them. Moreover, its social



status within the district declined, which is reflected in a noticeable decrease in the number of students currently enrolled, due to general attitude and policies by PUK lateron.

Given recent administrative developments, a specialised department for Turkmen education was established approximately one year ago within the Directorate of Education of the southern part of Sulaymaniya Governorate, which the Kurdish administration refers to as the ‘Garmiyan’ region. However, the appointment of a non-Turkmen-speaking director at the head of this directorate has generated fundamental problems that have negatively affected the educational process. This administration has been associated with a series of measures that have directly impacted the reality of Turkmen education and, in some cases, have led to a tangible decline in its performance.

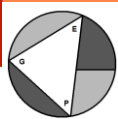
For example, in light of the chronic shortage of teaching staff, the ‘Turkmeneli Foundation’—supported by the Turkish state—appointed approximately 11 to 12 lecturers in specialised scientific subjects such as chemistry and physics about four to five years ago. These lecturers were distinguished by their competence and proficiency in the Turkmen language, as well as their ability to adapt to teaching requirements. Unusually, they were contracted by the Kurdish administration two years ago and their salaries were secured. However, at the beginning of the current academic year, these teachers were transferred to non-Turkmen schools in rural areas, which led to the depletion of specialised staff in Turkmen schools and negatively affected educational stability and the psychological state of students. Despite efforts made to address this situation, only four of them have been reinstated, reflecting the continuing administrative imbalances and their direct impact on the



structure of Turkmen education. In addition, 9 out of 28 members of the teaching staff in Turkmen schools in Kifri district are Kurds, and as in the case of Erbil, some of them do not master the Turkmen language. It has also been recorded that, since 2014, there have been no new appointments in these schools, coinciding with an increasing number of retired staff without the provision of suitable replacements, which has exacerbated the shortage of teaching personnel and directly affected the sustainability of the educational process.

With regard to the infrastructure of Turkmen schools in the city of Kifri, the three educational institutions (kindergarten, primary stage and intermediate–secondary stage) have been and continue to be housed in a single old building, which has suffered from clear deterioration in various aspects due to the absence of regular maintenance by the relevant administrative authorities. This neglect has been reflected in the structural condition of the building and in the educational environment within it, including teaching and learning conditions.

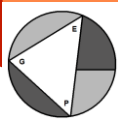
According to a report published in 2024, the teaching staff attribute the main reasons for the decline in student numbers to the poor structural condition of the school building, as the last renovation dates back to 2015, which is considered one of the most significant factors contributing to this decline. In contrast, Kurdish schools in the district are equipped with modern facilities such as indoor football fields, advanced laboratories and updated educational materials. Moreover, classrooms experience water leakage during the winter season. In addition, the school lacks an adequate courtyard, a sports hall and a library, as well as a dedicated room for parents' meetings (TEBA News Agency 2024).



In this context, one of the Kurdish funding institutions recently decided to rebuild the facility from scratch, and reconstruction work has already commenced, with the project expected to be completed within a few months. Under the policies adopted by the Kurdish administration toward Turkmen institutions, including the education sector, these schools in Kifri district have witnessed a noticeable decline in student numbers. Furthermore, the shortage of teaching staff has contributed to the closure of the literary stream in the secondary stage (TEBA News Agency 2024). Recent data indicate a significant decline in student numbers, with approximately 64 students currently enrolled in the primary stage, 87 students in the intermediate stage, and 27 students in the secondary stage in recent years.

This decline is considered an indicator of a set of interrelated factors that have affected the reality of Turkmen education in the district, as is also the case in the city of Erbil, in the context of the continued absence of supportive policies by the Kurdish administration toward Turkmen education, and indeed its opposition to it. Therefore, one must keep in mind that the proportion of the Turkmen population in the district is estimated at more than 20% of the total population of 66,434 inhabitants, which reflects a clear gap between the demographic weight of the Turkmen and their level of representation in educational institutions.

As for the subjects of history, geography and civic education, these curricula—more so than those applied in Turkmen schools affiliated with the central administration in Baghdad—are completely devoid of any information or references related to the Turkmen, their history, or

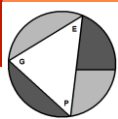


their geography. Rather, it is observed in almost all instances that their prominent historical role and their significant contribution to shaping the political and social structure of the region are overlooked.

The true historical context indicates that the Turkmen played a prominent political and administrative role in governing the region, including Iraq, beginning from the Seljuk period in 1055 AD, and this presence continued in various forms until the end of Ottoman rule in 1918. Nevertheless, these curricula entirely lack any clear references to the historical Turkmen regions; instead, these areas are often misleadingly included within a Kurdish geographical framework without any distinct historical or cultural differentiation.

