



Restructuring Teacher Policies for the sustainability of the Teaching Profession in Kuwait

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received: 20 October 2021

Received in revised form: 29 December 2021

Accepted: 27 February 2022

DOI: 10.14689/ejer.2022.98.03

Keywords

Teacher policies; Education Reform; Effective Teaching; Preservice programs

Purpose: The Kuwaiti context in relation to teaching profession is challenging, and the current policies are inadequate for improving teacher effectiveness and making major progress in education. The focus of the paper is the description of the set of teacher policies framework to analyze and assess teacher policies, as well as a review of the evidence base that supports it.

Methodology: In order to identify the changes needed, a qualitative study was conducted to review the current teachers' policies and regulations. The participants of the study included teachers, department heads, assistant directors, and school directors from all public and private education institutions across all educational districts, and also a few directors of administration from various educational regions and Islamic education institutions.

Findings: it was found that although the NTFW had outlined the teacher quality standards to be adopted in higher education national policies, the Kuwaiti government has not yet utilized these newly developed national standards for teachers that explicitly defined the knowledge, skills, and competencies that a prospective teacher needs to possess in order to be hired. **Implications to Research and practice:** While the review did not present a blueprint for action, nor was it meant to, it is hoped that the findings and recommendations provided therein would help identify the first steps towards the provision of a roadmap for sustained career-long of teachers in Kuwait and provide a basis for the formulation of policies on which a *Teacher Education Strategy* and a *National Teacher Framework* can be built.

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Introduction and Background

A global concern during the past few decades is with how to raise the effectiveness of teachers. This issue has been reflected by a series of factors but mostly by student outcomes which have been found correlating with socio-economic progress (Marsh & Roche, 1997). Studies have found that countries with higher student achievement in international exams have higher rates of economic growth; International assessments such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) have provided increasingly comprehensive information on student learning and how it varies due to teacher's effectiveness (Thompson et al., 2018).

In 2015, an education technical cooperation program was initiated by the Government of Kuwait in collaboration with the World Bank (Simone & Bazilian, 2019). This program, referred to as *The School Education Quality Improvement Program* (SEQI 2), is an extensive Reimbursable Advisory Services (RAS) engagement (Alhashem, 2021). The development objective was grounded in the five-year Kuwait National Education Development Plan (NEDP). It was based on the conceptual model for integrated education reform and focused on five core interventions known as the *Integrated Education Reform Program* (IERP): (i) a competence-based curriculum; (ii) effective teaching; (iii) school leadership; (iv) standards and assessments; and (v) system capacity building. The intended IERP outcomes were: (i) improved quality of core educational processes and products in curriculum, teaching and learning, classroom assessment, leadership, and supervision, as a prerequisite for increased student achievement on national and international assessments; and (ii) increased capacity to establish and use accountability systems for improved education decision making (Buabbas et al., 2019).

The State of Kuwait has undertaken a major comprehensive reform of the national education system in the last three decades, with one of its components focusing specifically on improving teacher effectiveness in the classroom (Almanea, 2018). In order to ascertain whether the aims of this initiative had been achieved, the National Center of Educational Development (NCED) with the support of the World Bank has studied the current status of teachers in Kuwait. This collaboration resulted in the initiation of four main projects to support the teaching profession. The objective of Component 2 titled "Effective Teaching" was to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Its key deliverables were the development and implementation of: (i) a National Teacher Policy and Regulatory Framework, (ii) a Professional Development program linked to teacher performance standards and teacher career path; and (iii) a teacher self-assessment tool based on these standards.

As teachers are the most important school-based factor in determining student achievement, the established standards are expected to serve as a guide for the adoption of specific skills and practices while teaching. The teacher framework delineates and collates all policies related to teaching education and practice, from their preservice programs to their retirement and exiting the field. Moreover, it works as a reference for all stakeholders, school leaders, and educators (World Bank, 2013).

Educational policies are considered one of the core elements in the package of initiatives, reforms, and approaches that the State of Kuwait seeks to achieve through its various institutions in order to realize its societal obligations and goals. Since these core

elements of the educational process are traditionally centered on the student, the teacher, and the curriculum, in the Policy Framework, NCED has focused on the status of the teaching profession in the State of Kuwait. The Policy Framework was developed to include several workable policies intended to regulate teachers' career path from the time of their appointment until retirement.

This research provides a framework for analyzing teacher policies in education system in Kuwait in order to support informed education policy decisions. It provides a lens through which government of Kuwait, and other interested parties can focus the attention on what the relevant dimensions regarding teacher policies are, what teacher policies seem to matter most to improve teacher effectiveness, and how to think about prioritizing policies within reform process. There is a need to develop mechanisms for improving teachers' effectiveness at various stages, starting from the preservice teacher colleges, and pursue it as they progress in their careers. In this context, the goal of these policies should be to enable educational decision makers and stakeholders to understand the specifics of the teaching profession, especially the aspects related to student learning.

