



The
University
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Challenges of Being a Teacher and Mother in Kuwait

By

Tasneem Alhattab

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillments of the requirements for
the degree of philosophy

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield

School of Education

April 2023

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Abstract

The aim of the current study is to understand the challenges Kuwaiti women face as mothers and teachers and to describe their experiences, roles, and difficulties. I focused on identifying the factors affecting the lives of a group of mothers in Kuwait and used an interpretive paradigm and a qualitative methodology (interviews) to investigate these challenges. I employed an ecological model of human development (systems theory) as the framework for this research and conducted thematic analysis to analyse the interviews. The findings revealed three main factors affecting the lives of the mother-teachers. The first factor (the work environment) involved three challenges associated with the teaching profession: firstly, challenges related to heavy burdens and a lack of time; secondly, challenges related to officials placing pressure on teachers; and thirdly, challenges related to the education system and curriculum. The second factor (the education system) concerned the curriculum and the associated obstacles that mothers and children face in Kuwait. This could also be segmented into three components: firstly, the challenges of mothers dealing with their children's education; secondly, challenges associated with the educational requirements of schools; and thirdly, the challenges that mothers face in consistently tracking their children's educational progress while fulfilling their roles as teachers. The third factor (the social expectations of Kuwaiti women) involved women's challenges within their households and Kuwaiti society, which values women's traditional roles. This, again, was divided into three categories: firstly, challenges related to the traditional roles of women and men in Kuwaiti culture; secondly, challenges associated with social obligations in Kuwaiti culture; and thirdly, challenges associated with social evaluations and the concept of the perfect woman (*Sanaa*) المرأة السنعة.

Acknowledgements

Praise be to God for His grace, generosity, assistance, and everything else that He provides. I am deeply grateful for the blessings that God has bestowed upon me, including the opportunity to pursue my academic goals. Without His divine assistance, I would not have overcome the difficulties and obstacles I faced. I would also like to extend my gratitude herein to the key people who have supported me and contributed to my challenging but rewarding academic journey.

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Tom Billington, Daniel Goodley, and Antonios Ktenidis, for their expert direction, insightful feedback, and constant encouragement throughout my research. During every phase of the journey, their guidance and mentorship supported my development.

I also would like to express my gratitude to the University of Sheffield for providing me with this wonderful opportunity to pursue a PhD, and to Kuwait for supporting and investing in my education by providing a scholarship that enabled me to undertake this research.

Furthermore, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to all the participants who graciously gave their time to the study. I appreciate their willingness to participate in this academic project. Their perspectives, insights, and experiences not only enriched my knowledge of the topic but also invaluable contributed to the success of the research.

Beyond that, I am deeply grateful to my husband, Faisal Alothman, for his extreme support, patience, and understanding, especially during the stressful and demanding periods of my PhD. He encouraged and inspired me throughout, providing essential support to my strengths and motivation. Above all, he gave me love and companionship—and helped to care for our children!

I also cannot fail to mention my mother, Wasmeyah Alkhalifah, who has been a source of unending emotional support. During my studies, her unwavering belief in me grounded my efforts, and I can never thank her enough for instilling in me a love of learning and intellectual curiosity, which have sustained me throughout my PhD journey, along with constant prayer. Her trust and confidence in me have reinforced my commitment to completing this PhD thesis, particularly during challenging times, and her financial support has also been a saving grace. I would also like to thank my father, Houmod, for his unwavering confidence in me. Without him, I would not have learned the value of perseverance. My father has been my teacher and mentor throughout my life, and he has given me an appreciation for lifelong learning.

In addition, throughout my PhD studies, my children, Abdulaziz, Khaled, Dania, and Razan, brought me a great deal of happiness and inspiration. I appreciate their unconditional affection, which motivates me to be my best self every day. They deserve special thanks for their tolerance, understanding, and unwavering support for my academic career. They were always there for me, even when I was preoccupied and struggling to balance my family life with my studies. I could not have reached this point without their belief and encouragement.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my siblings, their husbands and wives, my extended family, and my friends for their encouragement, constant support, and love throughout my academic journey. They have been vital sources of strength and motivation and have been supremely understanding throughout my studies. Their love and encouragement have been instrumental to my success. It is a sincere pleasure to have such wonderful people in my life.

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Glossary

Hadith	<p>“Hadith, in Sharia terminology, is what was transmitted from the Messenger of God (may God bless him and grant him peace) in terms of words, actions, statements, or descriptions.</p> <p>Hadith scholars define the Sunnah as what was transmitted from the Messenger of God (may God bless him and grant him peace) in terms of words, actions, reports, moral or ethical characteristics, or biographs. (Taqatqa,2023, p.1)</p>
‘Sanaa’ woman المرأة السنعة	<p><i>Sanaa</i> is a set of laws and rules that outlines the behaviours and manners of woman in her interactions with family members and the wider society. It may be considered etiquette and is inherited from one’s ancestors and passed on to one’s children (Ruslan, 2022).</p>
Diwaniyah	<p>“The term diwaniyah derives from the Persian word di:wa:n. It is a welcoming space where men gather to discuss politics and the economy (Al-Maghames, 1986). Diwaniyyah can be defined as a place that can be used as a male guesthouse where social gatherings and receptions are held. Therefore, the diwaniyyah comprises a significant aspect of Kuwaiti culture; it is a place where men can freely express their opinions and thoughts about matters of daily life both locally and globally, encompassing political, educational, social, economic, or sports issues (Al-Kandari, 2002)”. (Al-Sejari,2018, p.1)</p>
CBC	<p>Competency-based curriculum refers to systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students’ demonstration of the learned knowledge and skills expected to be learned as students’ progress through their education. (Sadeq, Akbar & Al Wazzan,2021, P.2)</p>
Abaya	<p>Muslim women, especially in the Arab Gulf states, frequently wear the abaya, an elongated and voluminous garment, which is layered over their other clothes. Sleeves extend to the forearms and provide coverage from the neck to the ankles. Consistently paired with a Shayla, a light, fitting veil, the abaya is customarily rendered black (Shimek, 2012).</p>
Fatwa	<p>“Fatwa, in <u>Islam</u>, a formal ruling or interpretation on a point of <u>Islamic law</u> given by a qualified legal scholar (known as a <u>mufti</u>). Fatwas are usually issued in response to questions from individuals or Islamic courts” (Britannica,2023)</p>
WhatsApp	<p>WhatsApp is a free multiplatform messaging app that allows users to have video and audio conversations, exchange text messages and communicate in several other ways. WhatsApp makes it easier to send PDFs, spreadsheets, and slideshows than email or other document-sharing methods. After creating a WhatsApp account, users can start sending messages to individual contacts or groups. If users want to create a group chat, they may invite up to 256 people (Goodwin, 2023).</p>

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Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter explains the background of the research and my position within the field of Psychology and Education, highlighting my personal interests and perspectives on the topic of study. This chapter also presents the research aim, research question, and significance of the research.

1.1 Background of the Literature

In this research, I focused on the factors that influence the lives of mothers working as teachers in Kuwait, given that teaching can be an overwhelming profession that is lived as well as worked. This research focused primarily on the ideologies underpinning the teaching profession in Kuwait and the considerable workload experienced by mother-teachers. The Kuwaiti context is unique since tradition and culture can sometimes plague both teachers and mothers. Thus, mother-teachers face many barriers in performing their roles, as highlighted throughout this research.

The literature on mothers who work as teachers has identified various challenges, such as the responsibility of upholding professionalism in their roles as educators, instructors, guides, appraisers, and examiners of students, while also fulfilling their obligations as mothers, attending to their husbands, caring for their children, and managing household tasks (Sabuhari et al 2017 cited in Eva, 2023). It is demanding to perform simultaneously as teachers and mothers due to the continuous caregiving expectations associated with both roles. Additionally, there are pressures for women to assume a greater share of responsibility for childcare and household tasks than their spouses (Claesson & Brice, 1989; Hermann, et al, 2023; Michaelian, 2005). In Kuwait, childcare is perceived as a task performed by women (Dashti & Yateem, 2018; Dwairy et al., 2010). Thus, mother-teachers have multiple roles as mothers, spouses, and teachers, with the former regarded as the most significant. These multiple roles often generate conflicts that increase levels of stress (Michaelian, 2005). Hermann et al. (2023) showed that mother-teachers find it difficult to balance

their multiple roles, feeling guilty for not paying enough attention to their children and suffering from the fact that work hours and school schedules are strict and inflexible. Additionally, as teachers, they experience hard work, exhaustion, high expectations, and problems with some learners. Finally, after teaching throughout the day, mother-teachers return home and become teachers again for their children.

According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), the work of working mothers can affect mother–child relationships and quality of life. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner (2005) claimed that religion, culture, school, traditions, and family also have pervasive influences. Thus, it is important to understand the context of human lives within the systems that contribute to and affect their quality of life. Vahedi et al (2019) found that children experienced heightened home conflict due to the work–family demands experienced by their parents, which often left their parents feeling annoyed, impatient, or angry, as well as leading to inter-parental conflict. Parental irritation frequently results in children developing behavioural problems. However, according to Vahedi et al (2019), mothers’ work–family conflicts tend to have a greater impact on their children’s childhood and adolescence. Therefore, in this study, I concentrated on the lives of a specific group of mothers who worked as teachers and examined the different factors mentioned during the interviews that affected these mothers’ lives.

To investigate these factors, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with the participants to obtain a clear in-depth understanding of the mother-teachers’ perspectives. The objective was to explain aspects of their lives as mother-teachers, along with the complications they raised and their effects. This subject deserves comprehensive investigation because mother-teachers, their children, and the people around them interact within disparate systems. The in-depth interviews enabled me to extensively investigate mothers-teachers lives and environments to draw attention to their diverse aspects.

The next section explains the researcher's position and the reasons for choosing to study this topic.

1.2 Researcher's Position and Perspectives

My family appreciates learning and teaching. My father holds a doctorate and has worked extensively in the education sector. His career achievements led to him becoming the first Kuwaiti official in the Department of Islamic Education, responsible for formulating, preparing, and supervising Islamic education for all levels of education in Kuwait. My mother was eventually promoted to the position of school principal. She was exceedingly patient and dedicated not only to her work but also to the upbringing of her five children. Following in our parents' footsteps, my sister and I also joined the education sector, becoming simultaneously teachers and mothers. I have also been nominated for a position in family counselling. My interest in psychology is focused on parent-child relationships and the influences of parents on their children's development. My interest in this topic began with questions regarding the behaviour of young people and the reactions of parents towards such behaviour. I expanded my knowledge of how parents affect their children's development, specifically focusing on attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Ainsworth et al 1978; Bowlby, 1979) and Baumrind's (1967, 1971, 1991) parenting style model. I was impressed by the research and theoretical foundations of these authors. However, the work of researchers such as Bronfenbrenner (2005) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) raised several questions in my mind, which revolved around how the most important factors influencing the lives of collective individuals (rather than only mothers) affect children's development.

My sister and I often wondered how our mother handled all the pressures in her life as a teacher and mother over the years. We also engaged in discussions on this topic, not only with our mother but with friends in the same field, frequently complaining about the difficulties we faced. However, we ensured that we kept these discussions among ourselves, and our voices were never heard by

others, such as officials in our schools, the Ministry of Education, newspapers, or the media. Subsequently, my sister earned a scholarship to pursue a master's degree, and she gave up working as a teacher to complete her studies. After obtaining a master's degree, she returned to teaching again for a short period, but could not bear the pressures and burdens that the profession imposed. Consequently, she resigned and stayed at home to take care of her three children. She was not the only one. Three of our friends who had combined education and motherhood decided to quit the teaching profession despite the financial advantages it offered. To reduce stress and pressure and maintain a balance in their lives, they chose jobs that paid lower wages and did not require much effort.

Due to this background, I conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with mothers who worked as teachers in Kuwait to understand the challenges they faced due to their dual roles as mothers and teachers. I attempted to understand the factors affecting their lives in the Kuwaiti context using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Being both a mother and a teacher in Kuwait gave me an advantage in this study because my position facilitated a better understanding of the participants' experiences.

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of the current study is to understand Kuwaiti women's challenges, including their experiences, roles, and difficulties, as both mothers and teachers. I particularly focused on identifying the range of factors affecting the lives of this group of mothers.

1.4 Research Question

What challenges and factors affect Kuwaiti women in performing their roles as mothers and teachers in Kuwait?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Limited research has been conducted on topics related to mother-teacher challenges in Kuwait. Consequently, the scope of such research in Kuwait needs to be expanded. Motherhood and teaching are essential roles that require great time and effort. Thus, I aimed to investigate the challenges of working mothers in the education sector in Kuwait in combining their roles as teachers and mothers. In this section, I justify the importance of this research on Kuwaiti female teachers.

First, the latest statistics of the Central Administration of Statistics in the State of Kuwait (2022) indicate that for two consecutive years, the greatest proportion of government employees worked in the Ministry of Education (35.8%), followed by the Ministry of Health (17.7%). Kuwaiti female workers in the Ministry of Education constitute 83,708 of the total number of 125,291 Ministry employees and thus are the largest working group in the Kuwaiti state's government sector. Consequently, it is crucial to devote attention to the problems of this large group. What is missing from these statistics, however, is the number of women working as teachers, as the statistics describe only the number of female workers in the Ministry of Education in general, with no definite number provided for female teachers. Other statistics on the number of female Kuwaiti teachers, prepared by the Department of Educational Institutions and Planning in the Ministry of Education (2016), suggest that the number of female teachers in Kuwait may be as high as 33,576. However, my search for the specific number of working mothers in the Ministry of Education did not yield an accurate result—only a presentation of the number of workers by demographic status in the government sector in general, as seen in Figure 1.

Numerical distribution for the employees in the Government Sector by marital status , nationality (Kuwaiti / non-Kuwaiti) and Sex as of 30-06-2021

غير كويتي Non- Kuwaiti			كويتي Kuwaiti			الحالة الزوجية Marital Status
جملة Total	اناث Females	ذكور Male	جملة Total	اناث Females	ذكور Male	
32263	9,255	23,008	54,879	32,826	22,053	لم يتزوج Single
49418	26,448	22,970	230,616	133,190	97,426	متزوج Married
2056	732	1,324	21,072	15,286	5,786	مطلق Divorced
195	173	22	1,148	1,032	116	أرمل widowed
6602	2,509	4,093	38,854	23,748	15,106	غير مبين No stated
90,534	39,117	51,417	346,569	206,082	140,487	الاجمالي Total

Figure 1: Comparison of the Demographic Status of Employees in the Government Sector in Kuwait (adapted from Central Statistics Bureau, 2022, p. 26)

In the Islamic faith, which prevails in the State of Kuwait, child-rearing is restricted to marriage, so I speculate, based on the numbers cited in Figure 1, that the number of mothers is greater than the number of unmarried women in the public sector, but this is merely an assumption, as the statistics are unclear. The previously mentioned sources covered various years, but they provided only an approximate indication of the number of mothers working as teachers in Kuwait.

Second, I focused on the workplace context in this research because I believe that a significant part of a teacher's day is spent at work and that work is considered a primary factor influencing parents and their children.

Furthermore, some mothers of my acquaintance sought less demanding jobs with low salaries to preserve their family relationships. This indicates that teaching is an extremely demanding profession that affects both mothers and their children. Because teaching is a vital job in the developing world, countries should take care of their teachers because they are the cornerstone of educational processes (Al-Saeed, 2018).

I chose the participant sample from the ranks of teachers rather than from other professions because I am a former teacher myself, and I believe that teaching is simultaneously an important calling and a demanding vocation to pursue from both personal and religious perspectives. In addition to the Muslim belief that teachers will be rewarded by God with high positions in heaven, teaching is the profession of prophets and messengers, and it is therefore greatly esteemed in Islam (Almunajid, 2003). In the Muslim culture, the teaching profession is regarded as reflecting of the mission of the prophets, as suggested in the hadith (see the glossary):

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, 'Verily, Allah did not send me to be harsh or obstinate; rather, He sent me to teach and to put at ease'. (Source: *Sahih Muslim (1478)*, cited in Elias (2017))

عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَبْعَنِي مُعْتَبًا وَلَا مُتَعَتِّبًا، وَلَكِنْ بَعَثَنِي مُعَلِّمًا مُبَسِّرًا الْمصدر صحيح مسلم 1478

Thus, I chose teachers over representatives of other occupations when selecting the participant sample for my study. When I reviewed the literature on the problems faced by teachers in Kuwait and other regions, I found results related to job satisfaction and teacher turnover, as will be explained in Chapter Two. To the best of my knowledge, however, no published research considers

the challenges faced by mothers who work as teachers and their effects on women's quality of life in Kuwait.

Kuwaiti studies have relied primarily on quantitative research, but quantitative research does not give participants the opportunity to elaborate on their answers and does not facilitate a detailed analysis of the topic of interest. Therefore, there is a need to conduct qualitative research, which is characterised by a deep search for the meaning of diverse problems and issues to recognise the root causes and details of a focal problem or phenomenon. I chose qualitative research for this study to examine deeply the phenomenon of interest and potentially formulate appropriate future solutions, or at least understand these challenges and their impact on human interactions and development.

An important paper issued by the Kuwaiti Teachers Association (KTA) was prepared by Alawaid and Aljasser (2010), who confirmed that teaching is a difficult profession and leads to chronic diseases. The authors presented a comprehensive table showing the work performed by teachers and the time they spent on each task. However, the study was brief and grounded in the authors' experiences in teaching and in the general educational field. It did not constitute a systematic exploration based on interviews or questionnaires, and it disregarded professional difficulties and the effects of those difficulties on the lives of teachers outside schools (or whether, for example, the difficulties teachers face indirectly impact their lives outside school boards).

I aimed to close some existing gaps in mothering and child research in Kuwait, especially regarding parents as the primary influence on children's lives. The influence of caregivers on children is important, but some theories and research on attachment and parenting styles have neglected other factors that affect not only the lives of children, but also those around them. Such factors include religion, culture, school, traditions, family, and *the nature of the parents' jobs*, as included in Bronfenbrenner's (2006) ecological model of human development, which I employed

as a framework for this study. Furthermore, some studies have relied on observations and experiments to understand parents' relationships with their children and the quality of those relationships. However, experiments (Ainsworth et al., 1978) conducted in artificial, abnormal environments do not reflect the reality of child–parent relationships, and, thus, cannot provide an accurate understanding of them.

I hope this study will enhance the understanding of the true nature of the influences affecting mother-teachers and their children by considering a specific group of people working as teachers and mothers simultaneously in a Kuwaiti context and by giving them the chance to talk about the challenges they face in balancing their roles. It is important to identify these challenges to contribute to a broader, in-depth understanding of how they affect mothers working in teaching jobs in Kuwait. Moreover, this study may help researchers, family consultants, psychologists, educators, policymakers, and politicians in Kuwait to formulate solutions and develop family- or education-related policies in the future. The efforts and responsibilities of diverse players in various professions and disciplines must be integrated to support the lives and well-being of individuals.

Summary

In this section, I outline the structure of this thesis. The aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of the challenges Kuwaiti mother-teachers face by examining their experiences, roles, and difficulties. This will help identify the many factors that have an impact on the lives of this group of mothers. This thesis consists of nine chapters, as follows:

- Chapter One includes the introduction, background, research position, research aim, research question, and the significance of the study.

- Chapter Two presents the literature review regarding the teaching profession, education in Kuwait, politics, and their effects on education; teachers' roles, difficulties, and job satisfaction; and teacher turnover and burnout.
- Chapter Three reviews the literature on mothers in Kuwait, beginning with explanations of the roles of mothers and women in the context of social life in Kuwait and ending with a discussion of the political discourse on mothers' roles.
- Chapter Four explains the research framework based on parenting and child development theories. First, I discuss attachment theories regarding maternal care and Ainsworth's contributions to attachment theory, followed by criticisms of attachment theory and alternate viewpoints on childcare from a feminist perspective. The subsequent discussion focuses on parenting styles and Baumrind's work. Finally, I describe systems theory and define the framework of this thesis.
- Chapter Five presents the research design and methodology, including the research question, research paradigm, and qualitative research approach. Furthermore, I outline the benefits of conducting a research pilot study, explain the sampling approach, and present the characteristics of the research participants. I explain the interview process, the thematic analysis procedures and difficulties, ethical considerations and dilemmas, the trustworthiness of the research design and, finally, the findings.
- Chapter Six presents the analysis and findings regarding challenges in the teaching profession (exosystem) and discusses three challenges:
 - Challenge 1: teachers' work intensity and lack of time
 - Challenge 2: pressure placed on teachers by officials
 - Challenge 3: the education system and curricula

- Chapter Seven presents the analysis and findings regarding the challenges mothers and children face due to the education system and curriculum (microsystem), explaining three challenges:

Challenge 1: mothers' and children's lives centred on education

Challenge 2: examination and school requirement pressures

Challenge 3: teachers' challenges in overseeing their children's education.

This chapter ends by explaining the Kuwaiti education system's effects on mothers and children.

- Chapter Eight presents the analysis and findings regarding the challenges of being a mother and a teacher simultaneously in the Kuwaiti context, again involving three challenges, as follows:

Challenge 1: women's and men's roles in Kuwaiti culture

Challenge 2: types of social obligations in Kuwaiti culture and the difficulties of social obligations for mothers working as teachers.

Challenge 3: The concept of the perfect woman (*Sanaa*), associated social expectations, and the difficulties that the notion of the *Sanaa* creates.

- Chapter Nine presents the discussion and conclusion of the thesis, starting with a summary of the findings, followed by the discussion, comprising:
 - discussion of the teaching profession, its challenges, and their influence (exosystem)
 - discussion of the challenges mothers and children face due to the education system and curriculum (exosystem and microsystem)

- discussion of the challenges of being a mother and a teacher in the Kuwaiti context
(macrosystem)

At the end of this thesis, I include sections regarding the contributions of the research, its limitations, suggestions for further research, and my recommendations to the Ministry of Education, decision makers, and officials working in Kuwaiti schools. I also make recommendations for the parents and husbands of teachers, and finally, for mother–teachers.

Chapter Two: The Teaching Profession

In this chapter, I discuss the teaching profession and its difficulties. The first section explains the main educational issues in Kuwait by presenting, in the first subsection, the political decisions affecting education in the country and the difficulties of the teaching profession, and in the second subsection, one of the most important issues in Kuwait—the Kuwaiti education system and curriculum. The second section presents a review of the literature on teacher’s difficulties regarding, in the first subsection, teachers’ job satisfaction and, in the second subsection, teacher turnover, to discern the factors considered most challenging for teachers.

2.1 Education in the Kuwaiti Context

It was crucial for me to identify the most pressing educational issues in Kuwait. Specifically, in this section, I assess the political discourse in Kuwait regarding the difficulties of the teaching profession and the Kuwaiti Parliament’s attempts to find solutions and enact laws to make the profession attractive and minimise the phenomenon of teachers leaving the profession because of its difficulties.

Second, I discuss the most urgent issues regarding the most important elements of education—teachers, learners, parents, and educational outcomes—as well as the education system and curricula in Kuwait, the associated evaluation processes for learners, and the obstacles they create. This literature review illustrates that curricula are the main causes of the difficulties teachers face in Kuwait.

2.1.1 Politics and Education in Kuwait

Kuwait is a democratic state with a longstanding parliament (the Kuwait National Assembly), in which women have served since 2009. Women’s participation in parliament has given them a new role in Kuwait, not only in parliamentary work but also in the political, social, and economic

lives of Kuwaitis (Kuwait National Assembly, 2015). Hence, women now have more opportunities to contribute to society.

Kuwait's parliament represents the voice of the people, and recently there has been a movement to enact a law to classify the education profession as difficult labour. The KTA demanded this change of designation from the National Assembly (Alawaid & Aljasser, 2010), explaining that education is considered a difficult profession. Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) examined the tasks performed by teachers and the results of other research outlining the psychological and physical problems teachers face (Alawaid & Aljasser, 2010).

Due to the difficulty of the profession and the absence of incentives for pursuing it, the number of teachers in Kuwait has declined in recent years. Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) presented a proposal to the National Assembly to incentivise work in the teaching sector by approving salary increases and offering teachers the right to retire early. They believed that increasing salaries would demonstrate appreciation for teachers' efforts and the importance of the teaching profession. Moreover, they hoped that this initiative would attract new teachers to the profession and/or prevent them from dropping out. Most Kuwaiti members of parliament approved the proposal, but the government rejected it for the second time (Masila, 2018). As a former teacher, I argue that education is an arduous profession that takes a toll on individuals and often has negative results both inside and outside schools. However, I do not agree that the teaching profession should be legislatively categorised as difficult work to be rewarded only with higher salaries and early retirement, since these measures would not reduce the mental and physical problems many teachers face.

Instead of classifying teaching as a difficult profession, the government should find alternatives for Kuwaiti education that will make teaching an enjoyable, attractive, and non-demanding profession—one that does not overwhelm teachers. Such changes would probably improve

teachers' physical and psychological health and their overall well-being. These improvements would also positively affect children.

The next section will consider the education system and curricula in Kuwait and the associated difficulties.

2.1.2 Education System and Curricula in the Kuwaiti Context

Educational curricula are considered important basic tools in education, and the impact of their success or failure is transmitted to teachers, learners, and parents. Ultimately, curricula influence the quality of education outputs; indeed, they are among the most prominent issues concerning education in Kuwait. This section explains the ongoing conflict in Kuwait over the Kuwaiti curriculum—a conflict that is ongoing due to constant changes that are justified in the name of development. Focusing on the educational curricula that emerged from 2006 to 2023, this section starts by presenting the Achievement File System (AFS) and proceeds to explain Kuwait's national Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC).

The CBC is the most recent curriculum applied in Kuwait, and it is still in place at the time of writing. Before its approval, the Achievement File System was in force. The implementation of a competency-based curriculum came as an alternative to the AFS, which was controversial in Kuwait. The AFS was implemented in the 2006–2007 (Alanba, 2013) and 2015–2016 academic years. It was replaced by the CBC, but gradually, in some classes and at some levels, until it was fully applied to all educational-level classes in the 2019–2020 academic year (Muhammad, 2020).

The AFS, according to a report by the KTA (Alanba, 2013), was a global evaluation system that proved successful in some countries and was applied in Kuwait in first–third-grade classes. It aimed to raise achievement in learning using skills and concepts only, presumably enabling parents to learn the strengths and weaknesses of their children. However, it has not been applied properly in Kuwait (Alanba, 2013).

Teachers declared that the negatives of the AFS outweighed its positives. Among these negatives was that the system placed a burden on teachers, crowding their teaching schedules and obliging them to conduct a great deal of work aloud (Alanba, 2013). Indeed, most teachers already struggled with administrative and supervisory burdens and high teaching quotas. Therefore, according to Al-Turki (2013), the AFS was an obstacle to teachers' optimal performance.

Teachers also faced difficulties related to learner assessment under the AFS. The challenges for teachers were the need to continuously assess learners and monitor their grades. The challenges for learners were that evaluations concerned multiple skills and items, but there was insufficient time to measure them, and class time was lacking for teaching the required skills. Moreover, a difficulty arose from the lack of clarity regarding the AFS mechanism that teachers should apply, in addition to the lack of adequate training for teachers. Those trained to use the AFS found it insufficient, although many teachers expressed a desire to receive training. Teachers were also confused by the myriad changes in the mechanism of application (Al-Turki, 2013). Teachers needed an evaluation system that would reflect the success or failure of learners and required tests on which they could rely to evaluate learners (Alanba, 2013).

One of the reports published by the KTA (Alanba, 2013)—a report prepared by mentors in the Ministry of Education—concluded that this system led to a clear and tangible decrease in intelligence, awareness, and perception among children. In fact, the report claimed that when students moved to the fourth grade of primary school, they could not manage tests. This led to an increased failure rate for fourth-grade students. The report contended that this system produced a low-literacy generation and that the system for evaluating students was insufficient and unclear, prompting some parents to support their children by enrolling them in private schools (Alanba, 2013).

Thus, the AFS was deemed unsuccessful based on such reports and not in the best interests of Kuwait's future generations. Learners suffered from poor academic achievement, and students moved to higher stages without gaining basic skills at the primary stage, such as reading and writing, which are the cornerstones of the stages that follow (Alanba, 2013). The study indicated that 60% of teachers believed that the AFS did not achieve the required goals (Al-Rashidi Ghazi, 2007, cited in Alanba, 2013).

The disadvantages of this system seem to have affected both teachers and learners by exacerbating learners' academic weaknesses. This issue tended to transfer the problems to children's homes by necessitating parental participation in supporting children, as will be addressed in the following chapters.

The educational research and curricular sector of the Ministry of Education conducted a study to evaluate the implementation of the AFS in primary schools, which included 305 teachers and 46 mentors. They unanimously agreed that the cumulative weaknesses of students were due to defects in the AFS and that its disadvantages outweighed its advantages. The negative effects of this system had knock-on effects on both teachers and students. Regarding the effect on teachers, the system exhausted them and depleted their efforts and time by forcing them to manage a great deal of paperwork (Al-Turki, 2013).

Regarding the effects on students, the negative impact lay in the fact that this system depended on the automatic promotion of students from the first grade to the fourth grade, without an evaluation mechanism to determine students' success or failure. This automatic promotion led to many students being absent and parents neglecting to follow their children's studies, knowing that their children would succeed automatically (Alanba, 2013).

In turn, parents were confused because they did not know when their children would be evaluated or on what part of the curriculum, contributing to learners' cumulative weaknesses.

Consequently, educational weaknesses among students were exacerbated by teachers' lack of objectivity and the lack of validity in grades when measuring students' skills. Alanba (2013) recommended cancelling this system of automatic transfer through the primary stages, highlighted the need to apply a pass or fail system, and proposed the establishment of extra classes to support low-achieving students in school.

Debate continued regarding the implementation of the CBC—an approach that aimed to transform students from listeners into decision-makers to help build their personalities. Presumably, this approach was intended to encourage students' thinking, analysis, and criticism (Al-Ajmi, 2018). However, Al-Ajmi argued that this curriculum was unclear due to frequent changes in curriculum competencies, which affected learners' futures. Hence, teachers and learners found the curriculum incomprehensible because of the extensive number of changes involved in developing and modifying it. One of the problems resulting from these continuous changes was that teachers were embarrassed by their unfamiliarity with the teaching methods, evaluation criteria, and grade monitoring for learners. Despite providing the activities and homework required by this curriculum, the teachers did not understand it. Problems occurred because the teachers' knowledge was limited to the traditional curriculum based on teacher-led indoctrination and learners' listening. According to Al-Ajmi (2018), teachers evaluated learners using repeated tests throughout the school year. Unfortunately, this practice did not match the competencies required by curriculum policies, which were based on evaluating learners' performance and collective activities. This approach depended on learners submitting projects or participating in problem-solving.

Al-Ajmi (2018) claimed that the problems of this curriculum resulted from teachers accustomed to the traditional style of teaching having trouble applying it. In addition, this

curriculum in student-dense classrooms forced teachers to focus on organising and disciplining their classes rather than education.

Al-Jassar (2018) criticised decision-makers in the Ministry of Education because their decisions affected students, educational outputs, and the development of the state. The author criticised the Ministry of Education's decision to implement a competency-based curriculum that was not founded on specific fields of study and did not address the education crisis in Kuwait, thus resembling other failed education decisions. The author claimed that the decision surprised people in education because their lack of training, particularly in administrative matters, did not prepare them to implement it, and because teacher training colleges did not provide students with adequate training. Al-Asfour (2017) supported Al-Jassar's criticism, asserting that, during the past two decades, education development policies in Kuwait had neglected one of the most important aspects of education system reforms—teachers' instruction in teacher training colleges (Al-Asfour, 2017).

Al-Jassar (2018) added that ministerial decisions did not consider the opinions of people in the field, including teachers, administrative staff, mentors, and the colleges of education concerned with teachers' outputs. The author claimed that such decisions must consider students and their families, in addition to material capabilities and training for educational stakeholders, since these factors contribute greatly to the success or failure of educational decisions. The author also pointed to the number of students in classes as an obstacle hindering the correct application of curriculum-required competencies, concluding that applying imported foreign experiences and models to Kuwait had led to the country's continuing educational problems.

Alajmi (2021), in an important recent study regarding the Kuwaiti CBC and the difficulties related to its application, considered 317 teachers and 94 mentors and identified weaknesses in professional development and training, assessment processes, the use of technology, financial

resources, and teacher guides, all of which posed difficulties. Additionally, he discovered a weakness in the use of teacher guides. His research, however, only included male volunteers and did not represent women's voices.

Behbahani (2016) stated that, like the AFS, the CBC failed because the Ministry of Education provided inadequate teacher training programmes, with the curriculum relying on lectures delivered by unqualified, and insufficiently trained instructors. Alajmi (2021) concluded that teachers' lack of understanding of Kuwait's national CBC in terms of lesson plans, activities for learning, teaching techniques, and evaluation procedures posed challenges for teachers. Before the implementation of the CBC in Kuwait, inadequate time and resources had been dedicated to the professional development and training of teachers, leading to difficulties in understanding the concept and objectives of the CBC.

There was also insufficient access to the necessary instructional technology required to utilise the CBC, as well as a lack of knowledge and clarity regarding the use of assessments within the CBC framework. Alajmi (2021) claimed that both teachers and instructional supervisors lacked awareness of the CBC in developing lesson plans, planning learning activities, selecting optimal instructional practices for teaching and learning, and choosing appropriate assessment methods. These deficiencies caused problems that prevented instructors from achieving the educational goals outlined in the CBC and led to the poor responses of instructional supervisors to the evolution of Kuwait's education system.

Because neither teachers nor instructional supervisors had the necessary experience of using appropriate assessments to implement the CBC in their classrooms, they were unsure of the ability of assessments to effectively assess students' performance and achievement. Moreover, textbooks and teacher guidelines regarding the CBC were notably absent.

Regarding learners' difficulties, Alajmi (2021) noted that 'learners are not familiar with the new CBC in terms of topics, contents, and materials needed to be learned, searched, analysed, evaluated, and creating new ideas' (p. 156). In addition, the study indicated that the CBC encompassed many projects that required challenging financial input from parents to ensure the provision of the necessary resources for their children. A deficiency also existed in the established protocols for providing information to parents regarding the CBC. A second difficulty pertained to the ambiguity surrounding the definition and significance of the CBC, particularly concerning the evaluation mechanism (Alajmi, 2021; Evans & DeMitchell, 2018). Behbahani (2016) stated that the failure of the CBC largely resulted from errors in the application of learner assessments and the use of traditional evaluations that assessed learners' lower-order cognitive skills but were not aligned with curriculum criteria (Wang, 2019). Therefore, there was a conflict between the CBC and education focused on exam preparation. Parents, students, and even some professors believed that children should wait until university to develop their skills since the amount of work and time spent on competency-based education hindered students' capacity to perform well academically. In both theory and practice, the CBC still has some way to go before it can be considered a viable solution to this conundrum.

The literature reviewed thus far highlighted several dilemmas related to Kuwait's AFS and CBC in 2006–2023 that imposed challenges on teachers, learners, and parents.

In conclusion, most of the challenges teachers experienced resulted from their lack of adequate training. In addition, the Ministry of Education did not involve teachers and stakeholders in curriculum development and decision-making processes. Thus, the Ministry of Education surprised teachers and administrative bodies with sudden changes in the curriculum, particularly concerning learners' evaluations, and thus caused them confusion and difficulty.

A further deficiency of the AFS and CBC was the failure to acknowledge that their influence extended to learners and their parents. Thus, it is important to consider the challenges faced by mothers and their children, which will be discussed in the coming chapters. The following section elucidates teachers' difficulties and presents the literature on teacher job satisfaction and turnover.

2.2 Teachers' Difficulties

The teaching profession is considered one of the most difficult and demanding professions in the world. Teachers are exposed to many pressures and professional demands. In this section, I present the literature regarding these difficulties. Such challenges vary across time and place, and according to previous research, this variety also holds true for the sources of professional difficulties and the challenges linked to the burdens of the teaching process, such as the large number of classes taught, the density of students in each class, problems with colleagues, problems with an administration and officials, students' behaviours, and issues with parents. A difficulty also arises from salaries being incommensurate with the teaching workload. Finally, the effects of this profession differ in terms of exposure to pressure, psychological tension, and psychosomatic diseases, and switching professions may involve less stressful work but offer less pay.

According to Lightfoot (2016), an examination of 4,450 survey responses revealed that numerous educators throughout England are in crisis. Nearly all respondents (98%) reported mounting pressure, while 82% characterised their workload as beyond their capacity to manage. Over 75% of individuals worked 49–65 hours per week. Approximately 73% of respondents reported that their workload significantly affected their physical health, while 75% indicated that their mental health was adversely impacted. A mere 12% of individuals reported a favourable work–life equilibrium, while only a third of respondents perceived their employers as considerate of their wellbeing.

This section addresses the role of teachers in Kuwait and provides reasons for teaching being so arduous in Kuwait. Al-Huwaidi (2020) mentioned the basic responsibilities of an educator, foremost among which is the teaching role, which involves planning and implementing lessons and preparing explanatory teaching aids. The second responsibility is organising the classroom environment, which involves classroom management and directing the behaviours of students. The third responsibility is professional development.

Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) outlined several tasks assigned to teachers in Kuwait and stated the approximate daily, weekly, or yearly minutes and hours spent on each role, as shown in Table 1, which displays teachers' workloads.

Al-Huwaidi (2020) focused on teachers' basic duties, whereas Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) discussed the reality of teachers' roles in the Kuwaiti context, which go beyond teaching functions. These studies mentioned several tasks that teachers considered extra work. One factor that can be psychologically exhausting for teachers is the workload, which consumes most of the teachers' time at home and work. As Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) pointed out, many tasks assigned to teachers are completed outside working hours at home due to a lack of time to complete them in school. These demands overlap with time that should be dedicated to teachers' personal and family lives.

The participants in Perryman and Calvert's (2020) study indicated that they worked 11 hours per day, equivalent to 60–70 hours per week, and on weekends. Hence, they had insufficient time for rest and hobbies. The subjects in his study described the teaching workload as 'incredible', 'unmanageable and unsustainable', 'insane', 'unrealistic', and 'extreme'. The teachers argued that the work was constant: 'I could never feel as if I'd finished for the day or week', 'I always took work home with me' and 'could never switch off'. One teacher commented, 'I was up at 5 a.m. every day, commuting or in school until 5 p.m., then working at home until at least 10 p.m. and

working at least 4 hours each weekend day' (p. 12). Hence, the teaching profession is challenging due to the workload occupying most of the teachers' time, at work or home.

Table 1 *Components of Teachers' Workloads in Kuwait*

Teachers' Roles	Timing
Teaching and preparing lessons	Approximately 1.30–3 hours daily
Designing and creating teaching tools	Approximately 1–3 hours daily
Following up on students' written work	About 40–80 pages, 15–45 minutes daily
Preparing student activities and participating in exercises	45 minutes weekly
Preparing tests	3–8 hours per semester
Grading tests	4–8 hours per semester
Preparing programmes for morning assemblies	2–4 hours per school year
Professional development	3.5–4 hours weekly
Participating in departmental meetings	2–4 times per year (1–4 hours per meeting)
Substituting for absent teachers	About 1–5 times weekly, 45 minutes each time
Preparing statistics	4–5 times per year, about 1–2 hours per session
Preparing workshops and lesson models	1–4 times yearly, 1–2.5 hours per session
Supporting students in classes	Once a week for 45 minutes
Attending departmental meetings	Once a week for about 1.5 hours
Discussing students' problems with social workers and parents	1–2 times weekly, about 45–60 minutes
Attending parent meetings	4 times per year, 1–2 hours per meeting
Grading students	4 times per year, 1 hour per session
Attending morning assemblies	About 15 minutes daily

In the subsequent section, I present a literature review pertaining to teachers' job satisfaction to elucidate the challenges associated with this occupation.

2.2.1 Teachers' Job Satisfaction.

In this section, I present the literature regarding the teaching profession. I did not conduct an in-depth investigation of the history, origin, or measurements of job satisfaction, but instead examined teachers' job dissatisfaction to understand the challenges of the teaching profession. I first define *job satisfaction* and then discuss the literature regarding teachers' job satisfaction.

Locke (1976) defined *job satisfaction* as 'a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences' (p. 1300). Bolin (2007) explained that several factors contribute to teaching satisfaction in China, including the concept of self-realisation, the perceived significance of the teaching profession, and students' and parents' admiration for educators. Teachers in China are involved in students' academic achievement and experience emotional well-being when they witness their students' progress, and the role of the teacher is crucial to the realisation of learners' full potential. However, their teaching experiences are marked by high levels of intensity and workload, the perception of never-ending work, the absence of relaxation, even during holidays, and the fatigue generated by the job. Moreover, the income of teachers is lower than that of other professionals, leading to dissatisfaction with the income, recent pay rises, and service bonuses. Teachers must also consider fairness and relationships with colleagues, school administrators, and supervisors, which may be either positive or negative.

Although some of the teachers highlighted salary as a primary reason for job dissatisfaction, Bolin (2007) claimed that increasing salaries without considering solutions for other work issues would not raise teachers' morale.

To investigate job satisfaction among primary school teachers in Kuwait, Al-Saeed, Al-Mawill, and Hatata (2019) recruited 425 female and male participants. Their results revealed that, regarding job satisfaction, the teachers stated that they were satisfied with the materials, salaries,

and incentives that accompanied their jobs; they did not contemplate leaving the profession; and they were satisfied with the organisational climate in their workplaces. The organisational dimension pertained to the availability of the necessary equipment for work. However, the lack of autonomy and independence in the performance of teachers' work undermined their satisfaction. The researcher explained that this phenomenon occurred because the authorities were constrained in their assessments of teachers and lacked the means to identify deficiencies and discrepancies in teachers' performance. In addition, many teachers voiced their discontent with their relationships with other employees.

As reported by Bahtilla (2017), the four main contributors to teacher attrition in Cameroon included low salary, poor work environment, a lack of job satisfaction, and the inferior leadership styles of principals.

The literature review summarised the factors influencing teachers' job satisfaction: teachers' achievement of self-fulfilment through their profession, workload, salary, work relationships, and cooperation; the importance of officials and their leadership styles in supporting teachers; the availability of basic work materials; and fair evaluation by officials.

The next section will examine the literature on teachers voluntarily departing from the teaching profession.

2.2.2 Teacher Turnover

There is global concern about teachers leaving the teaching profession, given its importance for the growth and development of countries. Moreover, the profession is linked to the education of generations, and the shortage of teachers leads to confusion in countries' educational processes. In this section, I do not intend to discuss the financial waste and material losses due to teachers leaving the profession or the costs to states of training teachers, despite their importance.

Instead, I aim to identify the difficulties of the teaching profession for teachers that lead them to leave it. Accordingly, I will focus on the difficulties that underpin turnover in this profession.

An important scientific paper (Perryman & Calvert, 2020) considered the reasons teachers became teachers and the reasons for them leaving the profession to help educators and decision-makers ameliorate turnover and improve teacher retention. They discovered that despite teachers' knowledge of the profession's difficulties and challenges, there was widespread disappointment because the reality of the teaching profession was worse than expected. The 3,500 United Kingdom (UK) survey respondents stated that the major reasons for leaving the teaching profession were workload and work-life balance. The teachers entered the profession because of their desire to help young people and make a difference, but their enthusiasm weakened when they started teaching and witnessed the reality of teachers' daily lives.

The top reasons former teachers gave for leaving the profession were the lack of work-life balance (75%), the workload (71%), the target-driven culture (57%), teaching making them ill (51%), government initiatives (43%), and a lack of support from management (38%). The authors also asked teachers still on the job why they might leave, and the results were as follows: workload (83%), to improve their work-life balance (76%), not feeling valued (58%), the target-driven culture (55%), government initiatives (47%), and a lack of support from management (47%) (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

Perryman and Calvert (2020) argued that one of the main factors influencing teachers' desire to leave the profession was the pressure of accountability, the performance culture in education, and teacher evaluations and inspections. Alajmy (2013) supported Perryman and Calvert's (2020) argument regarding the latter difficulty because teachers in Kuwait can expect impromptu inspections from officials and are always subject to censorship and supervision by four

officials: the head of the department, the school director, the assistant director, and the inspection supervisor. These reasons have been cited as psychologically exhausting.

Marsh (2015) enumerated various factors that contribute to teachers leaving the teaching profession. In the UK, heavy workloads are a significant concern (Marsh, 2015). According to the results of a survey conducted by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, most participants (76%) reported that the primary factor leading them to consider leaving the teaching profession was the excessive workload, which they perceived as the most challenging aspect of their occupation (Marsh, 2015). In response to questions regarding the work–life balance, 46% of the participants acknowledged engaging in work-related activities on weekends, with an average duration of 6–10 hours (Marsh, 2015). A significant number of teachers (81%) reported having insufficient time for leisure activities, while 80% expressed similar concerns regarding their inability to relax (Marsh, 2015). Next were frequent swift modifications, including alterations to the terms and conditions of the teachers’ work and substantial changes in the school curriculum. Challenging student behaviour also prompted teachers to consider leaving the teaching profession (Marsh, 2015).

According to a 2021 PA Media survey of a sample of 1,788 educators, 22% reported intending to resign from their current positions within the next two years. Educators asserted that a significant factor influencing their decisions to resign was the substantial burden of their job responsibilities. Over half (52%) reported that the workload was either ‘unmanageable’ or ‘unmanageable most of the time’ (The Guardian, 2022).

Teachers leaving the teaching profession is a global concern for educational decision-makers, and Kuwait is no exception (Al-Mahdy & Alazmi, 2023). Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) attributed this problem to the reality of teaching as an unpleasant profession. About 12,125 female Kuwaiti teachers resigned from their positions in 2009–2019 (Ministry of Education (MOE),

2019). This figure is substantial for a country with a small geographic size and approximately 324 schools for girls. Additionally, the number of teachers in the country is constantly decreasing, with such professionals either relinquishing their posts to carry out administrative work within the Ministry of Education or transferring to other ministries (Alawaid & Aljasser, 2010).

