King Abdullah University of Science and Technology

جامعة الملك عبدالله للعلوم والتقنية

أكاديمية كاوست
KAUST ACADEMY

MenaML

2026 / EVENT REPORT



A REGIONAL AI COMMUNITY

Six days of advanced machine learning, research exchange and collaboration at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology.

24–29 JANUARY 2026 | THUWAL, SAUDI ARABIA

A regional gathering at KAUST

Executive overview / The KAUST Academy project summary is the primary reporting source.

350+
PARTICIPANTS AT KAUST

2,300
APPLICATIONS

300
ACCEPTED SCHOLARS

The second MENA Machine Learning Winter School was hosted at KAUST from 24 to 29 January 2026. The event connected emerging AI talent with researchers and industry specialists through an intensive program of scientific learning and professional exchange.

KAUST Academy’s own project report describes the institutional work behind the event, including venues, arrivals, accommodation, transport, hospitality and coordination across campus services.



Leadership & opening

KAUST leadership and the MenaML organizing community







SIR EDWARD BYRNE AC / KAUST PRESIDENT

The opening remarks identify Sir Edward Byrne AC as the KAUST President welcoming the school. The opening program also featured MenaML co-founder Maria Abi Raad and curriculum lead Ibrahim Alabdulmohsin of Google DeepMind.

The learning program

Six days spanning advanced methods, applications and responsible AI

24 JAN	**Arrival & orientation**
25 JAN	**Beyond language modeling**
26 JAN	**Efficiency**
27 JAN	**AI for science**
28 JAN	**Impactful applications of AI**
29 JAN	**Responsible AI**

The program combined keynotes, tutorials, research talks, practical lab sessions, panel discussions, posters, mentoring and community activities.

Research & exhibition

Knowledge exchange beyond the lecture hall





HANDS-ON LEARNING

Technical instruction and lab-based activities gave participants opportunities to translate machine-learning concepts into practice. The Academy project overview highlights applied training and engagement with researchers and industry experts.

POSTERS & RESEARCH SHOWCASE

The MenaML program included poster sessions and research exchange. A participant account documents attendees presenting and discussing research posters. The submitted Academy summary does not establish a separate exhibition booth count or list of exhibitors, so these details are not presented as verified outcomes.

The KAUST Academy role

A coordinated institutional effort across the campus



THE KAUST ACADEMY TEAM

The Academy coordinated event delivery across visas, arrivals, accommodation, transportation, venues, hospitality, campus access and participant services.

ARRIVALS & VISAS

122 government visa invitation letters; arrival coordination with campus partners.

VENUES & LEARNING SPACES

Buildings 19 and 20; 13 library rooms booked for mock interviews.

HOSPITALITY & CAMPUS

KAUST INN, Al-Khozama, catering, transportation, tours and campus services.

KAUST people & partnerships

The campus community, external collaborators and institutional support

The Academy project report identifies coordination with the KAUST Event Team, Government Affairs, transportation, HR and Relocation, Core Labs, catering, communications and other campus stakeholders.

The event brought together KAUST, Google DeepMind, QCRI, InstaDeep and other contributors. KAUST's official announcement named the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology as strategic partner and cited participation from 16 international scientific and technology institutions.

The community in pictures

Selected event photographs / distinct scenes and subjects







Dialogue & exchange

Panels, conversations and the shared learning experience







Reach, impact & next steps

Connecting MENA talent to a global AI research network

42	50%	200+
COUNTRIES	GENDER PARITY	INSTITUTIONS

The school’s scale illustrates the demand for advanced machine-learning education and the value of cross-border scientific networks. By bringing the program to KAUST, the Academy helped connect participants, experts and research communities in a setting designed for learning and collaboration.

BEYOND THE WINTER SCHOOL

MenaML 2026 offered an environment for participants to deepen technical skills, share research, meet potential collaborators and explore opportunities with participating organizations. Its combination of scientific programming and campus-wide coordination provides a model for future initiatives.

LEARNING / CONNECTIONS / COLLABORATION

An international program supported by KAUST Academy and a wider network of research, industry and public-sector partners.