Keeping this larger objective in view and to improve the standards of education in the State of Kuwait, a few objectives were identified as guidelines for the MOE, which are as follows:

1. Adopt clear terms and regulations to ensure that only the most talented individuals enter the field of education.
2. Invest into the development of teachers' professional capacity, while ensuring that teacher training programs are in compliance with students' needs and are linked to incentives.
3. Adopt teacher assessments based on clear criteria.
4. Ensure fair and unbiased treatment of all teachers in terms of their rights and duties.

These objectives were the lens to build the following research questions of the study: What are the regulations and laws that regulate teachers' policies in Kuwait? How are they functioning together in different institutions?

Literature Review

- *Teacher Policies*

Policy frameworks provide a lens and general guidance to any education system (Murray et al., 2019). Each set of policies explains the expectations of an individual in any system or any action that occurs within the system and within the boundaries set by the policy framework. This may support certain types of actions and avoid others (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Thus, understanding any set of policies providing to the field more options to improve educational practices should be the first step towards systemic improvement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The analysis of policy framework and teachers' regulations allow for a better understanding of where to emphasize on and take actions towards improvement. The analysis of level of consistency of policy framework allows assessing the probability that it will achieve the expected outcomes, and help other related policies, such as having mechanisms to assess teacher performance and student learning, and a salary scale that makes performance-based incentives relevant (Murray et al., 2019).

Additionally, the analysis of policies, regulations, and frameworks may be more supportive during the implementation phase to figure out the gaps (Murray et al., 2019). The process of implementation of sets of policies will help in revisiting and assessing them which will help in understanding errors, discrepancy among policies even if the analysis. In order to understand why a certain policy is not producing the expected results, it is important to be able to assess whether this is due to a fault in the implementation process, to a mismatch between a policy and its context, or to a lack of internal consistency within the policy. While the analysis of policy frameworks does not allow carefully assessing all possibilities, it does provide a solid starting point for assessing the latter (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988).

Educational policies are considered one of the important basic elements in the package of initiatives, reforms, and approaches that the State of Kuwait seeks to achieve through its various institutions, in order to realize its societal obligations and goals. The policy framework aims at developing mechanisms to raise the efficiency of teachers at various stages: at the preservice teacher colleges or after graduation and appointment all through their career in the educational field. In this context, teachers' policies are designed as a road map for decision makers to enable them to make policies and regulations, which significantly impacts the standard of education in the country (Almanea, 2018). The focus remains on the need to develop teaching profession and to ensure better educational results. However, one of the problems encountered in implementing these policies is that teaching quality is scattered, incomplete or, presents contradictory findings (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Until recently, inadequate indication is still taking place that impacts negatively many teacher policies.

- *Teacher Policies Status in Kuwait*

There is no doubt that expectations of education and schools in Kuwait today are much more demanding than in the past. The role of education in the economic and social development of the country and in the preparation of our future generations is now undisputed. Concerns have been expressed by key stakeholders, as well as evidence from national and international assessments have consistently revealed that our schooling system is not providing our students with the required opportunities to develop high quality learning and to perform to the best of their abilities. In fact, the results of Kuwait in the last (TIMSS 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019) and in (PIRLS 2006 and 2011) place our country in a very disadvantaged position (I. Alhouti, 2018).

Moreover, the report on Kuwait's competitiveness shows that it has declined in the ranking from position 48 to position 75. Not to mention the declining quality of primary schools, Kuwait ranks 92 globally and 94 in terms of incompatibility of the quality of the education system with the needs of a competitive economy (Alhashem, 2021). Therefore, part of the reforming process is to dedicate to reform teachers' status because no educational development project will succeed if it cannot create and develop teacher's capacities to respond to these new challenges. The base of the development process will rise from professional development of teacher's competences (Alhashem, 2021).

In Kuwait, teachers' preparation, selection, and ongoing training are confronted with several challenges which must be addressed immediately (Alhashem & Alhouti, 2021; Ibrahim Alhouti & Male, 2017). Individuals who enter the teaching profession come from a variety of national and international institutions and no mechanism or criterion for determining their suitability for teaching is presently available. In addition, the statistics related to 2016 and 2017 demonstrate that Kuwaiti colleges and universities have dramatically increased their intake of teacher candidates, and there is no guarantee that this expansion will result in academic excellence (Statistical Analysis Group, 2017). Consequently, it is imperative to establish the minimum standards that must be met by all newly graduating teachers in order to ensure that schools are staffed with well-qualified teachers.

The Kuwaiti government has prioritized "localizing teacher professional development in schools" which is consistent with good practice globally. However, global experience shows that it is important to provide schools with technical support and orientation in order to make school-based professional development productive (Alhashem, 2021). The school-level collaboration among teachers is also stimulated by providing teachers with expert feedback on their classroom practice and support resources (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The participating teachers are provided a practical guidebook and video examples of effective classroom practices, which they find particularly helpful, as their classroom management has improved significantly and student learning increased in just one year (Bruns & Luque, 2015). These findings confirm that most efficient educational policies are invariably designed on the basis of good data and analysis of the underlying issues. Educational stakeholders that realize that research is an investment rather than a luxury reap gains in the form of more effective policies and more efficient spending.