From a geographical perspective, these curricula disregard the Turkmen presence in the areas currently under Kurdish administration, despite the fact that the Turkmen have been historically present—not only in the distant past—in all the areas encompassed today in northeastern Iraq under the designation of the Kurdish Region, even at its farthest extents (Campanile 1818: 42–43, 47). They constituted the majority of the population in the city of Erbil and the district of Kifri until the mid-twentieth century, and their proportion today remains no less than 20% in each of them. These Turkmen areas are erroneously and deliberately classified in Kurdish curricula under as ‘historically Kurdish regions’, despite the fact that Kurdish presence in large parts of northern Iraq is primarily the result of successive waves of Kurdish migration during the last centuries.

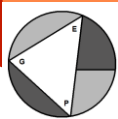
Indeed, studies concerning northern Iraq refer to this development. Edgar O’Ballance (O’Ballance 1973: 30) addressed this in a highly



condensed rhetorical narrative style of a descriptive and figurative nature, combining historical observation with impressionistic expression, while at the same time being clearly characterised by a strong metaphorical tendency inclined toward generalisation and intensified simile. In contrast, Hanna Batatu (Batatu, 1978: 913) explicitly and clearly confirms this historical development. This approach within the curricula reflects a broader tendency toward marginalising the historical and geographical narrative of the Turkmen, which provides evidence of the degree of explicitness and clarity of the negative, indeed repressive policies adopted by the Kurdish administration toward the Turkmen of Iraq.

The scale and nature of the obstacles imposed by the Kurdish administration on Turkmen mother-tongue education prevent it from being realised as genuine education in the Turkmen language. This situation is attributed to a set of factors extensively discussed and analysed in this study, most notably the exclusionary policies pursued by the Kurdish administration toward the Turkmen in Iraq, as well as its efforts to assert control over Turkmen-populated areas rich in natural resources, particularly oil reserves, within the framework of a project with Kurdish nationalist dimensions.

On the other hand, the Kurdish administration's insistence on preserving Turkmen education, despite its deteriorating condition—particularly in terms of the number of schools—is attributed to political considerations of a propagandistic nature. It employs and exploits this education in a misleading lip-serving exercise to promote a democratic image of the Kurdish political approach, despite its contradiction with its extreme nationalist nature. Kurdish politicians are keen to exploit

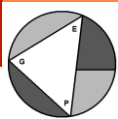


this aspect in national, regional and international forums to fabricate an idea of tolerance and respect for ethnic diversity in the Kurdish region while they are in fact just paying lip-service to such principles and practices. This is part of a broader strategy aimed at maintaining international sympathy and strengthening Western support, both politically and materially (Jerjis 2022; Jerjis 2024).

Discussion

As is evident from the foregoing, the field of study on mother-tongue Turkmen education in Iraq, across its various dimensions, suffers from a notable deficiency in academic output, manifested in the limited number of studies conducted on this vital area. Although some Turkish studies referenced in this research do exist, these largely confine themselves to providing a general overview, without engaging in an in-depth analysis of the structural and methodological issues that affect the different aspects of this field.

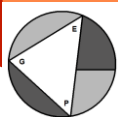
Although the number of Iraqi Turkmen is estimated to be no less than half that of the Kurds in the country, the volume of scholarly output concerning them remains extremely limited at both the domestic and international levels, particularly within Western literature. Overall, the number of specialised Western studies on the Iraqi Turkmen is exceedingly small compared to the vast number of academic publications, as well as reports by international organisations and media outlets, focusing on the Kurdish people and their issues in Iraq. Furthermore, there is an almost complete absence of Western studies addressing the issue of mother-tongue education among the Iraqi



Turkmen and its applications, despite the significant challenges faced by this sector, which reflects a clear research gap in all fields in favour of the Kurds in particular.

To grasp the scale of the challenge associated with providing mother-tongue education to a large community such as the Iraqi Turkmen, it is necessary to estimate the true, reliably estimated size of the target population under study first. After nearly a century of underestimating the number of Turkmen in Iraq, recent years have witnessed the emergence of studies and reports indicating that the size of this community far exceeds the proportion previously promoted by the Iraqi state (2%). Recent estimates—including those cited in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*—suggest that Turkmen constitute approximately 7% of Iraq's total population (Image 1; Kennedy 2024), amounting to around 3.2 million people. It is also noteworthy that the revised results of the 1957 census—estimating the Turkmen population at approximately 567,000, or about 9% of the total population at that time—remain largely absent from official consideration (Knights 2004: 262; Shah 2003: 4).

