

Reforming Assessment Practices for a Supportive Learning Environment in Kuwait: Reducing Psychological Stress Through Global Insights

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Abstract: *Kuwait's educational system remains rooted in traditional examination practices, which contribute to psychological stress and hinder academic creativity. This study examines the effects of these methods on students' mental health, academic performance, and readiness for the workforce. Drawing from both Arab and international research, including case studies from Finland, Singapore, the USA, and Canada, the paper identifies best practices in reducing test-related stress. It proposes a shift towards formative assessment, interactive teaching, and mental health support in schools to cultivate a more creative, inclusive, and productive learning environment.*

Keywords: Kuwait education, exam stress, formative assessment, student mental health, educational reform

1. Introduction

Education is a critical factor in the development of society and human capital. It equips students with essential knowledge and skills. According to the Kuwait Ministry of Education, education is free and mandatory. The curriculum emphasizes core subjects including Arabic, English, mathematics, and science. (MOE Kuwait, n.d.). The educational system heavily relies on regular exams, which have a negative impact on the classroom atmosphere and indirectly harm students' future jobs. It is important to remember that the structure and demands of the educational system can have a substantial impact on students' abilities, critical thinking, and flexibility, all of which are essential for a seamless transition into the job market. The study explores challenges and outcomes of teaching strategies used in Kuwaiti schools. This study aims to evaluate the impact of Kuwait's exam-based education system on student mental health and academic outcomes, and to propose alternative strategies inspired by global models.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it highlights how exam-related psychological stress undermines student performance and creativity, and provides evidence-based recommendations to reform Kuwait's education system in line with global best practices.

1.2 Objectives

- 1) Examine the current educational system in Kuwaiti schools.
- 2) Analyse the influence of psychological stress as well as the traditional exams on their achievement and creativity.
- 3) Compare the successful international and Arab educational studies.
- 4) Provide recommendations to improve the education system and reduce student stress.

2. Problem Statement

Kuwait education depends on theoretical learning and memorization. Students are assessed through frequent tests. The outcome is an environment that is not favourable for learning. This, leads to emotional distress and a loss of interest. Stress has a significant impact on performance and concentration (Al-Hamlan et al., 2025; BMC Public Health, 2025). Moreover, it could affect sleep efficiency and is connected to bad lifestyle choices. Therefore, less focus on school examinations and more support would improve student achievement and well-being.

2.1 TIMSS 2023 Statistics

According to TIMSS 2023, Kuwaiti students continue to lag behind the international average (500) in mathematics and science at the fourth and eighth grades, as indicated by the official national report on Kuwait's TIMSS 2023 results. In the fourth grade, students earned 378 points in mathematics and 392 points in science, while in the eighth grade, they earned 403 points in mathematics and 444 points in science. Furthermore, the TIMSS test shows a clear gap. In mathematics, you can see that their performance is much below the global average. However, there was a slight improvement in the 8th-grade science scores. However, the scores still indicate that the Kuwaiti educational system has systemic issues that absolutely need significant reform. (TIMSS, 2023).

Grade	Subject	Kuwait Score	International Centerpoint	Gap vs. International
4th	Mathematics	378	500	-122
4th	Science	392	500	-108
8th	Mathematics	403	500	-97
8th	Science	444	500	-56

Figure 1: Kuwait National Report on TIMSS 2023.

2.2 Primary Education Proficiency

Approximately half of the pupils in Kuwaiti elementary schools are unable to read. This is partly due to greater disparities in educational attainment among boys compared to girls. Because of the correlation between students' stress levels and their lack of literacy, it is imperative that schools establish secure environments in which students can cultivate their skills while simultaneously alleviating their academic tension (World Bank, 2024).

Table 1: Primary education reading proficiency

Category	Percentage
Students below the minimum reading proficiency	49%
Overall Learning Poverty	51%
Boys	56%
Girls	43.3%

3. The Importance of Mental Health and Its Impact on Academic Achievement

Mental health is crucial for achieving excellent academic performance. Students' performance is adversely affected by elevated levels of tension and anxiety, (Al-Fayyad, 2025; Al-Habsi et al., 2025). This would lead to challenges in concentration and knowledge retention. Therefore, it is important to adopt strategies that mitigate psychological stress, such as interactive learning, ongoing assessment, and support services.

4. Educational System Structure

The three main levels of the Kuwaiti education system are basic, intermediate, and secondary education. Education in Kuwait is compulsory and free. Core courses in science, mathematics, Arabic, and English form the foundation of the curriculum. In addition to using nationally standardized tests to measure overall academic performance, the system tracks student progress through frequent assessments and final semester exams (MOE Kuwait, n.d.). Conventional educational methods emphasize the memorization of information and the administration of final examinations. Unfortunately, this approach frustrates students and adds to their academic burden. Creativity, analytical thinking, and the pursuit of solutions are additionally minimized.

4.1 Effects of the Current System

The frequent examinations within Kuwait's educational framework exert considerable psychological stress on students, adversely affecting their overall academic performance. Frequent testing elevates stress and anxiety levels while simultaneously diminishing students' motivation and engagement in the learning process. This pressure restricts their capacity to thoroughly comprehend and retain the material, often compelling them to prioritize short-term memorization over deep understanding. The effects could prevent the development of critical thinking skills and creativity, which are essential for ongoing academic success (Alsaqabi, 2023). Moreover, it causes psychological pressure on students, reduces motivation for learning and creates a gap between the demands of the labour market and the requirements

5. Literature Review

This section examines research from both Arab and foreign institutions that addressed the impact of psychological stress and frequent exams on students' learning outcomes and overall health

5.1 Global Studies

5.1.1 Finland

Examinations in Finland postponed to the subsequent school year. It encourages students to think critically and focus on learning rather than memorisation. Thus, decreased anxiety, on the other hand, increased academic engagement; moreover, it improved overall psychological condition (NDTV, 2024). These findings imply that fewer early exams might be advantageous for Kuwait's educational system. Both academic achievement and mental health may benefit from this.

