

Kuwait: An Interplay of Socio-Economics and Identity

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Dedicated to My Late Grandfather, Mohammed Abdulhay AlBannay.

Abstract

There is a clear educational imbalance in Kuwait's schooling curriculum that deepened through socio-economic factors. Kuwait is facing and will face more serious challenges if this imbalance is not stabilized. With the technological development of our new globalized and connected world and a shift from a world reliant on crude oil, Kuwait is now stuck. The lack of educational development and critical thinking will lead to Kuwait's downfall economically, socially, and culturally. Therefore, to prevent the downfall of the State of Kuwait, a national dialogue must begin. This dialogue provides an analysis of Kuwait's national identity and how the education system may contradict the State's goal of national unity and maturation.

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I wish Kuwait a sustainable future full of social integration and effective progression.

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The beginning of the journey of knowledge is knowing you don't know.

Education mostly begins with something unknown which leads to a never-ending journey. You will never know everything; much like how you will never perfect anything. I am not an expert on education reform nor am I an expert on diversification or strategy. I am simply a person that began this journey with a passion for my country.

Kuwait, an authentic and powerful country, tucked into the Persian Gulf. A country filled with people that are givers, fighters, and lovers. A country that makes you feel safe but also makes you feel challenged. A neglected gem! Kuwait is not perfect - nothing will ever be - it has its challenges and it has harmony. So I want to begin our journey with addressing these challenges and starting a dialogue to develop the State of Kuwait to re-shine our gem.

Kuwait is a country known to be more democratic than other Arab states. However, its education system promotes ideas that contradict the country's goals. There is an evident educational imbalance in Kuwait's schooling curriculums that emerged over the years and deepened through social and cultural factors. The national curriculum constructs an exclusive, singular and fixed 'cultural identity'. This type of thinking acts as a burden towards Kuwait's main goals of:

1. National Unity
2. Economic and Democratic Maturation

Educational reforms have become top political priorities around the world as education is thought to be the solution to social and economic challenges. In the past decade, Kuwait attempted to reform its educational system aiming to shift its economy by improving the skill sets of its population and aiding in human development. Kuwait's democratic maturation is reliant on the recognition and action of its citizens but is currently absent from the education system.

Before we talk about the education system, let us start with Kuwait's national identity.

Chapter 1: Kuwait's Identity

What comprises Kuwait's identity and how did it evolve? Let us first take a look at Kuwait's history.

The History of Kuwait

The word Kuwait comes from the word "Kut" which means fort. Kuwait is a small Kut which developed through fortification. Tribal confederations that originated from Najd and adjacent countries are recognized as the founders of Kuwait, before the eighteenth century. Although Kuwait gained its independence and officially became a State in 1961, it has been a political entity since its founding. The families that migrated into Kuwait from Central Arabia and neighboring countries all held the same ideologies and values. Although we did differ religiously, culturally, and ethnically, it was simply not a factor in establishing our Kut. The act of constant migration (until they found the land of Kuwait) and establishing a new community created a unique, strong bond among people within the fort, which is reflected in Kuwait's society today.

Therefore, Kuwait was, from the beginning, different from its neighboring countries. Because of the diversity of people, we looked for similarities amongst each other, rather than differences. This created a strong Kuwaiti national identity. However, it is not to say that Kuwait has perfected national unity; in contrary, much like other members of the GCC, Kuwait struggles with combating issues with diverse groups within its society. The good news is that Kuwait has been in this combat for decades, which means there is a strong core already established when working on resolving national problems.

The geographical region of Kuwait has been occupied by people since antiquity. After the settlement of the community, Kuwait prospered and rapidly became the commercial center for the transit of goods as far as India, Zanzibar, and Africa. They were successful in earning income sources through herding, pearl diving, fishing, and horse trading.

Kuwait's location was very strategic as it allowed for diverse trading; a prosperous trading hub was the reputation of the State. However, the size of Kuwait left the state vulnerable and gave no choice for rulers to focus on diplomacy. Kuwait could only survive with effective foreign affairs and manipulation of the balance of local powers. Being a small, young, and vibrant State, we had to rely on foreign relations, which allowed Kuwait to strengthen its individuality amongst its neighboring countries. This sense of independence is a strong contribution to the state's national identity today. This also illustrates that since antiquity, Kuwait used critical thinking to develop and progress

the fort. People investigated and analyzed solutions to best cater to the economic and societal progression of the country.

To effectively analyze Kuwait's national identity, we have to dive deeper into its social history - power shifts, cultural clashes, societal divisions and more are all key aspects that shaped up the state's modern identity. Shafeeq Ghabra illustrated Kuwait's society in the best way. It is a transitional one, where socio-economic changes are occurring rapidly, resulting in socio-economic groups to be formed. These groups shaped policies and outcomes in Kuwait throughout history as Kuwaiti politics is essentially built on the power basis of ethnic, religious, and societal positions; as well as, commerce and ethics.

The relationship between state and society is a complicated one as their demands intersect and contradict each other. For example, the State wants to operate as a separate entity where it is not involved in any societal issues, however, the society competes on State power and resources. They contrast each other, yet have to coexist - if one breaks, the other follows suit, and then there is no State.

The societal transition in Kuwait began with the discovery of oil in 1946. There was a large scale oil revenue distribution that resulted in investment in education, infrastructure, health care, and housing. Kuwait shifted from a poor, tribal unit to a modern and prosperous State. Ghabra states: "Kuwait's socio-economic and political developments have been intricately linked to its oil industry". The fast growth of the oil industry led to the elimination of traditional networks and the existence of luxurious, tribal ones. Let us dive deeper into Kuwait's social scene.

Social Divisions

Prior to the oil boom, Kuwait was composed of three main social groups:

1. The Royal Family
2. The Merchants
3. The Laborers

Essentially, the merchants held the majority of the power because they were in charge of bringing steady and stable income sources into the country. This was done mostly through trade. The ruling family was in charge of security and diplomacy; and the laborers were in charge of labor work such as pearl diving, fishing, herding, etc. Everybody was living peacefully, contributing what they could to society. Eventually, there was a

dynamic power shift during Kuwait's transitional period - the oil boom. Merchants were not holding the main sources of income anymore. Oil is a part of the State and as a way of wealth distribution, the government went through the process of appraising and compensating, giving Kuwaiti citizens their shares of the income. This is not to say that the merchants lost their power. It's actually the opposite, they engulfed themselves in modern education and skyrocketed Kuwait's business sector. Politically, a national assembly was established to have control over reforms and policies. The powershift simply established the nucleus of Kuwait's societal and political scene we see today.

Dr. Rania Al Nakib explains Kuwait's modern power dynamics very well. She states: "Kuwait's national identity constructs an interplay between power-preservation, rentierism, culture, and Islam". The Kuwaiti identity today consists of divisions, where it is usually split into a series of 5 binaries:

1. Kuwaitis/Foreigners
2. Sunni/Shitte
3. Men/Women
4. *Hadar* (City-Dwellers)/Bedouins (Nomads)
5. Original/Naturalized Citizens

It is important to note that the *hadar* in Kuwait are known to be the social elite. This form of community was initiated from the migration and establishment of the state itself, as they felt a sense of strong community which was passed down through generations. That is why they call themselves *Aseel* (اصيل - in Arabic meaning "Theobred"). They are people who can trace their ancestry back to the Arabian Peninsula. The Originals in Kuwait are not *all* from the Arabian Peninsula, therefore, not all considered to be *Aseel*.

The most recognizable binary is the "Original, Kuwaiti, Sunni, *Hadar*, Male adult" - which is a small but powerful group within the society; as women, bedouins, and foreigners make up the majority of the population. This factious nature creates a paradoxical relationship between social groups in Kuwait and leads to political and social divide.

Within these binaries comes different social statuses and legal rights. For example; free access to public schools is dependent on the legal status of citizens. Article 50 in the Kuwaiti constitution states: "*Education is a right for Kuwaitis, guaranteed by the State in accordance with law and within the limits of public policy morals*". Therefore, this law

does not apply to approximately two-thirds of the population as the children of women who marry non-Kuwaitis are obliged to pay for education. This simple example is an act of differential segregation and is stretched across the Kuwaiti population.

“Distribution of social services through male citizens suggests that women do not have an independent status: a woman is a daughter and then a wife, supported by her father and then her husband.” - Dr. Rania Al Nakib

A Kuwaiti experiences being a Kuwaiti in a very one dimensional way, depending on which group they belong to. That being said, a “Kuwaiti, Sunni, Hadari, Male” has a very different perception of what it is to be Kuwaiti than a “Kuwaiti, Shiite, Bedouin, Male”. A simple example is that: although the shiite citizens were historically marginalized, they have the same legal rights as the sunnis. However, amongst the elites of the society, their “kuwaitiness” is considered weak. The distribution of oil wealth, overall, allowed for Kuwaiti binaries to be some-what equal (in terms of education, health care, subsidized commodities, etc.). Becoming *Aseel* became the commodity that everybody wanted as tracing your lineage to Arab descent is considered to be of strong value, much like Arabic horses. This pushed the other sects of society to start lobbying for their kind in order to have a voice in the parliament. This perception created an unconscious bias which resulted in implicit discrimination amongst the society.

It is important to understand that the transition of the economy and the equal distribution of wealth made the gap smaller amongst Kuwaitis. We ended up shifting our focus to what sets us apart, rather than what makes us similar. This is why ancestry and reputation is very important in Kuwaiti society. People define their identities with where they came from, rather than individual accomplishments or characteristics.

In general, this one dimensional perspective has a spillover effect on the country’s view of national identity as it causes social divisions and acts as a barrier towards national unity. This perspective also led to an idea called differential inclusion, where people choose who to include and exclude based on their binaries, social status, and money. I argue that the government helped foster a society with these values through policies and regulations, which are explored in the next section.

Differential Inclusion

The commercial export of crude oil in Kuwait began in 1946. By 1952, the country became the largest, singular, exporter in the Persian Gulf, which encouraged foreigners to work and reside in the State. Kuwait entered its golden era, filled with prosperity, modernization, and development. Today, Kuwaitis make up 30.4% of the population, where the majority of the labor force is made up of migrants; only 40% of the current labor force are Kuwaitis. Because education became a law, Kuwaitis were no longer equipped to do labor work. Nobody that has a higher education degree would want to dedicate their career to do that type of work. Therefore, we relied on foreigners to do the labor. At that time, we were under the protectorate of the United Kingdom, therefore, we can see that Kuwait gained confidence and independence as the British were forced to make Kuwaitis work in companies, not as laborers. This marked the beginning of Kuwait getting their independence.

Kuwait, then, decided to implement a strategy to reduce dependency on foreign workers, thus launching a new, modern education system. Article 40 in the constitution states: *“In conformity with the Law and within the limits of public order and morals, education for Kuwaitis is a right guaranteed by the State.”*. The state provided free education to all Kuwaitis from primary to university levels, with scholarships to promote studying abroad.

Many people believe that the wage differential between Kuwaitis and foreigners aided towards the rapid economic growth. However, in reality, there is no wage gap as a Kuwaiti and a foreigner get the same wages, as long as they both fit the criteria of the job. What actually aided to the rapid economic growth, is the supplemental aid that Kuwaitis were privileged enough to acquire, in terms of money and free social services. As a result, Kuwaitis became lazy and started going into the public sector as they were and still are guaranteed a governmental job with, arguably, the same salaries as a foreigner. The government now incentivises the private sector to increase the percentage of nationals among their employees. The “New Kuwait 2035 Vision” prioritizes the “Kuwaitization” of the labor force by adopting programs that motivate companies and Kuwaiti employees to enter the private sector.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Kuwait is divided into 6 governorates, each with their own areas or districts. Schools are distributed across areas, where district lines are organically organized based on lineage, religious sect, and culture. Some areas are known

to have an elite reputation, some are based on religious groups, and so on and so forth. Below, in Figure 1A, is a map divided into 6 sections based on color. Each color represents a governance in Kuwait.

Figure 1A



Potential Zoonotic Trematodes Recovered in Stray Cats from Kuwait ...
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279770643_Potential_Zoonotic_Trematodes_Recovered_in_Stray_Cats_from_Kuwait_Municipality_Kuwait

This illustrates a form of unconscious segregation. This segregated approach allows for, what I like to call “bubble thinking”. Children are raised and taught in a bubble, with no liberty to different ideas, perspectives, and even interactions with other genders or religions. It is not necessarily where someone lives physically, rather, the bubble is created based on how your family is connected to their binaries. This bubble fosters

biases and stereotypes within the Kuwaiti population. For example; if a boy is in an all boys school, was taught one dimensional sunni - islamic ideologies, and is in a hadhari neighborhood, he will not know anything outside of this “bubble”. Overall, schools reinforce and sustain Kuwait’s current social structure, and at the same time, wants to enforce the idea of national unity, which is contradictory.

