

Achieving Excellence in Kuwaiti Schools: A School Leaders' Viewpoint

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Abstract

Many challenges face Kuwaiti public schools such as inadequate teacher training, limited staffing and high costs of extracurricular materials. This study aimed to find the necessary internal and external changes required to achieve excellence in Kuwaiti schools. The main tool is a questionnaire. The study population included all school leaders in public schools in Kuwait during the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016 which comprised (4362) leaders. The study sample was 832 which were randomly selected. The study variables included gender, experience, scientific qualification, job position, educational level, and school district. T test, Cronbach's alpha, one-way ANOVA, range equation (for arithmetic means), and Pearson correlation coefficient through Likert scale survey response were used. The results showed that the wages and rewards are ranked first. Future studies should include other internal and external changes to achieve academic excellence in public education.

Keywords: Internal and external changes; Excellence

Introduction

Change is important for different organizations [1-3]. Many organizations are applying the change process to achieve efficiency [1]. This change which can be internal or external has led to the adoption of different models to improve the quality of education and help school systems to adopt quality approaches. Among these models is the school excellence model. According to Weichold [4] change is "variation in one or more parameters with reference to a context of change". Khan [5] has defined the school excellence as "effectiveness with a view to its exception beyond the satisfaction. This standard is achieved by the mutual collaboration of students and teachers in a way that highlights expectations of the society in comparison with those teachers and students of less effective schools".

The school excellence model is a self-evaluation option for schools [6,7] which is based on different quality models for assessing strengths and weaknesses in school performance by various standards in accordance with school objectives and overall policies of the national educational system [8]. This model emphasizes student-focused processes, overall quality and the role of teachers in achieving these [9,10]. The central objective of the school excellence model is to provide a comprehensive development plan to enhance the strengths of the school performance and support quality of educational output [10].

The contemporary educational system in Kuwait shows that the state suffers from many problems, mainly, low-quality teachers who lack skills in teaching and classroom management such as the inability to integrate technology into teaching and learning, and the focus on rote-learning. Most of the state's budget is spent on payrolls [11-14]. Almoosa, et al. [15] showed that Kuwait desperately needs to "focus on educational policies and strategies designed to ensure that all students benefit from the appropriate educational environment" Quality and equal opportunity in education are the main principles that Kuwait education seeks to achieve [16]. School excellence is the best approach

to the current educational challenges in Kuwait, especially the low-quality public schools [10].

Statement of the problem

Springborg [17] demonstrates that Kuwait suffers from many shortcomings in its educational system, such as low-quality output and inadequate processes. In addition, educational quality in Kuwait varies; it regressed to the 106th rank in a list of 148 countries in 2013-2014 international ranking, dropping down 18 steps compared with 2010-2011. Kuwait has lost ten places in the TIMSS, despite the increasing funds on education [18]. Kuwait ranked 47 of 53 in science and 48 of 53 in mathematics [11]. Clearly, there is an urgent need for a model for school excellence in Kuwait.

Creating excellence in schools requires improving the quality of relationships between the school environment and external stakeholders to enhance school climate, raising morale of everyone involved and gaining public confidence [19]. Achieving school excellence in Kuwait requires a culture that encourages creativity, innovation. School leadership must adopt non-traditional leadership styles. School principals must encourage high performance, motivate staff, promote teamwork and emphasize the importance of information and communication technology in improving all processes within the school environment [10].

Questions of the study

The main question is 'what are the needed internal and external changes to achieve school excellence in Public Education schools in the State of Kuwait from the viewpoints of school leaderships?

The sub-questions are: What are the internal changes required to achieve excellence in public education in Kuwait from the school leadership viewpoint?

What are the external changes required to achieve excellence in public education in Kuwait from the school leadership viewpoint?

Are there statistically significant differences within internal changes necessary for academic excellence in General Education schools in Kuwait attributed to the study variables (i.e., gender, job title, experience, school qualification, the province)?