In a quantitative study, Al-Mahdy and Alazmi (2023) found that support from school principals played an important role in reducing teacher turnover and increasing job satisfaction. This suggests that job satisfaction may arise from principals' introduction of measures to overcome obstacles. However, despite the insights derived from this study, the quantitative approach featured questions that failed to exhaustively explain the difficulties faced by teachers and how managerial factors and principals influenced teachers' job satisfaction or turnover. Studies associated with the challenges of teaching are limited and should be expanded to include the Kuwaiti context.

According to Alfahad (2015), administrators play a crucial role in enhancing teachers' job satisfaction. The author noted that high levels of stress may lead to increased teacher turnover, compelling managers to undertake tasks that could result in dissatisfaction, such as rearranging school schedules and finding replacement staff. Hence, it may be necessary for principals to introduce direct and indirect motivational strategies, including writing thank-you cards, presenting awards and souvenir photos, and demonstrating kindness, care, and respect to elevate general job satisfaction among employees.

My review of the literature on teacher turnover indicated that a high percentage of female teachers leave the profession, which suggests the difficulty and dissatisfaction caused by this profession. The reasons for teachers leaving the profession can be summarised as follows:

1. the work burden related to the teaching process
2. the desire to create or improve the work–life balance
3. the profession undermining teachers' physical health.

4. a lack of support from officials
5. accountability, inspections, and evaluations by officials
6. the lack of self-worth
7. the target-driven culture
8. students' behaviour
9. working outside standard working hours, making it difficult to pursue hobbies or relax
10. continuous changes in laws, regulations, and curricula
11. high levels of pressure

Summary

Based on the literature review in this chapter regarding teachers' job satisfaction and teacher turnover, I have explained the political debate regarding teaching in Kuwait to highlight the general political discourse regarding teachers' problems, which make teaching in Kuwait a hard profession. This chapter has illustrated the difficulties of the curriculum and education system in Kuwait, which pose challenges for teachers, learners, and parents, to show the issues teachers face in their profession.

Since teaching in Kuwait is considered a difficult profession that often has negative consequences, the lives of female teachers who combine their teaching professions with motherhood have become more demanding. Thus, in this study, I did not consider male teachers who combine fatherhood and teaching because Kuwait's social construct places the main responsibility for raising children on women. This increases the burdens of female teachers because, in Kuwait, women are held directly responsible for their children (Dashti & Yateem, 2018; Dwairy et al., 2010). In most professions, the occupational pressures imposed on women increase because of their roles as wives and mothers. Correspondingly, the next section concentrates on the role of motherhood in the Kuwaiti setting.

Chapter Three: Being a Mother in Kuwait

This chapter aims to first give a historical overview of women's roles in Kuwait and the expectations of Kuwaiti society concerning those roles. This is followed by a review of the literature on the history of women entering the workplace. Third, the chapter presents a review of the prevailing political discourse in Kuwait, which emphasises the nature of women's roles, and a review of the literature on work–family conflict, which poses challenges for working mothers. The fifth section explains women's social roles in Kuwait, and the chapter concludes with a summary.

3.1 Mothers' Roles

I would like to start this section with a quote from Couzy (2012) that defines a mother's role:

The notion of 'role' is impossible to define; the process from which roles are elaborated is essential to understanding women's roles. Norms, status, gender roles, and stereotypes appear to be the main elements that explain roles and why women, rather than men, have to take care of children, for instance. Each role that women have to fulfil has its own set of expectations: from the woman herself and from others. Therefore, these expectations will influence and, in some cases, determine women's behaviours and emotions (p. 59).

Traditional maternal roles are rooted in the values of early Kuwaiti society from the time before oil was discovered. At that time, women were confined to the home and its affairs, while men entered the economic, political, and educational fields, often in decision-making positions (Alsuwailan, 2006).

Despite Kuwait's economic, historical, and political development, women's current participation in the workforce, and the availability and spread of domestic workers in Kuwait, the primary roles of women are still restricted to managing the affairs of the home and children. Even if husbands help with household tasks, household affairs remain women's primary responsibility,

and society judges women when they fail to fulfil that responsibility. This section describes the expected roles of women in Kuwait, focusing on mothers' roles.

Throughout Kuwaiti history, it has been customary for women to work as housewives, tending to the needs of their families while their husbands are away on business (Tétreault, 2001). This is typical of women's roles throughout the Middle East. According to Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990), Arab women have the potential to balance their family and career responsibilities. However, the combination of work and family responsibilities can pose challenges for women due to the domestic and sociocultural barriers they routinely face:

Kuwaiti society is nevertheless a traditional, Muslim society in which the values concerning female chastity and integrity of the family hold a very high salience. The wife/mother role is considered the most important one by the majority of society. Any redefinitions in this role will come about slowly and will occur as accommodations, rather than alternatives, to it (Shah & Al-Qudsi, 1990, p. 29).

Women in Kuwait often have servants to help them with household chores, but childcare is among their most important responsibilities (Shah & Al-Qudsi, 1990).

Their expected roles include:

Household duties

- supervising the house and keeping it clean
- supervising servants and providing guidance and follow-up
- supervising the nutrition of family members and planning and providing meals for the family
- buying items to prepare meals

Childcare duties

- shopping for children's clothes and school supplies
- following up on children's daily schoolwork.

- preparing children for school exams
- supervising and ensuring children's cleanliness and health
- raising children and teaching them values and ethics
- communicating with teachers about children's academic performance

Dwairy et al. (2010) pointed out that, in the Middle East, mothers have greater responsibility than fathers for the home and for children's upbringing. Mothers are also responsible for discipline and are often blamed by other family members if their children behave badly. Fathers' roles centre on the family's safety and material needs, but mothers bear the primary responsibility for family life. This social construct places an additional burden on mothers rather than allowing them to share responsibility with fathers.

Mothers constituted the sample for this study because they bear direct responsibility for raising children in Kuwait. This aspect of Kuwaiti culture has religious roots. According to the Hadith of the Messenger Muhammad narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah's blessings be upon both):

Allah's Messenger said, 'Surely! Every one of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges: the Imam (ruler) of the people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects, a man is the guardian of his family (household) and is responsible for his subjects, a woman is the guardian of her husband's home and of his children and is responsible for them, and the slave of a man is a guardian of his master's property and is responsible for it. Surely, every one of you is a guardian and responsible for his charges'. (Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 89, Number 252)

حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، حَدَّثَنِي مَالِكٌ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ دِينَارٍ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُمَرَ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا - أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ أَلَا كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ، وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ، فَالْإِمَامُ الَّذِي عَلَى النَّاسِ رَاعٍ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ، وَالرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ، وَالْمَرْأَةُ رَاعِيَةٌ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِ رَوْحِهَا وَوَلَدِهِ وَهِيَ مَسْئُولَةٌ عَنْهُمْ، وَعَبْدُ الرَّجُلِ رَاعٍ عَلَى مَالِ سَيِّدِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْهُ، أَلَا فَكُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

In Kuwaiti society, most childcare providers are women, including mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and servants who live with the family. The Kuwaiti government reinforces the roles of mothers and fathers through laws related to maternity leave (a topic that will be explored in more detail later). The next section discusses the roles of Kuwaiti women in the workforce.

3.2 Women in the Workforce in Kuwait

This section provides a historical overview of women's participation in the workforce in Kuwait, beginning with an explanation of religious perspectives on working women.

Islam does not forbid women to work. One Islamic scholar, Al-Ghazali (1989), critiqued the cultural norms in Arab societies that restrict women's movements. These customs are often inaccurately attributed to Islam.

Although Islamic law permits women to work outside the home, this freedom is subject to certain conditions and controls. One of these is that a woman's work must not require her to do forbidden things. For example, a working woman's speech and dress must adhere to the legal Islamic requirements for modesty. In addition, her work cannot lead to her neglecting the tasks that God Almighty has assigned her, including her duties to her husband, her home, and her children (Mishal, 2020). This last rule embodies the idea that a Muslim woman's priorities are taking care of her husband and children and managing household affairs. This does not mean that she cannot work outside the home, but it may lead to conflicts between her work and her religious priorities.

Kuwaiti women have worked since ancient times. They entered the world of trade by selling goods in the markets when their husbands were absent on long pearl-diving trips (Alessa, 1981). Gradually, women began to teach young children in mosques and were called Mutawas. The first female schoolteacher was Maryam Abdul-Malik Al-Saleh, who began teaching in 1938 (Al-Bayan, 2018). Since then, women have gradually entered more and more areas of the Kuwaiti

workforce. They have also begun to participate more actively in society since gaining the rights to vote and run for office in 2009—rights that were previously limited to men (Kuwait National Assembly, 2015). Women have also become more involved in decision-making in various fields. Today, as in many countries, including the United States (US) and the UK, women comprise approximately half of the Kuwaiti workforce (Jones, Burke, & Westman, 2006).

According to the most recent statistics collected by the Central Administration of Statistics in the State of Kuwait (2022), more women than men work in the government sector, which employs 206,082 women and 140,487 men (not including military personnel). This increase in the number of working women in Kuwait necessitates a focus on the issues and challenges they face, as well as an exploration of potential solutions. The findings of the literature review suggest that women's various responsibilities, particularly those related to their roles as primary caregivers for their households and children, can present challenges due to role conflicts.

3.3 Political Discourse and Mothers' Roles

This section examines the political discourse and the role of the Kuwaiti government in determining and confirming the roles of mothers in Kuwait. Kuwaiti women entered the labour market a long time ago. When the government recognised the importance of allowing mothers to have time for their children, it granted women who gave birth mandatory maternity leave. According to Article 47 of civil service law, female employees have the right to maternity leave with full pay for two months after giving birth (Civil Service Commission (CSC), 2018). Furthermore, mothers receive half their normal pay for four additional months of leave (Kuwait Teachers Association (KTA), 2023). Mothers are also entitled to at least six months, but no more than four years, of unpaid maternity leave (KTA, 2023).

Fathers, however, receive a financial allowance for each child (Al-Kandari, 2007), which reinforces their role as their families' primary source of income. This government parental support

reinforces the government discourse, which views fathers as breadwinners and mothers as responsible for childcare.

The prevailing political discourse in Kuwait emphasises these traditional parental roles. A deputy of the Kuwaiti National Assembly submitted a proposal demanding a reduction in Kuwaiti women's working hours, justifying this request by arguing that women contribute to society by bringing up their children well—something that involves significant effort at home and at work. He added that mothers play an important role in promoting family cohesion (Alanba, 2010). The political discourse and government decisions related to mothers support mothers' demands for laws that recognise the burdens they face as working women in Kuwait. But where are the claims about the importance of fathers in the home? Discussions on this topic are addressed only to women, assigning them the primary responsibility for raising children and maintaining family cohesion, thus weakening the role of fathers in political discourse.

In addition to considering the primary role of Kuwaiti mothers as carers, it is necessary to understand their positions in their communities. Therefore, this study focused on two main contexts: mothers' workplaces, including their inherent challenges, and Kuwaiti society, including the roles and challenges of working mothers within it. Therefore, the next section focuses on the literature concerning work–family conflicts.

3.4 Work–Family Conflicts

According to the literature reviewed in the previous sections, working mothers may experience role conflicts because they are largely responsible for caring for their children and households in addition to their work outside the home. These priorities are derived from the cultural norms and religious beliefs of the society in which they live, both of which are the primary factors determining people's life priorities. Work–family conflicts can negatively affect parents and children, leading to internalised and externalised problems in children (Vahedi, Krug &

Westrupp, 2019). According to Zahn-Waxler, Klimes-Dougan, and Slattery (2000), internalised problems are characterised by disruptions in a child's emotions and moods, and they are typically associated with feelings of anxiety and depression. Externalised issues are characterised by actions that are disruptive and hurtful to others. These problems are often classified as irritation, manifesting in frustration, rage, hostility, aggressiveness, inattention, impulsivity, or overactivity.

Role conflicts occur when several roles interact and prevent a person from fulfilling his or her different roles simultaneously (Couzy, 2012). Ibriam and Madfouni (2017) examined role conflicts and their relationships with professional pressure among married women working as teachers in Algeria. Ibriam and Madfouni's (2017) quantitative study included 100 female teachers who worked as middle and primary schoolteachers. The researchers used two scales—the role conflict scale and the occupational pressure scale—to measure role conflict and pressure. The results showed that, first, the participants experienced high levels of role conflict and professional pressure due to their excessive busyness and increased responsibilities. Second, these pressures negatively affected their relationships with their husbands and children. Teaching is considered one of the most stressful professions in Algeria (Ibriam & Madfouni, 2017).

According to Dinh, Cooklin, Leach, Westrupp, Nicholson, and Strazdins (2017), children whose parents experience high levels of ongoing work–family conflict have an increased risk of both internalised and externalised difficulties. Work–family conflicts have been acknowledged as a key determinant of mothers' and fathers' mental health. These conflicts are caused by the expectations placed on working individuals, who also have significant responsibilities within their families. According to Vahedi et al. (2019), parents' work–family conflicts negatively impact their parenting behaviours, their relationships with each other, and their children's mental health. However, that study also found that mothers' work–family conflicts affected children more than those of fathers, perhaps because mothers have more responsibility for childcare. In Australia,

where the study was conducted, mothers could reduce their working hours after childbirth, but fathers could not (Vahedi et al., 2019). This emphasises the role of mothers as children's primary caregivers and could explain why mothers' work–family conflicts impact children's mental health more significantly than those of fathers. In addition, Vahedi et al. (2019) reported that conflicts between parents' work and home responsibilities are associated with both fathers' and mothers' reports of interparental conflict and parenting irritation and with children's internalised and externalised issues. In the same study, children's internalised and externalised problems correlated with interparental conflict and parenting irritation.

However, there is some uncertainty about the relationships among these factors. Quantitative research, by its very nature, may omit important details about events, the interactions between parents and children that lead to family conflicts, and how certain factors cause internalised and externalised problems in children. Therefore, I propose that qualitative studies can contribute to a more accurate understanding of human phenomena. There are several gaps in the reviewed literature; for example, none of the reviewed studies considered the possible impacts of the nature of parents' work or attempted to understand specific aspects of parents' work that contributed to work–family role conflicts.

Women may experience role conflicts because they play multiple roles. According to Couzy (2012):

Each different part of a woman's life, such as work, family, or community, is related to different roles: organizer's role, leader's role, mother's role, wife's role, daughter's role, soccer team coach's role, sister's role, etc. And when those roles interact with each other, conflicts can sometimes occur (p. 8).

Therefore, when considering conflicts between the work and family roles of Kuwaiti Muslim mothers, attention should be paid to the fact that such women may have other roles as well, and that these various roles may have varying levels of priority and importance for individuals. Every

individual plays several roles. For example, a woman who is a mother and a teacher may also be a wife, a daughter, a sister, a granddaughter, and a friend. She may play many roles in her life, and she may also assign different levels of importance to these roles. Individuals may prioritise different roles differently based on their own values. Conflicts occur when these roles interact and more than one is of equal importance or priority. For example, Muslims value parents and family (whether immediate or extended) very highly. In Muslim life, family is extremely important because family members also play religious roles. One of the most basic roles of a Muslim man is as a son with responsibilities to his parents and family.

In the present study, when I considered working mothers, I recognised that these women could play other roles and experience conflicts among multiple roles and priorities in their lives as mothers and teachers. The importance of these other roles was highlighted during the pilot study. One participant discussed other roles and priorities that competed with her roles as a teacher and mother. Therefore, the following section will address some of the other roles of Muslim women in Kuwaiti society.

3.5 Women and Social Life in Kuwait

A Kuwaiti mother is a member of her direct family, which consists of her husband and children. She is also a member of her husband's extended family as well as her own. As a woman, she has several titles and functions: wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, granddaughter, sister, aunt, cousin, neighbour, and friend. In the Kuwaiti context, each of these titles is associated with specific duties and tasks based on Kuwaiti customs and religious obligations.

The value Islam places on family life and family relationships emphasises the importance of a collective society based on unity and kinship ties, which involve cooperation and caring for others. Islam is the official religion of Kuwait; therefore, many of the values of Kuwaiti families are drawn from the values, teachings, and instructions of Islam (El-Haddad, 2003). Many

conceptualisations of family in Kuwait derive from social customs and traditions; for example, the Islamic religion emphasises family relationships. However, the Fatwa Centre on IslamWeb.net Fatwa (2023; see the glossary) provides the following example:

A man asks, ‘When I call a member of my family every week by phone, am I considered to have achieved family ties with my family? I am not a severer of ties, and I will not obtain sin. If I visited every one of them, it would be a hardship for me, whether due to the distance of the place or other reasons’.

According to the well-known Muslim scholar Sheikh Muhammad Al-Salih Al-Uthaymeen (may God have mercy upon him), relationships with relatives are based on the customs people follow. The Qur’an and the Sunnah do not specify the type or number of kinship ties an individual should have, because the Prophet Mohammed (may God bless him and grant him peace) made the type and number of kinship ties absolute (Al-Uthaymeen, 2005). Since kinship ties are defined by customs, if a custom says there is a relationship, there is a relationship. ‘Severing the ties of kinship’ means what people customarily understand it to mean. The Kuwaiti custom of maintaining kinship ties is demonstrated by weekly visits to one’s parents, including taking children to visit the extended families of both parents. Attending family events on happy and sad occasions is also essential for building and maintaining strong family relationships. However, there may be differences in the customs of different Muslim countries regarding the frequency and number of family visits. Since Kuwait covers a small geographic region and its population is quite condensed, it is easy for most families to pay weekly visits to extended family members. However, in larger countries with more widespread populations, weekly visits may impose a greater burden. Thus, the frequency of visits with extended family members differs across Muslim countries.

Kuwaiti culture emphasises the importance of family solidarity, communication among family members and maintaining good social relationships with other members of the community. These values are rooted in the teachings and values of Islam, which dictate that all people should

treat each other like brothers and sisters (Abudabbeh, 2005). This concept is considered essential for building social relationships, so people invest time, money, and effort in their social relationships.

The traditional family structure in Kuwait consists of a male husband, a female wife, and their children; in other words, the nuclear family. According to Islam, no children should be born outside of marriage (Al-Hamad, 2004; Omran, 2004). The other type of family in Kuwait is the extended family. The nuclear and extended families are connected, since the nuclear family usually has close relationships and strong links with the extended family, which consists of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins (Al-Ghanim, 2013; Al-Thakeb, 1985). Relatives often pay weekly visits to show their love and respect for their extended family, particularly older members of the family, and these visits strengthen family bonds. Strong relationships with the extended family have their origins in the Muslim religion, which considers individuals who fail to maintain these ties to be sinners.

Thus, a Muslim mother has a busy life replete with social obligations and duties. As a wife, she has certain obligations to her husband. She must obey him and maintain good relationships with his family by visiting them frequently. A Muslim mother is also a daughter, and Islam commands sons and daughters to maintain good relationships with their parents, even in adulthood, showing them reverence and caring for them (Al-Fouzan, 2023). Children should also continue to obey their parents. In addition, mothers should keep in touch with their extended families, including grandparents, children, and grandchildren, on the paternal and maternal sides. In Kuwait, it is customary to pay weekly visits to extended family members on a specific day. Many Kuwaiti women visit various family members three times a week. This inevitably affects women's daily duties at home and at work, adding further pressure due to the many obligations they must fulfil.

Summary

Kuwaiti women who are mothers and teachers have a wide range of responsibilities that extend across the household, workplace, and society. The current political discourse reflects the prevailing social construct in Kuwait that views fathers as breadwinners and assigns primary childcare responsibilities to mothers. Moreover, in Kuwait, cultural, and Islamic values emphasise the importance of family life and prioritise family ties and caregiving above any other responsibilities. It seems that these social norms in Kuwait do not change for working mothers whose roles extend beyond their household duties. Therefore, women in such positions may expect to encounter different challenges during their daily lives that expose them to work–family conflicts.

Chapter Four: Parenting and Child Development Theories

This chapter introduces and describes a number of theories and debates on parenting to investigate and justify the framework of this study. It begins with a description of the theory of attachment, which is focused, in part, on the mother's work and the styles of child attachments, followed by views on feminism and childcare that criticise the theory of attachment. The second part discusses parenting styles and their impacts on children, as well as their deficiencies. A system theory is presented at the end of this chapter.

Before I present this chapter, I would like to discuss why I chose attachment theory and the feminist discussions around attachment theory, as well as the parental styles and their effects on children. Why do I address these issues in this thesis? As I previously mentioned, I am a researcher interested in the field of parenting and parental influence on children, with a particular emphasis on attachment theory and parenting styles. After delving into these topics, I began to move towards a comprehensive view of the parental relationship, and this in-depth research led to my decision to focus this research on a comprehensive view of the factors affecting the life of the mother-teacher and her children within the contexts in which the mother and children live together as a way to understand the various factors that affect the lives of the mother working as a teacher.

I made this my focus because attachment theory and parental style models classify a mother as a good mother or a bad mother without considering the surrounding circumstances, which may be unfair. The accusation of being a bad mother is directed at the mother as if she is the only factor affecting the child. Based on this levelling of blame and judgment at the mother, attachment theory and the parenting style models unhelpfully construct the role of the mother and ignore other factors affecting a child's life with its mother. Thus, this chapter reviews attachment theory, feminism and parental style models to justify the driving reasons for choosing Bronfenbrenner's systems theory as the framework for this research.

Research conducted in the field of developmental psychology has focussed, in part, on the central role of parents, guardians and caregivers in influencing child development. Several debates revolve around related theories, such as the ‘attachment theory’ (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), which focuses on the mother’s primary role in influencing her child’s life and which distinguishes ‘good’ from ‘bad’ motherhood through specific criteria. (Burman, 2017). Attachment theory has received severe criticism because it neglects other factors that affect a child’s life and focuses only on the absence of the mother. Similarly, Baumrind’s ‘parenting style models’ (1967, 1971, 1991) emphasise good and bad parenting styles according to the positive and negative impacts of these styles on the child.

Overall, the principles of these theories make the mother, parent or guardian responsible for their positive or negative effects on a child’s life. The prevailing consensus is that the childcare giver plays a vital role in influencing a child’s life (Burman, 2017). However, these theories bear a shortage and gap as they disregard other factors that may affect the life of a child. That is, other important factors, such as culture, religion, family, school, friends or the nature of the parents’, guardians’, or caregivers’ work, may need consideration when focusing on the mother–child relationship. As Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) mentioned when proposing their ecological model of human development, the interactions in a person’s life and with his or her environment should also be considered.

4.1 Attachment Theory

One of the theories that revolves around parental relationships focuses on the mother’s primary role in raising and caring for her child and the impact, either positive or negative, on the child. That theory is attachment theory, which draws attention to the importance of children’s early years, their interactions with their mothers and the impact of these factors on the children. Here, I would

like to summarise the history of attachment theory, the context in which it emerged and how it is perceived from the viewpoint of feminism.

4.1.1 Maternal Care

Attachment theory was introduced by psychologist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby, who later worked with Mary Ainsworth to develop this theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1979). Bowlby worked as a psychiatrist at the London Children's Clinic, where he treated children suffering from emotional distress (Bowlby, 1979; Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991). His work experience provided him with the opportunity to look closely at the importance of early childhood relationships and the effects of caregiving deprivation. However, Bowlby's research on motherhood and childhood has been criticised by other researchers. This will be discussed in the following section.

The basis of attachment theory is that the first relationships in children's lives affect their later lives (Bowlby, 1979; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). This theory is concerned with personality development and the essential roles that parents play in early interactions with their child and the child's early interactions with them (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). When treating his patients, Bowlby focused on their childhood histories and early relationships (Bowlby, 1977; Bretherton, 1992). He believed in the important role of maternal care in children's mental health (Bowlby, 1951).

A systematic study by Bowlby in 1944 investigated 44 juvenile thieves and interviewed the same number of juveniles in a control group. The study was meant to test the hypothesis that the mother-child relationship during the first five years of a child's life is vital for the child's socialisation and that a disruption of this relationship is likely to lead to high rates of juvenile delinquencies in addition to emotional difficulties and anti-social behaviours (Bowlby, 1944). In other words, the aim of the study was to investigate the long-term effects of a lack of mothering.

The results indicated that most juvenile thieves had experienced long periods of separation from their mothers before the age of five (Bowlby, 1944). Those children who had experienced separation or lengthy deprivation of maternal care were also the most commonly determined to be juvenile thieves (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1944).

Following that study, the concept of attachment was developed further by Ainsworth, who contributed to the application and expansion of attachment theory using the concept of the attachment figure as the safe base through which children can explore the world. Ainsworth also formulated the concept of a mother's sensitivity to her infant's signals and how this relates to the development of infant attachment patterns to their mothers (Bretherton, 1992). The next section will explain Ainsworth's contributions to attachment theory in more detail.

4.1.2 Ainsworth's Contributions to Attachment Theory

Ainsworth conducted systematic studies in Uganda and Baltimore on Bowlby's theoretical construction of attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bretherton, 1992). These studies involved a series of interviews, observations and experiments called the 'strange situation' (Bretherton, 1992).

In Uganda, Ainsworth (1967) studied individual differences in the quality of mother-child interactions, which had not been a focus for Bowlby. The study included 28 children and their mothers, as well as an interpreter. Ainsworth and the interpreter visited the children's homes every two weeks for nine months. Ainsworth observed the children's behaviours, the extent of maternal responses to these behaviours, and the mothers' practices in caring for their children. For example, when the children felt frightened, hurt or hungry, or even when they were separated temporarily from their mothers, they continually sought contact with them (Ainsworth, 1967, cited in Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). This observation suggests that a child considers its mother to be a safe base through which it can explore the world.

In Baltimore, Ainsworth studied 26 mothers and their babies (Bretherton, 1992). She visited their homes for four hours every three weeks until the children were 54 weeks old, gathering a total of 72 hours of observation time per child with the help of two assistants. After the observation period, the mothers were interviewed, and both they and their children then participated in the 'strange situation' experiment for 20 minutes (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bretherton, 1992).

In both studies, the three observed attachment patterns were secure, ambivalent and avoidant infant styles (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Ainsworth et al., 1978). The secure attachment style demonstrated a secure pattern in which the children felt safe. Their mothers were sensitive and responded early, consistently and appropriately to their children's signals, such as crying when hungry. At one year of age, those children cried less than the others; they had secure attachments and were responsive to their mothers, regardless of whether their mothers were holding them or not. Those were also more likely to explore (Ainsworth, 1979), less likely to protest when their mothers left and more likely to greet their mothers warmly upon return (Ainsworth & Bell, 1969; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bell & Ainsworth, 1972). The mother's sensitivity in the first quarter of the first year of a child's life was associated with a more consistent mother-child relationship in the fourth quarter. Children whose mothers responded strongly to crying during the first months tended to cry less and communicated with more facial expressions, gestures and vocabulary (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972).

The second attachment style observed was the ambivalent pattern. As Ainsworth et al. (1978) indicated, this style was common among children whose mothers were less sensitive to their child's signals, such as crying and communication in general. These unsafe babies cried a lot, even when their mothers carried them, and they only explored a little. They protested over their mothers' departures much more than the 'safe' children.

The third observed attachment style was the avoidant pattern, which was common among children who had been rejected by their mothers at home (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). These children were worried about separation and cried a lot at home, but they cried less in a ‘strange situation’. When their mothers returned, their children avoided them (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

These studies of attachment indicate the importance of early parent–child relationships, with a focus on mother–child relationships, particularly in the first year of a child’s life. They also indicate how the response and sensitivity of mothers to their infants’ signals affects infants’ behaviours in their first years.

The attachment theory made a significant contribution in its time and in later times, and even today, researchers continue building on its base. Bowlby’s work, for example, has had a positive impact on changing childcare practices in residential institutions and hospitals (Burman, 2017). The use of methodological approaches, such as longitudinal designs, in both Bowlby’s and Ainsworth’s studies was based on the use of multiple methods, such as observation, interviews and experiments and did not rely on a single method, which, in my opinion, provides an in-depth understanding of the issues.

Despite its influence on other research, as well as its extension, evolution and application to different areas, attachment theory has some shortcomings and criticisms. For example, McLeod (2007) argued that Bowlby’s (1944) participants, who were asked to recall memories of being separated from their mothers, may not have had accurate memories. This is not the only criticism of the theory of attachment. Bowlby and the ‘strange situation’ of Ainsworth also received some criticism, the most significant of which were based on feminist views.

4.1.3 Feminism and Childcare

Childcare has been given considerable attention in developmental psychology research, with many studies on child development focusing on the parent–child relationship. However, because

emphasis is usually placed on mothers and their relationships with their children, this has led to criticisms by feminists of developmental psychology studies. The feminist movement has impacted the field of developmental psychology by challenging the prevailing notion that mothers are primarily responsible for the care of children within the family (New & David, 1985). This is the same notion and representation of motherhood that still exists in many Arab cultures.

One of the most prominent feminist critics of developmental psychology is Erica Burman (2017), who points out that psychological theory always represents mothers as the means by which children's developmental goals are achieved and always portrays mothers as the source of emotion to their children. In Burman's critique of attachment theory, she discusses the effects of Bowlby's (1951) theory of maternal deprivation on politics and on the status of women within society. She notes that the emergence of the theory in the 1950s coincided with the period when men returned from the Second World War to find that women had secured jobs. Because of the circumstances of the war and the decisions of many women to seek employment, children had been placed in nurseries (Burman, 2017). After the war, Bowlby's ideas gained extensive attention, leading to the closure of nurseries at that time (Burman, 2017). However, more recently, in the pursuit of women's liberation, feminists have contributed to the establishment of free childcare services amidst the increasing participation of women in the workplace (Burman, 2017).

Another criticism of Bowlby's work was its focus in most of his writing on concepts related to the mother-child relationship, such as maternal deprivation and its expected negative effects on a child's future behaviour, personality and mental health—which Bowlby argued arise from deficiencies in a mother's care for her child. However, other factors affect children's lives. Bowlby's 1944 study ignored the possibility that children's development would be affected by other variables, such as parental income and education (McLeod, 2007). Tizard (1991) argues that children who have been deprived of their mothers' care suffer not only from maternal deprivation

but also from the deprivation of the care of other family members with whom they live (Tizard, 1991). Moreover, the language used in most of Bowlby's studies focuses on using words that specifically refer to mothers rather than using a comprehensive word that indicates the main person responsible for childcare, such as 'caregiver'.

Attachment theory therefore affects the way people view mothers, as it categorises mothers as either 'good' or 'bad'. A 'good' mother is one who does not separate from her baby, responds quickly to her child and raises a child who displays positive behaviour. This indicates that the mother has a permanent presence with her child due to her dedication to motherhood (Burman, 2017). However, it seems impossible and stressful for a mother to be bound to her child all the time and for a child not to be exposed to any kind of separation from her. In this situation, the mother must respond to the child's signals with sensitivity. Burman (2017) argues that the criteria for care continuity in attachment theory are unclear, as the theory treats long-term, short-term, and regular separations as one, with all considered to have long-term negative effects on a child's life. This would mean that a mother cannot engage in any activities that take her away from her child. Consequently, a mother who has more than one child, each one with different demands, will be a 'bad' mother if, for example, she does not meet these demands by responding to or being sensitive to the youngest child's signals while she is busy with the older children.

Supporters of women's equality have endorsed the above-mentioned criticisms of attachment theory. In a Western context, these supporters, as individuals or organisations, aim to liberate women from prevailing ideas about their dominant role in the household, specifically in their care of children. The theory of attachment emerged in this context; accordingly, debates and criticisms among feminists about the theory have arisen mostly in the West. Policy interventions have also emerged. However, the application of psychological theories in other contexts and cultures without close examination is illogical, whereas disregarding the value of the theory

altogether is irrational. Instead, one should take into consideration the history, time and context in which the theory originally appeared and the social, economic and political influences that led to its emergence. Thus, the researcher should apply the theory in a manner appropriate to other contexts, taking into consideration that the appearance of the theory and the criticisms directed against it occurred in a specific context and in specific circumstances.

The feminist perspective holds that important gaps should be addressed. For example, the assumption that women were primarily responsible for caring for children was a social construct when Bowlby conducted his studies; consequently, he naturally focused his research on the behaviours of mothers. However, mothers are not the only influential factors in children's lives and mental health. Criticism of Bowlby's view was an attempt to change this social construct and bring about equality for women.

Nevertheless, women's movements should not limit themselves to criticism; rather, criticism should be regarded as the starting point in finding alternatives. During my research, I found that feminism in Kuwait mainly focuses on empowering women to enter various work sectors and obtaining various rights, such as seeking equality with men in parliamentary participation and the right to vote and nominate in the Kuwaiti parliament, in addition to having access to various ministerial positions. I see a weakness in the focus on motherhood issues and the search for solutions that should receive more attention. O'Reilly (2019) stated that the feminist movement has taken a different turn in the interests of its focuses on women's issues when she said, 'Motherhood, it could be said, is the unfinished business of feminism' (p. 13). In O'Reilly's article *Matricentric Feminism: A Feminism for Mothers, 2019*, she aimed to present and name a style of feminism centred around the mother: *matricentric feminism* (O'Reilly, 2019). She emphasised that attention must be paid to the issues and problems of motherhood that cause mothers to suffer by making these a starting point for women's empowerment. She indicated that many of the problems

faced by mothers, whether economic, social, political, cultural or psychological, are related to women's roles and identities as mothers. These issues were also neglected by the feminist movement in Kuwait, indicating a need to pay attention to issues of motherhood. One theory that considers the parent as the main factor influencing a child's life is the theory of parenting styles, which will be the focus of the next section.

4.2 Parenting Styles

Attachment theory was a central theory that focused on the role of the mother, but it neglected to consider other factors that influenced children's development. What distinguishes the theory of parenting styles from attachment theory is that it does not focus only on the mother, but also includes the impacts of both parents on children's school performance.

Patterns of parental authority and the classification of these parenting styles stem from several studies conducted by Diana Baumrind in the United States (Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1991; Baumrind & Black, 1967). The aim of these studies was to investigate the effect of different types of parenting styles on children's behaviour at the preschool age. All these studies used multiple methods, with an overall qualitative methodological approach, starting with the observation of children's behaviour in the childcare centre context, followed by two consecutive visits to obtain observational data on parental behaviour and then an in-depth interview with the mother and father.

Using all these methods gives credibility and validity to Baumrind's research results. However, two visits to collect observational data on parents' behaviour seem insufficient to provide an accurate picture of the behaviours of both parents and their children. Indeed, having the researcher present in the participants' homes immediately creates an artificial context. However, conducting interviews with both the mother and father seems to have addressed the limitations of the home visit by enabling the researcher to obtain in-depth interview data.

4.2.1 Children's Behaviours Resulting from Various Parenting Styles

According to Baumrind, children's behaviours are the direct result of the different parenting styles to which they are exposed. Children raised under the authoritarian style are often nervous, less content, restless, restrained, prone to fear and prone to aggression when put under pressure (Baumrind, 1967). As Baumrind (1967) stated, 'They are more inclined to do careful work and [function] at a higher cognitive level' (p. 131). By contrast, the children of parents who use a permissive parenting style often exhibit weak self-control and poor self-confidence compared to other children (Baumrind, 1967). Finally, Baumrind (1971) considered the authoritative parenting style to be the most conducive and favourable for child development, as it fosters independent and responsible behaviour by children. This parental pattern is associated with children's independent behaviour as well as beneficial and dominant behaviour (Baumrind, 1971). In addition, children raised under this style are characterised by self-confidence, self-reliance and exploration (Baumrind, 1967). Undoubtedly, the analysis of parenting styles has made a significant contribution to the field of psychology for understanding the parental influence on the child. Nevertheless, every scientific field has aspects that receive significant attention, as well as aspects of omission that require more attention. The next section will deal with the discussions revolving around parenting styles.

4.2.2 Discussions on Parenting Styles

The studies by Baumrind clearly demonstrate that the authoritative parenting style has had the greatest impact on child development in the context of Western societies. This indicates that the authoritative parenting style is superior to other parenting methods (Chao, 2001). However, when considering various parenting styles, it is important to understand the context in which (and the reasons why) parents adopt specific styles when dealing with their children. Questions remain

about the reasons behind parents' use of a particular style of parenting. Several questions about parenting style remain unanswered, or even unconsidered, in the field of parenting style research.

What prompted me to consider researching the effect of environments on both the mother and the child was the discovery that a study in Palestine found the authoritarian style to be the most popular style amongst parents (Dwairy et al., 2006). I began to contemplate what might be the reasons for the authoritarian style prevailing in this region, and I wondered whether the political conditions and war in Palestine are related to the prevalence of the authoritarian parenting style. Alhatab (2016) has argued that when looking in depth at the context of Palestine, as well as the instability and war conditions in this region, these factors may have affected the style of parenting. Living under conditions of war perhaps requires that parents maintain constant contact with their children due to the elevated risk of emergencies. In the context of war, the use of a permissive approach to parenting is inappropriate. Therefore, the authoritarian parenting style is not a negative approach under these circumstances, as the aim of implementing this style may be to protect children during war. Alternatively, it could be a result of the effect that war has on parents. In this case, child development will not be affected by parenting styles alone but also by the war, which becomes a contributing factor for both the parents and the children.

In the Chinese culture, parenting also tends to be highly authoritarian. Those who deal with children are given high levels of authority with the aim of steering the children towards achieving academic success (Guo, 2013; Smetana, 2017). By comparison, Asian American parents stress the values of warmth and closeness with their children, but they do not consider these values to be important when it comes to academic achievements (Chao, 1994).

Chao (1994) has argued that parental styles have various meanings in different cultures. For this reason, parenting styles typically differ from culture to culture according to the meanings attributed to them. As a result, one cannot consider certain parenting styles to be better than others,

as every culture and every context is unique. One cannot draw general conclusions about parenting styles.

Parenting style is not the only factor that has an impact on child development. Yes, parents play a fundamental and vital role in the upbringing of their children; however, parents are not the only factor affecting the life of a child. Rather, other influencing factors come into play, not only on the child, but also on the parents and the environment around the family. Focusing on the vital role that parents play in a child's life, either negatively or positively, is not wrong. Rather, this focus is important, vital and essential. However, it is important to take into consideration the surrounding factors affecting both the child and the parents together.

Considering the above, I endeavoured to research beyond the influence of a single factor—namely, the parents—on the development of the child. I therefore decided to widen my lens as a researcher interested in parenting and parents' relations with their children to examine the impact of the broader environment on human development in Kuwait. Bronfenbrenner (1979) has emphasised the role of culture in child-rearing, as well as other factors, such as school, society and the media. These aspects will be examined in detail in the next section.

4.3 Systems Theory

This section presents an important theory, systems theory, which provides researchers with a clear framework and a comprehensive view for understanding participants' lives and the factors that influence their lives in specific contexts, such as work, parents, schools and educational systems, the economy, health, family, societies and cultures. As the main focus of the present research is the mother–teacher's challenges, primarily as being a mother, this means that a child is present within the research scenario. This study focuses on the challenges the mother faces with her children from the mother's perspective, examined through interviews with the mothers by asking them about the challenges of being a mother–teacher in the Kuwaiti context.

‘Bronfenbrenner (1979) is one of the first scholars to address parental work and employment as important environmental predictors of family functioning and child development’ (Vahedi et al., 2019, p.39). Bronfenbrenner (2005) defined the exosystem as a system that may result in a low quality of caregiving to a child. The exosystem may have resulted from, for example, a parent’s stressful workplace. Vahedi et al. (2019) conducted a unique quantitative research study that used Bronfenbrenner’s model as a framework to study the role of work–family conflict that results from the parents’ jobs and the impact of this conflict on the parents. The results of this study showed that this work–family conflict led to parental irritation, which in turn created internal and external problems. Vahedi et al. (2019) discovered that children were exposed to more conflict at home as a result of their parents’ work–family conflicts, namely parental irritation and inter-parental conflict. In turn, parental irritation consistently created behavioural issues in both children and teenagers. The internal and external difficulties were both more strongly influenced by the mothers’ work–family conflicts throughout their children’s childhood and adolescence, whereas the fathers’ work–family conflicts had a negative effect on external problems only throughout adolescence (Vahedi et al., 2019).

The original proponents of systems theory pointed out that development needs to be studied in an environmental context, with humans living in their natural environments (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner (1974) challenged the prevailing view that development research is ‘the study of the strange behaviour of children in strange situations for the briefest possible period of time’ (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 794). Furthermore, psychologists often conduct some of their research on children in the context of the child’s immediate environment in a central way, such as by considering only the family and parents and paying little attention to the impact of the context in which growth occurs (Crowley, 2017; Hayes et al., 2017). This research

pays attention to understanding the mother–teacher challenges within their context, as the mother–teacher will inform the researcher about her challenges.

Several versions of Bronfenbrenner’s theory were published between 1973 and 2006 (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Tudge et al., 2016). The theory underwent development in several stages and has undergone several changes (Ceci, 2006; Hayes et al., 2017; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Tudge et al., 2016). The following sections explain the development of Bronfenbrenner’s theory of human development.

4.3.1 The Early Model

Systems theory was originally called the ecological model of human development (Hayes et al., 2017). The theory considers several systems that interact with one another and affect, and are affected by, each other. The ecological model consists of four levels or layers, with the child located in the middle. The first layer is composed of the immediate and close environment with which the child interacts and is called the **microsystem** (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This system includes the child’s parents, siblings, extended family, day care centre, school and friends. The next layer is called the **mesosystem** and is related to any interaction between two or more elements of the **microsystem**. These interactions affect the child through, for example, the communication between the school and the parents, who are at the centre of this system (Hayes et al., 2017). The third system, called the **exosystem**, refers to factors external to the child and the parents and includes, for example, the design of the curriculum and the educational system as its representative, as well as social media. This system affects both children and adults (Hayes et al., 2017). The **macrosystem** is the fourth system in the ecological model, and it influences the ways in which the other systems interact; it includes culture, government institutions and public policies (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Later, Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological model further by adding a final system called the **chronosystem**, which will be discussed in the next section.

This early model was criticised because it did not address the role of the individual and his or her participation in his or her development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner later admitted these gaps, clarifying that children have characteristics that can influence and be influenced by interactions in specific contexts. Bronfenbrenner worked on developing his theory by changing the model's name from the 'ecological' to the 'bioecological' model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), as will be explained in Section 4.3.2.

4.3.2 The Later Model

Bronfenbrenner revised and developed his theory, which came to be called the bioecological model of human development (Hayes et al., 2017). This model consists of four elements: process, person, context and time (PPCT) (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Tudge et al., 2016). The most recent development of this theory occurred in 2006. Thus, this section will focus on the most recent articles by Bronfenbrenner and other researchers who developed the theory's final modifications and will describe each element of the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Processes are certain types of interactions between living organisms and their environments. Proximal processes operate over time, and they have the power to influence development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The processes that Bronfenbrenner added to the model include behaviours that occur during interactions, as well as the psychological states, such as the feelings, opinions and beliefs of the humans who are interacting (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Examples of proximal processes include the nutrition a child is given, a child's time spent playing with others, their time spent in solitary play and a child's learning of new skills (Hayes et al., 2017).

The person element of the biological model of human development refers to an individual's personal characteristics. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) divided these characteristics into three categories. The first category consists of active behaviour dispositions, such as motivation, persistence and temperament, and whether the impact of these characteristics is positive or

subversive (Brown & Ward, 2018; Hayes et al., 2017). The second category includes resource characteristics, such as intelligence and competence, as well as the ability to communicate, trust others and demonstrate self-confidence. Adults in close proximity to a child can facilitate the development of these resources in the child. The third category includes demand characteristics, such as age, gender and skin colour, and how these affect the quality of the child's relationships with the people in his or her social circle. All of these characteristics affect the child's surroundings and interrelations (Hayes et al., 2017).

Context was included as an element in the bioecological model of human development to describe overlapping systems. The five context systems are interconnected, from those closest to the child to those that are most distant. The early model of the context element of ecological theory included the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner later updated the model by adding the **chronosystem** (Crowley, 2017; Hayes et al., 2017).

Time is the last element in the bioecological model of human development. It is represented by the **chronosystem**, which includes time-linked events that occur during a child's growth. Bronfenbrenner added the chronosystem to capture the importance of the influence of time and history on a child's development. Several changes occur in the individual and the environment over time. Examples of the effects of time in the chronosystem include the growth of a child in times of conflict, such as during parental separation or the occurrence of economic problems (Crowley, 2017).

A change in any system can impact the individuals interacting with the child; thus, the child is also affected by the change. For example, the parents' place is in the microsystem, while their work takes place in the ecosystem. If a parent begins a new job as a teacher, this change might affect the quality of his or her parenting when returning home after a stressful workday. The

parent's dealings with the child and the quality of their parenting, in turn, will influence the child's behaviours and reactions towards the parent.

The present study uses the ecological model of human development (systems theory) as a framework to understand the influences of the systems on humans—not only the child but also the mother–teacher.

Section 4.4 will define the research framework.

4.4 Defining the Research Framework

Bronfenbrenner's theory underwent three stages of development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013); however, for the present study, I will only use the first stage of his theory to elucidate a specific understanding. Due to time and space constraints, expanding on the other two stages of the theory is not possible. However, the second and third stages of the theory do provide avenues for further research that may be conducted in the future.

This study will focus on the first version of systems theory before Bronfenbrenner developed it further. I believe that the first version of the theory, called the ecological model of human development, is the distinctive theory and is most applicable to the present research study. This version allows the researcher to scrutinise multiple systems and, in the process, provides a comprehensive view of the mother–teacher challenges and a better understanding of the context in which they live. I will not use the later version of the theory, the bioecological model of human development, as updated by Bronfenbrenner, for several reasons, as I will explain below.

First, what distinguishes the first version of systems theory (i.e., the ecological theory model) is that it gives a more comprehensive view of the effects of multiple systems on the mother–teachers as well as on their children. It not only looks at the mother's influence on the child but instead encompasses a much broader understanding. It considers multiple systems that influence

both the mother–teacher and her child together, and it seems to me that using this theory as a framework for this study is the most appropriate to specifically facilitate achieving its aim.

Second, the aim of this study matches the first version of the theory, while the second version of the theory and its additions will not serve the purpose of this study. The second version focuses on the characteristics of the individual, which is not compatible with the aim and research questions of the present study. The first version of systems theory provides a more comprehensive view of the impact of distant and close systems on the mother–teacher and her child and their interactions, which is the basic focus of this study. A focus on the characteristics of the individuals and their children may benefit other studies, especially given what Bronfenbrenner added later and called personal elements and processes.

