Kuwait Education Program Achievement Report

December 2014

SCHOOL EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM
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Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

- In cooperation with the World Bank, Kuwait’s Ministry of Education and National Center for Education Development have been engaged in a multi-year integrated modernization program that addresses critical issues in Kuwait’s education system: curricular reform, the development of national assessment systems, improvement of school leadership, and creation of professional standards. These areas were selected based on a conceptual framework that identified the key reform pillars. The overall objective of the program is to improve the quality of schools and education in Kuwait.

- Capturing the accomplishments of this intensive effort and documenting lessons learned are valuable practices that can serve to inform future programs of education development in Kuwait and elsewhere. The intent of the Program Achievement Report (PAR) is to qualitatively and retrospectively take stock of major achievements and highlight lessons learned during the Education Technical Cooperation Program (2010-2014). The PAR can also serve as a guide for structuring and organizing future cooperation programs.
PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS (2010-2014)

1. The Kuwaiti MoE adopted an integrated approach to reform based on a comprehensive conceptual framework. The cohesive package included components at the heart of education quality: curriculum development and enhancement, effective school leadership, strengthening NCED and national assessment capacity and developing National Education Standards.

2. Technical capacity and ownership amongst MoE and NCED staff was strengthened so as to carry out and lead component-related tasks. Over the course of the project and across components, 805 individuals participated in training provided as part of the Technical Cooperation Program.

3. The ability of MoE and NCED to mobilize and motivate teams at all levels to lead, advocate for and embrace change was strengthened. Staff were empowered to serve as positive change agents, forming communities of learning and practice to lead knowledge transfer within teams.

4. Grades 1-12 curricula for 12 subjects were completely modernized for primary and intermediate stages/levels. The integrated curriculum is competences and standards-based as well as child-centered. In addition, key curriculum documents were developed, including a National Curriculum Framework, Implementation and Communications Plans and Teaching Plans.
Executive Summary

PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS

5. School leadership practices in 48 pilot schools were transformed. School leadership teams adopted participatory and team-based approaches to planning and decision-making. School leadership was re-conceptualized and reorganized with new and improved administrative procedures. New job descriptions were created to clearly define roles and responsibilities for the principal and assistant principals. Teams and teachers were trained on the use of data for decision-making, community engagement and outreach and planning for success.

6. MESA, a national assessment system based on international best practices, was developed at NCED and successfully implemented for three consecutive years in grades 5, 9 and 12.

7. Content and performance standards for teachers, school leaders and students were developed in collaboration between MoE, NCED, teachers, principals, civil society, Kuwait Teachers' Society private sector representatives and academics.
LESSONS LEARNED

1. Sustained, high-level political commitment and support to the reform process are necessary for real impact to occur. Key decisions were stalled at critical moments in the program’s trajectory, limiting its potential for positive impact.

2. Management oversight structures and implementation arrangements should be established, clarified and communicated in advance to facilitate project operations (i.e. Steering and Coordination Committees).

3. Clear, complete and frequent communication amongst stakeholders, across and within project teams, and with the public is necessary for ensuring smooth implementation.

4. Gaining buy-in from relevant stakeholders by developing a shared vision would facilitate the implementation of reforms.

5. The allocation of adequately skilled and qualified numbers of human resources is necessary for effective implementation. Staff turnover due to retirement or other reasons led to “lost” capacity and the need to retrain replacements, sometimes delaying implementation.

6. The absence of a clear and widely communicated mandate from MoE on intended uses of MESA and National Education Standards led to the underutilization of the MESA results.

7. Issues with the quality of language translation delayed project progress. The WB team relied on international experts being aided by translation and interpretation to overcome the language barrier. The translation and back-translation of materials affected turn-around time for documents and the quality of the end product.
Preface

In cooperation with the World Bank, Kuwait’s Ministry of Education and National Center for Education Development have been engaged in a multi-year, integrated modernization program that addresses critical issues in Kuwait’s education system: curricular reform, the development of national assessment systems, improvement of school leadership, and creation of professional standards. As the current phase of the program comes to an end, capturing the accomplishments of this intensive effort and documenting lessons learned are valuable practices that can serve to inform future programs for education development in Kuwait and elsewhere.

As such, the intent of the Program Achievement Report (PAR) is to qualitatively and retrospectively take stock of major achievements and highlight lessons learned during the Education Technical Cooperation Program (TCP) (2010-2014). The PAR can also serve as a guide for structuring and organizing future cooperation programs. Unlike a program evaluation, the PAR aims to capture stakeholder perspectives and experiences rather than just answer questions about effectiveness and efficiency.

