Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Kuwait's Strategic Education Planning Policy and Processes

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

Education planning is considered a vital factor in the success of any education system. For educational organisations such as the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Kuwait, strategic planning is very crucial for the achievement of the educational goals that reflect the aspirations of Kuwait's community, such as preparing graduates to help develop their countries. However, there is a need to build a strategic education plan that integrates the goals and objectives from the educational field, as well as from society. The main purpose of this research is to explore the current strategic education plan in Kuwait in terms of the issues that may arise from the policies that control the strategic education plan's formulation and implementation.

This research adopted a mixed methods approach for data collection, which was conducted in three phases. The first phase depended on exploratory interviews to investigate the nature of the current policy that controls the education system in Kuwait. In addition, the exploratory study aimed to identify issues (if any) result from policies that control strategic education plan's formulation and implementation. The second phase employed a questionnaire that explored research participants' perceptions regarding the issues that were identified by the exploratory study. The third phase depended on in-depth interviews to investigate the characteristics of the centralisation policy in the education system. This phase aimed to further investigate the interviewees' perceptions regarding the issues that had been identified in the first phase. The third phase also sought to investigate how the MoE's policies might underlie these issues, and they may act strengths or weaknesses in the strategic education plan.

The research sample of the three phases consisted of leaders from the three managerial tiers of the Kuwaiti education system (MoE officials, district leaders, and school leaders). The MoE leaders are those who chair different departments within the ministry. The district leaders are those who chair different departments within six education districts in Kuwait. The school leaders consist of head teachers, deputy heads, and department heads. The first phase involved 12 interviewees, the second phase involved 188 participants, and the third phase involved 22 interviewees.

The research findings identified the current policy that controls the education system in Kuwait. The findings indicated that the centralisation in education system is extreme, and that the MoE is the ultimate decision maker. The MoE adopts the tenets of centralisation in order to control resource allocation, curriculum planning, in-service programmes for teachers and staff, pupils' assessments, and educational planning.

My research identified seven issues associated with strategic education planning in Kuwait, which are all affected by the centralisation policy, as follows:

1. Efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic plan
2. Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan
3. Implementability
4. Collaborativeness and participativeness
5. Communicative capacity
6. Bureaucratisation
7. Work environment

These seven issues are seen as the problems that have resulted from the centralised nature of the strategic plan that affected the education system's outcome. For each issue, the research results identified a number of reasons as to why these issues can be viewed as weaknesses of the centralised strategic plan. Thus, the research found that the centralisation policy, which is embedded in both the formulation and the implementation of the strategic plan, is an obstacle to the strategic plan's effectiveness. Additionally, the research identified a relationship between the weaknesses of the strategic plan itself, and the MoE officials' practices as the ultimate decision makers. Finally, the research concluded that the implementers of the strategic plan tend to participate in decision-making; however, they should exercise a certain degree of autonomy within their workplace in order to identify the best ways through which to achieve the goals of the strategic plan.

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Abbreviations

CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMIN/DF	Chi-square based Minimum Discrepancy/Degrees of Freedom
DL	District leader
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
LEA	Local Education Authority
ML	Maximum Likelihood
MO	The Ministry of Education's official
MoE	The Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SL	School leader
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index

Chapter 1: Overview of the Research

1.1 Introduction

Educational systems all over the world are targets of change and reform. Every system may encounter internal forces, such as demographic changes and urbanisation, or external forces, such as globalisation and changes in political situations that might alter these systems. All of these changes are demanding, and educational systems are subsequently placed in situations where they need to adapt in order to cope with these forces, so as to ensure that they correctly respond to the unique needs of each of the forces of change. In fact, educational systems are held captive by these forces of change, with globalisation acting as one of the predominant forces of change that generates the need to rethink policies and regulations across different fields, including education (Carnoy, 1999). As a result, researchers in the education field started to analyse policies and regulations in response to the forces of change, in order cope with those changes, by designing a holistic education plan that deals with both internal and external demands, so the researchers could achieve their educational goals. These strategic education plans target the changes that are affected by internal and external factors. Moreover, research studies should focus on the strategic plans of the educational systems, so that researchers can investigate the adequacy of these plans in terms of meeting the local needs and aspirations of the communities, while considering the external circumstances as well. From this perspective, all educational systems should study their current practices with regard to educational policies and regulations in order to determine whether these systems need to maintain their current policies and regulations, or whether they should implement some changes in order to better meet their needs and achieve the system's goals.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Kuwait established a strategic education plan in order to ensure that the education system produces highly qualified graduates from their schools, who will be employed and foster the development of their country. Since the MoE began planning their education system, policies and regulations were established in order to control the education planning processes and practices. The MoE established the Department of Planning and Improvement, which is responsible

for the plan's formulation; the members of the department also decide which parties should be involved in this process.

There is no doubt that the success of the strategic education plan strongly depends on the policy that is adopted to manage that development process. If the policy ensures that the system builds a representative strategic plan that addresses the actual needs of the society, we can assert that this policy is appropriate and will be successful. However, if this policy fails to ensure the development of a strong strategic plan that includes all the needs of a particular society and utilises all the appropriate means that can lead to its success, we can say that this policy is inappropriate. Thus, the success of the strategic plan largely depends on the policy that controls its formulation and its implementation process.

1.2 The purpose of the research

My research focuses on the policy in Kuwait that is adopted when managing different managerial processes, with specific attention paid to the strategic plan of the MoE. First, this research attempts to identify the nature, extent, and characteristics of the current policy adopted by the MoE in Kuwait in order to control the education system in general, and to control the strategic education planning in particular. In addition, this research attempts to identify the issues that result from the current policy, and that control the strategic education plan with respect to the formulation and implementation processes. This research aims to investigate the perceptions surrounding the implications of the issues identified regarding policy and practice from the views of the individuals working in the MoE (MoE officials), those working in the educational district (district leaders), and those employed in the schools (school leaders). Finally, this research attempts to address how and why (if at all) the MoE's strategic plan policy affects the plan with respect to each of the issues identified.

1.3 The importance of the research

Kuwait is a wealthy country that depends on oil production as its main source of income. People in Kuwait have a very satisfactory lifestyle, as the average income per capita is approximately 1250 dinars, or about 2500 BP (Al-Marzooqi, 2013). Although the country is wealthy, there is evidence that the education system is

relatively poor and does not produce a high level of outcomes in public schools, especially when compared with other Arabian Gulf education systems such as those in Qatar and in the UAE (Al-Hummod, 2012; Ayoub, 2012; Al-Ramzi, 2009).

Many countries – irrespective of whether they are Middle Eastern countries (such as Qatar) or Western countries (such as England) – have revised their educational policies in terms of the locus of authority and power utilised in managing educational issues in response to the local needs that have been identified through research. Although the MoE established six educational districts as an initiative to decentralise the education system, there has not been a recent and clear description about the characteristics of education governance in Kuwait. Therefore, my research aimed to clarify the nature of the current policy that controls the education system by addressing its characteristics. In addition, my research aimed to examine the policy that the MoE in Kuwait adopted when creating an education plan. By analysing the strategic plan of the MoE according to the policy of control, this research will provide education officials (who are responsible for developing educational plans) with information about the issues (whether they are strengths or weaknesses) that may have resulted from the policy that controls the plan's formulation. In addition, this research raises questions about the issues and concerns that the implementers of the strategic plan encounter during the implementation stage of the educational strategic plan. Thus, this research will facilitate the Kuwaiti educational officials' knowledge about how implementers of the strategic plan perceive both the plan and its policy of control. Finally, this research supports the initiatives of the educational reform in Kuwait by focusing on the most powerful factor of the success of any education system: the strategic education plan.

1.4 Research questions

This investigation adopted an emergent research design, as the research questions emerged during the research process rather than being formulated at the outset. The initial research question addressed was:

1. How do the research participants characterise the education system in Kuwait?

What strongly emerged once the first research question was answered was the issue of centralisation. This led to formulation of three additional research questions:

2. What issues does centralisation in educational policy raise for the formulation and implementation of strategic education planning in Kuwait?
3. What are managers' perceptions about the implications of these issues for both policy and practice?
4. What reasons do managers provide for their perceptions regarding the centralised strategic plan?

1.5 Layout of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 presents an introduction of the current research. This chapter aims to clarify the purpose, importance, and questions of this research. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the education system in Kuwait in order to provide the reader with general information about the Kuwaiti education system's policies and practices. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical perspectives about the topics involved in this research in order to discuss the themes related to the main objectives of the research. Chapter 4 presents the research design and methodology, and explains all the methods employed to answer the research questions, so as to explain all of the adopted methods of the current research and justify the selection of the research design, sample, tools, and data analysis methods. Chapter 5 provides a presentation of the research findings of the qualitative and quantitative studies. The research findings are discussed in Chapter 6, in order to expand upon the findings and link them to the existing literature and to previous research. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the research conclusion, which includes the main findings, recommendations, and limitations of the research, while providing suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Overview of Kuwait's Educational System

2.1 Introduction

Education is an interactive and dynamic process that can be continually developed and adapted to meet the changing needs of a society; it can be said that every society develops its own education system in a way that mirrors how that particular society functions (Al-Sultan, 2010). In the context of Kuwait, the development of the entire population is the goal of the country's educational strategy (Al-Gonaim, 1999). The MoE has stated that its learning philosophy is to establish a modern Kuwait by effectively preparing the population of Kuwait to handle modern challenges. The intention of the MoE is to begin this process from the earliest stage during the education of young children (MoE, 2005).

As with all large, long-term projects, the creation of an efficient and contemporary educational model requires sufficient funding (Al-Ramzi, 2009). Kuwait's richness in natural resources, in particular oil, has supported the Kuwaiti government in allocating funds to build a large-scale, modern education system (Al-Gonaim, 1999). Thus, the government intended to employ its wealth to build an effective education system through the establishment of policies and plans as a way to respond to the demands of the 21st century.

2.2 Historical background of the State of Kuwait

Kuwait was established over 300 years ago, as a small country representing a commercial gate between neighbouring countries. In 1961, Kuwait obtained independence and joined the United Nations. Kuwait is an Islamic state, and inhabitants speak an Arabic language. Since its founding as a country, Kuwait has been governed by the Al-Sabah royal family, which was nominated by the Kuwaiti people. Today, Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah rules the country. Kuwaiti policies and rules are dictated by the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, the message of the prophet Mohammad (MoE, 2009).

Due to its position in the Arabian peninsula between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran, the population of Kuwait is drawn from mixed nationalities: Aljazeera Arabs (now the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), Iranians, and Iraqis (MoE, 2009).

Geographically, Kuwait is in the northwestern part of the Arabian Gulf, bordered by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the south and Iraq to the north, and by the Arab states of the Gulf. It lies between the latitudes 28°30′ and 30°06′ north and the longitudes 46°30′ and 49°00′ east. Kuwait has a desert environment, with a total area of about 18,000 km. Its capital city is Kuwait City, which is on the northern coast of the Kuwait Bay (MoE, 2009).

The topography of Kuwait is flat, characterised by some low hills and shallow depressions, a terrain of slightly uneven desert, and with a gradual slope ranging from sea level in the east, to 300 metres above sea level at the Arabian Gulf coast in the west and south. Throughout the year, the climate is hot and dry, particularly in the summer, when temperatures can reach up to 50°C in the shade; the winters are short and warm. In 2009, the population of Kuwait was nearly 3.5 million, consisting of 2,140,225 males and 1,344,656 females. Almost 1,800,000 of the people are Kuwaitis, representing 32.1% of the entire population; the remainder come from other ethnic groups and nationalities. Over 140 different nationalities from all over the world are represented in Kuwait, and the people of the country are employed in many different occupations. The majority of the Kuwait population lives in Kuwait City and its surrounding suburbs, with a particular concentration of people residing in the areas overlooking the coast of the Arabian Gulf (MoE, 2010).

2.3 Educational system in Kuwait: a historical view

Education in Kuwait can be historically traced to a form of primary learning that dates back to 1887. At that time, education consisted of people who were locally referred to as ‘Alkatateeb’ (writers), and who were mostly based in mosques and would teach children basic reading, writing, and mathematics, in addition to teaching the Holy Qur’an. The limited education of the Alkatateeb in Kuwait was present, until a new education system was introduced in 1911 with the opening of the first school for boys, called Al-Mubarkiya. In 1922, the first Kuwaiti private school, Al-Saada, was established (MoE, 2009). In 1936, responsibility for education shifted to the government with the establishment of the Council of Education, which supervised teaching, organised education through the planning and design of curricula, and provided funding. In 1937, the Council of Education opened one

primary girls' school and two primary boys' schools. Prospective pupil numbers increased quickly, leading the Council of Education to create additional classes within these schools, so as to meet the increasing demand for education. In 1947, a religious institute was established, and two years later, a teachers' institute was introduced to train primary school teachers (MoE, 2009).

To some extent, the Kuwaiti education system has been funded by some Arab countries, such as the Arab Republic of Egypt, with emphasis placed on science education. In 1952, the government began to self-manage education, and it was supported technically by other Arab countries. In 1954, educational reforms saw the restructuring of the learning curricula and study plans. Reorganisation of learning phases took place, and the redesign of curricula was implemented in order to better match the social and cultural development needs in Kuwait. The result was that education was modified to four years of kindergarten and primary learning, four years of intermediate schooling, and four years of secondary school (MoE, 2009).

After observing how other countries paid attention to the education of their craftsmen, Kuwait began to educate its craftsmen in 1955 – a move that later became known as the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. After that, in 1963, the first teachers' institute for both male and female teachers opened, awarding diplomas to pupils upon completion of their secondary school certificates. In 1993, the teachers' institute became known as the Basic Education College, and it awarded Bachelor of Education degrees after learners completed four years of postsecondary school study. To date, the first and only public university is Kuwait University, which opened in 1966. Since 2000, three colleges and four private universities have opened (MoE, 2009).

2.4 Educational districts and schools

Since the liberation of Kuwait from Britain in 1961, the MoE began to develop education systems in accordance with global developments. Between 1956 and 2004, the educational structure was as follows: two years of kindergarten, four years of primary school, and four years for each stage of intermediate and secondary school. In 2004, the educational scale was changed to two years of kindergarten, five years

of primary school, four years of intermediate school, and three years of secondary school (MoE, 1998).

In 1982, Kuwait was divided into six administrative districts: Al-Asema, Al-Farwaniya, Al-Jahra, Hawalli, Al-Ahmadi, and Mubarak Al-Kabeer. Within each district, the ministry established a branch that would serve to manage the schools (MoE, 2011). Table 1 presents the number of pupils distributed across the six educational districts.

Table 1: Number of pupils at each educational stage by district

Districts / Schools	Al-Ahmadi	Al-Jahra	Hawalli	Al-Asema	Al-Farwaniya	Mubarak Al-Kabeer
Kindergarten	11773	7463	5412	3197	9149	55137
Primary	33545	24443	20046	16598	28484	13193
Middle	24991	19826	16636	14720	21628	10587
Secondary	14579	11297	11926	11899	13588	7959

Source: (MoE, 2011)

2.5 Vision of the education system in Kuwait

Through the MoE, the Kuwait government has established its vision for the future of education from 2005 to 2025, a vision approved by the Minister's Council. The MoE has established six key goals of the public educational strategic plan for the State of Kuwait as follows:

1. To interact with the current environment without obstructing the privacy of community culture, through free-thinking and cooperation with dynamic changes. This intention has led to the development of different programmes, including encouraging learners and teachers in

‘free scientific thinking’, while developing ‘correct thinking skills’, and ‘creative thinking’. Examples of the application of this include encouraging the learning of foreign languages, applying brainstorming skills, and making full use of changes in information and communications technology.

2. To confirm beliefs in the importance of dialogue and of respect for the human rights of learners in order to provide a strong base for democracy. This includes different programmes aimed at covering concepts related to freedom, respect for law, and democratic life. Another programme is aimed at promoting the development of national identity, avoiding racism and communalism, while developing positive attitudes in learners towards group work and the spirit of initiative.
3. To support wealth production, without negatively affecting the environment or national resources. The focus of this move is to correct pupils’ incorrect perceptions regarding the abundance of oil, and to link the negative effects of oil production to the depletion of limited natural resources and the destruction of the environment. Furthermore, it emphasises the value of national human resources as the financial and moral wealth of the Kuwaiti society, confirming that each citizen shares responsibility for protecting public resources.
4. To confirm the essential requirements of curricula for schools in the general education system and to ensure the achievement of national goals. Different programmes set the criteria for compulsory school curricula for all schools, irrespective of differences in study systems. These are intended to prepare learners for interacting with a variety of available resources beyond teachers and books, with a focus on the interactive learning process and its results, rather than simply on the quantity of knowledge. Responsibility for achieving early education goals is shared between schools, families, and the community, alongside the development of a scientifically enquiring mind and self-learning skills.

5. To achieve strategic requirements by bringing about institutional reform in all general learning sectors. Programmes that implement decentralisation in educational management are aimed at improving learning and school management through performance evaluation. General schools require the motivation to differentiate and create new learning methods. There is encouragement that inter-school competition occurs to enhance quality in learning, improve teachers' performance, and increase teachers' productivity via training and incentives.
6. To bring the current general education system and the requirements of advanced technology closer together. It is important that a new generation of learners, across different scientific, practical, public, and private fields, do not suffer from technological illiteracy, while encouraging learners to benefit from the availability of information and communication technology facilities to increase their knowledge of the surrounding world (MoE, 2003, p. 20).

2.6 Comprehensive aim of education in Kuwait

Following the Curriculum Conference in 1972, the MoE worked on developing a document outlining the general aims of education, which were finalised and issued in 1976. The comprehensive aim of education in Kuwait is based on the following principles, as stated in that document:

> Adapting appropriate opportunities to help individuals attain comprehensive integrated development spiritually, ethically, intellectually, socially and physically as far as allowed by their aptitudes and capacities in light of the nature, philosophy and aspirations of the Kuwaiti society as well as in light of the principles of Islam, Arab heritage and the contemporary culture in a way that ensures the balance between the individuals' realisation of their selves and preparing them for constructive participation in the advancement of the Kuwaiti society in particular and the Arab and World Community in general (MoE, 2003, p.12).

As this text reveals, the articulators of this comprehensive aim sought to include all members of society, regardless of their social, economic, or mental capacity, meaning that the education system takes the needs of all categories of pupils into consideration. This implies that there is an agenda that considers the social, cultural, and religious identity of the Kuwaiti society. Following this comprehensive aim, the strategic education plan is built upon the premise that educational planning does not arise out of a vacuum, in isolation from the community's social, cultural, and religious contexts (MoE, 2003).

Regarding the social context, the strategic education plan in Kuwait aims to achieve two goals. First, it aims to meet individuals' needs according to their abilities and attitudes, as is the case with pupils with learning disabilities and special education requirements. Second, it aims to meet the needs of the community as a whole, as well as to facilitate broader national social and economic development (MoE, 2003). In other words, educational planning aims to support and develop individuals based on their needs and abilities, and according to the Kuwaiti community's aspirations. Al-Sharrah (2002) illustrates that educational planning in Kuwait provides all individuals with the same opportunity to be educated. Thus, educational planning considers the differences between pupils and attempts to provide appropriate education for all. In addition, the members involved in educational planning analyse each Kuwaiti community's needs to provide the resources necessary for different sectors within the country. Therefore, Kuwait's educational planning attempts to develop the community, while identifying and treating its social problems via short- and long-term objectives (Al-Sharrah, 2002).

The cultural context of Kuwaiti society is extremely important in educational planning. For example, Al-Sharrah (1997) indicates that while educational planning aims to support the cultural identity of the Kuwaiti community, it also protects that community from the effects of factors that contradict the local Kuwaiti identity. Moreover, educational planning supports the cultural heritage of previous Kuwaiti generations by including their struggles and efforts to build the country in the curriculum. Furthermore, it supports the customs and traditions of the Kuwaiti community and eliminates alien cultures (Ayasra, 2011). As an example, education in Kuwait excluded sex education within schools, as it opposes the local conservative

culture of Kuwaiti society. Educational planning provides alternative lessons about human proliferation via specific lessons in both religious and science curricula. In this way, educational planning controls the cultural context by supporting the culture's local identity, customs, and traditions, and prevents anything from opposing them.

Regarding the religious context, educational planning is keen to reinforce Islamic values in pupils, while supporting the religious privacy of the Kuwaiti community. The strategic education plan incorporates several goals to achieve this. First, religious goals aim to produce Muslims who believe in Allah, who worship him, and who fulfil his orders. Second, spiritual goals support the spiritual values of Muslim individuals and of the Islamic community. Third, moral goals enhance Muslim individuals' ethical and social values. Fourth, social goals relate to building the Muslim community, which includes cooperative individuals within a wider supporting network of social values (Monshid, 2014).

The strategic education plan translates social, cultural, and religious goals into several aims through different stages. After setting the comprehensive aim of the Kuwaiti education system, its general aims are subsequently addressed. Some of these are related to the social, cultural, and religious issues of Kuwaiti society. As a result, the following general aims of education, formulated more than three decades ago, were set in the light of the comprehensive aim:

1. Preparing the Kuwaiti citizen comprehensively within the mental, physical, m oral, social, and national aspects based on Islamic regulations and Arabic trad itions.
2. Preparing generations to believe in democracy as a lifestyle that abolishes all kinds of constraints imposed on humans by creating a society based on the awareness of the citizens.
3. Preparing future generations to believe in national unity.
4. Preparing future generations to believe in the Arab nationality and comprehensive Arab unity with the development of the Arab personality that is capable of committing to change and development, as well as to managing responsibility.

5. Developing the scope of general education to face the dramatic increases in population rates.

6. Providing pupils with a comprehensive theoretical and practical education in science, the arts, and literature.

7. Preparing future generations to believe in education as the main power of humans.

8. Preparing future generations to believe in scientific thinking, with careful considerations for instilling in them religious values generated from Islamic religion.

9. Preparing future generations so they are capable of creativity and innovation, while contributing positively to public life.

10. Directing youth and preparing them to meet the needs of the Kuwaiti society within different labour groups at all levels in order to address the needs of the social and economic development plans.

11. Balancing and integrating the educational policy and the higher education policy, while also achieving a balance between educational and vocational education programmes.

12. Granting the self-development of individuals by developing society within the qualitative and technical development of the educational process.

13. Taking care of talented and gifted individuals to prepare them as leaders who are able to create and innovate in all fields, so as to push development forward.

14. Taking care of pupils with special educational needs by preparing suitable programmes to meet their needs.

15. Supporting the social, health, and psychological services provided to pupils in a way that is compatible with the increasing numbers, while coordinating the efforts of the ministries and institutions in this field.

16. Achieving vocational enlightenment and direction for pupils according to their abilities and needs, while coordinating with the society's needs for different professions to implement the desired changes in society with regard to handicrafts.

17. Ensuring that there is good communication between schools and society (Cited in: Shafshak, 1980, p.267).

Another set of special aims were subsequently developed for each stage of the educational system across both public and private schools. In addition, the current educational policy was issued according to these general aims. General aims were used to produce special aims for each of the academic subjects taught.

Thus the MoE formulated a strategic plan that included a number of objectives that emerged from the comprehensive aim. The whole plan's formulation follows specific procedures in specific departments within the MoE. These procedures are presented in the following section, which provides a full description of the policies used in the formulation of the strategic education plan.

2.7 Strategic education plan formulation

The Department of Planning and Improvement in the MoE represents the highest authority involved in the development of the strategic education plan. According to Al-Hadhood (1994), the Department of Planning and Improvement helps guide the learning process, as it puts forth significant efforts toward improving learning through the fulfilment of a variety of tasks, including the formation of committees that assist in the preparation of a general framework for strategic education planning, through the evaluation of current planning policies, and by setting out education policies.

The MoE follows several steps to construct its strategic plan. Strategic plan formulation is based on the education policy that stemmed from the Supreme

Council of Planning. Al-Hamdan (1992, p. 29) outlined the general procedures that the MoE follows to formulate the strategic plan:

1. The Supreme Council of Planning, which is the central office of the planning body of the Kuwaiti government, sends the MoE the government's principles and of the general policy.

2. The MoE, represented by the Department of Planning and Improvement, receives Supreme Council of Planning guidelines, and then it begins implementing procedures involved in the plan's formulation.

3. The Department of Planning and Improvement establishes working teams from personnel who work within several departments at the MoE.

4. The team makes all the arrangements required to organise the planning of procedures, while informing all departments of their obligations with respect to the type of information required for the plan's formulation.

5. After receiving the information from each department, the planning team studies, categorises, and modifies the gathered information to convert them to a final information report.

6. The Department of Planning and Improvement constructs another team aimed at preparing the basic components of the plan as follows:

    - They study the qualitative and qualitative issues of the current education system.

    - They prepare policies and goals.

    - They provide budget estimations for the project.

    - They prepare construction projects such as the development of school buildings.

- They prepare programmes for improving the performance of individuals including teachers, headteachers, directors, and staff members.

7. The planning team presents the results of the previous procedures to the Department of Planning and Improvement for discussion and modification.

8. The highest levels of the MoE are represented by the minister, deputy minister, and undersecretary assistants, who review the plan in order to make decisions regarding whether it is necessary to revise particular sections of the plan, or whether they should deliver their approval if they are satisfied with the plan.

9. After approving the plan, the MoE sends a copy of the strategic plan document to the Supreme Council of Planning (which represents the government with regard to planning), in order to obtain final approval.

10. After obtaining final approval, the plan is put into practice, and all education levels are obliged to implement the plan according to the MoE's arrangements (Al-Hamdan, 1992, p 29).

It is clear from the procedures outlined above that individuals at the lower levels, particularly at the school-level, have no clear role in the formulation of the strategic plan. In addition, other stakeholders (such as parents, and head teachers, or civil society institutions) have no clear role in the formulation of the plan. This provides an indication that the strategic education plan's formulation is conducted in a top-down approach. This essentially creates a hierarchy of power, control, and authority, with the highest level being the MoE, and it filters down through to the committees, districts, and schools.

There is a lack of current literature that discusses the mechanisms of the strategic plan's formulation in Kuwait. Moreover, recent literature lacks a full description of the policy that controls the strategic plan's formulation, as it has not been discussed in detail since Al-Hamdan's (1992) description of the procedures involved in this

process. As a result, there is a gap in the knowledge and understanding of the policies underlying the formulation of the strategic education plan. Therefore, one of the aims of my research is to examine the views held by the research participants to investigate the nature and characteristics of the current policy used to control the education system in general, as well as to understand the strategic education plan's formulation in particular.

The Kuwaiti education system has undergone a number of significant changes between 1887 and the present day. It has been transformed from a very traditional system into a much more developed system that guides the country's efforts to improve the quality of its citizens' lives. The educational system has progressed and evolved, and is now wider and more complex since it is based on changes in the contemporary world. Consequently, this progress requires that the education system be controlled through the development of policy that ensures the best management of the education system in order to achieve positive outcomes.

The following chapter identifies the kinds of policies such as centralisation and decentralisation that the education systems might adopt for the purpose of controlling education issues, such as the formulation and implementation of strategic planning initiatives. It presents a discussion of the policies that might be utilised to control the strategic education planning formulation, and raises the advantages and disadvantages of both centralised and decentralised strategic education planning. Similarly, strategic planning implementation might also be controlled by centralisation or decentralisation policies. It also focuses on methods of policy implementation, highlighting advantages and disadvantages of top-down and bottom-up approaches of policy implementation.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Perspectives

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the strategic education planning of the MoE in Kuwait. The investigation focuses on the policy that the MoE applies to control the strategic education plan with regard to its impact on the plan's formulation and implementation. Thus this section begins by discussing the concepts of centralisation and decentralisation – which are used as methods of governance – including the inclination of some countries to adopt such policies as tools to control education systems. Since the strategic education plan is at the core of this research, the concept of strategic planning and its associated processes are presented in this section, as is a discussion of the issues that might potentially lead to the success of any strategic education plan. Given that the strategic plan is akin to any managerial process controlled by policies, such as centralisation and decentralisation, this section discusses the debate over centralised and decentralised strategic planning, raising concepts about the advantages and disadvantages of both of the frameworks through which strategic planning is controlled. Strategic plan implementation is also influenced by specific types of policies that embody top-down and bottom-up decision making. This section discusses these approaches, and addresses their advantages and disadvantages. Finally, the implementers of the strategic plan might have some requirements that they must abide by, and they may face some difficulties in their workplace, which may act as barriers in the implementation process. This section discusses these requirements and difficulties that resulted from those policies that ultimately control the implementation process.

3.2 Centralisation /decentralisation: methods of governance

Comparative studies on centralisation/decentralisation were carried out a long time ago by Al-Ahmad et al. (1994). However, Zajda (2006) states that this type of research perhaps goes back as far as 1933, when Isaac Kandel wrote about the education systems of the post-war period. Zajda reports that the highlighted comparisons were conducted between states (like France), which had engaged in very highly centralised decision making concerning education; conversely, other countries (like England) demonstrated more decentralised decision making.

However, Zajda (2006) explains that, even as early as 1933, the educational systems in those countries did not strictly ascribe to one direction or another. He presents a distinction between interna and externa (i.e. the internal and external aspects of education). Interna include aspects related to the classroom, such as the methodology used when teaching, the curriculum, or other kinds of in-class operations. On the other hand, externa include other aspects related to the school's infrastructure, like the maintenance of the building or its management. According to Zajda (2006, p. 99), Kandel's argument was that:

> Interna were more appropriately subject to decisions at local level, or the level of individual institutions, while decisions relating to externa could more appropriately be centralised to the level of the national Ministry of Education.

The idea of what is considered to be "local" or "decentralised" and what is to be considered "centralised" has evolved into broader concepts that adopt the same terminology. In other words, many more issues have been factored into these concepts, such as the increase in the central authority's duties, as well as the other types of issues that need to be addressed and the improvements that need to be achieved. In addition to the fact that local and smaller authorities wish to participate in making decisions about these issues, authorities, whether in large entities like governments or small entities like organisations or educational institutions, take these two systems (centralisation and decentralisation) into consideration when addressing their plans of action or identifying how they would like certain systems to run.

3.2.1 The concept of centralisation

The concept of centralisation is usually connected to the authority that is represented by the central management across different social, cultural, and political fields. Centralisation can be defined simply as the centralised control of a government. That being said, organisations under the government's jurisdiction receive instructions from one central authority, which implements the government's decisions. Al-Ahmad et al. (1994) presented an organisational definition of centralisation, defining it as a style of authority in which the educational departments are arranged hierarchically from high levels to low levels, with each level receiving decisions and tasks from the level above.

Lauglo (1995) notes that in such a centralised authority the central government concentrates on making decisions about a wide range of matters, thereby, "leaving only tightly programmed routine implementation to lower levels in the organisation" (Lauglo, 1995, p.6). Lauglo's perception indicates that centralisation guarantees a stable government in which decisions are made by the experts who are in the top position of authority, and this should lead to even more development across the country. Thus the concept of centralisation indicates that the top authority controls the decision-making. Whilst the lower organisational levels are required to implement those decisions, they are not empowered to participate in the decision-making process.

3.2.2 Rationale for the use of centralisation

Education is at the core of development and it reflects the directions the state takes in regard to politics, the economy, and many of the various other aspects of government (Ghenem, 2008). Along with that importance is the vital role that the state holds, as it has some control over education by a higher authority, and which is also responsible for the well-being of the country in general (Al-Bustan et al., 2003). For example, when one thinks of countries that are characterised by various ethnicities (such as Britain or the United States), a quick glance at their education systems may lead one to believe that there is no harm in letting education be completely decentralised; yet, a deeper investigation could reveal how problematic that decentralised system might prove to be when one also sees that a mass of various values exists, and as a result, the generally adopted standards that reflect the identity of the country may become lost. Reflecting on education in the past century, McGinn and Welsh (1999) point out how models of education, such as the learning-by-doing model, were adopted by individuals and probably by small communities. Each of those initiatives has its own respective objectives and standards. This, according to the authors, led to the absence of a shared set of values and facts which, in fact, was accompanied by the development of new and stronger governments that sought to develop schooling processes that lead to situations where the "control of education ended up more centralised than before" (McGinn and Welsh, 1999, p. 23).

I suggest that this point can be further clarified from two perspectives. First, educational systems of the past lay more in the hands of individuals and small local communities when compared to the present time. This could be due to the absence of an education system that resembles the form in which it exists today, or it could be that the structure of the government in those communities has changed, whereas now, education represents an important, distinguished part of the government. Each of these local communities has different views and different standards of education which, even if they worked well in the past, would not work well now due to the need for an organised body of education that follows similar standards, as set by the government. The second perspective, which is related to the first and which was also highlighted by McGinn and Welsh (1999), is that centralisation is the effect of urbanisation. When smaller communities expanded and cities with larger populations began to emerge, operating an education system became complicated. In other words, urbanisation led to a need for larger schools, as well as for more teachers, educators, and employees to help the sector run properly. As a result, an urgent need for additional financing likely emerged. All of these factors, and others, translate into the need for a larger authority to control and run the education sector. The role of a strong central government is to step forward and fulfil those needs.

Based on this argument, one can see that urbanisation is an important factor that enables centralisation to flourish. McGinn and Welsh (1999) have referred to this as a critical factor that leads to centralisation, especially in the field of education. The authors have indicated that urbanisation results in a need for larger schools, new fields of study, and increasing attention paid to new aspects of education that have not been previously explored. All of these necessitate expertise and unified standards that guarantee that educational development is distributed equally around the state. Therefore centralisation is seen as a policy that ensures equity between regions (Ghenem, 2008). Although this seems to be a valid argument, I suggest that these same factors have also led to decentralisation. In other words, as urbanisation (i.e. development and growth) increases dramatically – which, as noted above, leads to a need for centralisation – central governments may lose control, and these governmental authorities may feel that it was important to retain some level of

power, so they sought the help of the local communities and lower level organisations to establish this aim.

Attawi (2004) argues that it is important for an organisation to work under a centralised authority in order to guarantee that its work runs smoothly for optimal results. While this, in itself, is an important factor in support of centralisation, another related factor may be a reason lies behind using this policy. This additional factor is the inability of local organisations and authorities to handle financial issues, so that their objectives and financial needs are met (Courant and Loeb, 1997). In such cases, centralisation may become an urgent solution to try to manage financial resources. In studying similar issues (such as in Michigan), Courant and Loeb (1997) explain how some poor urban districts that have adopted decentralised systems in their schools oversaw the finances of these schools regionally for a few decades, but they eventually failed to cope with the financial burdens that were primarily caused by increasing property taxes. According to the authors, this was accompanied by increased spending, which necessitated an immediate change to a more centralised system in order to save the schools.

Brown (1991) indicates that size is another reason behind the adoption of centralisation, suggesting that the size of the district, the schools, or the numbers of students and schools are important factors. To explain this, in small countries (for example, in countries in the Middle East, such as the Kingdom of Bahrain), the number of schools and pupils in each geographical district are not large enough to really necessitate the need to decentralise the educational system if the affairs are still managed centrally. Brown (1991) argues that a school with fewer than 1000 pupils is considered small in size and, being from a small country (i.e., Kuwait), it seems that this is a very valid argument. However, a vital issue that needs to be taken into consideration is that bureaucracy and inequity are involved in the distribution of services. When this is the case, the argument for centralisation is less valid, as these issues will still affect these districts, irrespective of their size, or if they are in direct contact with the central authority (Al-Bustan et al., 2003). In other words, in a small country, where smaller districts can be tightly and closely connected to the central government, the need for decentralisation may weaken; corrupt bureaucrats and a sense of inequity in handling the services offered to those districts may still lead to

an urgent need for decentralisation, where the local communities in those smaller areas have a say in the distribution of resources. This may guarantee that, to some extent, stable improvements can keep pace with other, more privileged districts. Katorobo (2005) addresses the idea that decentralisation might be a solution for expanding cities. He points out that in their quest to meet the needs of rapidly expanding cities, central governments usually face "an urgent strategic need for urban public management to focus on aligning services to new demands" (Katorobo, 2005, p. 38), and that these governments mostly find it difficult to maintain some level of central control that can easily be managed and sustained in small cities, but not in heavily populated countries. Again, this reflects a decreased need for decentralisation in small-sized countries like Kuwait.

It should be stated that there may not be a need to change to a decentralised system. In other words, decentralisation could do more harm than good. To explain this, one should note that decentralisation is one of many widespread policies at the present time, and these policies seem to be constantly evolving into new methods and innovations (Hussain, 2006). However, one issue here is related to need and necessity. That means that it is important for schools to determine if there is a need for decentralisation before adopting it (Al-Ajmi, 2010). This involves checking to see if stakeholders, such as parents and members of the community, are in support of the change, and if they seem ready to take responsibility for the system, while acting as part of the new authority (Al-Ajmi, 2010). It seems that the importance of involving parents and the local community reflects recognition of the fact that parents are partners in the education of their children. Moreover, no one can ignore the fact that parents are very important stakeholders in educating these children (Al-Mehailby and Al-Jabr, 2002). First, parents are the ones who know more than anyone else about their children's needs. Second, they are responsible for dealing with issues that may arise in the students' education, including dropouts, failure, and so on. The community, which is a large entity comprised of the parents within a given society, represents the same degree of importance. In addition, NGOs and local businesses are important stakeholders in education as well; however, any new policy cannot be adopted without considering some basic issues. For example, Ghenem (2010) points out that, before embracing decentralisation, it is important for those connected with

the school to assess a school's readiness to take responsibly before the transition, while determining whether they would be willing to face any challenges that may come up as a result of the new policy.

Given that the policy of centralisation impedes participation, it seems that the very concept of decentralisation implies that wider involvement of the stakeholders can occur in education. In this light, decentralisation is seen as a means through which to reduce the amount of control the top authorities possess over certain decisions, and shifting this responsibility toward lower levels of management. These issues are discussed in the following section.

3.2.3 The concept of decentralisation

As the name suggests, decentralisation is characterised by ceasing the centralisation of a specific system, while shifting the locus of control towards other organisations that are more secondary in nature than the main organisation that lies at the centre. This concept is supported by Hanson (1998, p.112), who defines decentralisation as "the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility, and tasks from higher to lower organisational levels or between organisations".

Upon reviewing the literature on centralised systems and the early steps taken to transfer some of the authority to the lower levels of an organisation, one can see that there is a sense that some of the power is being replaced by, rather than completely transferred to, other authorities, as has been the case in recent years. A clear example of this is evident in China; Hawkins (2000) has pointed out that this trend emerged as far back as the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. It is important to note that these actions do not, in any sense, indicate an early shift to a decentralised system; for example, in China, this drastic reform appeared to occur only in 1985 (Hawkins, 2000). I suggest that any early attempts at decentralisation were not meant as a means through which reform to occur; rather, it took place only as an ad-libbed solution for dealing with the economic, political, or other issues that the state could not handle centrally. Thus (Hussain, 2006) comments that this kind of devolution to authority served two simultaneous purposes. One purpose was to distribute the responsibilities of the new government to other local organisations. The second purpose was to provide a different way through which to look for resources. This, to

some extent, explains the recentralisation that took place in some instances, as authorities regained their control once they feared losing it (Tatto, 1999).