In addition, if the present research study were to focus on the last version, I would need more time and space beyond the limited scope of this study. The latest version of the theory requires examination of more information for each individual surveyed and the individual family members, and this would require more time than the present study allows. This could lead to a loss of focus in this study.

Summary

This research study concerns mother–teacher challenges as a main concern. However, being a mother means that the challenges she faces will include not only herself but also her children.

Several theories related to parent–child relationships were described and discussed in this chapter. These theories focus on a single aspect, namely, the mother’s influence on the child. Very little attention is paid to contexts, as contexts are not their primary focus. These theories have made significant contributions to research on childhood development and psychology. Consequently, criticising these theories is not meant to diminish their importance and impact; rather, it is to recognise that every scientific field has aspects that need to be addressed, as well as certain gaps.

Some of these theories do seem to complement each other and do not deny what came before them. Bowlby's theory of attachment has received considerable criticism from the feminist critic Burman (2017), who focuses mainly on the theory's association with politics and maternal deprivation, while neglecting to consider other influential factors in the parent's and the child's lives.

The discussion on parenting styles suggested that the authoritative parenting style appears to be superior to other parenting methods and has the greatest impact on child development, particularly in the context of Western societies (Chao, 2001). However, it is important to understand the context and other reasons why parents adopt specific parenting styles in dealing with their children.

The significant shortcomings of attachment theory have been discussed at length in the literature. Attachment theory focuses on one factor affecting children's development and mental health while neglecting other influencing factors. Similar limitations can be seen in the parenting style model, which proposes ways in which parents deal with their children and the extent to which these styles affect children. The ecological model of human development overcomes the limitations of attachment theory and the parenting-style model by focusing on several factors that affect the life of the developing individual within his or her context.

Bronfenbrenner's model provides a broader scope and encompasses several different systems that influence parents and children. Accordingly, the attachment theory and parenting style model will not be used as a framework for this study. The current study adopts the ecological model of human development as its framework, as this model provides a more comprehensive approach for studying human development rather than providing a simple look at the individual unit. The ecological model of human development allows for an expanded perspective by considering

individuals and their interactions in close and distant environments, thereby enabling an examination of the factors that affect and are affected by the individual.

The use of the ecological model of human development as a framework will help to identify and analyse the different factors, such as the mother's work, social life, school, culture and religious values, that affect the lives of both the child and the mother. These factors will be identified through in-depth interviews with participants, and socially constructed meanings will be raised through the mothers' experiences.

Chapter Five: Research Design and Methodology

This research uses an interpretive paradigm and a qualitative methodology that focusses on understanding the challenges of being a teacher and a mother in the Kuwaiti context. This study considers the nature of the lives of these individuals, the challenges they face in performing their roles as mothers and teachers concurrently, and the other challenges revealed in the interviews. The data were then analysed thematically.

This chapter outlines the following sections. In the **first** section, I begin by formulating my research question. In the **second** section, I explain the paradigm of my thesis. The **third** section provides a definition of the research methodology and justifications for choosing it. The **fourth** section provides an overview of the benefits of conducting a pilot study to improve and develop my thesis. In the **fifth** section, I define the sampling design and describe the characteristics of the participants. The **sixth** section is a discussion of the interviewing process and the interviews. In the **seventh** section, I explain the thematic analysis and analytical procedures employed in this research. In the **eighth** section, I offer insights into ethical considerations and dilemmas. **Finally**, I outline the trustworthiness of qualitative research. **The next section**, Section 5.1, is a review of the research question mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis.

5.1 Research Question

What challenges and factors affect Kuwaiti women in performing their roles as mothers and teachers in Kuwait?

This research aims to understand Kuwaiti women's stories by showcasing their experiences, roles and the challenges they encounter in their day-to-day lives as mothers and teachers. The hope is that sharing these life experiences will assist in establishing an in-depth understanding of the different factors affecting the lives of these mothers and their children in Kuwait.

After explaining my position in the first chapter, reviewing the literature from the second to fourth chapters and subsequently determining my thesis question, I was able to explain the map of my thesis by describing the suitability of the chosen paradigm and the methodology and methods considered most appropriate for obtaining and analysing the data, in relation to answering my questions are outlined in the following sections. Section 5.2 will discuss the research paradigm and my ontological and epistemological positions.

5.2 Research Paradigm

In this section, I will explain the differences between positivist and interpretive approaches in defining my thesis paradigm. In addition, I will explain my ontological and epistemological position as a researcher, as this led to my choice of methodology and methods (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). A researcher's research position is essential. His or her ontological and epistemological positions need to be clear in terms of how they influence the choice of the methods of study and the selection of the analytic design, as presented in the following sections.

A paradigm, as defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994), is the 'basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways' (p. 105). Many different paradigms are used in research, including positivist and interpretivist approaches (Cohen et al., 2018; Wellington, 2015). Positivist and interpretive paradigms have different ontologies and epistemologies. Before explaining the differences, I will first define the meanings of ontology and epistemology. Moon and Blackman (2014) defined ontology as 'what actually exists in the world about which humans can acquire knowledge' (p. 1170) and whether one or multiple realities exist. Epistemology is defined as 'the theory of knowledge, thus epistemological assumptions concern the nature of knowledge, what constitutes knowledge and what it is possible to know and understand and re-present' (Sikes, 2004,

p. 6). Epistemology is concerned with how people create knowledge and what is possible to know (Moon & Blackman, 2014, p. 4).

Cohen et al. (2018) explained the different ontological and epistemological positions of positivist and interpretive paradigms. An objectivist ontology and a scientific, empirical, hypothesis-testing epistemology underpin positivism. By contrast, an interpretive paradigm underpins a subjectivist, interactionist, socially constructed ontology and an epistemology that recognises multiple realities, agentic behaviours and the importance of understanding a situation through the eyes of the participants. Research based on positivistic epistemology focuses on discovering facts or phenomena that can be observed and measured. Thus, through the data that the researcher collects, the researcher is able to find causal relationships between those data and can thereby create a generalisation while also supporting and explaining the behaviour or event that the researcher is studying through his or her use of international rules and laws (Alhrahsaheh & Pius, 2020). The main aim of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of people's experiences. To maintain the integrity of the phenomenon under investigation, investigators make efforts to obtain an in-depth understanding of the person (Cohen et al., 2018). The concern of the interpretive view regarding social science is 'to describe and explain human behaviour, emphasises how people differ from inanimate natural phenomena and, indeed, from each other'. (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 8).

The present research falls under an interpretive paradigm, which is an alternative to the positivism paradigm. Several factors contributed to my decision to forgo positivism, although interpretive and positivism are concerned with understanding phenomena in different ways (Cohen et al., 2011). 'Positivism strives for objectivity, measurability, predictability, controllability, patterning, the construction of laws and rules of behaviour, and the ascription of causality' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 51). Regarding the research question and its aim, positivism does not achieve what

I am seeking to do, which is to listen to and see the world through the participants' lenses. For this research, I was inclined towards the interpretive paradigm, in which questions are formulated in such a way that allows participants to express their opinions through interviews using open-ended questions, thereby letting the researcher hear closely what the participants have to say about their life challenges.

The belief of positivism is that social reality is located outside us and that access to knowledge takes place through observation and its accurate measurement. Therefore, what is observed from human behaviour is dependent on numerical measures, and the world needs a test of laws and theories to help understand the world (Creswell, 2014). My choice of this research topic is based on my own experience. I am a mother and a former teacher at an elementary school in Kuwait and a researcher interested in studying parenting, as I explained in the first chapter of this thesis, while explaining the reason for my choice of this research topic. As a researcher, my life, my identity and the context to which I belong, as well as my experiences, influenced my choice of the subject of this research and my interpretations. Through my position as a mother and a former teacher, I believe that reaching an understanding and interpretation of the challenges that people face cannot be achieved by mere external observations. Rather, it requires an in-depth understanding, and this type of knowledge can be obtained through an in-depth interview.

I chose to undertake an interpretive approach because, as a researcher, I believe in the existence of multiple realities, not one reality, and that reaching a deep understanding of human issues will not be achieved through objective and scientific methods. I believe that the social reality of the challenges faced by teachers and mothers in their lives and the factors affecting their lives are multiple and different; they differ according to people, times, places and cultures. For example, the challenges faced by mother–teachers in the past are definitely not the same as those faced by mothers in the present, and the challenges and factors women face in Kuwait are different from

those faced by women in other countries. Accordingly, these multiple social realities cannot be generalised.

Researchers can perceive the world via the participants' experiences and perceptions using the interpretative approach (Thanh et al., 2015). I see the value of relying on the inductive approach. In this way, I can delve into particulars and focus on the perspectives that participants, through their experiences, share about the complexities of human life. Specifically, this research elucidates the challenges and factors affecting Kuwaiti women as they perform their roles as mothers and teachers in Kuwait and the extent to which these difficulties affect the lives of these women and their children. My aim is not to generalise the results as quantitative research, but to see the complex nature of human life and understand its meaning (Creswell, 2018).

Ontological and epistemological assumptions influenced my choice of this research methodology. In Section 5.3, I discuss my justifications for using qualitative research.

5.3 Qualitative Research

This qualitative study seeks to understand the challenges and factors that affect women while performing their roles as mothers and teachers in the context of Kuwait. Creswell (2018) stated that the qualitative approach is used by researchers to study the problems of individuals or a group of people and thereafter discover the meanings underlying the problems faced by the person or persons under study. Qualitative research allows researchers to collect data in their natural contexts by directly communicating with participants. In qualitative studies, the researchers serve as an important tool because they comprehend the meanings behind the participants' difficulties. The aim of the present research could not be achieved through quantitative research, which focuses on gathering statistical data. While qualitative studies seek to investigate a specific group, quantitative research seeks to generalise (Cohen et al., 2018). The aim of a qualitative study is to identify the

study problem from the participants' perspectives and thereafter obtain information about the issue (Creswell, 2018). By contrast, quantitative research usually focuses on the testing of hypotheses, after which facts are identified and the difference between the changing relationships is determined (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2018).

The methodology chosen for the present study fully recognises the importance of understanding a situation from the participants' perspectives (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 175). The qualitative approach allowed me to ask the participants open-ended questions and facilitate a good flow of interaction and discussion. The participants could freely share their life challenges via this method, but they could not have done so had I chosen to use closed-ended questions in quantitative research. In this study, asking participants directly about their challenges regarding mothering and teaching roles allowed me to gain a better understanding of those challenges and problems.

5.4 Pilot Study

Some of the main benefits and aims of performing a pilot study are that it identifies potential areas where the main research project may fail, where research procedures may not be followed and whether planned methodologies are unsuitable or overly complex (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2010).

I conducted a pilot study with one participant, which assisted me in identifying the proper elements for the characteristics of the research sample, improved my confidence and skills in interviewing and improved the interview questions. After completing this experimental study, I formulated interview questions that would provoke further discussion when I did not understand the participant's intended meaning. The pilot study also helped me refine the key study questions in proportion to the time allowed for this research. This study initially included an additional question (How do you face/deal with such challenges?), but I eliminated it due to the timeframe available for conducting this thesis. The additional question led to the participant providing a large

amount of data. According to Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2010), the benefits of a pilot study are that it provides the ability to evaluate whether the sampling frame and procedure are successful, the opportunity to develop a research question and study strategy and the capability to determine the sample size.

The pilot study also helped me identify the research participants. The pilot study participant was a middle school teacher with previous experience teaching at the primary school level. When she shared the challenges she faced, it was a mixture of challenges she faced as a teacher in a middle school and a primary school. She did not specify between the two school types in her answers. This highlighted the need to specify that participants should be primary school teachers to ensure data accuracy.

During the interview, the pilot study participant stated that she is a divorced mother. In the interview, she talked about the role of her husband with her and her kids. However, after I finished the interview and looked at her data, my feeling was that a better choice would be a married mother, as that would allow me to obtain deeper data about the role of the husband with the mother-teacher and his children. My study required married participants to understand the parental responsibilities between couples. The pressures of work are greater on married women and on those who have children, as they bear the burdens of carrying out the responsibilities of the home, children and husband (Al-Wadiya, 2012). Upon reflection, I realised that I should have been more specific in my pilot focus study requirements. Nevertheless, I used this learning opportunity to harness my focus and streamline my exact requirements for my focus group and the information that I would eventually need. This participant gave me the advantage of deepening my understanding of each participant and how they can contribute to the parameters that I need for my research.

A reason for choosing a married woman is that the Muslim Arab society in Kuwait has particular expectations of a married woman, including responsibilities towards her husband, which

adds to her other responsibilities. In Kuwaiti society, which is Arab and Muslim, the mother is primarily responsible for the children and most of the children's affairs, in addition to the responsibilities of her difficult and exhausting profession as a teacher. The responsibilities of a married woman also extend to her having responsibilities, duties and roles towards her husband's family. Bakr (2012) pointed out that the Muslim Arab woman, even if she is a working woman, remains bound to her traditional roles as wife, mother and housewife. Bakr indicated that the overlap and conflict between the sum of these responsibilities and the woman's responsibility as an employee may become a source of conflict between her roles, which is called role conflict and which, in turn, may create psychological pressure (Bakr, 2012). The presence of participants with different characteristics, such as divorced mothers, may enrich the research in terms of creating an aspect of comparison regarding the difficulties faced by married mothers versus divorced mothers and identifying the extent of the differences in the difficulties they face by acting concurrently as mothers and teachers.

However, the limitations of this research at the present time preclude the consideration of these differences in challenges or of the challenges faced by the category of divorced mothers working in the field of teaching, despite the importance of this category.

Having conducted the pilot study and evaluated the findings, I was then able to define the criteria for the participants more accurately before submitting invitations to participate. The final criteria were as follows: the participant should be a teacher in a primary school who was teaching basic subjects and who was married with children.

Section 5.5 will provide more details about the participants in the main research study.

5.5 Sampling and Research Participants

Qualitative research sampling is characterised as purposeful, non-random sampling. Teddlie and Yu (2007) defined purposeful sampling 'as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of

individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions' (p. 77).

Several purposive sampling strategies can be used in qualitative research, such as snowball, homogeneous and maximal variation sampling. Wellington (2014) defines snowball sampling as a strategy in which 'one case suggests another who suggests another... Members of one sample lead to others...and so on' p. 118–120. Homogeneous sampling occurs when the researcher selects people who have similar characteristics, while maximal variation sampling involves the selection of individuals who have different characteristics (Creswell, 2014).

Homogeneous sampling strategies were used in this research. Based on the study's aim, my research question, the results of the pilot study, and my experience as a former primary school teacher, I chose general sample characteristics that I deemed appropriate. Thus, the sample participants were all married mothers working as teachers in government-run primary schools. All major taught subjects, such as Arabic, science, English or Islamic studies. However, physical education, art and computing teachers were excluded because, from my experience and observation as a former teacher, teachers of these subjects face less professional pressure in Kuwait. Main subject teachers must prepare worksheets, exams and quizzes in addition to following and correcting pupils' books and notebooks.

Unexpected differences in the sample characteristics appeared during the interviews, which I believe added value and richness to the data. The interviews revealed that the participants differed in terms of the number of years of experience each had as a teacher and mother as well as in their ages, numbers of children, ages of their children, and the subjects they teach.

The sample size was relatively small, as qualitative research focuses on depth of information over breadth of information (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Thus, rather than seeking generalised results,

qualitative research aims to understand a central phenomenon, focusing on a specific and small number of individuals (Creswell, 2014). While I originally planned for a sample size of four to five participants, I ultimately had a total of four participants, and one of them participated in the pilot study for several reasons: this small number of participants can be understood in a number of ways. **First**, accessing mothers-teachers can be difficult because they have so many competing responsibilities. **Second**, while the number of participants was low, this could be understood as improving the quality of analysis. **Third**, it is important to acknowledge the challenges of interviewing in Kuwaiti accent and then writing a thesis in English. **Fourth**, the number of participants was impacted by the changing nature of my research. **Fifth**, it could be argued that these small number of participants still permitted me to reach the saturation point. I will expand on these five points below.

First, the limited availability of respondents. In this context, I would like to mention that the fifth participant apologised due to a lack of time and family circumstances. There was difficulty in reaching the target people and devoting two hours of their time for the interview, regardless of the time they spend going back and forth to the interview. **Firstly**, Due to the great preoccupation of this group, it was not easy to conduct interviews for this research within their workplaces due to the lack of sufficient time for them due to the large number of workloads in the profession, which requires perhaps two hours for one interview, even if the interview is divided into different days. **Secondly**, interviewing parents is difficult because they have so many competing responsibilities. As the three participants participated, in addition to the participant participate in the pilot study, during the interviews Participants had many telephone interruptions during my interview with them, asking me to allow them to answer their phones to follow up on the affairs of the home and the extended family. One of the participants was receiving many calls, and these calls were justified by the fact that they were from her parents asking her not to be late for the family visit.

Approximately 100 teachers were contacted, but I received five responses regarding their desire to participate, one of whom was part of the pilot study, three of them participated, and one of them apologised for not participating a few minutes before the scheduled interview time.

Second, while I had a small number of participants this could be seen to improve the quality of analysis. Vasileiou et al. (2018) indicated that reaching the quality of the analysis is one of the main reasons qualitative researchers to have few participants in their research. As I described in the analysis section, focusing on the in-depth analysis has been somewhat complicated. In the analysis related to this research topic, there were two aspects of life that the participants talked about, and there was a great deal of overlap between the two contexts, and to try to understand in the analysis the impact resulting from the intersection of these challenges together and its impact on the lives of the mother and her children, which requires in-depth analysis and intensification of the analysis process, This complexity was an influential factor in not increasing the number of participants to compensate, for the limitations of this research in terms of time and the number of words required and to try to reach in-depth understanding and intensive analysis that reviews many aspects of the lives of the participants. The research questions also focused on inquiring about two basic aspects of one participant's life, each of which takes up a large part of their lives. I engaged with participants' difficulties and challenges of the profession and the minute details and different situations that they go through and that occur within it. The participants talked about many stories and detailed challenges that happen to them within the work. My interviews and analysis also allowed me to explicate aspects of participants' lives outside of work and the challenges of being mothers. It also included various details and stories, various life events and conflicts in their lives. I was permitted to ask; How do these challenges affect their lives with their children? This resulted in me obtaining a lot of data that contained many stories for each participant.

Third, it is important to acknowledge the challenges of interviewing in Kuwaiti and then writing a thesis in English. One of the requirements of this thesis is that it be presented in English, while the language used in interviewing the participants was Arabic, and more precisely (the Kuwaiti dialect). The process of translating the statements made by the participants went through many stages of translation from Arabic and into English, and then repeated checking and review with specialists in the field of translation from Arabic to English so that the data does not lose its intended meaning when translated into English. The procedure for translating qualitative data from Arabic to English is complicated, challenging, and Time-consuming (Abalkhail, 2018). This was enough to consume a lot of time and effort in this study, which makes it impossible to have a sample size larger than it is. present in this study.

Fourth, the number of participants was impacted by the changing nature of my research. As I indicated in chapter nine in the research limitations, I originally planned this research to be a narrative research based study on small numbers of participants, and as Guetterman (2015) points out, the numbers in narrative research range between 1 and 2. This constitutes a very small sample size, and it is worth noting that my research was conducted before the events of Covid-19 began and its spread around the world and its impact on the course of people's lives in the entire world. This research was supposed to be narrative research, but the circumstances of Covid-19 viruses forced me to change the method of analysis. This is a key factor in the fact that this research has three participants. The spread of Corona virus contributed to changing the course of this research by shifting the analysis in this research from narrative to using thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006).

Fifth, it could be argued that these small number of participants still permitted me to reach the saturation point. The saturation stage can be described as the point at which research reaches the conclusion that collecting more data may not lead to more topics and will not provide anything new. I believe that determining the similarity in the characteristics of samples in terms of choosing a similar research sample (called homogeneous sampling) has contributed to reaching rapid saturation of the data.

What made me decide that I had reached saturation was due to two reasons. Repetition of the themes present in the data for the three participants, and after the initial thematic analysis for all participants and comparing what I analysed with the data included in the pilot interview (note: the use of pilot study data in this research was excluded) There was repetition in the themes despite the different stories told by the participants under each theme, so I knew that I had reached saturation in the themes due to the repetition. Also, due to the large number of themes mentioned during the interview, they detailed their life events. This research was limited in time and in terms of the number of words, so the number of participants was small. Of the many topics and issues mentioned by the participants that require careful examination, the topics were mostly similar. This gives an indication that there is saturation in the themes in terms of their similarity. There are many themes as well.

Second, there are many important themes mentioned that require depth of research and analysis, and that are commensurate with the time allotted for the nature of this research. I only concluded that I had enough data after completing three interviews; I decided that this was enough to avoid repetition and that the three participants provided a large amount of data and a variety of themes about the challenges they faced in two life contexts: as a teacher and as a mother in the Kuwaiti context.

Accordingly, while I originally planned for a sample size of four to five participants, I came to the conclusion that I had ample data after completing three interviews. I decided that this was enough to avoid repetition and that the three participants had each provided a large amount of data on the challenges they experienced in two life settings: as a teacher and as a mother in the Kuwaiti context, and the effect of these challenges on their life and their children.

Table 2 in the following section provides information on the three participants interviewed for this research.

5.6 Interviews

This section begins with a definition of the type of interview used for this study, followed by a discussion of how the guiding interview questions were determined. Subsequently, the process of conducting the interviews is described and information is given regarding interview recording and data transcription.

Table 2 *Details of the Research Participants*

Participant name (anonymity)	Age	Number of children and their ages	Length of teaching experience	Teaching subject
Jinan	31	Three boys (12 and 7 years old and 9 months old) One girl (10 years old)	9 years	Arabic language
Muneera	40	Four boys (12, 12, 7 and 4 years old)	15 years	Science
Hadeel	37	Four girls (15, 13, 10 and 5 years old) One boy (6 years old)	15 years	English language

5.6.1 The Research Interview Type

In this section, I discuss the appropriateness of using interviews for this thesis, followed by an explanation and description of the type of interview chosen.

I collected data through interviews because I believe this approach to be the most appropriate method for researching this subject. The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges faced by women who are both teachers and mothers in a Kuwaiti context. Interviews facilitate the process of understanding these challenges by allowing the participants to express their thoughts on them in a safe and private environment. In addition, the interview format provides researchers with a great deal of flexibility, facilitating a thorough investigation of ideas, values, feelings and opinions (Wellington, 2015). Through interviews, researchers can investigate aspects they cannot observe, gather information about participants' views and personal history and provide participants with an opportunity to be heard, read and known (Wellington, 2015).

Interviews can take several forms. Mann (2016) provided a summary of 19 common interview types used by researchers, noting structured, unstructured and semi-structured to be the most popular. Structured interviews involve specific questions and the choice of previously determined answers, which would not have been appropriate for this thesis because of the lack of flexibility (Wellington, 2015). In structured interviews, the researcher is unable to change direction or make modifications during the interview process (Cohen et al., 2018), and this style of interview better serves the needs of quantitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Thus, I did not choose this interview approach, as it would have restricted me from building a broad understanding of the issues being studied and it would not have served the goals of the qualitative research approach of this study.

Semi-structured interviews are more flexible than structured interviews, but unstructured interviews are the most flexible (Wellington, 2015). The unstructured interview is characterised as informal and using open-ended and non-directive questions. In unstructured interviews, questions prepared by researchers in advance are less important than those that emerge spontaneously during the interview, as this type of interview is free from pre-existing protocols (Mann, 2016).

Conversely, semi-structured interviews depend on a series of predetermined open-ended questions about several issues that the researcher determines to be related to the research subject, and the questions are usually written up to use as a guide during the interview (Moriarty, 2011; Mann, 2016). Thus, I chose to use semi-structured interviews because their flexibility allows for the use of pre-determined questions that facilitate the gathering of data appropriate to the subject and provide the interviewer with control over the direction of the conversation. Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to use open-ended questions that give participants the freedom to expand on their thoughts and provide in-depth details, which I determined would be advantageous to the aims of this study.

5.6.2 Determination of the Guiding Interview Questions

The process of determining the interview questions benefited from consideration of the research aim and question, a review of the literature and the results of the pilot study. Table 3 shows the initial interview questions. The choice of guiding interview questions benefited from my experiences as a mother and former teacher, as my familiarity with these roles was expected to enable me to help interviewees address areas they might overlook. As predicted, I was able to use my personal history as a mother and teacher to encourage the participants' engagement with additional questions. Given this, in tandem with the flexibility of the semi-structured interview format, I was able to encourage participants to continue exploring the subject, asking for more details or further explanation. However, another important point to note is that I remained aware that my experiences as a mother and a former teacher could have introduced bias, so I consciously avoided the use of leading questions and of giving the interviewees' any sign of my agreement or disagreement with their responses (Cohen et al., 2018).

Table 3 *Interview Guide Before Developing and Altering the Interview Questions*

Main question
Tell me about the challenges you face as a mother and teacher at the same time.
Semi-structured questions
Tell me about your role as a mother. What does that involve/what are your main duties?
Tell me about your role as a teacher. What does that involve/what are your main duties?
How do you face/deal with such challenges?

Open-ended questions have several advantages, such as being flexible and giving the participants the freedom to talk without restrictions regarding the content or the way they respond. These questions also enable the interviewer to delve further or address any misunderstandings and can result in surprising or unanticipated responses that could point to previously unconsidered links (Cohen et al., 2018). These advantages gave me an in-depth understanding of the participants' challenges and the factors affecting women as they perform their concurrent roles as mothers and teachers in Kuwait. Such details are missing from the literature reviewed in Chapters 1–4.

I used the ecological perspective of human development as the framework for this study. Bronfenbrenner (2005) described the ecological systems as nested systems, and in-depth interview questions facilitated an in-depth understanding and details of the settings of these nested systems and their effects on human life. Asking the participants open-ended questions, such as 'Tell me about the challenges you face being a teacher and mother at the same time', allowed the participants to share their challenges in detail and show the complexity of these systems.

I planned the interview question guide by focusing on asking in-depth open-ended questions that would lead to an in-depth understanding of the participants' challenges. Such questions led to the respondents giving more details. For example, I asked the following questions about the participants' daily activities: Tell me about how you spend your time when returning home from

work. Tell me about how you spend your time on weekends. The interview question guide for this thesis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 *Interview Question Guide*

Opening questions (basic information)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • age, teaching experiences, teaching subject, number of children and their age(s)
Primary open-ended question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about the challenges you face as a mother and teacher at the same time.
Additional open-ended questions
<p><u>Challenges of being a teacher</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What challenges do you face in your work? - Tell me about your role as a teacher. What does this involve? - How do you spend your time at work? - What are your main duties? - How many classes do you teach? <p><u>Challenges of being a mother</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about your role as a mother. What does this involve/what are your main duties and challenges? - Tell me about your life/about how you spend your time after work/talk to me about your weekend. • Tell me about your husband’s role with your children. <p><u>The effects of these challenges on the mother and her children</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do you think these challenges affect your life and your children?
<p><u>Encouraging continuing dialogue</u></p> <p>Could you tell me more about...? How does xyz happen? Why?</p>

Finally, in-depth interview questions were an effective way to understand the participants’ challenges and lived experiences in detail. They provided an opportunity to highlight the

participants' voices and the problems they faced as they assumed the concurrent roles of mothers and teachers. The questions gave the women an opportunity to speak about their difficulties in a way that some might not dare to do openly and publicly for many reasons, such as the existence of power relations. They may be uncomfortable speaking freely to the heads of their departments, educational inspectors, or the head teachers at their schools—all of whom play a role in the teacher's job assessments.

The next section discusses the research interviews.

5.6.3 Conducting the Research Interviews

After the university approved my thesis regarding ethical considerations (see Appendix 5), I travelled from the UK to Kuwait to meet the participants in person. Upon arriving, I posted an announcement on WhatsApp, stating that I was a PhD student who was searching for married mothers working as teachers of main subjects in primary schools to volunteer to participate in my research. I provided my contact number for those who were interested in participating in the research. To ensure my announcements reached the target audience, I likewise contacted a female teacher (whom I knew previously) to ask for help sending my study participation announcement to any teachers she knew. Fortunately, she was a member of a social networking group on WhatsApp (see glossary) that included nearly 100 teachers from different schools in Kuwait. The aim of this social networking group was to facilitate the sharing of experiences among teachers. I asked my friend to send my announcement to this group of teachers, which she did.

After the announcement was sent to the teacher's group, I received calls and messages from five women who were willing to participate in my research. I hoped to meet the participants face to face because telephone interviews lack face-to-face engagement, non-verbal communication is lost throughout the interaction and the physical setting can be a disadvantage to more understanding (Edwards & Holland, 2013). However, Moriarty (2011) indicated that phone

interviews can be useful in some circumstances, such as when participants are unable or unwilling to meet the researcher face to face. One of the participants (Jinan) sent me a message expressing that she preferred a phone call interview rather than a face-to-face interview because she had a baby and therefore had difficulty leaving the house. Given her situation, I agreed to conduct the interview via phone call. This is an application of research ethics, which I used to consider the participants and their circumstances. Before conducting the phone interview, I was worried that the participant had low motivation. Cohen et al. (2018) indicated that motivation to participate by phone may be lower than with face-to-face interviews. However, I found that the phone interview was a pleasant experience, and the participant's motivation to participate was not low. During the interview, she shared vast information, with the interview lasting nearly two hours. She also indicated that I could call her again with further questions. Cohen et al. (2018) indicated that differences in participants' motivation to participate can be seen when the researcher chooses the telephone interview as the primary data collection tool versus when it is unplanned and requested by an interviewee instead of a face-to-face meeting. An advantage in this case was the time saved for both myself and the participant, because we did not have to travel to meet for the interview (Cohen et al., 2018).

I contacted the other participants and set an appropriate time and place to meet them after considering their schedules, and I tried to meet at their convenience. I agreed to meet each participant separately at a cafe in one of the commercial complexes in Kuwait, because of the availability of security in such places. These complexes provide first aid and have cameras that ensure the safety of all patrons in case of any emergency situation.

For reasons of time, the participants preferred having one long interview to talk about their challenges instead of several interviews. The interviews ranged in length between two and three

hours. Each interviewee provided many details about her challenges, which provided a large amount of data.

Section 5.7 will explain the processes used for interview recording and data transcription.

5.7 Thematic Analysis

I adopted the approach to thematic analysis advanced by Braun and Clarke (2006) because I have used this approach in a previous study. This is one of the research methods characterised by flexibility of analysis. “Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data” (Clarke & Braun, 2015, p. 1). It enables the researcher to systematically identify, organise and offer insights into patterns of meaning across data sets. This method is a way of identifying what is common in the way a topic is talked or written about, enabling the researcher to make sense of these commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57).

After completing all the transcriptions on the computer, I printed copies of the interviews to carry out the thematic analysis by hand. First, I printed copies of the relevant transcripts to write notes and highlight codes and themes on these copies. Second, I took advantage of the notes and the highlighted coloured words that I had added to the printed copies. Using the Microsoft Word program, I was able to manually categorise the data into groups.

I am aware of the availability of specialised thematic analysis software that can be used. In particular, I attended two sessions on NVivo software at the University of Sheffield to receive training in using this software to facilitate work on thematic analysis. However, I excluded the option of using this specialist software for analysing qualitative data because the program did not accept the Arabic language at the time I was carrying out the analysis. Using Nvivo would have required me to translate a huge amount of data into English, which would have been extremely time-consuming. As a result, I instead made the decision to analyse the data in the Arabic language.

At the end of my analysis, I translated into English only the data that I present in this thesis for the purposes of this research.

My approach to thematic analysis was based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. I used their approach as a guide to help me conduct thematic analysis across all three transcripts. Their guide is clear and flexible. The following table explains the process that I followed in carrying out the thematic analysis.

5.7.1 Thematic Analysis Procedures

In this section, I expand on some of the thematic analysis procedures that I mentioned in the above section on the thematic analysis process (Table 5), by providing more explanation. First, I discuss how I familiarised myself with the data. Second, I talk in more detail about the transcription process. Third, I describe the process of defining codes and themes. Fourth, I end by discussing a selected extract and the importance of listening to the participants.

Familiarise myself with the data. This step included recording the interviews and transcribing the data. The interviews were recorded only after the participants gave their approval for the interviews to be recorded (Wellington, 2015). The data were recorded using tablet voice-recording software. Recording interviews with such devices is easy, and the recordings can be saved and listened to again at any time (Brown, 2023). One of the advantages of voice-recording software is that I was able to control the speed or slowness of listening to the audio, which facilitated and speeded up the transcription process. It also had the advantage of making the audible sound clearer. This was important because when I listened to the audio for one of the interviews, I was unable to understand one of the words said during the interview. However, the slow speech feature enabled me to hear what the participant had said more clearly. One of the disadvantages of this approach is the limited space of tablet storage, as the three interviews consumed most of the tablet storage space.

Table 5 *Thematic Analysis Approach Based on Braun and Clarke (2006)*

Phase	Process
1- Familiarise myself with the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I transcribed the data from the audio recordings that I made using smart devices. I used an audio recording program on an iPad, and I carried out the transcription myself using a computer. During the transcription process, I highlighted words that I thought were important for the research so that I could focus on them after the completion of the transcript. - Repeated reading - Writing notes
2- Generate code	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I coded what I saw as interesting features of the data. I then collected all the data that I thought might be related under each code. - I coded as much as I could, using highlighters and writing notes. This helped to produce individual extracts of data under several themes.
3- Seek themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By collecting codes under candidate themes, I focused on developing an analysis that was broader than that attained in the coding phase. - “Thinking about the relationship between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes (e.g., main overarching themes and sub-themes within them)” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 89–90).
4- Review themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recoding - Re-theming
5- Define and name themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defining and refining themes - Giving titles to themes
6- Write up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analyses.” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78)

The first step in the data transcription involved transcribing the audio interviews by myself using a computer. I chose not to authorise another person to do this for three reasons. First, the conversations in the interviews took place in the Kuwaiti dialect, which might not be

understandable by other Arabic speakers. The interviews with the participants were in the Arabic language (Kuwaiti accent) because this was their mother tongue. Since it is also my first language, Arabic in the Kuwaiti accent facilitated communication between the participants and myself.

Next, using a computer, I transcribed the data myself into formal Arabic rather than the Kuwaiti dialect, which helped me later when I reviewed my English translations for the participants' quotations used in the analysis chapter with a professional English Arabic translator, as the translator could understand formal Arabic but not Kuwaiti accents. Second, although the transcription process was time-consuming, it provided an opportunity for me to familiarise myself with the data so that I could prepare myself for the analysis phase. Third, I did not allow others to carry out the transcription to avoid misunderstandings that might happen through other transcribers. I did this because when I heard the audio, I could remember the actual moment between myself and each participant and recall their facial expressions, voice and tone of voice. This helped me write the transcript, as I could understand what the participants meant when they uttered a specific word or explained a specific moment. These nuances might not have been caught by others who had not attended the conversations.

The second step for the data transcription involved printing out the transcripts of interviews, sticking them together and creating a notebook by applying a hard cover to them. This was helpful in protecting the paper from damage and in facilitating the initial analysis of the data, which involved highlighting the important words and writing important notes manually. Thus, my approach favoured working on paper and then using the computer.

While I carried out the transcriptions, I placed as much emphasis as possible on words that I thought were important. As Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated, this step provided me with a comprehensive overview of the various topics that the participants discussed. I then printed each interview separately. Next, I read the first interview on its own, assessing it and underscoring and

focusing on the main topics that it contained. I reviewed my initial work and then made more precise highlights using different colours to focus on words that referred to challenges and words that were significant for and related to the question, aims and topic of the research focus.

Defining Codes and Themes. The choice of themes was influenced by the research question and the pursuit to obtain answers. This means that the research question guided my choice of themes. Braun and Clarke (2012) indicated that the aim of an analysis is to answer the research questions, and the researcher must identify patterns of meaning (themes) related to the research topic and answer the research questions.

In the thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006), flexibility means that the analysis can be conducted in several ways, using either an inductive or deductive approach or both (Clarke & Braun, 2012). In my opinion, the flexibility of the thematic analysis allowed me, as a researcher, to use a combination of deductive and inductive approaches, which I chose under the assumption that both approaches will enrich the study. In the inductive approach, through in-depth interviews, the participants repeatedly emphasised several critical issues that challenged them. It is important not to ignore these issues because the codes and themes in the analysis were ‘drive[n] from the content of the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58).

In addition, Braun and Clarke (2012) indicated that when researchers analyse, they always bring something to the data; hence, a researcher should not use the inductive approach alone. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development influenced the thematic analysis and interpretation of the study results. This model emphasises the several systems and interactions that take place within the systems of human development. Thus, codes, themes, and interpretations are ‘drive[n] more [by] the concepts and ideas the researcher bring[s] to the data’ (Braun & Clarke,

2012, p. 58). Accordingly, the codes and themes used in this research were influenced by the system theory, which provided the theoretical framework of this study.

Selection of Interview Excerpts and Listening to the Participants. After familiarising myself with the data, reviewing the participants' data, generating the codes and defining the themes, I found various short stories about specific events in the participants' lives. Thus, the reader will see several themes in the analysis integrated with some details and an unbroken sequence of short stories. The readers will not read mere briefs extracted from the participants' viewpoints on the topic of this study but will find parts characterised by lengthy narrations for several reasons. First, I think this will provide readers with an in-depth understanding of events and the subjects' experiences and will enable them to listen carefully to the mother's/teacher's rich accounts and points of view. People tell stories to persuade the audience (Riessman, 2008). Consequently, the stories presented in the analysis will help the audience make sense of the challenges that the mothers–teacher faces.

Second, I want the participants' voices to be prominent and heard by the reader. Through the interviews, the participants' voices could be heard and known (Wellington, 2015). In this sense, the reader will hear the participants' strong voices through lengthy interview excerpts in the thematic analysis.

Third, some responses to the interview questions were stated coherently and sequentially, in a manner that does not accept deconstruction. Some of the participants' interpretations contained rich, accurate and linked details. Riessman (1993) referred to having difficulty dismantling participants' accounts told sequentially and coherently about the important stories and events in their lives. I think that summarising or shortening them may lead to a lack of clear understanding of the participants' accounts. Therefore, disassembling them may diminish their richness, and I

want the readers to clearly see what cannot be observed and to understand precise details of the participants' accounts.

5.7.2 Thematic Analysis Difficulties

My journey in the thematic analysis stage was difficult in terms of the huge amount of data, as every word that the participants said represents great importance in itself. Moreover, some responses to the interview questions contained several interrelated topics that were difficult to synthesise. For example, one section of an excerpt may include two or three codes that can fall under different themes because the text was said incoherently. Determining the codes of the themes was not an easy process and involved several stages of thinking, writing, amending repeatedly, and reviewing the data back and forth, which were time-consuming.

I found that making the right classification of codes and themes was confusing and that at times it would be better to include what the participants reported about several topics; that is, to place their responses under the main themes or sub-themes or in a totally different theme. One topic may be suitable for two or more themes. The classification process was exhausting. Therefore, I clarified and simplified that data as much as possible so that the readers can read clear and interconnected short stories without distraction and complications. This was achieved through the numerous readings and reviews and by putting myself in the position of the readers to determine whether my writing is readable in terms of coherence and cohesion. Furthermore, I asked my supervisors and friends to read my analysis and provide me with feedback on the points of weaknesses, divergence and lack of coherence that could affect the readers' understanding.

When I first identified the main and sub-themes and finished analysing them, they were too numerous. After reading them several times, I found similarities in the topics and repetitions in sentences such as 'works that are not in our speciality, our tasks, and our work... and the inability of the teacher to reject them because they are related to the evaluation'. Thus, this concept might

go under three themes related to the teachers' accountability, performativity, pressure from school officials and extra work. However, after several readings of the analysis, I found that these three can be linked together under 'pressure from school officials.

Repeated in-depth reading contributed to a more accurate analysis. My hope is that readers find the analysis accessible and easy to understand. Section 5.8 will discuss ethical considerations and dilemmas.

5.8 Ethical Considerations and Dilemmas

Ethics must be taken into account in any research. This research involves talking about the participants' challenges and the factors affecting their lives, and the participants discussed different relationships at work, at home and with other family members, as well as describing different events in their lives. This kind of research requires respect for privacy, confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen et al., 2018; Wellington, 2015). Guaranteeing anonymity gives the participants the freedom to share their challenges. The participants had the right to change their minds about participating in the study or to choose to refrain from answering some of the questions if they were uncomfortable. I ensured that I did not pressure the participants into answering any questions. In addition to explaining the research and its aims, I informed the participants that their interviews would be audio recorded (Creswell, 2014). This audio recording was password protected and all audio recordings were destroyed and deleted at the end of 2023.

Before conducting the interviews, I sent to the participants a PDF document explaining the research, its subject, its aim, the researcher's name, the university data and the communication data. I likewise explained the duration of the interview and the rights and obligations of the participants in this research (see Appendices 1&2). All the participants were given the opportunity to sign a participation consent form (see Appendices 3&4) and agreed to participate. Two

participants provided written agreements to participate in this research, and one of them orally agreed.

Prior to participating, the participants were informed of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Cohen et al., 2018). On the day of the scheduled meeting, I went to the agreed-upon location early to find a quiet spot that was conducive for the interview. However, after waiting for a while, I received a message from one of the participants, apologising that she could not attend the interview because her daughter was sick. Applying ethical standards, I respected her circumstances. I understand that participation in research is purely voluntary and that participants are entitled to withdraw at any time, without needing to provide a valid reason.

I faced an ethical dilemma when my friend expressed willingness to participate in my research. I was embarrassed when I had to tell her that she could not participate, and this was a situation I had not expected. While I thanked her for volunteering and expressed my appreciation for her willingness to participate, I told her that I would prefer not to have any prior knowledge about participants in my research for privacy reasons. Some of the questions would be about the challenges of being a mother and the role of her husband with their children, as well as questions about their lives, families and problems, which are private concerns. I considered that people I already knew may be more concerned with privacy and be less open to freely sharing their challenges with me, potentially affecting the credibility of the study.

I also did my part to preserve the privacy of the participants and ensure their anonymity. In fact, one of the participants told me that she would introduce me to a friend who also fit my participant criteria. I thanked her but explained to her that I could not meet this person because she was a relative of the participant's husband. Even if I anonymised both of their responses in the study, a high probability remained that they would still be able to identify one another if they read the analysis sections after the publication of this thesis. As a researcher, I pledged to preserve the

privacy of my participants as they share information about their lives, families, and problems. Thus, I prefer not to have participants who know each other in order to keep their data confidential.

5.9 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness for qualitative research has four elements, according to Guba (1981): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. To ensure rigor in my thesis, I followed several methods for promoting trustworthiness.

First, for the methodology, Shenton (2004) notes that one of the measures that enhances credibility, dependability and confirmability is the researcher's display of in-depth information about the research process. I presented the details related to the methodology and the basis on which I chose the research method, as well as the details of the data collection. I further provided details about the participants in the research and the sample size, which contributes to the trustworthiness of the results of this research.

Second, to ensure transferability, I chose a purposive sample that was similar in profession and motherhood, but the participants differed in that they worked at different schools and taught different subjects. Choosing purposive samples and the similarities and differences between them enhances the reliability of the results in this research.

The small sample size in this research will not allow generalisability. However, the in-depth explanation of the research method may become a standpoint for other researchers to conduct similar studies in other contexts or with larger numbers of participants.

Third, for dependability, discussing my project with my research community, peers and supervisor played a role in improving my research process and findings and in enhancing its trustworthiness.

Fourth, one of the procedures that will enhance the study's trustworthiness is the explanation of my position (Shenton, 2004). In the research, I explain my position as a mother and my experiences as a former teacher in Kuwait.

Fifth, I clarified the ethical approval from the university that I received to do my research, emphasising the credibility of my thesis (Shenton, 2004).

Lastly, after transcribing the participants' interviews, I contacted the participants to ask them to check that the transcriptions matched their words. This procedure is important for trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004).

5.10 Reporting the Findings

I would like to start with a summary of the general features of the results of this research to make it easier for the reader to understand the next chapter, which contains the analysis and results.

Figure 2 shows the overlapping systems in which individuals live according to Bronfenbrenner's (2006) classification. The circle in the middle is the location of the individual, which, in this study, is where the children are located. The next system is the microsystem, which is the closest system, including in this research the interaction of the children and their mothers. The data analysis shows that the prominent challenges in the analysis lens located in the microsystem were the mothers' direct interactions with their children in matters of their education, and the results show how the educational system and curricula impact the interaction between mothers and children.

The mesosystem focusses on the interactions of those in the microsystem with each other with regard to the children. No concerns in the data analysis were present regarding any interactions in this system, so this system did not create challenges in the lives of the participants. Rather, the most prominent system, which included factors that had the greatest impact on the mothers and their children, was the exosystem, in which the mothers' professions were located. The analysis

showed how the mothers' work had direct effects on themselves and indirect effects on their children and how the mothers dealt with their children. Additionally, results indicated an impact of the exosystem on the mothers and their children through the impact of the educational system in Kuwait and the curricula.

The macrosystem includes three effects on the mothers and their children: the impact of the cultural roles for women and men in Kuwait on the mothers/teachers, the impact of social obligations in Kuwaiti culture and the influence of Kuwaiti culture and its concepts and expectations of how mothers and wives perform their roles within Kuwaiti society.

This research asks about challenges and factors affecting the lives of these women while they act as teachers and mothers in Kuwait. To answer this question, I divided the analysis and findings into three chapters. The first is about the professional challenges of teaching and their effects on mothers and their children (exosystem). The second is about the challenges mothers and children face as a result of the educational system and curricula (microsystem and exosystem). The third chapter is about the challenges of being a mother and a teacher in the Kuwaiti context. Dividing the findings like this will provide the research with needed coherence. I present and support the findings with the participants' own words and with previous research. After these three chapters, I present the discussion finding in the last chapter of this thesis with the conclusion.