This focalized perspective allows for the subject to be kept away from injustices outside of their immediate view. This also preserves power and close-minded thinking as it limits student’s abilities to obtain the diversity of thoughts. It shifts us away from critical thinking. These students, in result, all have similar mental maps and ways to approach life. Creativity and curiosity is subdued which contributes to a lack of transformation and intellectualism. This acts as a barrier towards Kuwait’s goal of an economic shift to a knowledge based economy. How can a country grow into a knowledge/innovative based workforce when they are dis-encouraged to think outside the bubble?

Entitlement/ Superiority

Kuwait was established in the 60s as a Total Welfare State (TWS). The country simply wants to take care of its kids; meaning that it is committed to providing basic economic security for its citizens by protecting them from market risks. It can be analyzed as a socialist approach, where the possession of Kuwaiti nationality gives access to allowances and subsidies in, but not limited to healthcare, education, water and electricity, and employment domains. This is an encouragement to dependency on the state. These social assistance programs were created to eliminate poverty, distribute the wealth, and stimulate stability in Kuwait through education, training and development, and simply giving citizens the necessities of life to further develop and foster an innovative workforce and culture.

Unfortunately, these welfare programs increased dependency of citizens on the state and fostered a sense of entitlement amongst the Kuwaiti people. Almost all necessities are subsidized (and can be) due to income coming from oil exports, however, citizens are not giving back to the government. Usually, people give back in the form of taxes but, in this case, because we are Kuwaitis, we deserve these subsidized services. It is no longer a privilege, it is a right. That sounds great, in theory. Why not give people all the necessities to live if you are able to do so, without them needing to give anything in return? This cultivates a social issue, where people start believing that they deserve these privileges just because they are born Kuwaiti and this spills over to the country’s culture,

economy, and society. This also cultivates a sense of laziness and a lack of motivation to work. People are used to getting what they want without having to work for it; and this spills over to the workforce. Easy work hours + Easy money = No ambition, which means no development (from Kuwaitis).

What people don't realize is that this concept brings up societal conflicts. Kuwait is already made up of competing binaries, this just adds fuel to the fire. An example is the issue of naturalization of children with a Kuwaiti mother and a non-Kuwaiti father. This is a topic that has many different perspectives. However, the fact is that the government will not be able to sustain a total welfare state if more people become Kuwaiti citizens and gain these privileges. The country will simply not be able to afford it. Ethically, this brings up an issue of sexism, backed up by, what people like to call "religious views". However, the impact of the use of religion will be explored further.

These policies also fosters superiority within the Kuwaiti society. It essentially created a privileged class in Kuwait whose benefits are protected by the State and guaranteed by the government. Jacqueline Ismael, Professor of Sociology, illustrates that foreigners are used as instruments to legitimize the government and preserve its power. The well-being of all Kuwaitis (including minorities) are ensured against dis-advanatged foreigners. Kuwaitis almost forget the complex politics and societal divisions as they get advantages and privileges as a whole against a group that does not acquire what they have - in this case a Kuwaiti citizenship. This cultivates a concept of unconscious entitlement and fake pride. , which aids towards, what I like to call, "Spoiled Children Syndrome". In contrast, this system of policies was successful in cultivating a sense of national unity amongst different binaries, back then, an idea that Kuwait, today, struggles to maintain.

Loyalty

The 1970s was a decade to remember in terms of Middle Eastern history. From the siege of Mecca to the British officially withdrawing from the Gulf, it was a decade filled with transformative events that shaped up the GCC. Kuwait's segregated society became more apparent at that time because of the strengthened positions of Islamist groups. It is important to note that Kuwait has a very strong representation of different binaries and political groups within its political system; and this strengthened the segregation of binaries. The country operates with a national assembly made up of 50 elected members from a diversified group of political factions.

Political factions can be closely interlaced with Kuwait's societal binaries. Kuwaitis have a sense of tribal patriarchy that is reflected mostly in the state's political scene. In simple terms, if someone in a specific tribe is in trouble (even if they are wrong), that person will have the backing of their whole tribal community. This is mostly how political factions gain political power. Therefore, if a Bedouin, for example, is running for a spot in the National Assembly, they know they have an entire tribal community supporting their decision. This concept in Kuwait is called *faza'a* (in Arabic فزعة). A concept developed from physical war, which now turned into an internal societal war. This is illustrated more clearly in the past 20 years, post invasion.

The whole concept of *faza'a* is one that contradicts Kuwait's goal of national unity. It essentially puts citizens against each other as their loyalty will always lie with the people closest to them. There is a famous regional saying: "I stand with my brother against my cousin and I stand with my cousin against the stranger". This signifies the hierarchy of loyalty based on kinship and re-examines the idea of national unity.

The 70s also welcomed a new strategy of promoting and reinforcing national loyalty as Kuwait wrestled with the idea of creating a sense of national unity. The government spread the concept of "Al-Usra-Al-Wahida" - which translates to "one unified family". This concept illustrates an ideal, Kuwaiti, traditional family who have no problems and live under a "leader" (usually the eldest male). They are all loyal, and content. Kuwaiti children are taught to call the amir "Baba" ("Father") - I, personally, grew up thinking I had to call the amir "Baba" until I was 13. This strategy was quite successful in illustrating Kuwait, as a one big family; and the sole authority (the amir) deserves loyalty. Halib Barakat, an Arab Sociologist, demonstrates a profound similarity between the image of a father in a family and the image of god in Islam". I can't help but think that females are in inferior positions socially because of this seed that Kuwait has planted. Although in the 60s and 70s women were given equal rights, Kuwait could not resist going into a more conservative mentality because of the rise of the Islamist revolution and the increasing number of Bedouins getting citizenships (who have strong roots with their tribal culture). This mentality nurtured a generation of females that believed that they should be relying on men, since they hold the power to give their children citizenship and all privileges that comes with it. Females were engulfed in the idea that their family is their natural realm and that they are protected by either their fathers or husbands. This strengthened female dependency on males, much like how the people of Kuwait are dependent on the nation.

“Defining women as dependent on men acquits the State from any responsibility to support them. It is only when women lack male support and are unable to earn an income that the government steps in to provide them with assistance.” - Al Mughni

Loyalty in our national identity today is illustrated through tribal/sectorial relations and gender roles. However, I suggest that this loyalty exists because of dependency rather than respect. Citizens dependency on the State, women dependency on men, and people’s dependency on their tribes. This cultivated an imbalance in the relationship between the society and state as the relationship is essentially built on mis-perceived needs, rather than growth and respect.

It is important to note that the Kuwaiti people from almost all binaries and factions saw no contradictions between socio-economic progress and Islam; and this positive outlook is what supported the fast growth of Kuwait until the early 80s.

Islam

The 1980s is where we see a new set of values in Kuwait being born, called “True Islamic Values” by Islamist groups. This was not only happening in Kuwait, but the region as a whole. Kuwaiti Sociologist, Haya Al Mughni, argues that specifically in Kuwait, this period of Islamization is one of social control and a way to subject the Kuwaiti population to the authority of the monarchic state. She also argues that the government felt a need to associate itself with Islamic values due to the rising popularity of the Islamist groups politically. I argue that Islamist groups did not gain popularity, rather they gained political strength. The Bedouins were given Kuwaiti citizenship to support the ruling family politically at that time; and islamic ideologies strongly aligned with bedouin values. The government did not want to be weakened and this reversed the positive cultural developments that Kuwait grew into as it narrowed down intellectual discourse.

However, when speaking about Islam in terms of Kuwait’s national identity, there is a fine, hazy line between culture and religion. Islam is so embedded in Kuwait’s culture, that people don’t know if their actions are due to the former or the latter. For example, a majority of the Kuwaiti population would not be able to answer the question of: *Is a 3-day funeral part of the Kuwaiti culture or the islamic one?* My analysis is that this is because we are taught to see Islam and culture as one. I, personally, was never sat down and taught that signing paperwork for a marriage is cultural and not religious, or that

segregation is cultural, and not religious (After all, the *hajj* or pilgrimage is not segregated - and it is considered to be one of the five pillars of Islam).

I don't want to dwell on religion's role in culture and vice versa. However, it is important to note that cultural interpretation of Islam and personal interpretation of Islam are two very different approaches. Cultural interpretations are filled with biases and politics, while self interpretation is a relationship between the believer and god. Unfortunately, people are taught a one-dimensional, cultural perspective of Islam, especially in the Middle East, that may be controlling. The teaching of Islam became more dogmatic due to our weakened Arabic language. This is evident in countries that teach Islam but are non-Arab speakers. Self exploration is encouraged as I truly believe that Islam is a beautiful religion when it is a personal connection without influences from external factors. Moving on, I will only be focusing on the use of Islamic perspective in Kuwait's education system and curriculum.

Kuwait established *The Education Strategy 2005 -2025* which touches upon freedom's relationship with cultural identity, wealth production, and more socio-economic concepts that are relevant to the State. Islam is addressed in this strategy and is aligned with the GCC objective of: "*building the correct Islamic faith in the educated so that its principles become a method of thought and style, which develops the preparation of education with Arab-Islamic heritage and loyalty to the Arab-Islamic identity*". This demonstrates that a Kuwaiti is by default a muslim, disregarding the tiny Kuwaiti minority of Christians, and is a form of exclusion, which lays a burden towards Kuwait's national unity goal.

Furthermore, as Dr. Rania Al Nakib illustrates, "correct Islamic faith" implies that there is only one way to interpret Islam. It is singular and it is fixed. A concept as simple as the Sunni and Shitte divide demonstrates that we can't look at Islam, when it comes to politics, in a one-dimensional way or with biases. To put it simply, a sunni minister will interpret the "correct Islamic faith" differently than a shiite one, which will affect the education curricula and will lead to instability. It is estimated that the majority of the Kuwaiti population are Sunni, so why force the Shitte to learn about Sunni Islam, if it goes against their values? In 2010 there was a dispute about the content of the Islamic studies curriculum, this caused political tension leading to the then minister of education to almost resign. The "Correct Islamic Faith" mentality automatically puts Kuwait in a position where it will lose. There are many opinions in and about Islam, therefore, to present it as one correct faith leads to conflict and clashes.

“The didactic nature of Islamic studies and pedagogical methods in Kuwait’s national curriculum assume a particular patriarchal interpretation of Islam as ‘finished’, expecting obedience without discussion and debate.” - Dr. Rania Al Nakib

If students are taught that Islam is fixed, that leaves no room for the diversity of thought or critical thinking. Students are discouraged from asking questions out of fear because it is expected for them to be obedient. The fear is not just embedded into religious studies; it is also evident throughout the curricula as a whole. As educational theorist Ahmad AlBaghdadi questions: “Is the education ministry required to introduce religion into all topics of study?”.

I, personally, grew up with adults shutting me down when I asked hard questions, especially religious questions. They would simply tell me that I should not be asking these questions and that I should minimize these thoughts once they arise. This weakened my curiosity in so many ways as I was taught to shut down difficult questions. Curious people foster innovative environments that lead to sustainable developments. Kuwait’s way of embedding Islam into its education curriculum is at odds with curiosity and critical thinking, resulting in generations of one dimensional minded people that go through the same thought patterns. How can Kuwait develop into a knowledge-based economy if there is no development in the way citizens think?

Moving on to the segregated schooling system. As stated above, I see this as a cultural practice rather than a religious one. For example, in universities in Kuwait, students organically separate even if they have the option not to do so. The segregated system makes it hard for students to challenge naturally challenging concepts (like gender-roles), as it defends inequality through religion. It is common to see the government and religious groups working together to go against educational reforms. This way they are able to control content and the way it is taught. Students are essentially discouraged from “thinking outside the box” and this all goes back to the assumed “fixed” Islamic identity of Kuwait.

All in all, Kuwait’s socio-economic scene is quite complex. We touched upon characteristics within our national identity that should be factored into reforms and decision making. We can see the presence of critical thinking amongst the Kuwaiti population in the past; and a shift to a weakened sense of criticality with the transformation of Kuwait’s socio-economic scene. Kuwait’s current national identity almost contradicts its goal of unification as it is deeply embedded in its social scene.

However, the main goal is not to change our identity, but to evolve it and allow it to adapt to our globalized world; and the only way we can do so is through education.