3.2.4 Rationale for the use of decentralisation

Decentralisation is adopted in certain systems for many reasons. The first reason for adopting the concept of decentralisation is that it offers flexibility in decision-making (Al-Ajmi, 2010; Daradka, 2009; Ghenem, 2008). In some instances, those in charge in centrally controlled education systems have a hard time making appropriate decisions, as doing so necessitates being completely familiar with the education districts, their actual needs, their existing resources, and so on. In these cases, it may seem as though relaying some of the responsibility to the school's district may be a better option. Brown (1991) has noted that when a centralised education system is applied, even simple things like extending the school library or carrying out major maintenance becomes an issue, as these issues may not fall within the central office's existing plans for the school. I would argue that the need for headteachers and districts to have some level of authority over school issues brings about an urgent need to have sound information be provided by the school so that the authority is utilised properly. Therefore, decentralisation is seen as a policy that helps lower managerial levels deal with their needs and problems within a proper timeframe (Hanson, 1997).

Those in leading positions within the school and the district (such as head teachers) should be in continuous contact with the central office so that coordination and cooperation can occur, which will lead to the school's objectives being achieved. When addressing issues surrounding multiculturalism in education in Britain and France, Bleich (1998) pointed out that large numbers of people from other cultures exist in these countries. This means that these groups have their own perspectives on education, as well as their own objectives and goals. Any new and innovative ideas put forth from various individuals may carry more weight than the differences between these individuals, as these novel strategies could be incorporated into any work that is conducted when improving education. While centralisation may prohibit policymakers from using these ideas and new perspectives, decentralisation

“increases the number of decision-making gatekeepers who control the access of new ideas into the policy system” (Bleich, 1998, p. 81).

The second reason for decentralisation that it provides accountability to the people (Al-Ajmi, 2010; Daradka, 2009; Ghenem, 2008; Carnoy, 1999). According to Brown (1991), schools can only be held accountable when they are given freedom to spend budgets according to their needs. He pointed out that when schools obtain this type of freedom, they become accountable for their decisions in that they have to assess their performance. I suggest that when local authorities or schools are held accountable, it is vital that they be urged to maintain their tasks and duties, and are provided with assistance to do so. For Katorobo (2005), this can be achieved by rewarding these decision makers with greater levels of autonomy. On the other hand, accountability needs to be strengthened, and that can be achieved by applying mechanisms that affect the degree to which these local authorities can be held accountable. These mechanisms include “elections, mobility, information, rule of law and the extent to which the state can be influenced by outside interest” (Katorobo, 2005, p. 32).

The third reason why decentralisation might be used is for school productivity (Carnoy, 1999). When schools have more independence and authority, they are likely to be more productive, as they have more freedom to make decisions about and suggest areas for innovation. In addition, they have the resources and the ability to proceed with making any changes and improvements that respond to their needs. Issues arise when that control is left in the hands of the central office, where the school’s needs are not completely understood or known. According to Brown (1991), these issues include budget padding and the hoarding of supplies so that the schools can find ways to meet their actual needs. I suggest that in such cases of centralisation, the entire environment is unhealthy for the educational body of any government. This is because a gap exists between the central authority and the local schools; although both ends are trying to work towards achieving better education, neither of these bodies seem to achieve much progress. On the one hand, the central authority does not know the actual needs of the local schools and, on the other hand, the schools do not have the freedom, authority, or funds available to them to realise any of their goals.

Decentralisation does not necessarily mean that a centralised government actually believes in the idea of transforming into a new system where authority should be shared (Al-Bustan et al., 2003). In other words, decentralisation could only act as a means through which to strengthen deep-rooted, existing authority. As such, decentralisation acts to increase the central government's efficiency when it finds it difficult to deal with issues centrally. McGinn and Welsh (1999) indicate that when a government finds it difficult to deal with certain educational issues – which may include teacher deployment, payment, or the distribution of equipment and tools – it finds a solution in decentralisation, which allows these issues to be dealt with easily and by other groups. According to McGinn and Welsh, another reason as to why decentralisation occurs in, what seem to be, extremely centralised governments is the desire of those governments to tone down the strength of the lower-level organisations, such as teachers' unions. Extending some of the authority to these unions or to other local organisations will also mean extending a sense of accountability to these groups, pertaining to both the organisation's efficiency and the extent to which the lower-level organisation can achieve the goals and objectives of the government (Ghenem, 2008; Carnoy, 1999). As a result, governments find solutions to financial problems by delegating some of this responsibility to the local organisations.

The literature that addresses the transition from a centralised state to a decentralised state, or that at least discusses the implementation of increasingly more decentralised policies, refers to many circumstances that could help foster greater decentralisation. For example, the complexity of an education system, the heterogeneity amongst those who those interested in education, the large scale of educational enterprise and the financial and communication challenges of central government, could be some of the most common circumstances that pave the way for greater decentralisation (Lauglo, 1995). However, even with the way paved for a more decentralised system, other factors could arise that might stand in the way of this transition, as governments may take the opportunity to yield more authority to local organisations, enabling them to participate in decision making (Egel, 2010).

An argument can be made in favour of either centralisation or decentralisation. Although contemporary thought tends towards decentralisation, centralisation retains

support even from those who are typically in favour of decentralisation (Ghenem, 2008). In the instance when new authorities or governments can benefit from top-down methods of authority, the rationale for centralisation can seem legitimate; it can also seem legitimate in situations where the basis to adopt decentralisation has not yet been sufficiently established (Al-Bustan et al., 2003). For example, in countries that have adopted centralisation for decades, lower-level authorities are insufficiently empowered (or skilled) to make standalone decisions (Ghenem, 2008). Although the decentralisation movement has become a global trend towards reform (Tasi, 2007; Hanson, 1997), it is essential that decentralisation be achieved in a gradual and carefully planned way, rather than through sudden and instant reform. I would suggest that such a shift in authority requires readiness and awareness from those who will share their decision-making capacity with the top-level authorities.

The following section demonstrates that there is no evidence that decentralisation is the ultimate choice and the only solution available. Such claims are prevalent in some contexts where centralisation was readapted in certain systems after years of decentralisation. The following section discusses how improvements in education are more important than a shift toward decentralisation. In other words, blindly applying decentralisation to a system may not lead to improvements.

3.2.5 Examples of educational reform towards decentralisation

Although reforms surrounding centralisation and decentralisation in the England were very clear after 1980, especially with the development of the 1988 Educational Reform Act, the beginning of this movement can be traced back to the 1960s, when employers were unhappy with pupils' knowledge and skills, which were acquired by the schools (Daun, 2006).

According to Daun (2006), the change that occurred was gradual. As noted above, tangible changes began to arise in the 1980s, perhaps because parents became able to select schools within the state system. However, after that time, remarkable transitions followed, and a movement towards more decentralised education occurred. Daun (2006) outlines precise examples of those changes. For example, in 1992, all secondary schools were allowed to have full control of their budgets after they were put under the local management of schools (LMS). About ten years later,

schools became relatively autonomous, and in 2002, school companies started to appear. School companies represented a distinguished development, as it meant that schools could join forces to form companies that seemed to take them a step further towards autonomy.

The reforms in England have taken many years to develop, presenting researchers with a great model to observe and study the steps through which reforms take place and their respective goals are achieved. For example, schools in England used to follow the Local Education Authority (LEA), which meant that they were very limited in terms of independence and autonomy. After the reform of the 1980s, LEAs were no longer able to formulate and implement their own policies. For instance, schools obtained the authority to deal with its financial issues and with concerns surrounding teachers' deployment (Daun, 2006).

When addressing the issue of centralisation and reform in England, it is important to consider the situation in France as well. Daun (2006) points out that historically, France has been a highly centralised country Like England, a transition towards greater decentralisation began in France around the mid-1980s; however, the government was still trying to remain directly involved in the education sector, and in other sectors of the government. According to Daun (2006), the reason why this form of control was still in place is that the government regarded it as a way to ensure education equality with respect to economical, cultural, and geographical issues (Daun, 2006). It is important to note that additional, and important, steps towards greater decentralisation have taken place after the reforms were initiated in the 1980s. One example of the steps involved was that secondary schools were given a wider range of autonomy (Daun, 2006).

According to Cole and John (2001, p. 109), the motive behind this form of decentralisation is that:

> The voice of the 'consumer' started to be articulated against the decisions of the local education authority, in the form of resistance to comprehensive reorganisation schemes.

In this case, consumers are the stakeholders at the lower levels of government, as represented by teachers, school administrators, students, parents, and so on. Cole and

John pointed out that as parents became more involved in the reforms, they started to become concerned, as issues "emerged on the political agenda and became proposals of the main political parties" (Cole and John, 2001, p. 109). In fact, the growing voice of the consumers/people was not the only element that initiated the change to a more decentralised education system. As Cole and John have explained, there were concerns surrounding educational performance. These concerns were accompanied by economic pressures, as the government started to face difficulties when controlling the public expenditures.

Decentralisation is not the only solution regarding education problems, nor is it the only way to initiate development. It seems that in some contexts, a move toward decentralisation might actually take the form of recentralisation. This step backward stemmed from the many reasons that made the top authorities re-evaluates their policies. The next section presents a number of examples of some of the contexts in which these situations emerged, and it discusses why some authorities moved towards recentralisation.

3.2.6 Coming full circle: centralisation, decentralisation, and recentralisation

When exploring the literature on centralisation and decentralisation, and when examining the arguments presented in this thesis, one can very clearly see that there is a tendency to change centralised forms of governance to other forms governance. This is a sign of improvement, modernity, democratisation, and adherence to globalisation (Carnoy, 1999). If one looks at Taiwan and South Korea, which have very strict authoritarian regimes that have adopted highly centralised systems, one can see that while the government in both of these countries is undemocratic and very bureaucratic, it has practised centralisation for reasons that extend beyond the simple desire to exert control (Mok, 2006). Both countries were strongly motivated to keep and protect the political systems that were running their governments (i.e., anti-communism), while also defending each country's national identity. However, even with such an important and seemingly legitimate motive, this power was used to control schools insofar as the MoE imposed policies concerning personnel deployment, resource allocation, and curriculum development (Lo and Gu, 2008, p. 519). With new changes and reforms taking place around the world, it is difficult to

maintain such a rigid level of control, as change becomes a necessity when dealing with the needs imposed by the country itself, and by the changes imposed by globalisation.

Before addressing the issue of recentralisation, it is important to point out that the transition to decentralisation was not a haphazard, quick, or an unstudied reaction to either globalisation or the prevalence of the decentralisation movement across many countries; rather, this change took place gradually. For example, in Taiwan, although the system-wide reforms began in 1987, the tangible, observable, changes in the centralised policy occurred in the mid-1990s (Lo and Gu, 2008). In fact, according to Lo and Gu (2008), it was not until 2003 that the Taiwanese government began an experimental programme that involved organisational restructuring and developing a manpower plan for its schools. This programme was developed to implement reforms in locations where more autonomy was given to schools and other educational institutions. In addition, teachers and parents also exercised autonomy and participated in the governance of education. In fact, in Taiwan, it became a law for teachers to have professional autonomy, and they were granted the right to be involved in the school's management; Article 27 points out that:

> The teachers' associations have the function of maintaining teacher's professional autonomy, and they are teachers' representatives in the negotiation with the government departments regarding terms and conditions appointments (Lo and Gu, 2008, p. 512).

As discussed previously, decentralisation was a reform sought after by oppositions, organisations, and even individuals who aspired to weaken the level of authoritarian control in order to enable local organisations to possess even greater control. This initiative involved many countries around the world, and many of these countries have achieved, to a great extent, their goal of decentralising their systems, as exemplified in Indonesia (Green, 2005) and India (Johnson, 2003). However, of interest are cases where countries that reached their goals of achieving a decentralised system either reverted to centralisation, or they opted to turn to recentralisation instead (such as in Brazil).

In Brazil, local organisations and educational institutions became independent in terms of their finances and the work they performed, as was the case in other decentralised systems. Yet, not long after they were granted this authority, recentralisation occurred, as centralisation reappeared in the Brazilian democratic system (Almeida, 2005, p. 2). Economic concerns are one of the factors that facilitated the country's return to centralisation. Some of the key characteristics of decentralisation include financial autonomy and independence among local organisations. This occurs when local organisations are able to manage their own ways of obtaining money, while controlling their income and spending. In many countries that adopted decentralisation, a weak economy often resulted, and several financial issues arose, causing the government great difficulty when dealing with these matters (Ghenem, 2008).

According to Eaton and Dickovick (2004), when decentralisation is adopted, many reforms can occur – including those related to economics. These economic reforms symbolise the transfer of money to the local organisations or sub-national governments. Eaton and Dickovick (2004) noted that these transfers occurred without the development of specific or clear plans that outlined the spending responsibilities of these organisations. In addition, decentralisation brings about economic liberalisation which, in turn, leads to an increase in calls for "separatist claims and regional trading blocs" (Eaton and Dickonick, 2004, p. 90). Montero (2001), who is in support of this view, argues that the coming of recentralisation led to the distribution of authority, which is apparently good for the well-being of the country because recentralisation enables the government to control the country's economic issues by setting clear economic plans. He also observes that this shift in authority is elusive, as it sets the stage for a struggle over the distribution of authority between national and regional parties. This struggle simultaneously increases tensions between macroeconomic stability and decentralisation, which has caused the development of intense political conflicts (Montero, 2010).

Gershberg and Michael (1998) present a more moderate and clear view of recentralisation. The authors believe that while decentralisation is important for solving inefficient and weak service delivery, and for targeting the inequalities in resource allocation caused by overly-centralised systems, the system is only really

effective when both decentralisation and the strengthening of central functions (recentralisation) take place. It seems that this is true, especially when we look at political systems in countries that are governed by poverty and corruption. If we look at the explanation discussed earlier by Egel (2010), we find that decentralisation may be vital in solving problems associated with inequality or the inappropriate distribution of services, among others. Corrupt elites at the lower, or local, levels may abuse the benefits offered by decentralisation in order to use it for their own personal gain. In these instances, the adoption of recentralisation might be a balanced approach, as it could help by allowing for the distribution of authority, to some extent, while keeping some control in the hands of the central government to guarantee optimal use of authority.

In conclusion, centralisation and decentralisation are policies that control any managerial process. Given that this research focuses on the policies and processes underlying the strategic education plan, the next section presents a discussion of the processes involved in the strategic plan, while focusing on the plan's stages and requirements. Moreover, the next section will address the potential benefits of some of the processes, including collaboration and communication, as a means to enrich the strategic plan overall. However, it should be noted that the degrees to which collaboration and communication processes are used within the education system are directly related to whether the strategic plan's policy is centralised or decentralised.

3.3 Strategic educational planning

A strategic plan in an educational organisation becomes the guiding map of the organisations in which the planning is designed, developed, and implemented. The external environment of the organisation is complex, and rapid changes that occur in this environment may ultimately affect the organisation, either in a positive or negative manner. In response to these changes, strategic planning enables the organisation to adapt its respective entities according to these changes, while also establishing its goals and developing the actions needed to achieve them. Bryson (2004) commented that strategic planning clarifies what the organisation is, and what it should do, to achieve its goals. In this way, strategic planning in educational

organisations helps the members find the best ways to achieve their educational goals.

3.3.1 The concept of strategic planning

The very concept of strategic planning emerged from the business field, where different courses of action are applied in order to increase an organisation's revenue (Puanmau, 2006). Hax and Majluf (1990) defined strategic planning as an organisation's adoption of long-term trends and policies for the achievement of future goals that take into consideration relevant internal or external environmental changes. Puanmau also notes that the concept of strategic planning refers to the process by which a given organisation establishes the most appropriate strategies required to achieve its aims and objectives. Therefore, strategic planning can be seen as a means through which to provide a systematic process that organisations can use to gather a broad range of information to apply when setting long-term organisational directives; these guidelines can then be translated into actions that meet the organisation's objectives and goals (Poister and Streib, 2005).

Strategic planning can be regarded as a sort of template that involves a strategy, insofar as a physical document is used to signify the particular directives of an organisation (Boselie, 2010; Boxel and Purcell, 2007). This document contains all of the information regarding the components of the organisation's overall plan, including its strategies. In this way, it appears that an organisation's strategic plan also represents a physical manifestation of its desired position. Therefore, this is a process where strategic intent is converted into sustainable results over a specified time period.

3. 3.2 The process of strategic educational planning

Given that the formulation of an organisational plan is a systematic process, as indicated by Poister and Streib (2005), it is generally composed of different sequential and interrelated stages. Put simply, devising this type of plan consists of performing similar activities that are implemented in a similar order within similar phases (Al-Ajmi, 2010). Generally, the process of strategic planning in education most often contains several phases: environmental analysis, policy formulation, action plan development, and evaluation (Chang, 2008). However, prior to carrying

out the first stage of the plan's implementation, it is vital that the organisation's vision and mission are clearly articulated. The organisation's vision exemplifies what an organisation wants to be and strives to do in the coming years, while the mission relates to the organisation's overall purpose (Seiver, 2000; Cleland, 1996).

It is important to consider who creates the organisation's vision and mission statements. Puanmaue (2006) argues that these statements represent a direct translation of the aspirations of the actors involved, such as the MoE. According to Puanmau, the vision and mission could be created by people from within or without the MoE. This is because an organisation's vision does not merely represent the dreams of the institution; it is related to broader aspirations that are relevant to the community and society at large (Lumby, 2002). Irrespective of the thoughts or ideas of the various stakeholders involved, all of these aims would be amalgamated, so as to shape the vision and mission of the organisation (such as the MoE). Sevier (2000) is more specific in his views; he advocates that visionary leadership is one of the main characteristics of the individuals, or groups of individuals, who create the vision and mission of the educational organisation. Thus, leadership's development of the vision and mission of the organisation adds meaning to the organisation, while shaping the ultimate direction of the venture (Sevier, 2000). The most important application of the vision is to inspire individuals within the organisation in order to stimulate them to act positively for the future of the organisation (Al-Sakarna, 2010).

Once the vision and the mission of the organisation are clarified, there are four stages that are developed that are built upon the clear articulation of the vision and mission. According to Chang (2008), these stages include environmental analysis, policy formulation, action plan development, and evaluation.

3. 3.2.1 Environment analysis

Under normal circumstances, the strategic planning process beings by conducting a situation analysis that includes identifying the difficulties, strengths, and weaknesses of the organisation. According to Chang (2008), many terms have been used to describe this task, which involves analysing, diagnosing, assessing, and scanning the processes involved in implementing the strategic plan. However, of all the possible terms used to describe this process, "education sector analysis" is probably the most

commonly used. One of the essential principles of the strategic plan is the need for valid and reliable data. Hendrick (2010) argues that strategic planning requires a comprehensive assessment of the organisation's position, while taking into account the organisation's surroundings, in order to create more detailed guidelines to find solutions to any problems that the community may encounter. Kotler and Fox (1985) suggest that the data needed for strategic planning in education can be obtained through two processes of analysis: the first is to analyse the internal and external environments, and the second is to examine the available resources. The environmental analysis should be established in order to document the most important environmental factors that the organisation should take into account when drawing up its future aims, strategies, structures, and systems; the resource analysis should be established to identify the main resources that the organisation needs and obtains (Kotler and Fox, 1985). The main focus of the resource analysis involves considering all the financial, material, and human resources that are available. Another aim is to determine which facilities are available and can be used in the strategic analysis in order to estimate what is required to implement the strategic plan. In addition, a research analysis should be conducted where all educational inputs, such as finance, teachers, teaching materials, and school infrastructure, should be analysed in order to ensure accurate outputs (Chang, 2008). These resources play vital roles in increasing the organisation's efficiency and effectiveness, each of which is connected to the quality of the policy's outcomes (Schreens, 2000). Therefore, the education system should evaluate and consider the inputs, processes, and outputs, as well as their relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability (Chang, 2008). It can thus be seen that the nature of educational inputs (resources) should be carefully chosen according to educational needs, which can be identified by analysing the internal and external environments of the organisation. Consequently, determining the relevance of the resources to the system's needs is fundamental to achieving any of the desired goals.

Some authors, such as Al-Sakarna (2010), emphasise that the process of gathering data should be built upon a participatory approach. In this approach, different people from both within and without the organisation are involved in identifying its needs and problems (Ghenem, 2008). In order to ensure that a high level of information is

produced, I would suggest that gathering information should involve inputs from people at all educational levels, and other stakeholders should also be consulted. In this way, a wider range of information could be gathered from the diverse sources that are inside and outside the MoE. Bantel (1993) supports this perception, commenting that the heterogeneity of the planning team ensures that the plan is comprehensive insofar as it includes most needs and problems. Al-Hareeri et al. (2007) indicate that in order for the strategic plan to be comprehensive in scope, it should involve all levels of the organisation in order to identify key issues, such as the resources available, potential problems, and overall or specific needs. In addition, Al-Daradka (2009) has indicated that one of the problems associated with educational planning in developing countries is the lack and inaccuracy of information because of the wide gap between the planners' everyday experiences and the wider needs of the society. As a result, participation in gathering data should involve individuals from the society who are very familiar with its problems.

I would argue that the process of gathering data should be extended to include the international environment. It is crucial for education systems that seek reform and improvement to look at outside experiences. Davies and Ellison (2004) commented that successful planning considers experiences that occur outside of the organisation's environment. Furthermore, they observed that in order to gain information surrounding potential situations at the national and local levels, it is important to draw general international comparisons, while specifically focusing on the education sector. Davies and Ellison make it clear that gathering far-reaching data is integral to analysing the internal and external environment, along with the international environment, in order to ensure thorough coverage of all the community's needs and problems that should be addressed in the strategic plan.

It seems that drawing on global experiences in education can have a positive impact on pupils. According to Davies and Ellison (2004), global trends highlight a number of reforms that have strong implications for schools; one example is that the availability and use of technology in education is changing. Using technology (such as computers) in teaching increases opportunities for pupils to look at global information which, in turn, can directly and positively impact the classroom (Carnoy, 1999). Pupils and teachers in different locations are brought closer together through

improved communications. In addition, a broader range of information is more easily accessible, and pupils are able to become more aware of what their future may hold after they finish school; for many pupils, it is likely that their work will be more variable in scope, more international in nature, and their jobs will tend to lie within the service sector rather than in the production sector.

Consequently, it is important for pupils to benefit from international experiences, especially given that the world (and the field of education) is changing. Teaching and learning methods and means have been widely improved in many developed countries, such as in the USA and the UK (Al-Sharrah, 2002). Therefore, it would be useful to consider the experiences of these countries and to determine elements that are relevant and fit the local culture and context of the Kuwaiti education system. Educational planning can optimise the experience of other countries, as information can be gathered about what occurs in outside environments during the first stages of these initiatives.

3. 3.2.2 Policy formulation

Policy design is partly based on the outcomes of the sector analysis and, most of the time; it is based on previous or current educational policies (Chang, 2008). This stage is usually related to the planning of long-term strategic goals (Carron, 2010). Carron (2010) notes that when planning for projects that exceed short-term and medium-term plans, policy design should include primary strategies that are developed in order to achieve those goals. Hendrick (2003) commented that policy design includes both the processes for developing the strategy and for monitoring its impact. Policy design also addresses more wide ranging issues, such as strategic thinking and the strategy implementation. To elaborate, Chang (2008) has detailed the main implications of the policy formulation stage. First, this stage clarifies who should participate in the building of the action plan, both from inside and outside the organisation and it also outlines the ways in which those stakeholders can communicate. Second, it articulates issues of equity, such as disparities in gender and rural/urban disparities. Third, it shapes the institutional aspects, such as governance and management, as it strikes a balance between centralisation and decentralisation. Fourth, it highlights a number of ways to control costs and expenditures. Finally, it

sets policies regarding resource allocation and identifies ways to expend those resources both in terms of centralisation and decentralisation.

3. 3.2.3 Action planning

Action planning refers to the framework in which national policy details are presented. It includes the preparation for implementation, and it should contain the goals and the objectives of the strategy. In addition, the plan should identify the concerned actors and the activities required to achieve those objectives, and detail both the locations in which the activities should take place and the timeframe required to realise the plan's aims (Chang, 2008; Attawi, 2004). The objectives must be specific and clear to the individuals in the organisation, especially to those that play a role in the implementation of the plan. For example, the degree of clarity of the objectives will facilitate the implementation process while helping the implementers to understand and accept the required steps and activities so they can achieve the objectives (Al-Ajmi, 2008). It is important to consider who should set the strategic plan's objectives. The early stages of the strategic plan are developed by individuals (such as top-level managers) who have a strategic vision and an ability to look at the future of the system (Al-Sakara, 2010). These people may lack experience regarding the implications of the implementation process and its requirements because that part of the process is conducted by people at lower levels of the organisation who are more familiar with the nature of these elements (Mohammad, 2011). Mohammad (2011) indicates that it is logical that the people from the organisation's lower levels participate in and facilitate the implementation process because they belong to the target groups that will ultimately benefit from the results of the strategic plan.

In addition, the agencies and stakeholders that will ultimately benefit from the strategic plan should be involved in setting its objectives (Ghenem, 2008). For example, as stakeholders, parents maintain an interest in their children's learning; it matters to them that their children are educated in an environment characterised by a high level of organised work that follows a set of well-studied objectives. Moreover, teachers as stakeholders and, crucially, as implementers, are directly responsible for teaching their pupils, and for contributing to the pupils' learning. As long as the

pupils' level of achievement is regarded as one of the fundamental goals of education, teachers are still required to improve their performance in order to achieve that aim. In this case, it seems likely that involving teachers in decision making about personal development programmes will result in improving specific sets of skills that are recognised by teachers and school principals. Based on Mohammad's perception, the objectives and sub-objectives related to improving teachers' skills should be developed with the participation of both the teachers and the schools' principals because both of these groups of stakeholders share an avid interest in education. In this case, teacher training is connected to school effectiveness, especially in terms of pupil achievement (Rhaman et al., 2011). Thus, a broad discussion should be conducted, and knowledge exchange should occur between the planning team and the implementers – in conjunction with people who have an interest in the education output – in order to address the priorities and to ensure the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan (Mohammad, 2011). Thus, involving teachers or other stakeholders in the process of identifying objectives largely depends on whether the policy formulation stage included decisions about who should be involved in creating the plan.

In addition, action planning entails allocating the necessary financial and human resources needed to launch the policy. In terms of education, an educational action plan is supposed to reflect the education sector's policy and trends, while translating the objectives into operational terms within a specified period of time. According to Carron (2010), the plan of action is assumed to be a sort of "clarifying" tool that provides an explanation of the education policy, while also interpreting the policy's aims and strategies, organising its associated activities, indicating the time span in which the plan should be executed, allocating the required human and financial resources, distributing tasks and responsibilities, and drafting the budget. Carron emphasises that this complex process entails a great deal of consultation and negotiation between all the concerned parties throughout all stages of the process. In order for this plan to be implemented, the State authority should do its utmost to support this process. Consequently, the process depends on the type of resource allocation policy in place which, as previously mentioned, is established in the stage prior to building the action plan. It seems that an accurate estimation of the needs of

the people in the lower levels of the organisation is required in order to determine the resources that should be allocated. To achieve this, some organisations adopt collegial models of resource allocation (Bush, 2000). Coleman et al. (1994) indicated that when this approach is applied to financial allocation, budgetary decisions are largely made via the collaboration of many staff members and members of the main group, along with senior staff and governors. They also note that, due to its participatory approach, this process should support wider ownership and subsequent acceptance of the decisions being made. Levačić (2002) indicates that hierarchical coordination, in which top-level managers do not have the information required to identify the most efficient ways of applying resources to lower levels, is inefficient. She comments that this is often due to an excess of the wrong information being provided, particularly when decisions are being made about staff allocation, school infrastructure repairs, or the use of textbooks. In this case, Levačić seems to advocate delegating authority to lower levels so as to manage resources. Bush (2000) observes that the move towards delegating authority for resource allocation to lower levels is rooted in the assumption that those positioned more closely to the situations in which the resources are to be applied are better able to make effective spending decisions than nationally-operating officials or politicians. Simkins (1998) notes that improvements in quality, efficiency, and standards are best achieved when resource deployment decisions are made as close as possible to the point of delivery. Whatever approach is adopted regarding resource allocation, it should ensure that the resources will bring about the desired goals of the plan in order to ensure its effectiveness; otherwise, the resources will be wasted, and the education system will be inefficient.

The objectives of the strategic plan should be realistic, achievable, and affordable (Al-Ajmi, 2008; Al-Jabr, 1992). Al-Sharrah (2002) indicates that in educational strategic planning, the issues to be addressed by the processes of the strategic plan should reflect the needs of society in general and of the schools in particular. Al-Ajmi (2008) comments that these objectives should express the needs of the organisation, and any actions should be directed towards achieving them; otherwise, effort, budget, and time will be wasted, and the organisation will fall into a trap of inefficiency. To explain further, the organisation may set specific goals and

objectives in order to meet specific needs; however, those goals should be achievable and the available resources should be adequate. For example, when the goal of the organisation involves improving staff performance within schools, the MoE should devote a sufficient amount of the budget, and enlist the assistance of appropriate experts, to this purpose, while also finding an appropriate place for training and lecturing. If these resources are inadequate in that they do not meet this objective, the programme might fail and any resources applied will be wasted.

It is crucial for the strategic plan to be flexible. In some circumstances, some changes may necessitate modifying the plan; this means that the organisation should be flexible enough to accommodate any changes that may occur at any time. The significant advantage of strategic planning is that it anticipates the environmental risks that the organisation might face, while also allocating appropriate resources to deal with those risks. Flexibility enables the organisation to consider and implement other possible options and alternatives in case opportunities or threats relating to environmental change arise (Rudd et al., 2007). Another important point regarding flexibility is derived from "borrowing other systems' strategic plans" (Puanmau, 2006, p. 23). This means that some organisations, in specific scenarios, may need to copy the strategic plan of other organisations. This may be possible if the system from which the other plan is borrowed is modified to meet the needs of the borrowing organisation. In terms of education, the same principles apply to strategic planning: the plan should be dynamic, subject to regular development, open to adaptation due to unexpected changes, and subject to continuous monitoring.

Attawi (2004) emphasises that one of the characteristics of the strategic plan is that it is responsive to the environment. The environment is exposed to uncertain factors such as demographic change and technological development; therefore, the plan should be flexible, so that it can be adapted in order to address any of these uncertainties. Some authors draw links between the degree of flexibility of the strategic plan and the degree to which policies are decentralised. For example, Andersen (2000) argues that, despite the claim that certain components of the strategic plan require effective planning in order to develop new initiatives and oversee adaptive strategic actions, dependency on a centralised strategic planning process does not sufficiently support the plan's goals. She comments that the

decentralisation of strategic planning allows lower-level managers to make independent decisions, which could lead to the identification of optimal responses to change should environmental conditions change.

3. 3.2.4 Monitoring and evaluating the strategic plan

The strategic plan process aims to produce tangible, observable, and beneficial outputs. In addition, the strategic plan is a designed process that targets building a desired future for a specific community (Mohammed, 2011). The success and failure of achieving these aims largely depends on the capacity of the plan to meet its goals and objectives, as identified in the development phase of the action plan. Al-Sakarna (2010) has indicated that the only way an organisation can follow through with the success of its strategic plan is to build a strategy for monitoring and evaluating the plan. Chang (2008) identifies three basic methods that can be utilised for this purpose: monitoring, review, and evaluation.

Monitoring

Monitoring is the process of consistently observing and analysing the progress of activities that are in place, to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved. In order to assess the performance of the programme activities, information is collected and analysed regularly (Chang, 2008, p. 9). This involves recording the advantages and disadvantages of employing certain actions, while making appropriate decisions regarding the steps that must be taken to correct a particular fault in the plan, or to support the use of actions that achieve the plan's desired goals. In this way, monitoring aims to ensure that the principle of accountability has been sustained – either individually or collectively (Puanmau, 2009).

Programme managers, or those who are responsible for the execution of activities, are usually responsible for performing internal monitoring, as they have access to resources, activities, and outputs (Al-Sakarna, 2010). Internal monitoring focuses on the efficiency of the use of resources. Key sources for gathering information and data include financial accounts, monthly and quarterly reports, and internally-generated documents (including, but not limited to, mission reports, training records, and meeting minutes) (Al-Sakarna, 2010; Carron, 2010; Chang, 2008).

Review

Substantial monitoring of activities is typically carried out by those responsible for the activities, and this type of review is performed less frequently, as it may be conducted annually or as each phase reaches its completion (Chang, 2008). Al-Sakarna (2010) notes that the reviews that take place are usually referred to as mid-term reviews, the results of which are intended to provide feedback for the implementers and funders about the activities that have been carried out.

Chang (2008) has indicated that a review performs several functions. First, it can be applied to improve programme activities. Second, it provides a particular focus on the effectiveness and relevance of the tasks. Third, it assesses the degree to which the activities performed result in the desired outputs and expected outcomes. Therefore, the fundamental purpose of a review is to support the effectiveness of the strategic plan.

Evaluation

Evaluations are typically carried out by internal managers (such as institution programme managers) and external evaluators in order to support decision makers and stakeholders when learning from experience and applying that experiential information to future programmes (Chang, 2008). According to Chang (2008), this process places particular emphasis on sustainability and impact. Evaluations are carried out to assess the immediate impact of the plan, and they may be either terminal, taking place at the end of the phase of the strategic plan, or summative, taking place at its completion. Ex-post evaluations, which are conducted after the end of the project, assess the long-term impact and sustainability of the initiative (Al-Sakarna, 2010; Chang, 2008).

Both internal and external sources provide key data and information for evaluative purposes. Such sources may include, but are not limited to, national and international statistics, impact assessment reports, annual status reports, review reports, and consultants' reports (Chang, 2008).

3. 3.3 Accountability

The evaluation process is not merely targeted to estimate the degree to which the goals of the strategic plan are achieved; it is a process by which organisations and stakeholders apply a certain level of accountability to all individuals involved in the formulation and implementation of the plan.

Bush (1994) defines accountability as the requirement to provide those with a right to know with an account of the behaviours or events that occur within an organisation. When meeting the goals of the strategic plan, the kind of accountability involved is referred to as results-driven accountability (Anderson, 2005).

I would argue that every person within the organisation is accountable for achieving the objectives of the plan. Chang (2008) emphasises that all people are responsible for their work and the way in which the resources given to them are used. He further states that all people are accountable to a number of people – primarily to the communities and the individuals they serve, as well as to those who provide resources. It is important to consider how individuals within an organisation can vary in their degree of accountability. It seems that one's level of accountability largely depends on the degree to which an organisational tier is responsible for making decisions. In other words, individuals with a greater capacity to make decisions within the organisation are likely to be more accountable than those who have a more limited decision-making capacity. In some cases, the implementation process is delegated to people in the lower levels, enabling them to make decisions about, and build their own strategies for, implementation. In education, decentralisation initiatives aim to provide people at the lower levels with a wider range of authority to make autonomous educational decisions. The rationale behind this approach is that it should improve the quality of education, while increasing the level of accountability that each individual holds, so as to achieve certain results in the educational system (Carnoy, 1999). For example, in England and Wales, the 1988 Reform Act gave new emphasis to accountability, as it shifted responsibilities to autonomous and quasi-autonomous institutions (Daun, 2006). Thus, it can be seen that the greater degree of freedom given to people at the lower levels of an organisation is largely accompanied by an increase in accountability.

I suggest that by applying accountability, people in the low levels of management who act as implementers, and who have a great deal of authority over decision making, will play a vital role in achieving high-quality educational outcomes and increasing school effectiveness. Carnoy (1999) indicates that there is an assumption that increasing flexibility and control creates increased accountability for educational results by creating a better fit between the methods used and the stakeholders. He also indicates that reformers believe that if local educational authorities are regarded as, and perceive themselves to be, responsible for successful educational delivery, then educational quality should improve. Even if the system failed to achieve its educational goals, accountability represents a tool that is used, at minimum, to drive those who hold the authority for achieving those goals. In this manner, accountability acts an incentive that directs the implementers of the strategic plan towards the achievement of its aims.

Accountability implies that the executive body of the strategic plan, in addition to stakeholders, may be accountable for realising the plan's goals. The following section presents a discussion about the importance of collaboration and communication among stakeholders from both inside and outside the education system, in order to optimise their thoughts and suggestions for the sake of constructing an effective strategic plan.

3. 3.4 Strategic planning and stakeholders

Strategic planning in many sectors, such as in education, depends on the stakeholders that lie inside and outside the organisation (Al-Sakarna, 2010). Stakeholders may become partners in the strategic plan process in that they support the plan's formulation and implementation in a participative framework (Puanmau, 2000).

The policy formulation stage is the most vital, as it positively or negatively impacts the success of the strategic plan. Further actions depend upon the flexibility of or the limitations imposed by the policy. Some policies allow for external participation in the strategic plan (such as from stakeholders) by adopting a participatory approach. This approach is widely utilised in decentralised education systems (Hussain, 2006) In effect, a broad consultation should be carried out with the stakeholders to guarantee that the planning process has included the participation of a wide range of

actors (Puanmau, 2006). Stakeholders are the individuals who share a mutual interest with the organisation in an effort to achieve definitive aims, either individually or collectively (Johnson and Scholes, 2006). Within the field of education, there are number of sectors and civil society institutions that are interested in the outputs of the educational system; therefore, it is important to identify the individuals, groups, or institutions that are concerned about those interests.

Some authors suggest that stakeholders should play a bigger role in the strategic planning process; for example, Hendrick (2003) comments that stakeholders should be involved in planning the systems and in the decision-making processes. This allows for the exchange of different views and knowledge between the stakeholders and the organisation in a way that ensures the inclusion of the stakeholders' demands and needs. Others, such as Mohammad (2011), believe that the participatory approach should involve individuals from different levels of the organisation (top, middle, and lower levels). The idea behind this approach is that it should provide employees from different levels with the chance to become familiar with the strategic goals in order to be more capable of implementing them. This approach also helps employees gain a better understanding of their roles, which may diminish any role ambiguities or conflicts that may arise when implementing the strategic plan (Kim, 2002).