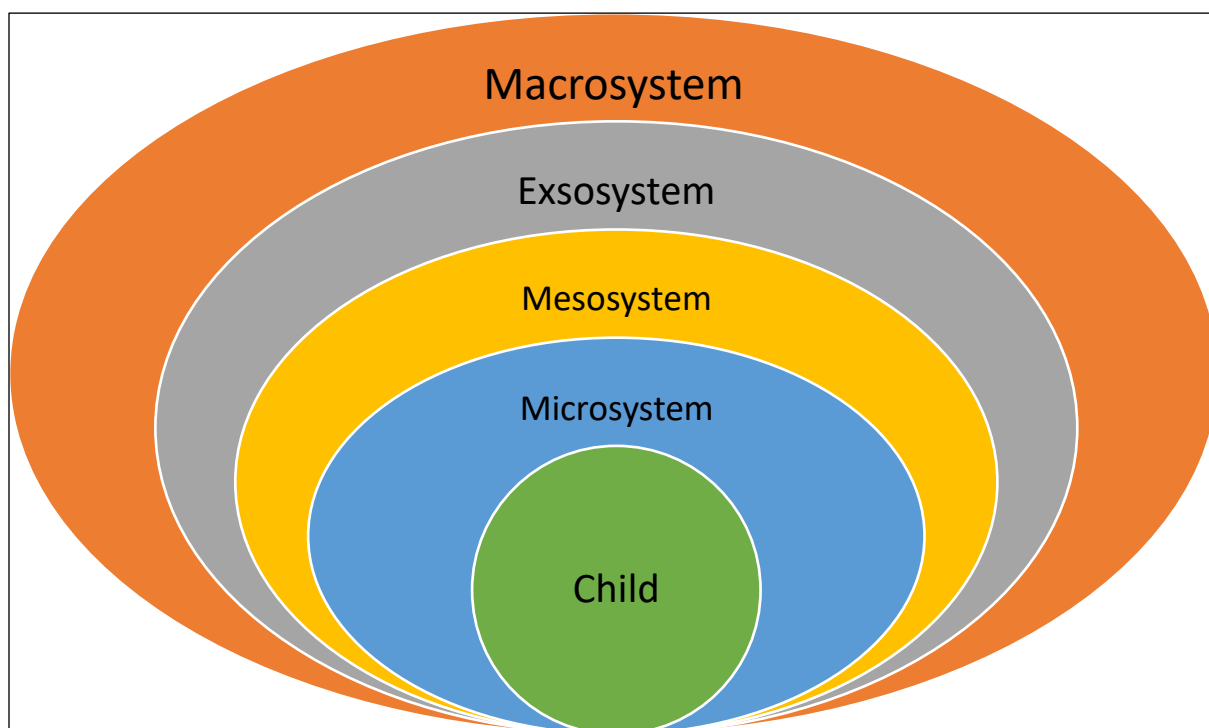


Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model

Summary

This chapter related the thesis methodology, starting by reviewing the research question and confirming that my position as a researcher and my experiences as a mother and a former teacher from Kuwait impacts this research. I explained my ontological and epistemological position regarding social reality and knowledge in this research and my resulting choice of the interpretive paradigm. This chapter highlighted the use of a qualitative approach, and I explained the benefit of the pilot study provided for this research. I then provided details about the participants, followed by the data collection method used. I detailed the in-depth interview process using open-ended questions and how the interviews were conducted. I provided the analysis process of the data and explained the thematic analysis procedure and difficulties. In the conclusion of this chapter, ethical considerations and a dilemma were discussed, in addition to the factors considered to ensure trustworthiness of this research.

The next three chapters will present the analysis of the data of the three participants and the results, followed by a discussion and conclusion chapter.

Chapter Six: Professional Challenges (Exosystem)

This chapter presents the results obtained through a thematic analysis of data collected by conducting in-depth interviews with three mothers who teach basic subjects in primary school. It also describes the current situation within the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), where their professional responsibilities pose challenges to female teachers that directly and indirectly impact their lives and their roles as mothers at home, respectively.

The main research question and the structure of this chapter are as follows:

Research question: What are the challenges and factors affecting Kuwaiti women while performing their roles as mothers and teachers in Kuwait?

Results related to the professional challenges of working mothers in the field of teaching are divided into four themes, which answer the research question. The first three themes concern the major professional challenges that teachers encounter in their profession. The first theme addresses teachers' work intensity and lack of time. The second theme explores the role of administrative leadership and teacher evaluation in the pressure that teachers experience. The third theme addresses the educational system and curriculum and their contribution to teachers' professional challenges. The fourth theme concerns the effects of the identified professional challenges of teaching on mothers who teach and their children.

Professional Challenges Affecting the Lives of Mothers and Their Children

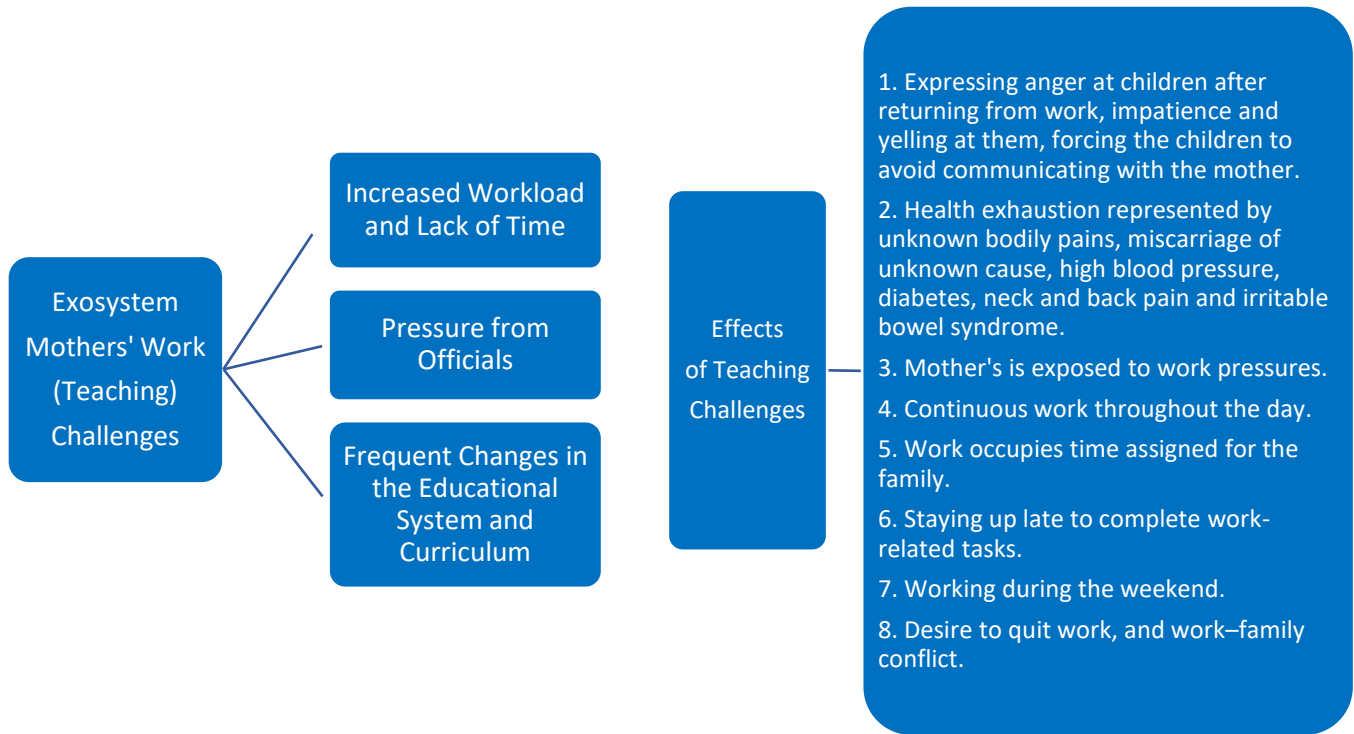


Figure 3: Professional Challenges Affecting the Lives of Mothers and Their Children

6.1 Challenge One: Teachers' Workload and Lack of Time

This section discusses the challenges that stem from the intensity of teachers' core and additional work responsibilities and the time pressure under which they work. The study conducted by Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) for the Kuwait Teachers Association classified teaching as among the most challenging professions in Kuwait owing to the many burdens associated with it and the large amount of time required to teach successfully. The section begins with a discussion of the challenges that teachers face in fulfilling their main role, which is teaching, followed by a discussion of the challenges related to their additional roles.

Teaching is the main role that teachers are expected to fulfil. In this study, as indicated by the data, the teachers faced several challenges, including the high intensity of work due to their high-class quota shares (teaching schedule) of basic subjects, the high number of students in their classes, and the need to spend additional time preparing backup lessons and reserve classes.

6.1.1 Teachers' Main Role (Teaching)

The participants identified three teaching-related roles that they perform and the challenges associated with them. The first challenge relates to teachers' class quota shares (the number of classes they teach with different age levels and curricula) and the high number of students in each class. The second challenge is related to the task of preparing backup lessons. The third challenge is related to the task of teaching reserve classes.

Teacher Class Quota Shares and Intensity in the Classroom

The participants talked about the number of lessons they taught for basic subjects and the number of students in each class.

Hadeel: Sometimes I teach three classes with students of different ages, each of which has about 25 pupils and lasts 45 minutes. This means that I teach 75 pupils.

Jinan: I teach about four lessons per day ... I teach about 18 lessons weekly.

Muneera: I taught three different curricula, so my weekly quota reached 24 lessons, with a high student density between 25 and 40. There was no mercy in that.

The participants indicated that they taught 15–24 lessons per week, with a high student density in the classroom that ranged from 25 to 40 students per class. Another challenge was having to teach many curricula in one school year; this means that teachers must follow up on more students, ranging from 75 to 120 students per day. Teachers are expected to follow up on

everything related to their students' performances, including correcting their books and notebooks, assessing them, conducting tests and performing other duties related to students' education within 45 minutes per session. The rest of the working hours in a school day are allocated to other tasks, including preparing for the next lesson, keeping track of students' books and notebooks and doing other activities, which will be discussed in the following sections.

According to Alorayer (2021), the high teaching hours for teachers is one of the most important factors driving female teachers in Kuwait to escape from the teaching profession. In addition, classroom density and the number of weekly classes they teach are factors that put pressure on teachers (Al-Musallam & Al-Jaber, 1994; Jaber, 2003). Together, these form two of the greatest pressures that teachers experience, which one participant (Muneera) described as 'having no mercy'.

The Requirement to Prepare Backup Lessons

Regarding the responsibility to prepare backup lessons and provide support to low-achieving students through additional lessons, Jinan commented as follows:

The school administration asks teachers to support and enhance pupils whose academic achievements are low. I teach 18 lessons per week... Where can I find time for them while I am responsible for teaching a main subject? How do they want me to give them extra lessons? I try as much as possible to do my work during school time. I barely have time to plan and prepare for my lessons.

Jinan's comments suggest that due to their heavy workload, teachers barely find time to prepare and teach their core lessons nor do they have sufficient time to prepare for backup lessons. While doing their best to perform all their required duties at school, they may not be able to find time to provide additional support to low-achieving students. This may mean that part of a teacher's work must be done at home, in turn affecting the time she has for herself and her family.

Regarding the reserve classes, which are similar to teaching additional classes, a responsibility teacher must take on when the assigned teacher is absent, **Hadeel** expressed the following sentiment:

Some of my roles as a teacher are to teach and supervise reserve classes (classes for which the assigned teachers are absent). My work takes up a lot of my time, even when I am at home. I used to complete my work at home. It's difficult The time in school starts from half past seven until half past one, and I teach a full quorum with almost three lessons per day in addition to the reserve lessons. The remaining time is for correcting students' work in around 75 books and notebooks. There is not enough time to make teaching explanation tools or even to make lesson plans for tomorrow's lessons.

According to **Hadeel**, their numerous tasks and lack of time impact the time they allocate to their families:

I must complete half of my work at home. This annoyed me, my husband and my children. This time should be for my family, not my work. Or I sacrifice my sleep to finish my work when everyone is asleep, but I told myself that I have to stop doing this, as this affects my health Unfortunately, we do not have assistant teachers to help us with all these tasks Otherwise, we would teach our classes with enthusiasm.

Furthermore, **Hadeel** indicated that these classes were additional tasks on top of their main teaching responsibilities, thus making their schedules even tighter and putting extra burdens on them during their official working hours. The participants shared that teachers are forced to complete portions of their work during family time. Bringing work home affects their lives with their children, causing themselves and their families distress and creating work–family conflicts. **Hadeel** tries to achieve a balance between work and home by spending time with her children until they sleep. After that, she stays up late to complete her work, which she cited as detrimental to her health.

Hadeel enumerated the main tasks that teachers are required to do and then pointed out the difficulties associated with them, specifying two in particular: the large amount of work and the lack of time. She believes that the solution to reducing the additional work assigned to teachers is to have teacher assistants who can carry some of these burdens. This would help teachers maintain good energy when teaching their classes.

Studies have indicated that teaching loads, classroom density and the number of weekly classes are factors that put pressure on teachers (Al-Musallam & Al-Jaber, 1994; Jaber, 2003). In the field of education, the number of teachers must be increased to reduce the burden on teachers. As Jaber (2003) indicated, schools with many teachers experience less pressure than those with few teachers. In this study, the above factors appeared to have been caused by the shortage of teachers and perhaps the need to create a new profession (assistant or part-time teacher). Teacher turnover is a global concern, and the Gulf Cooperation Council is facing a major crisis in teacher shortage (Al-Mahdy & Alazmi, 2023). Abbas (2017) indicated that most Gulf countries are facing a chronic shortage of qualified teachers to teach in general education schools. In addition, they rank second in terms of teacher shortage rates compared with other countries worldwide. This is because most young people prefer to work in private-sector institutions, which are characterised by high salaries and wages compared to the teaching profession.

The number of resignations among Kuwaiti teachers has increased from 400 per year to 1,700 annually, and this has become a significant problem facing officials in educational institutions in Kuwait (Al-Turki, 2017). Many teachers qualified by the state in teacher preparation institutions turn to other professions or move to administrative positions, which perhaps are less stressful and put less psychological pressure on them, causing a deficit in the number of teachers (Nawar, 2021). Nawar (2021) further added that fatigue, exhaustion and psychological pressure resulting from teaching and dealing with learners and parents on an ongoing basis, especially administrative

burdens, contribute to teachers leaving the profession. Although the State of Kuwait has increased teachers' salaries, it still suffers from teachers dropping out. These psychological pressures hinder the teacher from focusing on the teaching and learning process, and these administrative burdens lead to anxiety and confusion as they bring about additional work to the teaching tasks of preparing and correcting tests and communicating with parents (Nawar, 2021). Alorayer (2021) indicated the phenomenon of Kuwaiti female teachers leaving the teaching profession, which is not a new phenomenon. This shortage then causes existing teachers in the workforce to bear increased burdens and be exposed to immense pressures, in addition to having to complete their work at home because of the lack of time, which then creates conflicts at home.

6.1.2 Additional Work (Administrative Work)

This section describes two types of administrative work assigned to teachers that are considered stressful: **shifts** and **class supervision**.

A **shift** is an administrative task delegated to teachers at different times: at the beginning of their work hours, during their rest time or at the end of their work hours. Hadeel explained shift work as follows:

Morning shifts require our presence at 7:00 a.m. This is difficult, especially for mothers who have more than one child (some children may attend school in a different area). How do I drive my children to their schools? No teachers can be there before seven ... Schools are not responsible for students before seven o'clock ... Honestly, the days I have a morning shift are tense and make me feel irritated.

Hadeel highlights another way in which mother-teachers experience difficulties from work–family conflicts in terms of having to carry out morning shifts and bring their children to school before school hours officially begin. Hadeel pointed out that these morning shifts make her feel

irritated. Moreover, the participants mentioned that the extra work assigned to them, including supervising students' breaktimes and selling items in the canteen, is also stressful:

Hadeel: We have weekly shifts to supervise students' breaktimes ... sell items in the canteen once a month.

Jinan: Tasks like class monitoring in the morning, line-up duty and breaktime shifts at the end of the day, I believe that these tasks should not be part of the teacher's responsibilities ... They are additional burdens.

Jinan argued that some tasks assigned to teachers go beyond the usual paperwork and grading and should not be carried out by teachers, such as shifts and selling items in the canteen.

Class supervision is another additional burden assigned to teachers, making them responsible for a class of students that they were not assigned to teach. Refusal to carry out such additional work becomes a problem for the teachers. The participants explained the role of class supervisors to illustrate their additional roles and burdens:

Hadeel: In addition to administrative matters, during class supervision, the teacher is given responsibility for supervising one class. She must distribute and compile grade notebooks for all teachers in the class and review students' grades.

Jinan: Her role is to hand out certificates to the pupils ... and, prior to that, compile and distribute the class grade transcript to all the teachers of the class ... She has to check whether all grade transcripts have been reviewed ... after they have been checked by the teachers. In addition to her work as a teacher, this classroom and all its contents, including the pupils' chairs, tables, cabinets and lighting, are her responsibility! In case of any damage in the classroom, she must arrange and supervise any repairs... A colleague of mine was a class supervisor... She was asked by the deputy head teacher to wash the classroom curtains. Administrators often place many burdens on us; this is unfair.

The teachers pointed out the many roles the class supervisor is expected to take on, such as following up on grade transcripts and pupils' certificates by checking, reviewing and distributing

them. The teacher is responsible for the classroom, including its furniture and lighting. The teacher is required to follow up on maintenance and classroom repairs. All of these are added to the teacher's fundamental workload—teaching:

Hadeel: If a teacher refuses to be a class supervisor, she must justify her response with a convincing reason or be treated poorly I did not have the energy. For 10 years, I have been doing shift work and supervising classes. Sometimes, there are not many female cleaners at school... we teachers assume tasks like cleaning the students' tables or washing the curtains for the class. Honestly, this is too much.... It is too much for us to focus exclusively on being creative in the classroom, on planning lessons and working on the learning tools. We do not want more cumbersome tasks because we are already tired from exerting a lot of mental and physical effort.

Hadeel described being a class supervisor as extra work. She explained that focusing on teaching and its requirements is already a heavy enough burden and that any extra work would require her to exert much more mental and physical effort. Similarly, Jinan described having to perform class supervision as unfair because it is an additional burden on the teacher and is not among their competencies.

Such administrative work is additional work that is not in the teachers' job descriptions and is a burden and a pressure on them. This is one of the reasons teachers become unsatisfied with their jobs and leave them. According to Alorayer (2021), administrative burdens, such as shifts, canteen supervision and any work outside the framework of teaching, are among the most important factors that cause female teachers in Kuwait to leave the teaching profession. Shibl (2015) suggested that difficult working conditions, which are often associated with large numbers of students and classes, unfavourable school environments and the numerous tasks that teachers undertake, such as administrative tasks inside and outside the school, necessitate that the Ministry of Education must create new career paths (such as new teachers, expert teachers, teachers,

educational counsellors, curriculum authorship and educational leadership) and that corresponding standards be set.

6.2 Challenge Two: Officials Pressure Teachers

First, I want to define the term administrative leadership, which the participants mentioned. This includes officials such as the **school principal, principal's assistant, department heads** (heads of each subject department) and **mentors** (external supervisors of subjects).

Administrators play a major role in increasing or reducing the burden and psychological pressure on teachers (Jaber, 2003) and in their reluctance to continue in the teaching profession (Alorayer, 2021). Principals who implement a democratic leadership style encourage teachers to stay in the profession, whereas those with poor leadership style drive teachers to burnout and job dissatisfaction, causing the number of teachers to decline (Bahtilla, 2017).

During the interview, the research participants agreed in a broad but significant manner and in many situations that officials pressure them and increase their job burdens. They accepted these burdens against their will, even if they were outside the scope of a teacher's primary work, in fear of receiving low evaluations. This theme is the participants' worst worry, considering that they particularly focused on it during interviews, making this theme the most extensive professional challenge.

The **first part** of this work concerns officials who assign additional work to teachers. The **second part** describes school activities and administrative leadership dilemmas. The **third part** illustrates teachers' inability to refuse additional work or express an opinion about other professional matter.

6.2.1 Administrative Leadership Assigning Extra Work

In the interviews, the participants explained that some of the duties assigned to them by the officials were not part of their tasks; however, they were required to perform them, resulting in

increased burden due to additional work. This clearly indicates that the highest career level has power.

Muneera: I became the acting head teacher of the department for 3 years. While attending the meetings of the head teachers of the departments, the officials asked us for extensive work. We said, 'We don't have time to do all this'. They replied, 'Ask the teachers to do it'. I realised that any work pressure on the head teachers of the department is delegated to the teachers, even though it is not the teachers' responsibility to do these tasks. If our work is bound only to teaching, we're happy in general.

Jinan: I work hard and perform my work perfectly. I am never absent. On the other hand, there are those who miss many classes, but they perform the work that the principal or the head teacher of the department asks them to do, things I believe a teacher is not obligated to do. Then this teacher gets a distinctive evaluation. How painful and unfair.

Jinan indicated the injustice in some principals' evaluations, which disappointed the teachers who worked hard and honestly. In the end, the administration did not appreciate the teachers' work, leading them to contemplate leaving this stressful profession.

6.2.2 School Activities and Administrative Leadership Dilemmas

While it is important for teachers to conduct professional development activities, entertain students or develop their education and skills, the multitudinous professional burdens on the teacher make performing these activities stressful because they require a great deal of time, effort and work. The teachers in this study indicated that they lacked the time to perform such work. According to Montaser (2012), the teachers' work pressures make such activities burdensome. Alharbi's (2007) study regarding teachers' reluctance to participate in student activities in schools found that the main factors were the overcrowding of the school day with classes, the high burden of the teacher during school time, the lack of time allocated for student activities, the large number of physical and psychological work pressures that the teacher is exposed to, the inadequate budget

and financial support allocated to the activity programmes, and the lack of availability of materials, tools and means to implement the activity programmes. However, the teachers were not assessed for doing these activities. There is a great similarity in the factors related to school activities that Alharbi (2007) mentioned, but his study differed in that teachers who participated in the study were reluctant to perform these activities, whereas those who participated in the present study complained that they were forced to do so and paid for these activities with their own money because their performances in these activities could affect their evaluations, which will be explained below.

The analysis of the teachers' interviews revealed that they **faced three main dilemmas** that occurred quite frequently. Attention must be paid to such challenges as they pose an excessive burden and additional work to teachers. The interviewees considered this additional work and three dilemmas to be of low priority, as follows: **First**, officials ask teachers to perform additional extraneous activities during the school year. Teachers who refuse to do so risk receiving low evaluations. **Second**, it is customary among most schools that these activities are held, presented and prepared in an exaggerated manner that satisfies officials so that teachers can ensure that they obtain a high evaluation. **Third**, teachers pay their own money to complete these activities to obtain a high evaluation.

To introduce this section, I will begin with two participants' quotes that emphasise that even if the teacher is doing her main job as a teacher perfectly, she can still have a low evaluation if she has limited engagement in the activities. Subsequently, I will define some activities and their requirements, as mentioned by the teachers in their interviews, followed by the teachers' quotations. Finally, the literature review is discussed.

Muneera: I got a low evaluation ... The department head said, 'You didn't present lessons at the regional level, and you had few activities this year'. I

told her about my efforts in teaching, which were perfect. It isn't a priority for the teacher to do such activities and events... [but] the competency clause obliges me to do tests for students and design them, adhere to the ethics of teaching and cooperate with the department, and have my tools when teaching. I told her [that] she can evaluate these items. If she finds any failure in my teaching or a failure to achieve those items, I won't object to my low evaluation. She said, 'I have no bad comments on that'.

Hadeel: If the teacher doesn't do any activities during the year, the report of her achievements will be affected.

Teachers are forced to complete such tasks to attain high evaluations, and evidently so, these activities weigh down on the teachers, although they are not among their main roles. Table 6 shows the different activities identified by the participants and their requirements. This study aims to demonstrate how difficult and unreasonable it is for the participants to perform such activities.

Events. The participants described what the officials asked them to do, which they considered an obstacle to their teaching careers. However, they cannot refuse to perform these tasks because they affect their evaluations, which is an unspoken rule.

Jinan: Some officials ask us to perform activities in terms of teaching. If the Minister or any officials are visiting our school, we are assigned many extra activities, [including] organising the events, preparing and printing out leaflets [and] being responsible for the hospitality.

Muneera: Activities or events that take place [at] the level of the educational region include teaching the students a dance or a play to perform in front of invitees from the educational region. Well, I am a teacher, and this is not my job. But if I don't do [it], I will get a low rating. They don't want us to discuss [it].

Table 6 *Activities and Their Requirements*

Activity	Requirements
Events	Time to prepare, Train students for a dance or a play to present to the invitees, responsible for hospitality, perform extra activities, organising events, preparing and printing leaflets—all from the teacher’s budget.
Professional development activities (lectures, workshops and typical lessons)	Time to prepare, decorating the venue, renting chairs and tables, providing hospitality (including buffet, food and drinks) and renting maid service—all from the lecturer’s budget.
Pupils’ welcome events	Time to prepare, decorating the school with balloons and face painting for the children or anything appealing and catchy—all from the teacher’s budget.
Morning assembly and breaktime programmes	Time to prepare and be creative and work hard on tasks—all from the teacher’s budget.
Participating in competitions inside or outside the school	Time to prepare and train the students for competitions—all from the teacher’s budget.
Comfortable exams	Time to prepare activities that help students relieve their psychological stress from exams and be creative when presenting them, such as flashy decorations, models, illuminations and cartoon characters, distributing food and gifts, writing phrases of encouragement and pre-exam tips on cards and hanging or presenting them—all from the teacher’s budget.

Professional Development Activities (Lectures, Workshops and Typical lessons)

Continuous professional development is important for the teachers as well as their students (Alqahtani, 2018; Hustler et al., 2003). However, the participants reported **that excess**

preparation is expected when presenting professional development activities, such as lectures, workshops and **typical lessons**. The teacher must diligently prepare, present and organise these activities at a **high standard**. In fact, they indicated that it has become a tradition in many schools that these events **be beautifully and glamorously presented**, focusing not merely on the quality and educational value of the lecture or the typical lesson itself but also on how well the venue is decorated and the level of hospitality provided by the teacher. Everything must be splendid, from furniture to catering. These high expectations and exaggerated expenditures for such events tend to pressure teachers and cost them a significant amount of money.

Teachers who faced with the challenges of running **workshops** shared the following:

Jinan: In one of the workshops, every single teacher in the department had to contribute 150 Kuwaiti dinars. For some activities, the financial commitments range between 50 [and] 200 KD. My colleagues didn't have [that] amount at the time, so I had to lend it to them. The collected funds were then used to buy all that was needed for the workshop. It covered the costs for setting up the venue, decorations, renting chairs and tables and catering food and drink. Conducting workshops in this **exaggerated** way is unfortunately common among most schools. Each workshop is like a wedding!

Teachers who faced the challenges of running a **typical lesson** shared the following:

Hadeel: The teacher presents a lesson at the district level in the presence of various schools, mentors and officials. All expenses are out of pocket. The more creative and distinguished the activity, the **higher the evaluation score**.

Jinan: Typical lessons at the district level ... I took a pledge never to do them again! **Officials seem to focus on how the venue is decorated**, the type of **hospitality provided by me, such as the food and drinks** I serve, [and] how I arrange the tables [and] chairs rented from wedding venue companies! **Imagine the amount of money** I spent on these workshops. [T]he head teacher or department head would **give me a low evaluation if I did not do so**.

Teachers who faced the challenges of running **lectures** shared the following:

Jinan: I had a terrible experience. I agreed with one of the lecturers to give a lecture at our school. I invited the officials of the educational district and teachers from different schools. We waited for the lecturer to attend. [S]he did not come. [I]t was such an embarrassing situation for me. I was really upset. **I spent so much on decorating the setting, catering and renting the chairs and tables for this day.** Now, I pay the lecturers to ensure their attendance, though **it [is] a financial cost.** Lecturers are **paid between 50 and 200 dinars** in addition to the buffet that the teacher must prepare for the invitees, catering, service and furniture rental. The teacher pays a great sum of money! **Officials ask us to do these activities.**

As shown above, teachers spend a significant amount of effort and money on such activities because they were asked by officials to do so at the regional level to obtain a distinguished evaluation. Alqahtani (2018) supported this: ‘[The] standard in the teacher evaluation is the professional development. Therefore, the teacher attends or presents workshops to get the grade. It is not important what they benefited from attending the workshops’ (p. 97). In Alqahtani’s (2018) study, one of the participants expressed that she had attended many workshops at the school but did not benefit from them because the teachers were not qualified to present the workshops, and their only aim was to obtain a high evaluation. Alqahtani (2018) further added that the Ministry of Education should provide budgets for teachers’ professional development and a special budget for each school for professional development.

One activity that teachers organise is a welcome event for pupils. This section explains how activities such as welcoming pupils leave **teachers psychologically, physically and financially exhausted.** These activities are showy and seem related only to teachers’ evaluations.

Jinan: At the beginning of each year, we must perform a welcome event, such as a party, for pupils. **This involves decorating the school with balloons, face painting for the children or anything appealing and catchy.** Each department at the school must participate; it is obligatory! To be honest, it is hard to buy anything for this activity because of the insufficiency of money. I really don’t know what to do, **but I must participate.** Unfortunately, all these activities are paid for from our personal expenses.

Muneera: They want to make the school an attractive environment ... It only **adds work and a burden on us, and it makes teachers stressed out psychologically, physically and financially.**

For the morning assembly and breaktime programme, creative activities are involved.

These activities require great effort, and they also influence the teacher's evaluation.

Hadeel: Our work also includes morning assembly programmes. Although it lasts for only 10 minutes, **we must be creative and work a lot on** it. The head teacher evaluates the programme because it will represent the school in front of any guests. **If the programme has low standards, it will cause embarrassment for the head teacher.**

Although officials say that such activities and events are not obligatory, they do indeed impact the teacher's evaluation. In fact, the teacher is held accountable if she does not perform any activities or if her work lacks activities during the scholastic year.

Muneera: The school administration can **reduce your evaluation** if you do not do any activities during the year ... [D]uring **rest time, the school administration asks us to do an activity for the students.** They tell you that it is not compulsory and not a part of the teacher's tasks, but when it comes to a teacher's evaluation, the matter becomes different ... [I]t **decreases your evaluation level.**

Regarding **participation in competitions,** **Muneera** believes that school activities and events represent a challenge that also adds to the burden of teachers because such events require more effort from them:

Muneera: If officials only asked me to do my job as a teacher and teach the students! If I only had to deal with their books, notebooks, curricula, tests, worksheets, classes, teaching and making educational tools, I would be fine and happy. So, don't ask me to do more. This is an additional task ... We have **several competitions** in the Science Department. **I am very busy at work, and I don't have time to do [extra assignments].**

‘Comfortable exams’ are a concept introduced by the Ministry of Education, where teachers must take steps to alleviate students’ stress:

Jinan: A comfortable exam ... means providing a comfortable environment ... a suitable atmosphere for the pupils during the exam to relieve the stress [and] anxiety of the exam ... Teachers are obliged to **prepare activities to help relieve the psychological stress of exams on pupils**. This means an **additional workload and a financial burden**. **Those who refuse to participate in these activities are held accountable**.

Here, Jinan explained that money is not the only dilemma but also the **level of creativity** required from teachers when designing and performing these activities. This inevitably requires effort, money and time. **She pointed out that preparations for comfortable exams are demanding**; they include flashy decorations, designed models and cartoon characters, including the distribution of food and gifts. She finds this to be an excessive preparation for one day:

Jinan: Teachers must make attractive decorations for the exam ... We decorate using pictures and models with cartoon characters, write encouraging phrases and pre-exam tips and distribute snacks, small gifts and more. Teachers bear the costs of this. Every department at the school must participate and be creative. Some departments even order kids’ meals from a restaurant ... On one occasion, it was Ramadan—the holy month, we distributed little bundles of sweets, printed the name of the school on each sweets bag and presented it in a sophisticated and expensive way ... put up flashy and traditional decorations, lighting and balloons, along with Al-Gurgiaan’s songs [and] ... in the summer, we distributed ice cream.

It is clear that although the Ministry does not allocate a special budget for such activities, the teachers are expected to conduct these activities creatively, at their own expense. Ideally, money that is spent on school activities is money that teachers should have spent on themselves and their families (Alqahtani, 2018).

Jinan: Honestly, these ideas are good for the pupils but bad for the teacher, who pays using her salary. One of **my colleagues received a negative statement because she did not participate in the comfortable exam!** This

does not please Allah. We shouldn't be forced to do this work; this is not part of our teaching roles.

After the interview, Jinan sent me photos of pupils' welcome events, all the decorations and arrangements in the exam halls and so on, which the teachers had organised and funded. Officials pressure teachers to perform various activities through professional evaluations; therefore, officials hold all the power, while teachers are subject to their whims, exhausted from carrying out these activities to satisfy officials:

Jinan: I moved to another school because of the department head ... She used to collect lots of money from us for participation in school activities. There was always **exaggerated** spending on activities to make **exaggerated** decorations and for catering the whole event. It didn't matter what we were doing; instead, it mattered how much money we spent to present school activities ... She evaluated us based on that ... **In my current school**, the teachers share the expenses as a group ... collect a small amount of money to buy simple things ... for comfortable exam activities without exaggeration.

Jinan continued by describing the differences between schools in their requests and demands. Correspondingly, such disparities mean that officials can make teachers' work easy or difficult.

6.2.3 Teachers' Inability to Express Opinions

Officials use their authority to exploit clauses in the evaluation criteria, such as teacher cooperation. Cooperation, as Jinan pointed out, is a broad term and is therefore used loosely by school officials. Teachers' rejection of any tasks is used to imply that they are uncooperative, as stated in their evaluation reports. Consequently, they receive poor evaluations.

Al-Madhkoor and Al-Ameera (2015) supported what Jinan said that there is a need to make amendments to the items in the teacher evaluation criteria, especially the items regarding cooperation and the transferring of experiences to others. The reason that these two items are characterised by ambiguity and lack of clarity is because of the tasks they include; therefore, this item is often misunderstood.

Teachers' concerns about not receiving high ratings on evaluations include their perception that evaluations play a role in promotions and bonuses that are offered to teachers. Therefore, they force themselves to take on these additional tasks to avoid receiving a poor evaluation. This indicates the administrations' arbitrary management styles. Bahtilla (2017) highlighted that this authoritarian style causes teachers to leave the profession.

Hadeel: If a teacher refuses to be a classroom supervisor, she must justify her responses and provide reasons, **or she'll be treated badly.**

Jinan: The deputy head teacher asked a colleague of mine, a class supervisor, to wash the classroom curtains! She gave one of the cleaners at the school some money and washing detergent to wash the curtains instead of her. **The deputy head teacher wrote a statement that the teacher did not wash the curtains herself, as requested.** The deputy head teacher said, 'It would be better if you had sent the curtains to the launderette'. How sarcastic! **I wish we could respond to those in higher positions** than us, but ... just to avoid problems, my friend said that **if we expressed our refusal to clean ... the administration would hate us ... [and] would assign additional work to us in addition to our getting a bad evaluation.** Frankly, she is right; that is what the administration does.

Jinan: On one occasion, all the Arabic language teachers agreed to refuse the **extra work assigned by the department head. She got revenge on us** by giving us 18 lessons to teach weekly. It is known that new teachers must take more lessons than experienced teachers, who should get fewer lessons. However, the department head did the opposite. She gave us many lessons to teach, while she gave new teachers fewer lessons ... **She made frequent and sudden classroom visits to catch any mistakes.** She could not find any faults in my class. I always do my work perfectly.

Participants further indicated that officials would mistreat any teacher who refused to do what was asked of them. If teachers object and argue that extra work is not part of their roles and reject such work, officials would treat them poorly:

Jinan: Officials do not seem to care about how demanding and exhausting the assigned tasks are ... They don't appreciate teachers' work. In the evaluation criteria, the clause regarding cooperation stipulates that the teacher cooperates

and does everything requested ... If she rejects or expresses her opinion, the officials take it personally, as if it were a crime or shame. We are humiliated by this cooperation clause; if we refuse certain work, they put 'uncooperative' in our evaluation reports. The word 'cooperation' in the evaluation clauses is a general word and does not specify what to do.

The teachers' evaluations are weaponised and used as a tool to force them to be silent about or avoid expressing opposing opinions. Teachers are often obliged to accept and perform tasks that are beyond their specialisations. If the teachers reject the assigned work, they receive low scores on their evaluations. The participants also indicated that a boss may seek revenge against teachers who refuse assigned work, such as by adding exhausting tasks or intensifying the teacher's evaluation visits to catch mistakes in the teacher's class. Instead of being exposed to all of this, Jinan tried to find other solutions that would make her life at work better.

Jinan: I tried to solve the problems in various ways; I spoke with the school principal about the problems the department head created ... **but she didn't do us justice ... I decided to move.** The new school I moved to doesn't have a department head. The previous head wasn't good at dealing with teachers, and the teachers complained to the principal about her actions. She was then forced to transfer to another school. I wish I could find comfort in this school and not have to move again. The procedures of moving are not easy. The new school is far from my home and my children's schools. In the past, my workplace and my children's schools were on one street, **but I had to move to rid myself of the workplace pressures.**

Jinan moved to different schools because she realised that the administration played a significant role in pressuring the teachers. She searched for another school with a better administration. Teachers become unhappy when they have to endure the additional burdens imposed on them, as indicated by more than one interviewee:

Jinan: I tried to be patient, but I couldn't stand it anymore and had to move to another school. I didn't want to suffer anymore or put myself under **psychological pressure that affected me and my children ... I couldn't**

control myself or my behaviour at home; this **made me stressed** and affected my life at home.

I moved four times to maintain my psychological health and avoid **reaching a stage of pressure or having to reduce it**. At least I have no problem moving every year to a new school until I find a place where I feel comfortable working. **I believe that this comfort will have a positive effect on me, my home and my dealings with my children. We can't** refuse tasks or object to officials because that will affect our evaluation, and this is why I moved schools. **Using their authority, the managers assigned us jobs that were often not within our competence as teachers.**

Teacher transfer between schools is often due to the leadership styles of school officials (Bahtilla, 2017). The main reason Jinan transferred from one school to another was to find schools with cooperative officials, which also signifies the weakness of the teachers' positions versus the strength of the officials' positions. These moves resulted from **Jinan's desire, as a mother, to return home and feel comfortable without being reminded of work pressures**. The workplace becomes comfortable when people in **authority are supportive**.

Muneera: Officials do not like teachers who argue with them. Once a mentor visited me during a science test—an experiment called the Measurement of Irregular Body Size. I put the pupil's rock inside a graduated cylinder. Here, the mentor rejected what I did and said, 'In the test, you used a rock, while in the students' book, there is an example of measurements using a battery. You shouldn't change it'. **When I discussed it, she asked me not to. She went to the head teacher and lowered my evaluation.** It is really a **repellent profession**.

Muneera explained that her evaluation was negatively affected when she justified her position or discussed the matter with the officials.

One of the most prominent problems that schools suffer from is weak cooperation and understanding between teachers and administration (Olsen & Huang, 2018). School officials play a major role in mitigating all the difficulties teachers face both inside and outside of work. The

principal plays the most active role in identifying the reasons why teachers leave the profession, even if they love their work (Hee et al., 2019):

Muneera: My husband is also a teacher ... People may think that our worries are the same in terms of work ... [but] it is different. My husband doesn't suffer from pressure or worry at work. **There is a very big difference in the pressure we face from the school administration.** I expressed to my husband my wish to work at a school run by men. **I've never heard my husband complain about being a teacher!** On the contrary ... it is a comfortable job ... **This means that the principal can reduce meaningless work. Men do not want flashiness at work. Men just want to perform at work to see what the teacher offers in the classroom ... Women at work focus on minute, cumbersome details, such as whether the activities or events are decorated, neat, tidy, colourful or flashy, than teaching.** When the administration said, 'Take the students and train them for a dance so that we can compete with other schools and win and get a trophy from the school district' ... what about the lessons that depend on the students' grades? Pupils have exams and homework that they will actually miss. **What is important here?**

Muneera's experiences show that officials can make their work lives easy or hard. Muneera mentioned that her husband is also a teacher. However, he has no pressure at work nor complains about his work; rather, he considers his work comfortable. She indicated that the gender of the administration plays an important role in the presence or absence of various pressures in a teacher's life. Moreover, she wished to work as a teacher under male management. This highlights the disparity between schools for men and women in terms of the level of pressure on teachers. For her, women's administrations are demanding and stressful and are more interested in detail and the external appearance of activities.

She added that female department heads misuse their power to add more work. Muneera explained the distinction between male and female management: men want to perform work, while women want to focus on decoration and activities more than education.

Job satisfaction among female teachers is lower than among male teachers. Furthermore, emotional burnout is higher among female teachers in Kuwait because of occupational pressures (Al-Saeed, 2018). Perhaps this confirms Muneera's assertion that her husband does not face the same pressures at work as she does. Muneera's point regarding the differences between men and women in the professional burdens of teachers is in line with Al-Mashaan's (2000) study. The study revealed substantial divergence in teachers' professional burdens, professional development and psychosomatic disorders based on sex. For example, female teachers had higher averages than male teachers in terms of occupational stress and psychosomatic disorders.

The Ministry of Education has issued repeated warnings over the years regarding this phenomenon; however, it still exists. Montaser (2012) indicated that the Ministry issued leaflets to be circulated to all schools in Kuwait, stressing the need to avoid extravagance. In 2018, the Ministry of Education warned officials against linking a teacher's evaluations to activities performed and highlighted that the evaluations should be based on the teacher's performance in the classroom, not on extraneous activities outside the classroom. This warning was issued because the Ministry of Education noticed some school principals' abuse of this system and linked teachers' evaluations to their performance in activities (Al-Turki, 2018).

Al-Hammadi (2022) confirmed that these warnings establish mechanisms to control activities, events and workshops inside schools. However, most school administrations do not adhere to such warnings, and Ministry oversight is absent. Furthermore, Al-Hammadi (2022) mentioned a situation similar to that faced by female teachers in this study. The principal ordered a teacher to attend an educational workshop at the school that was prepared and organised by one of the other teachers. The teacher indicated that before the workshop started, she was surprised by the hotel service staff hired by the teacher, who had coordinated and organised the workshop. Attendees received food and drinks. However, the teacher was shocked at the poor contents of the workshop,

which lasted only 7 minutes (Al-Hammadi, 2022). This confirms what the participants mentioned about focusing on secondary matters that affect appearance instead of the importance of the content of the workshops and activities.

6.3 Challenge Three: The Educational System and Curriculum

Jinan's, Hadeel's and Muneera's work pressures were further exacerbated by the frequent changes in the educational system and school curriculum. First, the frequent changes in the decisions of the Ministry of Education and the school curricula increased the teachers' workloads. Second is the challenges that emerged from the Ministry of Education's choice of a single curriculum—the competency curriculum—which appeared to be unsuitable for the Kuwaiti context.

6.3.1 Frequent Changes in the School Curricula

According to Jinan, frequent changes in the decisions of the Ministry of Education and the school curricula increased her workload. Lightfoot (2016) indicated that continuous changes in government policies constitute the greatest burden for teachers. Marsh (2015) also argued that one of the reasons that teachers leave the profession is because of continuous changes in educational policies, including the educational curricula.

Jinan tried to achieve a balance between work and her responsibilities at home; she believed that her previous work experience played a role in alleviating work pressure. However, Jinan was unable to maintain this balance because of continuous changes in educational policies. This was affecting her life and her level of comfort at home. This made her constantly think about leaving teaching, despite her love for the profession.

Jinan: To be honest, despite my love for teaching, every year, I think about quitting the profession due to stress. There is floundering in decision-making; the Ministry of Education has a new decision every so often, and the curricula are changing rapidly. Previously, for the sake of my comfort and the

convenience of my home, I chose to teach only the Year 1 class every year. My goals were to reduce the amount of work and avoid having to write new lesson plans and make new preparations for lessons for different age groups each year. Unfortunately, I have not achieved this goal. I hoped to rest a little, but unfortunately, there is no relief because of the continuous changes in the curricula. There is no consistency in matters of curricula, planning methods and lesson preparations, which continue to change. I cannot, for example, benefit from the preparations I have made in the past years to save time and effort.

Jinan explained that a change in the curriculum means changing everything, from writing new lesson plans and preparing new teaching tools to conforming to new student assessment policies. The problem here is that continuous changes in the curricula cause instability in teachers' work and its mechanisms. While previous experiences are crucial in saving time and effort at work and relieving fatigue, the constantly changing curricula are confusing and consume large amounts of teachers' time and effort because they are new, changeable and not permanent. Al-Hammadi (2016) describes the decisions that teachers are surprised by as well as frustrated, including new directives from officials asking them to change the method of assessing students' grades for the sixth time. Jinan explained that the constant changes in curricula impacted her life at home, her comfort and the convenience of her family.

Furthermore, Jinan mentioned that when the competency curriculum was approved, the teachers did not receive any training or sufficient information on how to deal with the new curriculum. The teachers felt lost and confused with the different and often contradictory instructions given to them by officials.

Jinan: Unfortunately, even the mentors and department heads at the school do not understand these curricula, so they could not guide us. One time, the head of the department assessed me in class while I was teaching. She then started asking me questions about the curriculum—questions about this new curriculum that we, as teachers, are supposed to ask them as mentors and heads of departments! No one knows how to deal with this new curriculum. The

mentor gives us instructions that differ from the head teacher's and department's instructions. If you ask each teacher to explain to you what the competency curriculum is, you will be disappointed to hear different answers (laughs).

Muneera echoed Jinan's comments about the problem with the new curriculum, noting that the teachers and students had not received adequate training to deal with the change.

Muneera: This curriculum has not been implemented properly. The problem is that teachers and students were not trained on how to deal with the competency curriculum. When I looked at it, I did not like it very much. I see it as a difficult curriculum.

Given the lack of support from the administration and the ministry, Jinan adopted creative ways to prepare herself to teach the new curricula.

Jinan: I am trying hard to learn about this new curriculum and its mechanism. I develop myself professionally and learn. Without it, I do not know how to teach ideally. Telegram is one of the applications for smart electronic devices. Teachers from different schools in Kuwait join one group, and we communicate with each other (online). We chat and exchange experiences and information about the education field and teaching, and I try to benefit from them to understand the competency curriculum. I will not rely on the administration or officials, and I will not wait for them to explain to me and give me information.

