

# Growing globally minded citizens in the desert: A comparative curricula analysis of two schools in Kuwait.



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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the possibility and value of establishing an internationally focused curriculum in a middle-eastern, Islamic state. The study is based on the comparative curriculum analysis of two schools in Kuwait City, Kuwait and an examination of their shared vision and their differing pedagogical approaches to curriculum in light of the political, cultural and religious environment. The curriculum analysis is based on an examination of the relevant official curriculum documentation and mission statements of each school, as well as surveys that solicit the impressions of teachers regarding the success of their school in achieving their respective missions.

The authors identify three common challenges. First, both schools exist within a climate that contains elements incompatible with global values. Second, both schools present an inconsistent approach to ensuring that intercultural and internationally focused curriculum is being created and delivered. And third, both schools operate under unclear rights for expatriate workers, thus creating an uncertain and somewhat fearful environment for everyone from administration to the maintenance. The authors also raise the following questions: Who defines the truly global perspective? And what are the essential ingredients in developing citizenship for the new world?

## Background Information

Dualism pervades the environment.

**Politics:** Dual sovereignty is demonstrated in the combination of rule by democracy as well as rule by Emir. The position of Emir is inherited.

**Culture:** Dual values - family and clan oriented society with corresponding customs as well as a lifestyle of wealth with its economic and technological symbols. Tolerant with elements of corruption and exploitation.

**Religion:** Islamic faith is dominant. It is characterized by proscriptive and prescriptive expectations. Overall, both conservative and tolerant with elements of intolerance.

**Education:** Difficult to penetrate. Most information comes from the World Bank (2007) which uses *internal* and *external* measures where Kuwait ranks high internally, but low externally compared to others in the region.

- Increased movement to private schools for better education and maintenance of class privilege.

## Literature Review

### Global Free Market Reforms

World wide spread of reforms so that even the most stable systems are otherwise influenced to change. Most common characteristics associated with this change are:

- Education understood primarily as a means to enter the work force.
- Large scale criticism of schools
- Large scale change without corresponding financial support
- Increase in influence of parents
- School becomes a commodity for the sake of free market consumption
- Standards, accountability and testing on the rise (Benjamin Levin 1998)

### Adaptation

Spread of educational reform is not linear but is likened more to a contagion or epidemic in which the reform adapts as a virus to a host. Reforms are adopted selectively depending on advantages gained by the borrower or lender. Borrowing from an external source can bring justification to programs. Exporting can be economically rewarding and boost the prestige of the lender.

### Theory for a Global Education

It seems more and more necessary that teachers prepare students for a world larger than their local conditions would suppose. Following Cross and Molnar (1994), we identify three areas necessary to the development of a curriculum with a the goal of growing global citizens. The three areas include the following:

- **International Commerce** – Educate students to understand the influence of economics on the design of institutions around the world, and the impact of economics on human rights, culture and education.
- **Nationalist** – Educate students to understand the counter currents of local identity, community and solidarity. A new global society is a threat to traditional institutions and such dynamics need to be recognized.
- **Humanistic** – Educate students to support local conditions but do so while considering one's own culture from the perspective of other cultures. This should result in the humanistic orientation that involves deliberation or dialogue across difference where difference is not viewed as a problem to be solved but an opportunity for increased self knowledge and the formation of a planetary public.

## Key Findings: Case Study 1—Bilingual school

### Composition of Population:

88% Kuwaiti, 12% other Arab

### Mission Statement:

“foster an environment for students to develop the intellectual qualities, ethical values, and positive attitudes required for effective participation and leadership in the overall development of Kuwait and the rapidly changing world,”

### Official Curriculum:

-Ministry-provided curriculum for Arabic language classes and religion classes consists of unrelated topics.

-Desired behavioural outcomes:

Acquire learning skills needed to independently pursue knowledge and higher education.

Learn to seek information from various sources in order to reach conclusions through sound and objective reasoning.

Adopt a scientific attitude to learning that adheres to high ethical standards and respect for other people's ideas and beliefs.

Be responsible and committed citizens in their communities. Acquire, understand and respect Islamic teachings, traditions and culture.

Understand and appreciate the culture and traditions of Kuwait, the Arab regions and the world

### Hidden Curriculum:

-racism and hierarchy amongst students, teachers, janitorial staff

-teachers pressured to raise grades

-use of (illegitimate) power mechanisms supersedes process

### Null Curriculum:

-mono-cultural environment, which undermines multi-cultural attempts

-content oriented, rather than skills oriented

-disconnect between curriculum and cultural practices

-lacks horizontal awareness of curriculum

## Key Findings: Case Study 2—International Baccalaureate (IB) World School

### Composition of Population:

60% Kuwaiti, 35% other Arab, 5% other nationalities

### Mission Statement:

“distinguished in educating and nurturing unique and self-reliant world citizens.”

### Official Curriculum:

-Ministry-provided curriculum for Arabic language classes and religion classes consists of unrelated topics.

-IBO (PYP, MYP, DP) aims to develop in students:

- the disposition and capacity to be lifelong learners
- the capacity to adapt to a rapidly changing reality
- problem-solving and practical skills and intellectual rigor
- the capacity and self-confidence to act individually and collaboratively
- an awareness of global issues and the willingness to act responsibly
- the ability to engage in effective communication across frontiers

• respect for others and an appreciation of similarities and differences.

-holistic learning, intercultural awareness, communication

-interdisciplinary links

-IB Learner Profile

### Hidden Curriculum:

-racism and hierarchy among students (cliques based on social standing and ethnic background, which lead to bullying)

-racism and hierarchy among staff (local hires vs international hires, janitorial staff)

-national political environment (fear of reprisal for failing students, censorship)

### Null Curriculum:

-lacks true cultural awareness

-lacks parental involvement

-lacks teacher responsibility/accountability

-weak practical application of community and service

## Conclusions:

Both case studies are working towards an international curriculum for the purpose of growing globally minded citizens; however, there are three identifiable challenges affecting both schools:

1) They exist within, and perpetuate, a climate which contains elements that are incompatible with global values.

2) They have an inconsistent approach to ensuring that intercultural and internationally focused curriculum is being created and delivered.

3) They operate under unclear rights for expatriate workers, thus creating an uncertain and somewhat fearful environment.