Chapter 2: The Education System

Kuwait's Education System

Since 1966, Kuwait has offered education free of charge to everyone that legally resides in Kuwait, as per the constitution. Education is mandatory and enforced by law for ages 6-16 years old, and citizens have the freedom to choose if they want a public or private school education. Private schools are subsidized by the government and come in a variety of different systems (International Baccalaureate, American, British, French, etc.). The education system in Kuwait illustrates the government's willingness to invest in human resources and overcoming social development challenges. This resulted in a 0% illiteracy rate amongst the Kuwaiti people, which is a great accomplishment, but are we doing it effectively? Lets begin with the first traces of education in Kuwait.

Prior to the oil boom, Kuwait's education system consisted of Quranic schools that taught Islam and Arabic to boys. The first school, called Al Mubarkiya, was funded by merchants to establish a more modern educational institution where commerce, arithmetic skills, and letter drafting were added to the curriculum. This was mostly done to support supply clerks at that time. Women were uneducated and prioritized getting married, bearing children, and taking care of the household.

Structure and Organization of the Education System

After the generous investment in education coming from oil revenues, Kuwait evolved to have one of the most modern, technologically advanced education systems in the region. A national education department was initiated to manage government schools and teachers from neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine, were brought in to teach. Keep in mind, the transition that Kuwait went through required citizens to adapt to a new life as well, therefore, Kuwait brought in teachers from already developed, modernized educational systems to guide the transition and strengthen human development. The education department formally became the Ministry of Education in 1962 and was established to focus and adapt on educational developments.

Now, the education system is overseen by the Ministry of Education, the National Agency for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance (NAAAQA), the Supreme Education Council, and The National Center of Education Development (NCED). The center specifically has many regulatory responsibilities which includes inspecting schools and organizing international tests that compares Kuwait's education to global standards. The NCED also works closely with international institutions on technical issues when it

comes to reforms and policies. It is important to note that to this day, Kuwait does not have a process for the planning and implementation of policies. Everytime there is a new Minister of Education, there is a new approach to policies.

It is impossible to speak about educational reforms without politics, Kuwait is currently going through political unrest. In the past year, Kuwait had approximately 3 ministers of education (so far). In our modern age, the parliament is unable to complete its cycle of 4 years because of political turmoil. This means that ministers are replaced quite often and there is no system in place to keep a reform going with the constant change in parliament. If there are no systems to complete and implement a reform that a previous minister was working on, nothing will ever get done. The next minister will always have another agenda. There is nothing in place to make policy reform consistent. A minister should not have the final decisions on reforms; instead there should be a higher council that takes charge of reform creation and processing. This council should have diverse members from Kuwaiti society that are able to make decisions based on unity and inclusivity.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education is currently in charge of planning, creating, *and* evaluating policies. Of course there is a bias! Imagine a student being put in charge to grade themselves, everybody would have a 4.0 GPA! If we look globally, a ministry is responsible for the design and implementation of a sector of public policy. They should want the benefit of the people, not themselves. They should not be in charge of creation or evaluation, we need experts in separate agencies to do so.

The education system is constantly going through reform creation, without the actual implementation. This is because we have a structural defect; and with this defect all reforms are subject to failure. Dr. Ahood Al Asfoor points out that we need to separate powers between governmental agencies by setting boundaries. She proposes that the Supreme Education Council should be in charge of policy making which would be led by the Prime Minister. Policy implementation would be under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, where they develop operational plans that guarantee the establishment of these policies. Thus, they would not have the power to amend a reform, except by consulting with the Supreme Council. Finally, evaluations are the responsibility of the NCED. Currently, the only responsibility they hold is approvals of internal and external scholarships. This limitation is due to the lack of financial independence. Therefore, the agency should be given full control to evaluate reforms by allowing them to have full financial and administrative independence.

Essentially, there would be different parts to policy reforms and each part would be owned by a separate entity, this will be explored further in Chapter 5. However, this is a way where conflict of interest is avoided and there is a clear organizational structure that allows the reform to progress, even if the political instability in Kuwait continues.

Organization Structure

Moving on to the organizational structure of the education system, in the public sector, it consists of 4 levels before the University level:

1. Pre-primary Education
2. Primary Education
3. Intermediate Education
4. Secondary Education

Figure 2A, below, illustrates the education level and its characteristics.

Figure 2A:

| Education | Level | Grades | Age | Years |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------|------------|--------------|
| Pre-Primary | Kindergarten | KG 1 and 2 | 3 to 6 | 2 |
| Primary | Elementary | 1 to 5 | 6 to 11 | 5 |
| Intermediate | Middle | 6 to 10 | 12 to 16 | 4 |
| Secondary | High | 11 to 12 | 17 to 19 | 3 |
| Tertiary | Bachelors | | | 4 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---------|--|--|---|
| Tertiary | Masters | | | 2 |
| Tertiary | PHD | | | 3 |

When looking into the private sector, it is important to note that the organizational structure is dependent on the type of education system itself. For example, the American system follows a similar structure to the public education system in Kuwait. However, the British system is a completely different structure. It all depends on the type of system the school follows.

Pre-Primary Education

This is considered to be the kindergarten level where there is a focus on providing students conditioning for mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual development. This level develops the child's capacity for communication and allows them to discover their environment which guides them socially. Children usually start at age 3 or 4.

Primary Education

The primary level provides students with basic knowledge of linguistics, arithmetics, religion, and the arts. It is dedicated to strengthening the students spirit and mind by allowing them to explore concepts of responsibilities and social awareness. Teaching basic concepts of Islam and Arabic language is mandatory for public and private schools at this level. In 1994, the Commission for the Development of Arabic Language Curricula was developed to strengthen and aid the integration of the English language and the State's native language, Arabic. The commission is currently under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Education.

Core courses at this level includes:

| |
|------------------------------|
| 1. Islamic Education |
| 2. Arabic Language |
| 3. English Language |
| 4. Science |
| 5. Mathematics |
| 6. Social Studies |
| 7. Physical Education |
| 8. Fine Arts |
| 9. Music |

The Ministry of Education set regulations, starting at this level and ending at the completion of secondary education, to evaluate student performance in core classes and keep up with theoretical bases of measurements. This acts as a guide for faculty and student achievements. The system observes a two-semester academic year with central evaluations directly supervised by the Ministry. At the end of each year, there is a percentage calculated determining if students move onto the next level. These percentages are applied to all further education levels and are as follows:

| Percentage | Rubric |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 90% + | Excellent |
| 80% - 89% | Very Good |
| 70% - 79% | Good |
| 50% - 69% | Pass |
| Below 50% | Fail |

Intermediate Education

The main goal of this level is to help students achieve an understanding of their national identity specifically in the subjects of Arabic language, Social Studies, Math, Basic Science and English. This level is supposed to push students to develop the ability to think creatively and critically without limitations.

Courses at this level includes:

| |
|--|
| 1. Arabic Language |
| 2. Islamic Education |
| 3. English Language |
| 4. Mathematics |
| 5. Science |
| 6. Social Studies |
| 7. Physical Education |
| 8. Practical Studies |
| 9. Fine Arts |
| 10. Music |
| 11. Computer Studies |
| 12. Home Economics (For girls in the public sector) |

Secondary Education

The main goal for this level is to prepare students for higher education. Students are encouraged to discover their own identity and interest through the development of their knowledge, skills, and critical thinking. Furthermore, student's civic duty is brought into attention on the basis of understanding their rights and obligations as citizens of the state. A long-term goal of this level is to prepare the upcoming generation to keep up with

society and its needs. The aim is to safeguard the Kuwaiti identity by creating a system that integrates Arab-Islamic values.

Courses at this level includes

| |
|--|
| 1. Islamic Education |
| 2. Arabic Language |
| 3. English Language |
| 4. Mathematics |
| 5. Biology |
| 6. Physics |
| 7. Chemistry |
| 8. Scientific Knowledge |
| 9. Social Studies |
| 10. History (Depending on what type of school you are in (i.e: US History for American system schools)) |
| 11. Economics |
| 12. Sociology |
| 13. Psychology |
| 14. Fine Arts |
| 15. Computer Studies |
| 16. Physical Education |
| 17. Home Economics for girls |

After this level, students graduate and go to university. It is not mandatory for students to continue their academic career after this point.

The Curriculum

Kuwait's current curriculum is not useful for our current generation. It is based purely on memorization of information found in censored textbooks. It lacks critical thinking as there is no room for creativity or criticality in the educational environment. The Kuwaiti curriculum requires major reform to build students that have the capabilities and skills that are relevant to our changing realities. We need to foster skills that go hand in hand with our national goals. The curriculum should be centered on competencies, rather than on information; and should be subject to 5 elements to guide the national framework. The 5 elements includes:

| |
|---|
| Objectives |
| Content |
| Teaching and Learning Activities |
| Teaching Methods and Techniques |
| Evaluations |

Primary education focuses on basic student skill sets: Are they able to read and write? Can they comprehend basic math? The higher the level of education, the more goal-oriented the curriculum becomes. Suddenly there is a shift in skill sets where we expect students to gain knowledge holistically, but only teach them the method of memorization. Critical thinking is weakly present in the level of primary education, however, is non-existent in higher levels. This creates a gap between the transition of educational levels; as students essentially have to mentally shift from developing and working on different skill sets to only memorization. This causes confusion amongst students and contributes to the lack of innovation amongst Kuwaiti citizens. Basic skills and memorization does not encourage thinking unconventionally, rather it cultivates laziness. Students started to memorize information just to get an A; and once the exam is over the information goes in one ear and out the other. They don't have the incentive to explore or question because they were never taught to do so.

Another problem within the curriculum is that students only have two learning paths when they reach the Secondary Education stage. They can either choose to go the scientific (or “A’almy” in Arabic: علمي) route where they study in preparation to become doctors, engineers, or researchers; or they can pick the literary (or “Adabi” in Arabic: ادبي) route where they prepare to go into the business, political, or architectural world. This framework consists of a separation approach, where students are forced to choose one route at the age of 16 and have to stick to it forever. They have no room to explore other routes or even integrate them. They also have no flexibility to pursue their passions or skills that may potentially benefit the country (ie: digitalization, crafts, industrial skills, and sports). This approach limits the skill sets of the Kuwaiti citizens as they will only be experts in one specific field. Without the ability to explore different fields, people are limited to the scope of work they choose. This weakens innovation, which acts as a burden to achieving a knowledge based economy.

Finally, examinations in the curriculum are dependent on written tests that measure the information that students acquire. The curriculum neglects other modes of examination that would be useful in measuring the quality of education and students’ skill sets. Basic skills of critical thinking, like listening, speaking, presenting and analyzing are not present within the curriculum. I spoke to a professor at Northeastern University who taught a lot of Kuwaiti students in the past. She was in awe at the fact that the majority of Kuwaiti students could not write essays. This goes to show how much our current curriculum lacks. If a University level student struggles to write a basic, 5 paragraph, essay, imagine the consequences this will bring to Kuwait’s workforce.

Now, how can we correct our national curriculum?

The Supreme Education Council should adopt a general framework for the national curriculum with specific guidelines that cater towards Kuwait’s goals. The reform should include general education policies that are built on the basis of our modern era and aids to generational differences. Kuwait currently has a national curriculum, however it does not go hand in hand with the State’s visions. In figure 2B, below, I compare the current curriculum with a more desirable one that fits Kuwait’s goals.

Figure 2B:

| Subject | Current Curriculum | Desired Curriculum |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Content | Focuses on indoctrination and theoretical information | Focus on theoretical information with practical skills and critical thinking |
| Evaluations | Written examinations | A variety of objective methods that focuses on student achievements |
| Methods of Learning | Memorization and Recollection | Exploration and Investigation |
| Teacher Roles | A source of censored information | An organizer of wide ranges of learning experiences |
| Technology | A tool to present syllabi | A tool to to organize interactive educational experiences that serves elements of the curriculum |
| Textbooks | The only source of information | One of the main variety of sources of information |

As you can tell, the gaps between the current and desired curriculum is not small. A major change needs to be made in order to reduce this gap; and how to implement this change will be explored in further chapters.

Generational Differences

Another major concept in the current curriculum that needs to be explored is if our curriculum is suitable for our current generation. Generation Z (those born from 1995-2010) and Alpha (those born after 2010) are responsible for the sustainability of our country. They are our youth. We need to understand and shift our education system to best cater to the features of this new, upcoming generation. Kuwait's curriculum has

been static for a while now. Think about it, how often does Kuwait revise and modernize their national curriculum? The answer is: Once in a blue moon, *only if* the implementation happens. The curriculum has been stuck on the necessities and demands of previous generations that goes as far as the establishment of the modern State of Kuwait. In order to construct education to be a successful tool for the up and coming generations, we must understand the new generations' key features:

1. They thrive with experiential learning. Education, now, does not necessarily have to happen in the classroom.
2. They care about social justices and equity.
3. They care about the environment and believe in a personal and societal responsibility to make a difference.
4. They are highly skilled in technology and aspire to have financial independence at a young age.
5. They value freedom of expression and credibility.