Thus, stakeholders, as has been indicated above, are those who have relationships with the education system, and who affect, or are affected by, education-related decisions. In the following, I critically address the role of stakeholders to shed more light on their important role in the strategic plan. According to Brazer et al. (2010), when critical decisions in schools are made and implemented, specific actions are taken in accordance with those decisions in order to achieve the plan's objectives. Hence, Brazer et al. (2010) held that it is important to involve the stakeholders whose influence not only affects the outcomes of the decisions, but that also relieves decision-making professionals of some accountability-related pressure. While school institutions likely lean towards groupthink to help lessen decision-making accountability of the body in schools, groupthink does not provide an opportunity for outside creativity and insight of other stakeholders, who better understand society's future needs and expectations from school graduates (Mohammad, 2011). In

addition, the broader perspectives of other stakeholders will not only yield creative decisions, but they will also challenge traditional thinking and other methods relevant to strategic planning (Hussain, 2006). Studying the work of two organisations in Australia, Inglis and Minahan (2004) point out that when strategic planning depends solely on an organisation's managerial body, it is rarely successful, because initiating plans without including stakeholders may bog leaders down in long discussions, negotiations, and even conflicts of interests with stakeholders, distracting them from their actual jobs.

Thus, I suggest that the importance of stakeholders lies in two distinct roots. First, any critical decisions regarding schools and education in general are too important to be made by the school's decision-making body alone. Any consequences or ramifications will have effects that extend beyond the schools themselves. The second is that the success of the school and the quality of the outcomes (i.e., the students' performance) is in the best interest of many groups and individuals, not only of the schools. When students graduate, the quality of education they will have received will serve stakeholders throughout the entire society, rather than affecting the school itself directly.

Involving stakeholders in the strategic plan should be considered a necessity. According to Harriet et al. (2013, p.96), education's strategic plan is:

> An initiative that links the Ministry of Education (central government) and district (local government) specific activities related to Equitable and Quality Education, Educational Planning and Management, Science and Technology and Technical Vocational Education and Training to the education sector budget.

All other stakeholders that have a vested interest in the students, whether now or after graduation, must be involved to cover all the needs of students and educational professionals. An opposing issue emerges here, which is a question of whether stakeholders in society are aware of, fully familiar with, and knowledgeable enough about the policies, procedures, and the nature of the strategic education plans. In Harriet et al.'s (2013) study, stakeholders from the district, as represented by the Parent Teacher Association, the pupils' representatives, and the assembly members show little knowledge about the strategic education plan's development; thus, their participation and involvement will be less effective. As a result, it was suggested that

training sessions should be held for various stakeholders to familiarise them with the strategic plans (Mohammad, 2011). This enables stakeholders to better understand the needs of students, and to show them how to develop creative initiatives when participating in planning initiatives. In line with this, Mgomezulu (2007) believes that stakeholders' involvement can be meaningful, only when the stakeholders themselves are empowered to make decisions that influence organisational practices, polices, and directions. According to him, this could only happen when people in leadership positions, such as educational leaders, are willing to work with stakeholders to teach them the skills and expertise necessary to implement these policies (Mgomezulu, 2007).

Given that any project is set to start after the strategic plans have been created, following the plan means that one needs to initiate the use of resources, the implementation of ideas, the spending of money, and generally invest in the plan's success (Mohammad, 2011). While success is possible without involving stakeholders, in addition to what had been pointed out above, I suggest two further grounds for stakeholder importance. The first is that involving stakeholders creates a consensus at an early phase of the project. In other words, conflict is either minimal, or no conflict is expected to take place at a later point between the stakeholders because everyone already communicates with one another. This is a very critical issue because stakeholders represent the majority of individuals for whose sake the strategic education plan exists. The second is that involving stakeholders means that there exists a mutual loyalty between them and the educational institution in order to serve the best interests of the community.

Stakeholders are, undoubtedly, important in strategic planning; yet it must also be kept in mind that there are some negative aspects associated with involving stakeholders, which must be considered. One potential problem is that stakeholders can become resisters rather than helpers. In other words, some stakeholders may oppose the strategic plan, which could be due to individual interests that the new plans threaten, or the stakeholders may simply resent their inability to participate effectively (Al-Sakarna, 2010). Another issue is that involving the stakeholders may not always work. For one, if the strategic plans are limited by tight timelines, it will be hard to involve stakeholders, especially when training or some additional work is

still needed to bring a stakeholder up to speed. Furthermore, some strategic plans need some mechanism for accountability established by the leadership that creates or implements the plans (Al-Sakarna, 2010). I suggest that such divisive situations need firm and effective decisions. Thus, any consultation and time-consuming meetings with the stakeholders could only serve to hinder, not help, the strategic plans.

3. 3.4.1 Stakeholders and collaboration

Another important reason why stakeholders should be involved in the strategic plan is that it enhances collaboration with people both inside and outside the organisation. Collaboration provides a general idea about a plan's decision-making methods. For example, efforts to solve particular problems in specific communities may begin with the MoE utilising heterogeneous groups that are composed of individuals from both within and without the MoE. This group could interact with each other, suggest solutions, raise priorities, and make decisions about solutions to problems, while paying particular attention to the solution's usefulness in the wider community. Decisions are made collaboratively; Cardno (2012) describes collaboration as a form of work that is characterised by a combination of cooperation, partnership, agreement, and consent to accomplish institutional objectives. The term "collaboration" implies that two sides willingly combine their efforts towards achieving shared goals: "collaboration is a generic term for an agreement to work together" (Lumby, 2009, p.125). Working collaboratively in any field, such as education, can be accomplished using different approaches, which Cardno (2012) identified as internal collaboration and external collaboration. *Internal collaboration* between educational leaders and staff can be developed via the structures and values supported by active leaders. Those types of leaders have a solid understanding of the organisation's culture and their ability to support staff participation in planning and decision making, while also managing changes and productive relationships. Conversely, *external collaboration* can be developed through relevant consultation with parties that are external to the organisation, and who are able to contribute to and are interested in doing so (Cardno, 2012). This kind of collaboration allows stakeholders from outside the organisation to participate in decision-making.

To a certain extent, the concept of collaboration affords a degree of participation to the individuals who will take part in this process. This can be referred to as a decentralised policy, as it provides different individuals with the capacity to make decisions in the planning and implementation process. Centralised organisations are not inclined to involve stakeholders or people from the lower levels of the organisation in decision-making processes. Collaboration is a feature of decentralised organisations, where a collective effort is employed to make decisions that are targeted toward achieving the organisation's goals.

It is essential for the strategic plan's policies to localise ownership; this is an essential element in the development of any strategic plan, as it provides all individuals and parties within any organisation, such as the MoE, with the opportunity to feel responsible for the strategic plan. Ownership should be maintained at the MoE level, the school level, and the community level (Puanmau, 2006). To ensure the employees' level of commitment and enthusiasm toward implementing the plan effectively, the sense of ownership felt by both the professionals and the managerial team needs to be strengthened (Puanmau, 2006). Al-Sharrah (2002) confirms this idea, stating that by encouraging stakeholders to participate in the planning process, and by building a sense of ownership among them, they will be able to achieve better results when implementing the plan. I would argue that a sense of ownership and the ability to participate in designing the plan would also foster an understanding of the plan's components, thus allowing for better plan implementation. Even in situations where the resources of the organisation are sufficient enough to carry out the strategic plan, not involving the implementers in the planning stages from the very beginning might affect their level of commitment and devotion to the implementation (Puanmau, 2006).

3. 3.4.2 Stakeholders and communication

As mentioned earlier, strategic planning requires that data be obtained from both inside and outside the organisation. This implies that those who are responsible for policy formation will communicate the policies to the body of the organisation that is leading the initiative. Al-Hareeri et al. (2007) consider strategic planning as an ideal means of communication through which the organisation shares information via a

reciprocal process with the stakeholders. In order to accomplish these processes, it is essential that specific ways to communicate between the organisational tiers, as well as between the organisation and the outside community, be developed. In organisational matters, communication is a means that links individuals together when moving towards achieving common goals (Bolarinwa and Olorunfemi, 2009). Bolarinwa and Olorunfemi discuss that communication takes the form of a transaction between two or more individuals within a specific environment. Robbins et al. (2010) further assert that it is impossible for an individual, group, or organisation to exist without communication that supports this knowledge. Robbins et al. note that communication extends beyond simply engaging in knowledge transfer, as communication includes both the transfer of information, as well as establishing an understanding of the knowledge being presented.

In terms of the structure of the organisation, communication can flow in either a vertical (downward/upward) or lateral (horizontal) direction (Luneburg, 2010; Robbins et al., 2010; Cunneen, 2008). Downward communication flows from the top level of the organisation to the lower levels (Luneburge, 2010); top-level managers utilise this kind of communication to delegate responsibilities, establish and disseminate instructions, provide information about policies, highlight problem areas, and offer performance-related feedback (Robbins et al., 2010).

Upward communication flows from the lower levels of the organisation to the top levels (Luneburg, 2010). In this approach, the lower levels inform top-level managers about their progress in achieving the organisation's goals. In addition, members of the lower tiers express their feelings about the work to their managers and inform them about their ideas for improvements (Robbins et al., 2010). Clearly, lower level management can participate in a democratic framework, as long as they are able to offer suggestions to the top-level managers.

Lateral-flowing communication is characterised by information that is shared horizontally between employees from the same or similar levels so as to support coordination (Luneburge, 2010; Robbins, et al., 2010).

The importance of communication is widely acknowledged by a number of authors. For example, Puanmau (2006) identifies some principles of strategic planning from a

sample of 31 participants, ranging from educational planners to data managers, from 15 countries in the Pacific. The results demonstrated that the MoE should develop a communication strategy for the national, provincial, village, and school levels. The purpose of this strategy would be to develop awareness amongst the educational stakeholders in both the formal and non-formal sectors. This, in turn, provides a forum in which stakeholders can discuss and debate educational issues, and it provides a means through which parents, businesses, and civil society remain informed about future educational requirements in order to maintain a connection with national and international employment needs. Puanmau notes that when the MoE and its stakeholders maintain open communication channels, it becomes considerably easier to manage democratic participation in the educational process, including in the development of the strategic plan.

Puanmau's study builds a comprehensive perspective about the healthy nature of communication. First, he indicates that strategic planning in education requires a series of communications. Second, it appears that strategic planning requires the identification of stakeholders and anyone who has an interest in educational values. Third, the results of his study imply that communication between the organisation and the stakeholders should reach beyond routine meetings, extending to a healthy, continuous dialogue that addresses vital issues related to education. Finally, Puanmau indicates that healthy communication features stakeholders who participate in educational processes through a democratic structure.

As a managerial process, strategic planning is formulated in a policy framework that controls the plan in a centralised or decentralised manner. However, strategic planning can also be formulated using a combination of policies from centralisation and decentralisation. The next section presents the debate surrounding centralised and decentralised strategic planning.

3. 3.5 Debate over centralised and decentralised educational planning

Centralised educational planning is a planning process that takes place entirely at the central level (Devi, 1998). It is a kind of planning that governments use to achieve major changes in education. Prakash (2008) traces the notion of centralised education planning to the post-war era (and to the beginning of many countries' independence).

In a period that saw the setting of new systems, collapsing economies, and crumbling education systems, governments needed to establish centrally-controlled educational plans. These centralised plans aimed to build education systems that would guarantee the equal distribution of resources and personnel, with directives that were clearly controlled by a central office, which held authority over education plans and decision making. In this sense, centralised educational planning seems to be a tool through which governments can hold power and retain control. In addition, resources, such as human and financial resources, can be controlled because the MoE officials are solely responsible for any decision-making regarding the resources that are dedicated to the formulation and implementation of the plan (Ghenem, 2008). Therefore, financial expenditures and human resource deployment remain under the government's control. Consequently, some advocates of centralisation perceive this model as a way to maintain equity between schools because they are required to follow the regulations set out by the top members of the hierarchy (Ghenem, 2008). Others perceive centralisation as best practice, since it ensures efficiency by saving resources (Lyons, 1985). Ghenem (2008) notes that when upper-level management prevents local authorities from being involved in this process, better resource allocation and efficiency can result because the decision is made by one party rather than by many parties (Ghenem, 2008).

Another advantage of centralised planning is evident when those in power get things accomplished in a short timeframe. Centralised strategic planning implies that most tasks (such as information gathering) are accomplished by technicians who are mostly appointed by those in authority. In this case, upper management can guarantee that the tasks will be accomplished in a short timeframe, as long as the efforts dedicated to this purpose are not distributed among different regions and schools (Abd-Aldayem, 1985).

Centralised strategic planning has its disadvantages, and many critiques of it have been made – especially from those who advocate democracy. In cases where a government is in its infancy, its attempt to build itself can mean two things: the first is that it will tend to copy centralised systems from other models – often socialist models – as can be seen in the experience of India, which copied its centralised system from the Russian system (Prakash, 2008). The second is that while these

models are not as suitable as specifically-designed systems, and since they need to be adapted to fit different contexts, centralised models can encourage bureaucracies that are insufficiently concerned about the lower levels needs in the educational organisation (Al-Ateeqi, 2004).

One of the major disadvantages of centralised planning is its inability to accurately estimate the actual needs and problems of those in the regional levels, and of those in other lower levels, such as in schools and universities (Windham and Peng, 1997). Rodanilli et al. (1990) have commented that when a gap exists between the top and local authorities, centralisation acts an obstacle to addressing the schools' needs because information about those needs does not emanate from the people who are in the field. In other words, effective planning and assessment of a system's needs is dependent on having the right people do the right thing at the right time (Kaufman et al., 2002).

A strong information system within the tiers of the educational system is required to identify the overall needs and problems. An information system is one of the most essential factors for the success of any plan; if there is a lack of information, tensions between the top-level and lower-level authorities will occur because of a lack of coordination. Hajji (2002) argues that effective utilisation of the information system helps with the identification of crucial problems in the community. He emphasises that the information system provides intensive data that can help solve problems as they arise, while providing appropriate solutions. Hajji states that, in these circumstances, if an effective information system is built across all levels of the education system, the chances of being able to apply a unified solution to the problem will increase. Consequently, local problems will be treated in a similar manner, despite their variations (Hajji, 2002). Paraksh (2008) asserts that information sharing at the district, sub-district, and school levels, as well as the level of transparency and accountability to the community, are seen as critical elements in the decentralisation process.

Windham and Peng (1997) report that, in certain developing countries, the quality of education programmes declined as a result of centralisation. They note that the cause for this decline lies in the central government's focus on quantitative issues, as it paid

particular attention to preparing graduates to fit the specific needs of its projects, while also targeting issues of access, retention, and cost containment. Winddham and Peng (1997) also note that whilst all these activities are easily measured and are of political significance, less attention is being paid to what actually happens in the schools, as these activities are more difficult to understand operationally and conceptually.

Educational planning has broadened in recent years, so that its scope is no longer limited to one particular issue, such as the curriculum. Other issues, such as student enrolment, drop-out rates, teachers' pre-service training and lifelong learning whilst in service, the infrastructure of educational institutions, and so on, are elements that have become a critical part of educational planning. Such a large number of tasks should not be solely handled by the upper tiers of the educational system (Devi, 1998). Mohammad (2011) justified that by asserting that the top levels of the hierarchy are quite distanced from the schools and those in the field. He comments that individuals in the schools can provide solutions and suggestions to improve education while also addressing many educational problems because they engage in educational activities on a daily basis. In this regard, educational planning demands that collaborative working processes be conducted by all those involved in the field, irrespective of their position on the hierarchy of the educational system (Caillods, 1997; Kemmerer, 1997). In addition, educational planning under a decentralised model should shift from macro-level planning to micro-level planning. In micro-level planning, local (lower-level) authorities participate in the planning within the contexts of their districts (Devi, 1998; Callidos 1997; Windham, 1997). An investigation of this kind of education planning reveals more horizontal communication (between various districts) than vertical communication (between the local and top authorities). This feature is clearly referred to as decentralised educational planning, which is defined as a process where planning activities are decentralised, as diverse planning units participate in the plan's implementation (Devi, 1998).

An important dimension in the work of educational planners has emerged at the dawn of the new millennium. According to Scheerens (2000, p.9):

> As the work of educational planners has moved from increasing school enrolments to improvement of the quality of schooling, so planners have had to become interested in school effectiveness.

Decentralisation initiatives emerged in education as a means through which to improve the quality of education being provided (Karlsen, 2000). Moreover, many decentralisation initiatives emanated from the intention to increase the quality of education, while also enhancing the schools' effectiveness (Carnoy, 1999). The key argument in favour of decentralisation is that if districts and schools are given greater autonomy over decision making this, in turn, devolves local control over the curriculum and teaching methods, giving local communities and teachers increased power and accountability (Carnoy, 1999, p. 53). I would argue that this issue simply cannot be provided through centralised decisions and directions alone. Each school or educational institution has its own unique features and educational assets, and so in order to increase the effectiveness of these schools, educational planners should seek input from all the people who contribute to the education system, including different educational experts and professionals. With centralised planning, schools and local authorities are not able to build their own plans because they lack the autonomy required to do so.

In general, strategic planning requires conducting a series of communications and collaborations with those in external environments (Ugboro et al., 2010). As mentioned earlier, stakeholders are a rich source of information that can be applied to the benefit of the education system. However, in applying a centralised approach in both the education system and in educational planning, the chances of involving stakeholders from the outside community will be reduced. Therefore, decentralisation is seen as an appropriate policy for initiating a direct conversation with different stakeholders, as well as with individuals from external environments (Turan, 2009).

When decentralised approach is adopted, younger experts are encouraged to raise their voices in regard to educational planning; in fact, a variety of professions are expected to participate in this process according to their various needs and fields of expertise. According to Prakash (2008), this approach can popularise the use of local planning in education when developing local initiatives such as the District Primary

Education Plan. Variety in input is a vital feature of this type of planning. As the opportunity for input from the lower levels increases, the participation of and input from various social organisations, NGOs, and other smaller communities also increases. Plans tend to be more effective when they consider the needs and thoughts of the majority; these features cannot be obtained with the adoption of centralised planning.

Regardless of the nature of the policy that is enacted, the strategic plan's formulation requires that strategies be established for its implementation. In order for the plan or policies to be implemented successfully, an education system should develop appropriate methods to achieve this aim. The approaches used for policy implementation differ according to the policies of governance that exist within specific contexts. The following section presents a discussion of policy implementation, including the different approaches that are used to attain the policy's goals.

3.4 Policy implementation

After a policy has been formulated, processes should be enacted to execute that policy. This implementation process may encompass a number of actions at a variety of levels, and which are developed following the statement of that policy (Brynard, 2005). Hambleton (1983) is one of a number of authors who suggests that implementation is a separate process, commenting that at a deeply theoretical level, the processes of policy development and its implementation represent independent steps in the decision-making process; moreover, implementation is a process that takes place once the policy has been formulated. He also notes that policy implementation represents the successful achievement of a policy's objectives, which is reached through tactical planning and operational actions, as it meets any agreed upon requirements and outcomes (Hambelton, 1983). However, given that policy formulation and policy implementation are two separate processes, they are interdependent, as policy implementation represents the practical aspect of policy planning (Lahloob, 2012). While this distinction is important, it seems that it is sometimes given insufficient consideration by policymakers.

As an example, I will reflect on a personal experience. In early 2001-2002, a recommendation was made to offer a three-year diploma programme to in-service teachers, so that the standards for accepting and placing students into the institute's teachers' programme could be reformed. This recommendation was based on a study that was conducted on teachers graduating from the Teacher Training Institute. Since the study showed suboptimal outcomes, and given that the graduates were failing to meet the programmes' goals, a policy was created that outlined the admissions criteria to determine who should be accepted into the programme. Among other things, these criteria now noted that students had to have attained a certain level of English proficiency, they had to have passed a placement test, and they had to abide by stricter attendance rules. Theoretically, the new policies were excellent; however, many issues were not anticipated, which ultimately led to the failure of these policies. On the one hand, the institute's programmes are for in-service teachers who are not awarded complete study leave by their schools, so most of the people joining the programme elected to join it primarily because it offered a certain degree of flexibility regarding attendance. Second, most of the teachers joining the training programmes had been working in the field for many years without any on-the-job training, so everything was new to them, including the concepts and material covered by the placement test. In addition, they needed to study English for several months before they were able to apply for a place in the programme. All of these factors rendered these policies inapplicable and impossible to implement. Had these issues been considered while the policies were being developed, a different and more realistic direction could have been followed, making it possible to achieve the goals behind the reform.

3.4.1 Methods of policy implementation

In much the same way as different policies are utilised in planning processes, different methods are also used for policy implementation. With the development of research that investigates the various methods used for implementation, and their associated descriptions, two key schools of thought have emerged regarding these directives: top-down theory and bottom-up theory (Morris and Scott, 2003; Matland, 1995). The top-down theory focuses on policy design and centrally-managed factors, while the bottom-up theory argues that policy flows upwards from the lower-level

target groups and service deliverables (Matland, 1995). It now seems that the most popular approaches to policy implementation include a synergy of these two schools of thought, which link the macro-level perspectives of the top-down model to the micro-level factors of the bottom-up model (Matland, 1995).

In the top-down model, the plan implementation process addresses the tensions that exist between the official actions of the initiative (those of the decision-making authorities) and those of the target groups (Mazmanian and Sabatiere, 1989). A top-down approach has certain key features; it is primarily characterised by decisions that are made about a governmental policy that aims to meet a set of objectives within a given timeframe (Lahloob, 2012; Ayasra, 2011). These types of decisions are often made by central government officials. Following this decision, government officials are then tasked with researching certain areas that relate to the consistency of the actions performed by the implementing officials and target groups, and these must be in line with the objectives and the set procedures outlined in the policy's implementation directives. The second issue is related to measuring, over a certain period of time, the extent to which the impacts of the implementation remain consistent with the policy's objectives. The third issue addresses key factors that influence the significant outputs and impacts of the policy, be they directly related to the policy, or more politically oriented. The fourth issue considers the use of experience and review in order to evolve the policy over time (Lahloob, 2012; Mazmanian and Sabatiere, 1989). I would argue that this last factor is highly important for both the planning and implementation of the policies, as it adds a sense of urgency to them. On the one hand, it allows for amendments and corrections to be made during the planning of the policy's development and implementation; on the other hand, it allows for the use of skills and experience to guide these processes.

Although the top-down approach provides clarity and consistency (Matland, 1995), it is subject to much criticism. Primarily, this model is frequently accused of failing to consider the importance of the actions taken during previous policymaking initiatives, using statutory language as its point of inception instead. Matland (1995) argues that the roots of problems and obstacles noted during implementation (or during any of the other processes); can be traced back to the initial stages of the policymaking process. In order to better understand policy implementation, Winter

(1986) suggests that studies are needed regarding the early phases of policymaking. He asserts that the policy formulation stage provides implementers with general ideas about the plan's priorities and issues, and these individuals are required to agree upon any changes that need to be made. Thus, the implementers can take these factors into consideration during the implementation process. It seems that this would be relatively difficult when the policy, which is developed using a top-down approach, utilises statutory language as a starting point in policy implementation.

Further criticism of the top-down approach suggests that it encourages a multitude of government actions and instructions that lead to difficulties in implementation when there is a dominant policy, especially when none of the instructors and actors is preeminent (Lahloob, 2012). Such criticism is frequently levelled at the delivery of social services, where a lack of pre-eminent directions often prevails, making this criticism particularly pertinent (Lahloob, 2012; Sabatier, 1986). Furthermore, one of the biggest criticisms of the top-down approach is that it emphasises policy design, elevating the status of policy designers (Matland, 1995). Contrary to the experiences of policy designers, local officials who are engaged in delivering services have a more realistic understanding of the real problems that the policy is trying to tackle, and these officials are, therefore, in a better position to propose policies (Morris and Scott, 2003; Matland, 1995). Matland (1995) has argued that in the top-down approach, there is a need to control street-level agents or local implementers, as it is difficult for policy designers to exclusively control street-level actions. I would suggest that street-level actions, or street-level reactions, to policies emerge from two stands. First, when policies are established on a top-down basis, two issues are most likely to occur: one issue is that, at the bottom of the hierarchy, people are unresponsive to policies enacted from the top tiers (or they are, at the very least, dissatisfied with them) because the policies may not really meet their actual needs. In addition, the policymakers at the top will have to begin amending these policies, and they struggle with changing or modifying them so that they become more effective. Second, when policies are established on a bottom-up basis, it is less likely that people will have issues with those policies, as the policies will likely represent their needs. Moreover, it seems that a good number of the bottom-up policies are dictated by the people who are affected by the policies, especially since a decentralised

system is based on the participation of all members of the educational structure, whether they are situated at the bottom tiers (for instance, at the individual teacher level) or at the top (such as expert educators who are in authority).

However, to draw upon Matland's (1995) argument about the difficulties that policy designers face when controlling street-level actions, the real difficulty of implementing a decentralised system in educational planning emerges from having to take in all of the suggestions and inputs that are made by all the micro-level educators. In addition, each of these ideas has to be sorted carefully and clearly in order to decide upon the plans that best serve the educational needs of the community. In light of Matland's criticism, this discussion will be expanded upon further in the following section.

In contrast to the top-down approach, the bottom-up approach first identifies key agents at a local level, and then engages them in discussions about their goals, strategies, activities, and contacts (Morris and Scott, 2003; Sabatier, 1986). In doing so, the bottom-up approach develops a network of contacts, which can be used to map the individuals at local, regional, and national levels who are engaged in both governmental and non-governmental programmes, particularly in the areas of planning, financing, and execution (Sabatier, 1986). Matland (1995) examined scholarly attitudes towards this approach, and commented that many scholars suggest that a more thorough and grounded understanding of implementation can be achieved through reviewing policies from the perspectives of individuals representing the "lower" levels. In this way, policy developers can take into account the service deliverables and the needs of the target group. Matland argues that for micro-level implementers, this approach demands a thorough understanding of their goals, strategies, activities, and contacts.

Similar to the top-down approach, the bottom-up model is also criticised by some authors. The first criticism is that, in a democratic system, flexibility and autonomy are provided to the implementers (Paudel, 2009; Matland, 1995). As a result, concerns can emerge regarding whether the implementation process will be operated according to the central goals or according to more localised sub-goals. Matland (1995) comments that while flexibility and autonomy are indeed important, if the

goals of the top-level policy designers and the lower-level policy implementers differ too much, then too much flexibility and autonomy can lead to unsuccessful implementation of the policies and, therefore, result in insufficient performance when compared against organisational goals.

Further criticism suggests that the bottom-up approach places undue importance on the role of local autonomy (Lahloob, 2012; Matland, 1995). Where variations in actions exist, these may often be attributed to local differences; however, where limits are centrally set, such variations are more likely to fall within a given area that is limited by the central authority. Thus, while centrally acting individuals are unable to participate in small-scale matters, they are able to intervene in the activities of the implementers by structuring their activities and defining the overall strategy for them. In institutional structures, certain resources, and even the delegation of the actions required for implementation, may be determined centrally, and so they may influence the outcomes of policy enactment (Paudel, 2009; Matland, 1995; Sabatier, 1986).

Although each approach has its own advantages and disadvantages, it is difficult to decide whether one approach is better than the other. In certain contexts, a combination of the two approaches is used, as each approach brings certain advantages. I would argue that there is not one single, ideal approach to policy implementation. Adopting any of these approaches is ultimately dependent upon several factors, which will shape the different policies through certain managerial issues (such as the planning process), and therefore shape the approaches to implementing such policies. Examples of such factors are the cultural references and political situations of the communities. That said, I suggest that the arguments made above should not encourage the use of centralisation alone in some countries, due to the fact that these are often newly established countries in which the only form of power that can be effective is a centralised one, as it ignores the other levels within the country's organisational structure. It is also possible to combine these two approaches, although I do not imply that these systems can always work together (or simultaneously). I would, however, suggest that a collaboration that draws upon the relevant aspects of each approach has the potential to function better than adopting one approach alone. For example, while individuals or smaller groups within the

organisation can contribute to a thorough understanding of the needs that should be addressed in any policy, the inclusion of the perspectives of higher authorities – particularly in relatively new countries, as previously discussed – can add integrity to the organisation.

3.4.2 Some problems and obstacles of policy implementation

Despite the fact that (good) planning is crucial, the implementation process is widely considered to be one of the essential managerial processes involved since it depends on many factors, including as a clear and consistent policy. This process raises various problems and obstacles, and many developing countries are constantly confronting the challenges associated with policy implementation problems, which occur when the objectives of the policy are not achieved (Makinde, 2005).

As Sabatier (1986) indicates, one such problem is the existence of difficulties within the plan's implementation, which are sometimes due to bureaucratic incompetence or bureaucratic excess; in this light, officials are often unable to successfully complete the tasks they are required to fulfil. This can be interpreted as meaning that certain tasks require a specific type of experience, but bureaucracy may prevent its development, thus removing one's ability to complete certain tasks. Moreover, weakness in communication between the policymakers and implementers is one of the critical problems of policy implementation, as communication is considered to be essential to the achievement of effective implementation (Lahloob, 2012; Makinde, 2005). Makinde (2005) attributes this perception to the fact that clear, consistent, and precise communication delivered to the appropriate individuals during the implementation processes can help meet the policy's objectives. Any weaknesses in communication can lead to the presentation of inadequate information, which creates misunderstandings for the implementers, who may be confused as to what exactly is required of them (Makinde, 2005). Makinde (2005) adds that additional problems can emerge where insufficient or inadequate resources impede plan enactment. He indicates that resources include both human and material resources; thus, successful implementation is dependent upon a variety of resources, including an appropriate number of sufficiently trained personnel to perform the actions necessary to implement the plan, while sufficiently distributing clear information regarding the

process of implementation, and engaging in the sufficient devolution of authority to ensure that the required actions are carried out in a timely fashion (Lahloob, 2012; Ayasra, 2011; Makinde, 2005). Additional material resources, such as land, infrastructure, and equipment (as appropriate) will also be necessary for achieving successful policy implementation (Makinde, 2005). Without sufficient resources, laws cannot be enforced, services cannot be provided, and reasonable regulations will not be developed (Al-Sakarna, 2010; Makinde, 2005). From a bottom-up perspective, the fact that the target groups affected by the policy are not involved in policy formulation is often seen as problematic. Makinde (2005) emphasises that, in order to create and implement successful policies, they should be developed in a participatory way. By involving both the target groups and the policymakers in the development of the plans, the policies may more directly meet the needs of the target group. It is argued that by encouraging such participation, the target groups will feel a greater sense of involvement in the governing of their own situations, and the likelihood with which they will support successful policy implementation will increase.

In conclusion, the implementers of policies or plans may be affected by the method that is adopted to control policy implementation. For example, implementers may seek autonomy in their work in order to invest their abilities and creativity toward best attaining the goals of the policies or plans. Therefore, the workplace might be shaped by policies that control implementation. For example, in a highly top-down system, workplaces tend to be restrictive, and this might affect the implementers' decision making and reduce their capacity to set goals to manage their own work. The next section presents a discussion of how autonomy is needed, and how the work affects the implementers' freedom according to the adopted policy.

3.4.3 Work governance and implementers' performance

Implementers' activities and behaviours within the workplace are relatively guided by the policy that controls the implementation strategy (Lahloob, 2012). For example, the structure of the educational institution has a great influence over the work itself, as it can exert autonomy based on the extent to which the structure of the educational institution is centralised or decentralised. Therefore, the degree to which

employees participate in the decision-making process and the independence they exercise in their work determines the levels of centralisation or decentralisation. Furthermore, the structure of the organisation influences the employees' level of autonomy in their accomplishment of tasks. Al-Meqbla (2011) differentiates between these two types of educational structures, commenting that workers who operate in extremely centralised institutions are more likely to reject their work than those who operate in decentralised institutions. Thus, the workplace environment seems to be shaped by the policy and structure of the organisation that, in turn, influences the employees' autonomy at work. In other words, the workplace seems to be regarded as positive when it is run under a decentralised framework because it allows employees to work autonomously and with a greater amount of freedom.

Due to the vital importance of the characteristics of a given job, many authors interested in the field of business empowerment have conducted a significant amount of studies that have examined the factors and techniques that assist employers in achieving optimal results. The following section represents only a selected portion of some of the techniques that I would suggest are more effective when provided to employees.

For example, Singer (2011) argued that getting employees to set goals that are doable and realistic is a key to achieving success within one's job. Therefore, it can be seen that employees require the sort of work that enables them to set goals for themselves, rather than giving them pre-established goals set by top-level managers. In order to ensure better performance, Latham (2003) has indicated that the majority of findings from studies on goal-setting theory show that people perform better when given attainable goals than people who are not given any goals to aim for at all. Latham has also noted that people must possess a sufficient level of ability to meet the organisation's goals, accept the goals, and receive constructive feedback on their own performance. Latham raises the point that employees, as implementers, must accept the goals, irrespective of whether they are difficult or easy to achieve. Related to that point, Lunenburge (2011) has stated that if goals are very difficult to accomplish, then simply assigning them to different members of an organisation might not lead to the employees feeling a certain level of commitment to meeting those goals. Lunenburg noted that allowing an organisation's members to participate

in their own goal setting is a powerful method that can be used to gain members' acceptance of the goals. Such participation enhances the members' commitment to, and level of understanding regarding, their own goals and the organisation's goals, while ensuring that the aims set forth for the individuals are attainable. An emphasis on the attainability of goals appears in some theories of goal setting, including Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is defined as the belief that individuals hold power over their ability to achieve certain levels of performance that influence events that also affect their own lives. Self-efficacy is one's belief in his or her capability of achieving a given outcome or goal. Therefore, in cases of low self-efficacy, employees are unlikely to attain goals; consequently, low self-efficacy negatively impacts the employees' job satisfaction (Klassen and Chiu, 2010).

Further emphasis is placed on the influence that power holds on employees in their workplace; discussions have emerged surrounding the opinion that the drive to gain power represents a need for control over one's own work or the work of others (Palestini, 2011). Palestini notes that an individual who seeks autonomy or supervisory responsibility in his or her work is likely to demonstrate a need for power. In order to achieve this, Singer (2011) suggests giving employees more control over their own jobs. In other words, employees should be given more freedom in the ways in which they handle their assigned tasks. Doing so will enable them to get the task done while feeling that they had a say in their work. This has a tremendous impact on employees' attitudes towards their jobs (Singer, 2011). Siggins (1992) supports this technique, calling it a new paradigm of leadership or empowerment of the staff in which the manager "assumes more the role of a coach rather than someone who is in charge" (Siggins, 1992, p. 14). This status, Siggins believes, makes more sense as the employees who are doing the job are "actually doing the work, have the necessary information and relevant experience for problem solving within their units of operation" (Siggins, 1992, p. 14).

Shalley et al. (2000) have indicated that job autonomy, as an aspect of the workplace environment, is seen as a stimulator to creative work which, in turn, promotes job satisfaction. In their study of the correlation between creativity and various aspects of the workplace, Shalley et al. conclude that the high demand for creativity in the

workplace requires a high degree of autonomy within the workplace. They assert that in organisations in which creativity is important, it is also essential that the type of work environment provided to employees supports, rather than stifles, the creative process. Some authors perceive bureaucracy within the workplace as a constraint against creativity at work (Craft, 2005). In order to solve this problem, authors such as Hirst et al. (2011) commented that there should be changes in workplace policy that move towards decentralisation. In this regard, it can be seen that learning-oriented employees benefit from decentralisation as the type of system that helps avoid negative influences on creativity (Hirst et al., 2011). "Thus, from a creativity perspective, decentralised decision making is attractive, even when it does little for prove-oriented individuals" (Hirst et al., 2011, p. 638).

Some theories on job motivation and job satisfaction consider autonomy in the workplace as a vital factor that influences employees in a positive manner. Maslow's (1970) theory of the hierarchy of needs also seems to agree with the perception that autonomy has a positive influence on employees. According to Maslow (1970), self-actualising people do not depend on other people, cultural factors, general extrinsic satisfaction, or the world around them in order to feel satisfied; instead, they depend upon their own development and ongoing growth of their own potential.

In addition to Maslow's theory, Herzberg's (1970) motivational-hygiene theory focuses on the importance of internal job factors as motivating forces for employees. He argues that since a motivator is required to stimulate the employees to perform at their best and remain positive towards their job, the job should be redesigned in order to provide the maximum number of motivational opportunities. Job enrichment of this nature involves expanding the job so it provides employees with more opportunities to meet their motivator needs by allowing them to participate in the planning of, performance in, and evaluation of their work. Herzberg (1970) suggests a number of ways through which jobs can become more enriched. First, jobs can be enriched by decreasing management's control over employees whilst increasing the employees' accountability and responsibility for their own work; this, in turn, would increase employee autonomy, authority, and freedom. This move can be taken even further through the creation of workplaces where employees are empowered to create an entire unit instead of simply being one component of a unit. These approaches

make it more likely that employees will see their work, and therefore themselves, as meaningful within the overall organisational process. In this way, the provision of continuous and constructive feedback regarding productivity and performance is more successful when it is given directly to employees rather than via their supervisors. Encouraging and supporting employees to tackle new challenges and to develop expertise in a particular task or operation enhances this approach even further.

From Herzberg's suggestions it can be seen that employee authority and autonomy, in addition to other factors, represent issues associated with organisational enrichment. Schultz and Schultz (2010) note that each of these proposals shares the goal of increasing personal growth, providing recognition, and meeting employees' needs so they can take responsibility and achieve their own aims. Schultz and Schultz note that, as a result of effective job enrichment, employees positively develop their knowledge and skills, and these elements result in improved job performing (p. 229).

The literature has identified many other factors that may affect employees within the workplace. In addition, many other theories have emphasised the importance of autonomy on the job as a way of increasing productivity amongst employees. Thus, the workplace seems to be healthier when employees (as implementers to plans and policies) obtain a sense of autonomy to manage their work and to utilise their abilities. It seems that these elements can be provided by a decentralised work environment.

3.5 Conclusion

Centralisation and decentralisation are policies that are applied to manage education systems and managerial process (such as strategic planning). Some systems utilise high degrees of centralisation to manage education, whereas others utilise high degrees of decentralisation (Al-Ahmad et al., 1994). In addition, Al-Bustan et al. (2003) indicates that some systems might adopt a combination of both policies, so that some issues can be delegated to low managerial levels such as to local authorities and schools, while other issues are retained among those in the higher managerial levels.

In highly centralised systems, one can assume that strategic education planning is managed by the top level of management (such as by the MoE), which makes decisions regarding plans, policies, and processes. A highly centralised strategic education plan features an approach where the top levels of the education hierarchy make all the decisions regarding the resources needed for both the plan's formulation and implementation (Al-Sakarna, 2010). All personnel who contribute to the plans formulation are recruited by the top members of the education hierarchy. In addition, the degree to which stakeholders both within and without the education system participate in this strategy is limited (Al-Bustan et al., 2003). Thus, the quality and quantity of resources is controlled by the top members of the hierarchy, while individuals at the lower levels of the system do not have the same capacity to make decisions regarding these issues. Moreover, the goals and objectives of the plan are primarily constructed by individuals within the MoE, and they do not involve the input of different stakeholders within the education hierarchy.