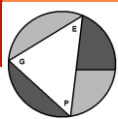
Taking into account that approximately 48% of Iraq's population is under the age of eighteen, according to UNESCO, the proportion of students within school-age groups can be estimated at no less than 30% of the total population. Accordingly, the number of Turkmen students at present is likely to be close to one million. This figure reflects the substantial demand for education in the Turkmen language, and the corresponding need for adequate institutional, human and material resources to ensure the provision of quality and sustainable mother-tongue education.



Excluding ‘comprehensive schools’ from this analysis, due to their failure to meet the minimum criteria of mother-tongue education—as explained elsewhere in this study—the number of primary schools across Turkmen-populated areas stands at 113, with only about 10,877 students enrolled (see Table 3). This means that approximately a mere 11% of Turkmen students receive their education in their mother tongue. Furthermore, the previously mentioned challenges and constraints indicate that this form of education does not, in essence, fulfill the defining criteria of true ‘mother-tongue education’ in its precise sense, and that its features largely remain an extension of patterns that prevailed in earlier historical periods, whether under the Ba’ath Party regime or during the monarchical era.

For example, although the state abolished education in the Turkmen language in the mid-1930s, educational practices in Kirkuk Province and other Turkmen-populated areas continued to include the use of the Turkmen language in classroom activities. In this context, Professor Edward Odisho, a Christian citizen of Kirkuk, notes that: “On various occasions in primary school, classroom presentations were conducted in the Turkmen language, and I will never forget one of my oral examinations in the fourth grade of primary school, which was conducted by Yusuf Effendi in the Turkmen language” (Odisho 2002; Bet-Shlimon 2019: 84).

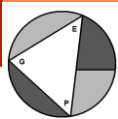
In the face of these accumulated challenges that have confronted Turkmen mother-tongue education since its inception, Turkmen educators moved toward establishing so-called ‘comprehensive schools’ as a partial solution and a practical alternative, until the institutional strengthening of Turkmen-language education is achieved, paving the



way for transforming these schools into basic education institutions. This model is based on teaching all subjects in Arabic, with the addition of the subject of Turkmen language and literature, with the aim of maintaining—at a minimum level—the Turkmen student's connection to their language and cultural identity.

However, despite its compensatory nature, this model does not meet the requirements of mother-tongue education, as Turkmen students are deprived of receiving core sciences—such as chemistry, physics, mathematics, history, and geography—in their mother tongue. Despite the passage of 22 years (2003-2025) since the adoption of this model, it has not undergone a substantive transformation into basic education schools in the Turkmen language, as was hoped; rather, indicators suggest the continuation of this situation in the foreseeable future. This negatively affects the development of both linguistic and cognitive competencies among Turkmen students. Moreover, comprehensive schools suffer from additional structural and organisational problems that further weaken their educational effectiveness.

In terms of curricula, the subject of Turkmen language and literature in comprehensive schools does not correspond to its counterpart in basic education schools; rather, it is presented in a significantly simplified form, to the extent that some teachers describe it as not exceeding the level of primary education. Furthermore, the number of lessons allocated to this subject does not exceed two periods per week in comprehensive schools, compared to as many as five to six periods in basic education schools. This is despite the fact that pedagogical logic requires the deepening and expansion of this subject, as it is the only subject the student receives in their mother tongue. In terms of

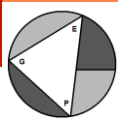


assessment, this subject is not subject to ministerial examinations, which weakens its perceived importance among both teaching staff and students and leads to its practical marginalisation.

This marginalisation is clearly reflected in school practice, where the Turkmen language subject is often neglected in favour of other subjects, particularly the sciences. In many cases, the periods allocated to this subject are used to teach core subjects such as chemistry or physics, revealing a distortion in the prioritisation of educational content and undermining the fundamental objective of including the Turkmen language within the curriculum.

In addition, a considerable number of basic schools—due to multiple reasons, including weak proficiency in the Turkmen language as a medium of instruction among some teachers or students, the unavailability or delayed delivery of curricula in the Turkmen language, as well as the influence of nationalist orientations among certain school administrations, particularly in areas under Kurdish administration—resort to not using the Turkmen language in instruction, especially in scientific subjects. In schools under the administration of the Kurdish authorities, these subjects are often taught in the Kurdish language; as noted earlier, one case was that of a major Turkmen school in which most of the teaching staff—except for one or two teachers—deliver instruction in Kurdish.