Objectives of the Study

The study's objective is to determine the necessary internal changes (those within the school environment) and external changes (at the level of Ministry of Education and educational districts). The overall goal is to achieve excellence and improve public education quality in Kuwait. The second goal is to verify statistically significant differences about internal changes required to achieve academic excellence in Kuwaiti schools.

Significance of the study

Because we live in competitive environments, there are many great challenges in educational systems, namely, excellence in Public Education. Little research is dedicated to investigating excellence in Kuwaiti public schools, and none of these studies (according to the researcher's knowledge) has been dedicated to internal and external changes needed for excellence.

Methodology of the Study

This Research depends on a quantitative approach to determine the needed internal changes and external changes to achieve school excellence in Kuwait. The research depended on a questionnaire for data collection from the study sample which is representative by school principals, assistant principals and heads of the scientific departments within Kuwaiti schools.

Limitations of the Study

The current study is limited to the needed internal and external changes required to achieve excellence in public education schools in Kuwait from the viewpoints of school leadership. This study is also limited to school leadership represented in school principals, assistant principals and head teachers of the scientific department within schools. Moreover, this study was applied during the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016 and limited to public education schools in Kuwait.

Literature Review

Change is an urgent and challenging need in modern education systems. As a result, different school reforms have concentrated on school change processes [20-22]. All improvement initiatives taking place within organizations, therefore, aim to create change to increase the quality and effectiveness within different processes in schools [23,24].

Many factors can affect the implementation of excellence within schools; among these is school leadership [25,26]. Leadership characteristics have been recognized as driving forces for stimulating excellence in schools [27], which includes educational matters and the ability to manage the school culture [28].

Dishong [29] argued that although curriculum, instruction and professional development were essential to education, climate and culture of academic excellence within schools are also radical. Turnbo, et al. [30] used the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)

scale, as reported by the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), to determine if there was a relationship between student performance and learning communities. The results indicated that student performance differed significantly. Dishong concluded that professional learning communities affected academic excellence.

Clark investigated how the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative impacted the school's culture and reviewed students' achievement depending on certain academic excellence criteria (e.g., curriculum, instruction and assessment). Findings indicated that schools have managed to implement its framework for action, with a positive change in school culture. Organizations depend on change processes to achieve excellence, but achieving excellence also means change at different levels to reach the desired objectives. The two processes rely on leadership, organization and governance for their implementation and for ensuring distinguished outcomes [31,32].

Research Methodology

This study depends on the descriptive analysis approach. The study population included all the school leaders in public education schools in Kuwait, in the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016. The study sample was 832, randomly selected. 50.6% of the study respondents are males and 49.4% are females. Of the study respondents, 25.8% has 1-5 year-experience, 24.3% of study respondents has 5-10 year-experience, 26.4% has 11-15 years' experience, and 23.4% has more than 15 years of experience. 65.6% has a bachelor's degree, 22.5% has master's degree, and 11.9% has a doctorate degree. Regarding positions, 31.9% are principals, 35.8% assistant principals, and 32.3% head of departments. 35.7% work in elementary schools, 32.6% work in middle schools, and 31.7% work in secondary schools. Regarding school location, 18.0% work in schools located in the Capital Governorate, 18.4% work in the Hawly Governorate, 15.4% work in El-Farawanya Governorate, and 15.3% work in schools located in Mubarak El-Kabeer Governorate, 16.6% work in El-Gahraa Governorate, and 16.3% work in Al-Ahmadi Governorate.

Research Tool

The researcher developed a questionnaire to identify the internal changes required to achieve excellence in public schools in Kuwait. He used the questionnaire as a key tool for collecting data required to support the theoretical research. The Likert scale has been used (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=partly agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was prepared and submitted to the research supervisor and then submitted to a group of the professors at the colleges of education to ascertain the extent to which each item is correlated to its dimension; the clarity and wording of each item; appropriateness for its objective; and ways to improve it by omission, addition or rewording. The questionnaire's validity was verified, and then approved for the interval. The construct validity has been verified by correlation coefficients between the total score of each axis and of the questionnaire. The correlation coefficient values of the questionnaire axes are high (0.923 to 0.935), and all are statistically significant at ($p > 0.01$), indicating the availability of a high degree of construct validity of the questionnaire axes. The reliability coefficient values of the questionnaire axes are high, because reliability coefficient

values of the axes range between 0.946 and 0.965, and the value of the total reliability coefficient of axes reached 0.938. These values, extracted from reliability coefficients refer to applying and trusting the tool.