In highly a centralised education system, the implementation process also seems to be centralised in that it adopts a top-down approach. Therefore, the implementers of the strategic plan receive directives to implement the plan from higher levels of the management team, and the implementers are required to carry out their actions according to the instructions they have received (Lahloob, 2012). As a result, the resources needed for implementation purposes are also controlled by the authorities; in this way, the implementers should utilise these resources according to the criteria set forth by the higher levels.

In contrast, highly decentralised education systems seem to adopt decentralised strategic education planning. In this approach, decisions are delegated to local authorities and schools, and individuals at these levels are able to manage the strategic plan using a participative approach. In addition, different parties and stakeholders are involved, and the top authorities establish a broad network that includes the members of a given society in order to address issues that will potentially be considered in the strategic plan (Mohammad, 2011). In decentralised strategic plans, resources are allocated according to the needs of the local authorizes, who will be able to make decisions regarding financial, material, and human resources. Thus, the lower levels will obtain a degree of control over the quantity and

quality of the resources needed for the plan's formulation. Moreover, information systems unites will be activated within local authorities as they will need to access information pertaining to planning issues (Carizzo et al., 2003).

In a highly decentralised education system, the implementation process is likely to take a bottom-up approach. According to Ayasra (2011), this approach increases the capacity of the implementers to develop their own strategies to implement the plan. As a result, resources can be allocated according to the implementers' needs, and individuals at the lower levels of the system can address the amount of time needed to enact the plan. Moreover, in decentralised strategic planning, the lower levels will be accountable to the top authorities when achieving the plan's goals. This will increase the implementers' responsibilities to successfully achieve the aims established in the plan, which will lead to improvements in the education system and its outcomes.

It is likely that the workplace will be more flexible when utilising a bottom-up approach. The implementers will be able to manage their work independently, and this will enable them to set goals for themselves while investing their creativity in their work. Thus, it seems that the employment of a decentralised framework in the implementation process provides implementers with a certain degree of autonomy where they can match their skills to their tasks, which will ultimately benefit their work.

It is essential to note that the arguments posited above assume that education systems are controlled by highly centralised and decentralised policies. Therefore, it seems as though highly centralised and decentralised systems represent polarities that oppose each other with regard to the amount of flexibility provided to the lower levels when making decisions. For this reason, some systems are able to achieve a sense of balance between both of these policies, and utilise them across a continuum; this requires that both policies be used with some degree of freedom.

Strategic education planning might be affected by centralised or decentralised policies because they both have their advantages and disadvantages. It is important to choose the policy that controls this process in a way that fits the context that it serves. This research attempts to investigate the effectiveness of Kuwait's strategic

education plan in terms of the issues that may have occurred as a result of the policy that controls this process. In order to meet this objective, the research methods that were chosen (including the research sample and the appropriate tools that were used) are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Research Methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods used to address the research questions of the present study. First, it highlights the research design underpinning the research. It then considers the selection and recruitment of the sample, and explains its composition and nature. In addition, this chapter details the methods of data collection, including the advantages of each method in the context of this research. This chapter also explains the chosen data analysis methods used for both the qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, this chapter addresses the ethics of this research and its contribution to the field.

As mentioned in chapter 1, this investigation adopted an emergent research design, as the research questions emerged during the research process rather than being formulated at the outset. The initial research question addressed was:

1. How do the research participants characterise the education system in Kuwait?

What strongly emerged once the first research question was answered was the issue of centralisation. This led to formulation of three additional research questions:

2. What issues does centralisation in educational policy raise for the formulation and implementation of strategic education planning in Kuwait?
3. What are managers' perceptions about the implications of these issues for both policy and practice?
4. What reasons do managers provide for their perceptions regarding the centralised strategic plan?

4.2 Research philosophy: pragmatic paradigm

Research in the fields of education and the social sciences is generally based on two distinct paradigms (positivist and interpretivist), which point out the ideology behind the adoption of using quantitative and qualitative methods (Grix, 2010). In the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher thinks that the investigation of specific

phenomena in the social sciences should be done subjectively; thus, participants' experiences should be shared in detail with the researcher. This means that the researcher should focus on the participants' views, as well as on the contexts in which these views are developed in order to understand, clarify, and interpret social realities (Grix, 2010; Cohen et al. 2007).

Conversely, the positivistic paradigm utilises methodological approaches that are adopted from the natural sciences, and which employ objective analyses of the social realities and phenomena observed as "laws or law-like generalisations" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.10). Therefore, Cohen et al. (2007, p.18) indicated that one of the main criticisms of this paradigm is:

> Its simplistic view of complex human and social realities, which sees human behaviour as static, fixed and limited while denying the role and importance of intension, individualism and freedom.

The pragmatic paradigm integrates both the positivistic paradigm and the interpretivistic paradigm, as this philosophical system exploits features from both of these paradigms (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p.87) argue that in pragmatic research:

> Decisions regarding the use of either quantitative/qualitative methods, or both, depend on the current statement of the research questions and the on-going phase of the inductive-deductive research cycle.

Therefore, the determination of which research method is used in pragmatism is ultimately based on what best serves the research purpose (Creswell, 2008). Consequently, a mixed methods approach was adopted in my research.

4.3 Research design: mixed methods

Cohen et al. (2007, p. 78), when considering the appropriate design to conducting any research, indicated that:

> There is no single blueprint for planning research. Research design is governed by the notion of fitness and purpose. The purposes of the research determine the methodology and the design of the research.

The design selected for this research was chosen according to this view, and it was also primarily chosen to be appropriate to the purpose of the current research.

A mixed methods approach was used to develop this research design; the study took on a qualitative-quantitative-qualitative method, conducted sequentially. I refer to these respectively as *Phase (1), Phase (2),* and *Phase (3)* of data collection. The first qualitative phase – an exploratory study – is dependent upon interviews for the collection of data, with the ultimate aim that the results of this phase will facilitate improved questionnaire design for use in the second phase; the data from the first phase will also help develop interviews for the third phase. By utilising both quantitative and qualitative research methods to produce highly varied data, the usefulness of the analysis is intended to be optimised and made more credible (Mason, 1994). The mixed methods approach assisted me in testing the research questions, while considering them from different perspectives. According to Sandelowski (2003), two main advantages exist to a mixed methods approach: it allows one to gain a more complete understanding of the research phenomenon of interest, and it also helps verify the data by comparing the sets of findings against each other. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 15) confirmed the many benefits to a mixed methods approach:

> If you visualise a continuum with qualitative research anchored at one pole and quantitative research anchored at the other, mixed methods research covers the large set of points in the middle area. If one prefers to think categorically, mixed methods research sits in a new third chair, with qualitative research sitting on the left side and quantitative research sitting on the right side.

My research employs both a questionnaire and interviews, with flexibility acting as one of the key differences between these two approaches. To conduct the research thoroughly, it is necessary to push beyond the results to understand, in more depth, the interviewees' responses on the questionnaire. The questionnaire, also described as the quantitative method, is relatively inflexible, as all participants receive the same set of questions and, by extension; they are less able to be flexible in their responses than with qualitative methods, such as interviews. Analysis of the two approaches must also be different: numerical and statistical data can be drawn from the analysis of quantitative approaches, but analysis of the qualitative results considers non-

numerical data. A mixed methods approach will, therefore, best enhance the results and the goals of my research due to the nature of the research questions being asked, which require going beyond the quantitative results of Phase 2 by conducting a deep investigation via the qualitative method in Phase 3.

It is common for researchers to apply a mixed methods approach in order to respond to their research questions. To emphasise this, Hanson et al. (2005) commented that mixing qualitative and quantitative methods "involves the collection, analysis, and integration of both qualitative and quantitative data in a single or multiphase study" (cited in Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 224). Witkin and Altschuld (1995) are also in favour of the mixed methods approach, commenting that applying a single approach to gain data is "Generally insufficient to provide an adequate basis for understanding needs and making decisions on priorities", and they therefore recommend that researchers "use more than one data source or method and that you balance quantitative methods with qualitative ones" (Witkin and Altschuld, 1995, p. 279).

The mixed methods approach follows different procedures according to the nature of the research. For example, some research begins with quantitative research, and vice versa. This study starts by using a qualitative method, which is represented by exploratory interviews. The following section presents the detailed procedures of the mixed methods approach, which follows three phases, while also explaining the means for and reasons behind conducting each phase.

4.3.1 Mixed methods procedures

Through the initial exploratory interviews, I obtained a general description of the policies that control the education system in Kuwait in general, and strategic education planning in particular. The results revealed that the policies in the Kuwaiti education system are reflective of centralisation; I identified a number of issues from the interviewees regarding the centralised strategic plan of the MoE in terms of both plan formulation and implementation. Afterward, some issues identified from the literature were added to those identified by the exploratory study, as addressed on pages 81-83. The quantitative phase was then designed by building upon the findings obtained during the first phase, and these results were compared to the issues that appeared as a result of the use of centralisation policies in the strategic education

plan formulation and implementation. This was achieved by constructing a *questionnaire* for the collection of data. This second, quantitative phase is, therefore, suitable for obtaining general perceptions of the study population regarding any issues identified by the *exploratory study*. Building upon the perceptions identified in the second phase, the third, qualitative phase employed in-depth interviews to explore issues highlighted by the questionnaire in more details, and to enhance the explanatory power of the data analysis. Thus, more detailed information can be obtained by the third phase of data collection (in-depth interviews) by investigating each issue thoroughly, while studying it in more detail.

All the methods employed for data collection were conducted in Arabic, which is the primary language of the Kuwaiti people. After discussing the interview schedule and the questionnaire with my supervisor, I translated both of these materials into Arabic, and they were ready for the piloting process, and subsequently for use in gathering data. After conducting the fieldwork, I translated the interview schedule and questionnaire into English in order to include them in my thesis. I used a specialist translator, emphasising that the participants' intended meaning should be retained to prevent deviation from the purpose of each tool. During the course of each interview, I used a digital audio recorder to record each of the interviews exactly as they happened, to add to their validity.

4.3.2 Phase (1): semi-structured interviews

This phase aimed to obtain general a description of the current policy controlling the education system in Kuwait. In addition, it aims to identify any issues regarding the strategic plan of the MoE according to the interviewees' perceptions.

For both the first and third phases, I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions in order to collect data related to the research questions. In general, interviews are seen as unique means of data collection. For example, Denzen and Lincoln (2005, p. 869) stated that:

> Most qualitative research probably is based on interviews. There are good reasons for this. By using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality.

Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) state that semi-structured interviews are widely considered as the most valuable research methods. Kvale (1996) suggests that semi-structured interviews are widely used because they offer opportunities for a fairly open dialogue in which honest views are more likely to be expressed. Generally, the semi-structured interview is a popular technique utilised by many researchers for a number of reasons, including the following: first, it represents an ideal technique for encouraging respondents to provide deeper insights and opinions. Second, this approach provides a degree of flexibility during the interview process, as it can allow for additional questions to be asked in order to achieve clearer explanations and elaborations (Smith et al., 1999). Using open-ended questions allows the interviewees to feel freer to express their own ideas and to respond to the questions in their own words. This can result in obtaining more information in general, while providing more useful and specific information for the research project (Thomas, 2009). However, in each phase, the interviews were built according to the purpose of that phase. For instance, the interviews of the first phase were developed with the aim of obtaining respondents' perceptions regarding the nature of the policy that controls the Kuwaiti education system and strategic education plan, while acquiring participants' perceptions regarding the issues of this policy as they relate to the plan's formulation and implementation. Conversely, in the third phase, the interviews were conducted in more depth, and the interviewees were asked to justify their perceptions and provide examples.

This technique was thus chosen to allow me to closely examine the participants' perspectives, while better investigating the issues that resulted from the policy that controls the strategic plan of the MoE. By utilising the interview technique, I was able to ask for additional clarifications by using the word *how* or *why*, helping me to obtain more detailed elaborations of the responses. Walter and Gall (1989) emphasised this feature of the qualitative approach, indicating that one of its benefits is that it allows the researcher to study the issue in a thorough manner. Moreover, flexibility is a key characteristic of the interview technique, as interviewees are free to respond according to their own perspectives. Such flexibility also offers the interviewees the opportunity to elaborate upon their initial ideas during the course of the interview and to share more opinions and thoughts with the interviewer

(Denscombe, 1998). This method also allows the interviewer the ability to modify the questions asked during the course of the interview in order to direct the collection of information to areas that are more relevant to the research. The same core list of questions are applied in the same order during the each interview, with questions added where appropriate (Cohen et al., 2007). A central reason behind my choice to use the semi-structured interview technique is that it allows the aims of the research to be explained more clearly, and it also allows the interviewees to provide clarifications regarding any of the questions asked. Of great importance to my research is that this type of interview process offers a number of opportunities to identify aspects of interest that may not have been considered during the initial planning of the interview phases (Askar et al., 2003). Another benefit is that it enabled me to take into consideration both the verbal and (sometimes) non-verbal cues of the interviewees' behaviours, which helped me to conduct observations for my analysis (Askar et al., 2003). All of these benefits make the semi-structured interview approach stand out from other data collection approaches.

For the exploratory study, I tried to collect as much information as possible by allowing the interviewees to offer their opinions and to express their ideas freely, in accordance with the purpose of this phase. The aim of conducting these interviews was to explore the interviewees' general perceptions regarding the policy that controls the education system, including the strategic plan, while identifying any issues that may have resulted from utilising this policy in the strategic plan's formulation and implementation. Therefore, I took advantage of the semi-structured nature of the interviews by encouraging the interviewees to speak freely and to express their ideas about these matters in as much detail as they wished.

The advantages of utilising open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews assisted me in obtaining new ideas on which to build the following phases. Moreover, this method of data collection provided a comfortable situation for interviewees to feel free to provide information, or criticisms of the MoE policy, whenever they wanted to during the interviews. Therefore, the open-ended questions assist the interviewees to answer the questions according to their feelings and knowledge about the subject matter being discussed. However, the interviewees were made aware of the nature of the aims and purposes of the interviews through the

provision of an information sheet that included details about the research. This is explained further in the section addressing research ethics.

4.3.2.1 Interview schedule

The participant sample included three categories of interviewees working within different managerial tiers of the Kuwaiti education system: MoE officials, district leaders, and school leaders. The MoE officials are the individuals who work at the MoE; the district leaders are individuals who work at the district level; and the school leaders are individuals who work at the school level. During the interviews, I asked each of the interviewees a number of questions based on the main research questions, and I collected any information gathered about each tier. The interview schedules consisted of similar points and were followed step by step according to each interviewee's level of responsibility. The general themes of the questions contained within each interview are generally similar; however, there are some differences between the questions, according to the nature of each tier. This was simply because in each tier, people differed according to their status. In other words, those working at the MoE can be broadly considered as policymakers, while those working at districts and schools can be broadly considered as policy implementers. It is, therefore, logical that policymakers should be asked different questions from those asked of the implementers.

There are two main purposes to the exploratory interviews. First, I intended to obtain an informative description of the nature of the policy controlling the education system in general, including the policy that controls the strategic education plan. Second, I intended to identify issues related to the strategic education plan for both the formulation and implementation processes, according to the policies that control them. Thus, the questions were organised according to these two purposes (see Appendix 2).

4.3.2.2 Piloting interview schedule

I tested the validity of the interview schedule by requesting opinions from specialists. I asked five experts in educational management to review the interview schedule and to provide any feedback that they could offer. Two of these experts work at Kuwait

University, and the other three work at the College of Basic Education that is sponsoring my study on educational planning. The five experts gave me feedback in a private meeting, and together we discussed their suggestions for modifications and additions to the interview schedule.

Generally, the experts agreed that the interview schedule is valid and meets the purpose of the main investigation of this phase. However, there were some slight changes that were recommended by the specialists who reviewed the interview schedule. Most of the suggestions focused on elaborating the interview schedule. For example, there were some suggestions that more detail be addressed in the sections that discussed the nature of the MoE's policy of controlling the education system, as well as in the section that investigated the nature of strategic education planning. Moreover, there were suggestions that the section be split so that the strategic plan is asked about in two separate sections (see Appendix 2).

4.3.2.3 Exploratory interview sampling

For the first phase, a particular convenience sample was selected, with the intention of initially exploring the participants' thoughts, and where the size of the sample and the specific cases selected depended on the purpose of the study. I interviewed a sample that consisted of twelve interviewees: two people from the MoE (one male and one female); four from the district level (two males and two females); and six from the school level (three males and three females). These last six people were represented by male and female headteachers, deputy heads, and heads of departments.

I hoped that this sample of twelve would be able to provide solid indications and meaningful insights into the issues being discussed, which would assist in accomplishing the aims of the qualitative phases of the research, while helping to design the quantitative research phase.

4.3.2.4 Issues (themes) identified by the exploratory interviews

The findings of the exploratory study revealed that there are *seven* issues of the strategic education plan of the MoE. The interviewees identified these issues of

concern that resulted from the centralisation policy that ultimately controls strategic plan formulation and implementation:

1. Efficiency of the strategic plan
2. Clarity of the strategic plan
3. Implementability
4. Fitness for purpose
5. Collaborativeness and participativeness
6. Communicative capacity
7. Bureaucratisation

4.3.2.5 Issues identified by the literature

A further *five* issues were identified by the literature in order to ensure that the following phases will investigate more issues and ensure wider coverage to potential issues to the strategic education plan.

1. Globalisability
2. Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan
3. Adapting to individuals
4. Impact upon work environment
5. Flexibility of the strategic plan

4.3.2.6 The final issues

After identifying twelve issues, it was thought that there were similarities between some of the themes that arose, which meant that there was a need to reduce the total number of issues that were raised. As a result, the twelve issues were conflated together to their final form, according to their similarities, as shown in Table 2. These issues were investigated sequentially in the questionnaire and in the in-depth interviews.

Table 2: The final issues of the centralised strategic education plan

Pre-conflation	After conflation
1. Efficiency of the strategic plan	1. Efficiency of the strategic plan
2. Fitness to the purpose 3. Globalisability 4. Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan	2. Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan
5. Clarity of the strategic plan 6. Implementability 7. Flexibility of the strategic plan	3. Implementability
8. Collaborativeness and participativeness	4. Collaborativeness and participativeness
9. Communicative capacity	5. Communicative capacity
10. Bureaucratisation	6. Bureaucratisation
11. Adapting to individuals 12. Impact upon the work environment	7. Work environment

4.3.3 Phase (2): questionnaire study

The questionnaire phase aimed to investigate the participants' perceptions towards the issues that were identified in the exploratory study. The questionnaire represented the quantitative data collection method that was employed, and it was the central tool used in the second phase. It was built upon the findings obtained in the first phase; specifically, I designed the questionnaire according to the issues identified during the first phase of the qualitative study, while taking into account other themes identified from the literature. There are many advantages to using questionnaires in this research. First, it is an economical research tool that allows for the inclusion of high numbers of participants in a short time. Second, it assists in identifying any major patterns relating to the given phenomenon being investigated for the purposes of this research. Third, there are many participants who manage departments and groups of people, and who are very busy during the working day, so any respondents who were unable to meet me due to other commitments or absence were able to participate in the research by email or fax. This meant that there was less pressure put on the respondents, as the questionnaire allowed them the time to consider the questions

before responding (Oppenheim, 1992). The questionnaire method could, therefore, be a useful approach when seeking responses from the sample of MoE officials recruited for this study, as the policies and regulations at the MoE are well established, and criticism of these policies and regulations may lead to embarrassment for the individuals involved. Therefore, use of a confidential questionnaire is a good method for obtaining the perceptions of these individuals.

The questionnaire depended on closed-ended questions. The rationale for the use of closed-ended questions in this research is in line with Neuman's (2007) views, as he listed the advantages and disadvantages of open-ended and closed questionnaires. The advantages of a closed questionnaire included the ease and speed with which participants could provide responses from their own perspectives, and he indicated that less articulate participants are not at a disadvantage when using this method. From the perspective of data analysis, it is easier to compare differences in responses, and to statistically analyse or codify the responses; in addition, replication is simpler. Furthermore, closed questionnaires can yield more relevant responses to the questions being asked, as participants are less able to provide irrelevant responses. The response choices can help participants understand the questions, and they are more likely to respond with answers that relate to more sensitive issues.

However, the advantages of utilising a questionnaire in this research do not eliminate the benefits of using interviews, as demonstrated by the research findings. This is explained in the section that details the presentation and discussion of findings.

4.3.3.1 Questionnaire design

As previously mentioned, I designed the questionnaire according to the findings of the exploratory study, which were conflated with issues derived from the literature. Therefore, seven issues were considered as relative dimensions in the questionnaire (see Table 2). In addition, these seven issues (themes) were considered as dependent variables of the questionnaire. Thus, the dependent variables of the questionnaire are the issues associated with the formulation of the strategic education plan, according to the centralisation policy, as appears below:

1. Efficiency of the strategic plan

2. Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan
3. Implementability
4. Collaborativeness and participativeness
5. Communicative capacity
6. Bureaucratisation
7. Work environment

The questionnaire consisted of several independent and dependent variables. The various independent variables, which are the factors of the comparative analysis conducted between the study groups, will be defined as follows:

1. Tiers (MoE, district, school)
2. Gender (male, female)
3. Educational district (AlAsma, Hawalli, AlFarwania, AlAhmadhi, AlJahra, Mubar Al Kabir)
4. Educational qualification (Diploma, B.S., MS/Ph. D).

The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "strongly disagree", 2 represents "disagree", 3 represents "undecided", 4 represents "agree", and 5 represents "strongly agree" (see appendix 4).

4.3.3.2 Content validity

The questionnaire was distributed among two groups of people: the first group consisted of four academics in educational management roles, in addition to two individuals who worked in general education. The second group consisted of six leaders from the three tiers of the Kuwaiti educational system (MoE, educational districts, and schools). Thus aim of this procedure is to obtain explore the extent of the questionnaire representation to the research aims. Moreover, this procedure aimed to identify any weaknesses in the questionnaire in terms of clarity of the questions. In addition, it aimed to obtain suggestions for improving the questionnaire items.

In general, the participants were satisfied with the nature of the questions in terms of how well the questions reflecting the aims of the research. However, several suggestions were obtained to improve the questionnaire, according to the frequent

appearance of specific suggestions from the participants. These suggestions are summarised in the following points:

- There were slight changes made to the introduction on the front page and to the independent variables. For the introduction, I deleted the blank space that required the respondents to enter their district. As an alternative, I asked the respondents to specify their managerial level (ministry, district, or school).
- Some participants requested that the category of (undecided) was added in the middle of the Likert scale because they are unfamiliar with the contents of some items, despite the clear formation of these items. Additionally, some of the academics with whom I consulted emphasised the importance of adding this category in order to avoid forcing some respondents to choose answers that did not completely represent their actual opinions.
- Avoidance of long statements.
- There was some duplication in the content of some of the items. The participants suggested keeping each item focused upon one idea and transferring the duplicated items into two or three questions, according to the number of ideas presented within these items.
- The participants suggested that some items were relatively vague, and so changes were made to make these items clearer in focus.
- Generally, the participants were happy with the issues covered by the questionnaire, and they were enthusiastic to know the results of the study.

4.3.3.3 Reliability of the questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire is discussed in data presentation chapter (see page 139).

4.3.3.4 Questionnaire sampling

The sample of this phase was based on the stratified random sampling of the MoE, district, and school levels. Thomas (2009) suggested that utilising stratified sampling allows the researcher to improve the sample representation. He also commented that this kind of sample reflects the characteristics of the population being studied. This phase included 188 participants that were selected from a number of schools (see Table 3). The numbers within this sample were as follows: 20 MoE officials (10

males and 10 females); district leaders (24 males and 24 females); and 120 school leaders (60 males and 60 females). The school leaders sample included 30 head teachers, 20 deputy heads, and ten department heads, each of which had an equal split of males and females.

4.3.3.5 Questionnaire challenges

I faced two challenges regarding the nature of the questionnaire items. The first was determining how the participants would provide their perceptions regarding the strategic education plan being formulated under a centralisation policy (as confirmed in the exploratory study). After some consideration, I decided to describe the nature of the policy in most of the questions by including the word *centralised.* Therefore, the respondents could provide answers according to the policy that controls the strategic plan. The second challenge then emerged: I was concerned that I may have faced a potential problem by leading the respondents to provide negative responses. This concern was founded in the inclusion of the word *centralised* within the questionnaire items, as there exists the possibility that the respondents would gain an impression that the centralised policy is a negative practice, especially since current claims have addressed the application of decentralisation within the Kuwaiti education system. In attempting to address this dilemma, I balanced the negative and positive items within the questionnaire. When considered according to this balance, it can be seen that the respondents would not gain any particular impression of my own opinions regarding the centralised nature of the strategic plan. Therefore, they would respond according to their own opinions, rather than being affected by their impressions of the types of being questions asked. This procedure helped me obtain substantive responses from the respondents.

4.3.4 Phase (3): in-depth interviews

The purpose of these interviews is to gather the perceptions of the interviewees across the three levels of management in the Kuwaiti education system (MoE officials, district leaders, and school leaders) regarding the issues (themes) identified in the earlier phases, and to discuss the extent to which the respondents agree that these issues exist. In addition, these interviews aim to obtain a deeper understanding of these issues with regard to the influence that the centralisation policy may hold for

them. Initially, it was critical that the nature of the policy of management within the Kuwaiti education system was emphasised, while identifying its characteristics. This was necessary to improve the validity of the main investigation of this phase. In other words, throughout the course of conducting these interviews, I was confident that the interviewees perceived the Kuwaiti education system and the MoE strategic planning processes as centralised in nature. This assumption was made because, as mentioned in Chapter 1, there is lack of literature that describes the policy that controls the education system in Kuwait, and there are hardly any works that discuss the nature of the policy guiding strategic plan formulation and implementation. In addition, my research focuses on exploring respondents' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the strategic education plan in light of the policy that controls its formulation and implementation.

4.3.4.1 In-depth interview schedule

The investigation commenced by asking the interviewees general questions about their jobs and roles in their work. Then, I asked the interviewees to provide information and a full description about the current policy that controls the education system. I asked the interviewees to address aspects of centralisation and to describe the degree with which the tenets of centralisation are used within the education system. The reason for this is that it helped to obtain additional details about the nature of the centralisation policy, while identifying its characteristics within the Kuwaiti education system and the strategic education plan. The following step focused on investigating, in more depth, the interviewees' perceptions regarding the issues that were identified in earlier phases of the research regarding the centralised strategic plan. Afterwards, I conducted a thorough investigation to obtain the interviewees' justifications about their perceptions regarding each issue that was raised. Thus, I attempted to obtain information about the consequences of the centralisation upon each of these concerns. As a result, a number of other issues emerged for each main theme, as consequences of the centralisation policy.

In these interviews, I followed specific procedures, as recommended by Thomas (2009), to accomplish the interviews by asking appropriate questions according to

the interview schedule. Thomas (2009, p. 164) described these procedures as the follows:

> Your interview schedule, drawn up prior to the interview, is a framework of issues, leading to possible questions, leading to possible follow up questions, leading to probes.

The following figure summarises the undertaken steps as follows:

Issue ⟶ Question ⟶ Follow-up question ⟶ Probes

Thomas (2009) indicates that studying issues begins with asking questions regarding the specific topics being investigated. Afterwards, the researcher might ask follow-up questions to encourage the interviewee to elaborate upon their initial responses. The elaborated responses may then be followed up with what Thomas refers to as "probes", which are intended to encourage the interviewees to further develop their responses. I decided to adopt Thomas's strategy because it fits the nature and purpose of the interviews, as they contain a number of issues obtained from the exploratory interviews that require deeper investigation. Thomas's strategy allows the participants to further delve into their responses, allowing them to provide in-depth information for the in-depth interviews.

As with the initial exploratory interviews, the in-depth interview schedule included a number of questions that differed according to the nature of the conversation and the status of the interviewee. Additional questions were developed from each of the interviewee's responses, and in certain cases, requests for examples, clarifications, and justifications emerged.

4.3.4.2 Piloting In-depth interview schedule

For the in-depth interview schedule, I followed the same procedures used for the exploratory interviews. For this third phase, however, I consulted my supervisors, Linda Evans and Geoff Hayward, regarding the interview schedule, and they provided me with useful feedback. In addition, I consulted six experts in the education field, two of whom are experts in research methods. Their feedback was taken into consideration, and the interview schedule was amended according to their suggestions.

The interview schedule was slightly amended according to the recommendations that were provided. Generally, the piloting procedure did not result in many changes. The major suggestions focused on further elaborating upon the interview schedule in general. I also added a new and detailed section at the beginning of the interview schedule to further emphasise the nature of the policy controlling both the Kuwaiti education system and the strategic planning approach (see Appendix 3).

4.3.4.3 In-depth interview sampling

For this phase, a purposive sample of 22 people was drawn from those who completed the questionnaire, as the questionnaire sample was asked if they would be willing to take part in the final interview phase. This sample was selected and included the following respondents: four MoE officials (two males and two females); six district leaders (three males and three females); and 12 school leaders (six males and six females) – these last twelve individuals were represented by headteachers, deputy heads, and department heads. As previously mentioned, this phase utilised interviews that were built according to the results of the first and second phases, in order to gain in-depth insights regarding the participants' perceptions.

The rationale behind adopting a purposive sample is to reach participants within the research population whose knowledge and experience can enrich the work. Ball (1990) illustrates that there are many instances where a purposive sample is used; this can include contacting experts, such as those who have extensive knowledge and expertise about certain areas, or they may be contacted based on their position of power, their profession, their access to certain networks, and other related issues. Moreover, it is not necessary that the purposive sample should be large in number, because sample selection depends on the capacity of the participants to provide rich and detailed information. In other words, the advantage of a purposive sample lies in its ability to enrich the research data (Creswell, 2008). Thus, purposive sampling, as opposed to probability sampling, should not necessarily lead to a generalisable or representative sample population; rather, it aims to obtain information that serves the purpose of the research and answers its questions (Cohen et al., 2007). Generally, qualitative researchers do not seek generalisable results. Rather, they seek to obtain rich data (Creswell, 2008). Cohen et al. (2007) illustrated that even though the

sample used in this study might not be representative of the population at large, and given that the participants' opinions may not be generalisable, the goal of this sampling method is to obtain information and opinions from individuals who have detailed knowledge about these issues. For example, with respect to the MoE officials, I selected leaders from four departments, each of whom are directly involved in the strategic plan's formulation. These four departments (Department of Curriculum, Department of Planning and Improvement, Department of Human Resources, and Department of General Education) are part of six departments, which are considered vital players in the plan's formulation.

Thus I selected my research sample according to the degree to which I believe that they can provide rich, deep, and meaningful information to strengthen my data and answer my research questions (see page 92).

Table 3 presents the details of the composition and distribution of the research sample for each of the three research phases.

4.3.4.4 Pre-interview procedures

I believe that there are many factors that influenced the success of the interviews that I adopted in the present research, and I have taken into consideration all of these factors. These factors, which I observed before conducting the interviews, are summarised in the following points,:

1. The interview situation includes the time, place, and interviewees. If the place and time are suitable, and if a positive approach exists between the interviewer and the interviewee, the interview will be more successful.
2. The interviewer and his/her characteristics: there is no doubt that the success of the interview depends greatly on the social skills of the researcher (such as his or her good reception to, and interaction with, the situation, along with any related verbal and non-verbal interactions), and the degree to which the researcher is realistic regarding the topic being addressed in the interview.
3. The interviewer must take into account the social characteristics of the respondents, and their ability and desire to answer the questions addressed to them.

4. Study contact, taking into consideration the interviewee's level of sensitivity and engagement, while observing any difficulties the respondents may have in answering the questions (Warwick and Lininger, 1975, p.184).

4.4 Research sample selection: rationale

The population of this research was derived from the three managerial tiers (MoE level, district level, and school level) in the Kuwaiti education system. The MoE, which is considered the highest level of management, includes decision makers and those who form the general policies of the Kuwaiti educational system. The sample of MoE officials was selected from the managers of several departments in the MoE (Department of Planning and Improvement, Department of Curriculum, Department of Human Resources, Department of Finance, Department of Development and Improvement, and Department of General Education). These departments represent the sectors responsible for the formulation of educational strategic planning. As the MoE officials represent the national level, it is essential to understand their opinions regarding the current policy for leading the educational system, while taking into account their opinion on strategic planning as policymakers. They can provide a great deal of information (such as detailing the reasons why the current policy that controls the education system was applied), and they can highlight, for the purpose of this research, whether there are any future intentions or possibilities to rework this policy and clarify whether it meets their goals as national-level policymakers.

The district level consists of managers who are required to implement the MoE's decisions and plans, and who also have other levels below them. The sample of this tier was represented by managers of the educational districts and heads of all the departments in the districts. In this way, I secured, within the sample, full coverage of the management roles across all six educational districts. The rationale for sampling this level is that it consists of the six educational districts in Kuwait, which includes all of the schools in public education. When selecting this level of the sample, I anticipated that the officials of these educational districts would provide realistic information and clear insights regarding their current roles in the development of the strategic education plan, while commenting on other educational issues. In addition, I hoped that they would provide opinions about how the districts

might participate more effectively in the strategic plan of the MoE. Moreover, the district leaders are represented by a group of people working directly in the educational field and, therefore, their opinions would be of crucial importance, especially regarding the strategic education plan. Also, the district leaders are responsible for a number of schools and staff within their educational district. As leaders, they may be able to estimate the needs of their district, and discuss how best to lead the schools within the district, while suggesting optimal ways for their improvement. They may also consider appropriate plans for developing the schools (with the cooperation of the school's headteachers) and address any problem-solving initiatives or concerns regarding the schools in their district. For these reasons, their participation in this research was crucial, and it thoroughly enriched the purpose of this study.

The school leaders represent the lowest level of managers, and they are required to implement the decisions of the higher tier. The sample of school leaders was represented by school head teachers, deputy heads, and heads of departments of both genders, selected from a number of schools within the six educational districts. Headteachers were chosen for inclusion in the research sample, as in Kuwait (as in many countries), headteachers are often appointed after many years of working in schools as teachers, heads of departments, and deputy heads. In this way, their experience allows them to represent the wider opinions within the schools, particularly with regard to providing information regarding the MoE's policies to control the education system and the planning processes. In addition, headteachers are educational leaders, and their role in achieving effective leadership in their organisation or institution is important to consider in the context of this research. In this light, the opinions they hold of the policies under which they work are highly credible, as headteachers have access to the most relevant and direct information regarding how their schools may be improved. This information is essential in this research, as these individuals are well-positioned to suggest process improvements in accordance with their knowledge about the school they are leading. This section of the sample enhances and strengthens this study, as headteachers deal directly with the students, who are ultimately the "outputs" of any strategic planning initiatives in the Kuwaiti educational system.

In terms of the selection of deputy heads, the rationale behind this lies in that they play a fundamental role in managing schools in Kuwait. To explain this, deputy heads are responsible for the staff, and they supervise staff members during the academic year; therefore, they are fully aware of the staff members' needs and problems. Moreover, deputy heads are responsible for solving the students' problems within schools; thus, they can provide rich information about their roles in making decisions regarding staff and student issues. In addition, according to their position within the schools, they can provide ideas about how the MoE's policy affects their roles, whether positively or negatively.

With respect to the heads of departments, they were chosen to represent teachers, as they manage groups of teachers and supervise their performance in teaching pupils throughout the academic year. I benefited in my research from the participation of the heads of departments, as they are the leaders of departments within the schools and they work as teachers at the same time. They are, therefore, able to provide information about their roles in managing their departments and discussing how that relates to the MoE policies that are being applied to strategic education plan formulation and implementation. Additionally, I hoped that heads of departments would be able to provide their perceptions regarding their departments' needs, while discussing whether the strategic education plan meets these needs or not.

These three managerial tiers included samples that I believed possessed the ability to enhance the required data regarding the educational system in Kuwait. These groups reflected the diversity that exists in the nature, function, and duties of each tier (to different extents) with respect to the strategic planning initiatives of the MoE in Kuwait. The research population reflected the groups of individuals concerned with strategic planning, although the differences found in the distribution of power amongst this group was evident. Furthermore, the district and school leaders represented a rich source of information, which is required by the MoE, so as to facilitate an accurate strategic education planning process. In addition, these members also represent their respective tiers during implementation of the strategic plan.

Most of the samples recruited for this study are considered an elite sample (such as the MoE officials and the district leaders) due to their high positions within their level of management, which they were selected to represent. Accordingly, I was keen to take into consideration that the research questions would be appropriate for the positions being represented by the sample individuals. Moreover, I was careful when choosing the ways in which I dealt with these sample groups, by using specific words when asking questions and when requesting clarification and repetition.

In order to ensure easy access to the research sample, I followed the procedures that are commonly used by any researcher in Kuwait when trying to begin the study in a smooth and effective manner, especially when I conducted the field research. The process of accessing the research sample demands the following procedures: first, I presented a letter from my supervisors explaining the purpose of my research, while including the potential study sample, to the Ministry of Education/Department of Research which, in turn, wrote a letter to the departments in which the chosen sample of individuals were based. Second, these letters were distributed amongst these departments in order to inform the individuals of the research being conducted, and the intended method of data collection. Once the departments received these letters, they were required to meet with me and assisted me in data collection. Finally, I arranged direct appointments with the individuals who were recruited as part of the sample, either directly or via their secretaries.

4.4.1 Contact with the research participants

The sample responded in two main ways to my request for interviews or to complete the questionnaire. Some of the participants met with me directly and asked for explanations and clarifications about the aims and purpose of the data collection method, and they then provided me with direct approval for conducting the data collection method by signing the consent form. Some respondents required time to read the information sheet, and they subsequently contacted me by telephone – either directly or via their secretaries – informing me about their decision regarding their preference to be interviewed or to complete the questionnaire.

Table 3 presents information on the composition of the research sample. The table also presents the number of individuals within each managerial tier, as represented

by the sample. In addition, the outlines the number of research participants in each phase of this research.

Table 3: Sample composition and sizes

Tier / Phase	MoE officials		District leaders		School leaders		Total
First interview phase	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	12
	1	1	2	2	3	3	
Questionnaire phase	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	188
	10	10	24	24	60	60	
Second interview phase	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	22
	2	2	3	3	6	6	

4.5 Data analysis

This section includes methods of analysing data generated from the two main strands (quantitative and qualitative).

4.5.1 The interviews analysis

My research used three phases for collecting data; two of the phases (Phases 1 and 3) were qualitative, as I had used interviews to address the research questions. Phase 1 was exploratory and Phase 3 was developed in order to get a more detailed understanding about the issues being studied. The same analysis procedures were followed in both qualitative phases. A thematic analysis method was applied to analyse the data collected through the interviews. The analysis of the interviews

followed content analysis, which is "a strict and systematic set of procedures for the rigorous analysis, examination and verification of the content of written data" (Cohen et al., 2007, p475). Thus, this approach allowed me to manage such large amounts of qualitative data.

