A Limited Second-Class Experience: A Sociological Perspective of the Experiences of Kuwaiti Male Education Majors

Dr. Sara Alnufaishan

Foundations of Education, College of Education, Kuwait University, Kuwait City, Kuwait

Dr. Nawaf Alanezi

Foundations of Education, College of Education, Kuwait University, Kuwait City, Kuwait

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Received: 10/4/2025 Accepted: 20/5/2025

Dr. Sara Alnufaishan[a] *

Dr. Nawaf Alanezi[b]

Abstract

The issue of male teacher shortages is widespread around the world, but in Kuwait, the problem is exacerbated by a gender-segregated education system that requires male teachers for male students, creating a high unmet demand for male teachers. As the country strives to increase male teacher representation, it is important to learn more about the experiences of male Kuwaiti education majors to learn why they chose the major, what social pressures they are experiencing, and how they are treated by peers and professors in their program. To address this topic, the present phenomenological approach study involved interviews with nine male Kuwaiti education majors. The following themes emerged from the research are: male education majors (1) believe women are teachers by nature (and nurture), (2) feel disconnected and powerless, and (3) report salary and benefits are motivators to becoming a teacher. These findings can inform efforts to increase male teacher representation.

Keywords: teaching shortages; male teachers; male experiences

منظور سوسيولوجي لخبرة الطلاب المعلمين في الكويت: هل يعد الرجال دخلاء على مهنة التدريس؟

د. ساره حمود النفيشان د. نواف ساري العنزي

المستخلص

تُعدّ مشكلة العجز في أعداد المعلمين الذكور من بين المشكلات الشائعة التي تعاني منها كثير من دول العلم؛ إلا أنها تتفاقم في الكويت نتيجة للنظام التعليمي القائم على الفصل بين الجنسين، الذي يُلزم بأن يُدرِّس الطلابَ الذكورَ معلمون رجالٌ فقط؛ وهو ما يخلق طلباً مرتفعاً على المعلمين الذكور يتعذر تلبيته.

في ضوء سعي دولة الكويت لتعزيز تمثيل الرجال في سلك التدريس، بات من الضروري استكشاف خبرات وتجارب خريجي كليات التربية الذكور الكويتيين، وذلك للوقوف على دوافع اختيارهم مهنة التدريس، والضغوط الاجتماعية التي تواجههم، وطبيعة تفاعل أقرانهم وأساتذتهم معهم.

وللبحث في هذه المشكلة، اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج نوعي فينومونولوجي/ ظواهراتي، وتم جمع بياناتها من خلال مقابلات شخصية (متعمقة) تم إجراؤها مع تسعة من خريجي كليات التربية الذكور من المواطنين الكويتيين.

وقد أثمر تحليل البيانات عن نتائج تجسدت في المواضيع التالية: (1) أن خريجو التربية الذكور يعتقدون أن المرأة مُعلمة بالفطرة (وكذلك بالنشأة والتكوين)، (2) وأنهم يشعرون بالانفصال (الإقصاء) والعجز، (3) وأخيراً أنهم يرون أن الرواتب والمزايا التي يتحصلوا عليها هي التي تُحفزهم على العمل كمعلمين. ومن شأن هذه النتائج أن تُثري الجهود المبذولة لزيادة تمثيل المعلمين الذكور.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العجز في أعداد المعلمين؛ المعلمون الذكور؛ الخبرات الذكورية

[a] *Foundations of Education, College of Education, Kuwait University, Kuwait City, Kuwait*
[b] *Foundations of Education, College of Education, Kuwait University, Kuwait City, Kuwait*

Introduction

Kuwait is currently experiencing a teacher shortage, especially male teachers. As a result of this shortage, Kuwait has opened opportunities to foreign teachers, although the general policy of the government and the Ministry of Education (MoE) prefers employing Kuwaiti nationals. Despite efforts to promote the teaching profession among Kuwaitis, over a quarter (26%) of all teachers in Kuwait are non-Kuwaiti and almost half (45%) of male teachers are non-Kuwaiti.

The shortage of male Kuwaiti teachers can be seen in part in the enrolment numbers for education and teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities. For example, based on MoE (2023) statistics, only around 25% of education majors are male. Likewise, of the 102,541 teachers in Kuwait (including all genders, nationalities, and public and private schools), 76,892 (74.7%) are female while 25,990 (25.3%) are male (MoE, 2023). Based on current (as of 2023) enrolment numbers at Kuwait University, the numbers look even bleaker: of the 8,534 education majors, 7,520 (88%) are female while only 1,014 (12%) are male, according to internal data gathered from the university.

