
Learning Resources Centers in Kuwait: Prospects for the Future

Taghreed AlQudsi-Ghabra, Ammar H. Safar, & Nedaa M. Qabazard
Kuwait University, Kuwait

Many countries have documented the impact of school learning resources centers (LRCs), serving students aged 6-18 years and pre-school, on the educational process and on student learning (Lonsdale, 2003), and have found that both human and material resources are essential to effective LRC operation. Kuwait has been blessed with an early educational public school system, which has been establishing a library in each school for over a course of more than seventy years. However, this early system has failed to keep pace with the latest advancement in the school library arena in terms of personnel, resource, and services that serve students, teachers and school administrators alike. Studying the current situation of school libraries in Kuwait is an important prerequisite to evaluating the situation in preparation for any reform. This paper is an analytical description of the current state of public school libraries in Kuwait, and it offers some suggestions for their reform.

Introduction

The school's learning resources center (LRC) is an integral part of the educational process, including the personal and recreational growth of students. It primarily serves students, teachers and staff as it strives to provide reading materials and the latest resources that support the curriculum and encourage reading. A LRC also enhances the patrons' library and information skills, such as searching, researching, evaluating, analyzing and synthesizing. In addition, LRC personnel train students in the skills of self-learning and critical and innovative thinking, and they provide quality learning opportunities by giving all patrons access to library resources and services throughout the school day.

Modern trends of education emphasize the importance of the school's LRC and the large role it can play in the goals of education (Lonsdale, 2003). In an attempt to assess and investigate the status of the LRCs in Kuwait as well as their achievements and prospective roles in stimulating student learning in an increasingly information-dependent life, this study provides a descriptive analysis of the LRCs in Kuwaiti public schools. The study documents the status of the Kuwaiti school library system and concludes with a set of identified problems and prospects for their solutions in order to maximize the impact of LRC on student learning.

Development of School Libraries in Kuwait

The school library system in Kuwait has been supported by a government-run infrastructure that can be traced back to the beginning of the compulsory public school in the early 1900s.

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The first formal school libraries were founded in 1936 at the Al-Mubarakiyah School which had opened in 1912 and at the Al-Ahmadiyah School which had opened in 1921 (Ali, 1997).

Kuwait was among the first countries in the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC) to establish school LRCs, formerly known as school libraries. According to Mr. Eid S. Shilaash (Shilaash et al, 2010, p. 25), the Interim Manager of the Libraries Administration (LA) at Kuwait's Ministry of Education (MOE), "efforts were taken since the late 1950s by MOE to develop the school library system in Kuwait, its facilities, resources, services, as well as its professional and administrative staff."

Extant literature about school libraries in Kuwait is scant. At most, the literature consists of brief reports and descriptions that lack detailed information, let alone the integration of an analysis of important developmental services provided by the government as part of the evolution of services that are fundamental to Kuwait's modernization.

A research study conducted by Yasser Yousef Abdel-Motey (1989), as part of his doctoral dissertation, scrutinized the competency of Kuwaiti schools' library media specialists (LMSs) and explored their training and preparation in Kuwait. The study yielded recommendations that are still valid; unfortunately, no other scholar or school fully explored nor applied them.

Buabbas, Medjdoub and Rezgui (2010) studied what they referred to as the "hidden parts" in the history of the school library system in Kuwait. Their study looked at the historical development of school libraries in Kuwait between 1911-1962 through interviews and examination of documentation. These researchers also carried out a study investigating the current status of the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) services and products in LRCs in Kuwait's public schools. The results revealed that both students and teachers strongly advocate ICT adoption. The study indicated a significant lack of ICT related services and products in the LRCs in Kuwaiti public high schools. It pointed to the need for school administrators to understand the importance of new environments to discover the evolving needs of education, in addition to the need for Kuwaiti policymakers to review and improve the current situation (Buabbas, Medjdoub, & Rezgui, 2010).

Current Status of LMCs in Kuwait

According to the 2009/2010 school year statistics (Al-Failkawai, 2010; Shilaash et al, 2011), there are a total of 820 public schools in the State of Kuwait, including general education schools, special needs education schools and religious education schools, as well as adult and illiteracy education centers. Of these schools, 783, or 95.50%, run LRCs that are regularly open to students and teachers as well as staff (see Table 1).

Table 1. Schools, classes, students, teachers, administrative staff, service staff, and learning resource centers in Kuwait's public schools by type of education as of 2010 (Shilaash et al, 2011)

Education Type	Schools	Classes	Students	Teachers	Administrative Staff	Service Staff	LRCs
General	779	14781	347422	52719	14593	2116	768
Special Needs	30	257	1698	1139	235	111	10
Religious	11	129	2947	605	99	10	5
Adults and Illiteracy	88	659	24888	3110	50	14	0
Total	908	15826	376955	57573	14977	2251	783

As Table 2 shows, among the 783 schools that operate LRCs, 288 are all-male schools, 296 are all-female schools and 199 are kindergarten schools that are mixed schools serving students aged four to six. Primary schools serve students aged 6-10, and secondary schools serve students aged 14-18. A few schools are conjoint schools (i.e., primary and intermediate; intermediate and secondary; or primary, intermediate, and secondary in case of special needs education schools).

Table 2. Number of learning resource centers in Kuwait public schools by education level and gender as of 2010 (Shilaash et al, 2011)

Education Level	Male	Female	Coeducational	LRCs
Kindergarten	0	0	199	199
Primary	125	119	0	244
Intermediate	93	96	0	189
Secondary	62	68	0	130
Conjoint	8	13	0	21
Total	288	296	199	783

Administration of Schools and LRCs

Public schools are centrally administered by Kuwait's Ministry of Education (MOE). The schools' LRCs are centrally administered by the Libraries Administration (LA) of MOE. LA is part of the Educational Development Sector (EDS) of MOE, which falls under the Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Development.

The LA's organizational structure consists of a Secretary Department as well as two major supervisory sections, one for "Research and Technical Affairs" and the other for "Supplies and Administrative Services." The Supervision for Research and Technical Affairs includes three departments, and those are: (1) Groups Construction Department; (2) Technical Preparation Department; and (3) Research Department. The Supervision for Supplies and Administrative Services includes the following: (1) Administrative Services Department; (2) Supplies and Bookbinding Department; and (3) Educational Information Department. The LA has 83 employees, including both professional as well as administrative staff. The workflow in the LA is centrally divided and distributed among the available departments based upon their specialties and professional level (Al-Failkawai et al, 2010; Shilaash et al, 2011). Figure 1 illustrates the MOE administrative structure. Note that the LA is located immediately below the Education Sector.

The LA also administers and oversees LRCs in the special needs education public schools, the religious education public schools, and the public libraries in the six governorates of the State of Kuwait, as well as some special libraries within MOE such as MOE's Central LRC, the National/Scientific Museum's LRC, and the Music Education Technical Supervision's LRC (see Figure 2).