Once I obtained their consent, I recorded the interviewees' responses, which were transcribed afterward. All responses were put together in order to compare and contrast them. Through repeated reviews of the transcribed data, and based on related codes that emerged, I was able to identify patterns to facilitate the analytical process. The constructed patterns were categorised to form overarching themes. These themes included insights, behaviours, perceptions, and interactions, as they related to the research questions.

In Phase 3, based on the themes that were created from Phase 1, a more refined content analysis was followed in order to investigate these themes in more depth. The same analytical procedures used in Phase 1 were followed in Phase 3. The idea to investigate the responses in greater detail stemmed from the establishment of new themes as they arose during Phase 1.

4.5.2 The questionnaire analysis

The questionnaire analysis depended on several statistical tests. All information about the questionnaire analysis and the employed tests are explained in the questionnaire results section (see page 130)

4.6 Ethical considerations

After preparing the methods of data collection, I followed the procedures outlined by the policies at the University of Leeds regarding the ethical requirements of research. Consequently, I managed the fieldwork of my research according to the following considerations.

As mentioned in the section that discussed the methods through which I made contact with the research participants, the first step I followed was to obtain approval from the Department of Research within the MoE, which acted as the *gatekeeper* that provided the necessary permissions to researchers in the field of education to access

their research samples. With regard to providing the participants with full information about the research, I was keen to inform the participants about the aims and purpose of the research. I followed three steps to ensure this: I began with visiting the Department of Research in order to request permission to conduct my research using interviews and questionnaires with the people working at the three managerial levels of the Kuwaiti education system (the MoE, districts, and schools). I wrote a full and detailed request to the head of the department, and the department then sent a letter to the three managerial levels informing them about my request. As a second step, I also provided the interviewees and questionnaire respondents with information sheets, which included all the information they would need to know about the research (see Appendix 5). I met many of the participants personally and talked to them directly about the research, answered all of their questions, and clarified everything that they felt needed further explanation; this represents the third and last step I took in providing the participants with information about this research.

I would like to present examples of the ethical considerations that I applied in my research, describing the rest of the procedures in Appendix 5, where the steps can be reviewed in greater detail. Since this research requires truthful answers pertaining to the current policies of the MoE, I used pseudonyms to represent the participants (see appendix 7 and 8). This procedure was used to protect the participants' identities and to preserve their anonymity. In addition, I told the participants that I appreciated and respected their right to withdraw from the research at any stage. I also informed them that I appreciated their right to review their answers at the end of the interviews, and indicated that they could postpone the meeting, if necessary. Furthermore, I informed the interviewees that the interviews would be recorded, and that they had the right to accept or refuse this, while also informing them that I would use the records only for the purpose of the current research.

Before conducting each phase of data collection, I asked the participants to sign a consent form so as to indicate that they had officially agreed to participate in this research (for further details on this, see Appendix 6).

After presenting the research design and methodology, the following section will present the research findings of the exploratory study, the questionnaire, and the in-depth interviews.

Chapter 5: Presentation of the findings

5.1 Introduction

This section attempts to answer the four research questions presented earlier. The first research question was investigated in Phase 1 and Phase 3 using semi-structured interviews. In Phase 1, the interviews were exploratory in that I intended to obtain general information about the overall policy controlling the education system in Kuwait (including the strategic education plan). In Phase 3, I conducted a deep investigation about the policy of the MoE in order to address its characteristics in more details.

The second research question was also investigated in Phase 1. I intended to identify any issues regarding the education system's strategic plan, according to the MoE policy used to control this process.

The third research question was investigated in Phase 2 using a closed-ended questionnaire in order to identify the participants' perceptions regarding the seven issues identified in Phase 1.

Finally, the fourth research question was investigated in Phase 3 using semi-structured interviews. The interviews attempted to investigate the seven issues in greater detail in order to obtain the interviewees' justifications for their perceptions that were obtained during the questionnaire phase.

I presented the findings of my research according to the research question. Each research question was used as a heading, and the results followed beneath each heading.

5.2 Findings of research question 1:

(How do the research participants characterise the education system in Kuwait?)

As mentioned above, this research question was investigated in two phases (Phase 1 and Phase 3):

5.2.1 Phase 1 findings

All of the interviewees agreed that the MoE adopted a policy of centralisation in order to control the education system. The results revealed that the policy was strictly applied, and that people at the lower levels of management were excluded from making decisions regarding any educational issues. These issues, such as resource and teacher deployment, are the sole responsibility of the MoE. Salman, a deputy head, indicated:

> …From the beginning of the establishment of the education system, the MoE is the controller of all educational elements. Neither the schools nor the districts can make decisions about deployments or the schools' budget or even ways of expending that budget…

Zainab, a headteacher, indicated:

> …Centralisation is the current policy. We cannot make decisions about vital educational issues. The only decisions we make as headteachers is the daily routine regarding the teachers' and pupils' commitments and behaviours at the schools. Everything comes from above…

Regarding the policy that controls the strategic plan, the interviewees also indicated that the plan is formulated at the top of the educational hierarchy in Kuwait, as represented by the MoE. Ali, a district leader said:

> The strategic plan is completely the responsibility of the MoE. None of the districts or schools can make decisions regarding the plan. We are implementers not formulators of the plan; the schools act more as implementers because they deal with teaching the pupils directly…

Thus, the results indicated that the MoE utilises the centralisation policy to manage educational issues, and it utilises the same policy to manage the process of formulating the strategic plan. According to the results, the policy seems to impede districts and schools from making decisions regarding the basic elements of education, such budgets, personnel deployment, curriculum, and establishment of the education strategic plan, which is the main focus of my current research.

5.2.2 Phase 3 findings

The results of the first phase of data collection (the exploratory study) demonstrated that the interviewees perceived the Kuwaiti education system to be centralised, with a centralisation policy being identified as the means through which the MoE managed the Kuwaiti education system.

Interviewees in the third phase of the study confirmed this perspective: The Kuwaiti education system has high level of centralisation with a highly prevalent top-down approach to decision making. Decisions are made by top-level management, who reside at the upper tier of the decision-making hierarchy. The interviewees specifically described the decision-making policy as "hyper-centralisation." The term "hyper" indicates the excessive or extreme use of something; therefore, the interviewees' use of this term implies that the MoE adopted and implement its centralisation policy in an excessive way. This sentiment appears in a comment by Morad, a head teacher with 12 years of experience:

> …Everything is decided and controlled by the Ministry of Education. I would describe it as a military style—you must implement decisions that come from the top and you cannot object or even give an opinion…

Such hyper-centralisation has several characteristics or aspects that further emphasise the interviewees' claims that a hyper-centralisation approach is used within the Kuwaiti education system. The analysis of the interviewees' perceptions suggests several features of this system that the respondents talked about intensively. These included the centralisation of:

- Resource allocation
- Curriculum planning
- In-service programmes for teachers and staff
- Pupils' assessments
- Educational planning

These five characteristics of centralisation in the Kuwaiti education system are examined through interviews with the respondents, as presented below.

5.2.2.1 Centralisation of resource allocation

During the interviews, interviewees focused on the following three types of resources: financial, material, and human:

- Financial resources refer to the amount of money that the lower levels receive.
- Material resources are the equipment, elements, and tools used in teaching and learning, in addition to those used in management.
- Human resources refer to all personnel, such as academic or managerial staff, who are employed in the districts and in the schools.

The interviewees indicated that in Kuwait, the central government is responsible for deciding the amount of resources that will be allocated to any of the public services, such as education. However, the degree of control over the allocation of financial resources and how those resources are then spent at both regional and local levels does seem to be extreme. For example, Farah, a leader working in the Al-Asma district (at the regional level), explained the process by which her district obtains funds:

> The MoE makes all decisions regarding our financial issues. As I am a leader, I do not have the authority to decide the amount of the budget distributed to the district which I lead. If we want to implement some changes, such as maintenance issues, we are obliged to write a letter to the MoE, which then reviews the request before deciding if it is worth performing the maintenance or not. Sometimes the MoE refuses our requests, in which case we have to wait, and write another letter, and so on…

According to Bader, a headteacher, a similar situation can be found at the local level in schools:

> The amount of our budget was decided many years ago. Each year we receive the same amount of budget. The scale of budget depends of the level of each school. If you go to any school in any district, you will discover that they receive the same amount of funds as we do…

These interview extracts exemplify both the degree of control exercised by the MoE and the inflexibility present in the current system. Therefore, it seems that the

regional or local levels have little, if any, discretion as to how the allocated resources can be spent (for example, on the routine maintenance of buildings). Furthermore, the resource allocation method where all schools receive the same amount of resources, regardless of the number of pupils they have, does not seem to employ a model or algorithm that can be flexible enough to meet the changing circumstances of schools, such as in instances where changes in the demographics of the local population may be evident. Possible reasons for this are explored below.

The Kuwaiti state is the only source of school funding. Because Kuwait is a wealthy country, its government funds all of the ministries and sectors, using oil production as its main source of fund provisioning. The private sector, or what Anderson (2002) describes as 'sponsors', includes parents, religious institutions, and business organisations, which are completely excluded from the school funding process, and from providing schools with material resources. Since the state is the only source of the education system's financial resources, this provides a 'primary indication', but not a certainty, that the government uses a centralisation policy. This is especially true because contrary to the situation in Kuwait, some decentralised systems allow the private sector to support schools and to supply them with funds and provisions. However, it is not appropriate to describe the Kuwaiti resource allocation process as centralised simply by considering the source of its resources because, while other countries may allow the private sector to participate in providing funds and materials for education, those resources may be allocated via a top-down approach that is highly bureaucratic. This is the reason behind my choice to use the expression of 'primary indication'.

With regard to resource control, I would suggest that two main processes can indicate the presence of centralisation: resource acquisition and resource allocation. To clarify this, organisations may use one of two approaches. The first approach, which the interviewees indicated is used by the MoE in Kuwait, is highly centralised, demonstrating a top-down method. The second approach, which none of the interviewees mentioned, is decentralised. The highly centralised approach implies that the central or upper level of management holds power over vital decision making within the organisation. Consequently, educational inputs, such as school budgets, are selected and allocated by personnel in the top departments. Under this system,

lower levels, such as the schools themselves, are not empowered to make decisions regarding the amount of the budgets that they will receive (Levačić, 2002). In effect, this situation places schools in the position of being decision receivers rather than being decision makers. I would suggest that, in such cases, the top of the hierarchy holds the power in resource allocation, and the lower levels must follow the upper level's regulations in order to get their own needs met. Robbins et al. (2010) supported this assumption by stating that if someone controls any process, he or she has power. This brings us to the very definition of decentralisation, which was mentioned earlier: when the power shifts from the top levels to the lower levels, the lower levels become holders of more power.

When decision-making is maintained only at the top level, that level becomes the only authority that is entitled to make decisions regarding the source and amount of resources; it is also the only authority that can determine the amount time allowed for the allocation of these resources. In this case, and with the use of the top-down approach, the procedures that are needed to obtain these resources are demanding, and they need to be undertaken in several stages, as explained by interviewees such as Noor. She perceived the acquisition of material resources to be a bureaucratic process. As the head of a chemistry department, she experienced some obstacles when she tried to obtain materials needed for teaching chemistry lessons. She commented on the method of resource allocation:

> …It is a very long and bureaucratic process that requires you to follow long procedures to obtain material resources such as computers and laboratory supplies, and you must wait for approval before being able to proceed. The problem is that in some cases your request is neglected without you ever knowing the reason…

It would appear that another aspect of centralisation can be seen when schools require specific kinds of resources that are needed for the pupils' learning or for managerial use. The interviewees indicated that the allocation of materials and supplies needed for pupils, teaching, and school activities are based on the MoE's regulations. The interviewees' responses make it clear that in order to obtain the material resources that they need, headteachers are required to write a letter to their educational district explaining the requirements of their school. The educational

district conveys this information to the MoE, which then analyses it and makes the decision to either approve or refuse the request. Levačić (2000) describes this kind of resource allocation as "bureaucratic allocation", whereby organisations allocate resources via the application of certain management rules, as enforced by the top-level authority. In this way, bureaucracy causes a delay in providing resources to schools, consequently affecting teaching and learning.

This situation also puts the districts and schools in the position of acting as decision receivers or, more precisely, as policy implementers. The structure of the MoE appears to validate the interviewees' claims that bureaucracy seems to prevail within the Kuwaiti education system. The policy of centralisation seems to be an option that the government chooses to apply to its organisations, such as the MoE, which results in bureaucracy. Saying that this top-down approach is an option implies that more than one option exists. According to organisational theory, an organisation can draw from one or more of six structures, including: work specialisation, departmentalisation, chain of command, span of control, formalisation, and centralisation/decentralisation (Robbins et al., 2010). Therefore, organisational structure refers to "the way in which jobs are formally divided, grouped and coordinated" (Robbins et al., 2010, p. 429). According to this classification of organisational structure, the MoE in Kuwait seems to adopt the centralisation structure, where the MoE is considered to be the highest decision-making authority and the lower levels are only required to follow any decisions made from the top.

Regarding human resource allocation, it seems that highly centralised education systems tend to recruit teachers and staff via the top-level authorities within the organisation. This assumption is made on the basis that the centralisation policy does not empower lower levels to recruit personnel. Pashiardis (2009) supports this assumption, indicating that the centralisation policy prevents school-level management from appointing personnel. This perception matches the interviewees' descriptions about the recruitment of teachers and staff under the prevailing centralisation policy. Again, the interviewees perceive the recruitment method to be an existing fact, resulting from centralisation. This issue is one of the deepest concerns expressed by the interviewees, especially those working at the school level. Districts and schools are not given the authority to employ staff and teachers; rather,

these processes are controlled directly by the MoE. According to the interviewees, staff and teachers apply for jobs directly through the MoE, which deploys human resources by distributing the employees across the districts; the districts then distribute teachers to the schools. Aisha, a headteacher, discussed some situations that reflect the degree of centralisation in teachers' recruitment:

> …One of the Arabic language teachers who was sent to work at our school really makes me hate my job. The inspector thinks that she is a very weak teacher and is still blaming me for that. I think he should rather tell the MoE about her because it was not me who hired her. Parents also still complain about her because they think she is an unqualified teacher. I would not have accepted her if I had the authority to do so…

Latifah, the head of a department in a secondary school, provided a response that emphasises Aisha's statement. She indicated that even though the headteacher was not happy with her recruitment at the school, the headteacher could not refuse her:

> …After I applied to my job through the MoE, I remember that when I came to this school with three of my colleagues, the headteacher at that time was unhappy about our coming to the school. I felt that when I saw her face on the first day. Then I discovered that there had been teacher redundancies in the departments to which we had been allocated. I was happy because I knew that the headteacher cannot refuse me…

From Aisha and Latifah's comments, it seems that the MoE totally controls teachers and staff recruitment, and they are allocated to a particular school regardless of departmental or school needs. It is clear that accepting or rejecting personnel sent to lower levels is not an option for lower-level management. In addition, I would argue that this method of recruitment means that neither districts nor schools are able to decide the quality and quantity of the personnel that they need to add in order to improve their staff; this is clearly apparent in both Aisha's and Latifah's comments. This situation is comparable to the one in Cyprus, where school management and headteachers must accept any teachers sent to them by the MoE and the Education Service Commission, irrespective of their areas of specialisation (Pashiardis, 2009).

The MoE officials confirmed the findings obtained from Aisha and Latifah (who work in lower-level management) with regard the policy of recruiting human resources. However, their responses revealed that the interviewees who work at the MoE had no concerns regarding this issue; this was especially clear when they indicated that human resource deployment is a national policy, requiring the ministry to hire all candidates, particularly those who apply for teaching jobs. To them, finding jobs for all applicants is a worthy accomplishment because it shows that the national policy has been successfully implemented. Nadia, a leader within the MoE, defended the use of centralisation in light of national policy standards. She commented:

> What can we do with the big number of applicants? In order to implement the national policy, which is to provide all Kuwaiti teachers with jobs, it is therefore essential to impose staff on schools and to not allow them the choice to take any decision regarding refusing the candidates…

After listening to the responses of the MoE officials, I tried to identify the source of this national policy. I reviewed the Kuwaiti Constitution, Article (41), which states citizens' rights and duties to work, as follows:

> Every Kuwaiti has the right to work and to choose the type of his work. Work is a duty of every citizen necessitated by personal dignity and public good. The state endeavours to make it available to citizens and to make its terms equitable (Kuwait's Ministry of Justice, 2011, p.23).

After considering the responses of MoE officials regarding national policy, I would argue that, to some extent, the centralisation policy practiced in recruitment serves a political agenda. It seems likely that this policy has been adopted to satisfy government targets that are meant to solve the unemployment problem by forcing lower levels of management to accept employees regardless of their district's or school's needs. This suggestion is supported by Nir (2009), who suggested that certain politicians would consider centralisation as a useful means to further their political agendas. This may disappoint some researchers and advocates of decentralisation in Kuwait, especially with regard to human resource deployment, because it appears that there would be a need to revise parts of the Kuwaiti

Constitution in order to support any move towards decentralisation. As long as there is a national policy that deploys Kuwaiti citizens to employment, irrespective of where employees are needed, top-level management will continue to control the deployment of staff, and lower levels will have no choice but to accept those hiring decisions.

It is clear that the source of financial and material resources for schools comes from the government as the sole provider of these means. It has also been demonstrated that the MoE applies a top-down approach in resource allocation – an approach that allows bureaucracy to prevail and, therefore, creates certain obstacles to the realisation of school efficiency. The deployment of human resources can also be seen as being centralised by the MoE.

Resources are needed to fund all education issues, such as teaching pupils and supporting staff. They are also needed to fund other issues such as curriculum planning. Some education systems plan curriculums under a centralised policy, whereas others apply decentralised frameworks. The following section presents the Kuwaiti education system's policy, as adopted in curriculum planning, as a prime example of centralisation.

5.2.2.2 Centralisation of curriculum planning

The curriculum planning process was described by the interviewees as centralised. They indicated that the MoE has established a specific department (Department of Curriculum) within the ministry, which is responsible for curriculum construction. Moreover, according to the interviewees, the Department of Curriculum deploys working teams to develop types of curriculums, and entrusts them to build curriculums. These teams consist of directors who work at the MoE, as well as some directors from the districts. All teams should follow the Department of Curriculum's rules, standards, and guidelines when building each curriculum. This requires that each team work according to the MoE's expectations, which may include details such as what the students should learn, what they should understand, and what they should be able to achieve after completing the curriculum for each course.

Regarding district roles in curriculum planning, there is no evidence that the members working at the district level participate in this process. According to the information obtained from the interviewees, there are specific departments within districts that are responsible for curriculum planning. However, there is no evidence that these departments are allowed to take part in curriculum planning. The interviewees indicated that these departments are responsible for following the curriculum for delivering lessons to pupils. For example, the Mathematics Department sends directors to schools regularly to assess how teachers deliver the lessons to their pupils.

I asked interviewees who work at district level about the roles of the Department of Curriculum within the districts. Abeer, a district leader, illustrated:

> …These departments are responsible of following up teaching curriculum within schools. Their role is to observe teachers performance with regard whether they meet the MoE's standards of curriculum delivery and give feedback accordingly.

I also asked Abeer to talk about the districts' roles in curriculum planning. She said:

> …We do not have big role in building curriculum. Sometimes the MoE chooses one of our directors to participate in this process. But they only want to benefit from the directors experience rather that allowing districts to participate in building curriculum. The directors do what they are asked to do from the Department of Curriculum, but not from us as educational districts.

Regarding schools' roles in curriculum planning, it seems that the extreme centralisation, which is applied by the MoE, excluded schools from participating in building the curriculum. The interviewees at the school level indicated that the centralisation policy prevents them from becoming involved in developing the curriculum. They also reported that individuals at the schools are only implementers of the national curriculum, which is constructed centrally. For example, Fouze, a headteacher, said:

> Designing curriculum is the responsibility of the Department of Curriculum within the MoE, it makes all decisions regarding curriculum

> contents and activities. This department deploys specific personnel to do this job and they are mostly chosen by officials who work at this department...

Thus, in addition to the district leaders, Fauz (as school leader) confirmed that curriculum planning is a centralised process, and explained that the top of education hierarchy (which is represented by the MoE) makes all of the decisions regarding this process. It appears as though both schools and districts do not play tangible roles in curriculum planning. The interviewees from both tiers asserted that all schools should utilise unified textbooks to teach curriculums. This means that all schools should implement a centralised curriculum by providing unified textbooks, which include the same content and learning activities to standardise the means of delivering knowledge related to each subject. Regarding this issue, Adel (a department head at a school) commented:

> …All schools within all districts teach one curriculum for each subject because textbooks are unified. For instance, you can find the same science textbook for the fourth year primary pupils, is taught in each primary school in all districts…

The MoE officials confirmed that curriculum planning is the responsibility of the Department of Planning within the MoE. They emphasised that this process should be centralised because this policy ensures that the curriculum is designed by well-trained experts. The MoE officials also asserted that schools do not need to choose textbooks as they want. The reason that these books are provided is that Kuwait is a small country, and Kuwaiti people are sharing one culture; therefore, the unified textbook meets the pupils' needs across the entire country.

Nadia is one of the MoE officials who believe that curriculum planning should remain centralised:

> I think that the MoE is able to build all curriculums using a group of qualified experts. We are keen that this curriculum meets needs of all pupils in our country. I believe that we have appropriate people and there is no need to involve other groups. The most important thing is to provide pupils with advanced curriculum and I think we are capable to do so…

Similarly, Majed, who worked at the MoE, thinks that curriculum planning should be centralised and that textbooks should be standardised. He said:

> The Department of Curriculum succeeded in providing good quality of curriculum. We use qualified people for this purpose and I think they are doing a good job…

Majed commented on the unified textbook:

> …The unified textbooks are appropriate to pupils and I do not remember that anybody has complained about this. Everybody prefers unified textbooks and I do not think we should change this.

It is clear that the MoE officials are confident that curriculum planning should be centralised because they believe that this policy ensures that experts can guarantee that the curriculum will be of good quality. McKimm (2007) comments that one of the advantages to adopting the centralised curricula is that it allows for the use of experts across a wide array of fields. However, he also thinks that decentralised curricula ensure that the local needs of pupils are better addressed. The interviewees, especially those who work at the MoE, think that all Kuwaiti pupils have similar needs and that they prefer a centralised curriculum. However, these experts are chosen by the central authority, which makes decisions regarding who should plan the curriculum.

In decentralised systems, curriculum planning is conducted by group of people who represent different agencies or stakeholders. For example, curriculum planning committees set up by the school, district, or even the state are the ones that directly address and handle the planning. In addition, the curriculum planning stakeholders are represented by the individuals who are involved with the curriculum in some way. Marsh (1997) pointed out that these include school-based personnel who, in turn, include teachers, principals, and parents. Marsh also states that university-based specialists, industry personnel, community groups, government agencies, and politicians are involved as well. Among all of these stakeholders, Marsh (1997) tends to focus primarily on teachers. He argues that teachers are important individuals who are involved in curriculum planning and development, irrespective of whether the activities are conducted individually or collectively. Similarly, Beyers (2008) added

library specialists to the list of pertinent stakeholders. He believes that involving library specialists in curriculum planning will help in a number of different ways. For example, he argued that library specialists are trained to know the content of the material being taught, and they are able to determine which clientele specific content serves. A second, and very important element, is that these individuals would be able to guide the instructors to locate all of the related and supporting materials available in the library.

Regarding the use of unified textbooks, some countries changed their policies, meaning that all pupils should be taught using different texts. For example, in China prior to 1986, the large student population followed a uniform textbook that was published by the Chinese MoE (Leung, 2004). This unified textbook was written according to the Chinese MoE's national curriculum standards (Leung, 2004). After applying a new policy, which was named as the "open doors" policy, the MoE allowed different groups and publishers to establish new textbooks in order to meet the different needs of pupils in different regions of the country. Leung (2004) noted that while schools are free to choose textbooks, the curriculum is still uniform.

Thus, it seems that the policy underlying curriculum planning in Kuwait does not allow different parties to participate in the planning process, indicating that the framework is highly centralised. In addition, the textbooks for each curriculum are unified, and all schools should implement the centralised curriculum by teaching content from the same textbooks.

Teachers who are required to deliver a standardised curriculum to pupils must have appropriate skills and knowledge to help them accomplish this task. They also need to cope with changes in their teaching methods and their pupils' learning styles. These skills, as well as any related knowledge, can be enhanced via in-service training programmes, which differ in nature across each system. The following section presents the policy of the Kuwaiti education system as it relates to in-service training programmes for teachers and staff.

5.2.2.3 Centralisation of in-service programmes for teachers and staff

In the Kuwaiti education system, one of the aspects of centralisation identified by the interviewees is that the MoE controls and designs programmes for developing teachers' skills during their employment. In Kuwait, schools and teachers do not contribute to the design and development of in-service programmes, and so the MoE largely controls the structure of these programmes. This method represents a strong top-down organisational management system in which teachers and schools are passive recipients of the ministry's strategy.

In the MoE, the department of development and improvement is responsible for designing in-service programmes, and the building of these programmes is largely based on the personal opinions of individual technical supervisors regarding the needs of teachers and other staff. The interviewees working within the MoE levels maintained that those technical supervisors closely appraise the needs of teachers and staff; however, the interviewees working within schools did not agree. They insisted that the majority of MoE technical supervisors plan in-service programmes without consulting with schools or teachers in order to ascertain whether the planned programmes meet the schools' or the teachers' needs.

Furthermore, the interviewees were largely of the opinion that many of the MoE technical supervisors are not sufficiently qualified or experienced to design in-service programmes. These interviewees maintained that the MoE should pay careful attention to the design and planning of in-service programmes, and that any of the processes that are employed should include the participation of academic and other professional school staff. In this way, it is evident that difficulties arise in the preparation of truly effective in-service programmes in the State of Kuwait. In order to achieve effective programmes, the actual needs of those participating in the programmes should be taken into consideration, and better training should be provided for those people who are responsible for developing the programmes. The interviewees indicated that schools are not able to decide the type or nature of the programmes or courses provided for the benefit of their staff. According to the interviewees, schools only receive specific programmes, and the programmes may or may not fit the requirements for the specific personal development needs of the

ministry's teaching staff. This claim is apparent in the comments made by Fahad, a deputy head, when he commented:

> I think they should have asked us about the nature of the programmes we require for professional development. Every year we receive the same programme. It has become useless because we need specific programmes which are not currently provided by the MoE…

Similarly, officials within the MoE illustrated that the in-service programme is centralised and controlled by Department of Development and Improvement with The MoE. MoE officials wish to maintain their control over teacher training, as can be seen in Majed's response:

> The Ministry of Education is keen to provide all staff members and teachers with the appropriate training they need for developing their skills. We hired people especially for this purpose. I think this process should be our responsibility of ensuring sufficient number of teachers and staff alongside ensuring their training during their span of year of service. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education funds these programmes, it is normal that the Ministry of Education controls the training programmes when it controls employing staff and providing funds…

The two excerpts from the interviews demonstrate a level of agreement about the MoE's policy of controlling the in-service programmes specially targeted for teachers and staff, with both interviewees from the top levels and the lower levels agreeing that the MoE centrally managed teachers' and staff members' professional development using a top-down policy. However, it is also clear that there is a difference between MoE officials' and school leaders' attitudes towards the policy of control. Indeed, the school leaders think that the current policy reduces the effectiveness of the in-service programmes by their use of the word "useless." The school leaders demonstrated a desire for flexibility in selecting the programmes by having a voice in deciding upon the nature of the training courses they receive during the academic year. In contrast, the MoE officials indicated that it is normal practice for the MoE to maintain control over teacher training, and said that the MoE established a specific department for staff and teacher training. The MoE officials justified their perception by saying that control over resources is always in the hands

of the MoE, and that the ministry is still able to hold this control over these centralised programmes.

Centralisation appears when higher levels of government formulate specific policies for the training of teachers. After the teachers are appointed, school management may recognise specific skills that some staff members or teachers need to improve upon through specific kinds of programmes. According to the centralisation policy, schools are not able to make decisions about the programmes they need to improve the skills of their staff or their teachers. From Majed's point of view, as indicated in his comments, when the MoE controls the resources, it is normal and logical that the MoE should make decisions regarding the amount of funds and the number of human resource personnel dedicated to supporting the training activities of teachers and staff. As long as the MoE makes exclusive decisions regarding the issues noted previously, the chances of the lower levels participating in making decisions regarding their staff and teachers is reduced and, as a result, the higher-level authorities will be able to fulfil their own agendas and drive the training programmes to achieve their own goals. Irrespective of whether this agenda is considered "good" or "bad", it can be seen in a number of cases that governments adopt specific policies aimed at managing professional development in order to meet certain agendas (Metwali, 2004). This is apparent in the comments from some of the MoE officials, as they articulate that professional development programmes for teachers in Kuwait are designed to meet the strategic objectives of the State of Kuwait. One of the key aims of the government is to increase the efficiency of Kuwaiti citizens, thereby increasing their ability to support and strengthen the development of effective management systems. The government demonstrates its intent to increase the efficiency of the services it provides to its citizens – an aim that is offset by the need to maintain control over the general expenditures and the appropriateness of the personnel deployed to the programmes.

Yigit (2008) provides an example of how the centralised approach is used in another context. According to Yigit, the policy of in-service programmes in Turkey is highly centralised by the Ministry of National Educational Directorates of In-Service Training. He states that, at the present time, in-service programmes can be regarded as employing a "top-down" model, since the selection of teachers who want to

participate in in-service programmes and activities is conducted by the Ministry after they have submitted their applications. The planning and coordination of in-service programmes is completely controlled by the Local Educational Directorates, and schools do not participate in this process.

In contrast to the Kuwaiti and Turkish contexts, other countries exhibit a shift of the responsibility for the professional development of teachers (including in-service programmes) to lower levels. Thus, in the Netherlands, the human resource policies and professional development programmes for teachers are controlled by individual school boards. Funding for these activities is drawn from personnel budgets, which are also controlled by the school boards (Eurybase, The Education System in the Netherlands, 2006/2007). This indicates that there is a wider degree of authority extended to schools in the Netherlands, enabling them to select and plan their own professional development programmes, which is in stark contrast to the situation in both Kuwait and Turkey.

According to Yigit's (2008) description, it is clear that the in-service programmes in Turkey are described as centralised, based on the fact that the top level of educational management has complete control over both the nature of the programmes and their content, and they also have authority over the selection of the trainees. By comparing the policy of professional development applied in Turkey to the policy of professional development applied in Kuwait, it could be said that the MoE's top-level control over in-service programmes indicates that these programmes exhibit centralised characteristics, which is an aspect of the "hyper-centralisation" evident in the Kuwaiti education system.

As the centralisation policy controls teachers' in-service programmes, another feature of the centralisation policy, as apparent in the education system, appears in the policy pertaining to pupils' assessment. The following section investigates pupils' assessment and raises the evidence that this process is centralised in nature.

5.2.2.4 Centralisation of pupils' assessments

The interviewees indicated that the departments of curriculum within the MoE, as well as within the districts, are responsible for the assessment of student

achievement. Each district designs unified exams for primary and middle school pupils, which are applied across all subjects, twice during the academic year. At the end of the first and second semesters, for both sets of unified exams, pupils are assessed on the same day and at the same time, based on the subject matter being examined. Furthermore, the interviewees added that the MoE is responsible for the end-of-year assessments in all secondary schools. Similar to what is seen in the districts, the MoE designs unified exams for all pupils across all subjects. The first unified exam takes place at the end of the first semester, and the second exam takes place at the end of the second semester. Again, the dates and times of the examinations are unified according to the subject.

Aisha, a headteacher of a middle school, described her perception of the methods used for pupil assessment. She said that:

> …It is the MoE and districts who control our pupils' assessment. Despite our frequent recommendations to leave this process entirely to schools, I do not know why the MoE insists on maintaining control of the process…

Aisha's comment clearly illustrates the policy that guides pupil examination. However, it also reveals the desire of the interviewees to hold more authority over pupil assessments, while wanting to raise their own perceptions towards the summative exams, which are handled by the districts to assess the middle school pupils. On the other hand, some of the interviewees regarded the centralised exams as beneficial. For example, Saad, a MoE official, stated that:

> …We should guarantee that the exams are valid and highly reflective to pupils' achievements. The MoE hires experts especially for this purpose. I think we are able to manage this process accurately. In this way, we are able to follow up pupils' levels of achievement, as a result, we can make a judgement as to whether schools are doing well with teaching pupils or not. This can be obtained simply by looking at exam results…

Saad's comment reveals that the centralised policy related to the pupils' exams is intended to benefit the pupils' learning by applying accountability measures. The literature emphasises that the centralised exams can have positive results. Wößmann (2000) indicates that in centralised examination systems, individual student

achievement is relative to the national average, and so pupil achievement at a national level is more easily measured. By looking at student performance in this way, it is possible to see whether or not a single pupil's performance matches the performance of the rest of the pupils in his or her class, and it is also possible to determine whether entire classes, which are taught by individual teachers, perform along the same lines as observed in the national average (Wößmann, 2000). As Wößmann notes, in cases of underachievement, this system allows parents and pupils to identify whether the pupil or teacher is, in fact, responsible for the student's underachievement. According to the interviewees, the central examinations allow the MoE to control the performance of both the teachers and the pupils, and they facilitate the identification of weaknesses in the ways in which teachers teach and pupils learn. As a result, these central examinations enable the MoE to retain control of measuring performance.

Additional justification for these methods of assessment, as posited by many of the interviewees, is that this approach helps the MoE reduce the likelihood of facing leaked exam questions, which may result from pupils gaining access to the questions in advance of sitting for the exams. Nasser described this problem:

> I think in this way (controlling pupils' assessment), we ensure that all exams remain in safe hands, far away from corrupted teachers or staff members, or others…

My view is that Nasser's comment addresses the concerns that Aisha articulated when she said: "I do not know why the MoE insists on maintaining control of the process." Regardless of the reason, it seems that the MoE wishes to retain and maintain control of the pupils' assessment.

The centralisation policy is especially apparent when the top authority within the education system makes an exclusive decision regarding the nature of the examinations (Wößmann, 2000). In other words, the top authority holds the control over the pupils' assessment methods, and schools are not able to contribute to the top authority's decision-making process; thus, the individuals working at the school level are not able to choose the nature of the examination scales. In some contexts, such as in Cyprus, the examination system is completely controlled by the Ministry of

Education and Culture, and the secondary school final year exams and university entrance exams are unified to simplify the process of assessing students before they enter university (Pashiardis, 2009).

Contrary to the nature of pupils' assessments in both Kuwait and Cyprus, decentralised systems seem to allow for wider participation from the schools in this process. In those types of environments, teachers are involved in designing national examinations based on their areas of specialisation, the training of the pupils, and the testing approaches used (Hussain, 2006). This illustrates how the decentralised examination process is relatively more open, and different parties are able to participate in the pupils' assessment; consequently, some of the responsibility for creating the examinations is shared. Despite its advantages or disadvantages, this type of situation is not accepted in the Kuwaiti context, as the interviewees clearly indicated that the education system is extremely centralised.

Since the policy of centralisation controls the most major elements of the education system, the strategic education plan seems to be centralised as well, as discussed in the following section.

5.2.2.5 Centralisation of the strategic education plan

Regarding the strategic planning process, the interviewees indicated that the MoE also plans the entire process centrally, and that it assigns responsibility for implementing the plan to the lower levels. This result suggests that the MoE has adopted a top-down approach to policy implementation as the main method by which it tries to achieve its objectives. Aisha, a headteacher, clearly acknowledged that the strategic plan of the MoE is centralised:

> The strategic plan is also centralised as regards to vital educational decisions around pupils, curriculum and teachers. I do not know exactly what the mechanism is for building the plan, but I am certain that schools and even districts are not involved in this planning process. We are implementers, not planners…

In order to maintain control of this process, the interviewees indicated that the MoE established the Department of Planning and Improvement, which deals with strategic planning. This department is responsible for deploying people to the positions that

are accountable for establishing the plan. The ministry does so from a pool of personnel, and these individuals are mostly drawn from the MoE. The possible reason as to why the MoE adopts this policy is that educational strategic planning requires that both resources and personnel be dedicated to the implementation process. While the system does not allow for lower levels to make decisions regarding the amount of resources they need, the MoE prefers to keep this policy in its own hands by excluding different levels and parties from participating in the planning process. In addition, the involvement of lower levels means that they can suggest goals and objectives, and this requires a specific amount of resources. For this reason, the MoE might exclude people from lower-level management and from outside of its own centralised organisation from participating in the process. In this way, the MoE applies a centralised policy to control all its educational issues.

The results demonstrated that the MoE in Kuwait manages its strategic education plan centrally. In order to identify the criteria that enable the education system to be regarded as centralised, it is necessary to define centralised educational planning in order to locate where its decisions and policies are made. Lyons (1985) suggests that the adoption of centralisation as a policy when managing educational planning implies that the top level of management controls the setting of objectives, as well as the decisions surrounding how to achieve these aims. Again, the power or authority that holds control over educational planning is usually manifest in the highest level of management. Two decades ago, the policy of centralisation dominated the educational system in Kuwait. The Department of Planning at the MoE represented the highest authority in this matter. Al-Hamdan (1992) indicates that the centralisation policy that controls the educational system in Kuwait prevents the lower levels and the other sectors from participating in establishing educational plans. In other words, the entire educational planning process and its associated phases are entirely controlled by the Department of Planning, and they do not delegate any of these areas to the districts or schools. However, the strategic education plan, which is considered to be the key to the future of the Kuwaiti educational system, is dominated by the top authority, as represented by the MoE. The Department of Planning recruits people from within and without the ministry for the purpose of building and implementing the strategic plan. The lower levels, such

as educational districts and schools, are not empowered to contribute to creating these plans, especially during the vital stages when the goals are identified and the methods are implemented. Although this policy was applied two decades ago, it is obvious that the process of educational planning remains stable in terms of the policy of control, which underscores the credibility of the interviewees' descriptions of it. Therefore, it is apparent that the key issue behind the centralisation of strategic planning is that while the top level of the organisation holds complete authority when building the strategic plan, it leaves the lower levels in a position of having to implement it. This affirms the interviewees' perceptions that the strategic plan is centralised.

With the adoption of a centralised policy, there might be some strengths and weaknesses that arose as a consequence of the MoE maintaining control of the education planning process. The following section presents findings regarding issues that resulted from applying the centralisation policy to the strategic plan's formulation and implementation.

3.3 Findings of research question 2:

(What issues does centralisation in educational policy raise for the formulation and implementation of strategic education planning in Kuwait?)