All of these features need to be taken into consideration while creating education reforms. What is happening now is that Kuwait does not understand what curriculums and methods work with Generation Z and Alpha. They are stuck in the past, believing that people do not have the means to explore the “outside world”, while in this day and age, we are able to access information about anything within seconds.

I went to a conference in Harvard University dedicated to the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence (AI). All of the speakers' main focus was the application of education using AI and technology. They emphasized that now, learning is self driven. I can take an online course anywhere around the world and become an expert in whatever I want to be. Technology and AI will have the power to replace people, so how do we cultivate a society where we can adapt to new jobs, new ways of receiving and filtering information, and new integrated and global perspectives? Therefore, the education system, especially in Kuwait, needs to evolve into one that encourages collective intelligence, collaborative learning, critical thinking and cognitive distribution through technological methods.

But don't be fooled, technology is not enough. It is essential for students in the modern generations to apply critical thinking to our new digital world. They need to understand how to search, compare, critique and link information in the technological realm. Kuwait

wants a knowledge based economy, right? But schools are teaching basic technological courses of hardwares. They are teaching easy, basic content. Everybody knows how hardware works. Even if you don't know you know - *you know*.

So what should we teach in our curriculums then? Marc Sayer states it perfectly: "Students must be technically skilled, global, knowledgeable, flexible, and insightful". We have to prioritize the human and social part of learning, especially when it comes to digital courses and softwares. Ethics, Differentiation of Media Sources, Cyber Security are all subjects more important than understanding how a computer works or how to use excel.

This brings us to the question of: how can we effectively educate our new generation? Below are 4 simplified key concepts to focus on when educating Generation Z and Alpha:

| |
|---|
| A focus on critical thinking (creativity, analysis, structure, etc.) |
| Integrating digitalization and technology hardware and software awareness |
| Training on digital citizenship and cyber security |
| Incorporating humanity, social, and environmental issues into the curriculum |

These concepts are aligned with the new generation's key features and aids to the effectiveness of the education system. This allows education in Kuwait to be impactful and more holistic. It reduces one-dimensionality of subjects and instead allows for a more integrative approach, where technology is embedded in socio-economic and environmental issues. It is a simple shift forward to the national curriculum to make it more effective.

Now, you may be wondering why this system is not working; we touched upon why the curriculum needs change but what has this system fostered? What are its effects?

Chapter 3: Reality

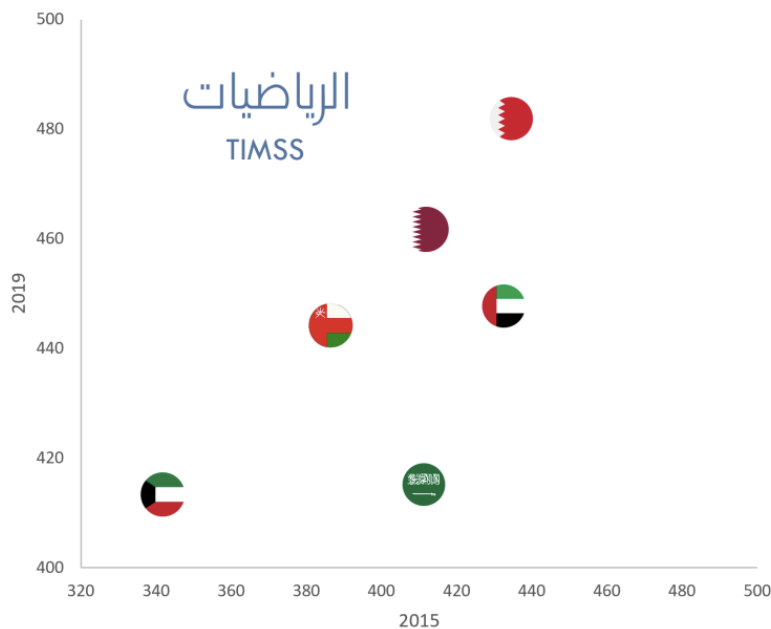
International Testing

In 2021, there was a governmental report issued that stated that a student that graduated from high school in Kuwait is the equivalent to a 7th grade student when compared to international standards.

TIMSS

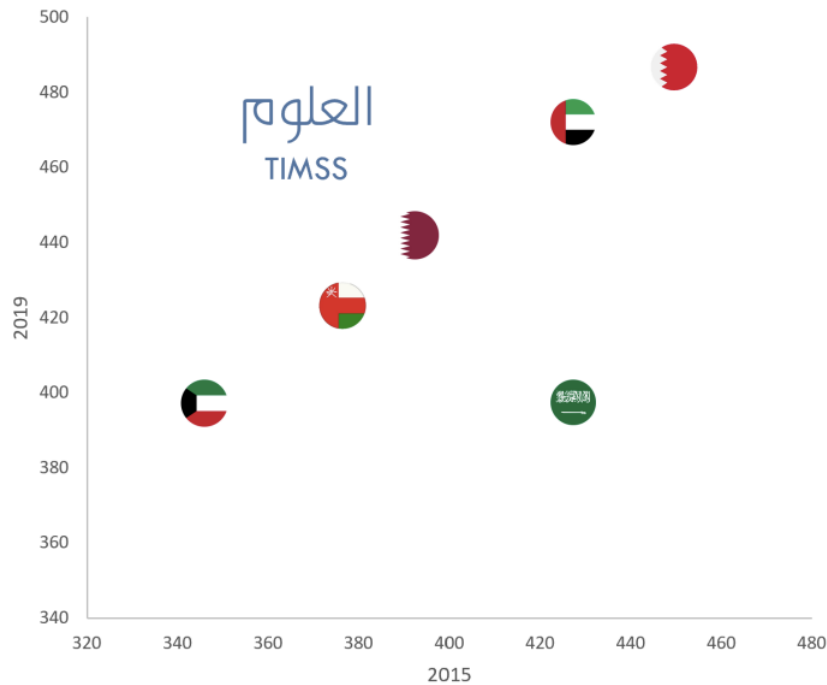
TIMSS is an important global exam that tests students' knowledge and application in science and math. As shown in Figures 3A and 3B below, the last exam that Kuwait participated in was in the year 2019, where we scored lowest amongst the GCC in both subjects. Kuwait was a country that had an education vision, established in 1955, with the specific goal of increasing global examination scores. As you can tell, we actually did the opposite. We went in reverse.

Figure 3A: Kuwait's Placement Amongst GCC in Mathematics



AlAsfoor, Ahood. "من هنا نبحر." *From Here We Sail*, https://www.fromherewesail.com/media/from_here_we_sail.pdf.

Figure 3B: Kuwait's Placement Amongst GCC in Science



AlAsfoor, Ahood. "من هنا نبحر." *From Here We Sail*, https://www.fromherewesail.com/media/from_here_we_sail.pdf.

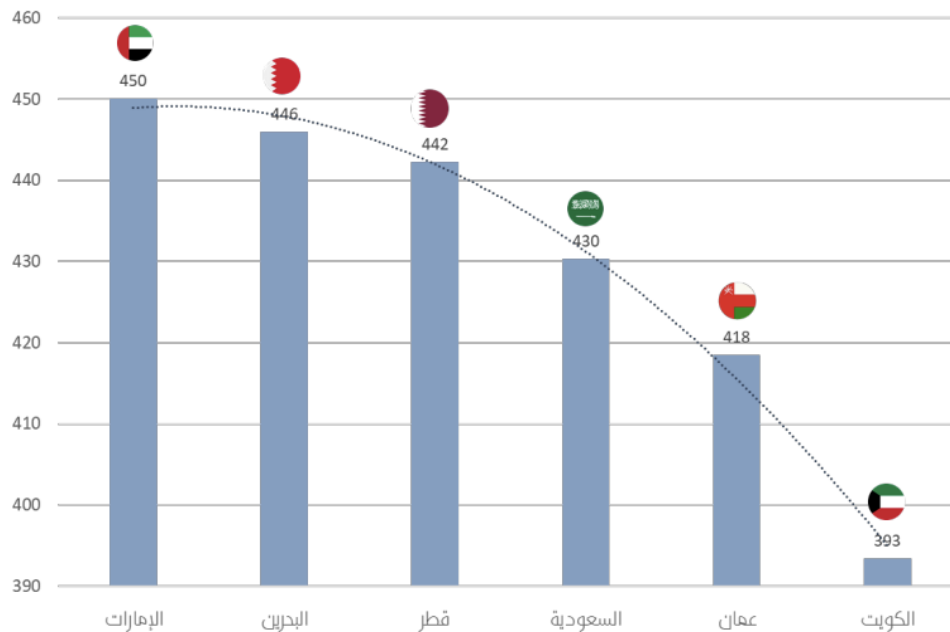
Let me give you a very basic example of our current situation in Kuwait. Let us say that a student is taught that $3+1=4$. They are taught to memorize this formula. In the Kuwaiti exam, the question would be "What is $3+1$?". In the global exam, the question would be "If Tim had 3 apples and Sam gave him one of his apples, how many apples does Tim have?". The students, in this scenario, must create the formula themselves, however, Kuwaiti students are not taught how to do so. They are only taught that $3+1=4$. They have the basic knowledge to solve the formula, but don't necessarily have the method to analyze and connect the word problem to the formula. This weakens the student as they lack the application of the knowledge they acquire. They lack criticality.

The students are not to blame, nor the teachers. This is a result of the Ministry of Education’s philosophy. Students are given lessons in all subjects in the exact same format, with the exact same type of examination. It is only normal for students to not score well, as they were challenged to think outside the box, and did not have the skills to do so. Memorization does not leave room for critical thinking as students are unable to have a diversity of thought processing and application. To put it simply, students are unable to perform well because they do not have the thought process to do so. To tackle this, we must embed critical thinking into the curriculum, which will be discussed further.

PIRLS

PIRLS on the other hand, examines international standards on reading and writing. Kuwait participated in the examination in 2016 and placed 47 out of the 50 in ranking. Figure 3C below demonstrates Kuwait's positioning in comparison to other members in the GCC.

Figure 3C: Kuwait’s Placement Amongst GCC in PIRLS



AlAsfoor, Ahood. "من هنا نبحر." *From Here We Sail*, https://www.fromherewesail.com/media/from_here_we_sail.pdf.

Literacy is the base of education. If students are unable to comprehend simple, short texts, how do we expect them to excel in other subjects, or even in life? A World Bank report illustrated that 51% of Kuwaiti students are falling behind on reading and writing in comparison to others their age. More than half of the population find it difficult to comprehend and produce texts. If such a basic skill to acquire knowledge is lacking within a country, how can the country foster a knowledge based economy to sustain its growth.

We are a country that is proud to have 0% illiteracy amongst our people, however the quality of literacy is one of the worst. The reason behind this weakness should be explored further. Is it because education is mandatory for everyone, so Kuwait dumbed down its quality? Maybe it is because of our sense of entitlement? We don't understand the privilege of free education, since we are not paying for it, so we got lazy? We need to understand the roots of this issue to understand how to fix it.

Censorship and Academic Freedom

Dr. Rania Al Nakib states: "Consequently, (Kuwait's modern).. education does little more than perpetuate the status quo, including existing power structures, and this process is supported by a traditionally authoritarian educational ethos". School curriculums consist of core classes that have been approved by the Ministry of Education. Content, textbooks, and methods of teaching are all regulated by the ministry. For public schools, textbooks are given to teachers at the beginning of the academic year with a schedule that illustrates what content and pages in the books they should be covering at any given day. Private schools are more flexible, however, still heavily regulated by the government. Although equality in education is something we all strive for, content choice needs to be discussed.

This brings me to the topic of censorship. Censorship has negative implications on academic discourse as it limits the freedom teachers have when transferring knowledge to students. To put it simply, instead of getting the big picture, students only get one side of the story. This contributes strongly to my bubble theory. If the only information you are receiving supports your ideologies in your specific bubble, then curiosity and creativity is not encouraged. Freedom of choice is blurred and people will grow up to be intolerant to difference. For a country that gives their citizens freedom of speech, they do not put qualified people to know what content should be or should not be censored.

When people think of censorship, they think of a dictatorship. The first feeling they get is pity, because people in a dictatorial regime don't know anything better than what is in their own bubble. People pity that they are being controlled. And isn't censorship a form of control? If the government can dictate what an entire generation of Kuwaitis can and can not think, they cultivate a society that will not even think of challenging them.