The main method used to collect data was interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders involved with the TCP that included 1) current and former senior leadership at MoE, NCED and WB; 2) project team leads at MoE, NCED and WB and 3) project team members, including curriculum and assessment teams, school principals and assistant principals. Interviewees were asked to describe their experiences with the TCP and probed on what they felt had been successfully achieved and what challenges they encountered. Common themes emerging from the discussions were identified and synthesized. Preliminary findings were shared with key counterparts for validation and comments.

In addition to interviews and focus groups, observations of working group and curriculum development sessions were conducted. Relevant documents were collected and reviewed for reference, including Education TCP project documents, progress reports and Aide-Memoires as well as a review of major project deliverables for each component.

The report is organized into three sections: Section 1 provides a background to the origins and development of the TCP; Section 2 describes the major milestones reached; and Section 3 outlines the lessons learned and includes suggestions to be considered in terms of planning for future partnerships.
Project Overview
Project Overview

The School Education Quality Improvement Technical Cooperation Program (SEQI TCP) between the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education (MoE), National Center for Educational Development (NCED) and World Bank (WB) began in 2010 with the goal of improving education quality through the development and modernization of four key areas: curriculum, school leadership, assessment and educational standards. Building upon earlier successful WB-MoE cooperation, the 2010-2014 TCP was based upon a comprehensive conceptual model. World Bank support across the four components included training and technical assistance for the key program activities.

“We have momentum for change in education.”
—Senior MoE leader
The World Bank commits to putting enhanced resources, locally as well as regionally and globally, to provide the highest quality technical assistance and support.

On their side, MoE and NCED (whose role and responsibilities require clear definition) will need to commit to having in place a set of prerequisites for success, including the needed staffing resources, and dedicate the needed staff time to meet the challenge of an expanding program, and a complex reform process.

The new phase of the TCP will require an enhanced program and project management structure, which need to be based on (i) a sound monitoring and evaluation system at all levels; (ii) results frameworks and operational plans to establish, guide, and track progress; and (iii) greatly enhanced governance structures, including clarity on the respective roles of MoE and NCED in the overall reform implementation process.

A key feature of the new TCP will be an emphasis on coordination across all teams involved in the reform process, taking a more integrated planning approach to delivery of outcomes and results. This need could be served by the establishment of a dedicated program management or implementation unit at the system level to report to senior management and coordinate the work of project teams for the reform pillars (which would coordinate the work of their project task teams).
Summary of World Bank Support to TCP Activities

Curriculum Development and Enhancement

- Training of 12 MoE subject expert teams (approx. 130 members) on modern curriculum development for Primary and Intermediate stages.
- Creation of new competences-based national curricula and standards for 12 Primary stage subjects.
- Creation of new competences-based national curricula and standards for 12 Intermediate stage subjects.
- Technical reports analyzing MoE textbook policies and sample of Primary stage textbooks.

Developing Effective School Leadership

- Technical support for school leadership policy reforms on school restructuring, job descriptions, administrative procedures, and the teacher career ladder for MoE and the Civil Service Commission.
- Development of the Kuwait National School Leadership Framework which identifies five school leadership domains, guides selection and the training of new principals and forms the basis for professional standards.
- Program management support of the national School Leadership Pilot in 48 government schools, which included all three stages (Primary, Intermediate and Secondary) and for both genders.
- Delivery of three training workshops and field support for over 400 School Leadership Pilot personnel from the General Supervision Department and supervisors, principals, teachers, vice principals and heads of departments.
- Completion of the Year 1 Evaluation of the Pilot Program for New School Leadership and Management.
Summary of World Bank Support to TCP Activities (Cont.)

Developing National Education Standards

- Ongoing technical support for the National Education Standards Executive Committee.
- Ongoing technical support for the National Education Standards Coordination Committee.
- Creation of writing and review teams for Teacher and Leadership Standards, and twelve groups in charge of Curriculum Standards for the Primary and Intermediate stages.
- Development of “General Standards” for teachers, school leaders and all twelve Primary stage subject curricula and Grades 5 and 9 (end of key stage) Performance Standards.
- National consultations on Teacher and Leadership Standards with local, regional and national stakeholders (i.e. Kuwait University and College of Basic Education at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training).
- Implementation support on “General Standards” for teachers and school leaders in the 48 pilot schools.