These rapid and frequent curriculum changes prevent those in charge of renewing the curriculum from preparing the educational body to understand the new educational curricula. Thus, teachers were forced to find solutions to their problems and develop themselves professionally. However, this increased the teachers' burdens because they require more time and effort. The Ministry of Education is supposed to play a major role in informing teachers and preparing them to accommodate and teach the new curriculum effectively. These frequent changes in educational policies add to immense work pressures and impact the lives of mothers working in the field of teaching, which justifies Jinan's desire to leave her job.

On the other hand, after reviewing the literature on school curricula in Kuwait, Alfuleej (2017) defended the new curriculum imposed by the Ministry of Education. He indicated that the problem is not with the new curriculum but rather with the teachers who are accustomed to traditional teaching styles and who would prefer to remain in their comfort zones. These teachers reject and resist change. He said that the teachers have low scientific knowledge and insufficient practical qualifications, thus making them unwilling to accept what is new in the educational arena. However, based on the interviews, the teachers worked hard to find appropriate methods of teaching this new curriculum despite the lack of teacher training. Al-Turki (2019) argued that the mistake in the sudden implementation of the new curriculum was the failure to provide intensive training courses, which could have enabled teachers to understand the curriculum and how to implement it. This failure left teachers confused. Regarding professional development planning for teacher training, officials lacked clear goals, which led to discrepancies among the training plans (Alhashem, 2021).

Guskey (1994) addressed the planning of changes in education policies in the following terms:

There is no easier way to sabotage change efforts than to take on too much at one time. In fact, if there is one truism in the vast research literature on change, it is that the magnitude of change a person is asked to make is inversely related to their likelihood of making it (p. 11).

He focused on the fact that development processes should, first, be small and occur within a short time, which leads to positive results and facilitates the implementation of changes, and second, that changes should involve the concerned individuals and take their perspectives into account. It is also important to consider parents' opinions when implementing educational changes because their values and experiences can contribute to the development process. Consequently,

the participants reacted negatively to the changes in the educational system and curricula because (1) they were not consulted, (2) there were too many changes implemented over a short period of time and (3) they lacked intensive vocational training that could otherwise smoothen the adoption of the changes in the curricula and the educational system. It should be noted that these changes were confusing not only for the teachers and the educational administrators but also for the students, posing particular challenges for teachers.

6.3.2 The Competency Curriculum

In the interviews, the participants stated that the new curriculum by the Ministry of Education—the Competency Curriculum—was developed by the World Bank. The curriculum was not carefully considered. The participants criticised its quality, claiming that it created many challenges for them.

Hadeel argued that the new curriculum is not suitable for the Kuwaiti context and that its implementation is stressful.

Hadeel: Now, a new Competency Curriculum has been developed by the World Bank in Kuwait, and officials are requesting that it be applied in a specific way that does not suit us. I must see each student separately, and English teachers must evaluate them one at a time on four skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading. This is a little chaotic and puts additional pressure on the teachers. In this case, when I focus on evaluating one student, I have to occupy the other students with something else.

Muhammad (2020) pointed out that one of the challenges to teaching performance under the national curriculum based on competencies is that the teacher faces difficulties when evaluating the primary school learner. Because English language teachers are required to use a specific assessment method, they must evaluate each student individually for several skills while simultaneously occupying the other students with other activities. This is difficult and places an

additional burden on the teachers. Perhaps this curriculum and its requirements are inappropriate in the Kuwaiti context because the country does not employ assistant teachers, which makes it difficult for a single teacher, unaided, to implement the curriculum's requirements. The provision of assistant teachers might help to reduce the demands that this curriculum places on teachers.

Hadeel further emphasized that the recently adopted curriculum poses other challenges that make it inappropriate in the Kuwaiti context, such as the curriculum's difficulty level and intensity. This places an excessive load on the school calendar, which does not have an adequate number of teaching days to cover the material. As a result, Hadeel puts pressure on herself and intensifies her work and efforts to ensure that the curriculum is completed on time. Because she was required to complete the entire curriculum, Hadeel had to teach additional lessons. Furthermore, she had to prepare worksheets for the pupils to complete at home to make sure that they understood the curriculum and did not miss anything. She also had to prepare the review papers and send video lessons to the students at home. This represented an additional demand on her time.

Hadeel: The curriculum is difficult. Officials demand that we finish the curriculum within a specific time frame, but it is very large, and there are unexpected days off related to [the] weather. Occasions arise in the country ... [and] we then receive orders from the officials to finish the curriculum as soon as possible. Sometimes students are absent ... so teachers give extra lessons and worksheets for students to solve at home with the help of their parents ... to ensure that they do not take the exam unless they have finished the curriculum. Teachers can use iPad programs to communicate with their students' parents or send videos explaining lessons to them. Then, the students can study at home. This shortens the class time and enables teachers to finish the curriculum within the specified time frame.

In addition to finding it difficult, Muneera agreed that the new curriculum was not implemented effectively. Meanwhile, Jinan described it as a failure and incomprehensible because it does not contain much information—'a curriculum that does not have a curriculum'. The shortcomings of the curriculum make students misbehave during the classes. It is a challenge for teachers to explain

the curriculum because it is incomprehensible not only to the teachers but also to the students. Implementing this curriculum demands that the teacher exert more effort and spend more time preparing tools, activities and games to occupy the students at all times.

Muneera: This curriculum is not implemented properly ... When I looked at it, I did not like it very much. I saw that it was a difficult curriculum.

Jinan: This curriculum is a failure and unsuccessful [The interviewee repeated this three times] ... It is a curriculum that does not have a curriculum. [The] pupils did not understand this incomprehensible curriculum, so they misbehaved, and I must bear that as a teacher. I must equip them with several activities, tools and games so that they can learn, and this demands great effort from us teachers.

Dr Ahmad Alfilakawi (2018), a professor at the Education College in Kuwait, also indicated that the recently approved competency curriculum was developed by the World Bank. He contends that the World Bank does not function as an educational entity in Kuwait. Therefore, the recommended curriculum is difficult for teachers to understand or accept because it was not tailored to suit the Kuwaiti context. This observation clearly supports and explains why the participants in this research described the curriculum as ‘difficult’ and not suited to them. The World Bank is an external entity that is not associated with education in Kuwait, yet it impacts teachers, students and parents through the educational curriculum it recommends. This demonstrates how these microsystems are influenced by the decisions made within external systems. This influence is evident in the impact of the curriculum (and of those who approved it) on teachers as well as in the subsequent impact of this professional pressure on the teachers’ families as described by the respondents in the interviews, which will be explained in detail in the next chapter. External decisions concerning the nature of Kuwait’s curricula, such as this intervention by the World Bank, affect and create challenges for Kuwaiti mothers working in the field of teaching.

This investigation considered not only the teachers' perspective but also those of the pupils and their parents. The supplementary worksheets given to pupils to solve at home with the help of their parents created additional responsibilities for the latter. Therefore, mothers are burdened with an additional responsibility because of this contextually inappropriate curriculum, which is flawed in terms of its difficulty, density and lack of compatibility with the school calendar. The next chapter focuses on the impacts of the educational system and the competency curriculum on mothers who work as teachers and their children. The participants described their concerns regarding the difficulties associated with education in Kuwait that, as mothers, they face with their children.

Al-Qenaie (2007) reported that frequently changing curricula is a source of pressure for teachers, driving them to leave the profession. This conclusion is supported by Alorayer (2021), who found that ever-changing, unstable curricula are confusing to teachers as are frequently occurring changes to educational mechanisms over short periods. Together, these factors give rise to pressures that impel female teachers to leave the profession.

Teachers' job descriptions should be more detailed. Teachers' opportunity to be involved in contributions to the development of school curricula and the work of school administration must also be reconsidered (Shibl, 2015). A paper presented at The Gulf Comparative Education Society conference by Alhouti (2021) highlighted that teachers in Kuwait and other Gulf countries have no active role in making decisions related to the educational process or education reform. As mentioned previously, the participants in the present study described the curriculum as difficult, unsuitable to the Kuwaiti context and, therefore, difficult for teachers to implement. Therefore, the curriculum has drawn widespread criticism from the education community. Teachers are the direct implementors of curricula; therefore, disregarding their opinions in decisions concerning the development and amendment of curricula (or in any decisions in the field of education) leads to

undue complications in the development and implementation of the curricula. Shibl (2015) emphasises that teachers are the linchpin of the educational process and that any development must rely on their input. Teachers should be the initiators of developments in education.

6.4 The Declining Health of Teachers

The participants expressed deep concern regarding the correlation between teaching and poor health. The previous sections highlighted the impact of work-related challenges on the participants' personal lives (Figure 3). This section focuses on work-related challenges that affect the participants' health (Figure 3). The participants pointed out that poor health is the outcome of the interplay between stress and work, such as the demands of motherhood, responsibilities as a wife and social obligations. They attributed the health problems they experienced to the teaching profession. Furthermore, the participants mentioned that the teaching profession had a significant impact on their physical and mental health. They experienced issues such as repeated miscarriages of unknown causes, unexplained body pains, vocal cord problems, diabetes, pressure, neck and back pain, psychological strain, mental illnesses and colon problems.

Al-Wadiya (2012) suggested that constant work pressure negatively affects mental and physical health. Compared to males, the female workforce is exposed to additional pressure because they bear the burden of balancing their responsibilities between work and family. According to Alawaid and Aljasser (2010), teaching is one of those occupations where workers are most impacted by different illnesses—physical and psychological. Physical illnesses include poor vision, varicose veins, hypertension, diabetes, heart diseases, asthma, allergies, hearing loss, inflammation of the vocal cords, headache, wrist tendonitis, laryngitis and throat pain, disc herniation, stiffness in the neck and joints, periods of stress, the muscles that control the voice box become tense, muscle pain, thyroid and irritable bowel syndrome. Psychological illnesses include

nervous tension and exhaustion, frustration and depression, anxiety disorder, apathy, introversion and forgetfulness.

Jinan emphasised that despite the increase in teacher salary, she still considers changing her job and accepting a less stressful one, even if that means a lower salary, to preserve her health and well-being and alleviate the pressures on her and her family because of the work.

Jinan: Teaching is hard. Officials do not consider the number of resignations at the Ministry of Education. Our conditions are pathetic; may Allah help us. We suffer from many physical and mental illnesses because of this profession; it is a challenging profession. Decision-makers must remove many of the tasks imposed on us. A high salary is no longer a reason for teachers to want to stay in this profession. The temptation to raise a teacher's salary does not eradicate the hardships that we suffer from. A high salary will not solve my suffering throughout the year, and the pressures I am exposed to will not restore my health and well-being. I told you I love my profession despite all the odds. However, despite my love for this profession, I am considering leaving it permanently.

Meanwhile, Hadeel emphasised that teachers must pay attention to their health, which otherwise can deteriorate. She pointed out that teaching affected her vocal cords. A study in Poland emphasised that female teachers were approximately two to three times more likely to suffer from voice disorders than non-teachers (Sliwinska-Kowalska et al., 2006).

Hadeel: Teachers should prioritise their health and be vigilant about potential issues such as blood pressure, diabetes and vocal cord problems. When I sought treatment for my vocal cords, the doctor told me to take care of myself and not neglect the issue. I bought a microphone for my lessons, so I did not have to raise my voice and tire myself.

Jinan added that teaching is a demanding profession that has impacted her health. She suffered from several maternity problems, including miscarriages and stillbirth, and attributed them all to physical exhaustion as a result of increased workload and pressure from the school administration

linked to teaching issues such as poor curriculum, administration problems with the teachers and work pressure and stress.

Jinan: Teaching is a stressful job. I was exposed to health problems during my work, and I believe this was because of teaching. I have had more than one pregnancy-related problem without any medical reasons. This happened to me twice. After a medical examination, the doctor told me that my baby was stillborn. I was in the last stages of my pregnancy. There were no health problems that could have led to this. I feel very tired physically after working in school.

Jinan continued to describe the challenges of day-to-day classroom teaching and lesson management and pointed to the health issues that other teachers also suffer from.

Jinan: Education is a stressful and exhausting profession in terms of health. My body can no longer bear the pain in my back. I monitor, while standing up, 30 students per class. I go around the class and check each student's work one by one. I have to bend over when teaching them while they are seated at their desks. During tests, I have to repeatedly bend over to explain the test questions to the students individually. Although I present the test on a large screen, the students are my responsibility. I have to make sure that all of them understand the questions correctly. We are not allowed to sit down. Isn't this hard work?

Most of my colleagues are very young, but they complain of visiting physiotherapy clinics for neck and back pain caused during teaching. Irritable bowel syndrome and diabetes are like gifts that every teacher is presented with. This, I'm afraid, is inevitable!

Jinan explained that her colleagues in the teaching profession also suffer from health problems. Most of her colleagues, despite being young, visited physiotherapy clinics for neck and back pain. She attributed these issues to prolonged standing in teachers, which is common as they are not allowed to sit down during the lessons. In addition, they need to bend frequently during teaching. Jinan pointed out that teaching is an exhausting and challenging profession that can lead to other health problems as well such as irritable bowel syndrome and diabetes.

Muneera stated that she suffered from pain that was unrelieved by painkillers, and she could not find a medical explanation for it until a doctor indicated the possibility of psychological

pressure that had turned into physical pain. Teachers are more likely to suffer from mental and psychosomatic illnesses as well as nonspecific problems, including tiredness, lethargy, headache and stress, than non-teachers (Scheuch et al., 2015). Muneera believes that the key to resolving this issue lies in changing her priorities. By seeking God's satisfaction as her priority, she can disregard people's expectations of her, whether at work or outside of work. She does not have to worry about people's opinions of her as long as what she does pleases God. She does not have to satisfy people at her own expense or her family. It appears that the psychological strain that impacted her health was because she prioritised people and their expectations and her pursuit of perfection at work and in life in general.

Muneera: I got sick with a disease that has no treatment. I travelled abroad, searching for treatment everywhere. Doctors told me that what I suffered from did not have a medical diagnosis. Because of the severity of the pain, I used to repeat a prayer, 'O Allah, keep me alive as long as You know that life is better for me and make me die if death is better for me'. I could no longer bear the intensity of the pain I suffered from. This matter shook me from the inside and changed my interests and convictions. I told myself I must stop pleasing people at the expense of myself, my home and my children.

Muneera said that pressure was not limited to the workplace but was also present at home and in her social life in Kuwait. It affected her social relationships, which will be discussed in detail in chapter eight. All these pressures affect physical health and in turn impact mental health.

Muneera: There was stress everywhere: at work, at home and in our social lives. When I went to the doctor, he said, 'We believe that you have severe psychological pressure; your body no longer tolerates it, so it turns into severe pain'. It was to such an extent that even painkillers were not able to reduce this pain or soothe it. I had to change my perspective. I realised that I could not please people at the expense of myself. I needed to take care of myself first. Because if I am in good physical and mental health, I can make those around me happy... I am trying to adjust things in my life. Thanks to God, the pain has diminished since I changed my priorities. Now, it has become vital to put me, first and foremost, to have God's satisfaction in my life before anything else. If I please God, I will never care about people and their words.

Both Jinan and Hadeel agreed that the pressures they experienced had more to do with work pressure, the demands of being a wife and a mother and social pressure. This will be discussed in detail in chapters seven and eight.

Jinan: There are difficulties that we teachers face as women. Sometimes, we have circumstances at home, for example, problems with the husband and others that are also stressful. They include pressure at work, and it is overwhelming when I don't have a maid at home.

Jinan said that many of her problems with her husband and at home or with others might be related to work–family imbalance. She believes that the solution to many problems teachers face is to create a new profession—teacher assistant. A teacher assistant can help reduce the pressures on the teacher at work; this in turn may positively impact the teacher's life in terms of her relationship with her children and the social environment.

Jinan: These pressures affect me, so my mood changes. And I think a lot about leaving this profession. One solution that might help relieve our pressure is to have a teacher assistant. I tell myself that employees in other jobs have easy office work. Meanwhile, I continue working after school. I get so tired, and in the end, there is no appreciation for what we do. Why don't I just quit work, then?

I do not want this teaching profession, and I do not want this fatigue that affects me and takes away my health and well-being. I would instead go to any other ministry with less work pressure and a more relaxed life.

Jinan stated that teachers-mothers may experience more stress at work, at home or face numerous issues with their husbands for various reasons. Sometimes, the absence of someone to help with the household chores further increases their responsibilities. These and the fact that teaching is indeed a stressful profession could be the reasons why Jinan considered resigning from teaching despite her love for the profession. Jinan also stated that teaching has affected her physical and mental health; she suffers from extreme fatigue due to the enormous effort she makes. Jinan finds teaching mentally stressful compared to other professions; her work always occupies her

thoughts, even during her leisure time. Though she works conscientiously and fears God of her negligence, she never seems to get a distinguished evaluation. Jinan said that her efforts at work are unappreciated and that there is an apparent lack of justice in this profession, particularly regarding teacher evaluation.

Hadeel pointed out that the conflict between work and family responsibilities causes her to stay up at night, thereby lacking sleep and affecting her health. She often has to stay up late to accomplish her work affairs as a teacher. According to Amschler and McKenzie (2010), 43% of teachers, particularly women, sleep for 6 hours or less every night. They revealed that due to sleep deprivation, school workers also experience more mood fluctuations and are more likely to develop health problems. It appears that Hadeel's lack of adequate sleep is the result of performing multiple roles as a mother, wife and teacher simultaneously, she completes her work responsibilities when everyone in the house is asleep.

Hadeel: I have gone through stages in my career, especially during the first 5 years, when I considered resigning to spend more time at home with my children and husband. Although my experience makes things easier, my profession is still difficult and requires much effort. There are only a few more years until I retire, so I must be patient. The balance between being a mother and a teacher requires great effort.

Preparing for teaching, giving creative lessons, being successful as a teacher and mother and raising children well require much physical and mental effort. The presence of too much work causes problems. I used to stay up late, which negatively affected my health. I had to take half of my work home. It was bothering me, my husband and my children. That time was my family's time, not the time for work. I would even sacrifice my bedtime to accomplish my work when everyone else was asleep. Then I said to myself, I have to stop doing this; this ruins my health and my family.

I conclude this chapter by reviewing the major reasons why the participants' desire to leave the teaching profession, which is challenging and negatively affects their lives beyond work. This will be discussed in detail in chapters seven and eight.

Although the reasons why these participants chose the teaching profession varied, they all expressed their desire to leave teaching. Hadeel and Janan stated that they loved their profession, but the pressures and problems associated with it were unbearable. However, Muneera said that she did not like the profession from the beginning and had joined it because there was no other alternative. At the end of the interview, Muneera said to me, 'Come with me. I will show you something'. We went to a clothing store inside the same mall where we had the interview, when we entered, she said, 'This store I opened recently. I own it, and if the store succeeds, I will inevitably leave teaching'.

Hadeel said, 'I will not allow my daughters to join the teaching profession because it is difficult and stressful, and I am impatiently awaiting retirement'.

Jinan: I love my job very much, and I cannot see myself in another profession other than being a primary school teacher. To be honest, despite my love for my work, I think of quitting this profession every year due to stress.

Summary

One of the most challenging aspects of a mother's teaching profession is that it affects both her life and that of her children (exosystem). This chapter reveals the three main challenges (see Table 7) teachers face:

- Increased workload and lack of time
- Pressure from officials
- Frequent changes in the educational system and curriculum

Table 8 shows the effects of the teaching profession on the teacher–mother life.

Table 7 *Challenges of Being a Teacher*

Challenge one: Increased workload and lack of time	
Teacher's main role (teaching)	Teachers are required to teach a large number of weekly lessons (15–24) in several classes. They may simultaneously teach students of three different age groups with different curricula. The teachers must follow up on everything related to the students, such as checking their books, textbooks and assignments. In addition to the difficulty of dealing with and teaching very young students, the teachers often handle a large number of students, which can range from 75 to 120. Some of their additional responsibilities include the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide additional classes to support low-achieving students.2. Conduct additional lessons for classes with teacher absenteeism.

<p>Additional work (administrative work)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shifts: Teachers have to work morning shifts that start at 7 a.m., half an hour before the shift starts, at the end of the shift or sometimes during rest time. 2. Class supervision: The class supervisor's tasks include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take responsibility for their class. • Collect and distribute students' evaluation grade lists to all the teachers of the subjects teaching their class. • Review the students' grades in all the subjects. • Ensure safety measures for classroom furniture, lights are functioning and cleanliness is maintained.
<p>Challenge two: Pressure from officials</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenges associated with administrative leadership and extra work 2. Challenges associated with school activities and administrative leadership behaviours 3. Challenges associated with 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Officials put pressure on teachers by asking them to perform additional tasks that are not part of their duty or competence. 2. Teachers have to apologise for not performing tasks that the officials have asked them to do. Failing to perform these tasks may result in a low evaluation. Therefore, teachers are forced to accept these additional burdens to avoid being mistreated or deprived of the distinguished evaluation. 3. Officials use teacher evaluation (cooperation clause) as a weapon, forcing teachers to remain silent from expressing any opposing opinions or to stay away from objecting to any additional actions requested by the officials. 4. Teachers are subjected to retaliation by being assigned more work. If they complain against the department head, the department head intensifies sudden evaluation visits to catch teachers' mistakes. 5. Teachers have to participate in multiple activities, such as events, lectures, workshops, model lessons, celebrations, morning assembly programmes, competitions and testing activities. 6. The gender of the department head plays an important role in the flexibility and existence of pressure at work. Some female officials are rigid regarding their work and show no flexibility. When they ask the teacher to do any work, they focus on minute details and flashy work, such as decorating, ornamenting and exhibiting extravagance. These not only require a lot of time, effort and money but are also

teachers' inability to express opinions	unimportant and deviate the teachers from their primary goal—teaching. The participants whose husbands are also teachers indicated that their husbands did not experience the same work pressures they did (the husbands worked in schools with only male staff).
Challenge three: Frequent changes in the educational system and curriculum	
1. Challenges associated with frequent changes in the school curriculum	<p>1. Frequent changes in the curriculum lead to the absence of stability in the work and its mechanism. This creates an increased burden at work as the teachers have to prepare again for the new lessons and learn about the new curriculum, methods of teaching it, preparation of new teaching means and new evaluation policies for students.</p> <p>2. A continuous and rapid change in the curriculum does not allow the Ministry of Education to prepare and train the educational staff, thus forcing teachers to invest more effort and time in self-learning. Officials criticise teachers for their work methods and the lack of training they have received for educational and administrative work.</p>
2. Challenges associated with the competency curriculum	<p>1. The competency curriculum was approved by the World Bank, an external party that is not associated with education. It does not fit the Kuwaiti context because its application is cumbersome for teachers. Rather, an assistant teacher system is required to help teachers in the classroom, which Kuwait does not have.</p> <p>2. The curricula's inadequacy concerning new competencies forces teachers to double their work, provide additional classes to students, prepare additional worksheets that contribute to students' understanding of the curriculum at home, and prepare and send educational videos to students via the Internet to support their understanding of the lessons.</p> <p>3. As indicated above, the competency curriculum is challenging and incomprehensible. This pushes students to helplessness. As a result, teachers have to prepare many multi-class activities to occupy the students in the classroom, which requires great effort.</p>

Table 8 *Effects of the Teaching Profession on the Teacher–Mother Life*

Effects
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. After returning home from work, the teacher–mother is angry with her children. She is impatient and yells at her children, forcing them to avoid communicating with their mother.2. She experiences health exhaustion represented by unknown bodily pains, miscarriage of no known cause, high blood pressure, diabetes, neck and back pain and irritable bowel syndrome.3. The mother’s exposure to work pressure intensifies her anger.4. She remains engaged in continuous work throughout the day.5. Work occupies the time she assigns to her family.6. She stays up late to complete work-related tasks.7. She works during the weekend.8. There is a constant desire to quit work.9. It leads to work–family conflict.

Chapter Seven: Educational System and Curriculum (Microsystem) Challenges Faced by Mothers and Children

I asked the participants, ‘Describe your life after you return home from work on weekdays, during weekends, and your life generally outside the school walls. What challenges do you face as a mother and a teacher at the same time?’ The data analysis reveals that the participants attend largely to their interactions with their children regarding their education. Therefore, in this chapter, I focus on how two main factors, identified in the data as the educational system and curricula (i.e., the microsystem) in Kuwait, play a major role in challenging and shaping Kuwaiti mothers’ and children’s lives. The discussion in this chapter sheds light on the effect of this microsystem on the interactions between mothers and their children (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Furthermore, the findings explain the challenges faced by mothers in raising their children. The participants describe the nature of mothers’ and children’s lives outside school, in the home context.

Four main themes are discussed in this chapter: 1) mothers’ and children’s lives centred on education, 2) the pressure from examinations and school requirements, 3) the challenges encountered by teachers in following up on their children’s education, and 4) the effect of the Kuwaiti educational system on parent–child relationships (see Figure 4). Before moving to Section 7.1, I first recall the research question:

What challenges and factors affect Kuwaiti women while performing their roles as mothers and teachers in Kuwait?

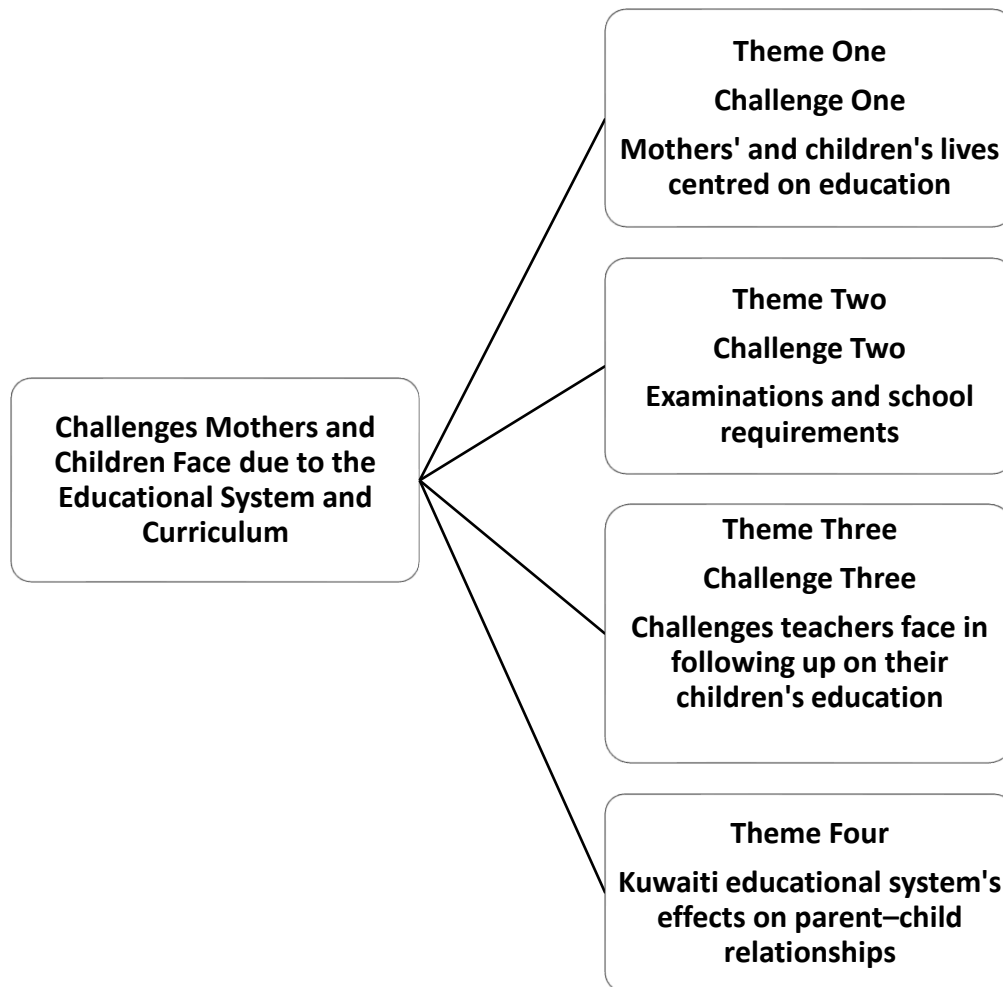


Figure 4: Challenges Faced by Kuwaiti Mothers and Children due to the Educational System and Curriculum.

7.1 Challenge One: Mothers' and Children's Lives Centred on Education

According to the analysis of the data reported by the participants based on their positions as teachers and mothers, there are several reasons why mothers and children centre their lives on education. This challenge revolves around how the educational system and curricula affect both mothers and children, highlighting the reasons why the participants support and devote particular attention to their children's education after school for example:

- 1- The educational system in primary school (achievement file system) can result in a poor academic foundation for children, which will adversely affect their future achievements.

Mothers believe that the educational system in Kuwait is weak and unreliable in teaching their children at the primary school stage, so they support their children after school to ensure that they build a strong educational foundation, as well as enrol them in private preschools to prepare them for primary school.

- 2- Mothers' non-engagement with their children's academic progress at home contributes to their children's low educational achievement. When children's education is not supported by their mothers, it can cause a gap in their knowledge. As a result, the children might be diagnosed with learning difficulties and need to attend special classes.
- 3- Teachers' workload often prevents them from supporting and strengthening the learning of low achievers, which means that mothers cannot rely on the schools to maximise their children's academic achievement.
- 4- The difficulties stemming from the curricula and the fact that large portions cannot be fit into the school calendar cause teachers to put pressure on mothers by assigning extra lessons and worksheets for students to complete at home with their help. Thus, if children had to rely exclusively on the schools for their education, many of them would not be able to excel. This pressure on mothers to support their children academically at home can lead them to enrol their children in an education centre or hire a private tutor to help with the core curricula.
- 5- The student assessment system's policy also puts pressure on students and mothers.

In this section, I explain in greater detail the reasons why Kuwaiti mothers' lives centre on their children's education, as listed above.

One of the reasons why mothers provide their children with additional educational support after school is the 'achievement file system' applied in primary school, where there are no grades and no failures, and everyone passes. From her point of view as a teacher and a mother, Jinan

believes that this system is inadequate. Parents should therefore neither rely on it nor depend solely on the school to teach their children. To compensate for the system's weaknesses, they must engage with their children in their education and give them the extra support they need. When children move to higher educational levels, they may face problems that lead to substandard academic performance because of their poor academic foundation. In Kuwait, the advanced educational stages feature exams and constant assessments based on measures of failure or success. A study conducted by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education to evaluate the achievement file system found that it was the main reason for the cumulative weakness in the academic performance of primary school students and that the automatic promotion policy caused parents to refrain from following up with their children (Al-Turki, 2013). Furthermore, the difficulties among teachers, including the limited class time to teach educational skills sufficiently, present problems associated with the achievement file system (Al-Turki, 2013):

Jinan: Before the competency-based curriculum was applied, there was the achievement file system, meaning that all pupils passed and did not fail.... Parents then inevitably relaxed and did not engage with their children's studies at home. One of my students was quite weak in learning. I asked his mother to support him at home ... but her response was 'there is no need to do so, as my son will inevitably pass this stage'!

Some parents do not understand that if their children's learning foundation is weak at the primary stage, then when they move to secondary school, which uses a different assessment system, they will suffer from the weaknesses that they acquired at the primary stage.

Jinan, a schoolteacher, observes the hidden defects in the educational system and their negative consequences, which emerge later and have detrimental impacts on pupils whose parents do not engage in their education at home. Jinan further points out that low achievers are usually those whose parents do not engage in their children's academic progress at home. Furthermore, family

problems, such as family disintegration, separation, and spouses' divorce, can cause parents to neglect their children's education. However, these problems are not necessarily the main reasons for children's low levels of academic achievement. Instead, the primary factor is whether the parents engage in and care about their children's education:

Jinan: Students suffer from neglect, family disintegration, and many cases of separation and divorce, so children are not taught and followed up on regarding their studies by their parents at home. There is no cooperation between parents and the school, so you find that these children do not do their homework ... they do not bring their school supplies and notebooks to school but leave these at home.

This above discussion explains why parents believe that they must help their children with their studies after school and why they believe that depending solely on schools to educate their children is not conducive to the latter's future success. Omar (2018) argues that one of the reasons why parents support their children with private lessons is their lack of confidence in an educational system that produces gaps in academic success, for example, fourth-grade students who do not know how to read and write (Alanba, 2013).

Hadeel explains that the situation of parents who do not support or follow up on their children's education might be linked to the children's diagnoses of learning difficulties. She describes parents' inability to follow up on their children's education as a kind of negligence:

If mothers refrain from teaching their children at home and depend on school, their children might be placed in classes where students have learning difficulties. I have been teaching at a school for students with learning difficulties for three years. Half of the students enrolled in these classes do not have real educational or cognitive difficulties but a gap in their education that starts in primary school. They have poor academic performance because their parents have not taught them at home since they were young. This is negligence on the part of the parents.

The workload of teachers, as reported by the mothers in this study, is considered one of the reasons why children's and parents' lives revolve around education after school. As Hadeel and Jinan point out, the pressure on teachers and the stressful nature of their profession makes it difficult for teachers to find time to provide weaker students with additional help, meaning that parents cannot rely on the school to maximise their children's academic achievement. Therefore, parents are pushed to find ways to support their children's education:

Hadeel: The mother should monitor her children's progress at home to empower them. The teacher alone cannot; she has limited time (45 minutes) to teach a lesson and a curriculum that she needs to cover in a specific timeframe.

Jinan: The school administration is pressuring teachers to support and assist the pupils whose academic achievement is poor.... How do they expect me to give extra lessons to them? I try as much as possible to do my work during school time. I barely have time to plan and prepare for my lessons. I teach four lessons per day.

From her perspective as a teacher, Hadeel argues that the extensive demands of the curricula compel parents to support their children academically. The many requirements set out in the curricula cannot fit within the confines of the school calendar, so teachers try to fill the educational gap by assigning students several tasks to be completed at home and by relying on parents to assist their children with these, indicating that mothers are required to fulfil many roles:

Hadeel: The curricula are difficult and very extensive.... To finish a curriculum on time, teachers give extra lessons and worksheets for students to solve at home with the help of their parents.... They have access to summaries of the lessons. There are also tablet programs that teachers can use to communicate with the students' parents or to send videos explaining the lessons to parents; then, the students can study at home and discuss the lessons in the classroom the following day. This shortens the time required to teach the class and enables teachers to finish the curriculum within the specified time.

Hadeel also discusses the factors that lead parents to support their children's education after school. First, they encounter difficulties associated with the curriculum (competency-based curriculum). Second, the intense evaluation system pushes parents to support and teach their children at home so that the latter can earn high grades, which in turn imposes strong pressures on both parents and children. These factors drive parents to hire private teachers or enrol their children in private education centres, due to their keen desire for their children to excel (Alsharah, 1998).

Hadeel explains the nature of her life after she returns home:

Hadeel: Frankly, there is great pressure on the children in school because of the difficulty of the curriculum.... This pressure falls on the mother to teach her children at home ... or else enrol them in an education centre to strengthen their education; this is exhausting. After arriving home from work, I would teach my son. I struggled with my son because he was in the foundational phase. I did the same with my daughters regarding their learning of the Arabic and English languages; I did not rely on the teachers. I have not been alone in doing this; my friends also complain about the curricula and how they are not teachers. This leads to arguments between them and their children. They are tired and have headaches.

I think that if mothers in Kuwait all abstained from teaching their children, and children had to rely exclusively on their schooling, many pupils would not excel.

Another reason why mothers support their children's studies at home or enrol their children in evening tutoring centres is the primary education system's inability to establish a strong foundation for learners. As indicated by Jinan below, she cannot rely solely on schools to solve this problem. Alsharah (1998) states that the defect lies in the educational system and its failure to provide students with a quality education, compelling parents to support their children in their studies. Similarly, my research reveals that mothers adopt an educator's role to assist their children in building a strong educational foundation that can help them move up to the advanced educational stages:

Jinan: I prefer to teach my kids after school so that they have a strong foundation ...; building their educational foundation is crucial.... I am an Arabic language teacher ...; my children are all excellent in Arabic. My son is now in eighth grade.... He still manages to earn distinguished grades in Arabic because of the strong foundation he built when he was in elementary school, because of me teaching him.... My children are all not good in English and mathematics.... I used to enrol them in private lessons in after-school education centres to boost their levels. Unfortunately, I had to do this from time to time because of their low achievement ... and based on the recommendations of their teachers as well.

Jinan's statement finds support in Rudman's (2014) observation that parents' assistance in their children's studies contributes to the latter's positive educational development.

The assessment system also affects mothers, who must bear the burden of teaching and following up with their children after school to boost their grades. Thus, they are compelled to spend their time teaching their children or driving them to evening classes. All these effort, time, and money spent in teaching and driving children to and from evening classes add to the burdens of the participants as mothers and teachers.

Jinan believes that teaching and educating children are tasks that should be carried out primarily by schools, not by mothers. However, she finds herself obliged to perform these functions because of deficiencies in the educational system and the presence of the student assessment system:

Jinan: I personally prefer not to enrol them in these extra lessons because they are supposed to learn in school, and my role at home should be limited to helping them do their homework only, but I have to. However, thank God, after all my efforts in teaching my children and enrolling them in these specialised extra lessons after school, they all earned distinguished evaluations in the end.

Hadeel is also aware of the importance of teaching her children after school:

Hadeel: When my older children were at the primary stage, I used to pressure them to earn good grades, so I taught them after school.

Apparently, the reasons for Jinan's decision to enrol her preschool-aged children in private nurseries were to help them build an academic foundation and prepare them for primary school. Jinan's role as a mother is related to her belief that the educational system in Kuwait is weak and unreliable in educating children at the primary school stage. She is convinced that nurseries were effective in establishing a solid foundation for her children's education, which helped them pass the primary stage easily and successfully, thus alleviating the burden on her during that phase.

Jinan: I find that introducing children to kindergarten is a good idea because nurseries are excellent in establishing a child's education at an early age and preparing them for entry in the first year of school. The children are able to memorise Arabic and English letters, numbers, and other things.

Muneera explains how enrolling her children in a private school alleviates the pressure on her. She seldom supports her children at home and depends more on the private school, indicating that some private schools can help students build strong educational foundations:

Muneera: My children are enrolled in a private school. The Arabic language curriculum is like the government's curriculum.... I see that the way the school teaches my children is strong.... My children are taught correctly in the Arabic language. Thus, they depend more on the school than on my help at home.

The private school's use of the same curriculum for the Arabic language as that applied in public schools is another reason for Muneera's heavy reliance on the private school to educate her children. Although the same book may be used in both public and private schools. The way in which the curriculum is delivered is different. This further indicates that private schools provide children with a solid foundation,

This confirms Jinan's statement that she does not depend on public schools because they are ineffective in helping students build strong educational foundations, after her children return from public school, she provides additional private tuition for them compared to Muneera who does not

do this. In reflecting on the participants' accounts, I propose the following question: What if mothers relied solely on public schools to teach their children and did not adopt these methods of helping to boost their children's academic performance? The result might be that most pupils would not obtain high levels of academic achievement. Although this might seem like a negative outcome, if this scenario were allowed to occur, it could perhaps draw the attention of the officials in the education sector and the Ministry of Education to the large numbers of pupils who are failing or are low achievers. Consequently, they might seek appropriate solutions. Specifically, this situation might encourage them to more closely/ identify the weaknesses of the existing educational system and curricula and investigate alternatives that would be more appropriate and the ways to implement them more effectively. Thus, the burden on mothers and the pressure on children in school and at home would be reduced.

Therefore, I argue that mothers' efforts to support their children in their studies obfuscate the real picture of students' educational outcomes in the view of Ministry of Education officials, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers to whose attention this should be brought. In other words, the mothers' extra efforts do not help expose the defects in the curricula or in educational policies. The current educational system thus heavily burdens children's caregivers, mainly mothers, who attempt to mitigate the imbalance in Kuwait's educational policy because they do not expect any solutions from the Ministry of Education. This practice has allowed the ministry to continue implementing its policies without frequent reviews or consideration of the real situation because it cannot perceive how much stress these policies impose on mothers and children.

Furthermore, mothers often assume the educator's role because they think that they cannot rely solely on schools. Another main reason why mothers are keen to follow up with their children after school relates to exams and other school requirements, which are assessed in the next section.

First, Gu et al. (2015) indicate that homework is the main reason for conflicts between schools and families, teachers and parents, and parents and children. Many conflicts occur in relation to homework that are reported in the news with headlines such as ‘Students commit suicide over homework’ and ‘Students beaten by father because they did not finish their homework’ (Gu et al., 2015 p.49). Many parents and students complain on the internet and in letters to the government about the heavy burden of homework. Both parents and students feel that teachers should assign less homework, and many families even think that no homework is best (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Other scholars argue that there are different types of parental involvement in homework, such as setting rules, monitoring children, and offering direct aid, which have different relations to children’s achievement (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Other research on the relations between how parents provide homework help and their children’s test scores in middle school and college shows diverse results and finds that the mothers are inclined to be more supportive and more frequently and regularly engaged in their children’s education, while the fathers’ involvement tends to be more sporadic and harsher (Kim & Fong, 2014).

7.2 Challenge Two: Examination and School Requirement Pressures

In this section, I discuss two important reasons why parents choose to closely monitor their children’s education at home and why there is additional pressure on both mothers and children (see Tables 9 and 10). The **first reason** concerns the exams that children are required to take from an early age (see Table 9), and **the second** relates to school requirements, such as homework and subject-related projects (see Table 10).

Table 9. Short and Long Exams

Short and Long Exams
The competency-based curriculum, with its many exams, is difficult and puts undue pressure on children.
Exams create anxiety and stress for students throughout the year.
Exams make parents seek to support their children's education by teaching them on their own or hiring a private tutor at home.
Exams create a state of heightened tension at home during the examination periods.
The continuous exams throughout the year cause parents to assist their children academically.

Table 10. School Requirements

School Requirements
Much academic pressure is placed on children.
The competency-based curriculum for science subjects imposes a lot of homework. Parents spend considerable time with their children in helping them finish such homework.
The competency-based curriculum relies on parents because children are required by teachers to work on their homework with their parents.
The competency-based curriculum requires children to search for information from external sources, and parents help their children with this task.
The difficulties of the competency-based curriculum sometimes cause parents to do the homework themselves instead of their children.
The large number of school requirements prevents children from joining extracurricular activities or having fun after school.
Children are assigned a great deal of homework every day and many subject-specific projects.
Children spend the whole day doing their homework for multiple subjects.
The huge amount of schoolwork puts pressure on the students; sometimes, their brains cannot process the abundance of information.

One of the reasons why parents devote so much attention to their children's education is the educational system's focus on the examination of pupils from an early age. Over the years, several changes in the educational system have taken place. Recently, both long and short exams have been applied at the primary school level as new forms of student assessment. However, it has been noted by participants that exams put additional pressure on children. To help alleviate some of this stress, the Ministry of Education has developed the concept of 'comfortable testing':

Jinan: The curriculum tends to put pressure on them at the primary stage, which stresses out the pupils.

Can you imagine that children in their first year of primary school now have short and lengthy exams? The Ministry of Education does not know what they are doing or what they want.

There is something called 'comfortable testing' in which the school provides a comfortable environment and a suitable atmosphere for the pupils during tests to relieve them of the stress and anxiety caused by exams.

Thus, it seems that the educational system forces parents to teach their children at home by making exam assessments a central part of their children's academic achievement from the latter's early years. Since the curriculum has become more difficult as a result, parents seek to support their children's education after school:

Hadeel: Frankly, there is a state of elevated tension at home during the period of my children's examinations, as they are scheduled for all academic levels, including the first years, on multiple subjects throughout the year. To support my children, I print past papers and exams for all the subjects and make my children do them before the exams. I correct them with grades to assess their levels in all subjects and strengthen their weaknesses.

Muneera: I hired them a tutor at home, especially during exams.

Hadeel describes the situation during examination periods and the fact that she has more than one child who requires attention. She helps them prepare for exams and searches for previous exam papers to support their education at home. The assumption of the educator role results in additional pressure on Hadeel. She mentions that there are continuous exams throughout the year, which indicates that they are in a constant state of stress at home. Muneera also supports her children's education by hiring a private tutor at home.

As the study's participants describe in the passages below, *school requirements*, such as homework and class projects, are stress factors affecting the lives of both mothers and children. The assignment of large amounts of homework has received much criticism from parents, who describe excessive homework as a heavy burden and a source of needless exhaustion in families (Rudman, 2014). In the following paragraphs, I discuss the effects of educational policy on the home lives of children and parents.

Muneera recalls how a little, as well as too much, academic pressure affected her children. She felt happy and comfortable with her children's new private school because it provided *a non-repelling and non-stressful environment*. As a teacher and mother, she compares the pressure that public and private schools put on children and discusses the major role played by schools in either reducing or increasing the burden on children and their parents at home. **Muneera** described her children's new school as follows:

The first school was a pupil-repelling environment. There was a lot of academic pressure on the children, and the other school that my children were transferred to has a nice policy ... with no homework on weekends.... The school say[s] that weekends are for the child to enjoy and not to study.... This is very beautiful.... **Homework is very simple**.... Arabic language homework is assigned only twice a week, [and] it can be done easily... in a few minutes per week.... There [is] one assignment per week for science.... In term[s] of the homework assigned to the child at home, **it is much more comfortable**

than [that of] government schools, although the curricula in the private school seem to me more difficult.

Muneera also explains the new competency-based science curriculum in public schools. The curriculum includes a lot of homework and many requirements, which are explicitly written in the pupils' books, that is, as **homework requiring the parents' help**. Thus, the curriculum seems to rely on parents to educate their children at home. **Muneera's** thoughts on the curriculum are captured below:

[Regarding] the new science curriculum my relatives complain [that] **they cannot raise their heads due to the multiple homework [assignments** It is written in the student's book **[as homework for parents....** [The] **curriculum highly depends on parents** to teach their children at home and solve the homework [problems] with them They make the parents preoccupied with their children. What does a mother, who has more than one or even four children, do?