The exploratory study identified several issues that resulted from the centralisation policy that controls the formulation and implementation of the strategic plan. These seven issues were consolidated with an additional five that driven from the literature, as mentioned in page 82. The seven issues that were identified from the exploratory study are listed below:

1. Efficiency of the strategic plan
2. Clarity of the strategic plan
3. Implementability
4. Fitness for purpose
5. Collaborativeness and participativeness
6. Communicative capacity
7. Bureaucratisation

5.3.1 Efficiency of the strategic plan

The results indicated that the strategic education plan is inefficient. This issue was strongly raised by a majority of the interviewees (7 out of 12); for example, most of the interviewees expressed concerns regarding the wide gap between the facilities provided by the MoE to the planning sector (in addition to schools), such as large budgets, human resources, and subsequent outputs (results) of the strategic education plan. Interviewees expressed the opinion that it is unreasonable for a petroleum-rich country like Kuwait, with its substantial financial resources, to limit the application of its fortune to the formulation of an efficient educational plan. Such a plan would intend to yield a strong output of graduates who are able to meet the local market demands. The interviewees suggested that the problems with the current educational system have been the same since the 1980s, and that education planning would be unable to solve these problems. The interviewees indicated that the MoE spends billions on education, but the problems remain unsolved. A comparison of the educational inputs and outputs has raised problems concerning the inefficiency of the current educational planning system in Kuwait. Yousif, a headteacher, expressed surprise when discussing the facilities provided by the Kuwaiti government to the MoE, as education is still unable to produce high-level outcomes:

> …Can you imagine how much money the government has? It spends this money generously to fund education sector that makes the planning sector within the ministry and schools rich with funds; this is in addition to the teams formed by human resources that work for the benefit of educational planning. However, a comparison between these facilities and the output results indicates the existence of a wide gap between them. We still suffered from the same problems many years ago, especially after obtaining independence from the Iraqi invasion in addition to that schools outcomes are still weak…

This result suggests that the strategic education plan of the MoE is inefficient based on the claim that it has failed to produce a high level of outcomes.

5.3.2 Clarity of the strategic plan

Most interviewees (9 out of 12) indicated that the current strategic planning initiative lacks clarity for several reasons. First, educational districts and schools are not well informed about the goals of the MoE's strategic plan; therefore, the implications of

the strategic plan are unclear which, in turn, makes the plan itself relatively vague. Second, some interviewees emphasised the importance of providing a guidance booklet along with the MoE's strategic plan, which would help others understand the plan. In addition, the objectives of this plan are unclear and mostly vague; for example, when the improvement of teachers' skills is set as an objective, there should also be clear descriptions regarding the nature of the precise skills that require improvement. In addition, the guidelines should detail whether the objective applies to primary or secondary school teachers, or both. Some interviewees criticised the manner in which the MoE informs the lower levels regarding the components of its strategic plans, and they commented that it is insufficient that the strategic plan is being introduced through these programmes alone. The interviewees expressed a desire to understand the broader strategic plan, including its goals, stages of implementation, methods of evaluation, and the MoE's expectations regarding their own role in the implementation process. The interviewees also believe that they should know the details about each objective and how it can be achieved. Mariam, a district leader, was very concerned about this issue; it is believed that she is one of the interviewees who best understand the strategic education planning process. She reflected her concerns regarding this issue through the following statement:

> …I was really disappointed when the Ministry of Education asked us to fulfil the tasks and requirements of the strategic plan without providing us with complete information about what this plan involves. At least, they should give us a guide to this plan. We did not participate in creating this plan and this makes the plan quite unclear. We should be better informed about what this plan comprises. Further, I believe that the plans should not be introduced as programmes as it makes the plan very vague and difficult to understand. In my opinion, if we understood the plan clearly, we would ensure that we enable its implementation better...

According to her response, it seems that the interviewees perceive the strategic education plan as unclear because the lower levels, such as the districts and schools, are not involved in the plan's formulation. In addition the MoE, as a top authority, is not keen on clarifying the details of the plan to those who are implementing it.

5.3.3 Implementability of the strategic plan

This issue is closely related to the strategic plan's clarity. To ensure the efficient implementation of any plan, the directives should have a high degree of clarity since those who are implementing the plan require an understanding of all the elements related to these strategies. Moreover, the plan should take into account the actual needs of the educational system. When this plan is based on the actual needs of the particular field for which it was created, those responsible for its implementation will guide their efforts according to these recognised needs.

The majority of the interviewees (8 out of 12) emphasised problems related to implementation, with some interviewees commenting that this problem is at the core of the strategic education plan. Many perceptions were obtained regarding this issue, and these perspectives reflect the idea that the districts and school leaders encounter many obstacles in the implementation process. First, as mentioned earlier, the educational plans are mostly unclear, and there is a weak link between the planning sector of the MoE and the districts and schools. This disadvantage further weakens the coordination between the planning and implementation systems. In addition, many individuals within the implementation system lack the requisite experience and skills required for both processes. In other words, there is a strong need to train these individuals in specific programmes to provide them with the knowledge necessary for implementing the strategic plan. Furthermore, the interviewees indicated that plans should be executed only once those responsible for its implementation are prepared, otherwise there will always be difficulties that arise in the implementation of these plans. However, the implementation process itself needs to be planned in order for it to be successfully fulfilled; the current lack of an efficient plan might be considered one of the major problems in this regard. Salman said:

> …How do they want us to implement this plan when we are not ready for implementation? We need to know how such plans can be implemented. We also need to know and understand the plan itself in order to prepare ourselves for implementation. To be honest, I do not think that a plan with vague objectives can be implemented. I think if we can make decisions regarding this plan, we can decide how to prepare ourselves for implementation. Our needs to implement the

> plan are unmet by the ministry which make all decisions about ways of implementing it…

The results suggested that the centralisation of the strategic plan causes problems in the implementation process. The implementers of the plan think that the MoE ignores their needs, as the MoE is the only authority that makes decisions regarding the requirements of the implementation process.

5.3.4 Fitness of purpose

This issue of fitness of purpose was drawn from several responses provided by the majority of the interviewees (7 out of 12). A majority of them felt that this issue is of great concern, and many interviewees mentioned that the MoE has developed its strategic plan on the basis of idealism rather than on the actual needs of the educational system in Kuwait. In other words, there is not a strong match between the objectives of the strategic education plan and the issues that should be focused upon, such as the needs of the teachers and students. Some of the interviewees referred to the unemployment of many Kuwaiti graduates, while one of the primary aims of the strategic education plan is to prepare students so they can meet the human resource demands of different sectors within the country. Other interviewees raised this issue by stating that the MoE does not fund educational districts and schools with sufficient budgets to ensure better implementation of the plan. They emphasised the importance of ensuring that a sense of balance exists between educational plans and the financial and human resources that enable this plan to turn into reality. The important responses regarding this issue included comments that indicated that the coordination between the planning system of the MoE and the other sectors within the country is weak. The interviewees considered that proper coordination would ensure that the graduates are of high quality, as they are needed to meet the needs of the Kuwaiti labour market. For example, the economic sector can provide information on the actual needs for human resources so that the ministry can take this need into account. Some of the interviewees accused centralisation as being a barrier toward meeting the actual needs of the lower levels of management (such as the schools and districts). According to these respondents, excluding districts and schools from making decisions regarding the plan’s objectives causes

this plan to miss many of these groups' needs. Jassim provided a simple, expressive, and informative example regarding this matter when he stated:

> When the people of a country are suffering from a specific disease—for example, the flu—the government asks doctors to study this problem and find a solution to it. This implies that the goals should be directed towards the solution of this disease and the achievement of these goals will result in eradicating the disease. Is it not reasonable that the doctors put their efforts into meeting the wrong goals which do not reflect the actual problem? If so, do these efforts reflect and express the actual needs? The answer is undoubtedly no...

He laughed and continued:

> …Can we imagine that the result of this effort will benefit some other disease, such as AIDS?"

Thus, the results suggest the strategic education plan does not meet the needs of the districts and schools, including addressing the pupils' needs. The results also illustrated that centralisation is the reason why the strategic plan does not respond to the actual needs of the districts, schools, pupils, and society as a whole.

5.3.5 Collaborativeness and participativeness

The majority of the interviewees (8 out of 12) think that the lack of collaboration and participation in the MoE's plan is a major issue; it is regarded as the main reason why the current plan is particularly weak. Some of the interviewees consider participation in the plan's formulation as the key to solving most of the educational problems in the education system, especially since many of the needs and problems that currently exist among the system can be identified by stakeholders such as headteachers and parents. In this way, increased participation might enrich the plan. Some interviewees commented that the lower levels of management should play a stronger role and have a greater say in the educational planning process, as they are field-based and communicate directly with schools, teachers, staff members, and students. The interviewees suggested that if those in the lower levels of management participated in creating the strategic plan of the Kuwaiti educational system, the objectives would be clearer, and they would become more familiar with them. Therefore, they would be better able to fulfil their roles in the implementation

process. Other interviewees suggested that educational districts and schools represent a critical source of data, which is necessary for building the strategic plan; thus, these levels are able to provide these data directly. Yousif was very upset regarding his role as the headteacher, as he had substantial experience in educational planning. He expressed this issue in a loud voice, almost as if he were shouting. This reflected his concerns regarding participation in the educational planning process. In fact, he mentioned many issues surrounding centralisation, but I will present the following comments made by him with regard to educational planning:

> …We know more than any other people about every single problem and issue in our schools and the best ways of solving these problems. We know how to improve our schools. Even the educational districts do not have rich information regarding schools' needs. I would ask a question here: is this really a headteacher's role—ascertaining teachers' commitment, dealing with daily routine, watching students entering and leaving the school? I think that if we participate in creating educational plans, there will be a greater chance of achieving the results. Next year will be a happy year for me because I'm retiring. I can then relax and stop thinking about the future of my school; I will forget how my thoughts are totally ignored by both the educational districts and the Ministry of Education. After all these years of experience, do you think I'm unable to enrich this plan if they allow me to contribute? There are numerous headteachers who feel the same way as me…

His assertions reflect that the centralisation policy of the MoE impedes participation from both districts and schools. The interviewees indicated that wider participation in the strategic education plan is essential because they believe that they are able to enrich it with useful suggestions. In addition, the interviewees exposed their desire to collaborate with the MoE in the plan's formulation, but the policy of centralisation does not allow such collaboration.

5.3.6 Communicative capacity

One of the issues mentioned by many interviewees (8 out of 12), particularly among district and school leaders, is the weak link between the MoE and the educational districts and schools. The participants indicated that this weak communication affected their performance when implementing the ministry's plans. Moreover, good

communication ensures that there is a strong level of understanding of the implications of the plans, including their objectives and targets. In addition, regular communication encourages lower-level management to become more engaged in their work, as they feel more accountable for fulfilling their duties, which should be presented to the higher levels. Interviewees like Zainab consider communication a tool for meeting expectations. She said:

> …Why doesn't the Ministry of Education arrange frequent meetings between us and the planning sector within the Ministry? The educational districts and us need to establish close communication with the decision makers to ascertain their views and inform us directly about our duties to implement the plan. The Ministry also does not give us any feedback during the academic year. At the end of the year, the Ministry questions us regarding, for example, the poor training programmes. Occasionally, the Ministry is unhappy with the results of these programmes. However, if we had any direct communication during the year, we could probably be able to meet the ministry's expectations and avoid mistakes...

The interviewees' responses emphasised that the centralisation in the strategic education plan weakens the link between the MoE and the lower managerial levels, such as districts and schools. The MoE makes unilateral decisions without sharing them with the districts and schools. According to the interviewees, this will affect the strategic plan in a negative manner, because a strong plan requires effective communication between all education tiers.

5.3.7 Bureaucratisation

The interviewees did not offer many views regarding positive aspects of the current strategic plan; they identified only strength of the strategic education plan. All of the interviewees considered the strategic education planning system to be completely under the control of the MoE. This control enables the ministry to control resource allocation, as well as the amount of effort and time devoted to formulating the strategic plan. Some believe that this level of control results in fewer contradictions in the views of the different parties involved in the planning process. Others believe that dealing with educational districts in an equitable manner might create a fairer

system, for example, by providing each district with a similar budget for implementing the plan. Ahmed expressed her view clearly regarding this aspect:

> …I believe that the Ministry of Education wants to wield strict control over the educational planning system. I'm not sure why, but I think the intention is to control this process in a manner that thwarts our demands or even objections. They do not want us to give them our estimations for financial support that enables them to save money. I also believe that the Ministry wants the strategic plan to appear as a beautiful picture in writing rather than being a technically good and strong plan…

The seven issues listed above were merged with another five issues that were identified in the literature. The total number of issues that were identified was seven, and these were explored in the questionnaire, which is detailed in the following section. Thus, the quantitative study attempted to explore the participants' perceptions about these issues in order to gain general impressions about them, while exploring the differences between the various groups of research participants. The results obtained in response to the next research question outline the research participants' perceptions regarding the seven identified issues.

5.4 Findings of research question 3:

(What are managers' perceptions about the implications of these issues of both policy and practice?)

5.4.1 Introduction

This section provides a detailed discussion of the statistical methodologies undertaken to investigate the research questions on the basis of the data collected, along with discussions of the obtained results. This section first describes the data analysis techniques employed in this research, and it then presents the results from these analyses. In addition, discussions about the findings as they pertain to the research questions are presented. Finally, the section concludes by highlighting the key findings from the statistical analyses.

5.4.2 Statistical methodology

The data were analysed using SPSS version 20 and SPSS Amos 20. Frequency distributions and percentages were used to study the background characteristics of the respondents. Descriptive statistics were calculated and used to investigate the important characteristics of the quantitative variables: central tendency, variability, and the data's distributional properties.

In the questionnaire, 37 questions (items) were posed to measure performance (issues) of the centralised strategic plan. The responses to each of these questions (items) lay on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Not decided; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree). Based on suggestions obtained from an exploratory study conducted before the data collection, the items were coded and divided into seven dimensions hypothesised to measure the performance of the centralised strategic plan. Table 4 shows the original taxonomy of these 37 items.

Table 4: The theoretical construction of the seven dimensions of performance of the centralised strategic plan

Dimension	Dimension name	Questionnaire items
Dimension 1	Efficiency of the strategic plan	1, 2, 3
Dimension 2	Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 35, 36, 37
Dimension 3	Implementability	4, 5, 6,7, 8, 9, 10, 20, 21, 22
Dimension 4	Collaborativeness and participativeness	23, 24, 25
Dimension 5	Communicative capacity	26, 27, 28
Dimension 6	Bureaucratisation	32, 33, 34
Dimension 7	Work environment	17, 18, 19, 29, 30, 31

To determine the underlying factorial constructs of the 37 questionnaire items based on the hypothesised seven-dimension factor model of performance of the centralised strategic plan, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) tests of model fit were performed.

The descriptive statistics were then computed to investigate the statistical properties of the constructed dimensions, and the reliability estimates were calculated based on Cronbach's alpha to examine the degree of relatedness among the questionnaire items across each of the dimensions. Histograms are utilised for each of the seven

dimensions to explore their distributional properties and to facilitate comparisons among them.

To study the differences in the scores across the dimensions of strategic plan performance based on respondents' background characteristics (Gender, district, educational qualifications, and tier strata), independent samples t-tests and one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed. The related statistical assumptions of distribution normality and homogeneity in variances were examined very carefully in each of these analyses. For post hoc analysis in ANOVA, Duncan's multiple comparisons tests were performed.

Lastly, regression analyses were used to quantify the associations between the performance dimensions of centralised strategic planning and the independent fact ors, while also serving to reconfirm the results from the earlier analyses.

5.4.3 Respondents' profiles

Table 5 presents the distribution of respondents by demographic and personal characteristics. Among a total of 188 respondents, the number of male and female respondents are equal. The distribution of the respondents over the districts is almost uniform: The largest group of 29 (17.3%) respondents are from the Al-Ahmadi district; whereas the smallest group of 27 (16.1%) are from the Mubarak Al-Kabeer district. All other districts (Al-Asma, Hawalli, Al-Farwani, and Al-Jahra) contain 28 (16.7%) respondents each. The 20 respondents that did not belong to any of the six districts were from the MoE. More than half (53.2%) of the respondents have a bachelor's degree as their highest educational qualification. Moreover, 18 (9.6%) respondents have a diploma, 50 (26.6%) have a master's degree, and 19 (10.1%) of the respondents have a doctoral degree. In the sample, there were 20 (10.6%) officials from the MoE, 48 (25.5%) leaders at the district level, and the majority of respondents (120; 63.8%) were school leaders (i.e., headteacher, deputy heads, and heads of departments).

Table 5: Distribution of respondents over the independent variables

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	94	50.0
	Female	94	50.0
District	Al-Asma	28	16.7
	Hawalli	28	16.7
	Al-Farwania	28	16.7
	Mubark Al-Kabeer	27	16.1
	Al-Ahmadi	29	17.3
	Al-Jahra	28	16.7
Qualification	Doctoral	19	10.1
	Masters	50	26.6
	Bachelor	100	53.2
	Diploma	18	09.6
Tier	MoE officials	20	10.6
	District leaders	48	25.5
	School leaders	120	63.8

5.4.4 Construct validity of the dimensions

To express the issues of the centralised strategic plan, seven dimensions (Efficiency of the Strategic Plan; Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan; Implementability; Collaborativeness and Participativeness; Communicative Capacity; Bureaucratisation; and Work Environment) were constructed using data from 37 items in the questionnaire (see Table 4). CFA was used to assess the construct validity of these dimensions using IBM SPSS AMOS 20.0, as well as the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation. Four assumptions needed to be fulfilled in order to use the ML method: (1) reasonable sample size; (2) the scale of the observed variables is continuous; (3) the hypothesised model is valid; and (4) the distribution of the observed multivariate variables is normal. The data met the first two criteria. The hypothesised model was developed from findings of an exploratory study conducted before collecting the data, and thus was assumed to be valid. Finally, the normality of the observed variables was tested, ascribing to the following rules of thumb, as suggested by West et al. (1995): for a sample size of 200 or less, moderately non-normal data (univariate skewness <2; univariate kurtosis <7) are acceptable (i.e., the robust standard errors generally provide accurate estimates, though the ML estimation method can be used for data with minor deviations from normality) (Raykov and Widaman, 1995). Table 6 summarises the descriptive statistics of all 37

items in the questionnaire. The measures of univariate skewness and kurtosis for each item suggest that the fourth assumption of the ML method was also met.

Table 6: Distribution of respondents across the independent variables

Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Item 1	1.00	5.00	2.692	1.024	.378	-1.176
Item 2	1.00	5.00	2.681	.956	.419	-.892
Item 3	1.00	5.00	2.612	1.066	.453	-.852
Item 4	1.00	5.00	2.090	1.093	1.035	.259
Item 5	1.00	5.00	2.271	1.042	.811	-.177
Item 6	1.00	5.00	2.809	1.135	.206	-1.144
Item 7	1.00	5.00	2.431	1.124	.506	-.843
Item 8	1.00	5.00	2.596	1.053	.286	-1.118
Item 9	1.00	5.00	2.101	1.102	.816	-.033
Item 10	1.00	5.00	2.750	1.006	.328	-.983
Item 11	1.00	5.00	2.825	1.182	.287	-1.068
Item 12	1.00	5.00	3.090	1.182	.039	-1.236
Item 13	1.00	5.00	2.473	1.135	.388	-.723
Item 14	1.00	5.00	2.601	1.077	.383	-.752
Item 15	1.00	5.00	2.287	1.096	.814	.108
Item 16	1.00	5.00	1.936	1.097	1.182	.675
Item 17	1.00	5.00	2.261	1.138	.661	-.786
Item 18	1.00	5.00	2.165	1.094	.831	-.370
Item 19	1.00	5.00	2.346	1.086	.568	-.841
Item 20	1.00	5.00	2.585	1.084	.657	-.549
Item 21	1.00	5.00	2.330	1.347	.785	-.631
Item 22	1.00	5.00	1.979	1.118	1.155	.660
Item 23	1.00	5.00	2.037	1.144	.945	-.186
Item 24	1.00	5.00	1.814	1.009	1.265	.785
Item 25	1.00	5.00	2.325	1.126	1.081	.363
Item 26	1.00	5.00	2.266	1.026	.769	-.243
Item 27	1.00	5.00	2.495	1.111	.391	-.813
Item 28	1.00	5.00	2.287	1.229	.676	-.556
Item 29	1.00	5.00	2.692	1.147	.219	-1.080
Item 30	1.00	5.00	3.053	1.083	-.260	-.975
Item 31	1.00	5.00	1.989	1.065	1.069	.638
Item 32	1.00	5.00	3.090	1.073	-.234	-.912
Item 33	1.00	5.00	2.995	1.082	-.066	-1.347
Item 34	1.00	5.00	2.995	1.107	-.181	-1.325
Item 35	1.00	5.00	2.713	1.198	.326	-1.010
Item 36	1.00	5.00	2.250	1.078	.756	.027
Item 37	1.00	5.00	1.931	1.019	1.060	.676

Table 7 presents the results of the initial step of the CFA with all 37 questionnaire items included. The values of the fit statistics (IFI,[1] TLI,[2] and CFI[3]) close to 1.00 indicate an adequate fit. The value of CMIN/DF[4] less than 2.00 is also a sign of good fit. However, a satisfactorily fitted model should take a value of RMSEA[5] that is less than 0.08. None of the fit statistics used for the first-step model falls at the satisfactory level, and as a result, the model needs to be respecified. Closer examination reveals that some of the items have very poor factor loadings (standardised regression weights) on their respective dimensions. To attain better model fit statistics, it was decided that items 11, 12, 14, 35, and 37 be discarded, as they all had standardised regression weights less than 0.40 on dimension 2 in the respecified model. Similarly, items 9, 20, 21, 25, 30, and 31 were also deleted given that they had standardised regression weights that were less than the specified level. Eliminating these items did not affect the importance of the other items considerably, while the overall goodness-of-fit indices improved. Thus, the second step (confirmatory factor analysis) used 26 of the original items, and the results are presented in Table 8. The fit statistics for the second step confirmatory factor analysis have been improved (CMIN/DF = 2.305; IFI = 0.843; TLI = 0.813; CFI = 0.840; RMSEA = 0.084). Though the model adequacy at the second step is improved, it is still not satisfactory; the CMIN/DF and RMSEA values are still in the unacceptable range.

[1] IFI – Incremental Fit Index
[2] TLI – Tucker-Lewis Index
[3] CFI – Comparative Fit Index
[4] CMIN/DF – Chi-square based Minimum Discrepancy/Degrees of Freedom
[5] RMSEA – Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Table 7: Standardised regression weights (factor loading) of the first step (confirmatory factor analysis) using all 37 items

Item	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3	Dimension 4	Dimension 5	Dimension 6	Dimension 7
Item 1	0.763						
Item 2	0.824						
Item 3	0.800						
Item 4			0.444				
Item 5			0.475				
Item 6			0.498				
Item 7			0.611				
Item 8			0.575				
Item 9			0.379				
Item 10			0.548				
Item 11		-0.010					
Item 12		0.021					
Item 13		0.617					
Item 14		0.331					
Item 15		0.575					
Item 16		0.719					
Item 17							0.863
Item 18							0.922
Item 19							0.840
Item 20			0.346				
Item 21			0.342				
Item 22			0.464				
Item 23				-0.772			
Item 24				-0.888			
Item 25				0.085			
Item 26					0.557		
Item 27					0.427		
Item 28					0.557		
Item 29							0.410
Item 30							0.346
Item 31							0.198
Item 32						0.699	
Item 33						0.913	
Item 34						0.973	
Item 35		-0.343					
Item 36		0.584					
Item 37		0.310					
Goodness-of-fit statistics							
CMIN	1767.912		IFI	0.641		RMSEA	0.101
DF	608		TLI	0.600			
CMIN/DF	2.908		CFI	0.635			
			IFI	0.641			

Table 8: Standardised regression weights (factor loading) of the second step (confirmatory analysis) using 26 items

Item	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3	Dimension 4	Dimension 5	Dimension 6	Dimension 7
Item 1	0.810						
Item 2	0.815						
Item 3	0.764						
Item 4			0.563				
Item 5			0.598				
Item 6			0.478				
Item 7			0.674				
Item 8			0.623				
Item 9			Deleted				
Item 10			0.551				
Item 11		Deleted					
Item 12		Deleted					
Item 13		0.649					
Item 14		Deleted					
Item 15		0.544					
Item 16		0.692					
Item 17							0.866
Item 18							0.930
Item 19							0.837
Item 20			Deleted				
Item 21			Deleted				
Item 22			0.338				
Item 23				0.768			
Item 24				0.894			
Item 25				Deleted			
Item 26					0.554		
Item 27					0.430		
Item 28					0.558		
Item 29							0.389
Item 30							Deleted
Item 31							Deleted
Item 32						0.698	
Item 33						0.911	
Item 34						0.975	
Item 35		Deleted					
Item 36		0.628					
Item 37		Deleted					
Goodness-of-fit statistics							
CMIN	640.795		IFI	0.843		RMSEA	0.084
DF	278		TLI	0.813			
CMIN/DF	2.305		CFI	0.840			

Table 9: Standardised regression weights (factor loading) of the third confirmatory factor analysis using 24 items

Item	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3	Dimension 4	Dimension 5	Dimension 6	Dimension 7
Item 1	0.764						
Item 2	0.812						
Item 3	0.812						
Item 4			0.606				
Item 5			0.634				
Item 6			0.464				
Item 7			0.664				
Item 8			0.623				
Item 9			Deleted				
Item 10			0.538				
Item 11		Deleted					
Item 12		Deleted					
Item 13		0.648					
Item 14		Deleted					
Item 15		0.543					
Item 16		0.694					
Item 17							0.870
Item 18							0.939
Item 19							0.827
Item 20			Deleted				
Item 21			Deleted				
Item 22			Deleted				
Item 23				0.768			
Item 24				0.894			
Item 25				Deleted			
Item 26					0.555		
Item 27					0.431		
Item 28					0.556		
Item 29							Deleted
Item 30							Deleted
Item 31							Deleted
Item 32						0.698	
Item 33						0.911	
Item 34						0.975	
Item 35		Deleted					
Item 36		0.628					
Item 37		Deleted					
Goodness-of-fit statistics							
CMIN	439.822		IFI	0.901		RMSEA	0.070
DF	231		TLI	0.879			
CMIN/DF	1.904		CFI	0.899			

Looking at the standardised regression weights of the 26 items in the model used in the second step, items 22 and 29 were found to have weights less than 0.40 and were deleted from the third-step model. The third-step confirmatory factor analysis results are shown in Table 9. The standardised regression weights for all the items in third-step confirmatory factor analysis are statistically significant. It is evident that the model fit indices fall in the acceptable range and, thus, the 24 items retained in the

third-step confirmatory factor analysis are finally used to compute the seven dimensions of performance associated with the centralised strategic plan.

5.4.4 Reliability of the dimensions

The items under each of the dimensions are averaged to find the scores of those dimensions. These computations further derived reliability measures of the constructed dimensions. Table 10 summarises the items used in the computation of all seven dimensions, along with their measures of reliability (Cronbach's alpha). The lower limit of acceptability of the Cronbach's alpha value is between 0.60 and 0.70 (Hair et al., 1998), and all the dimensions (except for communicative capacity) meet the acceptable range of reliability. Though the communicative capacity dimension has a reliability measure that is less than the threshold value, it was decided that this dimension be retained for further statistical analyses. Nunnaly (1978) has indicated that reliability coefficients that are lower than the threshold value are sometimes used in the literature. The overall reliability coefficient of all 24 items is also very high (0.886).

Table 10: Items and reliability measures for the performance of the centralised strategic plan dimension

Dimension Name	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Efficiency of the strategic plan	1, 2, 3	0.84
Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan	13, 15, 16, 36	0.728
Implementability	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	0.753
Collaborativeness and participativeness	23, 24	0.811
Communicative capacity	26, 27, 28	0.525
Bureaucratisation	32, 33, 34	0.892
Work environment	17, 18, 19	0.908
All	All items	0.886

5.4.5 Results

Two main statistical outcomes are presented in this section as follows:

5.4.5.1 Properties of the dimensions

The histograms explore the distributional properties of all the dimension measures (see Figure1).

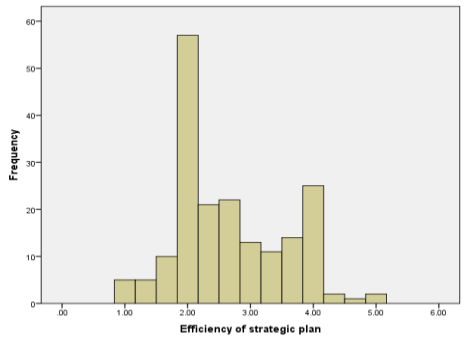

Figure 1a: Histogram of efficiency

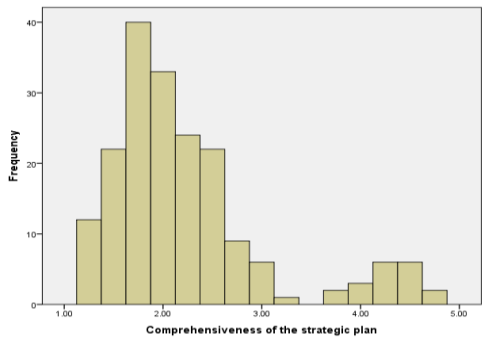

Figure 1b: Histogram of comprehensiveness

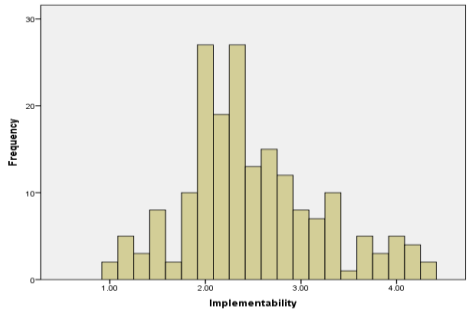

Figure 1c: Histogram of implemetability

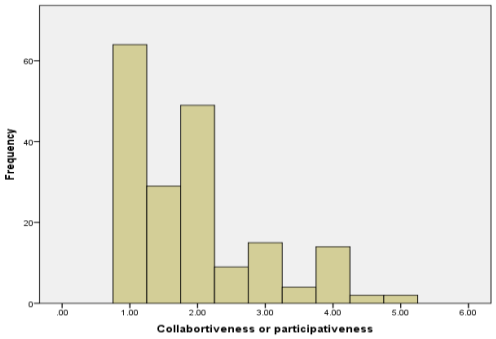

Figure 1d: Histogram of col. and participativeness

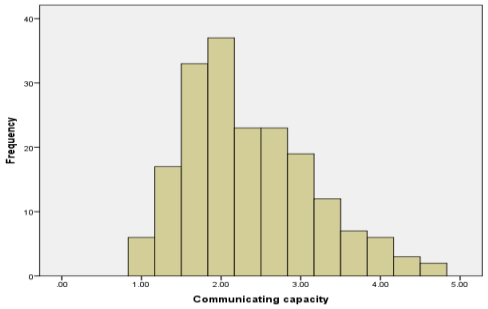

Figure 1e: Histogram of communicative capacity

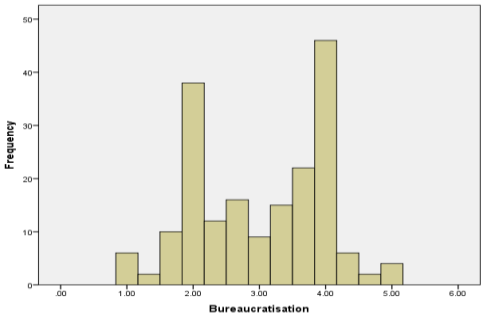

Figure 1f: Histogram of bureaucratisation

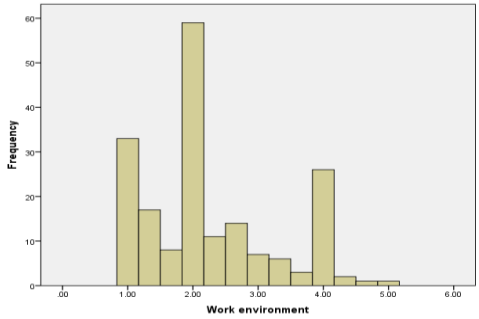

Figure 1e: Histogram of work environment

Figure 1: The distribution of responses of the seven dimensions

According to the histograms, none of them shows a normal distribution. In addition, there are varying modes and degrees of skewness in each distribution. For example, Figure 1a suggests a bimodal distribution, as there are two groups of responses (disagree and agree). The same bimodal pattern is observed in Figure 1f, and a trimodal distribution is found in Figure 1g. All the other distributions are also skewed, to a greater or lesser extent.

The question is, then, what mechanisms of response are producing these distributions? Table 11 provides all of the descriptive statistics for each dimension.

Table 11: Descriptive statistics of the Performance of the Centralised Strategic Plan dimension

Dimension Name	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Efficiency of the strategic plan	1.00	5.00	2.66	0.88	0.47	-0.65
Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan	1.25	4.75	2.24	0.82	1.52	1.89
Implementability	1.00	4.33	2.49	0.72	0.52	0.05
Collaborativeness and participativeness	1.00	5.00	1.93	0.99	1.11	0.52
Communicative capacity	1.00	4.67	2.34	0.81	0.66	-0.03
Bureaucratisation	1.00	5.00	3.03	0.99	-0.16	-1.10
Work environment	1.00	5.00	2.26	1.02	0.66	-0.54

5.4.5.2 Explaining variations in the dimensions

In order to explain the variation in each of the dimensions, inferential statistics were utilised. Inferential statistics are different from descriptive statistics in that they seek to withdraw inferences from the sample's data and results, and generalise them to the population (i.e., they make inferences). This sections aims to establish concrete conclusions about the impact of demographic/characteristic variables such as tier (A), gender (B), district (C), and qualifications (D) on the Performance of the Centralised Strategic Plan dimension's scores. For this particular section, parametric tests will be used since the dimension's scores are all regarded as normally distributed, which justifies the assumption made during the parametric tests.

To correctly examine the differences between the independent groups (levels of the independent variables) two main tests will be conducted. First, one-way ANOVAs –

which measure the effect of an independent variable (with three or more levels) on the dependent variables (i.e., Efficiency of the Strategic Plan; Comprehensiveness of the Strategic Plan; Implementability; Collaborativeness or Participativeness; Communicating Capacity; Bureaucratisation; and Work Environment) – were conducted. Using an alpha level of 5% (the maximum accepted level where the results are due to chance, and are not explained by the independent variable), it will be possible to determine which dimension is significantly affected by the independent variables when using ANOVA. Furthermore, a post hoc test (Duncan) will help to find the exact location of the difference (i.e., it will compare the independent variables using two levels at a time to see where the difference stems from).

The second test is the independent samples t-test, which is similar to the ANOVA. However, the t-test accounts for the effect that an independent variable has on two levels, and measures its effect on the dependent variable (the dimensions); again, an alpha level of 5% or less justifies a significant effect/difference. These tests will also provide descriptive outcomes to highlight the direction of the scores, and to discover which group of variables explains the most difference. The bar chart figures will be added for descriptive purposes.

A. Tier effect

Participants' tier classification, as explained earlier, is divided into three independent groups [i.e., MoE officials (MO), district leaders (DL), and school leaders (SL)]. ANOVA tests were used to assess whether or not this particular variable had a significant effect on the withdrawn dimensions (i.e., Efficiency of the Strategic Plan; Comprehensiveness of the Strategic Plan; Implementability; Collaborativeness or Participativeness; Communication Capacity; Bureaucratisation; and Work Environment). The results of the ANOVA and the descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 2 and Table 12.

A.1 Efficiency of the Strategic Plan

The first dimension measured by the questionnaire was concerned with participants' perceptions about the efficiency of the strategic plan. The outcome of the ANOVA showed that tier has no significant effect on this first dimension measured, $F(2,185) = 1.86$, $p > 0.05$ (MO=3.01, DL=2.64, SL=2.60). This implies that the type of tier does not appear to lead to any differences in the participants' level of agreement with the efficiency of the strategic plan, and that their level of agreement generally leaned towards more negative responses, except among the MO.

A.2 Comprehensiveness of the Strategic Plan

The second dimension measured from the questionnaire was respondents' perceptions on the Comprehensiveness of the Strategic Plan. Following the ANOVA, it was found that tier has a significant effect on these perceptions, $F(2,185) = 285.54$, $p < .001$ (MO=4.23, DL=2.26, SL=1.89). The Duncan post hoc tests showed that any comparison between any two of the three groups (i.e., MO vs. DL, MO vs. SL, DL vs. SL) results in a significant difference ($p < 0.001$). This clearly indicates that the three groups are different from each other when it comes to the extent to which the respondents agree with the idea that the strategic plan is comprehensive. It is clear that the MO agreed more (positively) and the SL agreed the least (negative) regarding the plan's level of comprehensiveness; hence, tier appears to have an effect on respondents' perceptions regarding the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan. This effect was demonstrated by differences between all three levels.

A.3 Implementability

This dimension measured from the questionnaire was respondent's perceptions on the implementability of the strategic plan. It was found that tier also has a significant effect on respondents' perceptions about this dimesion, $F(2,185) = 6.74$, $p < 0.01$ (MO=2.99, DL=2.55, SL=2.38). Though respondents from all tiers showed that they were in disagreement with the implementability of the strategic plan, a post hoc test (Duncan test) found that the respondent from the MoE (MO) possessed an average

agreement score that was significantly closer to the positive scores when compared to participants from the other two management tiers (DL and SL).

A.4 Collaborativeness or Participativeness

The fourth dimension measured by the questionnaire was concerned with participants' perceptions about the degree of collaboration involved in the development of the strategic plan. One-way ANOVA, $F(2,185)=24.68$, $p<0.001$ (MO=3.15, DL=2.05, SL=1.67) indicated that there were significant differences between individuals at different levels of the management hierarchy. Thus, a post-hoc test (Duncan) confirmed that there were significant differences between the mean responses of the three groups. Thus, individuals from the MoE perceived, at least to some extent, the development of the strategic plan to involve a collaborative process – a belief that was not shared by those holding district and (especially) school positions.

A.5 Communicative Capacity

This dimension involves the questionnaire measure pertaining to the participants' perceptions about the communicative capacity of the strategic plan. Participants' management tiers also showed a significant effect on their perceptions about the Communicative Capacity of the strategic plan, $F(2,185)=58.31$, $p<0.001$ (MO=3.55, DL=2.67, SL=2.01). The post hoc (Duncan) test revealed that all three groups were significantly different from each other ($p<0.001$) in terms of their average ratings regarding their level of agreement towards the communicating capacity of the strategic plan. The average agreement ratings were demonstrated to be the highest among the MO group, and least among those in the SL group, while the DL group had an average level of agreement that fell in between the MO and SL. A stronger level of agreement was only noticed among the MO group.