The evidence available further indicates that a good evaluation system must be comprehensive, and should incorporate the following major dimensions of teacher quality, namely: (1) expert assessments of teachers' classroom performance; (2) tests of content mastery; and (3) regular feedback from school directors, colleagues, and students. Recently, Alazmi and Al-Mahdy (2020) observed that teacher performance evaluation systems that cover these dimensions are consistently able to differentiate teachers by quality, and these quality differentials are correlated with student learning gains. In most countries, teacher quality is enhanced by: (i) defining explicit national teacher standards that set a new, and much higher, bar for quality; and (ii) developing a set of tests (including teaching a sample class) that screen candidates against these standards. For the tests to be effective, they must be rigorous and should measure teachers' content mastery, understanding of child development, pedagogy and classroom management techniques, and assess teachers' socio-emotional competencies.

In most countries where teacher quality is perceived to be low, the problem begins with the entry into teacher training programs, often due to a proliferation of private teacher training institutions with very low entry standards and low quality (Peng et al., 2014). Nonetheless, even well-resourced public institutions are sometimes unable to apply rigorous academic standards for admission and/or develop an excellent teaching faculty and high-quality instruction (Bruns & Luque, 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In most countries, governments are not directly involved in admissions to higher education because of university autonomy. The issue of colleges of education was addressed in Finland in the 1970s by reducing the number of teacher training programs and

concentrating resources on institutions that would produce only the teaching cadre that the country really needed. This practice helped in conserving resources by limiting the number of graduates entering the profession, while also raising teacher quality by mandating that only the top 20% of high school graduates would be admitted into training programs (Bruns & Luque, 2015).

Great teaching does not just happen. Teachers need to be developed, supported, and rewarded to promote inspired learning that will develop lifelong capacities in students. To achieve this ambitious goal, teachers need the capabilities to collaborate and learn from others, to assess their own practice and respond to feedback, and leverage technology to improve student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Effective teachers are highly proficient in: (i) assessing student needs and talents; (ii) evaluating the impact of their teaching; (iii) intervening and adapting multiple learning methods; and (iv) providing praise and regular feedback to students on their learning (Bruns & Luque, 2015).

Method

Research Design and Procedure

The present study was conducted using the ethnography approach, as the aim was to gain insight into the education system in Kuwait through participant observations, face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders, and focus group discussions involving different representatives on the educational community. The gathered data was transcribed and subjected to qualitative analysis allowing common themes to emerge.

The research took place first by analyzing the official documents related to teachers' policies, followed by interviews, meetings and discussions. The researchers tried to identify the roles and regulations of each institution that was involved with the teaching profession. A conceptual framework was designed and shaped in line with the World Bank consultants and developed with the guidance from a Working Group, comprising Ministry of Education staff (supervisors, principals, teachers), faculty members from both Kuwait University (KU) and from Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), and the NCED in collaboration with the World Bank. In addition to working group consultations, which were held from May 2015 to May 2016, a series of informal discussions also took place with international research scholars on teachers' effectiveness and motivated student learning, and developing an education system to support this vision.

- *NTFW Data Collection Time line*

The data was collected in time series from April 2015 to December 2019. The following account is evident of the progress that was made in each phase:

April 2015–February 2016

- i. A Teacher Policy Committee was formed which met regularly from April 2015 to March 2016 to help develop this study. The members of this Committee included faculty from the two preservice colleges of education (KU and PAAET), Teachers' Association, and school staff, as listed at the end of the NTFW document.
- ii. The World Bank technical team helped in defining the initial broad outlines of the framework by presenting alternatives for teacher's policies and best practices. Several meetings were held with the NTFW Committee.

- iii. The NTFW Committee submitted their comments to NCED by the end of February 2016.

March–April 2016

- i. Short Policy Action note prepared by the WB technical team. At the request of NCED, this supplemental note focused on presenting specific actions for the following priority areas: (i) preservice teacher education and recruitment; (ii) professional development; and (iii) incentivizing schools and teachers to improve teaching practice.
- ii. NCED held district-level meetings to discuss teacher-related elements of the framework. These meetings were organized for various educational segments and school districts, as listed at the end of the NTFW document.

May–August 2016

- i. Actions from the Short Policy Action note were prepared within a broader strategic framework across all policies, and were grouped under short-term (2016–2018) and long-term actions (2019–2023). This background document is to be used to prioritize policies and their execution, starting in September 2017.

September 2016–March 2017

- i. A second round of meetings was held by NCED to discuss the second NTFW draft with colleges of education and the administrative representatives of the Ministry of Education (MoE).
- ii. NCED revised the NTFW draft in alignment with feedback.
- iii. WB technical team prepared detailed comments for NCED.
- iv. Agreement reached with NCED to conduct a Quality Enhancement Review by April 2017.

September 2017–December 2019

- i. The final draft was completed and sent to the Steering Committee for approval by the Minister.
- ii. Due to Ministerial change and the period of COVID-19 Pandemic, the action plan of the project did not proceed forward as it was supposed to.