Muneera points out **the dilemma caused by the competency-based curriculum**. The curriculum **mainly depends on learners to search for information** but does not specify the sources, creating their insecurity related to looking for information on the internet and prompting their parents' intervention. In this way, the curriculum places a burden on parents to assist their children, especially in primary school (Al-Hammadi, 2016). **Muneera** describes this situation as follows:

The competency-based curricula are very difficult. The students cannot only rely on the curricula and the books that they have to learn from....Curriculum developers say that the source of the information is not the book that [the] students take home but that the information is available everywhere....They want the students to search for the information themselves, but how reliable is the information that they find when they search [for] it on the internet? Perhaps the children find information that [their] parents do not want them expose[d] to [on] websites that might contain inappropriate photos or videos, content, etc.

The participants explain how the extensive pressure on children to perform academic tasks and the difficulty level of the curricula require parental intervention. Moreover, the parents might find the curricula too difficult for the children to grasp and thus might complete their children's homework for them. In the following quotations, three participants discuss how pressure is put on parents and children.

Muneera: My niece came to me to help her with her science homework.... I was surprised when I found a terrible amount of homework. I am a science teacher, and I did not know the answers to the questions.... It's difficult, and they wrote in the book [to] search for the answer[s] on the internet. **The problem now is who is doing these tasks. They are, of course, [done by] the parents.** Imagine this assignment in a primary school, Arabic-language book: 'Write your daily notes with [a] photo.' My cousin complains, 'How will my son write this every day?' She adds, **'I am the one who will do it instead.** Imagine how long it takes a mother in a day [to help with homework]. I have [to] check on my son every day and tell him to write such and such.' **I see that the new curriculum has not been applied correctly.**

Hadeel: Homework is required [on a] daily [basis] for all subjects, such as Arabic, English, and mathematics. They usually have homework in no fewer than three subjects daily, in addition to subjects such as Islamic [studies] and social studies. My children must prepare in advance for the lessons and take notes so that they can interact with the teacher in the classroom. **The amount of schoolwork puts pressure on the students; sometimes, their brains cannot process the abundance of information.**

Jinan: My daughter's teachers give her a lot of homework. **I'm tired of helping her study.** She has many demands from school. Even when my daughter wants to do a project, she has to work so hard on it and dedicate a lot of time preparing for it.

One parental complaint regarding school requirements is that there is no time for children to have fun or engage in activities to develop their talents after school or on weekends (Baumgartner et al., 1993). Hadeel mentions that she **cannot let her children participate in activities, engage in hobbies, or develop skills after school** because of the many pressures related to her job as a teacher and her children's school requirements. She suggests that the Kuwaiti Ministry of

Education allocate more time during school hours for children to complete the learning requirements and revise their lessons in school instead of at home.

Hadeel: We, the teachers, have frequently asked officials in the Ministry [of Education] to reduce the number of daily lessons and add an extra hour for homework or revising lessons in school. [In] this way, the students could go home comfortably and have time to play and go outside.

According to the findings of a study conducted with 2,000 parents, children are not allowed to be children because they are burdened with homework and other curricular activities that restrict them from participating in play (*Daily Mail*, 2010).

7.3 Challenge Three: Teachers' Challenges in Overseeing Their Children's Education

In this section, I explore the extent to which teachers find it difficult to oversee their children's education. **Hadeel** describes her attempt to make her 10-year-old daughter self-reliant in completing her schoolwork. However, her daughter needs support, and because the girl knows that her friends' mothers help them with their schoolwork, she **blames Hadeel for no longer supporting her in her studies**. **Hadeel** justifies her approach by stating that the other mothers do not have stressful jobs and that working as a teacher negatively affects her mood at home, hindering her ability to support her daughter:

I am trying to make my 10-year-old daughter more self-reliant in her studies, but she blames me, saying, 'Why don't you teach me like the mothers of my friends?' However, most of her friends' mothers are not teachers; they return home with no work to prepare for the next day, so they are in [a] good mood. They have enough time to teach their children at home or enrol them in extra courses.

Jinan explains that teaching consumes a great deal of her time and that **work pressures make it difficult to oversee her children's education on a daily basis**. Therefore, she is sometimes forced to teach them and supervise their work on weekends, which should have been a period of rest for everyone. Nonetheless, she makes time to follow up on her children's education because

it is an essential part of her life and those of her children. Jinan describes her teaching-preparation strategy:

Teaching takes up a large part of my life, especially at the beginning of each academic year because of the new decisions and the newly introduced curricula.... Occasionally, **I need to do some work at home**, but I can do that in one day or just use the weekend. **I prepare my schoolwork a week in advance**, which includes planning my lessons, preparing the homework and worksheets, writing any reports, and preparing tests. This then relieves me from **pressure and an excessive workload during the week**. **Organising my time like this helps me find time for my children to support them in their homework and studies during the week**.

Jinan expresses the difficulty of being a teacher and overseeing her children's education:

Teaching affects my life at home and my children's [lives]. I give my children a quarter of my remaining daily energy. I am constantly trying to organise my time despite the pressures, so **I sometimes try to use my time during the weekends**. I ask my children to do all their homework for the whole week in advance on the weekend.... This arrangement helps me reduce my burdens and devote myself to other responsibilities during the week.... **It is hard for me to teach my children daily**.... I do not let them study alone; I must be with them and open the books with them. We go through all the lessons together, and if there is anything missing, they complete it and solve the homework.

Jinan's experience highlights the daily school-related pressure placed on children. She points out that children need daily instruction at home after school. Moreover, to overcome the difficulties of being both a teacher and a mother of several children, Jinan puts a great deal of effort into organising her routine and responsibilities by taking advantage of weekends. In an attempt to relieve the pressures that she and her children face during the week, Jinan urges her children to complete all their homework for the week on a single day during the weekend and compels herself to help them do so. This approach helps her fulfil her other responsibilities during the week. Jinan explains that she follows up on her children's lessons and that her children cannot study without her involvement and guidance, making it impossible for her to teach them every day.

7.4 The Kuwaiti Educational System's Effects on Mothers and Children

Based on the analysis of the data, in this section, I explain the mothers' difficulties related to the education of their children and its impact on their lives. The study's findings reveal the Kuwaiti educational system's effects on mothers and children:

- 1- After returning home from school, primary school students commonly spend the rest of the day doing homework with the help of their mothers, which is exhausting for both parties.
- 2- Mothers employ an authoritarian style and urge their children to do their homework perfectly. They do not accept any mediocre performance, and their authoritarian style upsets their children, causing them to cry while doing their homework. Mothers are strict with their children concerning education-related matters.
- 3- Child–mother relationships seem tense; mothers alienate their children by putting pressure on them to succeed academically. Meanwhile, fathers become closer to their children because they do not teach the latter.
- 4- Mothers get angry with their children while teaching them.
- 5- Kuwaiti parents want their children to earn full marks (i.e., excellent grades). To achieve this aim, mothers open their children's school bags and books to encourage them to do their homework. Mothers also prepare school supplies while their children sit comfortably.
- 6- Some fathers severely beat or scream at their children when the latter do not receive high marks or complete the school requirements.
- 7- Mothers commonly treat their children harshly while teaching them, get angry with them, and punish them severely by depriving them of something they love. The mothers justify this approach by stating that it is for the children's benefit.
- 8- Mothers seem to treat their children severely by adopting an **authoritarian style** regarding their studies. This may have been due to the pressures associated with the mothers' work

as teachers, as well as the pressures exerted by the educational system on parents and children regarding its requirements.

Jinan explains that it is challenging and exhausting to teach her son because he grumbles excessively when doing his homework. She describes her **strict approach to dealing with her son's schoolwork**:

My son sits the rest of the day after returning from school, doing his homework. Whenever he writes anything incorrectly, I erase it and ask him to rewrite it again and again until it is written correctly. I must admit, I am a bit of a perfectionist, so I don't let him write anything that is untidy or incorrect; it should be written on the line. He **gets upset and sometimes cries**, but I am stubborn; my son should not defeat me. **I want him to be adequately educated.** Therefore, I am not satisfied with any weak level of performance in his studies. I know he will suffer now, but later, he will rest.... **I exert great effort with my son** when teaching him and following up on his schoolwork. **I do not rely on what he learns in school only**; I must always teach him myself. However, I only teach him when I am in a good mood, not when my mood is terrible.... **It is impossible to teach my son daily**, so I have made the plan of teaching him for one day of the weekend. **Together, we do what is required of him** for a week in advance. However, if my work schedule is not so stressful during the week, **I occasionally spend some time working with him from the afternoon until the evening. I think that is a lot!**

Jinan describes her efforts to teach one of her children on some weekdays and the weekend to help him fulfil **numerous scholastic requirements**, and she explains **her desire to give him a strong educational foundation**. Despite her eagerness to teach her children after school, she is unable to do so every day due to challenges related to **her mood and psychological readiness** and **her own work pressure**. **Jinan's relationship with her son appears a bit tense**. In fact, she notes that her son loves his father more than her:

His relationship with his father is much stronger, and he does not favour me because I put pressure on him when he studies; however, it is for his own good. **I am very strict with my children when it comes to anything related to their education. I am strict in dealing with my children....** I am not as horrible as you think, just **assertive**, especially for the first primary

education stages.... My son is well established academically at the primary stages; he will find it easier later in the rest of his education.

Jinan's son most likely feel the way he does because of his mother's own academic pursuits, intensity, and insistence that he complete his homework perfectly. She justifies her strict approach to educating her son and his siblings by stating that it is in their best interest and that a strong academic foundation will make it easier for them to learn as they grow older. **Jinan** states frequently that her son favours his father because she takes a teaching role with her children in all of their educational affairs, whereas **their father** does not:

I used to get mad with my elder son when I taught him ... now... I have involved the father in dealing with our children if they do not do their schoolwork. I am tired of arguing with them day and night. Now, I say to my younger son, who is at the primary school stage, 'If you do not want to do your homework, I will tell your Dad.'... **I use my power to punish them by preventing them from going to a restaurant or by buying ice cream for everyone except the one who is being punished.... [I] deprive them of many of the things they love** so that I don't bother myself **arguing with them.** I say to my son, 'Do you want to do your homework or?' I then tell him to write again but [to do it] correctly and on the line in neat and beautiful handwriting, and he says, 'OK, I will do it beautifully' or 'I will be polite.'... He does not want me to deprive him of the things he loves. **I do not scream or shout. I leave that to their father** because he needs to be involved somehow. **I am tired,** and their father needs to stand by me, especially in these significant matters.

Jinan mentions that in the past, **she got angry with her** children quite easily while teaching them and that she **became tired of arguing with them** throughout the day about their studies. At a certain point, instead of getting angry, she began to deal with their academic weakness by using punishment and reward methods or involving their father.

Hadeel explains that the challenges of teaching her children after school negatively affected both parties and led her to **treat her children harshly:**

This put a lot of stress on my interactions with my children, so I treated them harshly. When I got **angry with them, I punished them severely** by

depriving them of something they loved, but that was only for their benefit. Sometimes, I dealt with them with more flexibility and firmness.

Muneera says that as a mother, she was keen on ensuring her children's success. Therefore, she made an effort to follow up on their lessons. According to her, **this was exhausting**, and she did her best to take care of her children and support their academic achievement. Her comments illustrate a mother's desire to attain perfection but do not mention the father's role in teaching the children and overseeing their studies.

What tired me the most was that I used to **teach my children and follow up with them on their lessons to strengthen and help them after they returned [home from] school**. I have two twin sons who are now 12. I have done my best to take care of them, and I have made mistakes in raising them...I wanted them to excel, and I was not satisfied that they were not excelling in school. As a result of my dealings with them and my great concern for them, they are very dependent on others and not on themselves.... They are now grown up, and I now have four children... I can't continue teaching and helping them after school. I have to focus on the youngest children.

Muneera quit overseeing her children's studies during an illness. Furthermore, **teaching her children strained her relationship with them** and made them dependent instead of independent:

I realised that it was not my role as a mother to teach my children at home. Unfortunately, I **realised** it late last year when I became very ill. This was a reason for me to stop teaching them at home, so I refrained from doing so, and [I also stopped] because **I didn't want to lose my relationship with my children**. So, I brought them a tutor at home, especially during the times of the exams. Thus, I bought my comfort by paying [a] sum of money for [a] private teacher. In the past, I used to open my children's bags and stay beside them when they did their homework to make sure they wrote words and letters on the line. So, my children became dependent. Now, [I] no longer do this. They must learn [for] themselves.

Muneera also points out that Kuwaiti society makes children the priority of mothers and puts a great deal of pressure on mothers to help their children with their studies. She explains that this situation negatively affected her relationship with her children:

We in our society have a complex called getting the full mark [an excellent grade]; we want our children to be excellent. To achieve this, I was the one who opened the bag and the books for my child, so he did his homework. I was the one who prepared his school tools while he was sitting comfortably. In the past, it was a big problem for me if they didn't excel and didn't receive distinguished grades.

Muneera explains that the Kuwaiti complex about earning excellent grades may lead parents to treat their children harshly. She describes a situation in which an elementary school student was severely beaten by his father because he did not receive a high mark:

One of the mothers I knew ... said that her child, who was in elementary school, was severely beaten by his father when he did not get a high mark.

According to Gu and colleagues' (2015) findings, the demands of school, such as homework, are primary causes of conflicts between parents and children. Furthermore, the researchers have found that some parents will hit their children as a punishment for not completing schoolwork.

Summary

The second finding of the second theme concerns the challenges of motherhood and the influence of the Kuwaiti educational system and curricula (microsystem) on mothers and their children. The home life of mothers and their children is devoted mainly to education. In an educational system based on evaluation, the curricula give rise to some challenges and pressures that negatively affect the lives of mothers and children alike. See Tables 11 and 12.

Table 11. *Challenges Related to the Inability of the Primary Educational System in Kuwait to Establish a Strong Educational Foundation for Learners*

<p>Challenges related to the inability of the primary educational system in</p>	<p>1- Mothers do not depend solely on the school for their children's education and distrust the quality of education provided by the school. Rather, they teach their children after school on a daily basis because the educational system depends on parents to follow up on their children's studies.</p>
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<p>Kuwait to establish a strong educational foundation for learners</p>	<p>2- If mothers did not teach their children, follow up on their school affairs, or help them, especially at the early stages, their children would likely receive a low evaluation, fail academically at the advanced stages, and possibly be diagnosed with learning difficulties.</p> <p>3- The extensive demands of the curricula and their own difficulties force mothers to teach their children.</p> <p>4- Mothers register their children in education centres to support their studies after school hours and enrol their young children in private nurseries and kindergartens that focus on providing a foundation for their education.</p> <p>5- The educational system puts pressure on mothers to teach their children and follow up on their educational affairs after school hours.</p> <p>6- The educational system is characterised by its emphasis on assessment and types of curricula, forcing mothers to teach and help their children at home.</p>
<p>Challenges related to exam pressures and school requirements</p>	<p>1- The exams and assessment prompt mothers to teach their children and prepare them for the exams.</p> <p>2- The science curriculum requires students to perform many tasks at home and with the help of their parents.</p> <p>3- The recently established curricula rely on students' self-driven learning because they are required to search for information using the internet.</p> <p>4- Some assignments in the competency-based curricula exceed students' abilities, so their mothers have to complete the assignments for them.</p> <p>5- The teacher's gender plays a role in either mitigating or worsening the problem of completing schoolwork at home. Male teachers assign less homework than their female colleagues.</p> <p>6- Children complain about excessive school requirements.</p>

The mothers' challenges and the educational system and curricula (microsystem) negatively affect mothers and children.

Table 12. *Impacts of the Teacher–Mother's Following up on her Children's Education*

<p>Impacts of the teacher–mother's following up on her children's education</p>	<p>1- Their teaching profession consumes much of the mothers' time and energy and plays a huge role in their lives. They complete some of their work at home, so they try to manage their schedule despite the pressures from teaching or tutoring their children when they return home from school.</p> <p>2- The mothers have to use some weekend days to complete as much of their own work as possible. Doing so enables them to reduce their workload during the week so they can find time to continue teaching their children after school hours.</p> <p>3- Mothers force their children to complete all their schoolwork for the coming week on the weekend. Mothers shoulder the responsibility of teaching their children and do not let the latter complete schoolwork alone.</p> <p>4- Mothers can neither enrol their children in entertaining activities nor allow them to engage in hobbies after school because of the pressures related to their children's schoolwork and to their own work as teachers.</p> <p>5- Teaching their children requires mothers to follow up on the kids' schoolwork every day, but the pressures of their own work make it difficult for them to do so.</p>
<p>Effects of the Kuwaiti educational system and curricula on teacher–mothers and their children</p>	<p>1- The evaluation system makes mothers keen on their children's obtaining a distinguished evaluation, so they pressure the children to excel in their studies.</p> <p>2- Mothers have conflicts and arguments with their children when following up on the latter's lessons and teaching them when both return home from work and from school, respectively.</p>

3- Teaching, helping, and supporting children at home entail an exhausting process that puts great pressure on mothers and creates ongoing difficulties.

4- The exam period creates a state of tension at home.

5- Mothers deal with their children in one of two ways: the encouraging method or the authoritarian method. In this study, the latter prevails. The children have much better relationships with their fathers than with their mothers because their fathers neither follow up on their studies nor put pressure on them.

6- Mothers experience nervousness while teaching their children.

7- Tensions and strained relationships between mothers and their children develop because mothers shoulder the responsibility of at-home teaching; some mothers are cruel towards and punish their children.

8- Mothers use reward and punishment methods, depriving the children of what they like when they perform their schoolwork inadequately.

Chapter Eight: The Challenges of Being a Mother and Teacher in the Kuwaiti Context

This research explores the difficulties faced by working mothers in the teaching field in the Kuwaiti context. To answer the research question, it is crucial to shed light on the Kuwaiti context and the cultural factors of this country that affect people's lives, including how these factors may contribute to increasing difficulties for mothers working in the teaching sector. Culture is an essential aspect of a person's daily life and is a critical factor affecting their dealings and behaviours according to social and cultural expectations.

Several themes emerged from the interviews. This section begins with one of the challenges that mothers face in Kuwait: the roles of men and women in the Kuwaiti context. Next, it explores the nature of social life in Kuwait and the obligations and requirements associated with it, both of which constitute challenges to the lives of mothers working as teachers. Finally, it examines the impact of challenges related to women's social roles, focusing on social assessment in Kuwaiti society. Before I move to the next section, I recall the research question, followed by Figure 5.

Research question: What challenges and factors affect Kuwaiti women while performing their roles as mothers and teachers in Kuwait?

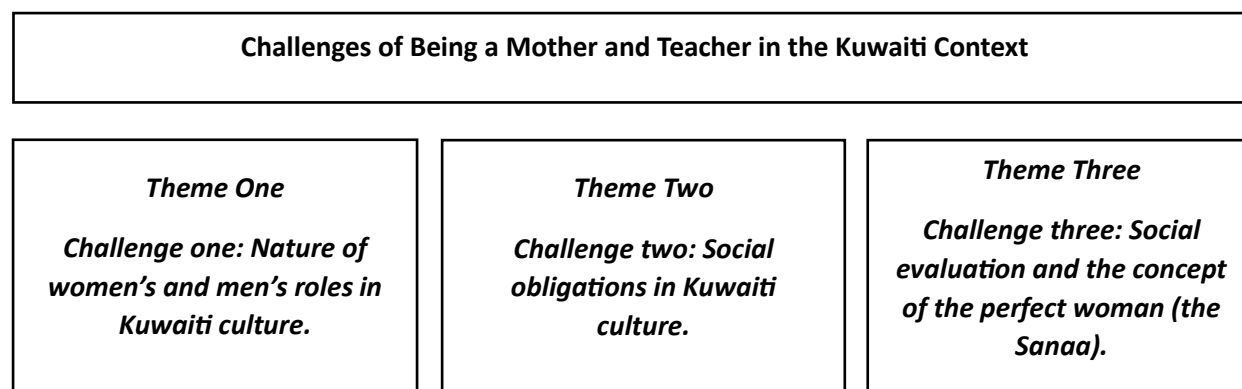


Figure 5: The Challenges of Being a Mother and Teacher in the Kuwaiti Context

8.1 Challenge One: Women's and Men's Roles in Kuwaiti Culture

This section explores the nature of the roles of men and women in Kuwaiti culture, particularly the father's limited role in family responsibilities. According to the data analysis, Kuwaiti mothers assume a larger number of roles than Kuwaiti fathers do. The participants cited examples of women's roles and the absence of the father in most of the responsibilities related to home affairs—raising children and managing their affairs, following up on educational requirements, cooking and providing food, transporting children to and from school, shopping for children's needs and considering their requests, and nurturing infants (which is considered a basic responsibility of women in Kuwait). In addition, the participants stated that children spend more time with their mothers than with their fathers.

The following statements shed light on the roles of the participants and their husbands. Muneera mentioned that having numerous duties related to children and the home is more challenging when a mother has more than one child:

Muneera: Mostly, I have more roles in the home and towards my children than my husband [does...]. [The] woman bears a lot of responsibilities on behalf of the man. She takes her children, if needed, to the doctor, buys the house's groceries from the supermarket, drops children to school and picks them up. When you have many children, you discover that you cannot be this super mom. This is difficult.

Hadeel confirmed Muneera's thoughts, stating that she also assumes more responsibility for her children than their father does.

Hadeel: In Kuwait, we suffer from [the] father's lack of family involvement. The mother is the one who drives her children places. The father has limited roles at home. He goes out with the family from time to time, but often, the mother is the mastermind of the house. I even have to pick up my little girl from kindergarten. Their school day ends earlier than mine. I leave school to pick her up and return with her to my school if I have [another] class before the end of the school day. After work is finished, I immediately pick up my other children from their schools. If their father is not busy, he picks them up, but in most

cases, I am the one responsible. I buy my children's clothes, [including] outfits for Eid and other events. I take the children with me to buy what they prefer [and] order products online, which still takes time to make decisions.

Hadeel confirmed that some of the mother's challenges result from the father's limited participation in family responsibilities and that she is the main parent responsible for delivering her children to their schools, managing household affairs, and meeting her children's needs. For example, she explained how she leaves work to pick up her child from kindergarten and then returns to work. After her workday ends, she goes to pick up her other children from their schools, which creates pressure and a cycle of constant preoccupation. She stated,

Hadeel: No one believes the amount of fatigue that the mother-teacher faces...that I come home after a tiring workday to follow my children's affairs [and] see [to] their school commitments and studies [while] teaching them at home.

It appears that in the father's absence, there is pressure on the mother to take her children to places that are not child-friendly, such as weddings that begin late at night, women's salons, or birth receptions, as in Jinan's case:

Jinan: When I go to the women's salon, I have to take my youngest son with me. Even at wedding parties, I take my kids, even though this is sometimes unacceptable to the host. It is not common for children to attend such occasions. However, I have to. Where do I leave my children? At the same time, I have to perform my social duties. I visited one of my friends in the hospital when she had a new baby. I told her that I would not stay long because my children were with me, and I did not wish to bother her. The important thing for me was that I performed the duty of visiting.

Muneera and Hadeel confirmed one of the negative aspects from their perspective of the little time fathers spend with their children, particularly boys:

Muneera: My husband [asked] me why my sons are so unmanly (fearful and weak). I told him that it is because they do not go out with [him], and they did not see [him] when [he speaks] to men in [Diwaniya] and how [he] deal[s]

with men. My sons always come out with me. What do you expect them to learn from me, the quiet voice of my conversation, when I deal with men outside or sellers, for example? There are limits to my dealings with men. My children acquired these skills from me and what they saw from my actions and their observations of me. There is no problem if [he takes] the children with [him] to the car garage to fix [his] car breakdowns. Take them with you. He says, 'What will they do there if I take them?' I told him, 'Just take them; at least they [will] see what you do'.

Hadeel described a similar problem in her family—the boys lacking a male role model:

Hadeel: My children are accustomed to the time they spend with me more than their father. In Kuwait, children are always seen with their mothers. I told him, 'If you don't want him to sound like the girls, just take him with you when you go out...to Diwaniyah (see glossary) or to the farm. I do not want him to get used to the atmosphere of the girls. I want him to learn how men talk and get used to their ways'. He agreed, but said, "Less than two years old, I will not take him. He will bother me'.

Other responsibilities that women fulfil are related to home affairs, such as cooking. In Hadeel's culture, it is considered a defect to not know how to cook. One of the responsibilities that makes Hadeel anxious in the morning is preparing her children's daily lunch boxes for school. This is difficult for her as a teacher because she must not be late for work. Moreover, she must drop her children to their respective schools before she goes to work.

Hadeel: One of my responsibilities as a wife is to take care of kitchen affairs. Every night, I prepare the lunch boxes for my children. I used to prepare them in the morning, but I was nervous because I had to be at work before the morning bell rang.

She also indicated that it is considered shameful for a man to manage household affairs—such as cleaning the clothes, cooking for the children, and washing dishes—because these are considered a woman's primary tasks.

Hadeel: I do not remember him ever doing the laundry. When he was studying abroad, I joined him while I was pregnant. I remember I was tired, and he took charge, cooked dinner for the children, washed the dishes and assumed

responsibility. Perhaps in Kuwait, people consider it [shameful] for a man to do something like washing dishes, etc. It is the responsibility of the mother.

As mentioned in detail in Chapter 7, all the participants had the challenging and pressing responsibility of following up with and teaching their children at home. These tasks place significant pressure on the mother after she returns from work, but she must do them in the absence of the father, who does not consider these tasks part of his role.

Jinan: My role with my children is to teach them and follow up with their homework.

Hadeel: We arrive home at around fifteen past two, pray if we have not already, eat lunch and rest. I give my children an hour of rest. Sometimes, I feel tired and need to nap, but I need to supervise my children while they study. My children have a lot of schoolwork, and they complain a lot; my son tires me.

As indicated above, their daily lives after returning from school with their children do not include much rest because they must ensure that the children complete their studies.

Further, the participants also referred to other responsibilities that they assumed, such as taking care of infants in the absence of their husbands.

Hadeel: Men do not take care of babies or feed them. Perhaps my husband gave our son milk, but he would not care for him for more than an hour or two. He cannot change his diaper or clothes. He does not know how to [track] the times for babies' milk or food. He tried to make the kids sleep when they were babies. He [did] simple things.

Muneera: From the birth of the child, you are responsible for that child. You breastfeed, change diapers, sleep [and] nurture your child, and you're not sleeping at night. There is no sharing with the man. Women bear this responsibility on their own. When the infant cries, he calls you and tells you that he is crying. He says, 'I don't know how to calm him down'. Even when a child needs their diaper changed, he doesn't change it for them.

Muneera mentioned an example of one of her relatives: She clarified her relative's perspective that the men in Kuwait are not ready to bear the inconvenience of their children and

the associated responsibilities. Her relative indicated that if her child cries, her husband does not help but rather goes to sleep in another room, away from the disturbance of the child's crying.

Muneera: My relative has twin babies. She tells me, 'My husband [leaves] me in the room with my two children, and he goes to sleep in the living room'. The man is not ready to endure the inconvenience or crying of the child—at least carry one child and [leave] the other with your wife. The woman is not a superwoman. Nevertheless, she wakes up early in the morning and goes to work. Men, yes, they have the strength, but...the woman bears much.

Muneera noted that the mother takes on the responsibility of caring for the child from its birth and blames the man for not helping his wife by bearing part of the responsibility when she is also working. Muneera indicated that the man should learn how to deal with the affairs of young children to help his wife, at least when she is away from the house for a limited period of time.

Muneera: My sister asked me, 'How do [you] get out of the house while [your] two-year-old stays at home?' I asked her, '[Do you] leave your child with his dad?' She said, 'He does not know how to deal with him'. I said, 'What is the problem if he learns how to deal with the child? What is the problem if he wears his nappies incorrectly?' My sister also has children whose ages are close—I saw her carrying one child and changing the other child's clothes.

According to the participants, they are constantly preoccupied with their work responsibilities, as explained in Chapter 6, including following up on their children and their school requirements after returning from an exhausting day at work, as explained in Chapter 7. In this chapter, the participants indicated that the father's role is rather limited in terms of accepting part of the burden of the responsibilities related to the children and the affairs of the house and this puts more pressure on the mother and causes her to become exhausted.

Given that the focus of this study is the Kuwaiti context, the following section considers other challenges that this group faces in this society, one of the main components of which is social

life. As the working mothers who were interviewed live in Kuwait, with its unique customs, traditions, and culture, the challenges they face related to their social lives are relevant to this study and are discussed in the subsequent sections.

8.2 Challenge Two: Social Obligations in Kuwaiti Culture

When I asked the participants about their lives after school and on weekends, their discussions on the challenges associated with teaching and childrearing were accompanied by thoughts regarding the **social obligations** that occupy a major part of their daily and weekly schedules. A few of the most important basic aspects of Kuwaiti culture are governed by social and religious values that emphasise good interrelationships among people, particularly family members:

Typical Kuwaiti social behaviour revolves around maintaining family relationships by fulfilling formalities towards extended family members. It is seen as socially unacceptable to ignore this integral part of the Kuwaiti culture characterised by large family circles with extended social networks and the numerous formalities that collectively take up a substantial amount of time. (Behbehani, 2014, pp. 34–35)

This section explores the social challenges faced by Kuwaiti mothers working as teachers. These challenges are related to dutifulness to parents, kinship ties, and the importance of fraternal relations, which are accompanied by certain expectations and are associated with images and customary expectations. Furthermore, they impose other fundamental responsibilities that cannot be neglected or that must be fulfilled. This section reveals the extent of the efforts exerted by the participating mother–teachers in fulfilling these social obligations. It begins by describing the types of social obligations that must be met and then discusses the additional difficulties stemming from these duties.

Before proceeding, I provide the reader with a short explanation of the nature of social gatherings in Kuwaiti culture, which I believe will facilitate a better understanding of the participants' responses. Kuwaiti society is traditionally characterised by segregation between men and women (Al-Kandari & Crews, 2014), even in a majority of social gatherings. The Kuwaiti family is typically large and strongly cohesive, but certain social events that women attend are not welcoming of children.

8.2.1. Types of Social Obligations

This section describes the nature of social life in Kuwait and how the habit of weekly social visits takes up considerable time and space in the participants' weekly schedules. The section also discusses frequent family gatherings and other occasional social events.

All the participants mentioned that they are visited four times per week by their mothers and fathers, their maternal and paternal relatives, and their husbands' immediate and extended family members. Thus, a given week is full of fixed social obligations in addition to seasonal and any other occasions to which they are invited. Al-Thakeb (1985) reported that 80% of the respondents in his study visited their families daily or weekly, depending on how far they lived from relatives in Kuwait. Similarly, Serour et al. (2007) stated that 82% of their sample had weekly visits with their extended families. These results indicate that the tradition of weekly family visits continues to occupy a crucial place in a Kuwaiti mother's schedule. The participants lamented that this frequency of visits puts pressure on them, allowing them little time for rest. They are constantly busy and exhausted, continually striving to find a balance between their work, children, and social obligations. **Table 13 presents the participants' weekly schedules, featuring their obligations and responsibilities**, and reflects the number of social obligations they must not neglect.

Participants stated that in Kuwait, there is strong social pressure to attend numerous visits, gatherings, and events involving their and their husbands' immediate and extended family members:

Hadeel: We have frequent visits and gatherings between close and extended family members. We have very strong relationships with our parents, siblings, grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, and aunts (from both the mother's and father's sides). There are many social gatherings. **Our weekends are often reserved for family visits, and there is an abnormal amount of social pressure.**

Muneera: Kuwait is characterised by large families and strong social cohesion among its members. The family is a blessing from God... I have four weekly visits: aunts on my father's side, aunts on my mother's side, my husband's family, and my family.

Jinan: **Social events and visits take up a lot of my time.** Some happen at different times, such as births and weddings, and some occur weekly... I have a large family... so four regular visits a week.

Performing these social duties is difficult because their abundance implies that there is a lack of time for the participants to accomplish all the tasks required of them. A few of the visits even occur weekly. The participants found that they could not fully adhere to all the social duties in Kuwaiti culture, even as they are underlain by traditions and are an essential aspect of their lives. The following section presents the reasons for the difficulties that confront the participants in their lives as mothers and teachers.

Table 13 *Participants' Weekly Obligations and Responsibilities*

Participants' weekly obligations				
Day	Hadeel	Muneera	Jinan	Other Obligations/Responsibilities
Sunday	Work and teaching her children after school	Work and teaching her children after school	Work and teaching her children after school	<p>Jinan</p> <p><i>Occasionally, certain events occur during the week, or we have some family and friends who visit, or we must attend events or weddings and respond to invitations. At other times, occasions happen suddenly, like when one of our relatives or friends has a baby reception, and they invite many people.... We are obligated to perform social duties and express our congratulations</i></p>
Monday	Work and teaching her children after school	Work and teaching her children after school	Work and teaching her children after school	
Tuesday	Work and teaching her children after school	Work and teaching her children after school	<p>Work and teaching her children after school.</p> <p><i>On Tuesdays, I meet up with only my sisters and my mother.</i></p>	
Wednesday	Work and teaching her children after school	Work and teaching her children after school	Work and teaching her children after school	
Thursday	<p>Work</p> <p><i>On Thursday, the weekend begins, so I like to have some rest.... A difficulty I face is that I cannot visit my aunts on my mom's and dad's sides every Thursday. They gather on the same day.... I try to balance my visits (an hour here and an hour there), and I only go twice a month rather than every week.</i></p>	<p>Work</p> <p><i>We visit my in-laws on Thursday, from 8:00 p.m. until 1:00 a.m.</i></p>	<p>Work</p> <p><i>Thursdays are for my aunts from my dad's side.</i></p>	

<p>Friday (Weekend)</p>	<p><i>Every Friday, I visit my family for lunch and my in-laws for dinner.</i></p>	<p><i>On the next day, I visit my family from 2:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.</i></p>	<p><i>On Fridays, I make two visits: lunch with my in-laws and dinner with my aunts from my mother's side.</i></p>	<p>Occasionally, on the weekend, the participants follow up on their children's education and do tasks related to their jobs.</p>
<p>Saturday (Weekend)</p>	<p><i>On Saturday, we occasionally go out with the children and come back early to get ready for school the next day.</i></p>	<p>Visit aunts</p>	<p><i>I spend Saturdays with my mom, dad, and siblings.</i></p>	

8.2.2. Difficulties Associated with the Social Obligations Faced by Mothers Working as Teachers

Behbehani (2014) stated that ‘Most social gatherings in Kuwait are ... associated with food consumption’ (pp. 34–35). This section elaborates on the difficulties faced by the participants in relation to their social lives in Kuwait. They explained that **their absence** from social events is likely due to the following factors: **first**, the pressures imposed on them by their numerous responsibilities as teachers; **second**, their responsibilities as mothers; and **third**, the fact that preparing for social occasions, satisfying numerous social obligations, and adhering to corresponding protocols require tremendous effort and time. They need to perform all these duties at the expense of the time that they should devote to their children and their homes. However, their **absence constitutes** a burden that exerts a psychological pressure on them, given that it motivates **family members to assign blame on them**. Blame can also result from their **failure to accomplish their religious duties towards their parents**.

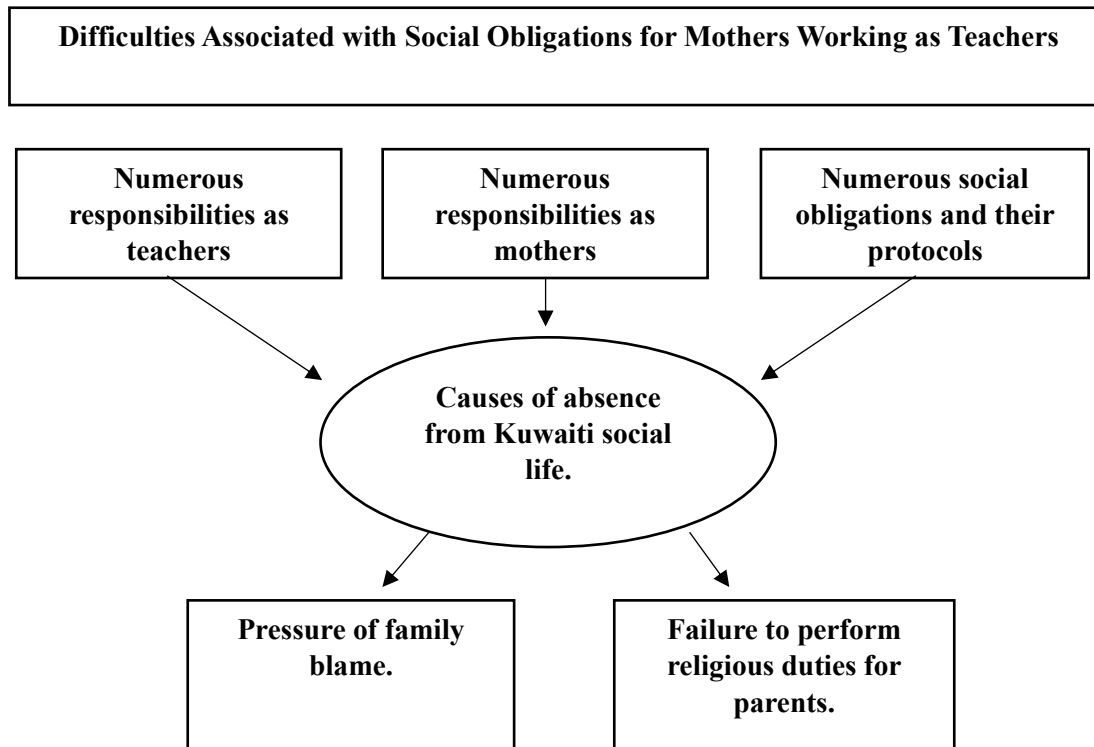


Figure 6: Explanation of the Difficulties Associated with Social Obligations and Their Effects.

Because the participants have numerous responsibilities as teachers and mothers, they find it rather challenging to perform social obligations. **Hadeel** shared that her priorities are her responsibilities towards her work, husband, children, and parents, which is why she cannot visit everyone:

Hadeel: As a teacher, I have duties in life towards my husband, children, and parents... **I cannot fulfil visiting duties for everyone** at the expense of myself and **my family**. Attending receptions and weddings **requires a lot of time, effort, and money**.

Muneera indicated that her life in the past revolved mostly around her work, home, and children, so she was unable to attend most social gatherings and had no life with friends. Now, she is attempting to balance these aspects of her life as much as possible:

Muneera: Five or six years ago, **I did not make such visits.** I did not go out with my friends. **My life was all about teaching** and preparing lessons and teaching tools. **I'm exhausted.** I do not have the state of mind for anything else. Even conversations with my husband all turn into fights.

Jinan also endeavours to juggle her work, children, and social duties by encouraging herself to complete most of her job-related tasks and follow up on her children's educational obligations. This helps her make time to perform a few of her social duties; she attends events for a few minutes and then leaves, as time is an important factor for her:

Jinan: I prefer to **prepare all of my work for the following week in one day...**because sometimes, some circumstances occur during the week, or we have some family and friends who visit.... We must attend events and respond to invitations.... We are obligated to perform our social duties and express our congratulations.... On occasion, I stay for a few minutes and then leave because I do not have enough time.

Perhaps what makes these commitments difficult for a busy woman to satisfy is that they are not simple social commitments in Kuwaiti society; instead, they entail considerable effort and preparation. Stress stems not only from the time taken to make the social visits but also from expectations from friends and family that impose additional demands.

The sentiments above reflect the difficulties of being a mother and a teacher in the Kuwaiti context. These women are busy and constantly working to fulfil the multitude of responsibilities that they have to assume as mothers and teachers. Jinan mentioned that her roles in life are not limited to teaching and motherhood and that she is a wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, and friend. First, the difficulties of her job as a teacher and her numerous work requirements have driven her to participate selectively in Kuwaiti society. Second, the education system in Kuwait has affected her children and, thus, her social life. She tends to spend a long time following up on her children's lessons after they return home from school.

Difficulty also arises from the protocols that underlie visits. The participants bemoaned that these codes of behaviour can be exhausting because of the time it takes to prepare for weekly visits or seasonal occasions. In particular, women exert effort to present themselves and their children in an elegant and elaborate manner. For example, they bring a home-cooked dish or buy food from the store or present a gift according to the type of occasion or visit. In addition, some of these events or gatherings do not welcome children. The specific difficulties associated with such events are detailed below.

Hadeel stated that events such as weddings and birth receptions require advance preparation, such as buying clothes and going to the beauty salon. Other weekly family visits entail preparing the children for these engagements, such as ensuring that their clothes are tidy and presentable and preparing or buying a dish to contribute to the social gatherings. Hadeel further disclosed that she is obligated to participate in these events, even if she is physically and psychologically exhausted and that she attends family gatherings only rarely because of preoccupations at work and her responsibilities as a mother:

Hadeel: Attending receptions and weddings **requires a lot of time, effort,** and money (from buying clothes for the occasion and going to the salon to attending events in the evening until after midnight).

Performing my duty to visit those around me is difficult and requires significant preparation. I must be physically and psychologically prepared for the visit; however, sometimes, I basically have to prepare for these events right after work, exhausted and with a headache. I may not even be able to take a short nap after work to ensure that we are ready for the visit. I prepare a dish or buy one to bring. **We cannot go empty-handed.** After preparing the clothes that I will wear, I make sure my children, even my oldest child, have made appropriate choices. **The clothes must be neat and beautiful; we are supposed to wear our best clothes and dress our children well.**

Hadeel added that there is a standard for the clothes that they wear; they must be dressed beautifully and elegantly and refrain from wearing anything simple—a common practice in

Kuwait. This is stressful for her because of the constant need to be ready for any gathering and to be sure that she has suitable attire, which appears to involve shopping regularly, in addition to preparing for the gatherings themselves. She said that when she attends visits wearing standard clothing, her family wonders if something is wrong with her.

She also shared that her **children occasionally refuse to wear clothes that she chooses for them and that conform to Kuwaiti standards. This exhausts her because it creates conflict between her and her children, eventually causing the children to refuse to participate.** When her children do not participate, she **is blamed by her family:**

Hadeel: If I visit relatives wearing my Abaya (see glossary), they ask me, ‘Are you okay?’ Then, they mock me. Let me wear what I want, even if it is a simple outfit. I’m not required to wear something according to their standards of luxury (wearing makeup and doing my hair). Sometimes, I want to visit people, but I am not in the mood to make all these preparations.

When we visit aunts, our clothes must be even more luxurious, so I have to think about what I will wear and how I will look. This is also exhausting. Sometimes, my children refuse to wear the clothes that I choose for them because their choices are inappropriate. Then, they get angry and refuse to go with me. My relatives ask me, ‘Where are your children? Why are you alone?’ A series of complaints begin, which I hate and make me regret that I went out for the visit.

Muneera compared the visits to her husband’s family to those to her parents. She considers the former somewhat formal, thereby requiring more preparation, as these visits call for a desirable and satisfactory appearance of the mother and her children and the provision of food dishes for the event. In contrast, visiting her mother and sisters is easier:

Muneera: Let us be frank about my husband’s family’s visits. It is somewhat formal, but in my family’s house, I don’t have a problem visiting them in pyjamas and with fluffy hair. For my in-laws’ visit, I have to make arrangements for myself, like my clothes and my children, my hair, and the dishes that I cook and take with me.

Other **protocols** result in difficulty because these social obligations are customarily fulfilled without the presence of children. For example, **Jinan** wonders who her children will stay with when she is out and about, performing these social duties. This indicates a lack of cooperation from her husband, which also contributes to the challenges that she encounters in performing a few of her social duties:

Jinan: Sometimes, I bring my children with me, even though it is not common for children to attend such occasions.... Where do I leave my children? I have to perform my social duties, so I take them with me, but I do not stay long. I take my children to a particular activity or take a tablet to keep them busy while visiting people so as not to disturb the hosts.... The important thing for me is that I perform the duty of visiting, even if it's for a short time.

All these difficulties (*i.e. the many responsibilities of teaching, a mother's duties, and a wife's numerous social obligations and their associated protocols*) place more pressure on the participants in cases wherein they are unable to fulfil the obligations and social duties expected of women in Kuwaiti culture. Simultaneously, these pressures discourage them from participating in obligatory events. First, as previously stated, this absence gives rise to blame from families and acquaintances. Second, the participants' failure to fulfil their religious duties towards their parents' triggers feelings of guilt, psychological pressure, and sadness. These burdens are further elaborated upon in the following paragraphs.

Further, the participants indicated that they are often busy and exhausted from their work and maternal responsibilities, which occasionally prevents them from participating in certain activities. The blame that arises from their failure to participate exerts pressure on them; it appears that their families are unaware of the demands imposed on mother-teachers and the fact that they also need time to rest. Muneera justified her absence by explaining that she occasionally needs to spend time with her friends to relieve herself of the stress that she experiences in her life. She did

not appear to regard attending to social obligations as a means to reduce pressure or as an avenue for stress relief:

Muneera: I do not always visit my in-laws. Sometimes, I go if I have been absent twice in a row...on Thursday, which is the last day of the week after returning from work. Sometimes, I need some rest.... Sometimes, I need to go out with my close friends.... I need to talk to someone who understands me to reduce stress.

Hadeel: I am trying to balance my four weekly visits so that I can be present. Sometimes, I have work that I want to complete over the weekend, and all the weekly visits prevent me from finishing it. The blame from my family if I miss visits affects my psyche and makes me feel sad.... I have broken down from having too many social duties when I feel that no one understands my circumstances.

Jinan: However, I often apologise and cannot attend visits that happen during the week because of my job and my children, and I have to check their homework. During summer vacations, I can attend family visits that happen in the middle of the week. We teachers are swamped with work, and you find us always thinking about it, even when we are at home. Our minds are busy thinking about what we will do the next day, while those in other jobs don't need to worry about the following day's work and can relax as soon as they leave their work in the afternoon.

Jinan shared that she could only fulfil these social duties during the summer holidays. This confirms the pressures that the teacher's role exerts on her—particularly the pressures exerted by the educational system and curricula. Both aspects demand her time and effort, rendering her mentally preoccupied and constantly wondering what she will do the next day at school. She compared teaching to other jobs in which employees are not compelled to think about work at home. This highlights the nature of teaching, with teachers often having to prepare for or contemplate their lessons at home.