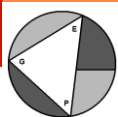
These structural problems have been directly reflected in indicators of enrolment and continuity in Turkmen education, as a continuous decline in enrolment rates in Turkmen schools is recorded year after year as a result of the accumulated problems affecting this sector. For example, data indicate that the number of students enrolled in the first



grade of primary education in one basic Turkmen primary school in Kirkuk Governorate has witnessed a gradual decline in recent years; their number was 21 students in 2022, then decreased to 19 students in 2023, reaching 15 students in 2024. Administrative and structural conditions have further exacerbated this decline, as the school was evacuated by the state approximately two years ago for reconstruction purposes, leading to the temporary relocation of students to a nearby site. However, reconstruction work has not yet commenced, which has negatively affected the stability of the educational process there. As a result, the number of enrolled students declined sharply, falling to 6 students in 2025, and reaching only 3 students in the last year (Note 2).

Turkmen schools in the region have also witnessed repeated cases of closure, most notably the closure of the Kirkklar Tepe Intermediate School in the village of Blawa in Kirkuk Governorate during the past year. In parallel, a noticeable decline has been observed in student numbers within classrooms in several educational institutions, including Ibn al-Athir Intermediate School, Tsin Sehidler School and Shaturlu Primary School in Kirkuk, where the number of students per class has decreased to between 3 and 5 students only. This indicates a deterioration in student density to near extinct levels.

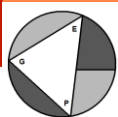
In a related context, available data show a continuous decline in the total number of students in Turkmen schools in the Kifri district under Kurdish administration. The number of students in the Kere Oglan Supplementary School decreased from 135 students in 2015 to 109 students in 2020, reaching 87 students in 2025, with a similar declining pattern recorded in the Martyr Muhammad Korkmaz Secondary School. New enrolment rates in 2025 also recorded a notable decrease, reaching



nine students in the Konca Gul kindergarten, five students in the Kere oylan Supplementary School, and seven students in the Martyr Muhammad Korkmaz Secondary School. This reflects a general trend toward the shrinking of the student base in these Turkmen educational institutions (see Table 4).

In Tuz Khurmatu district, enrolment in the only supplementary primary school, as the main school in the district, has remained low in recent years, stabilising at four students annually during the period 2022–2025, except for 2023, which witnessed a decrease to only a mere two students. With regard to Tuz Khurmatu district and Nineveh Governorate, the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) represented a sharp turning point that significantly affected Turkmen education. The total number of Turkmen schools in Tal Afar district reached 121 schools, while in other areas it reached 45 schools (ORSAM 2012: 10). In Tuz Khurmatu, for instance, the number of Turkmen schools in both Yengice subdistrict and Bastamli village was twice what it is today before the emergence of ISIS. This led to the complete suspension of the Turkmen educational system during the period of the state's control, with most schools disintegrating, before the process of re-establishing Turkmen schools began again in 2018 following the defeat of the organisation.

Turkmen educational staff in Nineveh Governorate have demonstrated notable efforts in reviving the educational sector, with the total number of Turkmen schools in Tal Afar district increasing today to 137 schools, and in other areas of Nineveh province to 63 schools (Table 3). However, the data continue to show challenges at the level of student enrolment, as the number of new students in one basic-level school was 24 in 2012, whereas this number declined to 14 students in the 2024–2025 school

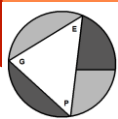


year, and then to 13 students in 2025–2026, reflecting a continued relative decline in enrolment rates despite the reopening of schools.

However, one must keep in mind that there are schools that include both systems (comprehensive and basic) within the same institution, making their classification within a single model imprecise. In such cases, a significant disparity appears between student numbers in the two tracks, with the comprehensive system far exceeding the basic education system.

This pattern indicates a potentially concerning trend toward the gradual decline of Turkmen-language education as a whole in the foreseeable future. For example, the number of basic education students in Ibn al-Athir Boys' Intermediate School is about 20 students, compared to 400–500 students in the comprehensive system. The same situation applies to Dogus Girls' Intermediate School, where the number of basic education students is around 20, compared to 300–400 students in the comprehensive system. The same is true for Tsin Sehidler Intermediate School, where the number of basic education students is 25, compared to approximately 400 students in the comprehensive system.