Such discrepancies are due in part to the gender-segregated nature of the Kuwaiti education system. In Kuwait, male teachers only teach male students who are in 6th to 12th grade. All other students—all female students as well as male students before 6th grade—are taught by females. In other words, three-fourths of the grades are taught by females while only one-fourth are taught by males. Thus, the total number of male teachers would be expected to be around 25% in this sort of gender-segregated and age-based system. Still, the fact that the percentage of male education majors at Kuwait University is only around half that (12%) is alarming, which also aligns with the concerning statistic that nearly half of the male teachers in Kuwait are non-Kuwaiti males (MoE, 2023).

As a result of this situation, males are a by far numerical minority in the teaching profession in Kuwait. To learn what effect this situation has on males, this study explored the experiences of male Kuwaiti education majors as a numerical minority in a female-dominated major.

Theoretical Framework: Connell's Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity

One especially influential scholar in masculinity studies is Raewyn Connell who, along with colleagues, developed a perspective on masculinity and gender called: *gender order theory*. Major components of this theory include the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities, which were systematised in the foundational article "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity" that proposed a model of multiple masculinities and power relations (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, 1985; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In this theory, hegemonic masculinity is conceptualised as the abstract, overarching, universalised masculine perspective that has dominated societies and social systems throughout history and around the world—and continues to have a dominant influence on most aspects of most societies today. It is defined as "a collective project for realising gender hierarchy" (Connell, 2016, p. 306).

However, hegemonic masculinity is not the representation of any individual man but rather the sum and abstraction of the "ideals, fantasies, and desires" of male-dominated societies and perspectives over the millennia (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, 838). Thus, individual male experiences and identities do not necessarily align with or agree with hegemonic masculinity, and in many cases have a discordant relationship with this dominant influence. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explained, "Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" (p. 836). Thus, depending on the global, regional, local, individual, and embodied locations and experiences, several different "masculinities" emerge in a complex relationship between hegemonic masculinity and these layered factors (see Figure 1).

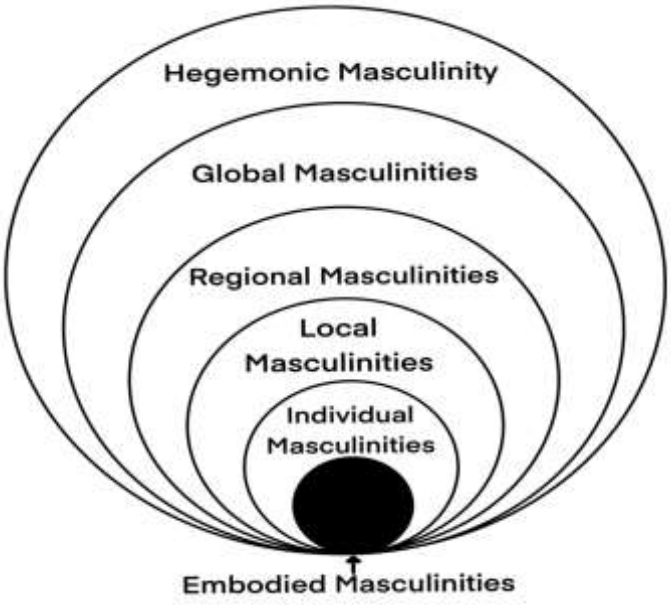

Figure 1. A Visual Representation of Connell's Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity and Multiple Masculinities

Literature Review

Males as a minority gender in educational fields

Several scholars have claimed the teaching profession became feminised in the 20th century (McDowell and Klattenberg, 2019; Ponte, 2012). Around the world, women tend to enter the teaching profession more than men in general (Christensen, et al. 2019; Low et al. 2011; Suryani 2021), and especially in early childhood education (Frigerio, 2022). Female teachers may even have higher levels of commitment to the teaching profession than male teachers, according to research by Štemberger (2020), due to multifaceted and deeply embedded in cultural norms, values, and gender roles. McDowell and Klattenberg (2019) found that such gender stereotypes discouraged the men in their study becoming a teacher. The association of teaching with traditionally feminine qualities like care and nurturing have reinforced the perspective that the duties and responsibilities typically required in the teaching profession are, as Johnson (2008) notes, "outside the normative boundaries of what are acceptable masculine practices" (p. 4). Moreover, in most countries, teaching tends to come with relatively

low wages and modest social status compared to other professions coupled with demanding work conditions and increasingly unfavourable public opinions of teachers (McDowell and Klattenberg, 2019; McGrath and Van Bergen, 2017; Ponte, 2012; Qin, 2021; Sutcher, et al. 2019).