5.1.2 USA

Studies on active learning in the United States demonstrate that engaging students through interactive and participatory methods significantly improves academic achievement compared to traditional lecture-based education (Freeman et al., 2014). Students in schools that use active learning methods tend to do better on examinations, remember what they've learned for longer, and feel less frustrated with school (Freeman et al., 2014). These results show that moving away from only using traditional teaching methods, which often rely on high-stakes tests, can help students do better in school and feel better emotionally.

5.1.3 Singapore

The Ministry of Education in Singapore reduced early primary assessments to promote a more supportive learning environment. Evidence indicates that minimizing high-stakes testing in early education enhances children's focus on concepts, fosters creativity, and reduces anxiety (MOE Singapore, 2019). According to these modifications, a reduction in the number of tests can improve academic performance and mental health.

5.1.4 Netherlands

In the Netherlands, primary schools have implemented a system that emphasizes continuous formative assessment over standardized testing. This method promotes learning via feedback, self-reflection, and skill enhancement, rather than solely through examination results. Research indicates that students in these institutions exhibit reduced stress levels and enhanced engagement, concurrently attaining robust academic outcomes (OECD, 2023). This model emphasizes the advantages of alleviating the pressures associated with conventional examinations.

5.1.5 Canada

In their 2024 study, Najafi, MacLeod, and Spector examined the impact of active learning in Canadian classrooms. Students who engage in problem-solving rather than test-focused activities report reduced stress levels. In addition, they possess better critical thinking skills and the ability to solve problems. The research, conducted at the university level, yields results relevant to elementary and middle schools.

Previous studies show that students' performance, critical thinking, and mental health can all be significantly enhanced by using active and participatory learning methodologies in conjunction with fewer high-stakes exams.

5.2 Arab Studies

5.2.1 Iraq

Fayyad (2025) investigated psychological stress in female students who excelled in preparatory schools in Baghdad. It indicated that the majority of students experienced moderate stress levels. Additionally, this stress decreased upon the initiation of guidance programs. This indicates that mental health support significantly enhances academic achievement and overall well-being.

5.2.2 Oman

This study analyzed the impact of guidance programs on student stress levels. The findings demonstrated that the implementation of these programs resulted in a reduction of psychological stress among students and an enhancement of their academic performance. These interventions underscore the significance of implementing supportive educational strategies to improve mental well-being and learning outcomes (Al-Habsi et al., 2025).

5.2.3 Saudi Arabia

While Alshareef et al. (2025) concentrated on test anxiety among medical students, their findings hold significance for elementary and secondary education as well. Studies indicate that students experiencing high test-related stress often perform poorly academically. Traditional exams often raise stress levels, reducing student engagement and achievement. This emphasizes the necessity of establishing support systems and strategies for emotional regulation to help students manage the demands of tests and improve their academic performance.

5.2.4 Egypt

A recent study conducted in Egypt examined test anxiety among students aged 10 to 17. The study employed the Arabic version of the Children's Test Anxiety Scale (CTAS). The findings indicated that anxiety affected students' cognitive processes (25.26%), emotional responses (19.66%), and task-unrelated behaviours (18.6%). The scale demonstrated high reliability, indicated by Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.75 to 0.89. Thus, test anxiety is a significant concern for students. It impacts cognitive, emotional, and behavioural functioning. Therefore, it's essential to apply supportive strategies, which, on the other hand, will reduce stress and will improve learning outcomes (Fathy & Murad, 2022).

5.2.5 Palestine

A Palestinian study examined the inverse relationship between academic performance and test anxiety among 3rd-grade pupils. It indicated that lower performance is associated with increased test-related stress, which demonstrates the significant impact of traditional examinations on students' achievements. (Rizq, 2024). The findings emphasize the importance of employing supportive educational strategies to alleviate anxiety and create a stress-free, healthier learning environment. This is consistent with the goals of fostering creativity and well-being in educational environments.

6. Research Methodology

- Type of Research: Descriptive and analytical study.
- Data Sources: TIMSS reports, Arab and global studies, academic articles.
- Data Collection Tools: Document and statistical analysis, tables.
- Analysis Method: Descriptive and comparative analysis to derive recommendations.

Sources were selected based on their relevance, recency, and peer-reviewed status to ensure the reliability of the analysis.

7. Recommendations

- 1) Eliminate the dependence on final examinations in favor of ongoing formative evaluation.
- 2) Incorporate project-based and problem-solving learning.
- 3) Conduct psychological support and counseling programs in educational institutions.
- 4) Educate educators on implementing active learning strategies.
- 5) Align curricula with the requirements of the labor market and the skills that need to be developed in the future.
- 6) While contemplating the Kuwaiti societal context, learn from global experiences.
- 7) Suggestions for Decision-Makers: Develop policies to reduce student psychological pressure.
 - Develop policies aimed at alleviating students' psychological stress.
 - Distribute funds to promote mental health and counseling initiatives.
 - To evaluate the effectiveness of new educational policies, monitor committees should be established.
 - Strengthen partnerships between the Ministry of Education, research centers, and universities to implement international best practices on a local scale.

8. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the pressing need for educational reform in Kuwait. Traditional exams contribute to widespread psychological stress and inhibit students' creative and cognitive development. Shifting towards formative assessment, project-based learning, and mental health support systems can foster more meaningful learning outcomes. A stress-free education system not only enhances student well-being but also prepares a more adaptive and innovative workforce for Kuwait's future.

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Author Profile

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