Results and Discussion

The results showed that the internal changes required to achieve academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait from the school leadership perspective are of high degree, as the general arithmetic mean of the total summation of the dimensions of the first axis is 3.73; SD 0.207), indicating homogeneity of responses of public education leaders in Kuwait. The results also show that "culture of learning and commitment to improve performance" is ranked first (arithmetic mean, 3.88), followed by the dimension of "school culture" which is ranked second (arithmetic mean, 3.68), and finally, "education and learning community," (arithmetic mean, 3.67). This researcher believes that receiving a high degree of approval for the internal changes required for academic excellence can be attributed to the respondents' thoughts about the need for internal changes at the administrative/organizational levels in the schools of Kuwait, and their belief that they are necessary for academic excellence.

Question no. 1: What changes in school culture are needed to achieve academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait?

Changes in school culture are required for academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait. This is expressed by a high degree of response for changes in school culture needed to academic excellence in Kuwaiti public schools due to the respondents' (school leaders) awareness of the importance of school culture towards academic excellence.

Question no. 2: What changes in education and the learning community are necessary to achieve academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait?

The results show that changes in education and learning community for academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait are highly valued. The general mean of the second dimension is 3.67 (SD, 0.333) indicating the homogeneity of respondents' views about these statements. This researcher thinks that the high degree of response for changes in education and the learning community could be attributed to the respondents' (school leaders) awareness of these needs inside the schools. Their understanding to deficiencies in public schools in Kuwait and the need for further internal changes in the educational process have a positive impact on improving the output of that process and achieving the school administration's goals. This result was in accord with Dishong [29] who showed that climate, culture and relationships in a professional learning community framework were needed to achieve academic excellence.

Question no. 3: What are the required changes to improve performance and academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait?

The changes of the culture of learning and commitment to improve performance required to achieve academic excellence are high. The general mean of the third dimension is 3.88 (SD, 0.410) indicating the homogeneity of the respondents' views. 'Investing experience and acquired knowledge by every individual' was ranked first, with an arithmetic mean of 4.11, and SD of 0.673, followed second by 'allowing workers to participate in determining their needs of learning) with an arithmetic mean of 4.09, and a SD deviation of 0.684. A high degree of response for changes in the culture of learning and commitment to improve performance in Kuwait public schools could be attributed to

the respondents' desire to improve the educational output of public schools in Kuwait. Their feeling that deficiencies exist in school administrations regarding the required culture of learning and commitment to improve performance could also be attributed to the respondents' awareness of the many obstacles that prevent improving performance, and their belief in the need to conduct further internal changes to reduce and eliminate them. This is consistent with the results demonstrated that promoting a school culture is intently based on academic excellence to experience extraordinary growth in student achievement.

Question no. 4: What are the external changes required to achieve academic excellence in public education schools in Kuwait?

The external changes required for academic excellence in Kuwait public schools are of high degree. The general arithmetic mean of the total summation of the dimensions was 4.10 (SD=0.193). This indicates homogeneity of responses of the leaders in public schools in Kuwait regarding the external changes required for academic excellence in public education in Kuwait. The dimension of 'wages and rewards' was ranked first with an arithmetic mean of 4.20), followed by the dimension of 'evaluation', which was ranked second (arithmetic mean=4.05). Finally, 'procedures and laws' with an arithmetic mean of 4.01. The high degree of approval for external changes needed for academic excellence in Kuwait public schools can be attributed to many external obstacles. These reduce the excellence of public schools in Kuwait academically, contributing to respondents' desire for external changes. This could also be due to the lack of interest by the Ministry of Education and school administrations in Kuwait to consolidate work on standards of excellence limiting school leaders' ability to improve the schools.

Question no. 5: What are the changes in procedures and laws to achieve academic excellence in public education schools in Kuwait?