Keep in mind, I am writing this to start a national discourse about educational systems. I am challenging you to think in another way. This does not mean that you have to take sides. You just have to consider what the other side is thinking. I am focusing on Kuwait's educational system because I am Kuwaiti; so let me give you a personal example.

I went to a private school. I remember in the beginning of the academic term, they gave us textbooks that we, as students, had to censor. I clearly remember scratching out the word "Israel" and replacing it with "Occupied Palestine" many times. This type of regulation keeps me in my bubble. I never knew what Israel's side of the story was, but I would have wanted to know, to come up with my *own* conclusions. I also remember scratching out a picture of the statue of David, of Michelangelo, because of nudity. Now, I am not taking a side and saying that you should not censor; I am simply illustrating that censorship goes beyond political ideologies. I argue that education should be transparent and multi-dimensional, where facts and different perspectives are presented, leaving room for students to have the freedom of choice and analysis. This openness within education encourages students to ask difficult questions and fosters a creative environment, which allows for future innovation and potentially a knowledge based economy. This also allows children to be able to make their own choices. It gives them a sense of trust and shows them that they are able to make their own decisions and bear its consequences. This all factors under the umbrella of critical thinking and spills over to a more efficient and effective work environment, fostering healthy competition.

Academic freedom is crucial for quality education. It drives innovation and allows people to receive and generate knowledge without fear. There should be a structure of education and values across the board. The margin increases with age and the development of the brain. The Academic Freedom Index (AFI) allows countries to gain insight to assess academic liberty. The index is based on five indicators, illustrated below:

Figure 3D:

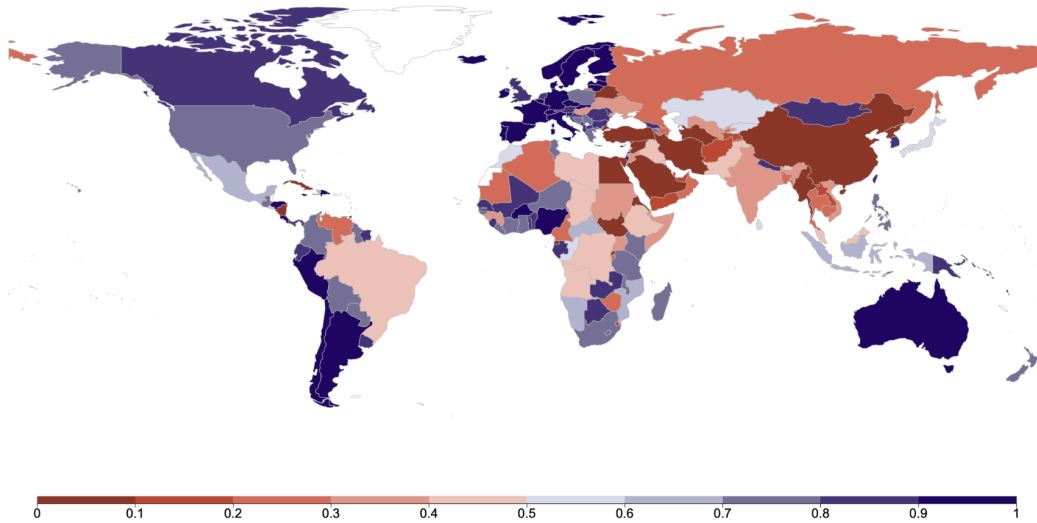
| |
|---|
| Freedom to Research and Teach |
| Freedom of Academic Exchange and Dissemination |
| Institutional Autonomy |
| Campus Integrity |
| Freedom of Cultural and Academic Expression |

Kuwait is considered to be in the bottom 30 to 40 percentile in the AFI. This illustrates that Kuwait is strongly censored and has a lot of room for improvement. Censorship is dangerous to our democracy. It suppresses and discriminates against different perspectives and ideas, which creates an environment that is against open discussions, as people feel unsafe discussing “taboo” ideas. This aids Kuwait's social segregation as people are afraid to exchange different viewpoints and approaches. It limits diversity and inclusivity. Students are not exposed to different cultures which contributes to our sense of entitlement and exclusivity. It is almost ignorant, which leads to sexism, racism, and bigotry within our society.

The state should use the Academic Freedom Index as a tool for self-assessment and then set goals for improvement. The indicators should not be applied all at once in the primary level of education, rather indicators should be introduced based on the educational level. The higher the education level, the more indicators introduced.

Transparency is key to a successful education. Afterall, isn't unregulated censorship going against basic human rights?

Figure 3E: The State of Academic Freedom 2022



"Academic Freedom Index." *Academic Freedom Index*, <https://academic-freedom-index.net/>.

Speaking of human rights, Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs states: *"Since its independence and the adoption of its constitution in 1962, the State of Kuwait has been keen on promoting and protecting human rights by including in the constitution many articles and texts that are consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... and relevant international charters and conventions."* It is clear that the State prioritizes human rights and understands its importance. However, the education system presents a more complex case.

A Clash on Human Rights and The Constitution

In the 1990s human rights and the constitution was a new addition to Kuwait's national curriculum. It was added as a 45 minute class to be taken once a week, mandatory for public schools. In terms of content, teachers were given a schedule on what to teach and when to teach it, like all other subjects. There were three sources that were recognized for the course's content:

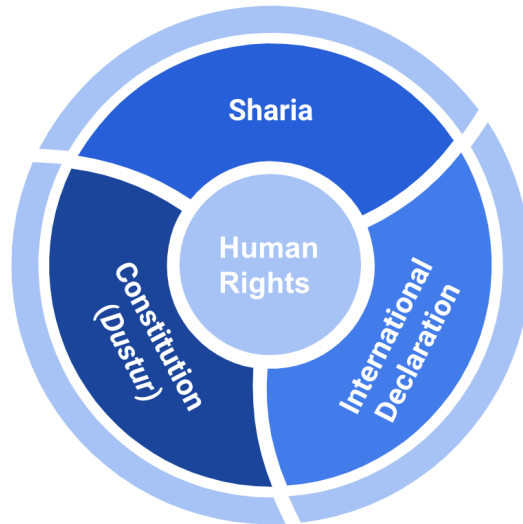
1. Sharia
2. International Declaration
3. Kuwaiti Constitution (*Dustur*)

The subject was taught to students in the perspectives of these three sources in that specific order, and all information was presented as facts. There was no room to question or contradict anything, not even the tensions that arise amongst the relationships between the three sources. This created contradictions within the curriculum itself. For example, gender equality in inheritance laws in the Sharia perspective and the International Declaration contradict each other. At the same time, Article 153 of the *dustur* encourages honor killings as a punishment for specific crimes, which contradicts Sharia law (as it is considered to be unlawful to do so). The clashes of the three sources are not addressed in the course at all.

Because the Sharia law is presented first, it is assumed that *that* perspective is more important. The order in which the content is presented demonstrates the importance of the perspectives in which they are taught. Think of it as a hierarchical triangle, where Sharia is at the top of the triangle, sitting above the International Declaration and Kuwaiti Constitution. As Dr. Rania Al Nakib demonstrated: “with the Islamic perspective being presented first throughout the textbook, the implication is that this takes precedence. This justifies allowing constitutional and universal rights to take second and third place to a particular interpretation of Islamic rights.”.

Instead, the framework in which these courses should be presented is more of a holistic, circular one. All perspectives must be presented with their limitations and clashes. It is up to the student to decide their opinions on their rights; and it is a right in itself for students to understand all of their rights.

Figure 3F:



Let me side track a bit to clarify: In Kuwait, if you have daughters but you don't have any sons, and you are sunni-muslim, a percentage of your inheritance goes to your brothers; in the understanding that they will take care of the daughters. While, if you are a shiite-muslim, your daughter will inherit your inheritance completely. The general rule of thumb is that the brother doubles the share of the sister. Now, this is illustrated under Sharia law, which the *dustur* abides to as it is the main source of Kuwaiti laws and legislation. The sharia law itself stems from the interpretation of Islam through the Quran or *hadiths*, and there are many forms and opinions on those interpretations, based on different sects of Islam. Some people think it is correct, some think it reflects a bias. Therefore, a more holistic approach of teaching human rights will allow for all perspectives to be presented. The students can have the choice of what they think is right for them.

Going back to the tensions between the sources, it simply confuses the students. This particular strand of the curriculum should shift its focus to teaching values of respect and tolerance towards different religions and institutions. Teachers should be facilitating dialogues that allow students to explore their identities within the different sources of

their rights. As Dr. Rania Al Nakib states: “When schools are spaces that are free from national, religious and corporate hegemony, the voices of young people may be heard – and how they are constructing their own identity may be recognized – and transformative education becomes possible”. I believe in relaxing and regulating influences, rather than eliminating them as a whole, as a school without national hegemony can’t cultivate healthy nationalism.

Teachers

There was a study conducted in the US that demonstrated that with proficient and innovative teachers, the learning speed of students increased triple the amount than the students that were taught by non-innovative, non-proficient ones. Teachers are the stepping stones of education. Unfortunately in Kuwait, they are limited to the content and strategies that the government gives them. This means that there is no incentive for people to become teachers as the job is inflexible and repetitive. Essentially, a good percentage become actors because they are presented with no flexibility to demonstrate their own strategies of teaching. They are forced to instruct even if they do not necessarily agree with the content. However, it is important to know that the education system was not always like this. Education reflected Kuwait pre-invasion: strong.

The State’s educational peak was pre-invasion, after the educated expats migrated into Kuwait and became teachers. It is important to note that these teachers helped establish every element of the modern State. They developed our electricity system, army, passport system, banks, education and more. The way I see it, there were 2 major tipping points when it comes to education in Kuwait. The first one is after the Iraqi invasion. During the invasion, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) supported Saddam Hussain which led to intense backlash from Kuwait. There was a narrative created amongst Kuwaitis that the Palestinians sided with Iraq, as Hussain promised them nationalities. This resulted in Kuwait pushing the Palestenians and Iraqis out of the country. This, I believe, was the start of the demise of the education system as we lost quality labor that contributed strongly to the bases of our education.

The question now is: who replaced them as educators? A lower caliber of teachers. Therefore, after the invasion the desire to get children educated increased, while the caliber of teachers decreased. Essentially, the demand went up, while supply quality went down. This marked the beginning of extensive corruption within Kuwait’s education

system as it became a malleable space, rather than a fixed one. It became very easy for students to bribe teachers to get the grades they wanted. This resulted in a slow-moving, lazy educational domain.

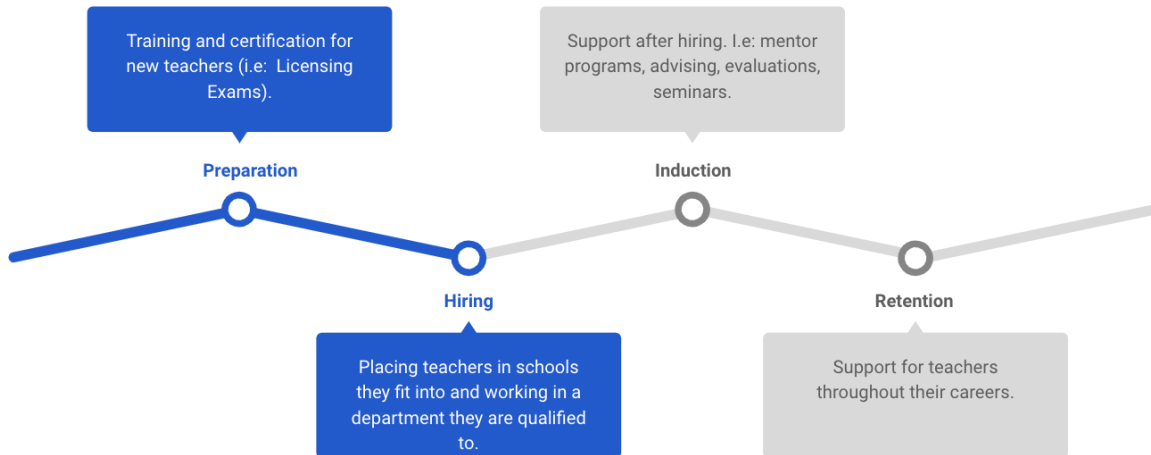
The culture of cheating in Kuwait, unfortunately, is tolerated. Some parents have a mentality of: as long as my child gets a good grade, we are supporting their actions, even when it comes to cheating or plagiarism. There was a special session held by the National Assembly in April 2023 dedicated to investigating a school exam cheating scandal which 40,000 students participated in. Authorities uncovered a network of 17 people, including 11 teachers, who leaked questions of the higher secondary exams; and the ministry found out about this scandal through the media. This just goes to show how corrupt the Kuwaiti education system is. Parents actually fought in support for their children, rather than using their power to teach them of their wrong-doings; and this supports the spoiled children syndrome.