Thus, the gender disparity in the teaching profession is common across countries (Hjalmarsson and Löfdahl, 2014; Johnson, 2008; Low et al., 2011; McDowell and Klattenberg, 2019; McGrath and Van Bergen, 2017), but the problem has a unique element in Gulf countries like Kuwait. As cited in McGrath and Van Bergen (2017), data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows that the shortage of male teachers is a global problem, but it varies greatly by country: "the proportion of male primary school teachers is close to or above 40% in some countries (China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey), yet less than 5% in others (Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Russia, and Slovenia)" (p. 159). This statistic makes it seem like the male teacher shortage is less of a problem in Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, but that fails to account for the impact of gender segregated classrooms that exist in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf countries where almost half the teachers must be male by law, a gap which is often filled by foreign teachers.

In all countries, the gender disparity in teaching is especially apparent in early childhood education. In early childhood education, as Frigerio (2022) has noted, males account for only 2–3% of teachers in most Western countries. Moreover, early childhood education and childcare have historically been associated with feminine roles (Frigerio, 2022). While some research on gender disparities in fields where men are a minority has shown men do not always feel disadvantaged when they are the minority in their classes and professions, they do often report having to deal with negative gender-based stereotypes.

For example, in a study of men's experiences amidst the growing number of women as a majority in higher education in the United Kingdom, Woodfield (2017) found that most of the men she studied did not recognise themselves as comprising a disadvantaged minority. Moreover, both men and women in Woodfield's study believe "women face greater challenges because of their gender" even when they constitute the majority (p. 29).

However, in studies that focus on the education field, especially early childhood education in particular, men do report being treated differently and being

stereotyped by colleagues, parents, and the general public, though these reported disadvantages seem to vary by country. For instance, Frigerio (2022) conducted in-depth interviews with five males in the field of early childhood education in the United Kingdom and found that the participants in this study reported that they often feel out of place as men in a woman's world, with one teacher on becoming a male nursery teacher stating: "I entered a woman's world!" (p. 129). This sense of being in a woman's world has been reported by male educators in other studies as well.

Martino's (2008) review of research on males in education, especially early childhood education, has shown that there is a widespread perception that teaching children is "doing women's work" (189). Additionally, he argued that "male teachers and boys have been constituted on the basis of their essentialised gender attributes within the context of discussions about educational policy and popular media reports which reiterate the need for a more balanced teaching profession…" based on historical prevalence of "hegemonic masculinity…[that] underlie anxieties about the impact of feminisation on male teachers and boys in elementary schools" (Martino, 2008, pp. 218–219). Moreover, attempts to increase the numbers of males in education have played into these gendered stereotypes rather than by challenging or critiquing them. Efforts to recruit and retain male teachers are often based on one of the following aspects: the need for positive male role models for children, especially boys; the ability of male teachers to address the needs of boys; and the benefit of diversifying perspectives that males can bring, among other arguments (Chaaban et al., 2022). In other words, when administrators and politicians have called for re-masculinising education through speeches, policies, and laws, they have often done so by reinforcing gender stereotypes, emphasising the importance of having male role models for boys, particularly males with strong, masculine traits.

Several studies by Moosa and Bhana (e.g, Bhana and Moosa, 2015; Moosa and Bhana, 2019) on male early childhood educators in South Africa have also shown that men who teach young children often feel like they are out of place and are treated as if they are doing a woman's job. Even worse, some of them report that they are eyed with suspicion with the belief being that "you can never be too sure what their intentions might be" (Moosa and Bhana, 2019, p. 169). Some male teachers face accusations that they even have perversions or sexual intentions, which attaches a

stigma to the job that leads men to avoid the profession altogether. Furthermore, Moosa and Bhana (2019) found

> Many of the male students portrayed teaching in the FP [Foundational Phase, i.e., early childhood education] as a feminine activity and marginalised men in such teaching by characterising them as weak or gay. They also demonstrated an inability to consider the importance and value of men caring for and teaching young children. Instead they demonstrated a belief that positioned women as solely responsible for teaching younger children because of their 'inherent' feminine qualities which made them better suited to care for and work with young children. (p. 15)

Similarly, a study by Hjalmarsson and Löfdahl (2014) on Swedish male teachers summarises the advantages and disadvantages of being a male minority quite well. They found that male teachers "view themselves as privileged due to their minority position" while "on the other hand feel considerable pressure from others as well as from themselves to perform a certain kind of masculinity" (p. 280).