• *Participants*

The participants of this research included teachers, department heads, assistant directors, and school directors from all public and private education institutions across all educational districts, who were sent invitations to participate in this study. A separate invitation was also extended to the directors of administration from various educational regions and Islamic education institutions, as shown in [Table 1](#). There were 14 groups in total with one of the groups comprising the Minister of Education and the Assistant Undersecretaries. Other groups included managers and supervisors (supervisor general/technical supervisor/senior supervisor), members from teacher associations grad levels, subject area teachers covering 11 school subjects, teachers from private schools, school principals, KU professors, and professors from PAAET. The research standards and criteria were presented to each group and the members were asked to provide their feedback, comments, and suggestions.

Table 1

Participants from School Districts, Private Education, Teachers' Association, and Technical Supervision

| | Asamah | Hawalli | Mubarak Al-Kabir | Ahmadi | Farwaniah | Jahrah | Private Sector |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|------------------|--------|-----------|--------|----------------|
| Teachers | 7 | 8 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 9 | 0 |
| Heads of Department | 6 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 0 |
| Supervisors | 3 | 1 | 1 | | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Asst. Directors | 4 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| Directors | 5 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Department Directors | 5 | | | | | | |
| Technical Supervisors | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| College of Education, KU | | | | 5 | | | |
| College of Basic Education | | | | 20 | | | |
| PAAET | | | | | | | |
| Total | | | | 168 | | | |

- *Data Analysis*

Data analysis took place periodically at the end of every school year, after an average of three to four meetings or intensive sessions. In the first year, the World Bank team proposed the initial broad outlines of the framework by considering findings yielded by previous studies on teacher policies and best practices from other countries. The result of this effort resulted in framing a conceptual teacher framework aimed at better organizing the teacher qualification process and ensuring that only the most capable individuals would enter and remain in the profession. Its further aim was to outline a clear career ladder prepared by the teacher frame of reference committee and in cooperation with the World Bank within one of the World Bank agreement projects with the Ministry of Education.

Once the framework was established, the committee prepared a draft that contained the following nine policies as well as related materials: (1) Admission to the colleges of preparation; (2) Preservice training; (3) Teacher assignment; (4) Workforce distribution; (5) Career stages and incentives; (6) Professional development; (7) Teacher quotas; (8) Teacher evaluation; and (9) Teachers' rights and duties

After the committee had finished its work, the committee chairman recommended the creation of a series of discussion seminars, allowing groups in different educational fields to share their views, thus enriching the draft before entering the accreditation stage.

The second and the third year focused on revisions, expansion and finalizing what was proposed in the first year. The following paragraphs are the summary of the sessions and workshops, distributed from selection of candidates for teacher training to policy related to continuous professional development and workforce planning.

- i. In relation to *selection of candidates for teacher training*, most focus groups put greater emphasis on the competitive nature of the candidate selection process. They stated that not all applicants should be selected for training (perhaps more true of the social sciences and primary fields than of the sciences and mathematics). Issues to be considered included: Who shall we select? What criteria shall we use? How shall we cull the trainees who are unable to demonstrate their competence? Teachers have the responsibility of training (and nurturing) the youth of the nation, and only the best can be entrusted with this task. A need was felt to design a policy framework that recognizes the critical need to establish a proper relationship with the training bodies (KU and CBE). It was also mentioned that tertiary institutions often over-emphasize the academic side of teacher training in comparison with the practical (practicum) side of the teacher's training. It was recommended that only the Ministry of Education should be responsible for the quality of the teacher and the quality of the students taught in schools. The Ministry was also the major employer and should make the decisions as to where a teacher graduate should deliver the quality education which the Ministry needs.
- ii. In relation to the second policy, *Pre-Service Training*, it was emphasized that modern teacher pre-service training incorporates: (1) teaching subject content (to a level of academic excellence); (2) child development (including child psychology, child maturation and ability to learn, "foundations of education", etc); (3) teaching methodology (lesson types, motivation, discipline, etc); and, (4) learning through "practicum" (teaching practice). Pre-service teacher training is much more than subject knowledge. The policy framework correctly recognizes the importance of the practical training of teachers. All teacher trainees require early and extensive experience in the classroom under the direct supervision of a Master Teacher. If possible this should be integrated throughout the four years of training. If not, the practicum should be at least for a duration of 20 weeks in the end-on education diploma year. This should include observation of the Master Teacher at work; preparation of sets of lessons by the teacher; teaching of sets of lessons in all subjects to be taught; critiques of those lessons by the Master Teacher; testing procedures; interactive lessons; experiential lessons; lessons utilizing a wide range of technology (computers, libraries, audio-visual aides); and so on.
- iii. In terms of the third policy, *recruitment and appointment procedures*, the policy framework insisted on recruitment procedures which should reflect the highest standards and enable the weeding out of the weaker applicants. The introduction of a Teacher License was suggested as a necessary barrier to ensure only the best are employed. The policy framework sought to identify clear standards for the selection and recruitment of teachers. For example, the Teacher Law of 2005 defined four groups of standards required of all teachers: (1) Professional expertise (subject expertise); (2). Pedagogical competence (knowledge and skills of teaching); (3) Social role (at community level); and, (4) Personality development (moral beliefs and standards, behavior, etc). it was suggested that countries should define similar groups of standards which can each be expanded into a broader list of behaviors. However, it was felt necessary to identify and

demonstrate methods how each behavior could be assessed; and what evidence teachers could produce to illustrate their performance in each standard.