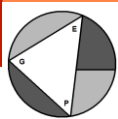
It is noteworthy that large numbers of Turkmen, particularly in Wasit Governorate—within the districts of Al-Aziziya, Badra, and Jassan—have undergone a near-complete process of linguistic Arabisation over successive generations. This has led to the loss of the mother tongue for centuries, despite the continued of their awareness of belonging to Turkmen origins, as is the case with the al-Qara Gholi (Arabised) and Qara Ulus (Kurdified) tribes. Despite the submission of repeated requests from these areas—particularly by the Turkmen of Al-Aziziya—to establish Turkmen-language schools dedicated to mother-tongue



instruction, political challenges within the Turkmen political system, coupled with limited resources and the structural constraints facing the Turkmen education sector, have hindered the effective fulfillment of these demands.

With regard to educational outcomes, Table 5 shown above presents statistics on success rates in the ministerial final examinations (sixth scientific grade) across a number of years, reflecting the academic level of students in Turkmen schools. The data indicate a continuous decline in first attempt success rates in recent years, decreasing from 15.22% to 4.58%, while the increase recorded in the 2020–2021 academic year constitutes an exceptional case associated with the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. A similar downward trend is also evident in overall success rates after the completion of all three examination attempts, declining from 58.7% to 33.23%.

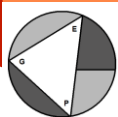
One of the most significant indicators is the decline in students' high-achievement levels, as the category of higher-grade averages has decreased from the level of 'Very Good' to 'Good'. This decline has negatively affected the opportunities available to Turkmen students to enroll in competitive fields of study, particularly in medical and engineering disciplines, as their chances of admission to public universities within the regular morning study system have become nearly nonexistent. In comparison with general indicators, it is observed that the first attempt pass rate in Turkmen education, amounting to 4.58% as shown in the table 5, is lower than its counterpart at the level of Kirkuk Governorate 5.06%, as well as lower than the overall national average in Iraq 4.95% (Results Download Center 2024).



The phenomenon of the commodification of education constitutes one of the most prominent structural challenges facing the educational system in Iraq as a whole. Education has increasingly been transformed into a field generating economic returns for teaching staff, particularly in light of the declining efficiency of formal schooling within institutions. This reality has led to an increasing reliance on private tutoring as a supplementary—indeed, in some cases alternative—mechanism to the classroom-based educational process, such that it has become common for students to attend additional lessons outside school, especially in the period preceding final examinations.

In this context, a large number of students are compelled to receive private tutoring in several academic subjects simultaneously; a student may, for instance, enroll in classes in five subjects, with an average cost reaching approximately one million Iraqi dinars per subject per student. This imposes a heavy financial burden on families, particularly those with limited incomes. Consequently, this situation deepens the educational and social gap, as students from low-income families are deprived of access to this form of educational support, which negatively affects their academic achievement and limits their opportunities for admission to higher education, whether in institutes or universities.

This issue is further exacerbated in the context of Turkmen-language education, due to the limited availability of qualified teaching staff capable of instructing curricula in this language, as well as the shortage of specialised pedagogical competencies in this field. In addition, this is accompanied by a lack of supplementary educational materials, such as study summaries and examination guides, designed for Turkmen-speaking students. Furthermore, Turkmen students suffer from limited



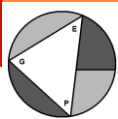
access to educational digital resources in their mother tongue, including online lessons and internet-based educational content, which further intensifies the challenges they face and adversely affects educational equity between them and their peers in other linguistic environments.

Conclusion

The analysis of the trajectory of mother-tongue education among Iraqi Turkmen demonstrates that, since the establishment of the modern Iraqi state, it has been subjected to a series of structurally restrictive policies, in addition to systematic and explicit practices that have contributed to undermining its institutional development. Despite the constitutional and legal recognition, in 2005, of the right of Iraq's communities to receive education in their mother tongue, this form of education continues to face deep-seated and long-standing structural challenges that have impeded its normal development and achievement of its educational and cultural objectives and potentials.

Turkmen education has not been immune to forms of politically motivated discrimination; on the contrary, it has been subjected, since the early 1990s in the Kurdistan Region to such practices, which continued in the post-2003 period, both in areas under Kurdish administration and those under the central government. In both contexts, the Turkmen community has been omitted from the content of history, geography, and civic education textbooks, not only in general curricula but also within the context of mother-tongue education.

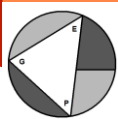
This approach is interpreted in some academic studies as part of identity-based policies, whereby certain administrations seek to



reshape historical and geographical narratives in line with their political visions. These approaches are discussed within the framework of 'historical narrative reconstruction', a well-known phenomenon in academic literature that is employed in various international contexts to reinforce national identities and justify indeed repressive political orientations (Berger & Lorenz 2010).