Males as a minority gender in the teaching field in the Middle East

Chaaban et al. (2022) addressed this issue as it pertains to Qatar, where a shortage of Qatari teachers in public schools in general has been persistent and particularly bad among male Qatari teachers, leading to recruiting teachers from neighbouring countries to fill the gaps (not unlike in Kuwait). Chaaban et al. cited government statistics showing that 72% of teachers in 2020 were female compared to 28% male, of which only 1% were male teachers of Qatari nationality, the rest being foreign male teachers. As Chaaban et al. note, these numbers only reinforce the perception that teaching is a profession for women and low-status foreign workers, further discouraging male Qataris from considering entering the profession themselves. In their study, Chaaban et al. (2022) interviewed four male Qatari teachers who expressed the following feelings about the teaching profession they entered: it "comes at the bottom of the list" of professions, "it is a marginal career that does not enjoy the respect and recognition as other careers," and "when someone hears that I am a teacher, their look turns into sympathy . . . as they understand the hardships that teachers endure and know that the job never ends, not even after school hours" (p. 7).

Moreover, they found that Qatari culture limits the desirability of teaching for men due to the perception that it is a feminine job with low status.

Another Qatar study by Alkhateeb et al. (2022) found the males who participated in their study saw the importance of having male teachers for building a healthy, well-rounded society, but they did not want to become teachers themselves due to the perception that teaching is a demanding and stressful profession that pays poorly and has a poor social status and reputation, especially in media representations. Additionally, most of the males in this study perceived the job as being intrinsically feminine. As Alkhateeb et al. (2022) noted, "women were considered (by nature and God's design) the ideal teachers of children due to their nurturing and patient demeanour" (p. 2). As they further explained,

> [T]he global gender imbalance in the teaching profession is firmly rooted in issues relating to economic development and capitalism, the place of women in society, cultural definitions of masculinity and the declining status of the teaching profession. (Alkhateeb et al., 2022, p. 2)

Likewise, a master's thesis by Antar (2013) addressed the issue of the male teacher shortage in Lebanon, finding that the low salary of teachers, the diminished social status of teachers, and the perception of teaching as a gendered profession best suited for women were three major reasons why the participants believed there was a shortage of male teachers.

Ahmad et al. (2018) found that even females perceive the profession as feminine in their research on how mothers of students and female teachers perceived male preschool teachers in Jordan, where less than 1% of preschool teachers are male. While most the Jordanian women surveyed perceived men working in preschools as acceptable, with the younger participants being the most accepting, they still generally believed it is better suited for females. Likewise, a study by Bariş (2013) in Turkey, where kindergarten is called *anaokulu* meaning "mother's school," found that female preschool teachers had a negative attitude toward male preschool teachers in the hiring process.

Arab masculinities

Research on masculine identities has been sparse in general, but especially in the Arab world. According to Isidoros and Inhorn (2022), in their introduction to *Arab Masculinities: Anthropological Reconceptions in Precarious Times*, sociological research on the Middle East has gone through at least three phases: in the first phase, during the first half of the twentieth century, almost all researchers studying Middle Eastern cultures were men, and so they wrote primarily from a man's perspective and only had access to men's lives in the Middle East with few exceptions. During the era known as second-wave feminism during the 1970s, women scholars aimed to correct the one-sided nature of prior research and started conducting research on Middle Eastern women's experiences.

However, as Isidoros and Inhorn (2022) have noted, this feminist wave, laudable as it is, largely neglected Middle Eastern men's experiences. As they state, "This new genre of woman-centred [sic] Middle East ethnography eventually prevailed in terms of the sheer number of volumes published, comprising one-quarter of the entire ethnographic corpus by the year 2020" and, thus, "In all this work by women anthropologists, men were hardly present" (Isidoros and Inhorn, 2022, pp. 4–5). Moreover, "representations of Middle Eastern men—whether by male anthropologists enchanted with the hegemonic tribal hero warrior or women anthropologists critical of men as hegemonic patriarchs—have unwittingly served to reinforce these views of toxic masculinity in the MENA region" (Isidoros and Inhorn, 2022, p. 7). Thus, the scant research on Middle Eastern masculinities tend to highlight toxic masculinities and stereotypes to the detriment of more realistic, multifaceted masculinities.

Methods and materials

While some research has addressed the experiences of male teachers as a minority in other countries throughout the Middle East, including other Arabian Gulf countries, no studies have addressed this topic in Kuwait. To address this gap, the present study examined the experiences of male education majors in Kuwait as a gender minority in a female-dominated discipline.

Research design and research question

A phenomenological approach was used, riven by the following research question:

What are the experiences of male Kuwaiti education majors as a minority gender in the female-dominated discipline of K-12 education in Kuwait?