To answer this question, the results show the changes in procedures and laws necessary for academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait are highly valued. The general is 4.01 (SD=0.341) indicating the homogeneity of the respondents' views. Therefore, 'using individuals' mental skills in applying regulations and laws' was ranked first with an arithmetic mean of 4.06 and SD of 0.444). This is followed by 'reducing the level of routine/immobility among workers in performing their works' with an arithmetic mean of 4.05 and SD of 0.492. High response for changes in procedures and laws needed for academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait might be attributed to current procedures and laws that are traditional and so limited to achieve school excellence. If respondents (school leaders) could be informed about the latest procedures and laws followed in those schools winning excellence awards, this might contribute to their desire to develop and change traditional laws and procedures. A framework for action is, therefore, a must for achieving excellence in schools. This is in harmony of Clark [33] who found that the middle schools that have managed to implement its Framework for Action (required by the North Carolina Turnaround Initiative) has both a positive change in school culture and an improvement, as evidenced in student achievement results.

Question no. 6: What are the changes of wages and rewards required to achieve academic excellence in public education schools in Kuwait?

The changes in wages and rewards in public schools in Kuwait are of a very high degree. The general mean was 4.20 (SD=0.339) indicating homogeneity between the respondents' views. 'Establishing a financial incentive system to support achieving school excellence' was ranked first, with an arithmetic mean of 4.48, and SD of 0.774. This is followed

'making salaries and incentives in conformity with efforts exerted by workers' with an arithmetic mean of 4.46 and SD of 0.677. Whereas 'reviewing workers' comments on wages and salaries' was last with an arithmetic mean of 3.72 and SD of 0.675. The high degree of response for changes in wages and rewards might be accredited to the respondents' awareness of clear deficiencies in employees' wages and rewards policies in public schools in Kuwait, contributing to their desire to modify the regulations of wages and rewards. Increasing wages for school employees would motivate them financially and morally, raising their professional competencies and resulting in academic excellence.

Question no. 7: What are the changes of evaluation necessary to achieve academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait?

The results indicated that changes in evaluation needed to achieve academic excellence are of high degree. The general mean was 4.05 (SD=0.311), indicating the homogeneity of respondents' views. 'Designing a system to measure achievement of school excellence in light of achieving strategic goals' was ranked first with an arithmetic mean of 4.31 and SD of 0.816. This was followed 'providing programs to evaluate performance after changing responsibilities and roles in the organization because of structural reorganization' with an arithmetic mean of 4.25 and SD of 0.581. The high degree of response for changes

in evaluation could be attributed to the fact that the respondents are aware of the Ministry of Education and educational departments' which are not interested in follow-up to teaching. This lack of interest, it is thought, contributed to the inability to develop and improve work in school and achieve academic excellence. This requires further changes to improve the performance of teaching and administrative work in school. This result agrees with Clark [33], who listed academic excellence criteria as being: curriculum, instruction, assessment and appropriate academic interventions. Finally, are there statistically significant differences in the sample's opinions about internal changes needed for academic excellence in general education in Kuwait attributed to the variables (i.e., gender, job title, experience, school, qualification, province).

Results of T-Test and ANOVA

Moreover, a T-test has been calculated to verify statistical differences, as well as a One-Way ANOVA test, to clarify the significance of differences in the responses of the study sample items, according to the study variables. Results of the analysis about what is contained in the study axes are shown in the tables that follow. Table 1 shows that there are no statistically significant differences at 0.05 or less in the respondents' responses according to gender.

Axis	Gender	Num.	Mean	Standard deviation	Calculated(T) values	Degrees of freedom	Significance Level	Significance
First axis: Internal changes required to achieve school excellence	Male	421	3.73	0.206	-0.069	830	0.945	Not Significant
	Female	411	3.73	0.209				
Second axis: External changes required to achieve school excellence	Male	421	4.1	0.198	0.037	830	0.97	Not Significant
	Female	411	4.1	0.189				

Table 1: Differences according to gender required to achieve school excellence.