The last tipping point was the Covid-19 pandemic. Education came to a halt in Kuwait for approximately 7 months. No country in the world stopped education for that long. As illustrated in the book “From Here We Sail”, the pandemic exposed the tip of the iceberg when it comes to issues in education. Kuwaiti citizens had time to explore the depth of this educational iceberg and realized that the way teachers are treated holds a big chunk of this iceberg. Most teachers in Kuwait came up with innovative solutions when the pandemic hit to strongly dive into a digital world. However, teachers have no voice when it comes to reforms or policies, therefore all of their ideas went to waste.

This brings me to the topic of reform creation with the perspectives of different stakeholders. And who is a more important stakeholder than a teacher in education reforms? In the State of Kuwait, teachers are usually the last to know about any policy or curriculum change. They actually receive news of the change at the same time students do.

Not only that, but more importantly, there should be a clear education mentoring pipeline, which will ensure teachers are of quality and have adequate resources for training. As shown in Figure 3G below, the pipeline would include preparation, hiring, induction, and retention. This way the government guarantees teacher retention and support.

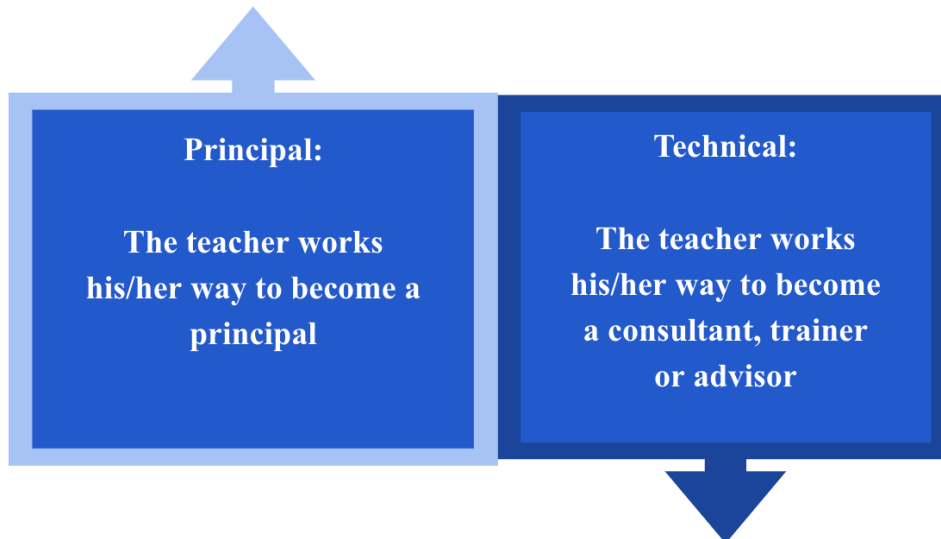
Figure 3G:



The preparation stage would ensure that teachers are up to date with new policies and reforms from the government. It would also ensure that teachers are certified and trained to do their jobs. The hiring stage is meant to place teachers where they are fit to teach. As you know, our society is segregated, therefore to ensure national unity, there should be a diverse pool of teachers in each governance. This will allow students to be exposed to different cultures and binaries. Furthermore, the induction phase ensures that teachers are transitioning smoothly into their jobs and have all the tools necessary to excel in it. Finally, the final phase allows teachers to be supported throughout their careers and have a clear career path. Afterall, confused teachers create confused students, so supporting them will allow teachers to do their jobs the best way possible.

Generally, being a teacher is not attractive to foreigners or Kuwaitis because of its inflexibility and lack of career progression. This is an international issue, not just a local one. Teachers generally have 2 career paths:

Figure 3H:



Dr. Asfour illustrates that there should be legal definitions of educators’ rights, powers, and duties. This will allow for a clear promotional path for teachers based on their needs. As you can see, in Figure 3H, above, all current paths lead to dis-connecting the teacher from the actual teaching of the students. The only way to stay within the walls of the school is to become a principal, and for many, that is not enough. Therefore, the retention phase in the education pipeline with clear roles and responsibilities allows for a more attractive work space.

All in all, teachers need flexibility; they can’t be controlled as this spills over to the students and then to society. Teachers should be able to communicate openly and creatively with students. This will only be possible if we integrate critical thinking into our national curriculum.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the act of reaching a conclusion through evaluations, analysis, interpretations, and the application of creative thought. It is important as it allows the student to foster independent thinking. It does not only require logic but creativity as

well, and it is important to differentiate between creative and critical thinking. Creative thinking is used to develop new concepts and ideas, whereas critical thinking may use creativity and past experiences to progress an already existing idea and apply it to reality. This means that what is taught to you in the past, is essential in shaping how you think critically. Both methods of thinking are equally important, however, Kuwait is missing the importance of the criticality of thought.

Lets apply this to the current state of Kuwait. We spoke about censorship, freedom and clashes between different institutions and ideologies in the education system. What type of person do you think that system will foster? A closed minded, confused individual which is the exact opposite of the ideal Kuwaiti citizen that the country wants to create.

The lack of critical thinking in Kuwait is dangerous and many are unaware of this danger. People are unable to complete simple and critical skills like analysis, problem solving, and decision making. The simplest example I could present is the inability of Kuwaiti citizens to distinguish between media sources. We have censorship in schools but outside of schools people have the freedom of speech and are able to say whatever they want to, whenever they want to. Essentially, we are limiting students through censorship and once they graduate, they are free to have access to whatever knowledge or perspective they desire. Teaching critical thinking at a young age will help students understand what they should or should not say; and more importantly, how to say it. There is an evidently confused media space and citizens are unable to understand its different perspectives. This aids in societal segregation, propaganda, and control, allowing the Kuwaiti society to operate in reverse of their goals. Questioning is a skill that comes with criticality and builds reasonable and confident voices amongst the Kuwaiti people. Isn't Kuwait supposed to be democratic? Then why encourage undemocratic behavior? We need to teach people how to state an opinion and respect others; the problem arises because we see our opinions as truths.

I remember speaking to a teacher during the Covid-19 lockdowns about the halt in education that Kuwait let itself go through. She said: "If I could take this year and only teach critical thinking to the citizens of Kuwait, Kuwait will thrive". She, as a teacher, understood the importance of criticality, however, she could not implement it in her work as she is limited to the scope of the government. Memorization is a great skill to have. However, opinions, debates, case studies, analysis, experiential learning, and more, all offer what the Kuwaiti education system lacks: "Education of the heart". Education of

the heart consists of spreading moral values which produce character. It makes a person capable of critical thinking and decision making based on culture, morals and needs of the society. These methods build integrity, accountability, trust, and more qualities that the Kuwaiti society needs to cultivate.

The system should create the conditions in which students can build positive relationships with others, where students are connected with others and see the basic skills of humanity being enacted. They should be able to get the opportunities to practice critical thinking with others. What the education of the heart is referring to, here, is educating children with the positive attributes that allows for a progressive and healthy society. Kuwait wants national unification; then why don't we teach and practice respect, inclusivity and unity? Kuwait wants a knowledge based economy, then why not teach different perspectives and ideas?

Our educational methods, now, are very archaic by nature. Some people are afraid to move from this archaism because it may clash with the religious curriculum or even worse, culture. We simply fail to isolate the idea of religion and the curriculum, which should operate as separate structures. Religion does not contradict criticality, on the contrary, it actually encourages it. The problem is within the way religion is taught and used, not the religion itself. Students are taught to fear the idea of questioning. All curriculums in this modern era should be one driven by dialogue; curriculums should not be factual. Even the Islamic perception of critical thinking illustrates that the goal is "*to find the truth in every matter and to reject falsehood.*". How do we find the truth without questioning? Don't you think this is a contradiction to Islam itself, or any other religion? It is more so, on a religion that's based on learning. After all, the first command that came from Allah upon the prophet is: "Read". Not only to read; but to read about how a person was created. This requires investigation, analysis, and curiosity. The first command in the religion of Islam was to critically think. So, why do we have a curriculum that is required to foster Arab-Islamic perspectives, not teaching the first commands of Islam?

The implementation of critical thinking will allow students to participate in problem solving, knowledge construction, and life skills. This will lead to transformative education which will cultivate a transformative socio-economic space. We must adapt and develop to our adapting world.

Chapter 4: Developments

“While Kuwait aspires to become a knowledge-based economy, it defines this within its education system in reverse: rather than knowledge fuelling the economy, the economy drives education.” - Dr. Rania Al Nakib

So, where is the education in Kuwait going and more importantly, how should Kuwait view education?

In the words of John Shelton “We should view our schools as institutions that educate children to be good citizens in a democracy”. The goal should not solely be to help students get a job, rather it should build a person that would excel in life and have a sense of passion for their careers. This is done through critical thinking, creativity, and using different modes of learning in different environments.

The first thing we should think about is what makes an ideal Kuwaiti citizen. The Kuwaiti Planning and Development Council launched a strategy to build a creative human capital. The strategy consisted of 8 pillars:

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| Safety and Security |
| Quality of Education |
| Increase Capacity of Higher Education |
| Correcting Labor Market imbalances |
| Youth Empowerment |
| Inclusivity with the Disabled |
| Promotion of Social Cohesion |
| Improving Elderly Care Service |

Firstly, the issue here is that this is not an educational philosophy nor are they guidelines, they are simply general goals to make a better country. Instead, the council should have created pillars that catered towards creativity through education. However, in order to

have a successful education vision that promotes a creative human capital, we need to understand what type of person the State of Kuwait wants to cultivate. If you want to cultivate a type of person that holds strong values such as humanity, integrity, and a love for their country, then you need to educate the heart and the mind simultaneously. This holistic approach to education removes prejudices and segregation and allows students to understand the value of learning. Unfortunately, Kuwaiti education is only cognitive, and it began with a reform in collaboration with Egypt.

In 1942, the Ministry of Education in Kuwait asked Egypt's Ministry of Education to create a study plan for their schools. The plan included teaching methods and curriculum developments which went through minor modifications to consider the needs of the Kuwaiti society. The issue with plans like these is that the entities responsible for the reform do not understand the Kuwaiti society. Even if they researched it, they would never fully understand it unless the members of the team grew up in Kuwait's society. Kuwait needs Kuwaiti experts, scholars, and professionals to create a study plan that caters towards Kuwaiti people and their needs. Since the establishment of education, Kuwait has never had its own, customized curriculum - one that was established by a team that has a majority of Kuwaitis all living and understanding Kuwait with different educational backgrounds.

Kuwait's Visions

On paper, Kuwait seems like it is booming! It looks like Kuwait is developing and modernizing educational reforms and policies. However, in reality there is no implementation. Since 1990, neither the Ministry of Education nor the successive ministers of the past implemented any of the policies they set. If we begin in 1997 where the Ministry of Education launched a new set of strategies and goals; they aimed for a "forward-looking" vision. But it was all talk, no action. After that came the Draft Education Plan in 2001, Kuwait launched a new education strategy project. Again, all talk, no action. Then 2003 and then 2005 and you can get the rest. The strategy issued in 2003 were for the years 2005-2025 and its methodological frameworks were actually pretty good. However, it has not been implemented yet.

Fast forward to today, the New Kuwait 2035 vision has a goal inspired by the UN SDG goal of "privatizing the education sector and ensuring that all new schools follow a PPP

(Public Private Partnership) model: the program aims to provide access to high-quality education across all levels, including technical, vocational and tertiary education”.

Kuwait’s New Vision 2035

If the Kuwaiti, oil-dominant, economy drives education, how can Kuwait achieve its goal of transitioning into a knowledge-based economy? The system actually contradicts our history of being an open, flexible, cosmopolitan center. A State that used to welcome and encourage innovation and diversity is now a State that controls ways of thinking to repress the diversity of thought. The State suppresses critical thinking. Luckily, Kuwait issued the New Kuwait 2035 Vision where education is a major part of national discourse. The vision allowed the government to increase spending on education and displayed a commitment to the importance of education for economic diversification and the overall social well-being.

One of the first indicators of the 2035 vision is: *“contributing to the achievement of interaction with the current age requirement of freedom of thought and response to the dynamics of change without conflict with the cultural identity of the society”*. This is done through the government on a PPP basis and aligns many developmental pillars with the State of Kuwait.