At the structural level, Turkmen education suffers from severe imbalances affecting its core foundations. Key decisions—particularly those related to funding and appointments—are linked to authorities that are not directly connected to the specific nature of this educational system, thereby limiting its autonomy and effectiveness. The sector also faces clear financial constraints, manifested in insufficient and inadequate funding, alongside a severe shortage of qualified teaching staff and professional training. This is further compounded by weaknesses in the quality of textbook translation into the Turkmen language, given the near-total reliance on translation processes, as well as irregular salary payments for a large proportion of teaching personnel. Available data indicate that approximately half of these staff members have not received salaries for more than two decades, while a significant proportion remains outside the official state payroll system to this day.

These problems are further exacerbated by the continued shortage in the provision of school textbooks, as the Iraqi state has not prepared textbooks for Turkmen schools for more than two decades. The distribution of these textbooks is also characterised by chronic delays that persist to the present day, and in some cases extend until the end of the academic year. In addition, there is an insufficiency in school buildings, as well as structural problems in a number of existing

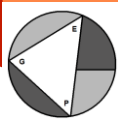


buildings, which negatively affect the educational environment and the quality of the educational process.

As a result of this extensive institutional deficiency and acute shortages across various domains of Turkmen education, educational initiatives have emerged in the form of so-called 'comprehensive schools', which provide only a minimal level of mother-tongue instruction, typically limited to the teaching of the Turkmen language and its literature, with observed shortcomings and neglect even in the provision of this basic component to Turkmen students.

Moreover, Turkmen education is affected by the widespread phenomenon of private tutoring, as a direct consequence of the weakness of formal educational outputs. This is further accompanied by a clear digital and educational gap, reflected in the limited—indeed often absent—availability of electronic educational programs in the Turkmen language, compared to those available in Arabic and Kurdish. This situation contributes to widening disparities in learning opportunities and restricts the academic attainment of Turkmen students.

Collectively, these factors have confined Turkmen education to a limited scope and impact, preventing it from attracting more than a small proportion of Turkmen students. Statistical data indicate that approximately a mere 1.1% of the total Turkmen student population—estimated at around one million students—receive their education in their mother tongue at the basic education level, numbering no more than approximately 11,000 students (see Table 3). Although the Turkmen constitute the third-largest ethnic community in Iraq, this

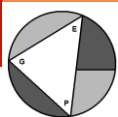


reality reflects an ongoing state of linguistic and cultural marginalisation, which threatens the sustainability of the Turkmen language and undermines the foundations of the cultural identity of this community.

Within this limited administrative framework, Turkmen education has failed to meet a significant proportion of its basic needs across various domains, while in contrast the Kurdish educational system has witnessed notable development, becoming an integrated educational structure representing the national language of a broad ethnic community supported by more stable and effective institutional and administrative frameworks, whereas Arabic remains the state and instructional language in Iraq for more than a century.

In addition to the domain of mother-tongue education, the Turkmen political system as a whole suffers from a state of disintegration, fragmentation and paralysis, which negatively affects all the rights of millions of Turkmen in Iraq. This situation is attributed to the dominance of ethno-national and sectarian dynamics within the Iraqi political arena, as well as the influence exercised by the Turkish state over the Turkmen political system.

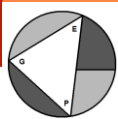
The large number of serious phenomena and the profound structural and systemic imbalances in the Turkmen education system presented above reveal a highly alarming trend, represented by the possible gradual decline of Turkmen-language education as a whole in the foreseeable future, which will deprive the Turkmen community, the third largest ethnic group in Iraq, of one of its most important fundamental human rights.



Despite all these challenges and violations of Turkmen rights in mother-tongue education, Turkmen education has managed to preserve its existence, at least on a basic level, relying on the expertise of Turkmen teaching cadres and the accumulation of their professional experience, in addition to the strong desire of the Turkmen individual to preserve their language and cultural identity. In light of these challenges, it becomes necessary to adopt a comprehensive package of structural reforms. Among the most prominent of these reforms is the reintroduction of the 'Law on the Regulation of Turkmen Rights', which was previously rejected by the Iraqi Parliament in 2014 for political reasons by Kurdish parties and some Arab politicians with discriminatory orientations, without disregarding the role of the Turkey as an actor in this context.