The Table 2 shows that there are no statistically significant differences at 0.05 or less in the respondents' responses according to job position.

Axis	Source of variation	Squares total	Degrees of freedom	Squares mean	P value	Statistical significance
First axis: Internal changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups	0.047	2	0.023	0.548	0.579
	Within groups	35.561	829	0.043		
	Total	35.608	831			
Second axis: External changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups	0.121	2	0.061	1.625	0.198
	Within groups	30.904	829	0.037		
	Total	31.026	831			

Table 2: Differences according to job position.

Table 3 shows that there are no statistically significant differences at 0.05 or less in the respondents' responses according to the Experience variable.

Axis	Source variation	of	Squares total	Degrees freedom	of	Squares mean	P value	Statistical significance
First axis: Internal changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups		0.094	3		0.031	0.727	0.536
	Within groups		35.514	828		0.043		
	Total		35.608	831				
Second axis: External changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups		0.082	3		0.027	0.734	0.532
	Within groups		30.943	828		0.037		
	Total		31.026	831				

Table 3: Differences according to experience.

Table 4 shows that there are no statistically significant differences at 0.05 or less in the respondents' responses according to the educational level variable.

Axis	Source variation	of	Squares total	Degrees freedom	of	Squares mean	P value	Statistical significance
First axis: Internal changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups		0.069	2		0.034	0.804	0.448
	Within groups		35.539	829		0.043		
	Total		35.608	831				
Second axis: External changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups		0.033	2		0.016	0.438	0.646
	Within groups		30.993	829		0.037		
	Total		31.026	831				

Table 4: Differences according to educational level.

Table 5 shows that there are no statistically significant differences at 0.05 or less in the respondents' responses according to the scientific qualification.

Axis	Source variation	of	Squares total	Degrees freedom	of	Squares mean	P value	Statistical significance
First axis: Internal changes required to achieve school excellence Second axis: External changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups		0.003	2		0.002	0.04	0.961
	Within groups		35.604	829		0.043		
	Total		35.608	831				
Second axis: External changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups		0.056	2		0.028	0.748	0.474
	Within groups		30.97	829		0.037		
	Total		31.026	831				

Table 5: Differences according to scientific qualification.

Table 6 shows that there are no statistically significant differences at 0.05 or less in the respondents' responses according to the school district.

Axis	Source of variation	Squares total	Degrees of freedom	Squares mean	P value	Statistical significance
First axis: Internal changes required to achieve school excellence Second axis: External changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups	0.264	5	0.053	1.232	0.292
	Within groups	35.344	826	0.043		
	Total	35.608	831			
Second axis: External changes required to achieve school excellence	Among groups	0.053	5	0.011	0.284	0.922
	Within groups	30.972	826	0.037		
	Total	31.026	831			

Table 6: Differences according to school district.

Conclusion

The study has shown that the internal changes necessary for academic excellence in public education in Kuwait, according to school leaders, are of high degree. In addition, the dimension of the culture of learning and commitment to improve performance is ranked first, followed by the dimension of school culture in the second rank, and finally, the dimension of education and learning community. The external changes required to achieve academic excellence in public schools in Kuwait, from the perspective of school leadership are of a high degree [34-37].

The dimension of wages and rewards are ranked first, followed by the dimension of evaluation ranked second, and finally is the dimension of procedures and laws. There are no statistically significant differences at 0.05 or less in the responses according to the study variables (i.e., gender, job position, experience, educational level, scientific qualification, school district) about the study axes. This study proposes establishing principles for school culture in public schools in Kuwait because of its positive impact on school excellence. The researcher calls for conducting training courses and workshops with specialists to disseminate the culture of education and excellence in the teaching community in Kuwait. The Ministry of Education and other educational organizations in Kuwait need to develop and modify some traditional procedures and laws to keep pace with modern teaching methods and research. The employees' wages and rewards policies must be taken into consideration towards enhancing excellence. The Ministry of Education and the educational supervisors in Kuwait should participate in the evaluation process of administrative and teaching performance in public schools [38-43].

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