- iv. In terms of the policy related to *continuous professional development*, the teacher policy framework highlighted the need of a program of continuous professional development for all teachers. It was proposed that the training structure should be organized around three nodes of in-service activity and delivery, namely: (1) district training centers; (2) school committees chaired by the Principal; and, (3) identification of individual teacher's needs. It is important to operate on a train-the-trainer (TOT) model to ensure innovative methods transferred quickly to the classroom. Centrally trained and appointed Master Teachers were selected and trained in new methods. These teams of trainers should then train school teams at district resource centers. The final step should be to train classroom teachers. This model could vary between primary and secondary teachers. For example, it should establish separate primary and secondary learning groups - the latter to focus more deeply on their specialist subject area.
- v. In terms of the policy related to *assessment of performance*, the teacher policy framework identified the importance of on-going assessment of each teacher's performance. Some educational systems simply maintain records of teachers' service and reports written by the principal or members of the school's senior executive that are taken into account for promotion or other reason. There may also be an agreement on new school duties to perform (school duties should be rotated every two or three years to "round-out" a teacher professional role). The classroom teacher and the supervisor usually should meet quite regularly to assess improvements, smooth out difficulties, and facilitate the professional performance process. At the end of each year, the teacher and his/her supervisor should meet to assess progress made during the year, and to write down, say, 5 or 6 goals as target for the following year.
- vi. In terms of policy related to *managing teacher under-performance* (managing "low productivity"), the underperforming teacher was admitted as a very difficult management situation in all education systems. A need was felt to take a great care at the point of the beginning of the employment and during probation to ensure teaching ability is properly sought and assessed. Tertiary institutions are too often more impressed by the academic success of their graduates than their teaching ability. Many lecturers have never taught in a school classroom and consequently do not value it highly enough - some, they say, may even be "refugees from the classroom". In some countries there is a requirement that all lecturers responsible for training teacher undergraduates should return to the classroom on exchange for one or two terms every five years to re-focus on the key issue. In planning the management of such teachers it is very important that they receive "natural justice" from the system. i.e. once weaknesses are identified, every assistance must be given. Intensive joint lesson planning including goal setting with a Senior Teacher, classroom observation and demonstration lessons, inter-visitation with good teachers in other classes, and constant counselling - all are needed. In some systems there will be an Industrial Tribunal to which teachers can take their case if they are unfairly treated or dismissed - the judge should call for the written evidence to support the case: such as written instructions to the teacher; written evidence of the weaknesses and deficiencies identified; notes given to the teacher on each occasion when he/she was visited in the classroom; etc. If a judge rules for re-instatement of an incompetent teacher, quite often the morale of other teachers (and school) is negatively affected.

- vii. In terms of the policy related to *workforce planning*, in a relatively small education system, opportunities for promotion to senior positions such as the school principal, can be limited. This can have an impact on the morale of younger teachers which are energetic and ambitious, and seek to implement new teaching and management strategies. It is important to see this as an overall workforce planning issue. It is important to train and employ only the number of teachers needed. To train too many is a waste of a nation's resources and will bring pressure to bear on the Ministry to employ a large number of unnecessary teachers – often in subject areas where there is already an excess. When this happens, the education system begins to lose focus. The period loadings given to different teachers in different subject areas can vary widely, and if teachers continue to be paid the same salary, then there can be a serious undermining of the teacher's morale. School staffing policy needs to be tightly defined. Class sizes for various grades need to be clearly stated and at the end of each year teacher vacancies need to be carefully defined and predicted accurately for the next year. No commitments can be given that all teachers trained will be employed each year
- viii. In terms of Policy related to *Rights and duties of the teacher* (teaching hours/administrative tasks), the rights and duties of all teachers should be clearly defined and understood. Many school systems have a *Teachers' Handbook* which is available and issued to all teachers but not in Kuwait. This sets out the teaching hours and duties of classroom teachers and many other categories of teachers such as those teaching in Special Schools (schools for various types of student disability). A part of the duties of teachers is outside the classroom – such school duties might include coaching sporting teams, assisting in the preparation of a school play or musical production, training a debating team, taking a chess club and other forms of school club, etc.

Results

To raise the quality of the teaching staff is a big challenge in Kuwait, as the government has the largest leverage at the point of initial hiring. Most countries have increased teacher quality by: (i) defining explicit national teacher standards that set a new, and much higher, bar for quality; and (ii) developing a set of tests (sometimes including teaching a sample class) that screen candidates. The most beneficial tests are rigorous, and measure teachers' content mastery, understanding of child development, pedagogy and classroom management techniques, and assess teachers' socio-emotional competencies (Almanea, 2018; Wiseman et al., 2014). Several countries have established excellent national standards for teachers and these examples might be helpful when developing the same in Kuwait. It would also be prudent to involve expert teachers from across the school system in the design process, but all parties must recognize that the goal is to set a much higher bar for future teachers (Alsaleh, 2020).