Strengthening the National Center for Education Development – National Assessment MESA

- Technical proposal for the design of a stand-alone national center for assessment and evaluation.
- Technical assistance for MoE and NCED staff for project training in five work streams: test management, test administration and development, field operations, data management and analysis and the dissemination of test results (MESA stands for Mathematics, English, Science and Arabic).
- Intensive implementation support for the delivery of three MESA national learning assessments (Grade 5 in 2012, Grade 9 in 2013 and Grade 12 is ongoing until December 2014) including support for work in all five technical streams.
- Technical report assessing the status of Kuwait’s policies on comprehensive student assessment.
- Rapid assessment of NCED’s organizational capacity and the delivery of the presentation to NCED leadership and senior Assessment Unit staff on policy options for the future of Assessment Unit development.
Program Achievements
Program Achievements

OVERALL

1. One of the major successes was the adoption of an *integrated approach to reform*, based upon a conceptual model jointly developed by MoE, the World Bank and NCED. The comprehensive, strategic approach indicated MoE’s significant commitment to reform. The cohesive package included components at the heart of education quality: curriculum development and enhancement, effective school leadership, strengthening NCED and national assessment capacity and developing National Education Standards. Unlike previous initiatives that were piecemeal and disjointed, the TCP promoted collaboration and communication across departments within the MoE; and between MoE and NCED.

“In general, we are much better than we were four years ago.”

—Senior MoE official
Program Achievements

2. **Technical capacity and ownership amongst MoE and NCED staff was strengthened.** The development of national cadres with exposure to and training on best practices in curriculum development, effective school leadership, standards development and national student assessments is noteworthy. In total, training was provided to 805 individuals at the MoE and NCED, including school leadership staff, curriculum experts, test item developers and standards writers. Teams across project components demonstrated increased technical capacity to both lead project activities and perform project tasks as they took on increasing responsibilities for implementation. International consultants noted significant improvement in the quality of technical work, documents and materials produced by project teams. A curriculum expert noted that the subject teams, made up of 130 individuals, were “committed and serious.” Focus group discussions held with subject leads of the curriculum reform team strongly felt that their skills had developed through the training, as did MESA teams. The lead assessment expert, who expressed confidence in NCED’s ability to run the assessment, noted a significant improvement over time in the team’s technical skills, in addition to improvements in organization, planning and budgeting functions. The director of NCED also echoed this observation. The table below summarizes the number of staff trained by component:

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<th>Component</th>
<th># of staff trained</th>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum Reform</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Assessment</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Education Standards</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership</td>
<td>606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>805</strong></td>
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The TCP enhanced MoE and NCED’s abilities to mobilize and motivate teams at all levels to lead, advocate for and embrace change. The implementation of TCP activities often required additional effort from MoE and NCED teams, who demonstrated a real desire for and ability to serve as positive change agents. The organic formation of communities of learning and practice as well as transfer of knowledge within teams was remarkable and noted by both international experts and the teams themselves. In describing principals participating in the SLP Pilot, “[their] commitment and enthusiasm for embracing change and doing the best that they can with what they have is outstanding across all schools.” (School Leadership Program Evaluation Report, 2014).
Program Achievements

4. The TCP mobilized national teams who collaborated for the complete modernization of existing Grades 1-12 curriculum for all twelve subjects. The new curriculum is based upon sound theoretical principles whilst adopting an integrated and child-centered approach with specified learning activities. On the positive aspects of the new curriculum, subject leads commended the move away from memorization towards the development of competences and skills and the integration of subjects. Teams also noted that the competences and standards-based curriculum has the potential to transform Kuwaiti education if implemented with fidelity. In addition to grade and subject specific curricula, the curriculum revision process included the development of key curriculum reform documents, including a National Curriculum Framework, Implementation and Communications Plans and Teaching Plans. The work undertaken included a review of and recommendations for curriculum sector policies and architecture that included organizational restructuring, the revision of textbooks and teaching and learning materials as well as provision of in-service teacher preparation.
5. The TCP enabled the transformation of school management practices in pilot schools. The 48 schools taking part in the School Leadership Program (SLP) Pilot underwent significant improvements to the policies, processes and practices of school leadership. New job descriptions were created to clearly define roles and responsibilities for the principal and assistant principals. School leadership was re-conceptualized and reorganized with new and improved administrative procedures and the beginnings of a career ladder system were put in place. School leadership teams and teachers were trained on the use of data for decision-making, community engagement and outreach and planning for success. Pilot schools now use participatory and team-based approaches for planning and decision-making and relationships with parents and other community members are stronger. Principals participating in the SLP Pilot welcomed the increased autonomy they have been given to manage their schools and expressed readiness to be held accountable for their decisions.

“The use of data in schools represents a major change in thinking.”
— Team Lead, WB
6. The establishment of a national assessment system housed at NCED is one of the TCP’s major achievements. Knowledge of the “how-to” for the administration of a national student assessment has increased dramatically. MESA was successfully implemented for three consecutive years for Grades 5, 9 and 12. A strong foundation is in place that will allow for the continuous development of national assessment policies and practices, including tailoring and refining the assessment more specifically towards the national needs of policymakers, practitioners and the public.