Further, whether participants can regularly participate in family visits appears to be a matter of concern, as these visits constitute the basis of life in Kuwaiti society. Failure in this respect is also stressful because of the blame that ensues:

Muneera: My husband is upset that I do not always visit his family. Sometimes, I go. If I miss two visits, I attend the third one with a smile and a dish. I welcome and greet them. I am absent from these gatherings not because of hatred or because I do not want [to see them], but because I am very busy, especially on Thursday, which is the end of week.

Hadeel: If I do not visit my relatives enough, my mother gets angry with me. When I miss such events, my family blames me, especially my in-laws, who say, ‘Why don’t you come to our events’? I visit them when time permits; on other occasions, I have to apologise, and my sister goes with my mother instead of me. I can barely visit my aunts or my mother’s cousin. Unfortunately, my family does not understand or acknowledge my situation.

First, regarding the matter of blame, Hadeel confirmed Muneera’s assertions that such behaviour is induced by their inability to attend family events, particularly those involving her husband’s family and other occasions. Hadeel also becomes **sad and stressed because of this.** She highlighted that **there is no understanding from family members regarding her preoccupations and lack of time.** Occasionally, she needs to dedicate more time to work on weekends.

Second, it is known that honouring parents and caring for them have a religious basis in Kuwaiti culture (Al-Kandari & Crews, 2014; Marwan, 2021). As asserted by Hadeel, such family visits have religious considerations. The participants are keen to satisfy these duties, and failure to do so makes them feel guilty. Jinan expressed grief over this and also expressed her desire to cry over the impact of her work as a teacher on her failure to perform her responsibilities towards her parents:

Hadeel: We consider these visits to be ties of kinship from a religious point of view, for which we are rewarded by God.... I feel that I am falling short in my

responsibilities towards my parents because of my preoccupation with my job and my kids. My visits are limited and short.... Sometimes, I forget to ask about how they are doing because of my many responsibilities.

Jinan: Following my summer vacation, when I start working, **I do not see my parents as much as I would like to. I send them messages apologising** for failing to fulfil my duty towards them... **I feel like I want to cry now.** I want to find time to see my mom and dad during the week. I can only visit them at lunch on weekends, and I cannot stay until the evening.

Muneera: My mother quarrels with me. She says, ‘You are not asking about me’ because I do not visit her. I get bored with this life of routine [her work].

As the participants explained, the difficulties that they face in performing social duties, which in the Kuwaiti context require significant effort and time, stem from a lack of time and constant fatigue due to their dual obligations as teachers and mothers. The next section elucidates one of the cultural concepts that contributes to stress in the lives of the participants and is related to the roles of men and women and social life in Kuwait. Specifically, the next section discusses the notion of the perfect woman.

8.3 Challenge Three: The Concept of the Perfect Woman (*Sanaa*)

This chapter revolves around the larger macro system represented by the Kuwaiti culture and its impact on participants. In Kuwait, mothers shoulder numerous responsibilities due, partially, to the evaluative social concept of the ideal woman (*Sanaa*), which demands that women perform numerous roles for their husbands, children, and other family members in a distinct and complete manner. Women may be motivated to assume more roles than men due to their desire to attain the ideal image of *Sanaa* in the eyes of others and their positive evaluation.

The participants indicated that a woman’s fundamental role is based on caring for children, the home, and related affairs. The *Sanaa* woman performs these roles, her social roles, and her duties to the fullest. This social concept has been passed down for generations. Alsuwailan (2006,

p. 6) indicated that, in the past, the first priority for mothers was to prepare ‘their daughters **to be good wives and mothers** by **encouraging** them to perform **household tasks**’. The participants of this study appeared to struggle with conflicts between simultaneously fulfilling difficult responsibilities as a teacher and mother and following the cultural expectations of the ‘good woman’ inherent in the concept of *Sanaa*.

A mother’s role is significant but difficult to perform perfectly. Therefore, the participants considered it important to ask their husbands to shoulder part of their responsibilities. However, this request implied abandoning the idealism required by Kuwaiti society because it caused challenges and difficulties in women’s lives and did not allow the moderation they required to fulfil their roles as mothers and teachers.

This section is divided into two subthemes. The first subtheme concerns the social expectations of the *Sanaa* woman. The results of the data analysis were used to determine the (*Sanaa*) woman’s responsibilities and characteristics. For the second subtheme, quotations were extracted from participants regarding their difficulties with the concept of the *Sanaa* woman. These quotations were also used to define the *Sanaa* woman and her responsibilities as part of **the first subtheme**.

8.3.1 Social Expectations of the Sanaa Woman

This section defines the social expectations of the *Sanaa* woman and then describes this woman. ‘The term *social expectations* refer[s] to the general standards of behaviour that individuals who live within a society are expected to uphold [... and] specific social behaviours [that] differ from one culture to the next’ (What is the meaning of the term social expectations, 2020).

The term *Sanaa* is commonly used in the cultures of Kuwait and other Arabic Gulf countries. *Sanaa* refers to a set of laws and rules that govern behaviours and manners in

interactions with guests and family members. It may be considered etiquette and is inherited from one's ancestors and passed on to one's children (Ruslan, 2022). The only term I found in the literature is from Algahfiry (2022), who indicated that the *Sanaa* word is a description of etiquette that grandmothers impart to girls and women, expresses the ability to fulfil numerous responsibilities and possess the high-level skills to employ this ability in a timely manner (Algahfiry, 2022). Table 14 presents interviewees' descriptions of the *Sanaa* woman's characteristics and responsibilities in Kuwaiti culture, particularly regarding her role as a mother and her social obligations towards her immediate and extended family, including her in-laws.

Participants described the *Sanaa* woman as a perfectionist who embodies the concept of being a good woman, wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, etc. They described certain acts that women should perform to be 'good women', as expected by their culture and as related to their position in the family. For example, a woman who is a good wife and mother must know how to manage household affairs, including cleaning, tidying, cooking, doing the laundry, serving her husband, and caring about his affairs. She must also be nice to her husband's family, visit them and bring them food, attend family occasions, and give them gifts occasionally. In addition, she must raise her children and care for them, be responsible for their cleanliness and clothes and ensure that they look elegant, and fulfil their school requirements. She must perfectly perform all her roles and fulfil her social obligations to her immediate and extended family and in-laws.

According to the study's participants, in Kuwait, a woman's *Sanaa* reputation—who she is and what she does—impacts her attempts to seek the label of 'the *Sanaa* woman'. She might assume numerous roles because society views women according to a specific notion and image with its own criteria and roles that she, and not a man, must uphold. The participants also discussed how the *Sanaa* concept creates challenges in their lives for their roles as mothers, wives, and

immediate and extended family members. According to the subjects, *Sanaa* women assume numerous roles and perform them to the fullest, even if they are exhausted.

This section explores the societal expectations of a *Sanaa* woman and reveals that attempting to attain that label (and reputation) exhausts women. It was important to give this term space in this research, as the participants mentioned *Sanaa* woman in several parts of their interviews. Thus, it appears to play a major role in their lives and motivates their actions.

A cursory review of Table (14) may lead the reader to believe that the participants objected to basic matters related to the values of Muslim societies, such as maintaining kinship ties, visiting family, obeying one's husband, and caring for one's children (Almunajid,1979), but this is not the case. The subjects objected to the exaggerated expectations of the role of the *Sanaa* woman. A few of the *Sanaa* responsibilities and characteristics overlapped with interviewees' basic, inherent responsibilities. The inheritance of the *Sanaa* concept and its traditional application do not consider changes that have occurred over time, such as women entering the workforce and children attending school.

A woman who is a mother and a teacher has a full daily schedule that poses a concern regarding these roles. Interviewees stated that their parents blamed them if they failed to fulfil a few of the *Sanaa* woman's duties and responsibilities. Hence, it is evident that busy women are placed under immense stress in Kuwaiti society, including the individuals in this study.

Table 14 : *The Sanaa Women’s Responsibilities and Characteristics*

<i>Sanaa</i> women’s responsibilities and characteristics		
Mothers must raise their children well and oversee their education. She (not the father) will be blamed if her children misbehave.	Women must perfectly perform their roles as mothers, wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, etc.	Mothers must care for their children and take special care of all aspects of caring for infants, which are not the husband’s responsibility.
Wives must serve their husbands, care about their affairs, and comfort them in an exaggerated manner by assuming more child- and household-related roles than husbands.	All the responsibilities that a woman shoulders make her a <i>Sanaa</i> woman because she is the one who makes sacrifices for her family’s comfort.	The wife manages household affairs, including cleaning and laundry, and her house must always be tidy and fragrant.
She accepts all invitations to attend weekly and occasional gatherings with her immediate and extended family, friends, and in-laws.	She brings dishes to every visit and gathering or gifts for specific events.	She visits her relatives in her best outfit, and her children’s clothes are tidy and distinctive.

8.3.2 Difficulties Created by the Notion of the Sanaa Woman

Efforts to meet the expectations of the concept of the *Sanaa* woman create unbearable difficulties, responsibilities, and social pressure on Kuwaiti women. Women who cannot fulfil their roles are blamed, judged, and not excused because society reveres the *Sanaa* image. This affects women psychologically and creates stressors regarding the social expectations of women

and the image of what they should be. For busy mothers, such as the participants, the ideal implementation of a gruelling schedule of weekly commitments constitutes a burden.

One of the manifestations of being a *Sanaa* woman is performing social visits with one's husband's family, such as accompanying one's mother-in-law to social gatherings. Hadeel viewed the concept of the *Sanaa* woman as positive because it corroborated the main values of her religious beliefs. For example, it emphasises the importance of kinship when one accepts invitations to visit family members. However, Hadeel argued that the expectations associated with the *Sanaa* woman extend beyond visits to and invitations from close family. Indeed, the *Sanaa* woman is expected to visit her husband's close family members and those who are far away and attend their events. However, the performance of such visits must be within the limits of reason and human capabilities. In the past, Hadeel was able to make a few visits. However, this became more difficult when she had more children and her responsibilities increased. Hadeel described the situation in the following manner:

Hadeel: The notion of *Sanaa* is sometimes realistic; we must not neglect our basic values. For example, we are religiously obligated to perform kinship. However, we are not obligated to do more than that, especially when it is not the first degree of kinship. His parents, then his sisters and brothers, are the closest. You are not religiously sinning if you do not visit your husband's aunts. You cannot attend all family events. In the past, when I had only two children, I used to accept invitations and attend any gatherings of my in-laws with my mother-in-law, but now I cannot.

Participants also discussed the difficulties related to *Sana*, why they objected to this concept and associated traditions, and the pressure placed on them to take on more responsibilities. They also described the *Sanaa* woman and her obligations, which are listed in [Table 14](#).

First, participants described that the inherited nature of this concept contradicts changes that have taken place over time, such as the entry of women into the workforce.

Hadeel: The expectations of Sanaa have exhausted us. Our mothers raised us in an unhealthy way because their mothers brought them up this way. When a daughter gets married, she must know how to cook and perform all social duties. She must not disappoint her husband or his family by not visiting the in-laws' side of the family, **even if she is overwhelmed. She has her job and other responsibilities.** If any of her relatives or acquaintances give birth, she must congratulate them in person with a gift. She must visit her relatives in her best outfit; her children's clothes must be tidy and distinctive. If she brings food with her, they will say 'Sanaa' if she brings more than one dish; she did not come empty-handed.

Muneera: Mostly, as a mother, I have more roles in the home and with regard to my children than my husband. I'm **working also...** The reason for this is...our upbringing was wrong in teaching us the responsibilities of men and women, [and] our family always instructed that women should do more. ...This word makes us tired and exhausts us.

Second, participants' families do not take into consideration their responsibilities with their children and the stressful nature of their work. According to Hadeel, these demands and expectations are exhausting and require a great deal of time and effort. She also indicated the importance of families understanding and appreciating their circumstances. In addition, she stated that fulfilling the concept of *Sanaa* is exhausting and does not consider human circumstances, one's psychological state, or one's priorities. Hadeel's thoughts in this regard are quoted below:

This is all too much. Our families must excuse us and understand our circumstances. If I do not perform my social duties, they blame me...People have to accept me as I am—a human being. I make mistakes and undergo stress, bad moods, **and suffering, whether from work or from my children or husband's responsibilities...**I have been affected by the judgement of others, and this has caused me psychological stress. Sometimes, the accumulated pressure has made me angry, stressed, and tense. I have gone to my room, closed the door, and cried. People have to understand that I cannot always be fresh, happy, or in a good mood to attend gatherings. This is harmful. **The word Sanaa has brought us to a stage we must end.**

Third, the participants noted that social responsibilities and obligations were performed according to idealistic, disproportionate expectations that were exhausting. **Hadeel** described the concept of *Sanaa* as performing one's roles well. She said that certain concepts—such as cordial

dealings with family, kinship ties, generosity, and hospitality—are Islamic morals but noted that Islam commands only what is possible. However, in Kuwaiti society, the applied image of the *Sanaa* concept is exaggerated and exhausting. If she cannot reach that standard, she feels psychological pressure due to the blame directed at her negligence. She described the situation in the following manner:

Hadeel: In Kuwait, women strive **for perfection**. Social evaluation is very strong and negatively influential. The basic *Sanaa* standard is perfection....A *Sanaa* mother must [ensure that] her house is always tidy and fragrant,... that she is a master cook ...and that she buys dishes or makes them herself to bring to any visit or gathering. All of this requires time, budgeting, and advance preparation.... We were brought up to be generous, be hospitable, speak nicely and have a **good appearance**. Our religion commanded us to do such things without exceed[ing] our capacity.

Through the influence of Kuwaiti culture, **women became keen on performing** their roles perfectly. The participants explained that the *Sanaa* woman's desire for perfection prevents her from giving her husband the latitude to shoulder responsibilities with her. Therefore, he is not used to handling too many responsibilities related to his children. Her desire for perfection is represented, for example, in ensuring that her children always appear tidy and clean. In addition, she may lack the confidence to assign roles and tasks to her husband related to their children or the house because he will not perform them as accurately and completely as she does. The subjects shared their experiences in the following manner:

Muneera: My sister tells me, 'I am afraid that if I go out and leave my children with their father, they may go out with him in clothes that are not beautiful and are untidy'. I asked, 'What is the problem if the child appears untidy?' We, the women, always **want everything perfect**. The child is always clean and must not appear dirty. **We always make our children's appearances perfect and clean.**

Jinan: [In the] last two years, my husband and I have divided [our] roles. Previously, I used to do everything from shopping for groceries and household goods to buying school stationery and clothes for my children. **Because I was a perfectionist**, I was so accurate, and I wanted everything to be perfect.... Now... I tell myself not to be too perfect. The distribution of roles between us and [our]

cooperation has helped me a lot by relieving me of some of the burdens.... I discovered...my husband was not helping me before, not because he did not want to, but because I was not asking him to help me.

Hadeel: We may not like to assign men such tasks because they inevitably spoil matters and will not do them properly. We do not accept just anything and want everything to be done properly.

Hadeel and Muneera blamed their upbringing for exaggerating the considerations they extended to their husbands and providing them with comfort by having wives bear more responsibilities than husbands:

Hadeel: Our grandmothers and mothers taught us to consider our husband in an **exaggerated manner** at the expense of our own comfort['s], which feels stressful. I notice it in myself ...and [in] the women around me—the mother is the foundation of the house. It is our social upbringing.

Muneera: We have the **Sanaa** word, which causes us to satisfy others before everything, serve the husband, and comfort him until we obtain [the] Sanaa title.

Fourth, the *Sanaa* concept pressurises the mother by limiting the care and upbringing of children and home affairs to women. Interviewees expressed the need for their husbands to share their responsibilities because they themselves are working women. These individuals described the *Sanaa* woman as raising her children well because she is primarily responsible for them. Moreover, society blames the mother more than the father for issues related to childrearing due to society's expectations of the responsibilities of women and men. The participants described the situation in the following manner:

Hadeel: All the responsibilities women shoulder makes them Sanaa, the one who makes sacrifices.... We live in a judgemental society that evaluates us for everything.... Often, the mother is blamed, not the father, for her children's behaviour, because she is the one who often spends the most time with them.

Jinan: In our Kuwaiti society, [the] perspective on the mother is that she is to blame in the first place if her children are not raised well. Even if her son grows up and becomes a man and makes any mistakes, people will say his mother did not raise him well, and the father, of course, is not blamed at all.

Muneera objected to the fact that husbands do not share childrearing responsibilities with their wives. She wondered why it is considered shameful for a man to assume such responsibilities, particularly for infants, in a question she directed to society with mock astonishment.

What is the problem if the man endures the responsibility with me in caring for the child? Yes, God has singled out women for pregnancy and childbirth [and] breastfeeding, so you always find the child with us, but we are here as mothers who seem to take extra enthusiasm **in showing we are Sanaa** and showing that we know how to take care of the child and take care of his affairs.... But when you have many children,... **you cannot be this supermom**.... This is difficult.

When speaking about their husbands' involvement, women used the word 'now', which suggests that such cooperation did not exist previously. Participants did not ask their husbands to help with their children because of society's view of the *Sanaa* woman. Mothers seek perfection because they want to supervise everything that concerns their children and because they want everything to be perfect, as being perfect is a result of aiming to receive the title of *Sanaa*. However, over time, the participants discovered the mistake of not involving their husbands in childrearing responsibilities. The women described the situation in the following manner:

Jinan: The woman, herself, in Kuwait is wrong to rightfully bear the responsibilities of her children alone....However, I've recently discovered that I was wrong about that because that put a lot of pressure on me....My children have grown up. I realised that was a big mistake because I could no longer offer my children what I used to when they were younger. This is why I have now started asking my husband to take on some of the responsibilities of the children, and he doesn't mind... As a teacher and a mother, it is important to involve the father in the upbringing of the children and not bear all the responsibilities of the home and the children alone....

Hadeel: I have now entrusted him with buying school supplies and stationery for our children. I wrote a list for him. Sometimes, I deliberately occupy myself in some work so that he bears the responsibility of taking the children with him to buy things for school, whether clothes or stationery. I do this so he knows what his children prefer and there are conversations between them.

The participants also discussed notions of shame in Kuwaiti society with regard to a man who performs **basic** roles related to taking care of household affairs or cooking. The woman is expected to handle such affairs, not the man. Hadeel shared the following thoughts on the matter:

Hadeel: One of my responsibilities as a wife is to take care of kitchen affairs. Since the beginning of my marriage, I have faced the problem of cooking. Because my husband studied abroad, he knew how to cook. I was ashamed of myself because he knew how, and I, the woman, did not.

The participants described the social expectations attached to women's roles with which they were raised as overwhelming. People who have these stressful, difficult expectations do not consider that being a mother and an employee with a demanding profession requires much effort and time or that teachers have an enormous number of responsibilities. Due to the *Sanaa* expectation that a woman be perfect and comforting to her husband, the participants undertook numerous responsibilities regarding their children without requesting help from their husbands. The *Sanaa* expectation also meant that women were expected to perform social visits and complex visit protocols.

Summary

This section summarises the third finding of the third theme: the challenges and influences of being a mother and a teacher in the Kuwaiti context (The Macrosystem). The teacher– mother who belongs to the Kuwaiti context encounters three challenges that are a source of concern, as displayed in Table 15, and their effect on her life as a mother and a teacher, as presented in Table 16.

Table 15 *Challenges of Being a Mother and Teacher in the Kuwaiti Context*

<p>Challenges imposed by the roles of women and men in Kuwaiti culture</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fathers play a minor and limited role in the family, while mothers play more roles for the children and the house, as the mother is the basis of the home. She is a superwoman. She takes care of domestic and childcare affairs, including children’s food, needs, buying and preparing lunchboxes for school, teaching her children, and transporting them to school and elsewhere. 2. Taking care of all infants’ affairs is the responsibility of women, while men play no role here. 3. Children spend most of their time with their mother, not their father. The mother takes her children wherever she goes, even if there is no need for the presence of children in those places, such as women’s salons, visiting sick family members, hospitals, or gatherings that do not accept the presence of children. 4. In Kuwaiti culture, the woman is responsible for the house and the kitchen and it is considered shameful for men to undertake these responsibilities.
<p>Challenges imposed by social life and its obligations in Kuwaiti culture.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The mother has responsibilities that she cannot ignore in the Kuwaiti culture, including her social responsibilities and duties towards her extended family and her husband’s family. These obligations are represented in attending weekly and seasonal social gatherings.

	<p>2. The social obligations in Kuwait are numerous and repetitive on a weekly basis. The mother, who is also a teacher, cannot continue attending to these numerous obligations, whether weekly or seasonal, with members of the extended family because she is enormously occupied with her work, her children, and their studies. She has no time and is very exhausted by these responsibilities.</p> <p>3. Certain family obligations pressurise teachers–mothers. Attending such gatherings mandates specific preparations and protocols that require time, effort, and work.</p> <p>4. The mother is criticised and blamed if she does not fulfil her social obligations. Her inability to attend to most social obligations due to a lack of time, which is already distributed between her work and her children, constitutes psychological pressure on her.</p> <p>5. Working in the teaching profession deprives the teacher–mother from social life as it exists in the Kuwaiti context.</p> <p>6. The teacher–mother occasionally pressurises herself by accomplishing a great deal of work related to her profession or children and following up on their school obligations to strike a balance and attend to these social obligations.</p> <p>7. The failure of teacher–mothers to fulfil the duty of visiting parents due to the pressures of work and the responsibilities of children makes them feel guilty because these duties have religious considerations.</p>
<p>Challenges imposed by the social expectations of women (the concept</p>	<p>1. The societal evaluation that describes women as Sanaa constitutes one of the reasons for the numerous responsibilities the mother bears instead of the father.</p> <p>2. The teacher–mother’s affiliation with the Kuwaiti context and its culture-imposed challenges and pressures on her as the ideal woman implies that she</p>

<p>of the ideal woman in Kuwaiti society)</p>	<p>must perform her roles as a mother, wife, and family member in an ideal manner, as expected, and in accordance with several criteria.</p> <p>Towards the husband</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To perform her role for her husband in an ideal manner through the ideal management of her house's affairs and by performing her social roles for her husband's family, taking care of him and serving him in an exaggerated manner, and providing comfort for him at the expense of her own. In order to be the ideal woman in the eyes of society, the woman takes responsibility for the house's affairs, children, and their studies and roles beyond her capacity without asking the help of her husband. <p>Towards children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taking care of children's affairs, teaching them, and following up on their education. - Bringing up her children properly. She, not her husband, is blamed if their children misbehave. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ideal woman takes care of all the needs of her infant children, not her husband. <p>Towards the house and its responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing the affairs of her house well and permanently taking care of the 'housekeeping'. - Being a good cook. - The challenges of the concept of shame. The ideal woman should not let her husband perform tasks that society assumes to be women's responsibility, such as cooking and domestic affairs. <p>Towards social obligations</p>
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	<p>- Attending the weekly family gatherings of her family and her husband's family, having an elegant appearance, and preparing or buying dishes to take along in social gatherings.</p> <p>- Accepting invitations to family occasions for her family members and her husband's extended family, even if it is stressful.</p> <p>3. Mothers were affected by the culture of perfection in society, which made them assume numerous responsibilities instead of the father. Mothers did not request help from their husbands, as mothers wanted to fully perform and demonstrate roles perfectly, which constitutes more of a burden for mothers.</p> <p>4. The difficulty of the responsibility of motherhood and teaching created a challenge. It is difficult for the teacher–mother to meet the expectations of Kuwaiti society: they must perform their basic social roles in Kuwaiti society perfectly to be called the Sanaa woman. Conversely, those social expectations posed a challenge to teacher–mothers because achieving the concept of the Sanaa woman is exhausting.</p> <p>5. The failure of the teacher–mother to perform her social roles in Kuwaiti society due to the lack of time and the several burdens related to being a mother and a teacher created challenge, conflict, and grief when a woman was not able to fulfil a few of the social expectations of the (Sanaa) woman. Furthermore, she suffered distress and sadness due to the blame of the society that does not understand her work circumstances and obligations as well as her responsibilities as a mother.</p>
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Table 16 summarises the effect of the challenges associated with the teachers' Kuwaiti context.

Table 16 *Effect of the Challenges Associated with the Teachers' Kuwaiti Context*

Effect of the challenges associated	1. The traditional picture of the roles of men and women in Kuwait culture added a substantial number of responsibilities to mothers and made them the foundation of the household. Consequently, it is difficult for women to
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<p>with the teachers’ Kuwaiti context</p>	<p>assume all the roles expected from them, particularly when they have more than one child, apart from the several responsibilities of the teacher–mother that require great effort and time. It is impossible to perform these responsibilities in an optimal manner.</p> <p>2. The social roles: The teacher–mother cannot always attend gatherings and participate in social life due to the exhaustion and fatigue caused by work and following up on the children’s education and other affairs. She is exposed to psychological pressure and experiences sadness when she is blamed for her failure to perform social duties for her and her husband’s family. The inability of society to understand the pressures and exhaustion she is experiencing at work and at home depresses her.</p> <p>3. The concept of the ideal woman exacerbates the pressures and burdens on women. This leads them to play many roles in an ideal manner to be the perfect woman, as expected by society. Moreover, idealism also has an impact, as she seeks to please other family members at the expense of herself and her own comfort.</p>
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Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion

In this final chapter of the thesis, I recall the research aim and the research question, followed by a discussion of the findings related to the three themes initially presented in the three previous analysis chapters. Then, I outline the contributions of this thesis and explain the limiting difficulties encountered during this research to help other researchers avoid them in the future. Finally, recommendations for future research are presented to form a good starting point and potentially contribute to adding to and expanding knowledge to help mothers and teachers.

9.1 Thesis Aim

The aim of my research is to provide a better understanding of Kuwaiti mother–teachers’ challenges by defining their experiences, roles, and the difficulties they encounter in their lives as both mothers and teachers in order to identify the different factors affecting the lives of this group of mothers in Kuwait.

This research is derived from my interest in the field of parenting, particularly parental influence on children, focused on theories such as Baumrind’s (1967, 1971, 1991) parenting style theory and Ainsworth and Bowlby’s (1991) attachment theory. Parents and primary caregivers significantly influence the children in their charge, whether positively or negatively. However, in searching the literature related to research on parenting and child development, I have observed a global emphasis on a single factor affecting children, namely parents, specifically mothers. Parents, especially mothers, are solely blamed when children misbehave. This perspective omits other factors that influence children’s lives, whether directly or indirectly. Hardly any research concentrates on parents and children in the natural contexts of their lives and considers these contexts’ effects; most studies resort to conducting artificial laboratory experiments (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

My choice of the framework in this research is Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) ecological model of human development (systems theory), which promotes considering the contexts in which the developing children live and their interactions within these systems (e.g., taking into account those who live with the children). This theory promotes research on the direct and indirect environmental factors affecting children and the interactions occurring in those settings, such as **the mother's workplace**, which has a direct impact on the mother and an indirect effect on the child.

I argue that it is important to consider the context in which both the mother and the child live. Basing this research on Bronfenbrenner's theory (the ecological model of human development systems) has aided in identifying the factors affecting the lives of mothers – putting pressure on them while they perform their roles as mothers and teachers in the contexts in which they live – and has facilitated a deeper understanding of these challenges. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on the mothers' workplaces. The workplace is a factor influencing the lives of these women, whose workplace challenges are revealed through the accounts of the participants in this research. My thesis concentrates on mothers working in the teaching profession, one of the most difficult and arduous professions in Kuwait, as discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Using Bronfenbrenner's theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) has helped me focus my search lens on a wide range of systems – the exosystem (the mother's workplace and the Kuwaiti educational system and curricula), the microsystem (the child and the mother), and the macrosystem (the Kuwaiti context and culture) – to identify the challenges that mothers face when serving the dual role of mother and teacher in the Kuwaiti context.

Thus, my research is guided by the following broad ideas: Mothers are not the only factors affecting their children's lives. It is crucial to understand the influence of the environmental

contexts in which children and their caregivers live. In the following sections, I review the research question that has guided this thesis and discuss the results emerging from this study.

9.1.1 Research Question

What challenges and factors affect Kuwaiti women as they perform their roles as mothers and teachers in Kuwait?

In this section, I discuss the three main results of my thematic analysis of the research data. The first result relates to the challenges associated with the teaching profession and its influence (exosystem). The second result pertains to the challenges that influence mothers and children in the Kuwaiti educational system and curricula (exosystem and microsystem). The third result is associated with the challenges influencing women's lives as teachers and mothers in Kuwait (macrosystem).

The findings focus on three ecological factors that pose challenges to the lives of mothers who teach in Kuwait: professional (exosystem), educational (exosystem and microsystem), and motherhood challenges (macrosystem).

9.2 Professional Challenges (Exosystem)

One of the most prominent results of this research is the discovery of three challenges related to teaching in Kuwait: first, challenges linked to workloads and the lack of time; second, challenges associated with education officials' roles in increasing teachers' workloads; and third, challenges connected to the Kuwaiti educational system and curricula. Based on the data provided by the participants, no significant challenges are identified as related to income, poor work environments, problems among colleagues, learners' behaviours, or problems with learners' parents (Bahtilla [2017] and Bolin [2007] have indicated that these challenges may be encountered by teachers).

Al-Saeed et al. (2019) report that teachers in Kuwait are satisfied with their incomes. Furthermore, my study's participants state that teachers' high salaries or salary increases will not

solve the problem of the workload in the teaching profession and will not prevent teachers from leaving the profession due to stress. I have discovered the mothers' intention of quitting the teaching profession because they cannot balance the stress associated with being a teacher and their responsibilities as mothers and wives and their other social responsibilities in the Kuwaiti culture. This finding indicates that balancing these responsibilities related to family and work is an important issue for employed mothers and that working in the teaching profession is not conducive to this balance for mothers.

9.2.1 Teachers' Workloads and Lack of Time

In this research, one of the most challenging problems involves the teachers' workloads and lack of time that their main role (teaching) and the accompanying administrative work impose on them, which is a globally reported issue. Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) indicate that the most prominent difficulties in the teaching profession in Kuwait are related to the teachers' heavy workloads and extensive amount of time spent during and outside their work hours. Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) classify this profession as one of the most arduous.

Likewise, the workloads of teachers in Britain have been described as crazy and unbearable; these teachers cannot find time to rest or engage in hobbies (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). A similar situation is identified in this study since teachers find themselves in a continuous state of working. An Australian study reports significant increases in the number of work hours spent by teachers, in their workloads and in the complexity of their jobs, and in administrative work between 2013 and 2017 (Stacey et al., 2023).

In my research, the challenges of basic teaching work emerging from the participants' statements are threefold. First, teachers provide a large number of lessons, ranging from 15 to 24 per week. This is in addition to teaching several different classes, comprising students of varying

ages and numbers (75–120 students), as well as the associated difficulties of teaching such large classes. Teachers must also follow up on everything related to students' academic affairs, from checking their homework to correcting their books and notebooks. Second, teachers give additional lessons to students with weak academic performance and teach extra lessons for classes whose regular teachers are absent.

Third, the participants consider it exhausting for them to be expected to perform administrative tasks in addition to the burdens of their basic teaching work. They believe that some tasks assigned to teachers are administrative work, which is not supposed to be included among their tasks. These functions include shift work (whether in the morning, during the students' rest time, or at the end of the school day), as well as taking turns in selling food to the students at their rest time.

The participants indicate that the administrative work, including classroom supervision tasks, is time consuming. The role of a supervisor is considered an additional responsibility, and the participants believe that teachers already have a significant workload in terms of meeting the teaching requirements. Any extra tasks require teachers to exert more mental and physical efforts that are beyond their expertise and add to their burden. The difficulty lies in the many tasks of the classroom supervisor, who is responsible for distributing grade sheets for students to all of their teachers so that the latter can record the students' grades. Then, the classroom supervisor collects and revises these documents to making revisions where necessary, and finally, distributes academic certificates to the students. Another function entails following up on all the affairs of the classroom for which the teacher is responsible, including the state of the furniture and classroom supplies; repairs, such as lighting, electricity, and other maintenance; and the cleanliness of the classroom, including washing the curtains. Whoever is entrusted with these tasks and refuses to complete them is subject to accountability. Alorayer (2021) argues that administrative

responsibilities and any work that is not directly related to teaching are among the most significant factors that lead female teachers in Kuwait to leave the profession.

Based on my study, the mother–teachers face several notable challenges, the most prominent being heavy workloads and limited time availability. The hurdles they encounter significantly influence their lives and prompt them to consider quitting the profession due to their inability to effectively manage the demands of work alongside other responsibilities. This finding is consistent with Alorayer’s (2021) report that the substantial number of teaching hours is a key factor that drives female teachers in Kuwait to leave the teaching profession.

9.2.2 The Role of Officials and Evaluations in Creating Pressure on Teachers

One of the most prominently reported challenges creating pressure on teachers is related to the role of officials in increasing workloads and applying psychological pressure to teachers, as well as officials who misuse teacher evaluations. Al-Saeed et al. (2019) confirm that teachers are dissatisfied with the restrictions exercised by officials regarding their evaluations of teachers. Alajmy (2013) asserts that evaluation is considered one of the most significant challenges faced by teachers and that it makes their profession difficult. Bahtilla (2017) also indicates that the authoritarian leadership styles of principals create a dilemma for teachers and contribute to teacher dissatisfaction, which contribute to high rates of teacher attrition.

In the results of this research, the main focus is on the role of officials, specifically in creating burdens for teachers through their unrealistic expectations of teachers. The jobs that officials assign to teachers are frequently not part of the latter’s job description, yet teachers are obliged to perform them. The alternative is to risk poor evaluations, as well as be considered uncooperative.

Furthermore, officials request teachers to perform a large number of extracurricular school activities, which the participants reported as being very stressful. For example, officials ask teachers to attend events, such as learner welcome events, morning assemblies, break time

programmes, and engage in professional development activities (lectures, workshops, and typical lessons), in addition to participating in competitions inside or outside the school and in comfortable exams. Teachers are also expected to perform at these events with grandeur and showmanship. These extra tasks are often linked to teacher evaluations under cooperation clauses. If teachers refuse to perform or do not engage in many of these activities, they receive poor evaluations and risk being considered uncooperative and low-achieving teachers.

Interestingly, the teachers commonly report the challenges they have faced with school officials, including school principals, principals' assistants, department heads, and mentors (school inspector). The participants have filed complaints against these officials in several situations and about the officials' use of their authority, as well as the teachers' annual performance evaluations as influential tools to pressure them into performing additional work that they consider outside the scope of their duties. Teachers who express objections have been subjected to mistreatment by school officials and have received poor evaluations. One element of the teachers' performance evaluation criteria is cooperation, which school officials use as a tool to assign additional work to teachers. When teachers refuse to do the tasks that they believe are beyond their main teaching functions, school officials label them as uncooperative in evaluations. Thus, teachers prefer to silently accept the work assigned to them, even if it is not directly related to their basic tasks, so that they are not deprived of distinguished performance evaluations. These findings confirm those reported by Al-Madhkoor and Al-Ameera (2015), highlighting the necessity of modifying the elements of teacher evaluation standards in Kuwait, particularly those pertaining to collaboration. This item is characterised by its ambiguity, which often leads to misunderstandings.

School officials are expected to play an active role in alleviating the pressures and workloads to which teachers are subjected. Teachers report transferring from one school to another because of the school officials' mismanagement and pressure. These moves show their attempts to find

understanding officials who will not pressure teachers and will give fair evaluations, allowing teachers to return home comfortably, without feeling psychological pressure. This issue confirms officials' active role in either reducing teachers' work or increasing its complexity and burden. According to Bahtilla (2017), administrators wield a significant influence in determining whether or not teachers will remain in their positions, move to another school, or change jobs.

The participants further draw attention to the officials' genders as affecting work flexibility and determining the presence or absence of work pressure. The reported pressure on two teachers is compared with the pressure on their husbands, who are also teachers. The participants state that their husbands do not bear the same challenges and pressures at work as theirs. From their experiences, the participants find that the professional challenges created by female officials are often more rigorous regarding work. When female officials ask teachers to do some work, they focus on minute details. These include decorating and embellishment in presenting work or activities, the performance of which requires significant time and effort and whose outcome appears unimportant, deviating from the primary goal of the teaching profession. The case is not the same for male teachers. The genders of administration officials affect the presence or absence of various pressures on teachers. This point highlights the disparity between schools for men and for women in terms of the level of pressure on teachers. Women's administrations are demanding, stressful, and more interested in details and the external appearance of activities. Female department heads misuse their power to add more work. The distinction between male and female management is that male officials concentrate on the actual teaching, while female officials prefer to focus more on decorations and activities other than education. Female teachers report lower job satisfaction compared to their male colleagues. Furthermore, emotional burnout is more common among female teachers in Kuwait due to professional demands (Al-Saeed, 2018), which might imply that male teachers endure less work-related stress than their female peers. These results align

with Al-Mashaan's (2001) research on differences in professional obligations between male and female teachers, finding gender-based variations in teachers' professional burdens, career advancement, and psychosomatic disorders. For example, women had higher incidences of work stress and psychosomatic conditions than their male counterparts.

In the present research I have identified challenges related to officials' role in creating more work pressures, which supports a previous study reporting that an important factor in teachers' job dissatisfaction is the role played by officials, with many teachers arguing that officials should develop motivational methods with teachers (Bolin, 2007). However, in my research, the participants do not indicate their need for motivation; they report that the officials are the ones who contribute to complicating work, creating difficulties, and increasing workloads. Officials do so by asking teachers to perform or supervise various activities that are presented with showmanship and linking those responsibilities to teachers' evaluations.

Teachers report being asked to perform the following additional work related to various activities: coordinating different occasions, lectures, workshops, and model lessons; celebrating the first day of school, creating morning routine programmes for students and programmes for their break times; participating in various competitions; and performing comfortable testing activities. The results show that the difficulty lies first in the abundance of these activities, and second, in the way that teachers must perform these tasks creatively and with showmanship that consumes much effort, time, and money. Teachers doing few activities will not receive good evaluations.

I argue that the occupational difficulties identified in this research can be understood only through detailed data. The hardship is not only in performing many activities but in how such work must be undertaken. The data show that this work poses challenges, such as officials asking for such work to be performed in a creative and ornate manner, with showmanship. Details about

occupational difficulties are missing in Alawaid and Aljasser's (2010) research, though a distinctive detail mentioned in their study is the time it takes to perform these tasks (see Table 1).

In this section, three challenges of concern to the participants have been identified. First, school officials assign additional work to teachers. Second, difficulties arise from the school activities, presenting leadership dilemmas. Third, teachers feel that they are unable to refuse extra work or express their opinions on professional matters. The leadership styles of school principals significantly influence teachers' decisions to either stay in or leave the teaching profession (Bahtilla, 2017).

9.2.3 Challenges Associated with the Educational System and Curricula

One of the major challenges that teachers face is associated with the educational system and curricula in Kuwait. The educational system, decisions, and curricula of the Ministry of Education are in a state of continuous change and thus lack stability. This situation confuses teachers in their work and prevents them from achieving stability, creating a greater burden at work. According to Marsh (2015), a factor contributing to teachers leaving the profession constitutes the persistent alterations to educational policies, including frequent modifications of academic curricula.

Furthermore, every new decision or amendment in the educational system or curricula requires teachers to make new preparations and efforts. According to Lightfoot (2016), ongoing changes in government policies are among the factors that impose a burden on teachers. They must spend time on becoming acquainted with these new systems and curricula and the methods for teaching them, as well as preparing new educational tools.

Moreover, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education does not train teachers in new work mechanisms. In this study, the teachers report devoting their time and effort to keeping up with the changes and engaging in self-learning. The Ministry of Education's lack of adequate training for educational stakeholders exposes the teachers to the officials' many contradictory directives about the new

mechanisms of their work. According to Al-Turki (2019), mistakes result from the rapid implementation of new curricula due to the lack of comprehensive training programmes. These programmes could equip teachers with the necessary knowledge to comprehend new curricula and effectively put them into practice. The teachers report feeling confused by this failure. The absence of clear goals in professional development planning for teacher training results in inconsistencies among training programmes (Alhashem, 2021).

In Australia, a frequent cause of anxiety among teachers is related to the rapid changes in educational decisions that occur over short, frequent periods of time. It is the teachers' right to have changes in curricula not be implemented in this way. Decisions should be made more slowly and in consultation with teachers (Stacey et al., 2023). Likewise, the present study's results show that among the most significant challenges faced by the participants are the many changes in educational systems and curricula, which confuse teachers and result in increased pressure and workloads.

The competency-based curricula in Kuwait were endorsed by the World Bank in cooperation with the Ministry of Education (Alfilakawi's, 2018). However, the World Bank is an external party that has nothing to do with education, and the data show that these curricula are unsuitable for the Kuwaiti educational context. For example, the large number of lessons in competency-based curricula does not fit Kuwaiti schools' calendars, forcing teachers to double their workloads and efforts and provide additional classes and materials to help students learn at home. Additionally, teachers must prepare educational videos to send to students via technological communication platforms to support their understanding and follow up on their lessons at home. These are attempts to accomplish more work and to finish each curriculum within the specified scheduled time. The increased workload imposed by the competency-based curricula poses a challenge to teachers. The participants' description of the curricula as 'tough' and unsuitable for them supports Alfilakawi's

(2018) argument that the World Bank does not operate as an educational institution in Kuwait. Consequently, the curricula proposed by the World Bank are challenging for Kuwaiti teachers to understand or accept as these have not been customised to fit the Kuwaiti environment.

The female teachers' experiences with these curricula show that the method of applying them is stressful. These curricula make students the focus of the educational process, and the application of this method depends on students searching for information. It also depends on teachers' evaluations of students individually; at the time of the evaluations, teachers must occupy the rest of the students with other activities that the teachers must prepare for them. Thus, the teachers must prepare many tools that contribute to the learning process, as well as classroom activities and games. Muhammad (2020) highlights the teachers' struggles with assessing primary school students as among the obstacles to teaching performance under the national competency-based curricula. The results of the present research show that the mentioned tasks require the presence of an assistant teacher, but in the Kuwaiti context, this job does not exist. Thus, a heavy burden to perform many tasks falls on the teacher. The curricula were not well studied by policymakers before being applied, so their application is inappropriate in the Kuwaiti context.

The teachers have negative impressions of the competency-based curricula. They indicate that such curricula represent a failure, describing them as difficult and incomprehensible. Because students did not understand the lessons under the curricula, they misbehave in the classroom, prompting teachers to use differentiated learning to occupy the students.

A detailed examination of the competency-based approach is not provided here as this is not the aim of this thesis. Rather, the aim is to understand the challenges imposed on teachers. The goal is to understand the challenges created by the Ministry of Education and decision-makers through continuous changes to the curricula and the educational system.

9.2.4 The Effect of Professional Challenges on Mothers and Children

This study indicates that the teaching profession affects the lives of both teachers and their children. The profession also creates difficulties when teachers attempt to achieve work–life balance, as argued by Perryman and Calvert (2020), who identify the struggle for balance as one of the strongest and most prominent reasons why teachers leave the profession. This finding confirms the teachers’ lack of a healthy balance between their work and life responsibilities, and it is one more issue that makes teachers think about quitting the profession. This study shows the participants’ conflicts between their roles as teachers and mothers.

The teachers indicate their desire to leave the profession because they cannot bear its pressures on them, represented by a state of continuous work for most of the day. Teaching work occupies much of their time (including during weekends and in the evenings, since they have to accomplish much of their work at home), which is supposed to be dedicated to their families. As shown in the analysis, the teachers believe that the difficulty of this profession is a cause of their exhaustion. Their health problems, such as physical pain, miscarriage and stillbirth with no identified cause, high blood pressure or elevated blood sugar, and psychological pressure, are represented as having unknown causes.

This research also shows the negative impacts of professional challenges on mother–teachers and their children. The teachers link the effects of the teaching profession and its pressures to their ways of dealing with their children in terms of anger, impatience, and verbal expressions of these emotions, which lead the children to avoid communication with their mothers.

These findings are consistent with those reported by Vahedi et al. (2019), who find that parenting irritation is often caused by family–job conflict, which is also positively associated with children internalising and externalising difficulties. Decisions related to educational policy and decision-making in any context have a direct impact on teachers, and thus, an indirect effect on

their children. In Kuwait, decision-makers should pay attention to the roots of professional problems when deliberating on issues related to the teaching profession and should find solutions that address the problems and challenges faced by teachers.

Political debates in the Kuwaiti Parliament (Masila, 2018) have categorised teaching as a difficult profession. Accordingly, the Parliament proposed increasing teachers' salaries or providing them with benefits, such as early retirement (Alawaid & Aljasser, 2010). However, these parliamentary discussions did not appear interested in addressing the roots of the problems affecting teachers, including the problems mentioned in this thesis, and the extent of these problems' impacts on teachers' quality of life and the lives of those around them, including their children. For example, new positions could be created, such as assistant teaching jobs or part-time teaching jobs; these roles would take on part of the teachers' burdens.

Alawaid and Aljasser (2010) have aimed to prove that teaching is a difficult profession, so teachers can obtain the right to early retirement. They discuss the work entrusted to teachers and the time spent on each task, and they cite the relevant literature to identify the health and psychological problems to which teachers are exposed. However, the solutions should be deeper than just financial advantages and early retirement. For example, increasing financial allocations may contribute to reducing teacher dropouts from the profession, but it will not remove professional difficulties and their effects that extend outside the scope of teachers' work.

From this viewpoint, it is clear how more distant systems, such as education policies, the regulation of the teaching profession, parliamentary dialogues, and decisions about the educational system, have impacts on mothers and their children.

9.3 Challenges that Mothers and Children Face in the Educational System and Curricula (Exosystem and Microsystem)

The microsystem is associated with the interactions between mothers and their children, and the findings of this research show that such interactions are mostly concentrated on matters related to children's education, with both mothers and their children facing difficulties in the educational system and curricula (exosystem). The first challenge involves the inability of the Kuwaiti educational system and curricula to establish a strong educational foundation for learners, which leads parents to intervene by assisting and supporting their children in their studies. The second challenge related to education in Kuwait comprises the demands and stress placed on both mothers and their children, for example, the stresses imposed by tests, homework, projects, and school-wide activities. These challenges lead to negative results for mothers and their children as their relationships become tense and their lives revolve only around educational affairs, creating burdensome responsibilities for mother-teachers. The third challenge is related to teachers overseeing their children's education. As indicated by the participants, children need their families' support in meeting their school requirements because the Kuwaiti educational system is demanding. Furthermore, teachers are engaged in a demanding profession, which negatively affects their mood at home and limits their capacity to support their children's education at home after school. Work responsibilities make it difficult to keep track of their children's education on a daily basis, and this study reveals that teaching has impacts on teachers' home lives, as well as their children's lives. Despite these difficulties, they continuously attempt to manage their time and spend weekends helping with their children's education as it is difficult for them to teach their children daily.