This latter reform should be undertaken within an effective legal framework, with its administration entrusted to an independent Turkmen institution elected either directly by the Turkmen community or through its representatives among politicians, intellectuals, notables, and opinion leaders, alongside the allocation of an independent budget agency commensurate with the demographic weight of this community. Such a measure would contribute to the establishment of an integrated administrative system for managing Turkmen affairs, including the development of sustainable, high-quality education in the Turkmen language, in a manner that ensures the preservation of the cultural and linguistic identity of millions of Turkmen in Iraq.

Conversely, any approaches that do not originate from these structural foundations and do not aim to comprehensively address deep institutional problems are likely to remain limited in impact and

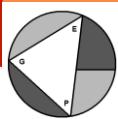


unproductive in outcome, thereby leaving the Turkmen issue without substantive transformation and perpetuating the condition of weakness, stagnation, and failure that has characterised Turkmen political performance since its modern formation in the early 1990s. This is further reflected in the continued suffering of the Turkmen community across political, educational, economic, and other spheres within Iraq and its political context, which is marked by ethno-sectarian entanglements, the dominance of patronage and individual interests, as well as the influence of external interventions in many aspects of Iraq's political and administrative landscape.

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Notes

1. The author of this study was a fifth-grade secondary school student at that time, and he participated in several protest activities, particularly the school boycott. He also contributed to writing political slogans using paints that were not easily removable on the walls of the alleys in two neighbourhoods of Kirkuk, namely Piryadi and Cukur.
2. All data and information presented in this study were derived from both official and unofficial Turkmen sources, including political, administrative, and educational actors operating within Turkmen-inhabited areas. Due to prevailing security and political conditions, the names of sources and participants remained not disclosed, out of concern for potential retaliatory actions by central governmental authorities or by the administrations of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

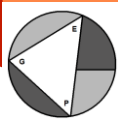


It is also noteworthy that there is a probability that these authorities may adopt punitive measures against the Turkmen educational institution as a whole, rather than addressing the significant structural deficiencies affecting Turkmen education. Such actions would further exacerbate the ongoing deterioration of mother-tongue education in the Turkmen language.

3. In this context, a fundamental methodological problem emerges, represented by a clear disparity in the level of documentation and analytical treatment between international media and academic literature, particularly that produced in Western circles. Although the violations that occurred on 24 April 2005 against the Turkmen, along with hundreds of similar incidents, constitute explicit breaches of the most basic principles of human rights, these have received little to no attention from Western media and academic institutions, nor from reports issued by European human rights organisations, despite their long-standing and extensive presence in the region.

This neglect appears inconsistent with the extensive media coverage and substantial academic attention afforded to issues related to the Kurds, despite the considerable disparity in the scale and frequency of such events compared to those affecting the Turkmen and other Iraqi minorities. Western academic and media institutions have produced hundreds, indeed thousands, of studies and research works on incidents related to the Kurds, whereas the violations suffered by the Turkmen, as well as other Iraqi minorities, have remained markedly under-documented and under-analysed.

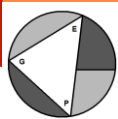
4. The Turkmen language is classified as one of the dialects of the Turkic languages, and the difference between it and the Turkish language is comparable to that between Azeri and Turkish, both in terms of linguistic structure and the degree of lexical proximity. The Turkmen language, like Turkish in the period following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, was written in the Arabic script. With the linguistic transformations that the Turkic world witnessed—particularly after the convening of the Baku



Conference in 1926, which paved the way for the adoption of the Latin alphabet in Azerbaijan and subsequently the official adoption of the Latin alphabet by Turkey on 1 November 1928—limited attempts began among the Iraqi Turkmen to use the Latin script; however, these remained within a very narrow scope at first.

In this context, correspondence and statements issued by the Iraqi Turkmen Solidarity Association, established in 1959 in Istanbul, continued to be written in Turkish using the Latin alphabet, and some related journals subsequently appeared. With the establishment of the Safe Haven in northern Iraq in the early 1990s, Turkmen education underwent a notable transformation, as Turkmen schools adopting the Latin alphabet in instruction were established from 1993, and magazines and newspapers were published in the Latin script. After 2003, the use of this alphabet expanded, and the choice of script became part of broader linguistic and educational debates, which this study addresses in detail.

Nevertheless, two central issues remain under discussion within the Turkmen community, both at the level of political elites and within cultural and academic circles. The first concerns the choice of script used in education; a considerable segment of the Turkmen community continues to support the use of the Arabic script in teaching. Indeed, the lack of sufficient support from Turkmen Shiite political leaders—who integrated into the ruling party structures after 2003—may be regarded as one of the factors that have contributed to the weakening of the current Turkmen education based on the Latin alphabet. The second issue relates to the language of instruction itself: while one group of leaders supports the adoption of the Turkmen language as it is in the educational process, another group advocates the adoption of Turkish as the language of instruction for Turkmen education, which is the approach currently in practice. In light of the instability affecting the Turkmen political system and the mother-tongue education system, these debates remain informal and have not resulted in stable or formally adopted, definite educational policies.