Population and sample

This study targeted male undergraduate education majors at a university in Kuwait. The total number of such male students is approximately 1014 among 8534, or about 12% of the undergraduate student body majoring in education–the rest of which (88%) are female. Among this population, students were recruited for interviews using in-class announcements made by faculty in the college as well as an announcement made by the president of the student union. From that, 30 names of potential participants emerged and, after further contact and conversation about the aims and procedures of the study, 12 agreed to be interviewed. However, three either did not show up or did not respond to the interview questions. Thus, nine undergraduate male students in the education department were interviewed in the end.

Data collection methods

To gather data on the experiences of these nine undergraduate male Kuwaiti education majors, 60-minute semi-structured interviews were conducted. These semi-structured interviews included 28 questions divided into two parts (questions about their beliefs about teaching in general and questions about their experiences as male undergraduate education majors at the university), plus seven questions about their demographic background (age, marital status, nationality, major, year of study, employment status, and post-graduation plans), as well as some conversational follow-up questions depending on the participants' responses. The interview questions were as follows:

Questions perspectives towards teaching as a profession

(1) Why did you decide to major in education? Was education your first desire?
(2) In your experience, what is it like being a male education major?

(3) In your experience, what are the benefits of being a male education major, if any?
(4) In your experience, what are the downsides of being a male education major, if any?
(5) What does your family think about your decision to major in education? Why?
(6) What other career/academic options did you consider besides education, if any?
(7) Why did you choose to pursue education rather than those other options?
(8) What is your relationship with your male peers in the major like? How do you feel about the way they treat you?
(9) What is your relationship with your female peers in the major like? How do you feel about the way they treat you?
(10) What is your relationship with your female professors like? How do you feel about the way they treat you?
(11) What is your relationship with your male professors like? How do you feel about the way they treat you?
(12) What are your plans after graduation?
(13) Do you want to work in education?
(14) Would you like to work outside of the teaching job in the future? And why?
(15) Why do you think the majority of education majors in Kuwait are female?
(16) What, if anything, do you think would increase the number of male education majors?
(17) In your opinion, do you think education is a man's job, a woman's job, or both? Why?
(18) In your opinion, who usually makes better teachers, males or females? Why?
(19) Does whether males or females make "better teachers" depend on the age or gender of the students?
(20) Why do you think male teachers don't teach students from K-5? Does this mean that the male teacher is unable to deal with students from K-5?
(21) Do you think females are better at teaching K-5 students?
(22) Would you consider teaching at the primary level in private schools as a male teacher? Explain your answer, whether yes or no.
(23) What are the characteristics of a successful teacher?

Questions about being a male undergraduate student at the university

(24) Do you face difficulties in registering courses as a male student?
(25) Do you face difficulties in terms of providing services such as cafeterias, restaurants and rest areas?
(26) Do you face difficulties in finding lecture times or professors when registering for courses?
(27) Talk about the difficulties that you face in the College of Education as a student, and that you think are not faced by your fellow female students.
(28) Is there anything you would like to add about your presence as a student in the College of Education?

Interviews were conducted in Arabic, audio recorded using a smartphone (with participants' permission) and transcribed using Google's speech-to-text software on Chrome/Google Docs.

Data analysis

Arabic responses were coded qualitatively by the two authors working independently, and then the codes were compared. Similar codes were kept, but any differences in the coding resulted in discussing the differences to come to a consensus. Responses and the codes were then translated from Arabic to English with input from three bilingual scholars, the two authors/researchers plus a native Arabic speaker who is an expert in English.

Results

Demographics

Among the nine male Kuwaiti education majors who participated, all were 20 to 24 years old, single (never married), and enrolled as undergraduate education students in a major university in Kuwait, although they had different specialisations: two in English, two in Arabic, one in chemistry, one in philosophy, one in history, one in geography, and one in Islamic religious studies. None of the participants were freshmen, two were sophomores, five were juniors, and two were seniors. Finally, none of the participants were employed at the time of the study.

Themes

Women are teachers by nature (and nurture)

One theme that emerged was the belief that women are better teachers by nature, although men could also be good teachers. When asked if they thought teaching was a man's job, a woman's job, or a job for everyone, four out of nine said it was a woman's job, while the other five said it was a job for everyone. None of them said it was a man's job specifically. Both Student 2 and Student 5 mentioned that teaching is mostly a woman's job because women are good teachers "by nature."