A.6 Bureaucratisation

It was found that management tiers had a significant effect on respondents' perceptions regarding **Bureaucratisation** of the strategic plan, $F(2,185)=3.51$, $p<0.05$ (MO 3.33, DL=3.25, SL=2.88). Although a significant overall difference was

found, the post hoc (Duncan) test found no pairwise differences in the average agreement rating that respondents provided from the three management tiers. With respect to perceptions about Bureaucratisation, it was apparent that, once again, respondents from the MO had the highest level of agreement, and the SL individuals were least likely to agree. The MO and DL groups showed higher levels of agreement, while the SL showed, yet again, greater disagreement based on the mean score.

A.7 Work Environment

Another dimension that was measured from the questionnaire was respondents' perceptions of the Work Environment. It was found that respondents' management tiers has a significant effect on their attitudes towards the Work Environment of the strategic plan, $F(2,185)=10.72$, $p<0.001$ (MO=3.13, DL=2.36, SL=2.06). Here the post hoc (Duncan) test showed that there was a significant difference in MO and DL respondents' perceptions ($p<0.01$) and between the views of MO and SL ($p<0.001$). Despite the significant difference between tiers, it was shown that both the DL and SL groups exhibited similar levels of agreement, and these were both negative when compared to responses from the MO.

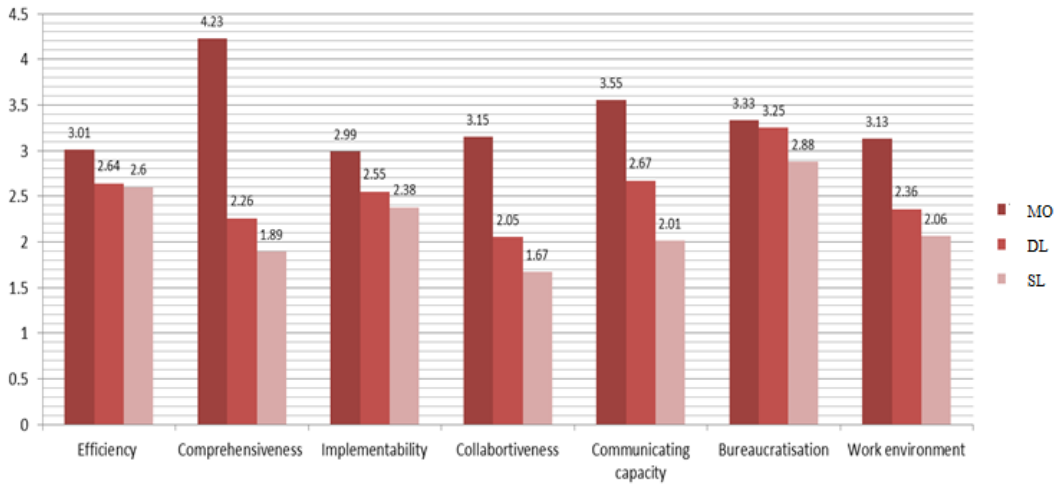

Figure 2: A bar chart showing the mean score of all tier levels across all dimensions

Table 12: The results of an ANOVA showing the effect of tier across all dimensions

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Efficiency of strategic plan	Between Groups	2.874	2	1.437	1.86	.16
	Within Groups	142.788	185	.772		
	Total	145.661	187			
Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan	Between Groups	94.390	2	47.195	285.545	<.001
	Within Groups	30.577	185	.165		
	Total	124.967	187			
Implementability	Between Groups	6.583	2	3.292	6.740	<.01
	Within Groups	90.346	185	.488		
	Total	96.930	187			
Collaborativeness and participativeness	Between Groups	38.540	2	19.270	24.685	<.001
	Within Groups	144.418	185	.781		
	Total	182.957	187			
Communicating capacity	Between Groups	46.939	2	23.469	58.313	<.001
	Within Groups	74.458	185	.402		
	Total	121.397	187			
Bureaucratisation	Between Groups	6.646	2	3.323	3.506	.032
	Within Groups	175.332	185	.948		
	Total	181.978	187			
Work environment	Between Groups	20.101	2	10.050	10.725	<.001
	Within Groups	173.362	185	.937		
	Total	193.463	187			

B. Gender effect

This section delved into assessing the effects of gender on the research dimensions (Performance of the Centralised Strategic Plan) (i.e., Efficiency of the Strategic Plan;

Comprehensiveness of the Strategic Plan; Implementability; Collaborativeness or Participativeness; Communicative Capacity; Bureaucratisation; and Work Environment). Gender is an independent variable with two levels (male, female); hence, a suitable inferential test that should be used is the independent samples t-test – a test that determines whether male and female participants have different agreement scores. After conducting this test, it was evident that gender has no significant effect on any of the dimensions ($p>0.05$ for all dimensions). This is reflected in Figure 3 and Table 13.

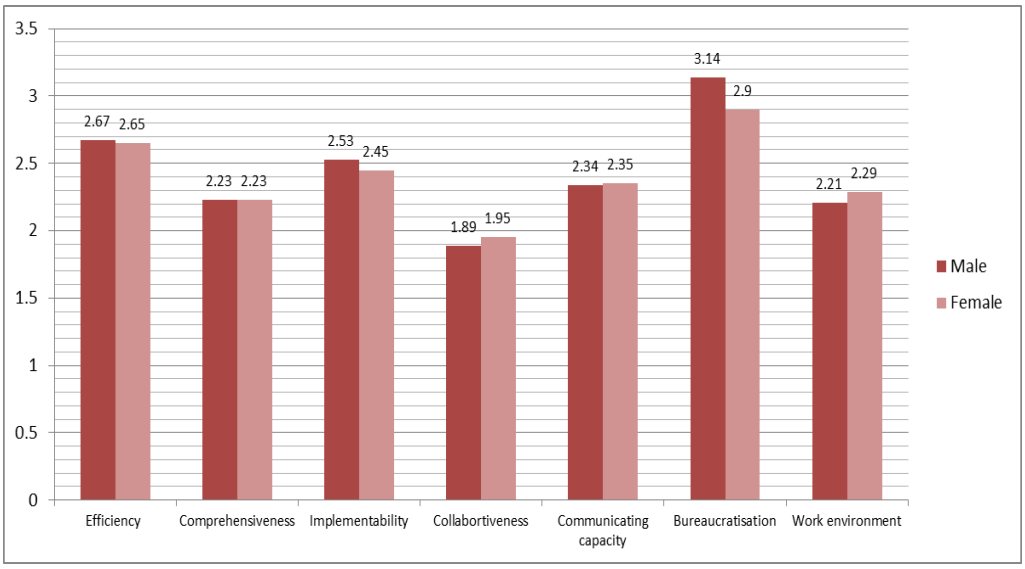

Figure 3: Means score across all dimensions based on participants' gender

Table 13: Independent samples t-test examining sex and agreement scores across all dimensions

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Efficiency of strategic plan	Equal variances assumed	.098	.754	.137	186	.891	.01773	.12908	-.23691	.27237
	Equal variances not assumed			.137	185.969	.891	.01773	.12908	-.23691	.27237
Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan	Equal variances assumed	.595	.441	.044	186	.965	.00532	.11956	-.23055	.24119
	Equal variances not assumed			.044	184.754	.965	.00532	.11956	-.23056	.24120
Implementability	Equal variances assumed	1.37	.243	.776	186	.439	.08156	.10513	-.12584	.28896
	Equal variances not assumed			.776	185.369	.439	.08156	.10513	-.12584	.28896
Collaborativeness or participativeness	Equal variances assumed	.534	.466	-.441	186	.659	-.06383	.14459	-.34908	.22142
	Equal variances not assumed			-.441	185.946	.659	-.06383	.14459	-.34908	.22142
Communicating capacity	Equal variances assumed	.062	.803	-.090	186	.928	-.01064	.11784	-.24311	.22183
	Equal variances not assumed			-.090	185.827	.928	-.01064	.11784	-.24311	.22184
Bureaucratisation	Equal variances assumed	.899	.344	1.659	186	.099	.23759	.14322	-.04496	.52014
	Equal variances not assumed			1.659	185.235	.099	.23759	.14322	-.04497	.52015
Work environment	Equal variances assumed	.059	.808	-.549	186	.584	-.08156	.14864	-.37480	.21168
	Equal variances not assumed			-.549	185.331	.584	-.08156	.14864	-.37481	.21169

C. District effects

The district as independent variables had six levels (Al-Asma, Hawalli, Al-Farwania, Mubark Al-Kabeer, Al-Ahmadi, and Al-Jahra); hence, a suitable test to assess these variables is the ANOVA, which measures the differences between all of the districts across all of the measured dimensions. The results of the ANOVA and the descriptive outcome analyses clearly demonstrate that there are no differences

between district and level of agreement for the Efficiency of the Strategic Plan, Comprehensiveness of the Strategic Plan, Implementability, Collaborativeness or Participativeness, Communicating Capacity, Bureaucratisation, or Work Environment dimensions (P>0.05). Following the post hoc test (Duncan), it was once again apparent that no differences existed between any two district levels across any of the dimensions (p>0.05 for all pairwise comparisons). In conclusion, no district effects were found, as can be observed in Tables 14 and 15.

Table 14: The mean dimension scores across all districts

	Al-Asma	Hawalli	Al-Farwania	Mubark Al-Kabeer	Al-Ahmadi	Al-Jahra
Efficiency of Strategic plan	2.5952	2.5119	2.4405	2.8519	2.5517	2.7738
Comprehensiveness	2.1429	1.8393	1.8214	2.1759	2.0603	1.9554
Implementability	2.3214	2.4226	2.369	2.6481	2.2644	2.5774
Collaborativeness	1.875	1.5179	1.9107	2.0741	1.6034	1.7143
Communicating Capacity	2.119	2.2143	2.0833	2.4568	2.1724	2.2024
Bureaucratisation	2.9524	2.8571	2.6905	3.0123	3.0805	3.3452
Work environment	2.0119	2.119	2.0476	2.284	2.2069	2.25

Table 15: The results of an ANOVA for the effect of districts across all dimensions

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Efficiency of strategic plan	Between Groups	3.496	5	.699	.901	.482
	Within Groups	125.679	162	.776		
	Total	129.175	167			
Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan	Between Groups	3.184	5	.637	3.482	.051
	Within Groups	29.628	162	.183		
	Total	32.812	167			
Implementability	Between Groups	3.124	5	.625	1.321	.258
	Within Groups	76.617	162	.473		
	Total	79.741	167			
Collaborativeness and participativeness	Between Groups	6.015	5	1.203	1.675	.143
	Within Groups	116.336	162	.718		
	Total	122.351	167			
Communicating capacity	Between Groups	2.366	5	.473	.966	.440
	Within Groups	79.369	162	.490		
	Total	81.735	167			
Bureaucratisation	Between Groups	6.830	5	1.366	1.409	.224
	Within Groups	157.042	162	.969		
	Total	163.872	167			
Work environment	Between Groups	1.711	5	.342	.353	.880
	Within Groups	156.923	162	.969		
	Total	158.634	167			

D. Qualification effects

Finally, participants' qualifications were taken into consideration to determine whether there was a possible effect of this variable on participants' agreement levels across each of the dimensions. Given that the qualification variable had more than

three levels, it was tested using ANOVA. Tables 16 and 17 highlight that education did not have a significant effect on any of the scores ($p>0.05$ for all dimensions). Furthermore, the post hoc (Duncan) test revealed no differences between any two levels of the independent variables ($p>0.05$ for all pairwise comparisons).

Table 16: The mean scores of across all dimensions with respect to qualification

Dimension Name	Diploma	Bachelor	Masters	Doctoral	Total
Efficiency of strategic plan	2.8947	2.8333	2.5267	2.6481	2.6578
Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan	2.3684	2.145	2.29	2.0833	2.2393
Implementability	2.3772	2.5767	2.4783	2.3981	2.4866
Collabortiveness or participativeness	1.7105	1.96	1.925	2	1.9198
Communicating capacity	2.1228	2.26	2.4	2.5185	2.3458
Bureaucratisation	2.7368	3.02	3.1133	2.8889	3.0285
Work environment	1.7895	2.2	2.3567	2.2593	2.2478

Table 17: ANOVA results showing the effect of qualification across all dimensions

Dimension name		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Efficiency of strategic plan	Between Groups	4.329	3	1.443	1.874	.135
	Within Groups	140.879	183	.770		
	Total	145.207	186			
Comprehensiveness	Between Groups	1.456	3	.485	.721	.541
	Within Groups	123.272	183	.674		
	Total	124.729	186			
Implementability	Between Groups	.781	3	.260	.499	.683
	Within Groups	95.436	183	.522		
	Total	96.217	186			
Collabortiveness or participativeness	Between Groups	1.031	3	.344	.348	.791
	Within Groups	180.765	183	.988		
	Total	181.797	186			
Communicating capacity	Between Groups	2.144	3	.715	1.100	.350
	Within Groups	118.827	183	.649		
	Total	120.971	186			
Bureaucratisation	Between Groups	2.690	3	.897	.916	.434
	Within Groups	179.158	183	.979		
	Total	181.848	186			
Work environment	Between Groups	5.293	3	1.764	1.744	.160
	Within Groups	185.116	183	1.012		
	Total	190.409	186			

5.4.5.3 Regression analysis

From the results of the descriptive and inferential analyses, as described above, it is clear that on all of the seven performance measurement scales (dimensions) related to strategic planning, the observed variation in Figure 1 is attributable to systematic differences that underlie the responses of individuals located at different levels of the management hierarchy. The quantification of the level of magnitude of these differences requires that a regression analysis be conducted. Table 18 presents the results from the linear regression analyses that were completed across all seven of the performance dimensions based on the respondents' tier classification. The performance dimensions were regressed only on the tier (A) classification because the other demographic factors did not appear to have a significant impact on these measures, as discussed earlier. For all the regression models presented in Table 18, necessary assumptions regarding the characteristics of the residuals are assessed very carefully and were found to be satisfactory. This ensured that the conclusions that were drawn from the regression analyses were valid. In all the regression models, the school leaders were treated as a reference category, and the results obtained from the MoE officials and district leaders were compared with them.

A.1 Efficiency of Strategic Planning

In accordance with the ANOVA results, the first regression model that examined the scores of "Efficiency of Strategic Planning" based on tier classification found no significant association between efficiency scores and management tier. The model is statistically insignificant ($F=1.86$; $p=0.16$). The very low R^2 (0.02) and Adj. R^2 (0.01) values also rejects the usefulness of this model to determine measures of efficiency on strategic planning by the tier factor. It also indicates that there are some other important factors/variables that might better determine the results obtained across the efficiency measures.

A.2 Comprehensiveness of the Strategic Plan

When the scores pertaining to "Comprehensiveness of the Strategic Plan" are regressed based on tier, both the MoE official and district leader classes were found

to have statistically significant impacts on the dimension's scores. A regression coefficient of 2.35 was observed for the MoE officials' responses on this domain, which implies that the they are expected to have an agreement score that is 2.35 units greater, on average, when compared to the school leaders' score when asked to rate the comprehensiveness of the centralised strategic plan. In a similar fashion, the district leaders are expected to have scores greater than 0.37 units, on average, when compared to the scores observed among the school leaders. The model fit indices ($F=285.55$; $p\leq0.001$; $R^2=0.76$; and Adj. $R^2=0.75$) is satisfactory in this model, implying that the fitted regression model adequately explains the proposed relationship.

A.3 Implementability

Though the MoE officials' responses on the "Implementability" domain were significant; however, the district leaders' responses on this same dimension did not appear to be statistically significant. It was expected that the MoE officials' average agreement score on the Implementability scale would be greater by 0.61 units when compared to the school leaders' scores. Though this regression model is statistically significant ($F=6.70$; $p\leq0.001$), the low R^2 (0.07) and Adj. R^2 (0.06) values suggest that there are other important factors/variables that may better explain the variation in scores across the "Implementability" performance dimension.

A.4 Collaborativeness and Participativeness

Scores across the "Collaborativeness and Participativeness" performance dimension highlighted that there was a tier effect, as management level was a significant predictor of scores across this measure. The MoE officials have 1.48 units more expected score on this dimension compared to the school leaders, while the district leaders are expected to have 0.38 units more agreement score on "Collaborativeness and Participativeness" than the school leaders. This model is statistically significant ($F=24.69$; $p\leq0.001$), and the other model fit statistics ($R^2=0.21$ and Adj. $R^2=0.20$) are quite good.

A.5 Communicative Capacity

Tier was also significantly associated with respondents' level of agreement on the "Communication Capacity" performance dimension. The MoE officials have 1.53 units more expected agreement score and the district leaders are expected to have 0.65 units more average score on this dimension than the school leaders. The effects noted among both the MoE officials and district leaders are statistically significant. The model is also statistically significant ($F=58.31$; $p\leq0.001$), and the model fit statistics ($R^2=0.39$ and Adj. $R^2=0.38$) are satisfactory.

A.6 Bureaucratisation

Similar to the ANOVA results, the regression scores across the "Bureaucratisation" domain appeared to yield interesting findings when assessed by tier. Contrary to most of the performance dimension scores discussed above, the agreement score on "Bureaucratisation" is not significantly affected by the MoE officials (regression coefficient =0.45; $p=0.06$). In other words, the MoE officials do not have very high agreement scores on this dimension. Rather, it was found that the district leaders have on average agreement score that is 0.36 units higher, on average, than the school leaders. The model fit criteria ($R^2=0.04$ and Adj. $R^2=0.03$) are very poor for this model, indicating that the "tier classification" factor was insufficient for explaining variation across the "Bureaucratisation" scores.

A.7 Work Environment

The last regression model estimates the impact of management tier on the dimension that presented respondents' perceptions about the work environment of the new strategic plan. The estimated results, which are shown in Table 19, demonstrate that the MoE officials have provided significantly higher ratings on the "Work Environment" dimension of the strategic plan than did the school leaders; conversely, the ratings among district and school leaders were found to differ significantly. The MoE officials were expected to have a better average agreement score on the "Work Environment" domain (which was greater by 1.06 units) than the school leaders. Though this regression model is statistically significant ($F=10.73$,

$p \leq 0.001$), the low R^2 (0.10) and Adj. R^2 (0.09) values suggest that there are other important factors/variables that may better explain the variation observed in the scores across the "Work Environment" performance dimension.

Table 18: Linear regression results of the performance measures scales based on tier classification

Dependent Variable	Independent variable (Tier classification)	Regression Coefficients (95% CI)	t statistic (p-value)
Efficiency of strategic plan	Constant	2.61 (2.45, 2.77)	32.53 (< .001)
	MoE officials	0.41 (-0.01, 0.83)	1.94 (0.06)
	District leaders	0.04 (-0.26, 0.33)	0.25 (0.80)
	School leaders	Reference	-
		R^2 = 0.02	Adj. R^2 = 0.01
			F = 1.86 (p-value = 0.16)
Comprehensiveness of strategic plan	Constant	1.89 (1.82, 1.97)	50.97 (< .001)
	MoE officials	2.35 (2.15, 2.54)	23.89 (< .001)
	District leaders	0.37 (0.24, 0.51)	5.39 (< .001)
	School leaders	Reference	-
		R^2 = 0.76	Adj. R^2 = 0.75
			F = 285.55 (p-value = <.001)
Implementability	Constant	2.38 (2.26, 2.51)	37.36 (< .001)
	MoE officials	0.61 (0.28, 0.94)	3.60 (< .001)
	District leaders	0.17 (-0.07, 0.40)	1.41 (0.16)
	School leaders	Reference	-
		R^2 = 0.07	Adj. R^2 = 0.06
			F = 6.70 (p-value = <.001)
Collaborativeness or participativeness	Constant	1.67 (1.51, 1.83)	20.72 (< .001)
	MoE officials	1.48 (1.06, 1.90)	6.93 (< .001)
	District leaders	0.38 (0.08, 0.68)	2.53 (0.01)
	School leaders	Reference	-
		R^2 = 0.21	Adj. R^2 = 0.20
			F = 24.69 (p-value = <.001)
Communicating capacity	Constant	2.02 (1.91, 2.13)	34.87 (< .001)
	MoE officials	1.53 (1.23, 1.83)	9.99 (< .001)
	District leaders	0.65 (0.44, 0.87)	6.04 (< .001)
	School leaders	Reference	-
		R^2 = 0.39	Adj. R^2 = 0.38
			F = 58.31 (p-value = <.001)
Bureaucratisation	Constant	2.89 (2.71, 3.06)	32.48 (< .001)
	MoE officials	0.45 (-0.02, 0.91)	1.90 (0.06)
	District leaders	0.36 (0.04, 0.69)	2.19 (0.03)
	School leaders	Reference	-
		R^2 = 0.04	Adj. R^2 = 0.03
			F = 3.51 (p-value = 0.03)
Work environment	Constant	2.07 (1.90, 2.24)	23.42 (< .001)
	MoE officials	1.06 (0.60, 1.53)	4.55 (< .001)
	District leaders	0.29 (-0.03, 0.62)	1.76 (0.08)
	School leader	Reference	-
		R^2 = 0.10	Adj. R^2 = 0.09
			F = 10.73 (p-value < .001)

5.4.6 Conclusions

In the statistical analyses that were conducted in this section, several statistical techniques (such as univariate exploration, statistical graphics, and inferential statistics) have been used to study the strengths and weaknesses of the centralised strategic plan. First of all, performance measures across seven dimensions of the centralised strategic plan using 24 of the original 37 questionnaire items have been constructed. A comprehensive confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) led to the deletion of 13 items from the original list of performance measures; this was due to construct validity issues. The reliability of the newly constructed dimensions was found to be satisfactory.

The statistical graphics and computed descriptive statistics used in this study explored the overall average scores across all seven performance dimensions; it was found that the scores fell at or lower than the "neutral" level. A detailed study of the variations of the dimension scores across respondents' background characteristics was conducted through independent samples t-tests and using analysis of variance. It was observed that the background characteristics (Gender, districts, and educational qualifications) did not adequately account for the variations in respondents' views towards the performance dimensions. On the other hand, the respondents' tier classification was found to be the most significant predictor of their varying views towards the different performance dimensions of the strategic plan. Respondents from the higher tier class provided significantly higher scores than did the district and school leaders across almost all dimensions. In a similar fashion, district leaders who evaluated the centralised strategic planning; showed no significant differences for some dimensions. The findings from the regression analyses assessed the strength of the relationships between the tier classifications; the results supported the findings observed in the earlier analyses.

Thus, the results of the quantitative phase show interesting findings insofar as the interviewees at the MoE (MoE officials) appear to have more positive attitudes toward the centralised strategic education plan. In contrast, interviewees at various districts (district leaders) and schools (schools) appear to hold more negative

attitudes toward the centralised strategic plan. The MoE officials are involved in strategic plan's formulation, whereas district and school leaders are merely implementers. Thus, the following phase (Phase 3) involves conducting in-depth interviews to extend beyond the results of both the exploratory and the questionnaire studies. Moreover, it investigates the differences in interviewees' perceptions toward various the issues that were studied during the questionnaire phase by outlining interviewees' justifications for and interpretations of these topics. Furthermore, in addition to addressing the characteristics of the centralisation policy in the Kuwaiti education system, the aim of Phase 3 is to investigate how centralisation underlies each of the seven issues that were identified in the exploratory interviews, by further examining the MoE officials', district leaders', and school leaders' perceptions towards these issues.

5.5 Findings of research question 4:

(What reasons do managers provide for their perceptions regarding the centralised strategic plan?)

This research question attempts to investigate, in more depth, the issues that were identified from both the exploratory interviews and the literature. The interviews aimed to address these issues thoroughly, while obtaining the interviewees' justifications as to their perceptions regarding the seven identified issues. Moreover, given that the questionnaire revealed that there are differences in the participants' perceptions and vary according to tier, this section aimed to investigate the perceptions of the MoE officials, district leaders, and school leaders by raising the differences in their thoughts and by obtaining their reasoning behind their perceptions. The seven issues are listed as the follows:

1. Efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic plan
2. Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan
3. Implementability
4. Collaborativeness and participativeness
5. Communicative capacity
6. Bureaucratisation
7. Work environment

Prior to presenting this section's findings, it is essential to note that a new issue emerged during the discussions held with the interviewees; this issue pertained to the efficiency of the strategic plan. Specifically, there were concerns that the level of effectiveness of the strategic plan contributed to the weakness of the strategic plan's outcomes in general.

5.5.1 Efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic plan

This section begins by presenting different perspectives regarding the definition of "efficiency"; in this way, those perspectives can be linked to the interviewees' responses regarding the strategic plan's efficiency. Initially, the issue of efficiency focuses on the outcome level of the strategic plan as it compares to the available

resources. Of course, when addressing outcome levels, the focus is inherently directed towards positive results. Therefore, efficiency refers to the maximum possible level of achievement obtained in educational outputs from a particular set of resources (Levačić, 2002). In this context, efficiency can also refer to the expected level of output balanced against the lowest input or cost (Bell, 2000; Scheerens, 2000). I would argue that evaluating the achieved levels of output against the quantity and the cost of the input is insufficient. It is important to consider how the input has been applied. Ofsted describes efficiency as the effective use of available resources in order to achieve the best possible educational outcomes for all pupils (Cited in: McAlees, 2000). According to this definition, concerns should be raised about the factors that ensure the appropriate use of available resources, such as resource allocation policies.

The interviewees' responses indicated that there is a perception of weakness in the pupils' levels of achievement. The interviewees expressed concerns regarding the strategic plan's outcome, as represented by these results. This concern is clearly voiced by Morad, a headteacher, as he talked about the pupils' level of achievement as it related to the strategic plan:

> Our pupils' level of achievement is a disaster. I believe that there are many causes for that. I can now tell you my opinion about these causes. But, you firstly always know that if there is a real strong plan, there would not be such disaster…

Morad's comment is illustrative of the sample's views, but the results of a study conducted by Al-Ramzi (2009) revealed that educational improvement is the main priority of the Kuwaiti society for three of reasons. First, the average number of Kuwaiti pupils that are failing is increasing to such an extent that educational service leaders must intervene in order to effectively examine this problem and find a solution. Second, the pupils' levels of achievement in Kuwaiti public schools are lower than the achievement levels of pupils in private schools. Third, the average number of pupils dropping out of school has increased (Al-Ramzi, 2009). Al-Humood (2012) similarly emphasised the poor level of school outcomes. He indicated that the quality of school graduates is relatively weak and needs

improvement. He also stated that Kuwaiti pupils are showing signs of low pass rates on their university enrolment examinations. These studies, therefore, support the interviewees' claims that school outcomes are below average when compared to the rest of the Arabian Gulf. Interviewees attributed the failure of the strategic plan to produce better pupil outcomes to an efficiency gap between the resources available at the regional and school levels and the desired level of pupil attainment. Sanad, a deputy head, illustrated this point:

> …Compared with the potential for resource provision from the MoE, our pupils' achievement levels are very low. It is really disappointing when we see the amount and variety of resources that MoEs in our neighbouring countries provide to their schools. Although we are richer than they are, and our MoE has all that we need in terms of resources, these resources are not productively employed to effectively enhance student achievement. Unfortunately, I can say this is one of our schools' weaknesses in developing pupils' achievement levels…

The majority of the interviewees (16 out of 22) claimed that the strategic plan is inefficient (see Table 19). The table also demonstrates that there is a correlation between individuals' positions in Kuwait's educational management hierarchy and their perceptions about this issue. Therefore, two (50%) of the MoE officials interviewees, 66% of the district leader interviewees, and 83% of the school leader interviewees did not believe that the strategic plan was efficient.

The majority of the interviewees perceive that the policy of centralisation affects the efficiency of the strategic plan, as reflected in the pupils' low levels of achievement. While the strategic plan is intended to ensure a positive level of pupil achievement, the majority of the interviewees described the school outcomes as being relatively weak, suggesting that there are problems in the plan's design and/or its implementation. In particular, interviewees linked weak pupil outcomes to the limited resources available for teaching and for improving the pupils' cognitive skills.

Table 19: Interviewees' perceptions of the efficiency of the strategic plan

Interviewees' managerial strata	MoE officials	District leaders	School leaders	Total
Agree	2	2	2	6
Disagree	2	4	10	16
Total	4	6	12	22

These results focus the analysis onto resource acquisition and allocation. The interviewees indicated that the MoE's policy of resource acquisition and allocation was highly centralised. According to the interviewees, this prevents schools from obtaining sufficient teaching resources, despite the large MoE budget. According to the interviewees, this is because the resource allocation process is entirely controlled by the MoE, which prevents schools from making decisions regarding the amount and type of resources, and the number and type of personnel they need during the academic year. Thus, centralisation creates many obstacles, such as inadequate resources, which impede the schools' ability to effectively support the pupils' learning. To elaborate, it is common for action plans to include comprehensive details about the plan's objectives and the different types of resources needed to achieve them (Glover, 2000). But, according to the interviewees, when developing the strategic plan's objectives, the Department of Planning within the MoE is responsible for deciding the amount of budget that each level receives. The interviewees indicated that lower levels, such as schools, are not involved in making decisions about the amount and nature of the resources that they need because they are excluded from the planning process. As a result, the objectives relating to professional development for teachers and staff are built into the plan, and are based

on a top-down decision-making approach that does not appear to take into account many of the day-to-day realities within the schools.

The interviewees expressed several concerns about the consequences that centralisation had in the allocation of the resources needed to implement an effective strategic plan. First, schools are unprepared to successfully manage situations that require emergency funds because their budgets are pre-allocated to specific, basic requirements, such as school maintenance and furniture. Second, for the most part, the material resources distributed by the MoE are deemed insufficient, and the process by which schools are supplied with these resources is lengthy. This frequently leads to a number of problems, such as leaving science laboratories short of the materials required to conduct science lessons. Third, schools do not have the latitude to recruit staff in accordance with their needs. Instead, staff members are hired centrally, rather than through a process that would allow each school to maintain the quality of staff that matches its individual and unique needs. Fahad, the head of a department within a school, provides examples of the concerns related to the centralisation policy that controls the strategic plan:

> …If we are involved in the strategic plan, I can guarantee that all resources will be available and all qualified personnel will be secured. It is a matter of sharing with us the decisions regarding the resources during the establishment of the plan. It does not make sense that you need something implemented but others decide what and how much you need. We are charged with teaching pupils, but how can we guarantee good results with some unqualified teachers. If you look at the hall physical exercises, you will find they are very poor. Look, I am not saying that I, rather than them, should plan and make the entire decision. What I mean is the MoE should be consulted about the resources, and of course, schools are the best consultants, especially about their needs…

The interviewees raised additional concerns about the impact of centralisation and how it seems to affect the efficiency of the education system. For example, the centralised framework of the strategic plan imposes a bureaucratic approach on the allocation of resources. One can infer from Sanad's comment that the MoE is able to

provide many kinds of resources that the schools need because, as mentioned earlier, Kuwait is a rich country and the government is responsible for supplying schools with these resources. Sanad's comment implies that while resources are available, they are beyond the schools' reach because the MoE adopted a specific policy for resource allocation, which is characterised by long time delays. To explain this, the government provides the MoE with a large amount of funding, as it does with its other ministries. This means that the financial resources are available, but schools cannot decide upon the amount of funds that they need because only the MoE decides this amount. When schools require specific materials, they must follow the MoE's regulations on how they can obtain those resources. For example, when a school needs to equip its management team or classes with computers, it must submit a request in the form of a written letter to the district. The district then conveys this letter to the MoE, which studies the request and makes a decision. This issue came to the fore when interviewees explained why they believed that financial and material resources had caused inefficiencies in the strategic plan; they also discussed their perceptions of the relationship between resource allocation and the centralisation policy. Adel, a head of a department within a school, commented:

> …You cannot imagine the length of time required to obtain resources from the MoE. It is like asking for charity rather than something that will benefit pupils' education. Sometimes they send us resources, such as those we use as teaching materials, but they are insufficient. If we want additional resources, this will take a very long time that involves following a long, boring routine of procedures. In addition to that sometimes because purchasing them from suppliers also takes a long amount of time. This affects the quality of our teaching and, consequently, affects pupils' learning…

This time lag reflects a high degree of bureaucracy, which the interviewees considered to be an obstacle to gaining sufficient resources within an appropriate timeframe. Such excessive bureaucracy is arguably characteristic of highly centralised organisational forms that delegate minimal amounts of responsibility to the lower levels of the hierarchy. In this case, schools face a dilemma in that they are unable to decide on the amount of resources they need, they have no influence on the

time it takes to obtain those resources, and they are unsure as to whether they will even obtain the required resources at all. According to the interviewees, this ultimately affects the school's capacity to teach, and it consequently affects the pupils' learning, specifically because teachers need appropriate teaching materials to deliver knowledge to learners, thereby ensuring positive levels of achievement. The interviewees emphasised that when the human or material resources become available based on the schools' actual needs, this would lead to improvements in pupils' achievement levels and, as a result, the desired educational outcomes would be achieved.

According to the district and school leaders, the mechanisms in place for deciding the amount of resources that are provided to each school has a negative impact on efficiency. The interviewees working in the MoE confirmed the process of resource allocation. The financial resources devoted to executing certain aspects of the strategic plan, such as the supplementation of the schools' funds, are decided by the MoE itself. The MoE estimates the amount of budget needed to meet the goals of the strategic plan. All of these procedures are fulfilled without consulting the implementers of the plan – namely, the schools and districts. This was clearly mentioned in interviews with MoE managers. For example Majed, one of the MoE officials, confirmed that:

> …All financial issues regarding, and the materials needed for, the implementation of the strategic plan are our responsibility. We can estimate the amount of funding required for implementation of the strategic plan. Schools receive these funds and resources only after we have carefully decided them...

However, even central managers questioned the efficiency of this process*:*

> I think education would be better in our country if there were a degree of decentralisation in some areas, especially those which are directly related to pupils teaching and learning…

The evidence suggests that interviewees consider centralisation to be responsible for the inefficiency of the strategic plan. There is also evidence that a better approach

should encourage the MoE officials to work with the lower levels (such as schools) in the estimation of resources for implementation purposes. They also believe that schools should be allowed to participate in the resource allocation process and decide ways of spending resources on pupils teaching and services. Indeed, such freedom can only be obtained by decentralising these processes. According to Bush (2000), many schools now manage multimillion-pound budgets, and spending decisions can, and do, have a powerful impact on their outcomes, as well as on the quality of teaching and learning. He indicates that in many education systems, such as in the UK and Canada, the policy of decentralisation provides schools with the responsibility to utilise the resources they need, based on their own estimations of the amounts required.

It is clear that the interviewees attribute their concerns about pupils' achievement levels on a failure to successfully align the available resources so as to benefit pupils' learning. As with goods and services in general, outcomes in education depend on the quantity, quality, and proportions of the inputs applied (Levačić, 2000). Therefore, a link has been made between the negative level of outcomes and the resources provided during the academic year, and this is viewed in terms of any problems that arise related to the quantity, quality, or adequacy of the resources, or in terms of how those resources are spent. It can be argued that resources are wasted when they do not meet the requirements of schools and when they create negative outcomes; such wasted resources are likely the result of factors such as resource allocation policies. As long as the MoE is spending money and recruiting personnel without obtaining positive results, the education system can be regarded as inefficient.

Alternative explanations for the low levels of pupil attainment in Kuwait were proffered by some interviewees who did not attribute low attainment to inefficiencies in the strategic plan. For example, the two MoE official interviewees who viewed the plan as being efficient (Table 19) acknowledged that there is a weakness in the schools' outcomes, as evidenced in the pupils' levels of achievement; however, they indicated that this problem might be caused by the teachers themselves. To explain

this, the two MoE officials noted that the regulations imposed by the government require the MoE to hire all the teaching applicants. Consequently, this increases the opportunity to hire unqualified teachers who might negatively affect the pupils' learning. This issue is explained, previously, in more detail on page (108).

Another issue raised by these two MoE officials pertained to maternity leave, which they think might affect the achievement of female pupils because the MoE provides six months' leave for female teachers after giving birth. In Kuwait, male and female pupils are separated from each other in separate schools. In addition, male pupils are taught by male teachers and female pupils are taught by female teachers. According to these officials, maternity leave causes tension within female schools because the management in those schools might substitute the teacher who has just given birth with a different teacher who is not familiar with the new class she is being asked to teach. Consequently, the new teacher needs time to get used to the class and the pupils need time to get used to the new teacher. According to the interviewees, this might be a factor that affects the pupils' learning.

It would seem that the MoE officials' attributions regarding weak pupil achievement are invalid. Regarding the problem of hiring unqualified teachers, the regulations of the MoE require inspectors to visit schools and observe teachers' performance during the course of the academic year, in order to ensure that teachers are providing optimal learning environments. If there is a weakness in a teacher's performance, the inspectors will write a report and convey it to the district, which subsequently moves weak teachers from their teaching roles to managerial jobs. In addition, the MoE established a special department to improve teachers' skills, especially for those who demonstrate low performance levels. These two circumstances oppose the claim that the imposition of unqualified teachers adversely affects pupils' learning.

Regarding female teachers, the statistics in Kuwait indicate that there is large number of female teachers within state schools. When a teacher takes maternity leave, another teacher can substitute her easily. Thus, finding an alternative teacher does not seem to be a big problem in Kuwait state schools.

In effect, there were only two district leaders who did not perceive inefficiencies in the strategic plan (see Table 19). However, what is interesting to note is that both of these individuals are advocates of the centralisation policy, especially with respect to the way in which resources are allocated – but only for workload reasons. This opinion is clearly seen in Abeer's comment:

> …If the MoE delegates the responsibility of resources allocation to schools, I think this will increase our responsibility to supervise this process as a local authority. We are managing a big number of schools; it is difficult to us to focus on our need in addition to the schools'. The current situation is better to us as long as the MoE takes the responsibility of resource allocation…

The two school leaders who disagreed with the opinion that the strategic plan is inefficient mentioned that many teachers purchase the material resources they need to teach their pupils. This made them think that resources are available for teachers to teach lessons, which excludes the resource allocation from being one of the primary causes of low achievement levels among pupils. In fact, this research focuses on all kinds of materials, not only material resources. All types of resources might affect the pupils' learning, but the interviewees seemed to ignore the other resources. In my opinion, only a small number of teachers are willing to spend their own money on providing resources and funding for schools, as these should be the responsibility of the MoE. This renders the responses of these two school leaders as relatively shallow, and it does not provide reasonable justification for their claims.