The excess of teachers at the school level is typically managed by assigning a different teacher to each subject, due to which even young students are exposed to many different teachers each day. This practice diverges from the approach adopted in most other countries, where the youngest students are taught by a single teacher, as this is less disruptive for the students and more efficient instructionally. As in Kuwait teachers are also unevenly distributed across schools, excess staffing is particularly acute in girls' schools. As a result of this practice, education spending is inefficient because the budget designated for important non-salary expenditures, such as information and communications technology (ICT), books, assessments, program evaluation, information management, professional development, and research is inadequate (Aljassar & Altammar, 2020).

Therefore, each of the proposed actions under the Articles should be reviewed and amended where necessary to ensure that they fully support the core goals of effective teaching. For example, it is essential to seek answers to some questions: Will the actions help to attract the best and brightest to the profession? Are preservice preparation programs well aligned with the new curriculum and assessment processes to ensure that newly qualified teachers possess the practical skills required for effective teaching? Will proposed actions support beginning teachers in their first few years of teaching? Will outstanding teachers and schools be encouraged and recognized? Are incremental professional learning and performance management systems aligned?

The broader technical design should ideally be completed in conjunction with the formulation of implementation details to ensure that recommendations are feasible. This should be followed by crafting administrative procedures. A decision also needs to be taken on the strategies that can eliminate excessive teacher rotation, especially in grades 1–3, which precludes bonding and undermines learning. Measures need to be put in place to prevent seemingly random emergence of new teacher regulations that undermine the current reform process. For example, the new CSC regulation allows for an unlimited number of teachers to take up to three years of paid leave for personal reasons. If this regulation is followed by many of the newly trained teachers (i.e., those that have passed the new competency-based assessments) this will adversely impact student learning and the current reform process.

Nevertheless, an equally powerful policy change is to shift from automatic promotions based on years of service to promotions based on evaluated performance, as such merit-based system could change teachers' incentives profoundly. School districts across the United States and a growing number of developing countries have adopted this reform (Bruns & Luque, 2015) However, it only works if the teacher performance evaluation has legitimacy, i.e., it is perceived by teachers as based on relevant measures of teacher quality and is administered in a fair and incorruptible manner.

The results of all interviews, focus groups and studying all rules and regulations are summarized in the [Table 2](#) in the form of a matrix.

Table 2*NTFW Policies and Comments*

| Issues | Policies | Global Best Practices | Comments |
|---|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Preservice</u>: Trainees are being appointed in schools without: • adequate pedagogical skills in the new competency-based curriculum (subject methods and new assessment requirements) or • sufficient teaching experience. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Policy One</u>: Selection and admission to accredited colleges • <u>Policy Two</u>: Preservice teacher training programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen the quality of all applicants to colleges of education by administering a rigorous test focusing on content mastery and critical thinking skills (similar to PISA), as well as conducting an in-depth interview. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The two policies are closely related and should be presented as one, denoted as preservice/initial preparation of teachers combined with useful training and experience. 2. Need to include a statement on upgrading teacher preparation courses to match current classroom practice (i.e., new competency-based curriculum). 3. Articulation on what is specifically needed to improve the quality of current programs requires the team to study/discuss the current programs and present recommendations for upgrades in consultation with PAAET, KU, and MoE. 4. Need to add proposed action: "Determine the projected numbers of teachers required for each subject across the country for the next 5–10 years and provide these estimates to PAAET and KU to assist with planning student intake and faculty needs for teaching in the various disciplines on that strict basis." 5. Need to add proposed action: "Inform potential teacher candidates prior to commencing their training that they may need to wait for a longer time to secure appointments related to disciplines in the humanities. A firm MoE decision needs to be taken to direct this action." 5. Need to add other incentives to attract the best candidates into teaching. |

| Issues | Policies | Global Best Practices | Comments |
|---|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mismatch between teacher supply and demand in various categories. • Large discrepancies in teacher workloads in schools. • Too many teachers rotating in younger grades, preventing students from establishing bonds, which can only be achieved with 1-2 teachers per class. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Policy Three</u>: Teacher appointment and induction into the teaching profession • <u>Policy Four</u>: Teacher distribution to schools and equitable workload management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher candidates carry out practicum training only in centers of excellence under the guidance of a master teacher | <p>Most of these details seem to reflect the content of the current CSC regulations, with the exception of the “requirement” to pass the teacher proficiency test administered by the NCED. If there are any new requirements these should be made clearer.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Action should be added on induction training and support for newly appointed graduate teachers (alternatively, this could be added under Policy CPD). 2. Policy 4 is too narrow an area and should be combined with Policy 3 as “Appointment to Schools” or could be added under the policy regarding teacher responsibilities. 3. Need to add a proposed action to limit the number of teachers to one or two in grades 1-3 4. Some actions under Policy 2 are also linked to addressing the issue of mismatch between supply and demand |