In response to a related question about who tends to make better teachers—men, women, or no difference—three participants said women make better teachers in general, one said men, two said no differences, and three said it depends. Student 8 said men make better teachers because

> *A woman should be committed to her home and her children and not devote herself to learning.*

This was the most conservative view expressed by the participants. The participants who said that women tend to make better teachers emphasised that women have more experience with and interest in working with children. Student 6 said,

> *Women are better teachers because her instinct is like a mother who can deal with everyone.*

Students 7 and 9 emphasised that this is particularly true for younger children, stating

> *I believe that the woman's emotional nature enables her to deal better with children at in earlier grades [K-5]*. (Student 7)

> *Young children must have a woman with them [as a teacher], because men cannot handle the noise and chaos.* (Student 9)

Many of the participants mentioned that whether men or women make better teachers depends on the age of the children as well as the skills and expectations of the job. For example, Student 2, Student 3, and Student 8 all said that men are better communicators and can deliver information and main ideas better, especially for older students, while women are better at listening, discussing, and exploring topics in greater detail.

When asked if they would ever consider teaching younger children, such as in grades K through 5, only two even entertained the idea. Student 1 said, "I hope, and I

think I can, because after all, they are children and easy to understand," while Student 4 was less confident, stating only that "It is possible." All the rest answered with resounding "no" responses, such as Student 9 who said, simply, "Impossible" while others said, "Too much effort" (Student 7), "Dealing with a child is stressful" (Student 5), and "It's hard" (Student 6).

In addition to age being a factor, the gender of the student is another factor mentioned by the participants. As Student 3 said, the different skills of male and female teachers can work better for students of the same gender:

> *For male students, men are better [teachers] because they can communicate the information faster, and there is less shyness. However, for female students, it is better for women to teach them because they understand each other.*

The comment about there being "less shyness" may be confusing for some readers outside of the Kuwaiti environment, but Student 3 explained further that males should be modest around females and vice versa.

The perception of teaching being a woman's job can even affect how others treat the students in their experience. Student 9 mentioned that some of his family members saw him as entering a feminine profession. He said,

> *My mother is a teacher and supports my decision to be a teacher, but my father is a police officer and believes it is a job more suitable for women.*

Student 9 also expressed that even his female peers in the education college make him feel like they think it is a job more for women than men. When asked about his interactions with female students in the education college, he said that there is no interaction at all and that,

> *I feel that they [my female peers] find it strange that a man wants to become a teacher.*

Student 9 also said that teaching is mostly a woman's job, but not because it is part of women's nature. Rather, he said it is a woman's job due to social factors and pressures in Kuwait. He said,

> *Women are teachers more because it offers an unmixed work environment [in terms of gender] and is more supportive of women's lifestyles.*

What he meant was that the unmixed work environment, in other words the gender segregated work environment, is more amenable to the desires and expectations of some women and their families, particularly more conservative ones. It offers an opportunity to have a good profession without having to mix with men, which some Kuwaiti families are strict about. This point leads directly to the next theme, which is that female peers are seen as more conservative than in other majors, which affects the environment in the college of education and the students' experiences in that environment.

Being a numerical minority contributes to disconnection and powerlessness

Unlike some of the other colleges in the university, the education college has always had gender segregated classes with males as numerical minorities. As student 7 said,

> *There is no equality in dealing with male and female students because the college basically prepares the student for a separate life with no mixing [of genders] in it.*

Additionally, even though the cafeteria and student lounge areas in the college are supposed to be for all students, the male students said they do not feel welcome there. When asked about some of the downsides of being a male education major, almost all of them mentioned issues related to being excluded by the female majority, which affected the following student spaces and services for males.

As alluded to earlier, one of the complaints about the downsides centred on the cafeteria. Students 1, 3, 4, and 9 all mentioned the cafeteria as being an issue as well, meaning that 5 out of 9 participants raised that issue.

Students also brought up the issue of the student lounge. The student lounges are open to everyone, but the female education students take them over and make the male students feel unwelcome. Thus, many of the male students in this study reported that they wanted their own space, which they currently do not have.

When asked what sort of services or places the male students felt they needed, Students 1, 3, 4, and 8 all mentioned the lack of a seating area, rest area, lounge, or *diwaniya* for men. Student 1 mentioned the word *diwaniya* in particular, which has a specific meaning in Arabic. It is a sitting area traditionally for males only where men sit, socialise, and discuss life, society, religion, and politics.