Baumgartner et al. (1993) indicate that many parents live with a great deal of stress and that homework and tests impose additional pressures on both parents and children. Their study's

participants stated that parents with more than one child do not even have time to eat, let alone meet school requirements. They also mention the long projects that their children spend time on weekends to complete, and the children may be asked by more than one teacher to meet school requirements. Furthermore, the parents admit that schoolwork has a negative effect on their lives. In addition to the difficulty of dealing with their children who are frustrated with duties, parents who do not find time to follow up with their kids think that they are bad parents. They say that the time spent at home should be allotted for play and for the family to be together and that their job is to be parents, not home-schoolers (Baumgartner et al. 1993). Their comments find support in the opinions expressed by the participants in the present research, especially in light of the pressures they suffer in their work as teachers. Following up with their children at home creates additional pressure and can lead to strained relationships with their children.

The participants in this research also acknowledge that they deal with their children in an authoritarian manner when it comes to the latter's studies. This indicates the influence of the environment, namely living in Kuwait and how its educational system pressures children and encourages mothers to deal with their children in an authoritarian manner. The existence of an evaluation system for learners makes parents put pressure on their children. The data provided by the participants in this research show that the teaching profession causes mothers' relationships with their children to suffer when they get angry with the latter. In addition to the Kuwaiti educational system's demands on parents to educate their children, the pressure from the mother-teachers' profession and the other difficulties they face justify their authoritarian behaviour towards their children.

9.4 Challenges of Being a Mother and a Teacher in the Kuwaiti Context (Macrosystem)

This study reveals the Kuwaiti culture's significant role in influencing the lives of working mothers in the teaching field. Various challenges lead to conflicts between their roles as mothers

and teachers, which adhere to the norms and expectations of their culture. The challenges of being a mother and a teacher in Kuwait are related to the Kuwaiti culture (macrosystem). Three challenges represent the participants' main concerns: challenges related to women's and men's roles in the Kuwaiti culture, challenges involving social obligations in the Kuwaiti culture, and challenges linked to the concept of the perfect woman (*Sanaa*).

9.4.1 Women's and Men's Roles in Kuwaiti Culture

This research shows that the Kuwaiti culture demands that women bear greater responsibilities towards their children and at home and compensate for the absence of men's contributions to most of these roles. Kuwaiti mothers take on a greater number of roles compared to Kuwaiti fathers. The participants provide instances of women's involvement in various domestic tasks, such as taking care of household affairs, tending to their babies and raising them as they grow up, managing their affairs, ensuring that their children's educational needs are met, transporting their children to school, cooking and providing meals, and shopping for their needs. Furthermore, the participants assert that children spend a greater amount of time in the company of their mothers than their fathers. These responsibilities are primarily shouldered by women in Kuwait, which is a cultural norm resulting from the stereotypes of women's and men's roles.

The participants demonstrate a continual preoccupation with their work responsibilities as teachers. They also diligently attend to their children's needs and academic obligations upon returning home from a tiring day at work. As expressed by the participants, the fathers' minimal involvement in sharing the responsibilities associated with the children and household affairs results in increased pressure on the mothers, leading to the latter's fatigue. Mother-teachers must fulfil several important roles in their lives (mother, wife, and family member), in addition to working in a stressful profession.

The studies of Couzy (2012) and Vahedi et al. (2019) support these findings, referring to the conflict of roles for working mothers, which poses external and internal problems for them. The internal problems of mothers who are also teachers include exposure to psychological pressure, frustration, and anxiety when they cannot fulfil some of these roles as expected by society. Their external problems include behaviours such as repeated apologies for not attending family gatherings and not performing Kuwaiti social duties. The macrosystem's impact on individuals is outlined in Bronfenbrenner's systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which is represented in the results of this research via the influence of the Kuwaiti culture on determining the expectations about the roles of women, which creates challenges for working mothers.

9.4.2 Social Obligations in Kuwaiti Culture

There are challenges associated with one of the most important pillars of life in the Kuwaiti culture, which is social life with its obligations. This is considered an essential part of the lives of Kuwaitis and cannot be ignored.

The most prominent challenges in the participants' lives include multiple social obligations to both their families and their husbands' extended families. In the Kuwaiti culture, a woman's failure to fulfil these obligations can expose her to blame and reproach from those around her. The numerous pressing responsibilities of a mother-teacher result in psychological pressure because those around her cannot understand the burdens she endures.

These findings are consistent with Behbehani's (2014) observation that the primary focus of traditional Kuwaiti social behaviour is the maintenance of familial bonds through the performance of social obligations towards members of one's extended family. Neglecting this essential component of the Kuwaiti culture – characterised by large family circles with wide social networks and myriad formalities that in combination, take up a considerable amount of time – is considered

socially undesirable. Behbehani (2014) points to one of the protocols of social gatherings in Kuwait – the majority of these events are connected with the consumption of food. According to Hendriani et al. (2022), female teachers face a variety of challenges, including the lack of both free time and social engagement because teachers are overloaded with responsibilities. Heavy demands in school and at home lead to fatigue and even job turnover. Weekly family gatherings constitute a source of concern for mother–teachers due to their lack of time. Visiting protocols impose a heavy burden on them, who are already overloaded, as described.

In examining the recovery resource of female teachers in Kuwait, Aljuwaisri (2015) indicates that social gatherings are sources of anxiety and pressure for some mother–teachers, instead of being opportunities for self-entertainment, due to their recurrence during the week and their demanding and stressful protocols.

The current research has made it clear that social life is of supreme value for Kuwaiti society and cannot be neglected or ignored. Women are subject to psychological pressures due to their exposure to blame and their feelings of being negligent in performing these roles. Furthermore, these social roles consume a lot of time, and they include protocols such as dressing well and participating in food offerings, which make this social responsibility difficult for busy women, especially since these visits are repeated on a gruelling weekly basis.

9.4.3 The Concept of the Perfect Woman (*Sanaa*)

The social expectations for the ideal woman (the concept of the *Sanaa* woman that is common in Kuwait) add to Kuwaiti women’s burden due to the exhausting pressure of attaining the image of idealism in performing their social roles (as mothers, wives, and members of families). Their failure to do these tasks exposes women to social evaluation that does not consider the circumstances and pressures that mother–teachers go through, in turn leading to their distress, anxiety, and psychological pressure. Similarly, Aljuwaisri (2015) asserts that women face

significant societal pressure; even if they successfully enter the workforce, their primary role still revolves around family responsibilities. Therefore, women in Kuwait may feel compelled to excel in their familial duties, resulting in their assuming the burden of responsibility for any family shortcomings, issues, or failures.

The Kuwaiti culture places significant pressure on mother–teachers to fulfil their roles as mothers, wives, and family members in an ideal manner. These include managing the household, the children, and their education. The ideal woman in Kuwait will take on all the above-mentioned tasks and excel in them, regardless of her professional responsibility. She is also expected to attend weekly family gatherings and accept invitations to family occasions.

The culture of perfection in Kuwait makes mothers take on many responsibilities, making them more burdensome. Meeting the expectations of Kuwaiti society, which requires perfect performance of basic social roles, presents challenges for mother–teachers. The failure to fulfil these expectations can lead to conflict, grief, and distress. Additionally, the blame of society due to a lack of understanding of their work circumstances and obligations as mothers can cause them anguish and sadness.

There is a significant lack of literature about a discussion or research on the concept of the *Sanaa* women (المرأة السنعة) in Kuwait or in the Gulf cooperation council countries (GCC). The GCC countries are similar in culture, customs, and traditions. The participants in this research frequently touch on the concept of the *Sanaa* women, considering that the mentioned societal expectations towards married women and mothers have a great influence on their lives.

9.5 Research Contributions

In this section, I discuss the primary contributions of this thesis, as follows:

1. This research reveals three major dilemmas and issues that have impacts on the lives of mother–teachers. This important contribution will be helpful in informing future solutions for this group of people, thus allowing them to overcome the complexities that they face, both professionally as a teacher and personally as a mother, in terms of their role in their children’s education. Furthermore, these solutions will improve the quality of mother–teachers’ lives, as well as those of their children and other family members.
2. The thematic analysis and my presentation of it in the form of lengthy statements contribute to highlighting the voices of the participants, which help obtain a deeper understanding of the details of the difficulties and challenges they face. I emphasise the importance of collaborative decision-making to achieve the right solutions to help this group of people in the future, whether this process involves the Ministry of Education or other policymakers.

9.6 Research Limitations

In this section, I explain the main factors contributing to the limitations of this research and the problems I encountered. These drawbacks came from the literature available in the field, difficulties with gathering information and with the process of analysis, and the unexpected disaster and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. To help future researchers avoid these potential issues, I also explain how I believe I could have avoided these problems:

- 1- The results of this thesis cannot be generalised since the sample included only three participants, and the target research segment comprised only mother–teachers teaching three main subjects (Arabic, the English language, and science) in primary public schools. Intermediate or secondary school teachers or kindergarten teachers were excluded. It was

not possible for me to use the analysed data and extract results from the dataset to create a questionnaire to help generalise the results.

- 2- One of the problems that I encountered was that one of the participants differed from the others, partly because her children were studying in private schools and the rest of the participants' children attended public schools. However, her perspectives constitute a strength of this research because she enabled a comparison that benefited the data analysis. Furthermore, she shared unexpected ideas in comparing the pressures imposed by the public-school curriculum on the mother–teacher and her children and the flexibility offered by some private schools, which contributes to reducing the burdens on both the mother and her children.
- 3- One of the difficulties that I faced was the lack of references related to education, teaching, or motherhood in Kuwait and the lack of information about the concept of a *Sanaa* woman (المرأة السنعة ; see the Glossary), although this word is often used in the Kuwaiti context. Therefore, this study benefited from the fact that I live and work in the same context as the participants do. Thus, I explained the term myself according to my understanding. What helped me write the description of this term was that during the analysis of the data, the participants defined the word. The only source from which I found a similar explanation was the use of the concept of *Sanaa* to explain a similar aspect of Emirati society.
- 4- The unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, imposed limitations on my research and reduced my ability to conduct it as planned. One of the difficulties I encountered in undertaking this research was the time period during which the COVID-19 virus spread, which stopped the wheel of life around the world. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, I used to travel to the university daily, taking advantage of the opportunity because my three children were studying in their respective schools at the same time. Their enrolment in after-school

activities gave me the chance to devote myself to working on this research. Sometimes, I visited the university library on weekends to complete work on this research while my husband took care of our children. However, after the onset of COVID-19, universities and schools closed. My main concern at the time was how to protect myself and my children from this virus. Survival became the main concern in light of the continuous spread of the virus and the increasing number of deaths around the world. It became difficult to leave the house for fear of our safety. Food and basic materials for living and storing food for as long as possible became my goal. It was during this period when air traffic decreased dramatically that the State of Kuwait announced its desire to evacuate its citizens from all other countries and have them return to Kuwait. The return process was not easy; there were anxiety, tension, and stress from having to get in touch with the Embassy of the State of Kuwait to set a date for my family's return. My husband, children, and I were on a long waiting list for our turn to go home. We had to leave my place of study in Britain and hand over the house where we lived to the real estate office because we did not know what awaited us, how long the pandemic would last, and when the universities and schools would reopen. It took a lot of time and effort to pack up and empty the house of all our belongings. When we returned to Kuwait, it entered a stage of lockdown, involving a complete curfew. In addition to imposing quarantine restrictions on travellers for a full month at that time, I could not purchase a device that would allow me to connect to the internet and continue working because of the complete curfew. Thus, I could not access the sources of knowledge I needed via the internet, as I only took with me some books and a few references to Kuwait. Furthermore, my children and I were exposed to the COVID-19 virus more than once, and subsequently, we followed the required quarantine protocols. When I caught the virus, I isolated myself from my children. It was very stressful,

physically and psychologically, and I was exhausted from following the quarantine protocols. A few days later, one of my children became infected and entered into quarantine; subsequently, my second son did as well. My entire family, including my husband and daughter, became infected in succession, and it took us a long time to recover. It was a mentally and physically stressful and time-consuming period, and the presence of the children at home and working from home were obstacles that made me lose focus. Furthermore, I could neither engage continuously in work nor maintain an atmosphere of calmness while conducting this research. I had to respond to my children's demands and consider their constant interruptions throughout the day. Additionally, one of my children and I struggled against severe depression. My child requiring medication and his refusal to continue his treatment were all unexpected factors that took time away from this research, thus affecting its quality.

- 5- One of the effects of COVID-19 on this research was that after a period of time, Kuwait announced the transition to online-based teaching and learning for young people. My children continued to study online for two consecutive years. This made the research process extremely difficult, and this period was among the toughest throughout my studies, as I experienced hardship in moving the research forward. The process was painstakingly slow due to the conflict resulting from my dual roles as mother and researcher and the new situation in which we found ourselves, having to adjust to a different lifestyle. The constant presence of the children at home was one of the difficulties that greatly slowed down my research work. My time was spent monitoring and aiding my children in their online studies. In addition to taking exams remotely, we faced obstacles associated with disruption in the internet connection, variation in speeds and signal strength, which hindered both my

children's and my study processes. COVID-19 presented a stressful and psychologically disturbing experience for my whole family.

9.7 Research Suggestions

In this section, I present research suggestions that may benefit future researchers in expanding the knowledge based on this thesis. I think that this thesis will be a good starting point for other researchers interested in Kuwaiti mother–teachers' situations:

- 1- It would be interesting to expand on the topic of this research to identify the difficulties faced by the children and spouses of mother–teachers in learning about the other side of their lives, which were not covered by this research. This could be done using the same research methodology that I used, which, in my opinion, contributed to identifying the depth of the challenges faced by the children and husbands of mother–teachers. By deepening their understanding of the challenges, they can arrive at solutions together.
- 2- In this study, two of the participants mentioned that their husbands worked as teachers but did not experience the same professional challenges they faced. It would be interesting to identify the challenges of working fathers in the teaching profession and then make a comparison with working mothers in the same profession. The data of this research indicate that there is no proportionality in the professional difficulties faced by male and female teachers in Kuwait; however, this research did not identify the causes of these differences in the professional difficulties faced by female and male teachers.
- 3- One of the points raised in this research, which would be interesting to expand on, involved the positive and negative impacts of the concept of *Sanaa* (السنة) on the lives

- of Kuwaiti women. I found that the participants struggled with the expectations raised by the *Sanaa* concept in Kuwait, and there was a lack of research around this concept.
- 4- Notably, the participants indicated that the officials' genders contributed to the amount of stress they perceived and their workloads. According to the participants, a large part of the difficulties at work stemmed from the fact that female-led departments in the teaching profession in Kuwait were stressful and focused on fine details and the glamour of various activities rather than on the curriculum contents. The work must appear to be adorned, and numerous activities were demanded, in contrast to the focus of the male-led departments. It would be interesting to expand on this topic and research it. According to Barbuto et al. (2007), for every study that concludes that women are more different in their leadership styles than men, another one arrives at the opposite conclusion. It is worth investigating the differences in the work challenges faced by male teachers and whether male head teachers impose the same challenges on male teachers as female head teachers do on female teachers, as shown in this research.
 - 5- I believe that gaining a deep understanding of mother-teachers' challenges and the effects of these challenges on them and their children makes it possible to conduct additional quantitative research to generalise the results by using the data contained in the Analysis and Results sections of this thesis. The data could help develop the questions used in the research tool, which could take the form of a questionnaire.
 - 6- I also suggest the increased and expanded use of qualitative approaches in research in the Kuwaiti context, which would help dissect the problems in depth. This would help researchers reach the right solutions, as previous studies related to the subject of this research were dominated by quantitative data. Most of the Arabic literature and research in the Kuwaiti context and on education or mothering used quantitative

methods; therefore, there is a need to expand research using qualitative methods to study Arabic resources.

9.8 Recommendations

In this section, I make several recommendations related to the research results, which may benefit the Ministry of Education, decision-makers, and officials working in Kuwaiti schools. I also make recommendations for the parents and husbands of teachers, and finally, for mother-teachers.

9.8.1 Recommendations for Teachers' Families

The following are my recommendations for teachers' families:

- 1- The family must consider the mother-teacher and the pressures to which she is exposed in her work, as well as the many burdens resulting from her children and her home. Additionally, it is best to avoid blaming the mother when she is unable to fulfil her social obligations.
- 2- Family members must support working mothers.

9.8.2 Recommendations for the Ministry of Education, Decision-Makers in Kuwait, and the Responsible Authorities in Schools

I offer the Ministry of Education, decision-makers, and responsible authorities the following suggestions:

- 1- Develop family-friendly policies and be more flexible with working mothers.
- 2- Create the positions of assistant teachers or part-time teachers.
- 3- Pay attention to mother-teachers' problems that push them to think about leaving the profession.

- 4- Prepare teachers and administrative staff well before implementing any changes to the educational system or curricula.
- 5- Attempt to reduce pressures related to school requirements on students and tests.
- 6- Consider the reasons why parents might proactively engage in the education of their children and do not rely solely on the school to do so.
- 7- Strengthen the primary educational foundation and avoid relying on parents to ensure their children's education.
- 8- Given that the prevailing culture in Kuwait is that the mother is primarily responsible for the care of her children, everyone who deals with this mother, whether representing an institution, should provide support and allow flexibility in her work and change her functions and roles as necessary. It is important to consider the mother-teachers' role as mothers in society to retain them as teachers and ensure their continued desire to work. Furthermore, this could reduce the negative impact of work challenges, enabling her to have more time to teach her children.

9.8.3 Recommendations for Mothers-Teachers and Their Husbands

The following are my recommendations for mother-teachers and their husbands:

1. Husbands and wives can jointly handle their responsibilities for their children, taking into account the large number of duties that mothers bear, to achieve balance in their lives.
2. Mother-teachers should be aware of ensuring work-life balance in their lives because 'it would appear [that] role conflict is a reality in women's lives. The further we progress through the twenty-first century and its new values, the greater the need to

take action to manage the gap between what women should do, can do and might do’
(Couzy, 2012, p. 60).

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I have reviewed the purpose of my study and the research question and have then proceeded to discuss the findings related to the three themes that were first introduced in the three preceding analytical chapters. This was followed by a discussion of how my thesis contributes to the field of Psychology and Education. Then, I have discussed the challenges that I faced that led to the limitations of my research and may assist future researchers by helping them avoid encountering similar challenges. Finally, I have provided some ideas for further studies that I believe might serve as a solid foundation for new investigations into my recommended areas of research and contribute to the growth of existing knowledge and the acquisition of new information about the covered topics.

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المرجع في صلة الرحم إلى عرف المجتمع

Appendices

Appendix 1 *Information Paper for Participants in a Research Study form*



Information Paper for Participants in a Research Study

Title of the research: Kuwaiti Women's Stories of Mothering and Teaching: To Be a Mother and Teacher at the Same Time; A thematic analysis.

Investigator: Tasneem Alhattab will conduct this study, under the supervision of Professor Tom Billington.

Purpose of the study: This research aims to give Kuwaiti women a voice – an opportunity to tell our stories and thereby explore both our experiences and the day-to-day challenges we encounter in our roles as mothers and teachers. It is hoped that sharing our life experiences will deepen our understanding of the different factors affecting the lives of working mothers and their children in Kuwait. It is also hoped that, by focusing on how the women in the study address challenges, this research will contribute to the well-being of mothers in similar situations in the future.

Research procedures: The interview will take approximately two hours and will be conducted at a time and place convenient for you. The questions will revolve around your life as a mother and teacher in Kuwait. The interview questions will be divided into three sections. In the first section, you will answer general questions, such your age, the number of children you have, their age(s), how many years' work experience you have and so forth. In the second section, I will ask about your role and life as a teacher. In the third section. I will ask about your role and life as a mother. I will conduct this interview face-to-face, and it will be recorded.

Discomfort and risks: There is no risk associated with participating in my study, and I do not anticipate any discomfort.

Costs or compensation: Participation is voluntary. There is neither cost nor compensation associated with your participation in this study.

Duration: The interview will last approximately two hours and will take place on a single day. However, if we wish to continue the conversation, we could arrange another occasion. Likewise, following transcription, I might call you for an additional interview, in which case, I will make a brief call at a time convenient for you.

Statement of confidentiality: Your participation and data will be kept completely confidential. Your first name and family name will be made anonymous. The interview information will only be used for the purposes of the research, and the recording will be secured with the researcher. Only individuals directly involved in the research will be able to access these records. Finally, the findings in the thesis – and in any subsequent publication – will be presented in a way that maintains participants’ anonymity.

Rights and questions: You have the right to review the interview questions beforehand. You also have the right to ask any questions during and after participating in this study. You have the right to ask for a copy of your interview transcript. Participants may contact me at talhatab1@sheffield.ac.uk or my supervisor, Professor Tom Billington, at t.billington@sheffield.ac.uk with any questions.

The right to withdraw: You have the right to refuse to participate in this study, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question without withdrawing from the entire study; however, we encourage you to answer all the questions, as failing to do so could invalidate the results.

Ethical review: This project has been approved as ethical via an ethics review by the University of Sheffield. The University’s Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University’s Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact me at

Phone number : [REDACTED]

Email: talhatab1@sheffield.ac.uk

Or my supervisor, Professor Tom Billington, at

Tel: [REDACTED]

Fax: (+44) (0)114 222

Email: t.billington@Sheffield.ac.uk

My signature below indicates that I have read the information above and that I agree to participate in this study. I can ask for a copy of this consent form.

Participant’s Signature:

Participant’s Name:

Investigator’s Signature:

Date:



معلومات مهمة للمشاركين في الدراسة البحثية

عنوان البحث: قصص نساء الكويت عن الامومه والتعليم : ان تكوني أما و معلمه في نفس الوقت ؛ التحليل الموضوعي

الباحث : تسنيم الحطاب سوف تجري هذا البحث تحت اشراف البروفسور توم بلينتون

هدف البحث : يهدف هذا البحث لاعطاء المرأة الكويتية الصوت – الفرصة لان تقول قصصنا كأهات ومعلمات في الوقت نفسه وبالتالي استكشاف كل من تجاربنا والتحديات اليومية التي نواجهها في أدوارنا كأهات ومعلمات. ومن المؤمل أن تبادل تجاربنا الحياتية سيعمق فهمنا للعوامل المختلفة التي تؤثر على حياة الأمهات العاملات وأطفالهن في الكويت. ومن المؤمل أيضاً أنه من خلال التركيز في هذه الدراسه على كيفية تعامل النساء مع التحديات التي تواجههن في حياتهن كأهات ومعلمات في الوقت نفسه ، سيسهم هذا البحث في رفاه الأمهات في حالات مماثلة في المستقبل.

إجراءات البحث: تستغرق المقابلة ساعتين تقريباً وسيتم إجراؤها في وقت ومكان مناسبين لك. سوف تدور الأسئلة حول حياتك كأم ومعلمة في الكويت. سيتم تقسيم أسئلة المقابلة إلى ثلاثة أقسام. في القسم الأول ، سوف تجيب عن أسئلة عامة ، مثل عمرك ، وعدد الأطفال لديك ، وأعمارهم ، وعدد سنوات خبرة العمل لديك وما إلى ذلك. في القسم الثاني ، سوف أسأل عن دورك وحياتك كمعلمة. في القسم الثالث. سوف أسأل عن دورك وحياتك كأم. سأجري هذه المقابلة وجها لوجه ، وسيتم تسجيلها صوتياً

عدم الراحة والمخاطر: لا توجد مخاطر مرتبطة بالمشاركة في دراستي ، ولا أتوقع أي إزعاج.

التكاليف أو التعويض: المشاركة تطوعية. لا توجد تكلفة ولا تعويض مرتبط بمشاركتك في هذه الدراسة.

المدة: ستستغرق المقابلة ساعتين تقريباً وستتم في يوم واحد. ولكن ، إذا كنا نرغب في مواصلة المحادثة ، فيمكننا ترتيب مقابلة أخرى. وايضا ، بعد تفريغ المقابلة على الورق ، قد أتصل بك لإجراء مقابلة إضافية قصيرة لتوضيح بعض الامور ، وفي هذه الحالة ، سأجري مكالمة هاتفية قصيرة في الوقت المناسب لك.

بيان السرية: سيتم الحفاظ على سرية مشاركتك وبياناتك. اسمك الأول واسم العائلة الخاص بك سيكون مجهولاً. لن يتم استخدام معلومات المقابلة إلا لأغراض البحث ، وسيتم تأمين التسجيل مع الباحث. لن يتمكن سوى الأفراد المشاركين بشكل مباشر في البحث من الوصول إلى هذه السجلات. وأخيراً ، سيتم عرض النتائج في الرسالة - وفي أي منشور لاحق - بطريقة تحافظ على إخفاء هوية المشاركين.

الحقوق والأسئلة: لديك الحق في مراجعة أسئلة المقابلة مسبقاً. لديك أيضاً الحق في طرح أي أسئلة أثناء وبعد المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. لديك الحق في طلب نسخة من نسخة المقابلة الخاصة بك. اذا رغبت في الاستفسار عن اي أمر يمكن للمشاركين الاتصال بي على

talhattab1@sheffield.ac.uk

أو المشرف ، البروفسور توم بيلينغتون ، على t.billington@sheffield.ac.uk .

الحق في الانسحاب: لك الحق في رفض المشاركة في هذه الدراسة ، ولديك الحق في الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت دون تقديم تفسير. لديك أيضاً الحق في رفض الإجابة عن أي سؤال دون الانسحاب من الدراسة بأكملها ؛ ومع ذلك ، فإننا نشجعك على الإجابة عن جميع الأسئلة ، حيث أن الفشل في القيام بذلك قد يؤدي إلى إبطال نتائج الدراسه.

المراجعة الأخلاقية: تمت الموافقة على هذا المشروع على أنه أخلاقي من خلال مراجعة الأخلاقيات من جامعة شيفيلد. تراقب لجنة أخلاقيات البحث في الجامعة تطبيق وتسليم إجراءات مراجعة أخلاقيات الجامعة عبر الجامعة.

إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة أو تحتاج إلى مزيد من المعلومات ، يرجى الاتصال بي على

رقم الهاتف:
البريد الإلكتروني: talhattab1@sheffield.ac.uk

أو مشرفي ، البروفسور توم بيلينغتون

رقم الهاتف:
رقم الفاكس : (+44) (0)114 222
البريد الإلكتروني: t.billington@Sheffield.ac.uk

يشير توقيعك أدناه إلى أنني قد قرأت المعلومات أعلاه وأنتني أوافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. يمكنني طلب نسخة من نموذج الموافقة هذا.

توقيع المشارك

اسم المشارك

توقيع الباحث

التاريخ

Appendix 3 *Consent Form.*



Title of Research Project: Kuwaiti Women’s Stories of Mothering and Teaching: To Be a Mother and Teacher at the Same Time; A thematic analysis.

Name of Researcher: Tasneem Alhattab

Participant Identification Number for this project: **Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated () that explains the above research project and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, I understand that should I not wish to answer any question(s), I am free to decline.

3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant Date Signature
(or legal representative)

Lead Researcher Date Signature

To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties, the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to all participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact me at

Phone number : ██████████

Email: talhattab1@sheffield.ac.uk

or my supervisor, Professor Tom Billington, at

Tel: ██████████

Fax: (+44) (0)114 222

Email: t.billington@Sheffield.ac.uk



عنوان مشروع البحث: قصص المرأة الكويتية عن الأمومة والتعليم: أن تكون أمًا ومعلمة في نفس الوقت ؛ تحليل موضوعي..

اسم الباحث : تسنيم الحطاب

الرقم التعريفي للمشارك

من فضلك ضع علامة صح

1. أؤكد أنني قمت بقراءة وفهم ورقة المعلومات بتاريخ. التي تشرح المشروع البحثي المذكور أعلاه وأني قد أتاحت لي الفرصة لطرح الأسئلة حول المشروع.

2. أنا أفهم أن مشاركتي تطوعية وأني حر في الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إعطاء أي سبب ودون وجود أي اثار سلبية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، أفهم أنني بإمكانني عدم الرد على أي سؤال (أسئلة) ، فأنا حر في أن أتر

3. أتفهم أن إجاباتي ستظل سرية للغاية. و إنني أعطي إذنًا لأعضاء فريق البحث للوصول إلى إجاباتي المجهولة المصدر. أتفهم أنه لن يتم ربط اسمي بالمواد البحثية ، ولن يتم تحديدها أو التعرف عليها في التقرير أو التقارير الناتجة عن البحث.

4. أوافق على البيانات التي تم جمعها مني لاستخدامها في الأبحاث المستقبلية.

5. أوافق على المشاركة في مشروع البحث المذكور أعلاه.

التوقيع _____ التاريخ _____ اسم المشارك _____

التوقيع _____ التاريخ _____ اسم الباحث _____

ليتم توقيعه تاريخه بحضور المشارك

النسخ:
بمجرد أن يتم التوقيع على هذا من قبل جميع الأطراف ، يجب أن يتلقى المشاركون نسخة من نموذج الموافقة على المشاركة والمؤرخ ،
والخطاب / النص المكتوب مسبقاً / ورقة المعلومات وأي معلومات خطية أخرى يتم تقديمها إلى جميع المشاركين. يجب وضع نسخة
من استمارة الموافقة الموقعة والمؤرخة في السجل الرئيسي للمشروع (على سبيل المثال ، ملف موقع) ، والذي يجب الاحتفاظ به في
مكان آمن.

إذا كانت لديك أية أسئلة أو استفسارات يمكنك التواصل معي

Phone number [REDACTED]
Email: talhattab1@sheffield.ac.uk

أو على المشرف البروفيسور توم بلينغتون

Te [REDACTED]
Fax: (+44) (0)114 222

Email: t.billington@Sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 5 Ethical Approval and Ethical Application



Downloaded: 13/09/2023
Approved: 16/10/2018

Tasneem Alhattab
Registration number: 160256516
School of Education
Programme: PhD

Dear Tasneem

PROJECT TITLE: Kuwaiti Women's Stories of Mothering and Teaching : To Be a Mother and Teacher at the Same Time - A thematic analysis
APPLICATION: Reference Number 021342

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 16/10/2018 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 021342 (form submission date: 16/09/2018); (expected project end date: 31/12/2020).
- Participant information sheet 1049595 version 2 (13/08/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1050838 version 1 (14/08/2018).
- Participant consent form 1049596 version 2 (13/08/2018).
- Participant consent form 1050839 version 1 (14/08/2018).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

*In general, all reviewers thought this was a very thoughtful and strong application. However, there were two small areas where we felt further consideration would be beneficial: * You may wish to consider the length of the interview - these are currently 2 hours, which feels a little long. You may wish to make clear that participants can stop, have a break or re-arrange a follow-on interview. * With the information sheet, there are a couple of aspects that could be tidied up; firstly, it seems to include a version of the consent form, which given we have this as a separate document, we could probably do without. Secondly, on the application form, there is a really nice statement about ensuring that the participants do not feel judged by the researcher, or that their choices and opinions are likely to cause conflict. It would be great to see this reflected on the participant-facing information sheet as well.*

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

ED6ETH Edu
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIIPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.



The University
Of
Sheffield.

Application 021342

Section A: Applicant details

Date application started:

Thu 21 June 2018 at 14:50

First name:

Tasneem

Last name:

Alhattab

Email:

talhattab1@sheffield.ac.uk

Programme name:

PhD

Module name:

standard PhD

Last updated:

13/09/2023

Department:

School of Education

Applying as:

Postgraduate research

Research project title:

Kuwaiti Women's Stories of Mothering and Teaching : To Be a Mother and Teacher at the Same Time - A thematic analysis

Has your research project undergone academic review, in accordance with the appropriate process?

No

Similar applications:

- not entered -

Section B: Basic information

Supervisor

Name

Email

Tom Billington

t.billington@sheffield.ac.uk

Proposed project duration

Start date (of data collection):

Wed 31 October 2018

Anticipated end date (of project)

Thu 31 December 2020

3: Project code (where applicable)

Project externally funded?

- not entered -

Project code
- not entered -

Suitability

Takes place outside UK?

Yes

Involves NHS?

No

Health and/or social care human-interventional study?

No

ESRC funded?

No

Likely to lead to publication in a peer-reviewed journal?

Yes

Led by another UK institution?

No

Involves human tissue?

No

Clinical trial or a medical device study?

No

Involves social care services provided by a local authority?

No

Involves adults who lack the capacity to consent?

No

Involves research on groups that are on the Home Office list of 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations'?

No

Indicators of risk

Involves potentially vulnerable participants?

No

Involves potentially highly sensitive topics?

No

Section C: Summary of research

1. Aims & Objectives

My study, aims to present the stories of women from Kuwait in order to understand the challenges they encounter as mothers and teachers at the same time, and how they deal with these challenges. It aims to give Kuwaiti women a voice to tell their stories exploring their experiences, roles, and the challenges they encounter in their day to day lives as mothers and teachers. It is hoped that sharing these life experiences would assist in understanding different factors affecting the lives of working mothers and their children in Kuwait. Focusing on how these challenges are managed and dealt with is hoped to contribute to the well-being of mothers in similar situations in the future

Positionality

I grew up in a family that values learning and teaching. My father holds a doctorate degree and worked in the education sector for many years. He continued to advance until he became the first Kuwaiti official in the Department of Islamic Education responsible for authoring and supervising the curriculum of Islamic Education for all levels of study in Kuwait. My mother is a teacher and she was eventually promoted to the position of head teacher during her career. She was very patient, dedicated to her work and to raising her five children. Following in our parents' footsteps, my sister and I also joined the education sector, both of us combining the profession of teaching with motherhood. I am also currently a candidate to work in the family counselling sector, and my interest in psychology is based on parent-child relationships and their influence on children's development. My interest in this subject began with questions pertaining to the behaviour of young people and the reactions of parents toward such behaviour. The stories of Frantz Fanon (1986) have inspired me, as have other readings such as Burman (2017) about feminism. My questions have become more focused on the most comprehensive

factors affecting the life of the individual rather than merely looking at the mother and child.

My sister and I would always ask our mother how she handled all the pressure in her life as a teacher and mother over the years. We would so often have this type of discussion between us as we would with friends who are in the same field as us. We talk and complain about the difficulties we face, but our discussions always stayed among us and our voices were never heard by others. My sister received a scholarship for a Master's degree and she stopped working as a teacher during her study. After completing her MA, she returned to teaching again for a period, but could not bear its pressures and burdens. As a result, she resigned from the teaching profession, choosing to stay at home and take care of her three children. She was not the only one. Three of our friends who had combined education and motherhood decided to withdraw from the teaching profession, despite the material advantages it offered. They took minimum wage jobs that did not require much effort, trying to ease the pressure and keep their lives balanced.

Since I am from Kuwait and have experience as both a mother and teacher there, my position as a researcher in this study is likely to be very advantageous; this will help me to gain a better understanding of the participants and a better interpretation of their experiences.

2. Methodology

My research will employ a qualitative methodology, which will identify life events and human experiences through personal stories. This research will explore the challenges encountered by Kuwaiti mothers who also work as teachers. Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the participants' stories. Data collected through interviews represents the most appropriate method for this research. The purpose of this study is to listen to women's stories and experiences of being mothers and teachers at the same time. Interviews will facilitate this process. I will select no more than four to six participants.

Research Methodology

This research sets out to explore the challenges encountered by Kuwaiti mothers who are also working as teachers. The research question should guide the choice of a specific methodology. This research will employ a qualitative methodology, which will serve to identify life events and human experiences through personal stories. The aim of this research could not be achieved using quantitative statistical research, which relates more to numbers and statistics. While quantitative research seeks to generalize, qualitative studies seek to investigate a specific group (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Using qualitative methodology reflects my belief that social reality is "socially constructed, subjectively experienced and the result of human thought as expressed through language" (Sikes, 2004, p. 5). In this research, I will reflect this social reality by listening to, understanding, and presenting participants' stories. More specifically, the study will consider the challenges faced by women when carrying out their roles as a mother and teacher simultaneously. The methodology of this study fully appreciates "the importance of understanding a situation through the eyes of the participants" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 175). By asking participants about their stories and life experiences in regard to mothering and teaching roles, I hope to gain a better understanding of some of the challenges, problems and possible solutions/alternatives there are. It is hoped that this discussion may assist in contributing to people's (parents, children and family members) well-being in the future.

Narrative

Narrating is a way to understand human life, events and experiences while providing benefits to the future. As Creswell (2014) puts it, "Narrative research [involves] exploring individual stories to describe the lives of people" (p. 34). People use stories to express their feelings and explain their life experiences; alternatively, they may use them to clarify a position that may predict future prospects or bring meaning to everyday experiences (Hiles, Ernk, & Chrz, 2017). In this research, narrative represents a collaborative practice between the researcher (the listener) and the narrator (the research participant) through interaction. Ultimately, narratives represent relational work that brings people together to listen and empathize (Riessman, 2000). Despite these positive aspects to narratives, Gergen (2011) notes a potential shortcoming; he argues that participants may not fully express their ideas in their stories. In this case, it becomes the job of the researcher to try and manage the data in a way that addresses this issue. Gergen (2011) suggests conjoint narration, a relational view involving the interviewer and interviewee. For example, researchers and participants might work together to review the story after the researcher writes it down.

Method

Data collected through interviews represents the most appropriate method for this research. The purpose of this study is to listen to women's stories and experiences of being both mothers and teachers at the same time. Interviews will facilitate this process. As Wellington (2015) points out, interviews seek to gain information about participants' views, history and also give people a voice, and others a chance to hear, read and know. The interview format involves a great deal of flexibility, allowing researchers to investigate ideas, values, feelings and opinions (Wellington, 2015).

Interviews may take three forms: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Cohen, et al., 2018; Wellington, 2015). Narrative interviews do not normally follow a structured approach, which depends on specific questions and previously-determined procedures. Following the structured form, the interviewer lacks the freedom to follow new directions or to make modifications (Cohen et al., 2018). This format also restricts the researcher and participant based on the researcher's specific questions, a style that perhaps fails to align with the narrative aim. By comparison, semi-structured and unstructured interviews facilitate narrative expression (Hiles, Ernk, & Chrz, 2017). In an unstructured interview, the researcher does not have a list of pre-processed questions (Wellington, 2015). While this format has its benefits, I prefer to use a semi-structured interview format with some pre-determined questions as well as open-ended questions (Wellington, 2015). Because I have had the experience of being a mother working as a teacher, I believe I can help the interviewee address areas they may overlook in their narratives. I will be able to encourage participant engagement with additional questions. Having said that, semi-structured questions during an interview should be used sparingly as such questions may interrupt the narrator's thoughts during the storytelling. Therefore, it is preferable not to ask too many questions; the researcher should only ask questions that may enrich the stories while choosing the right moment to ask a question in order to allow the participant to narrate her ideas more fully.

Duration: The interview will last approximately two hours and will take place on a single day. However, if the participants wish to continue the conversation, I could arrange another occasion. Likewise, following transcription, I might call the participants for an additional

interview, in which case, I will make a brief call at a time convenient for them.

The interviews with the participants will be in Arabic; the transcript of the interviews will be written in Arabic and then translated into English. Arabic-to-English translation specialists will then review the translation to ensure accuracy. Finally, the interpretation and analysis of the interviews will be in English.

Interview sample

Main Question:

Tell me your story as a mother and teacher at the same time.

Semi-structured questions

Tell me about your role as mother. What does that involve/what are your main duties?

Tell me about your role as teacher. What does that involve/what are your main duties?

How do you face/deal with such challenges?

Analysis

To analyse the data, I will use thematic analysis, which serves well in narrative studies (Riessman, 2008). The analysis will undergo several stages starting with audiotape transcription before moving on to restory (Creswell, 2014). Restorying will organise the key codes, identifying elements that appear in the stories, such as setting, characters, actions, problem and resolution (Creswell, 2014). Following this identification, I then will begin coding the data into categories or themes mentioned in the stories. This process aims to provide depth and insight into understanding individual human experiences. Narrative analysis involves describing the context and details of participants' experiences, including their friends, families, workplaces and homes (Creswell, 2014). Analysing narratives thematically is distinct from other types of qualitative research in that it involves presenting narratives as a sequence of events (Riesman, 2008). Creswell (2014) indicates that coding the subject matter comes after the story is presented. Nonetheless, this analysis has incredible flexibility, which can be both positive and negative. For instance, this flexibility may make it difficult for the researcher to focus on topics other than the one in the spotlight (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017).

3. Personal Safety

Have you completed your departmental risk assessment procedures, if appropriate?

Not applicable

Raises personal safety issues?

No

My research raises no personal safety issues for me or for the research participants. It involves talking about participants' life experiences, the challenges they face and how they cope with these challenges. I will also consider conducting the interviews in neutral settings rather than in the homes of the interviewees. -

Section D: About the participants

1. Potential Participants

The participants will be similar in that all of them will be married mothers working as teachers in government primary schools. Moreover, I will select teachers who teach the major subjects, which include Arabic, Islamic education, mathematics, science, geography, history and English, and exclude teachers who teach physical education, art and computing. This is due to the unequal professional pressure of teaching these latter subjects, which usually do not require as much effort as teaching the major subjects.

2. Recruiting Potential Participants

The participants will be mothers working as teachers in Kuwaiti schools. To find participants, I will send messages through social media platforms that are used commonly in Kuwait, such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter. In the announcements, I will explain the nature of the study and its aim and give information about myself as a researcher, including contact information.

2.1. Advertising methods

Will the study be advertised using the volunteer lists for staff or students maintained by IT Services? No

- not entered -

3. Consent

Will informed consent be obtained from the participants? (i.e. the proposed process) Yes

I will give the participants two papers containing information about the research and how they can participate as well as a consent sheet (see section F) and supporting documentation

4. Payment

Will financial/in kind payments be offered to participants? No

5. Potential Harm to Participants

What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants?

This study includes talking about the participants' life stories, their experiences and their different relationships at work (school) and at home. Clearly, this kind of research requires respect for privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. Anonymity will give participants the freedom to talk about their stories without fear that someone will be able to identify them.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

The study will respect participants' privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. Guaranteeing anonymity will give participants the freedom to talk about their stories without harm. I will avoid doing the interviews in their workplace and choose a location that is comfortable for each participant.

To preserve my safety and the participants' safety, I will arrange to hold the interviews in places that contain first-aid resources and permanent security staff. I will also ensure the participants' comfort by selecting locations such as shopping centres in Kuwait, coffee shops, or meeting rooms. I will cover hospitality expenses if required.

The participants will be asked to fill out a form that includes their personal information, including questions such as whether they suffer from health problems or whether they are pregnant. The form will include first-aid measures to deal with medical situations, as well as the contact information of people close to them in the event of emergency. I will also create a list of the emergency telephone numbers in Kuwait and will be prepared to use them in case of emergency.

As for the interviews with the participants, I will be careful not to misunderstand participants or express a view opposing their personal experience. The main role for me as a researcher is to listen attentively and provide the opportunity for participants to present their experience, as this will allow them to speak openly without fear of the researcher's criticism. If a participant becomes frustrated, angry, or upset for any reason, the situation will be diffused calmly, and another meeting will be arranged at a time that suits both parties.

6. Potential harm to others who may be affected by the research activities

Which other people, if any, may be affected by the research activities, beyond the participants and the research team?

- not entered -

What is the potential for harm to these people?

- not entered -

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate safeguarding of these people?

- not entered -

7. Reporting of safeguarding concerns or incidents

What arrangements will be in place for participants, and any other people external to the University who are involved in, or affected by, the research, to enable reporting of incidents or concerns?

- not entered -

Who will be the Designated Safeguarding Contact(s)?

- not entered -

How will reported incidents or concerns be handled and escalated?

- not entered -

Section E: About the data

1. Data Processing

Will you be processing (i.e. collecting, recording, storing, or otherwise using) personal data as part of this project? (Personal data is any information relating to an identified or identifiable living person).

No

Please outline how your data will be managed and stored securely, in line with good practice and relevant funder requirements

I will record the interviewees using an audio iPad app and keep it safe. At the end of the study, I will destroy the audio record. I will use the transcription within the study and within the subsequent publication

Data protection

I will put the data on a password-protected iPad and in a back-up data collection system, which will also be password-protected. When the iPad is not in use, I will store it in a safe place.

Section F: Supporting documentation

Information & Consent

Participant information sheets relevant to project?

Yes

Document 1049595 (Version 2)	All versions
Document 1050838 (Version 1)	All versions

Consent forms relevant to project?

Yes

Document 1049596 (Version 2)	All versions
Document 1050839 (Version 1)	All versions

Additional Documentation

External Documentation

- not entered -

Section G: Declaration

Signed by:

Tsneem Alhattab

Date signed:

Sun 16 September 2018 at 23:51

Official notes

- not entered -

Appendix 6 *Project Timeline*

Table 17 below gives a timeline of the research activities carried out at all the stages of the research programme.

Table 17 *Project Timeline*

Month/Year	Task
January 2017	Beginning of studies and extensive background reading
September–December 2017 January	Start of writing confirmation report and enrolment in four PG Modules
May 2018	Submission of confirmation review
June 2018	Confirmation review
July 2018	Submission of application for ethical approval
October 2018	Acceptance of application for ethical approval
December 2018 - April 2019 April 2019 April–June 2019	Travelling to Kuwait for pilot study and data collection; data is stored on a password-protected iPad. Transcription of interviews Writing part of methodology chapter
May–December 2019	Data analysis and findings
January 2020 (covid-19 pandemic)	Beginning to write up the data during covid-19 pandemic
May 2021-April 2022	Maternity leave
April 2022- April 2023	Continue write up of the data
April 2023	Thesis submission for examination
December 2023	Delete all the participant data from the iPad