| Issues | Policies | Global Best Practices | Comments |
|---|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need an updated mechanism to: (i) ensure that all teachers are meeting acceptable teaching standards, and (ii) reward high performing teachers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Policy Five:</u> Career path • <u>Policy Six:</u> Professional development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants must undergo a rigorous evaluation based on the Kuwait Framework 1. for Teaching Excellence (national teacher standards). The evaluation will include: (i) a rigorous test of content mastery and critical thinking skills; (ii) expert review of a teaching portfolio, including a videotaped lesson taught by the candidate; and (iii) an interview. • Some of this work is directly linked to promotion, but there should also be other means to recognize and reward teachers. These need to be defined in the new teacher career path ladder/CPD framework and should • be linked to teacher performance standards. • Candidates must have a combined score of “good” or “excellent” on the content mastery test and their teaching portfolio to be considered for a classroom teaching position. • Some reference should be made to teacher self-assessment as one of the tools for collecting teacher data to identify PD needs. This should be linked with teacher performance standards. • Add proposed action: “To establish a district-wide induction program linked to schools for newly appointed graduates” (more details are provided in NTPF). • Should state annual number of PD hours expected, and how these can be completed. • Should state clear policy actions on rewards and sanctions based on agreed achievement criteria and performance indicators. • Should state proposals for allocating funding for PD based on impact (This requires an inventory of all PD activities currently offered and their approximate costs to uncover duplicate or misdirected efforts). • Add proposed action: “To provide specific time-frame for teachers to practice specific instructional techniques with school leaders and expert peers, and opportunities for teachers to observe colleagues at their own or nearby schools to learn from each other.” • Add proposed action: “Central monitoring of quality of courses/criteria for all PD providers to ensure that they meet accreditation standards.” | <p>1. This policy is related to the CPD framework discussions and needs to be aligned. It is therefore difficult to complete these areas of the NTFW at this time. This is especially challenging since NCED requested not to reactivate discussions on the career path ladder at this stage.</p> <p>2. Additional statements related to school leadership need to be added, focusing on providing (i) conditions for improving teaching quality, and (ii) stronger pedagogical support to teachers.</p> |

Discussion

The NTFW outlined the teacher quality issues that have been created by national policies guaranteeing access to higher education, employment for all college graduates, and tenure for all teachers, irrespective of performance. The picture is made complicated further by an imbalance in school staffing because 70% of all teachers are female, but prefer not to teach in boys' schools for cultural reasons. Because neither universities nor the Ministry of Education has been able to limit the number of higher education students who pursue the teaching profession or to steer them towards the MESA disciplines – Math, English, Science, and Arabic – where Kuwaiti schools have most vacancies, the national education system is also reliant on expatriate teachers (40% of the total at present).

The discussion pointed out the educational dysfunction that resulted from these policies, and which explained for the low learning outcomes among Kuwaiti students. As no caps were imposed on the number of teacher trainees accepted into the training colleges, number of graduates significantly surpassed the needs of the education system. There are currently 30,000 students in Kuwait's two teacher training colleges, which is equivalent to nearly 50% of 66,000 teachers currently in service. Thus, the government must work on regulating the flow of candidates accepted into teacher training colleges as well as those hired into the education system. These are the two points at which high-performing education systems across the world exercise selectivity, and low-performing systems typically do not.

Unfortunately, Kuwait's government does not yet utilize the newly developed national standards for teachers that explicitly define the knowledge, skills, and competencies that a prospective teacher needs to possess in order to be hired. In the absence of explicit standards and any tests or assessment processes that can be adopted to verify whether candidates meet these standards, there is essentially no means of identifying the strongest and weakest teacher candidates. This means that all candidates are hired, leading to one of the lowest pupil-teacher ratios in basic education in the world, which was 8:1 in 2015 (Alabdulhadi, 2019).

In terms of teachers' performance and promotion process, a combination of automatic promotion based on years of service and the inability of the public sector to dismiss civil service employees for poor performance has created weak incentives for teachers to develop their competences even though salaries in the education sector are high. The system apparently also suffers from political interference with teacher promotions and transfers, which is a common problem in countries that lack explicit standards and meritocratic policies, along with institutional processes to implement them. Owing to the absence of all these measures, teachers with low skill levels and few incentives to work hard continue to be hired in large numbers, very few of whom have the desire to pursue in-service teacher development programs and improve their performance. Moreover, the lack of a national student assessment system disincentivizes schools from improving their performance at the institutional level. School administrators and principals do not know how their students' learning progress compares to that of their cohorts in other schools and the MoE has no data on how the overall system is doing beyond the information gained from Kuwait's intermittent participation in international assessments.

To overcome these shortcomings, the draft document proposes the refinement and further development of eleven policies relating to teacher management which will improve the quality of teaching in Kuwait. Each policy area is defined in terms of: (a) policy currently followed; (b) justifications for further reform; and (c) suggestions for improvement. The draft framework is an excellent outline of current thinking and covers the area of teacher quality improvement fairly thoroughly. It sets an ambitious agenda for the future improvement of teaching in Kuwait.