Some of the responses from the participants did not mention specific issues, but instead mentioned a general feeling of discomfort and a lack of belongingness. For instance, Student 7 said,

> *The number of females is very large. As a man, I feel completely unwanted and have no place for me*

And at a later point Student 7 reiterated

> *The crowding of females everywhere makes me uncomfortable and disoriented, and I do not know where to go. A special place should be allocated for men.*

Another one of the biggest complaints from the male students was the lack of classes available to them. Because classes are segregated by gender in the college of education, and because the number of male students is small, there are often not enough students to fill the male sections of certain required classes, or the classes are offered at bad times. This situation makes the male students must wait a semester to take a class, take classes at undesirable times, or have spread out schedules with a morning class and a late afternoon class with nothing in between. As Student 8 said,

> *Because of the lack of courses, the time is very long between classes. Choosing the time for my courses is very annoying. I may find some courses in the morning and others at a much later time.*

Similarly, Student 7 said,

> *Those responsible for registration need to understand the necessity to coordinate registration times better. For example, the morning courses must be more varied so I can register for multiple morning courses. Because there is a lack of courses, the time is very long between classes.*

Both Student 5 and Student 8 suggested allowing for mixing genders in classes or offering more classes for males.

Somewhat related to the feeling disconnected, the male students in this study also experience feelings of powerlessness in their college as a minority and described their interactions with female peers as cold, disconnected, or nonexistent. Student 8 said,

> *Women act as if the college is theirs, so they raid our private places, and this is disrespectful to us.*

When asked about his interactions with female students in the education college, eight of the nine students said there is no interaction or relationship between male and female students whatsoever. To this point, Student 5 said in no uncertain terms,

They disapprove of our presence as male students.

Only Student 1 had a positive response to this question, describing the relationship as being,

Like sisters; cooperative.

However, it is not clear whether this was a diplomatic response or a sincere one since the student did not elaborate further even when asked to explain.

Although the students describe their interactions with female peers as cold or nonexistent, their descriptions of their interactions with female professors are generally warm and positive, maybe even better than with their male professors. Student 1 remarked,

The female professors are better than the male doctors, and I hope the number of courses they teach will increase for us.

Similarly, Student 5 stated,

The female professors are better than males, and our relationship is better.

In fact, all nine students said their interactions with female professors are good or excellent, and five out of nine said the interactions are "better" or "much better" than with their male professors.

Male Kuwaiti education students are motivated by salary and benefits

These male Kuwait education majors have chosen to pursue teaching as a profession despite many of the negative experiences they have faced, such as the lack of courses, feeling disconnected and excluded, and experiencing unfair treatment. In response to questions about why they decided to become teachers despite these issues, most cited the pay, schedule, job security, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. For instance, Student 5 said,

Teaching is not my first desire, but the salary is good.

However, even though the students participating in this study generally considered the salary to be sufficient, it is not quite as high as some other jobs they have taken into consideration. For example, Student 4 mentioned that, if he would not

end up going into teaching, he would probably consider a job in the military police of Kuwait since

The salary is better for the military.

In addition to salary, job security—the likelihood of getting and keeping a job—was another major concern. Student 3 said,

The best thing about it is that I am reassured about the future because of the job security.

In other words, the demand for male Kuwaiti teachers is higher than the supply, so there is a good chance to land a good job in a good location.

Some of the students shared that the schedule and time off is particularly appealing. Student 9 remarked,

Since I want to marry a teacher, my work hours for me, my wife and my children will be at the same time.

Overall, only three of the participants mentioned anything like a love or a passion for the teaching profession, while the other six all mentioned salary and/or benefits.

Discussion and Conclusions

Women are teachers by nature (and nurture)

One of the common themes that arose in the interviews with male education majors in Kuwait was that the participants generally perceived women as being better teachers due to innate and social factors. This perception was widely reflected in the literature as well. Both Chaaban et al. (2022) and Alkhateeb et al. (2022) observed similar views among Qataris, as did Antar (2013) among Lebanese, Ahmad et al. (2018) among Jordanians, and Bariş (2013) among Turkish participants. Even outside of the Middle East, this perception remains strong. Studies conducted in Britain (Frigerio, 2022), the United States (Christensen et al., 2019; Ponte, 2012), Sweden (Hjalmarsson and Löfdahl, 2014), Singapore (Low et al., 2011), Indonesia (Suryani, 2021), and South Africa (Bhana and Moosa, 2015; Moosa and Bhana, 2019) have all reported that a stereotype exists that teaching is a feminine profession, especially early childhood and elementary education. Indeed, a cross-national study by McDowell and Klattenberg (2019) found this to be a common perception around the world.

Being a numerical minority contributes to deep feelings of disconnection and powerlessness

The finding that the male students felt disconnected and powerless as a numerical minority within the conservative gender-segregated environment differs from much of the literature due to the specific situation and population involved. For instance, in two studies, one in Britain (Woodfield, 2017) and the other in Sweden (Hjalmarsson and Löfdahl, 2014), found that the male participants did not feel discriminated against, out of place, or disadvantaged being part of a minority of males within the teaching profession.