7. Content and performance standards for teachers, school leaders and students have been developed in collaboration between MoE, NCED, teachers, principals, supervisors, Kuwait Teachers' Society, civil society, private sector representatives, and academics. These standards articulate what school leaders, teachers and students should know and be able to do. Nationally adopted standards have the potential to ensure better accountability, improve professional practice and enhance the public profile and standing of the teaching profession.
Lessons Learned
Lessons Learned

1. The TCP saw six different administrations take office during a 4-year period. The constant transition made decision-making at the most senior level difficult, stalling decisions at key moments in the program’s trajectory. **Sustained, high-level political commitment and support to the reform process** is necessary for real impact to occur. High-level support and clearly communicated national political commitment and continuity is critical from the outset for both policy reforms and project design as well as for the sustainability of reform efforts. Key policy and program decisions were stalled at critical moments with negative consequences including delayed implementation and demoralized teams. For example, at the time of the focus group discussion with curriculum teams, it was unclear whether the MoE would move forward with curriculum implementation after the allocation of significant time and resources. The uncertainty regarding next steps disincentivized the teams that had dedicated much time and effort to the development of new materials to continue the process. To ensure that the human and material resources allocated to reform are used effectively and efficiently, the MoE should ensure that dialogue between partners is sustained throughout changes in senior leadership and large multi-year reform initiatives such as the TCP can withstand political shifts.

2. **Management oversight structures and implementation arrangements should be established in advance to facilitate project operations.** Clear mandates for steering and coordination committees, agreement amongst teams on the coordination process, division of labor, and modality of support were lacking in the early stages of the TCP. Implementation arrangements that specify the roles and responsibilities of all parties were not always clear and milestones for measuring project progress were not in place. Project management tools such as Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks, Project Implementation Plans and Results Frameworks could be jointly used by WB and MoE teams to evaluate progress and authorize further project activities.
Lessons Learned

3. **Clear, complete and frequent communication is critical** for all program stages: a) among stakeholders (MoE, WB and NCED); b) across and within project teams; and c) with the public. Almost all program stakeholders expressed that a common, shared vision was not communicated clearly to all. For example, curriculum reform teams expressed concerns on the lack of communication about the new curriculum and felt that promotion about the new curriculum via the media and parents would prepare the public for the forthcoming change. A lack of consistent and regularized information-sharing across project teams hindered collaboration. The preparation of a well-designed communications strategy would be a key step in future programs and facilitate the continuous monitoring of perceptions, needs and expectations amongst all parties.

4. **Buy-in from relevant stakeholders and developing a shared vision** are important through all stages in the project cycle but with different purposes for each stage. For example, within the MoE, sharing the vision of the TCP across all departments, and not just those directly concerned, would reduce the burden on schools and staff from competing ministry initiatives. In the SLP Pilot, the lack of district-level support in the early stages limited the impact of the program as district officials were unsupportive of changes until the final stages of the Pilot. Supervisors responsible for supporting the work of principals, teaching staff, district-level data and planning officers as well as others working between the ministry and schools should have been more closely involved. MoE and school staff and the wider public, more generally, could have been better informed and engaged in the curriculum modernization process so as to ensure a smooth transition for implementation.
Lessons Learned

5. The allocation of adequately skilled and qualified numbers of human resources is necessary for effective implementation. The suboptimal allocation of human resources and structural constraints in recruitment and hiring led to delays in project implementation. Project continuity was sometimes jeopardized by staff turnover. On the WB side, the size and strength of the Bank team did not match program scope and requirements in the initial stages and was later adjusted to better meet the program’s needs. In the SLP Pilot, for example, despite the skill, commitment and dedication of the MoE/SLP Project Management Team, its current size is inadequate to ensure ongoing effective and efficient implementation in all pilot schools so as to include greater capacity for technical/educational, logistical and administrative support. In the early stages of the curriculum team’s work, the allocation of staff who had competing core responsibilities to labor-intensive working groups led to turnover amongst team members before teams became fully operational. In MESA, subject specialists that can lead item development within NCED are needed as the availability of seconded MoE staff to work with NCED continuously was limited.

6. The absence of a clear and widely communicated mandate from MoE on intended uses of MESA and National Education Standards led to the underutilization of the MESA results. Similarly, the lack of clarity on intended future uses of standards has limited implementation and further technical development. Collaboration between NCED and MoE should include developing a joint strategy guided by a common vision and shared priorities.
Lessons Learned

7. Qualitative issues in the provision of technical assistance delayed project progress. Because Arabic-speaking specialists were not always available for the provision of technical assistance or training, the WB team relied on other international experts being aided by translation and interpretation to overcome the language barrier. The translation and back-translation of materials affected turn-around time for documents and the quality of the end products. Kuwaiti project teams noted the importance of not just language but also the adaptation of training material and workshop content to the Kuwaiti educational context. MoE and NCED teams valued even more structured guidance and mentorship from the WB in the form of more frequent interactions with expert teams, operational manuals and implementation guidelines.