Efforts now need to be focused on developing the details of each policy and identifying the various parties that should be involved in this process. These are largely teacher management policies, some of which concern matters that can be contentious to some groups of people within the education field. For example, certain university faculty may resist the suggestion that all graduates must complete a full year of teacher training in addition to their degree. Similarly, the teacher associations may challenge the idea that underperforming teachers could ultimately face dismissal or demotion. Moreover, those with vested interests in this process within the MoE may resist the notion that quotas must be placed on entry to certain courses, or that certain teachers specializing in presently understaffed subjects could receive scholarships or bonus payments.

Conclusion and recommendations

Many factors, both within and outside the school, come together to allow for inspired learning. Once students are in schools, their performance is most closely influenced by teacher quality. The challenges of today's increasingly complex and global society require our students to have different competencies, and teachers to have diverse capabilities. Teachers need to know how to develop these capacities in their students in ways that inspire them to be lifelong learners, not just while they are at school. To achieve these goals, the state needs a well-qualified teaching force. No education development project can succeed if it fails to establish and develop the teachers' potential to respond to these new challenges.

The Kuwaiti education system needs a way of identifying its most effective teachers, who will be given precedence when assigning classroom teaching positions, awarding promotions, and selecting mentors for other teachers. This merit-based strategy protects students and creates powerful incentives for good performance. It also motivates teachers with weaker evaluations to invest more actively in their own professional development. Finally, it gives the education system a means of objectively identifying ineffective teachers and dealing with these issues in a straightforward manner.

Introducing a rigorous test of academic ability for admission to the teacher training colleges is the most efficient way to for the Government of Kuwait to raise the quality of teacher candidates and reduce the imbalance between teacher supply and demand. If this is politically impossible, it is important to find alternative strategies that would serve the same purpose, such as allowing candidates to enter teacher training institutions, but restricting them to general content courses until they can re-take the admissions test and score above the desired threshold. This alternative measure could remedy the weaknesses in candidates' academic preparation while signaling a commitment to making teaching a higher-quality and high-prestige profession. Even if Kuwaiti national policy dictates that all candidates must be employed, the teacher standards and entrance exam can identify the

candidates who should be placed first, or those who are eligible for classroom teaching assignments. The government is fully justified in a setting a policy mandating that only the very best teachers are placed in classrooms.

A diagnostic study of teacher practice in Kuwait would similarly produce insights that school-level professional development could build on. However, in the current context of a major teacher policy reform, it would yield two additional results that would be even more valuable: (i) it would create a baseline picture of the system before the new teacher framework is introduced that will help the government evaluate the impact of the policy reforms, and (ii) it could help build the technical capacity for classroom observations that will be needed for comprehensive teacher evaluations in the future.

Given that acceptance of change can be difficult, it is necessary to have a well thought-out strategy before commencement. Ample body of evidence indicates that the best system change requires genuine support and public commitment by the Chief Executive Officer of the education system and public statements by the political head (Minister of Education). Execution often requires the following steps: (a) an Act of parliament (or similar high-level legislative instrument) which sets out the rationale for and a broad range of new policies for the management of teachers (the passing of this Act by a majority of members of the legislature would signal bipartisan support for change/improvement); (b) a number of regulations which set out the key requirements for the implementation of each area of the Act (policies); (c) a draft operational manual and draft procedures which set out the steps to be followed by officers in implementing and evaluating the policy; (d) a period of trialing the policy in sample schools followed by feedback and a review, before finalization of procedures; and (e) preparation of in-service materials and provision of training for officers before full implementation. As evident from these five steps, careful implementation takes time and effort if the change is to be accepted by all, and to ensure widespread commitment to these changes. These are the broad strategies adopted by education systems in making effective change.

The educational context in Kuwait is challenging, and not everything can be done at once. Nonetheless, it is difficult to make major progress in education without a core set of policies addressed in a coherent way. As noted earlier in this study, if key elements of an education system are in alignment, they reinforce each other and help accelerate improvement. If this is not achieved, clear incentives are not created and different policies undermine each other. The draft NTFW is commendable in that it covers all the major elements of teacher policy and creates the scaffolding for a comprehensive teacher reform. However, the policies in each area as currently drafted are not sufficiently deep to produce major improvement.

It is hoped that these suggestions would be considered by the Government of Kuwait while developing revisions to the NTPF that could substantially deepen its impact. It is also important that the NTPF be aligned with the complementary CPD framework being developed, which is intended to match career path/ladder. Possible next steps include the actions and decisions should also be taken in the formulation of longer-term initiatives. The priority actions to advance the NTFW should include (1) identifying relevant agencies responsible for the policy actions, and begin preparation of an implementation roadmap; (2) establishing contact with experts from other developing countries that have implemented successful teacher policy reforms (Chile in Latin America, the Netherlands in

Europe, and selected US states) and could potentially provide useful advice on how to draft effective legislation and build implementation capacity; and (3) conducting diagnostic studies to generate solid evidence on key issues and establish a baseline for system quality against which progress can be measured and analyzed. Most importantly, a study of teachers' classroom practice should be conducted using a validated, standardized instrument such as the Stallings classroom snapshot, along with a test of teachers' content mastery.

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