However, in another British study, Frigerio (2022) found that male nursery schoolteachers in the study did feel out of place, with one exclaiming, "I entered a woman's world!" Still, even Frigerio's study did not report the degree of feelings of exclusion and enforced conservatism in gender interactions as this present study.

Male Kuwaiti education students are motivated by high salary and greater benefits

While some of the male Kuwaiti education students expressed a passion for teaching, most of them reported being influenced by salary and benefits. In other words, they considered the salary, benefits, vacation time, and job security to be the most appealing aspects of the profession that motivated them to major in education. However, they were discouraged by the perception of the field as feminine and not prestigious. Previous research on the topic has also shown that men tend to be motivated by salary and demotivated by a lack of salary and social status of teachers—that is, when the salary is good and the society values the profession, men are more likely to consider the profession (Fiske, 2012). However, if the salary is low or the prestige and reputation are low, or both the salary and prestige are low, then men tend to avoid the profession.

Among studies of male teachers in the Arab world, Antar (2013) found that the shortage of male teachers in Lebanon was largely due to the low salary and low social status of teachers along with the perception of teaching as a gendered profession best suited for women, which aligns with the present findings. Chaaban et

al.'s (2022) study interviews with Qatari males found that teaching "comes at the bottom of the list" of professions and "is a marginal career that does not enjoy the respect and recognition as other careers" (p. 7). The low reputation of the job, again, discouraged the Qatari males in Chaaban et al.'s study from becoming teachers, which was also exacerbated by the perception of the profession as feminine. Alkhateeb et al. (2022) also found that Qatari males do not find teaching to be an appealing profession due to the perception that it is a stressful, low-paying profession that has a poor social status and reputation. Alonaizi (2016), who studied male Kuwaiti teachers, arrived at similar findings, although the opinions of the teaching profession were less negative than the Qatari studies.

Hegemonic masculinity and the experience of being a numerical minority

This research sheds light on a situation where females are the numerically dominant group inscribed within a broader regional environment where males are the dominant social and political force in the highly patriarchal society of the Gulf states, including Kuwait. Thus, males still hold most of the power in the social hierarchy in general, but in this specific situation, the hierarchy is flipped in some ways. As a result, the males in this study, as a numerical minority, describe experiencing some relatively minor inconveniences, such as not having access to as much space for studying, eating, and socialising or not having as many options for courses, but outside of the college of education and after graduation, they perceive that they have more opportunities for different types of teaching and administrative jobs than the female education students, which is similar to the "glass escalator" concept (Williams, 1992).

In relation to Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, the hegemonic, global, and regional environments still favour a male-dominated society, but the local situation is somewhat reversed to make it female-dominated in certain ways so that the individual and embodied experiences of the male education students in this study reveal a complicated relationship between their masculine identities and the environment and profession they are in. In this sense, the males in this study experienced what it is like to have a second-class status, although only to a limited extent.

Recommendations

One commonly reported experience among male Kuwaiti education majors is

feeling disconnected and powerless as a numerical minority in a conservative, gender-segregated environment. They have fewer course choices, less flexibility in their courses, fewer amenities, and little to no space to call their own or even to freely share with female students. In a limited sense, the male Kuwaiti education students in this study are experiencing what it means to be a second-class citizen, something women have a long history of dealing with in Kuwait and around the world in most other aspects of society. To address this issue, though, the country in general and the university in particular should continue to strive for greater male representation among the Kuwaiti teaching profession—a goal the country is pursuing.

Another recommendation that would help address this problem is more gender integration in the college. More integration between genders would provide more options and flexibility for male students concerning courses, resources, and spaces that are not afforded to them in the current segregated system. However, the recent decision to segregate even more colleges in Kuwait, as reported by AlMutairi (2024), is heading in the opposite direction from this recommendation. Still, it must be stressed that it is possible to integrate classes while also keeping male and female students separate within the classroom to adhere to religious rules, national laws, and cultural values while also addressing the problem faced by male education students, as opposed to complete segregation of courses.

The alternative to some degree of integration—that is, if complete segregation continues to be the policy—is to ensure that all students have the same resources and opportunities regardless of gender, which would mean increased costs to offer the same courses and resources twice. In the case of male education students in Kuwait, this might mean spending more money to offer more courses and create additional student support services as well as more spaces to gather and eat specifically for male students. As it currently stands, male education students in Kuwait report that very few if any of the student resources are going to them, which will only lead to fewer males deciding to become education majors and pursue the teaching profession rather than the goal of attracting more. In conjunction with the finding that male students report being motivated by salary and benefits in their pursuit of a major and a career, the lack of resources for male education students in Kuwait is and will continue to be a major

demotivator and disincentive to becoming a teacher unless otherwise addressed through policy changes and/or increased funding.

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