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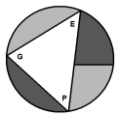
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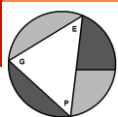
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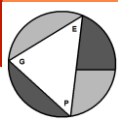
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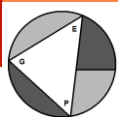
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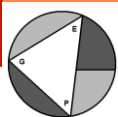
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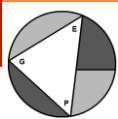
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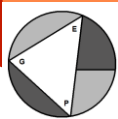
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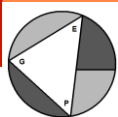
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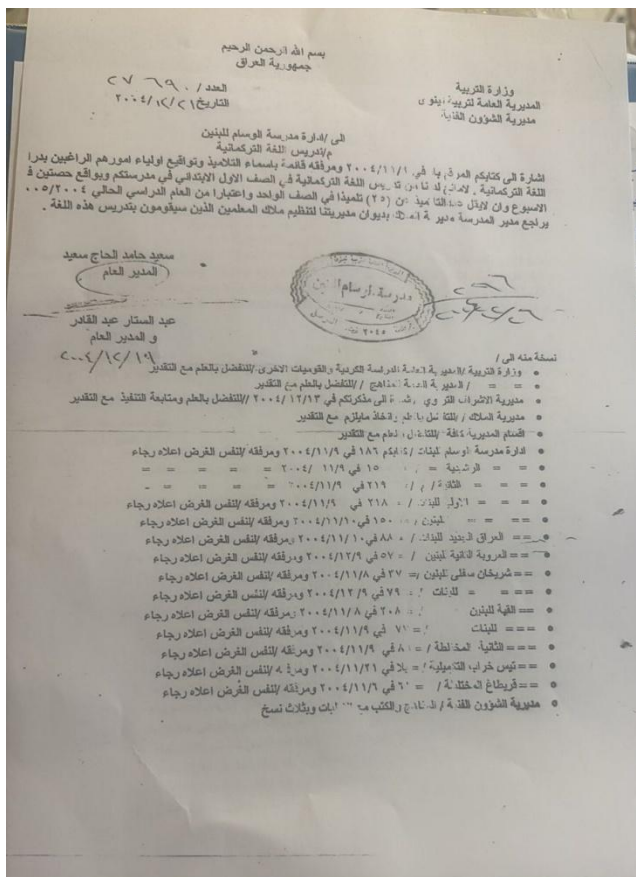
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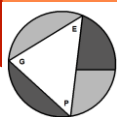
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Appendix

Letter of the Iraqi Ministry of Education No. (27690) dated 21 December 2004 regarding the starting of Turkmen education in the mother tongue in Nineveh Governorate

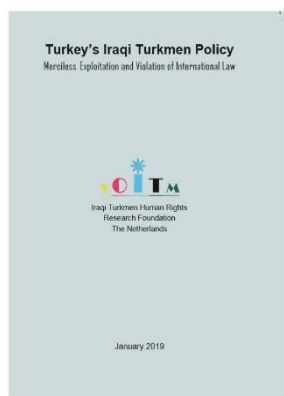




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About "Turkey's Iraqi Turkmen Policy"

The Turkmen in Iraq are of ethnic Turkic communities living in several countries neighboring Turkey.

The animosity and the hatred that had developed towards the Ottomans in the later decades of the Empire reflected onto those Turkic origin communities in the newly created countries after the Ottomans dismembered, which all were ruled by non-Turkish governments. The Turkic communities in the Balkans were exposed to massacres, in Greece they are still deprived of their ethnic rights, and in the Arabic countries, they are marginalized and exposed to serious assimilation policies, as in the cases of the Iraqi and Syrian Turkmen.

These suppressed communities had no other choice than to consider Turkey as their only rescuer and subjugate themselves to Turkey. At the same time, this has increased the animosity against them in their new countries and removed the possibility of getting help from any other national, regional or international powers.

On the other side, Turkey had neither ability nor intention to help these Turkic communities, in contrary, Turkey remain inattentive to their sufferings, even misused these communities benefiting from their blind obedience.

This book presents the history of 3 decades of the Turkish policy towards the Turkmen of Iraq, which can be considered a vivid view of the Turkish relation with Turkic communities in the neighboring countries.