This illustrates that Kuwait is an advocate for freedom of thought. The State knows that they must adjust to our new globalized world. However, it is clear throughout numerous published reports from the Ministry of Education that Kuwait has a fear of a weakened national identity in the face of globalization. My evaluations demonstrate that this fear stems from the rapid westernization that occurred during Kuwait’s historic transitional period. However, as I stated previously, Kuwait has a strong core of nationalism and patriotism to work with, so what is the point of being afraid if there is already a strong, established base? If we focus on the wording of the reports, we notice that Kuwait puts its national identity above global integration. Phrases such as “protecting Kuwait’s essence” demonstrates that there is no room for development of the Kuwaiti culture, as it is assumed that the culture is static. Any change is posed as a threat to what it means to be “Kuwaiti”.

If I could define cultural development, it would include the preservation and growth of the State’s identity and culture with the integration of modern concepts, like diversity and inclusion. After all, what is a State without its culture? Cultural development is the

process of sustaining, enhancing and illustrating cultural activities towards desirable futures. This includes the arts, music, language, food and more. The action of cultural development will essentially integrate modern concepts into the State's society without weakening its national essence. What is missing in Kuwait is teaching people to hold onto their Kuwaiti roots, and at the same time be modern and authentic.

Let me tell you a short story about when I was studying in Boston. I met an Italian girl, Alessandra, and she was fascinated about Arab culture. We grew a strong bond by sharing different perspectives and knowledge about where we grew up. She asked me a lot about Kuwait. One day, she asked me what our main source of income was before the discovery of oil. I struggled to answer. I had very limited knowledge about Kuwait's history, excluding the Iraqi invasion. This got me to explore why I know so little about the history of my own country. She, as an Italian, had so much knowledge on Italian culture, history, and politics. Why did I struggle? When I explored this concept further, I realized that most schools in Kuwait vaguely touch upon Kuwaiti history.

I went to an American school in Kuwait and it was mandatory for me to study US history, I actually knew more US presidents than Kuwaiti amirs. Why did I not take a course on Kuwait's history? Why is it mandatory for students to take a Sunni-dominant Islam class, even if they don't follow the same branch of Islam, but not take a Kuwait history class - a place they grew up in?

This is what makes people lose the essence of Kuwait. Nobody knows Kuwait's story, not even its people. We have a limited view of our history. Kuwait's history, in all perspectives, is what makes people authentic and true to their values. If people truly understand where they come from and why they are the way they are, without biases, modern ideologies can't take over their authenticity. Instead, there will be a form of integration. Constant development in all areas of the State have to be implemented to support this integration, however, these developments must cater towards Kuwait's society to successfully sustain the essence of Kuwait.

The New Kuwait 2035 Vision is on the right track. We just need to let go of the fear of losing our "Kuwaitiness" and instead focus on actual developments.

The World Bank Reforms

Fortunately, Kuwait decided to undertake a major reform of its public education, which included the revision of the national curriculum. The Ministry of Education, the National Center for Education Development, and the World Bank worked together to create an integrated and modernized education program. The project focused on learning outcomes, curriculum enhancement, effective teaching leadership, strengthening the education development center and its capacity for national assessment. Essentially, the main goal was to shift the content-based approach of our system to a competency based one. This was done through setting 4 reform pillars:

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| Quality Curriculum |
| Effective Teaching and Instructional Improvement |
| Quality Learning Environment |
| System Effectiveness |

Before we dive deep into Competence-Based Curriculums (CBC), it is important for us to understand what makes up a curriculum. There are three main players when it comes to curriculum development - teachers, students, and the learning material itself. Think of it as a game, if any of the players are not playing, there is no game! This means that the curriculum design would be unsuccessful if we don't take all players into consideration. Furthermore, the roles of each player should change based on the needs of our current and future generations. Since we are living in an information revolution, teachers are supposed to adjust to becoming facilitators, rather than knowledge suppliers. They should take into consideration students' new needs of adapting to our new, globalized world. Sustainable change should be adopted by implementing meaningful and relatable strategies from all perspectives, with all stakeholders in play.

“We are rebuilding the airplane while it is flying”

There is a feeling of uncertainty that comes with curriculum design. It is a risk because you are responsible for keeping the operation going, while testing the changes with actual participants in real time. However, it is a risk worth taking if it is done right.

The shift to a competency- based curriculum is a step to achieving sustainable development towards Kuwait’s goals. In simple terms, a competency based education system is one that does not focus on grades, instead, it focuses on how competent a student is in a specific subject. This is a more equitable form of education as it gives students flexibility and equal opportunities to show off their knowledge, based on their own learning styles. For example, let's say a teacher assigns students a task to research photosynthesis. Instead of saying they have to write an essay on the topic, the teacher gives students the flexibility to display their knowledge through different modes of their choice (a presentation, an essay, an infographic, etc.). It does not matter how the student presents their knowledge as long as they grasp it and are able to apply it. Students are given the support they need individually to move forward and master the subject and skills. Instead of moving forward based on age, students move forward based on where they are and what they are capable of. We live in an era where information can be acquired within the palm of our hands. Therefore, only exposing students to different content and subjects is a waste of time, rather, education should also be devoted to developing skills on how to look for, present, and analyze information.

The CBC of Kuwait enforces the development of human resources as it guarantees sustainable well-being of Kuwaiti citizens. It prepares them to work hard to achieve the national vision by integrating the competencies required from the youth to satisfy the challenges of our digital age and our knowledge economy. Keep in mind, I used the word *integrating*, which is an important aspect of curriculum development in Kuwait. An integrated method of education is one that connects different areas of studies by dissolving subject-matter lines. It emphasizes the unification of concepts and makes connections for students, allowing them to engage in activities that can be connected to real life. As Gardener states: “(Kuwait should) develop within the curriculum a clear structure that is built based on domain-specific expertise; in other words, to bring to school the “intellectual heart” or “experiential soul” of a discipline”. Students should be able to apply the knowledge they acquire into real life situations using customized methods of presentation based on their capabilities. An effective way of assessing this, is

testing students on specific domains. For example, if a student is being tested on Science, the domains that should be tested are:

1. Investigating
2. Analyzing
3. Explaining
4. Interrelating

Educating people is deeper than the cognitive part of learning. Again, there should be a holistic approach to education where values are incorporated to teach analysis, rationality, accountability, and more. You can't expect to throw a kid out into the real world with only cognitive knowledge.

The domain method, integrated into a CBC curriculum, allows the student to understand different ways of approaching a subject. The student, in this case, would learn how to investigate (let's use my previous example) photosynthesis, analyze how it works, explain it (in a way that best caters towards the student) and then connect it to real life, or other subjects. The student here develops new ways of thinking about the concept. This fosters curiosity and innovation, where people can look at “the big picture”, rather than looking at something in a one-dimensional perspective. This introduces critical thinking and encourages analytical reasoning, creativity, and even teamwork. As stated previously, censorship in the education system restricts this process because it limits the effectiveness of communication between teachers and students. How can a student fully investigate a concept if they are not allowed to explore other perspectives of the concept?

Going back to competences, Kuwait's “new” national framework, in collaboration with The World Bank, is demonstrated as a package of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, beliefs, and personal attributes that all students need to acquire from Grade 1 -12. This is done for their personal and professional development and inclusion within the Kuwaiti society. However, there were many issues with The World Bank plan as a whole. Firstly, the people working on the reform were not Arab (except 1 guy who had to fight his way to become a consultant). This is a situation where history repeats itself. As I stated previously, Egypt played a huge role in Kuwait's education system but, as we know, it came with many consequences since Egyptians simply did not understand the Kuwaiti society. The same thing happened with the World Bank reforms. The team was made up of people that are not from the country they are trying to reform, and on top of that, they were non-Arab speakers!

At the end of the day, no matter how effective the reform is set to be, it will never be a good fit to Kuwaiti society unless the reform is done by Kuwaitis. It is not like Kuwait does not have local educators who could work on it. On the contrary, there are many Kuwaiti professors and experts that are qualified and able to lead such a reform. They were simply not asked to do so.

Another issue with the World Bank plan was that the team working on it were not allowed to touch the textbooks. This reverses the reform itself. If the plan was to shift the educational methods in Kuwait, there is no way it would be successful without developing textbooks that cater towards the plan. It just makes education static. We can see that Kuwait has tried to fix its negative educational trajectory. We can also see that there are many issues when it comes to the ways we are trying to fix it.

The question now is: What should we do in the future?

Chapter 5: The Future

So, what is needed to sustain Kuwait? The answer is: many things! Like all other countries around the world, Kuwait is not perfect; but the issue is that Kuwait is not progressing. Development is needed for the sustainability of Kuwait. As we have covered in previous chapters, education plays a huge role in all aspects of Kuwait’s well-being. As I stated in the beginning, the purpose of this piece is to start a national dialogue about reaching Kuwait’s goals through its education system. Let us conclude this dialogue with ways to improve Kuwait’s education in order to achieve national unity and a knowledge-based economy.

I think it begins with changing the meaning of success to Kuwaiti people. There was a global poll that went around Instagram where people from different countries submitted responses to the question: “What is your dream job?”. The result for Asia is shown in Figure 5A, below:

Figure 5A:



Hart, Jordan. “Map Shows Each Country’s Dream Job Based on Google Search Data - and Reveals Most People Wish They Were Pilots.” *Business Insider*, Business Insider, <https://www.businessinsider.com/dream-jobs-world-revealed-based-google-searches-2023-1>.

As you can see, the majority of Kuwaitis' ambitions are to become influencers. Why? Because it simply became a trend to do so. It is interesting to see how we think. This illustrates peoples' laziness towards success; and Kuwaitis tie success with money. We want to get from point A-Z, the fastest and easiest way possible, as long as it brings in money. We see people opening up coffee shops and if they succeed, suddenly Kuwait is filled with coffee shops serving the exact same concepts. Companies started to adopt a more reactive strategy towards innovation by waiting to see who or what will succeed, and then replicating it. This copy-cat culture pulls us further away from an economy driven by knowledge. This reaction can be directly linked to our curriculum which is heavily dependent on memorization. People can only operate within the realm of the box they see led someone else to success. We copy the idea, follow the same steps, and voila! The same concepts again and again and again.

If you really think about it, everything that is considered new or innovative in Kuwait was actually an idea taken from abroad and adjusted to the Kuwaiti society. Nothing was *really* new and challenging. This can also link back to our easy money = easy success mentality. We see a concept succeed abroad so we implement it, but what do you think this does to our national identity moving forward? Eventually, nothing will truly be authentic or innovative.

To be honest, I don't blame us. We got used to the idea of taking things without giving anything back. I mean, the government subsidizes everything and we don't pay taxes. We have our oil money and we've been doing well so far, so why the need to diversify our economy if we are comfortable? That mentality, to me, is dangerous. Thankfully, we are living in, arguably, the most comfortable means compared to other countries around the world, but is this sustainable for our futures?

What if we can shift our narrative and tie success to a concept like innovation or creativity, or even happiness? We would foster children that don't define success with other people's measurements. I define success differently than you do; and pursuing our definitions of success, without comparison and without judgment, will lead us to the road to happiness. We, all, individually have to live up to our own potential and with that we will be able to foster people that want to work; not because they *need to* but because they *want to*. People will become inspired, motivated, happy, and in return will inspire and

motivate our future generations. This will lead Kuwait to a journey of innovation, development and unity.

Reality check! It is not that easy.

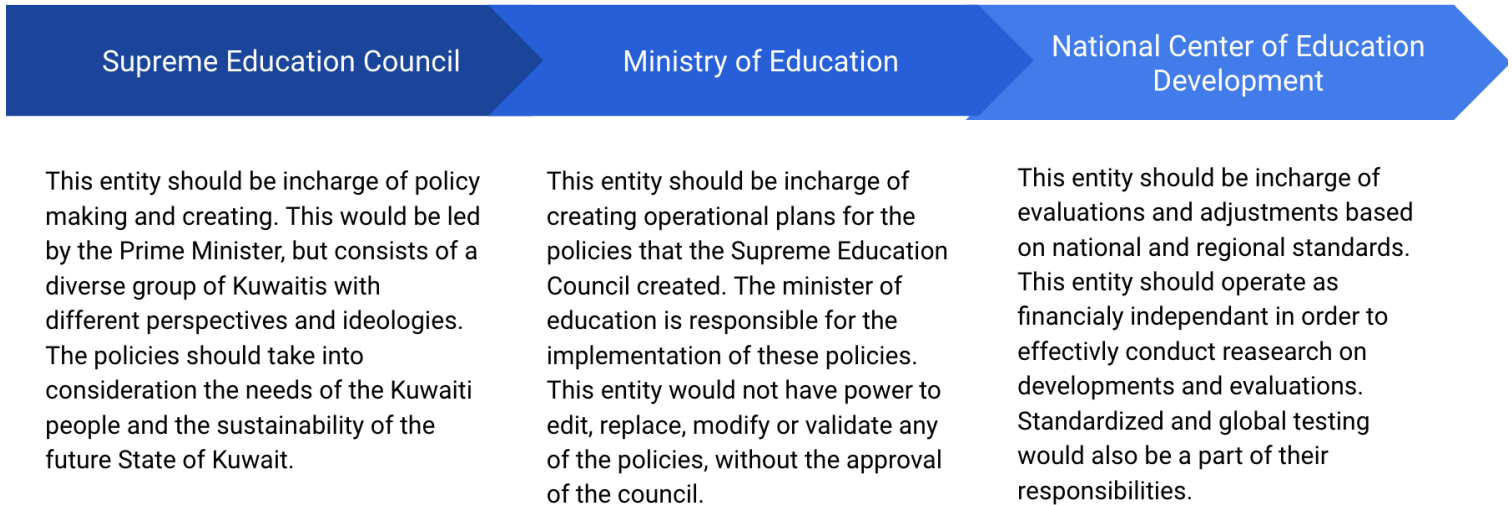
I am sorry to burst your bubble, but Kuwait's identity for decades has been accustomed to superiority, entitlement, and segregation. We can't just change it. We can't just change the meaning of success. Instead, let us look into a more realistic approach:

Practice What You Preach

It is important to tackle the overall education issue in Kuwait through a bottom-top approach. What is happening now is that we keep changing ministers and members of the parliament, but this just allows us to dive deeper into a cycle of failure and corruption. Members of the parliament should be the voice of the Kuwaiti people, but how can that be if gaining a seat in parliament is through corruption or *fazaa*? It is not diverse nor inclusive.

Reform is nothing without implementation; and we experienced failure after failure because of the lack of implementation. All words, no action. How can we mobilize a ministry that is archaic in nature and push progression? In Chapter 2, we dove into the organizational structure of Kuwait's education system and what it should look like. The separation of entities is crucial for the sustainability of education reform. Below is an exploration of what this new structure would generally look like and what responsibilities each should hold, inspired by Dr. Asfour:

Figure 5B:



For some reason, people keep forgetting that Kuwait is a democratic State. Therefore, when looking into policies and reforms, the correct question to ask is: What do the people want? This should be step 1 of the reform process, under the responsibilities of the council. It is also important to note that Kuwaiti society does not only mean Kuwaiti people. Expats should be taken into consideration when implementing these policies. Currently, 70% of Kuwait's population are non-nationals; to put it simply, 70% of Kuwait's society, in the eyes of the government, are irrelevant. How can we develop as a country if reforms and policies do not take the bulk of our society into consideration? At the end of the day, only 30% of the Kuwaiti population will progress, the rest will stay static (and that gets us nowhere). Therefore, it is important to create an inclusive reform program where its planning and application takes into consideration everybody that is legally residing in Kuwait, as they are the ones contributing to socio-economic developments.

I believe that the best way to do so is through implementing a Collective Impact Model into the system. Collective Impact is the commitment of a group of actors from different

sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration. In Kuwait's case, members of the group should consist of multiple people from all social binaries. The reason I say multiple people is because one representative may not be enough representation for a specific social group. For example, a Sunni can be a liberal or conservative; therefore to tackle all aspects of Kuwaiti social life, members representing each binary should be diverse and inclusive, as well. Not only that, but members of the council should be from all aspects of education - a teacher, a student, a policy maker, an economist, an employee in the public and private sector, etc. Different perspectives will allow for a more holistic and effective reform. This council will essentially act as a governmental agency providing consultation throughout the policy reform process and guidance through the communication between different entities. Once we have an inclusive agency and separate governmental entities, then we have to have clear definitions of our educational concepts.

What does it mean to be creative? What is integrity? What is education? The act of setting definitions that are agreed upon amongst all sectors of society is, in itself, a way of unification. Let the Kuwaiti people get involved; let them set their own definitions of success. If the citizens are involved, they will have more of an incentive to follow through with changed policies and reforms. They will *want* to do so, not *have* to do so. All in all, it is more democratic.

After definitions are agreed upon, a system for evaluation must be put into place. This system will most likely be formed through global standards of education with the integration of local goals; and should be under the responsibility of the National Center of Education. For example, a global standard is: "*a student should be able to recognize and respect diverse perspectives*". Kuwait instead would set a goal of "*examining and respecting perspectives of different groups, schools, and religions and identifying the influences of those perspectives*". This way Kuwait caters towards global standards, but at the same time, understands its society's and peoples' needs enough to establish an objective that caters towards one of its national goals. This method requires people that fully understand Kuwaiti society (what it lacks, what it needs, and how to influence it). A system for evaluation is essential for reform development. The government and citizens need to understand what is working and what needs work; and the only way that is possible is if there is clear data on the performance of the implementation of the reform.

Let us sum up what we need as a base for change when it comes to policy implementation for Kuwait:

1. Inclusivity amongst all social binaries and in all aspects of policy formation.
2. Separate entities that understand their responsibilities towards reform planning and implementation.
3. Clear definitions.
4. A form of evaluation.

But, how do we start?

In my opinion, the best way to tackle a problem is to understand what exactly the problem is. By now, we should all know that Kuwait's education system needs re-engineering. Therefore, I will propose a potential approach for the scope of work, which consists of 4 phases that can be applied to education reforms in Kuwait.

Phase 1: Maturity Assessment

The first phase requires data collection from all aspects of Kuwaiti society, including non-nationals. Data should be collected on their experiences as teachers, students, reformists, educators, managers, and more. They should address what is doing well, what needs to change, and what needs to completely disappear. Essentially, you are revising the people that went through important experiences. Developments should start locally, not from people high in power. We have to start listening to the benefactors of our society to truly understand what our society needs. The stories that will be gathered is more important than the structure of the reform as it will be the basis of what the new reforms will be built on.

We will have quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data will be easy to analyze as it is solely based on numerical values - What is Kuwait's global ranking in Mathematics? What is the capacity of each classroom? It is very straightforward. However, qualitative data is more complex - How effective is our teacher training? Are students able to connect classroom ideas to real life experiences? This type of data is harder to measure and is more prone to conflicts between binaries. It will require field work with observations, understanding, and interpreting behavior.

Phase 1 should also include an assessment of the key functions and operations of the process of policy formation. Data should be collected on transparency, efficiency, and even legitimacy of the key people and entities involved. How are they operating? Is the way it's operating working?

This phase is dedicated to understanding what our current state is. Only when we know where we are *now*, can we determine where we want to be in the *future*. Therefore, the final step in phase 1 is to determine our future state, which is all dependent on Kuwait's national goals. In this case, our future state is to achieve national unity and shift to a knowledge based economy. But, how do we get there? This brings me to phase 2.

Phase 2: Gap Analysis

This phase is dedicated to identifying gaps between your current state and your desired state. Think of it as hurdling: You begin in the start line, you end in the finish line, but there are hurdles you must jump over to reach the finish line. In this case, the gaps are the hurdles. To put it simply, if Kuwait sets a goal of increasing the amount of desks in a classroom from 20 desks to 45 desks within the span of a year. Your current state is 20 desks, your desired state is 45 desks, so your gap is 25 desks in the span of a year.

By defining gaps, the journey to reach your goal becomes simpler. The hurdles will not seem to be too complex. The gap analysis helps you drill down into the root causes behind failures. It creates a roadmap that aligns the current operations with desired objectives. If the desired goal is quantitative, then it'll be easy to visualize different trajectories than if it is qualitative. You can ask yourself: Why were we unable to get 25 more desks? Where is the issue? Then you can work towards solving the issue.

This is where we will be able to understand what the gap is exactly. I gave you a very simple example, however in the real world, there are many different factors that can contribute to the gap or may shift your focus towards something that seems like it is a gap, where in reality it is not. This was evident in the World Bank Reform Project, discussed in Chapter 4. The gap that the reformists focused on was the education curriculum itself, however in reality, they should have focused on the lack of Kuwaiti people on the reform team, before they address the issues of the curriculum. A gap analysis would have caught that crack.

Furthermore, if the goal is qualitative, then that is a different story. Phase 3 will be essential for qualitative data as it integrates standards and frameworks that can guide local policy makers on where qualitative goals should be heading.

Phase 3: Benchmarking

This phase is where we align our goals to global and local standards to meet overall national goals. For example, the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages have 5 goals that are required for somebody to be fluent in a language: Communication, Culture, Connection, Comparison, and Community. Since Kuwait has a goal of shifting to a knowledge based economy, reading and writing should be a part of Kuwait's standards. This way, Kuwait meets global standards and adheres to national standards within the same reform. Aligning goals to global standards allows Kuwait to participate in international dialogue. Kuwait is currently segregated from the world and filters the way it looks at societal differences through narrow perspectives. If you think about it, the only contribution Kuwait has globally is through money - either investments, aid, charity, or oil. Aligning governmental objectives with global entities allows Kuwait to join the global conversation on development. Also, it can contribute to the legitimacy of the policy reform as many countries already follow global standards.

This brings us to the question of what does this alignment look like? Alignment of the reform plan with national goals and the reform itself with global goals are both through creating strategic pillars, dedicated to reaching the policy's future state. Strategic pillars are the backbone of your strategy. It is important to note that they are not the goal, but the roadmap to achieve the goal. For example, in Kuwait's case, a goal would be national unity. A pillar would be critical thinking, as it is part of the roadmap on how to achieve national unity. The pillars should be translated and applied to the educational reform strategy in its entirety, including the different entities and the scope of work of the reform implementation. All of the planning for change needs to align with the key pillars of the project.

Under each pillar there will be a set of Key Performance Indexes (KPI). This is a quantifiable measure of performance over time, dedicated to meeting each pillar, thus meeting each goal. It helps the team focus on what is important. For example, if our pillar is critical thinking, then some KPIs may include:

- Increasing students' exposure to different social binaries/perceptions in Kuwait.
- Increasing teachers' flexibility to explore and use different methods of learning.
- Expanding students' ability to explain and analyze perspectives they don't agree with.

These indexes are able to support the pillar of critical thinking and close the gap between our current and future state. If we see growth or improvements among these KPIs, we would notice that we are aligned with our pillar and are slowly reaching the goal of national unity. It keeps the team on track and is a way to evaluate progress. As H. James Harrington states “If you can’t measure something, you can’t understand it. If you can’t understand it, you can’t control it. If you can’t control it, you can’t improve it”.

Phase 4: Action

The final phase is dedicated to the actual implementation of the reform. We now have a roadmap that takes us to our future state and a way to evaluate each stop within the roadmap. The only thing left to do is to take action. This may sound like the easiest part, however, Kuwait struggles with it the most. External factors should not affect the reform rollout as long as it directly impacts the reform itself. Other than that, even through political turmoil, the reform shall go on.

It is important to note that through the reform process there should be constant evaluations against pillars and KPIs to ensure there is no sidetracking. Furthermore, there should be monthly evaluations after the implementation of the reform to understand what change it has done and if it is aiding Kuwait's overall goals. This should be under the responsibility of only the National Center of Education Development. However, it is important to note again, that if the change of the policy is required, only the Supreme Education Council should have the power to modify and edit the reform.

Conclusion

Throughout Kuwait’s history, its strategic position demonstrated an outward looking vision. However, aspects of our national identity contradicts this vision. The Kuwaiti experience is unique and has been moving forward with autonomy. If we examine Kuwait’s stories from its establishment to what it is today, we could see that Kuwait has a

strong understanding of itself. We are small but powerful. We are present and we don't take sides. We have peace and individuality. But we are exclusive and lack progression.

The journey towards the sustainability of Kuwait and meeting its national goals of unity and a knowledge-based economy begins with critical thinking. Critical thinking will foster the exploration and acceptance of identities. This exploration is uncomfortable, especially for a group of people that are not used to exploring and presenting their opinions. The only time you will learn anything worth learning is if you are uncomfortable and open to different points of views. It is important to also teach the difference between facts and opinions. As you know, our national identity consists of entitlement and superiority, which may sometimes lead people to believe that their opinions are facts. People should be encouraged to challenge their own opinions; and only then we will truly grow.

Serious reforms that follow through and advance the society and economy is necessary. We must have a clear vision. We must select fit and educated leaders that have the will and motivation to make a change. We need justice, transparency and inclusivity.

Without inclusivity, Kuwait can't move forward.

However, I can't help but think that I am in a new bubble. I am a person that was educated in Kuwait and in the United States. I am a person that popped my Kuwaiti bubble, however, what if my perception of all of this is just a new, westernized bubble?

The End

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