Regarding the issue of effectiveness, the results demonstrated that the centralised strategic plan is inefficient and ineffective. According to Schreens (2000), effectiveness is the degree to which desired output levels are achieved. The majority of the interviewees described the quality of the educational outcomes of the strategic plan as relatively weak because the plan does not meet the aspirations of either the MoE or the Kuwaiti society. For example, 18 out of 22 interviewees indicated that school leavers' achievements do not reflect the desired level of achievement established by the strategic plan so it is, in essence, ineffective. This perception is corroborated by Al-Hummod (2012) and the Al-Ramzi (2009), who demonstrated

that educational outcomes are weak and do not reflect the aspirations of the Kuwaiti society, such as obtaining high-quality graduates from schools. Compared to other educational outcomes in other countries, Kuwait educational outcomes are among the lowest according to international tests in mathematics, science, and English (Ayoub, 2012). This negative outcome was witnessed directly by the interviewees. For example, Hajar, a leader in the Al Farwaniya district, expressed disappointment about the quality of the schools' outcomes:

> …The educational outcomes in Kuwait are disappointing. When I look to the Arabian Gulf countries' developments, I feel sorry for our education system. I feel embarrassed when I discuss our pupils' level of achievement with my friends from other countries. I think education is weak in Kuwait. Many things should be improved, many things should be changed. Thanks be to Allah that we have oil…

Given that the system's overall educational outcomes are weak, the most likely explanation is that the outcomes are somehow related to a school's general effectiveness; this, in turn, calls to question the level of effectiveness in teaching. The quality of teaching may be the cause of poor system outcomes, as was reflected in a concern highlighted by the interviewees. This issue concerned the centralisation of the personnel development programmes that were supplied to teachers in current and active service (in-service programmes). According to the interviewees, Department of Development and Improvement within the MoE controls the programmes that are developed to improve teachers' skills. Therefore, schools do not participate in the design of the in-service programmes, and they lack the authority to suggest programmes targeted at improving specific skills that would, in accordance with the schools' knowledge of their own needs, improve the level of teachers' required skills to enhance teaching and learning. A lack of these skills would affect pupils' achievements and, consequently, produce weak educational outcomes for the system. Morad, for instance, identified the in-service training programme as a cause of the ineffectiveness of the strategic plan:

> …In the academic year of 2007/2008, the MoE launched a new and very advanced mathematics curriculum which includes advanced activities for third-grade primary school pupils. The nature of this

> curriculum required the preparation and training of teachers on ways of delivering content to pupils. But this did not happen. The consequences were dreadful as teachers were shocked and confused to be teaching the new styles of classes without receiving training on how the content should be delivered. Student achievement levels declined and parents were very angry about that. The MoE 'solved' this problem by simply cancelling the new style of curriculum and reinstating the old style, which teachers were accustomed to delivering, and resumed teaching…

The interviewees also indicated that the MoE made the Department of Development and Improvement solely responsible for the design of the programmes, and the programmes were developed according to the specific objectives presented in the strategic plan. This department, in addition to groups of technical supervisors in the districts, worked on identifying appropriate training programmes. According to the interviewees, excluding schools from building the training programmes led the MoE to miss some essential elements that the teachers needed. For example, training programmes help teachers instil values in pupils; these values are widely recognised by schools, especially when teachers notice negative behavioural patterns. Given that pupils' behaviour is one of the educational outcomes, Aisha, a headteacher in a middle school, commented:

> …I sent a letter many times to the MoE asking for a training programme to improve teachers' abilities to deal with aggressive pupils. The Ministry's response was shocking. They asked me to wait for this kind of programme to be added to the schedule and confirmed that this may take more than one academic year…

The interviewees expressed a belief that there should be wider involvement of the schools in the design, content, and types of teacher training programmes. They agreed that a more accurate estimation could then be made as to the kinds of programmes that would likely improve specific teaching requirements which, in turn, could facilitate improved teaching while enhancing pupils' outcomes. The interviewees expressed enthusiasm about participating in making decisions concerning the nature of the training programmes they required.

Noor suggested a solution to the issues referred to in Fauz's comments:

> I think the MoE should study the needs precisely before designing the training programmes by asking schools to identify the areas of improvement and suggest the sort of programmes they need to achieve this improvement. I think this would be a good example of cooperation…

The interviewees linked the low level of pupils' achievement to the poor in-service programmes, which do not meet teachers' professional development needs. Given that there is a relationship between the level of teacher training and a school's effectiveness (Collbert, 2008), more appropriate training programmes would lead to increasingly more qualified teachers, ultimately resulting in the achievement of desired outcomes. These outcomes, according to the results obtained in this research, are difficult to attain if the training programmes remain centralised. However, it is the centralised nature of the development of the strategic plan that influences the design of the in-service programmes, which means that schools are unable to participate in or suggest the kinds of programmes they require. Professional development programmes and their application depend on effective training plans that match the teachers' skill requirements. According to Eurydice (2008), in countries such as Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, for example, it is up to individual teachers to organise their professional development because training plans are developed within schools, as part of the school's development plans.

Given the level of consensus established by the lower-level management interviewees, as well as by experts such as AlMusaileem (2010) and AlMoqatei (2010), what remains to be explained is why the process of centralised planning continues. The most likely explanation for this is that a culture of denial exists within the MoE. Thus, a small number of those interviewed (4 out of 22) – the MoE official and the district leaders – disagreed with the widely-held belief that the strategic plan is ineffective. Some responses initially indicated that these respondents refused to consider the plan as inefficient or ineffective, as can be seen in Saad's response:

> I think it is unfair to describe the strategic plan as inefficient or ineffective, when it has taken a long time and hard effort for it to be formulated…

However, when I discussed with them the various perspectives relating to resource allocation – how it is dominated by the MoE and how high levels of bureaucracy present a serious obstacle to a school's capacity to obtain the resources it requires – and set these sentiments against the context of low levels of pupil achievement, they softened their stance in refusing to acknowledge that the strategic plan is ineffective (See appendix 10). Although they initially refused to admit that the MoE's policy could be the reason behind the low levels of educational outcomes, these interviewees subsequently acknowledged that school outcomes do not meet the desired levels; however, they still refused to describe the strategic plan as ineffective. It is likely that it was difficult (and would be unusual) for these four interviewees to describe the strategic plan negatively because of their positions as leaders working within the MoE. It could be suggested that high-status officials lack the courage to criticise MoE projects. This became clear when an official initially consented to be interviewed for the purpose of this research, but he then apologised, saying that he could not continue the interview. Of course, all participants in research have the right to withdraw their participation at any time. In this instance, it was apparent from the timing of his withdrawal that he did not wish to comment on the strategic plan. Additionally, some may consider describing the strategic plan as ineffective to be tantamount to destroying its credibility, and by extension, it makes the education system appear weak. Moreover, during the time when I was conducting Phase 3 of my research, the media was campaigning against the MoE, with particular blame targeted at the Ministry for the low levels of pupil achievement – a crisis which the MoE had not yet attempted to justify. This situation may explain why four interviewees refused to acknowledge the ineffectiveness of the strategic plan, and in the context of the media activity at the time of the interviews, this might be regarded as a logical decision.

This sense of denial about the problem created by highly centralised educational planning is reflected in the responses received to suggestions of receiving external

advice. For example, in 2009, the government of Kuwait adopted an initiative to establish a vision for the country for the year 2030. The initiative cost 12 million Kuwaiti dinars (approximately 27 million GBP), which was given to the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Tony Blair's) company to conduct this initiative. The final report stated that the education system in Kuwait is a system with one of the highest levels of expenditures when compared to the EU average, and it achieves far lower outcomes, indicating the ineffectiveness of the education system (Ayoub, 2012). The report also emphasised that education in Kuwait is relatively weak and needs greater attention from its leaders in order to improve the outputs of schools (AlMoqtei, 2010). However, the Minister of Education argued that the report does not reflect the reality of the Kuwaiti education system although, as both AlMusaileem (2010) and AlMoqatei (2010) indicated, Blair's report highlighted the reality of Kuwait's education system. This example lends credence to the argument that senior officials in the MoE were caught in a culture of denial, and they would find it extremely difficult to accept that the strategic plan was both inefficient and ineffective.

There are many other possible reasons for the rejection of Blair's report; indeed, the MoE officials gave no clear statements or justifications regarding its rejection. The report was headed: "In short, you are in danger," because Blair evidently regarded Kuwait's education system as being unable to prepare graduates to cope with future challenges (Al-Moqatei, 2010; Al-Musaileem, 2010); he then provided evidence supporting his claims. Blair's report describes pupils' achievement as weak, especially when comparing their results on international exams, such as on the TIMMS and PIRL, with those of pupils from other countries (Al-Humood, 2012). According to the Academic Freedom Watch in the Arab World (2013), the report revealed that even though the Kuwaiti government spends billions on education, pupils' achievement shows little productive return on this serious investment, and the MoE in Kuwait spends between 6.2% and 8.3% of its national income on education, while Singapore, which has one of the strongest education systems, spends only 3.1%. The report made many of these comparisons, and this might be a reason why the report was rejected. The report highlighted the low skill level of teachers, and

recommended that the MoE should select its teachers more carefully, beginning with revising policies pertaining to their deployment and training (Academic Freedom Watch in the Arab World, 2013). This issue likely touched on the MoE officials' credibility in terms of teachers' deployment, as the MoE takes responsibility for providing qualified teachers. It is also possible that in rejecting Blair's criticisms, the establishment of the Kuwaiti government's national policy might ensure that every Kuwaiti's citizen has the right to obtain a job and to decide the nature of this job (Kuwait's Ministry of Justice, 2011). A former minister of the MoE in Kuwait officially announced the report's rejection; it was argued that the report did not reflect the reality of Kuwait's education system. Moreover, the MoE took responsibility for teacher training, and established a specific department for this purpose. It is possible that the MoE officials did not accept that their plan failed to enhance teachers' skills because such an accusation questions the authority of the department, especially since, according to the Academic Freedom Watch in the Arab World (2013), the report identified weaknesses in the training programmes.

Blair's report observes that headteachers lack the authority to make vital education decisions. It recommended that headteachers should have a wider degree of authority to make decisions for their schools, especially regarding school improvement (Al-Musaileem, 2010). This is another likely reason why the MoE officials rejected the report, because it indicated that there were a number of higher-level problems that led to weaknesses in education outcomes; it recommended that schools should have a degree of decision-making autonomy, and this might have led MoE officials to feel that a large part of the responsibility of the pupils' weaknesses lay in their systematic policies, and that these policies failed to provide high-quality school outcomes. Rather than adopting Blair's report, the MoE officials complained that the report failed to recognise the strengths of Kuwait's education system (Al-Meqatei, 2010). Such claims require evidence, and the MoE officials should detail those positive aspects of Kuwait's education system in order to strengthen their defence.

Blair's report also identified prevalent corruption amongst teachers. It indicated that some teachers assign higher marks to pupils with powerful parents than they do for pupils with ordinary parents (Academic Freedom Watch in the Arab World, 2013).

Of course, such claims expose the dark side of any education system because such practices oppose educational values such as equity. It seems that this claim also failed to satisfy the MoE officials, who do not want the education system they lead to appear in a negative light.

The report also attributed pupils' low achievement levels to weaknesses in the curriculum (Ayoub, 2012). The MoE controls the curriculum design through its fully equipped and staffed Department of Curriculum. It is possible that in criticising the curriculum, the MoE's performance, as represented by the Department of Planning, is being criticised as well. The MoE officials believe that their department can provide pupils with a high-quality curriculum. This belief might constitute another reason for rejecting the report's claims, especially since the report did not indicate the specific nature of this weakness; in addition, the report did not discuss the subjects in which this weakness appeared.

Thus a culture of denial among the MoE officials is evident when considering their reactions to Blair's views, and when comparing the MoE officials' views to those of scholars and educators who accept Blair's argument. This latter pro-Blair group believes that the report articulates some of their feelings towards the problems of Kuwait's education system. My interviewees from the lower levels of the education system (especially from schools) also echoed Blair's sentiments. Al-Moqatei (2010) emphasises, to some extent, this contradiction. He indicates that it is possible that officials in Kuwait prefer to hide the negative reality of the education system to avoid portraying it as weak. Whether education officials accepted or rejected the report, it has still been suspended since 2009 on the grounds that it represents a waste of time, effort, and money.

In conclusion, the majority of the interviewees at district and school levels think that the strategic plan is both inefficient and ineffective because it fails to produce positive outcomes. Many issues could be considered in the strategic plan, and these concerns could be applied to benefit school outcomes. However, this would depend on the degree to which the strategic plan comprehensively includes and deals with educational needs and problems. This issue is presented in the following section.

5.3.2 The comprehensiveness of the strategic plan

The concept of comprehensiveness in this section refers to the degree to which the strategic plan includes all of the issues related to educational needs. Thus, this section focuses on the extent to which the strategic plan, in its centralised nature, is comprehensive. To accomplish this, the investigation examined whether centralisation enables the strategic plan to cover any and all educational needs that arise, and it ensures that the education system in Kuwait includes all of the means through which teaching and learning occur. The MoE gathers information about the needs and issues of the education system and embeds them within the plan centrally; lower levels are not involved in this process. Arguably, in order for all of these elements to develop centrally, a strategic plan requires a degree of omniscience, which is logically impossible.

The results revealed that the centralisation policy prevents the strategic plan's framework from taking into account many local issues, which are mostly the demands of the Kuwaiti society and its schools. Moreover, the external (global) issues that exert their demands are not considered either; these include benefiting from developed countries' experiences and employing technology in teaching and learning. Most of the interviewees (18 out 22) disagreed that the centralised strategic plan is comprehensive (see Table 20). The table presents the number of individuals at each level of the educational management's hierarchy who either agree or disagree about the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan. Thus, 75% of the MoE officials disagree that the strategic plan is implementable, while 83% of the district leaders and 83% of the school leaders agree.

The interviewees attributed the incomprehensiveness of the strategic plan to the following reasons:

1. Educational needs are incorrectly estimated.
2. The strategic plan cannot cater to society's problems.
3. The strategic plan impedes learning from outside.

Table 20: Interviewees' perceptions of the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan

Interviewees Managerial level	MoE officials	District leaders	School leaders	Total
Agree	1	1	2	4
Disagree	3	5	10	18
Total	4	6	12	22

Educational needs are incorrectly estimated

The first impact of the centralisation policy on the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan reflects how the pupils' educational needs are not fully covered by the strategic plan because of its centralised bias. The principal issue in this case include the degree of accuracy with which the needs of schools, districts, and parents are estimated. The interviewees believed that if schools, districts, and parents were involved in the development of the strategic plan, their actual needs would be estimated more accurately, and the strategic plan would subsequently be more comprehensive. This was emphasised in the response of Fauz, a headteacher at a secondary school with 9 years' experience. She was nervous when discussing the impact of centralisation, and questioned whether the strategic plan was realistic, as the following quotation makes clear:

> …Even though the strategic plan is centralised, there should be a degree of freedom to express what we need it to consider. The Ministry can study these needs, then decide whether they are valid or not. I think the best way to increase the degree of realism in the plan is to make the objectives stem from people working on the ground. This will make the priority more keenly felt, because these people

> know much more than those who are sitting in the Ministry that decide and dictate our needs…

Moreover, the strategic plan focuses on quantitative issues more than on qualitative ones. That is, many interviewees indicated quantitative issues, such as the number of school buildings, pupils, teachers, and employees, are minutely considered in the strategic plan whereas qualitative issues, such as pupils' achievement, teachers' skills, and curriculum quality, do not get enough consideration. This result is supported by the first set of perceptions reported in the section that presented the findings about the strategic plan's efficiency and effectiveness; namely, the factors that led to the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the centralised strategic plan, as demonstrated by the low level of pupils' academic achievement, was caused by the centralisation of resource allocation and the development of in-service programmes for teachers. It was revealed that the centralised strategic plan does not properly estimate the adequate provision of resources or determine the nature of the in-service programmes. This situation highlights the incomprehensiveness of the strategic plan because of its failure to estimate specific needs, and in its inability to provide resources and programmes as a result. The interviewees further addressed this issue. For example Nawal, a head of a department, said:

> …The MoE exaggerates too much in focusing upon numbers such as how much money they spend, how many pupils enrolled, how many pupils and teachers within each school how many schools' building we have… I think there should be further focus upon how to spend the money, how to teach pupils better and how to improve teachers' performance… It is a matter of how to manage not how much we have.

The strategic plan cannot cater to society's problems

The second impact of centralisation on the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan focuses on its coverage of society's problems. The interviewees expressed the view that the centralised strategic plan cannot cover all of society's problems because the MoE does involve lower levels of management in the process of problem identification. According to the respondents, social problems could be addressed if

stakeholders were involved, but this would contravene the MoE's policy. The interviewees provided examples of the problems that Kuwaiti society faced. The first problem pertains to terrorist ideologies that affect unemployed pupils as soon as they leave school. According to the interviewees, these problems are clear in Kuwait, but are not tackled in the strategic plan – although education is the most important factor in solving such problems. Abeer, a top district leader, commented:

> …I believe that if the MoE gave me the opportunity to participate in building the strategic plan, many problems could be addressed and solutions could be suggested.

This quote indicates that although Abeer is a top district leader, she think that she should participate in establishing the strategic plan's goals in order to ensure that the problems within the district that she leads are comprehensively addressed.

The strategic plan impedes learning from outside

Regarding the third impact of centralisation, it seems that there is a refusal to learn from outside sources. Thus, the interviewees were certain that the MoE system missed many opportunities to enlist outside help to develop the education system, as they adopted a view that they could ensure obtaining optimal results. Many developed education systems are decentralised; in particular, the countries to which the MoE sends head teachers, deputy heads, and teachers in order to benefit from their educational practices and experience are largely decentralised. The biggest obstacle to applying similar innovations from these countries (such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom) is that their education systems are relatively decentralised and the schools are relatively autonomous. In contrast, Kuwait's education system is centralised, so most of the ideas that seconded staff bring back from these countries cannot be applied because to do so requires a degree of freedom for teachers and headteachers.

The interviewees also made the point that centralisation is an obstacle to the use of new technology, which might support pupils' learning. Schools lack material resources and cannot decide for themselves the nature and quantity of the material resources they will receive. However, since the world is changing and technology is

developing – including the technology used for learning – schools need to keep up with these developments for the benefit of their pupils. According to the interviewees, centralisation does not allow schools to choose the technology that they need to achieve this purpose. Thus, the results indicated that the centralised strategic plan impedes learning from external sources. Waleed, a department head, commented:

> …We can only catch sight of the technology in books and television. We would hope, if we could, to choose it. In fact, the Ministry could import this technology without our recommendation, but this does not happen. I think the reason is that the MoE uses the wrong people to decide our needs on our behalf…

The respondents do not think that the MoE's strategic plan is comprehensive because stakeholders and civil society institutions are excluded; the only people included in the planning process are those who are already working in the field of education, and who are located in the MoE. Puanmau (2006) is an advocate of comprehensive strategic planning. He argues that it should take into account social, economic, political, cultural, and spiritual environments. He also emphasises the need for resources to be used for the benefit of the entire community.

It appears from Table 20 that, once again, some of the MoE officials have different perspectives about the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan. The interviewee from the MoE failed to provide realistic evidence to support the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan. The interviewees initially mentioned that all educational elements, such as teachers, curricula, and pupils, are considered in the education system. For example, Norah, MoE official, indicated:

> …If we look at the strategic plan, we will find the three educational elements are broadly included… It is therefore comprehensive.

Norah provided relatively shallow responses about the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan, which reflected his positive attitude towards this issue. However, during discussions about various issues, such as complaints raised related to the curricula, pupil achievement levels, as well as teachers' qualifications and training

issues, these interviewees began to raise their own concerns that related to these areas. In addition, the MoE officials admitted that the strategic plan failed to include appropriate technological resources to teach pupils. The only type of technology that they mentioned was computers, but there is evidence that computers are only used to study information technology, and have not yet been applied to support other subjects.

To conclude, the interviewees believed that the centralised nature of the strategic plan prevented it from being comprehensive. They argued that if more people contributed to this plan, the actual needs and problems of the schools, and of society as a whole, would be more accurately assessed, and new technologies would be better applied to benefit the pupils. The interviewees showed a great tendency towards the decentralisation policy, as adopted in many countries, as it allows different parties to participate effectively in strategic planning to ensure that a given societies' needs are addressed, and its overall value is increased.

It is not sufficient that the plan be comprehensive, unless one takes into account the factors that lead to the achievement of goals. The implementation of the plan requires that the plan be adequate enough for the implementers to be able to enact it. These abilities may be affected by policies that should facilitate the implementation process. The following section investigates issues that may be regarded as obstacles to exacting the strategic plan, in its centralised nature.

5.5.3. Implementability

The concept of implementation refers to carrying out the work. If this work is easy and clear enough to be carried out smoothly and successfully, the work is implementable, or able to be implemented. In this section, implementability refers to whether the strategic plan is implementable or not. In addition, the centralised framework of the strategic plan may (or may not) cause barriers to the successful completion of the plan. Thus, this section focuses on factors that may affect the implementation of the strategic plan, considering that the process of its development is controlled centrally by the MoE. The implementation process of the strategic plan

is defined as the procedures and actions that are undertaken to achieve the goals and objectives of the strategic plan (Mohammad, 2011). The centralised nature of the strategic plan was viewed by the research participants as a barrier to successful implementation of the strategic plan.

The majority of the interviewees (17 out of 22) agreed that a centralised policy makes it difficult to exact the strategic plan (see Table 21). The table presents the number of individuals at each level of the educational management hierarchy who either agree or disagree with the implementability of the strategic plan. Thus, 25% of the MoE officials disagreed that the strategic plan is implementable, while 66% of the district leaders and 83% of the school leaders felt this way.

By analysing the responses of the interviewees who disagreed with proposition that the strategic plan is implementable, three main impacts of centralisation on the implementability of the strategic plan were evident:

1. Lack of clarity
2. Lack of resources
3. Rigidity of the plan

Table 21: Interviewees' perceptions of the implementability of the strategic plan

Interviewees' managerial level	**MoE officials**	**District leaders**	**School leaders**	**Total**
Agree	3	2	2	7
Disagree	1	4	10	15
Total	4	6	12	22

Lack of clarity

The lack of clarity of the strategic plan represented a major concern for the majority of the interviewees. Here, it is essential to distinguish between a lack of understanding of the plan and a poor presentation of the plan to the implementers. Some of the interviewees commented on both the vagueness of the plan and the fact that they had not seen the plan in its entirety. Some of the interviewees indicated that the MoE did not provide copies of the entire strategic plan to schools and districts, so they were largely unfamiliar with the plan's components. Other interviewees indicated that they were unaware of the strategic plan's objectives, or they had little, if any, knowledge or understanding of the most appropriate ways to implement the plan. These instances reflect the idea that a lack of clarity is the main issue when implementing the strategic plan.

The interviewees emphasised that if lower-level management, such as schools and districts, were involved in the strategic plan's formulation, many ambiguous elements would be clearer to them. I would argue, however, that the lack of involvement of lower-level management cannot be held entirely responsible for the lack of clarity in the strategic plan. The MoE could introduce the plan to all levels via more accessible methods, such as through conferences or programmes, to clarify and justify goals, objectives, and methods of achievement. It is clear that none of these approaches were utilised by the MoE.

From the perspective of the interviewees, if the objectives and intended methodology of the strategic plan were based on consultations with schools, it would be easier for those working within the schools to understand the plan, as it would better reflect their actual needs and desires according to their own experiences. Latifah, a head of a department at a secondary school, provided a strong response regarding the extent to which the strategic plan is understood:

> Look, I would understand the plan if it included our frequent problems with pupils and teachers. I would understand it if it included our requirements for managing pupils and for successful teaching. I

> would understand it if it included solutions to the difficulties that we witness during our service in schools…

Latifah continued her response by explaining the basis for her complaints, clearly referring to centralisation as the reason for the lack of a better understanding of the plan:

> …I am not saying that these objectives are not weak. What I am trying to say is that we are people who have spent our working days with pupils and teachers for many years. If we were to be involved in the strategic plan, we could introduce our problems and needs as we have experienced and suffered for many years. It would be easy for us to understand plans that take schools' recommendations into account when setting the objectives because they would then reflect the needs with which we are familiar...

It is clear that her response refers to the approach through which the MoE, as the top of the education hierarchy, informs the lower levels about the strategic plan's components. This approach, according interviewees such as Latifah, does not enable the lower levels to participate in constructing the objectives for the strategic plan. The interviewees indicated that this approach to constructing the plan would allow others at the lower levels to better understand and accept it, making it easier to implement.

Some authors have emphasised the importance of finding appropriate approaches to deliver the strategic plan to the lower levels. For example, Al-Sakarna (2010) states that theorists emphasise that in order for a strategic plan to be efficient, the lower levels must first accept the plan because they are the ones who will implement it, and are therefore accountable for meeting its goals and objectives. Because lower-level management teams are the actual implementers of the plan, top-level management should allow them to review the strategic plan in order to ensure that the lower levels understand the plan's the goals, objectives, and strategies. Management at the low-level management should also be asked to provide feedback (Al-Sakarna, 2010). Reviewing the strategic plan allows implementers to review the goals, objectives, and strategies, while informing the top levels about whether they perceive the

strategic plan as clear or vague. This, in turn, allows the senior management to make changes or modifications to meet the recommendations made by the lower tier. Mohammad (2011) emphasises this position, arguing that the MoE should distribute the strategic plan to lower levels, as they are participants as well as implementers. In other words, the lower levels should implement what they have helped to plan – an approach that will make it easier for them to understand the strategic plan in a clear and effective manner. Thus, both Al-Sakarna (2010) and Mohammad (2011) express opinions that are in agreement with the interviewees' perceptions that they need a degree of involvement in the formulation of the strategic plan in order to obtain a better understanding of its implications.

In conclusion, the interviewees referred to the following issues regarding their ability to implement the strategic plan. In order to obtain an optimal implementation of any plan, the directive itself should have a high degree of clarity, since the individuals responsible for implementing the system, such as school heads and teachers; need to understand all the elements related to the plan. Moreover, the plan should expresses the actual needs of the educational system; if the plan is based on the actual needs "in the field", the implementers will guide their efforts according to the needs that they have recognised throughout their careers, especially as they worked within schools and would be better able to understand all of the objectives related to their actual needs. The interviewees indicated that a centralisation policy reduces the clarity of the strategic plan; consequently, this lack of clarity affects the process of implementation of the strategic plan.

Lack of resources

A lack of resources appears to be the main cause of many concerns presented in this section; this includes the interviewees' concerns regarding the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the strategic plan. The interviewees claimed that schools lack sufficient resources to teach their pupils, and they also possess ongoing concerns regarding the bureaucracy of the system, especially when schools are trying to obtain teaching materials. According to the participants' responses, a lack of resources also leads to implementation difficulties; the interviewees emphasised that they face

problems in fulfilling the MoE's requirements because of the lack of resources. As mentioned earlier, districts and schools hold no authority when selecting the resources that they need for educational purposes, whether for pupils' learning or for general school equipment. As a result, the implementation process cannot be fulfilled because it requires more resources than have been provided due to the restrictive centralised policy. Arguably, the bureaucracy that surrounds the obtaining of resources also affects the quality of the resources. The MoE in Kuwait provides schools with resources, as specific departments within the ministry coordinate with the districts to determine resource allocation. Regardless of the quality of these resources, schools have no choice but to accept whatever is sent to them, and they must use these resources when teaching lessons. The implementation of any plan, therefore, requires resources that are adequate enough to achieve the plan's objectives. Morad commented:

> …I am not convinced by the quality of material resources which teachers use to teach pupils. But, accepting them is better than having nothing. Nobody should be blamed regarding pupils' results…

Adel, the head of a science department at a middle school, complained of a shortage of essential resources, particularly because science lessons include many experiments and therefore require a variety of materials:

> …If you have time, I can take you to see how poorly equipped our science laboratories are because of the lack of resources. If I had a budget and the authority to buy them, you would see how rich and full of equipment and resources the laboratory could be. I am sure the pupils would want to spend all day and all night at school…

It is clear from Morad and Adel's statements that schools face problems when implementing the strategic plan's focus on increasing pupils' achievement because, in order to achieve positive results, the schools require sufficient materials; these include human, material, and financial resources. The interviewees thus perceive the strategic plan as difficult to exact because lower levels are not able to make decisions regarding the quality and quantity of the resources, according to their knowledge.

Rigidity of the plan

A third reason as to why ineffective implementation may be evident is that the strategic plan might be too rigid or inflexible. Participants' responses implied that there are no opportunities for them to change or modify the strategic plan at any stage of its formulation or implementation in response to any recommendations made or the identification of weaknesses by lower-level management. As far as the interviewees are aware, the MoE rejected recommendations to make changes to, or to add or remove any objectives of the strategic plan if they were presented by individuals working within the schools. In fact, according to the interviewees, if the MoE were to accept recommendations from the lower levels, the MoE would have to allow individuals at the lower tiers to participate in the development of the strategic plan, which is not an option. This may cause problems because the interviewees are convinced that any plan should be flexible enough to allow changes to be made, if they are needed. In addition, there are instances where changes to the overall plan may solve some of these problems. The interviewees believe that if they had the chance to submit their recommendations, many problems could be avoided, thus saving time, effort, and money. As Sanad, deputy head, pointed out:

> …We are only allowed to implement the strategic plan. Even if we expect problems, we cannot change the situation. Sometimes changes are made, but only as reactions or responses to the consequences of problems. I think an inflexible plan cannot achieve its goals…

Al-Sakarna (2010) indicates that it is essential to take into account the recommendations of the low-level managers before the implementation of the plan commences. Al-Sakarna states that obtaining feedback helps top-level managers to discover any issues that may have been overlooked and, subsequently, these elements could be incorporated into the refinement of the plan. By allowing lower-level managers to participate in the formulation of the plan, the implementation process would be supported because the consideration of their perspectives could lead to a more thoroughly considered plan that would be associated with higher chances of successful implementation (Al-Sakarna, 2010). Consequently, changes and modifications to the initiative can be avoided because many considerations were

identified during the plan's formulation stage. Carrizo et al. (2003) argued that this can be achieved by activating the information systems across the various levels of the education system. For example, the information system within each level can gather information from different stakeholders, who share an interest in education, by arranging meetings or other methods of communication to obtain their perceptions, suggestions, and recommendations for potential consideration in the strategic plan. I would argue that this approach of gathering information is strongly connected to the policy of a decentralised education system. A decentralised system is one where each level within the educational structure conducts its own plan. In this case, each level requires its own information system that would be used to gather information, and it would be characterised by greater participation from the stakeholders (Carizzo et al., 2011).

When discussing this situation with the interviewees, it appears as though this situation is the complete opposite of the MoE's policy of strategic plan formulation. It was mentioned earlier that the MoE has appointed the Department of Planning and Development as the entity that holds responsibility for plan formulation and enactment. The final document of the strategic plan is issued once this department has reviewed the plan and submitted it to the higher level for approval. Regarding this practice, Al-Sakarna (2010) stated that when the top-level management involves lower levels in the strategic plan's formulation, this decreases the perception that the strategic plan was only produced by those in the upper tier; instead, the plan becomes a conglomeration of the expertise and experience of all levels of management. In fact, all organisations face changes in their internal and external environments; therefore, the organisation should be responsive to these changes, which could be observed by any of its members. The interviewees articulated that the centralisation policy prevents such changes from occurring, since alterations to any of the decisions made can only be proposed by top-level management. Bader, a headteacher, provides an example about a situation he experienced when he proposed changes that were completely rejected by the MoE:

> …The same strategic plan has been applied for many years without change. The same document is utilised from the beginning of the implementation to the end. There is no option for conducting change, and our suggestions are not taken into account. For example, there was a recommendation from some educators to establish vocational education in order to provide opportunities to pupils who want to enrol in this kind of education as it would help them pursue their future career goals. The MoE refused this suggestion, which might be a good solution for pupils who graduate from school and do not want to enrol in university. Instead, they are forced to enter other fields that they do not like, such as the military, although they have a huge amount of energy that could be supported by vocational education. I think that they are wasting good potential professionals.

It is obvious that the interviewees want to participate in the strategic plan in order to ensure flexibility. I suggest that involving a third party could be useful for increasing the flexibility of the strategic plan. For example, several stakeholders could be involved as their perceptions regarding the goals and objectives of the strategic plan may be of benefit in the formulation and implementation stages. Stakeholders, such as parents, can suggest issues that may not have been considered previously in the development of the strategic plan; therefore, the fact that stakeholders may be allowed to participate in these processes may reduce the plan's rigidity.

Seven interviewees did not express concerns regarding the implementability of the strategic plan. For example, the three MoE leaders indicated that the strategic plan of the MoE is unique and costs a large amount of money. Two of the interviewees seemed to ignore the lower levels' concerns about this issue and continued to praise the plan. For example, Saad said:

> …This plan cost a lot of money and consumed a lot of time and effort. Do you expect that we constructed a plan which is not implementable?

In my opinion, this raises the issue mentioned by some interviewees insofar as the MoE appears to focus on the idealistic picture of the plan rather than on its implementability. This issue was also raised by Al-Sharrah (2002), when he mentioned that in some cases, the MoE focuses on the plan's formalities rather than on whether it is implementable or not. It can, therefore, be seen that those who read

the document that outlines the plan will regard it as ideal on paper, but they will not be able to judge its adequacy in terms of the implementers' ability to carry it out.

The two interviewees from the districts and the other two from the schools did not reflect any concerns regarding the strategic plan's implementability. Their responses did not reflect what was being asked of them. It seems to me that they did not want to criticise the plan because they only focused on the need for training programmes when implementing the strategic plan. Although this issue is important, the MoE designed training programmes for the implementers within the six districts. I discovered that these four interviewees did not join in these training programmes; therefore, their responses have become less valid. However, training programmes cannot be considered as indicators of the plan's success. Rather, they can be regarded as factors that assist the implementers in following through with the plan.

In conclusion, the results show that the interviewees regard the strategic plan as difficult to implement. In my opinion, this is the most dangerous issue that faces the strategic plan of an educational system because failure to implement the plan means failure to attain its goals. The strategic plan is a long-term plan that needs years of implementation, as well as a substantial budget. Failure means that many years of work and money are wasted. Consequently, the whole education system could be in danger.

The results indicated that there are barriers to the strategic plan's implementation caused by the centralisation policy. The following section investigates the MoE's policy regarding collaboration and participation with individuals inside or outside the education system.

5.5.4 Collaborativeness and participativeness

This section focuses on the advantages of allowing centralised strategic planning to become a collaborative and participative process. As previously mentioned, the education system in Kuwait consists of three managerial tiers (MoE, districts, and schools). This section considers the extent to which each of these tiers works individually or collaboratively during the formulation of the strategic plan. It also

explores the collaboration between the MoE, institutions, and stakeholders within civil society. The results demonstrate that the centralisation policy that controls strategic planning has resulted in ineffective collaboration between the three tiers of the education system in Kuwait; specifically, effective collaboration does not seem to exist between the MoE and the stakeholders or civil society institutions. The same result can be observed when centralisation does not allow people from outside the MoE to share in their efforts to achieve certain aims.

As mentioned in chapter 3, collaboration in general implies that two sides willingly combine their efforts towards achieving shared goals: "collaboration is a generic term for an agreement to work together" (Lumby, 2009, p.125). However, in organisational situations, collaboration can also refer to a type of business style applied by professionals in order to achieve shared goals (Friend and Bursuck, 1996). The interviewees focused on working together and on sharing thoughts and efforts within the internal environment of the MoE and between the MoE and the external environment. The majority of the interviewees (17 out of the 22) disagreed that the centralised framework, including the strategic plan, offers those at the lower levels of the educational system the chance to collaborate and participate (see Table 22). The table presents the number of individuals at each level of the educational management hierarchy who either agreed or disagreed about the collaborativeness and participativeness of the strategic plan. Thus, 25% of the MoE officials, 66% of the district leaders, and 100% of the school leaders disagreed that the strategic plan involved opportunities for collaboration and participation.

The interviewees indicated that the centralisation policy is the cause of the isolation and the sense of disconnection observed between the three tiers, as well as between the MoE and the stakeholders. Two reasons for this can be drawn from the interviewees' responses:

1. Prevention of internal collaboration
2. Prevention of external collaboration

Table 22: Interviewees' perceptions of the collaborativeness and participativeness of the strategic plan

Interviewees' managerial level	MoE officials	District leaders	School leaders	Total
Agree	3	2	0	5
Disagree	1	4	12	17
Total	4	6	12	22

Prevention of internal collaboration

The interviewees indicated that as long as the MoE continued to apply centralisation to the formulation of the strategic plan, any effective ideas put forward by the lower levels would not be considered, so any opportunity for them to benefit from the formulation of the strategic plan would be reduced. It can, therefore, be seen that the interviewees considered the centralisation policy as an obstacle to the implementation of a collaborative approach. The interviewees indicated that they were confident in their ability to enrich the strategic plan, if they were allowed to participate in its formulation. Hajar, a district leader, commented:

> …When I meet with my colleagues from other districts unofficially, we share many ideas that would support the strategic plan and enrich its implementation. I am sure that we can work together as a team; everybody can help everyone else with ideas. [Hajar paused, then continued] Do what we [indicates the MoE] want, that's all…

Similar concerns can clearly be found in schools. Fahad expressed his desire to participate in the strategic plan's formulation as well:

> …I believe that I and other headteachers should participate in this strategic plan because we have long experience in schools. In

> addition, we need to inform and to be informed, inform the MoE about our visions and to be informed about the strategic plan's implications. It is a matter of giving opportunity. I think the Ministry of Education should expand the Department of Planning and Improvement in a way that includes schools and districts representatives. Each representative might coordinate between schools and the MoE. These representatives could also gather schools' and districts' ideas and suggestions and convey them to the MoE. I think this is a good way of working together. Unfortunately, there are no signs of any intentions to apply such an initiative because this means reviewing regulations about decentralisation...

In this case, it can be seen that the interviewees believed that as long as teamwork between the three tiers is not permitted, collaboration within the education system does not exist. The interviewees indicated that making lower levels responsible for implementation alone, with no involvement in planning, reduced the likelihood with which the tiers exchanged their knowledge, ideas, and experiences with one another in a collaborative effort that could enhance the initiative. The interviewees suggested that if the MoE were to apply a teamwork-based approach, this could increase productive collaboration between the three levels of management. Consequently, according to the interviewees, the chance to benefit from ideas and experiences, and the chance to suggest objectives and priorities, is reduced without collaboration.

The interviewees also described the quality of the decisions that might be achieved through a collaborative approach. As Coleman and Bush commented, "quality decisions emerge from a full utilisation of the knowledge and skills of team members" (Coleman and Bush, 1994, p. 280). Thus, high-quality decisions can be seen to emerge from teamwork, due to the fact that participation via this approach implies that different actions are employed, such as seeking suggestions, agreeing, disagreeing, and seeking clarifications about various elements of the plan (Everard and Morris, 2004). True collaboration is demonstrated only within teams where all members feel as though their contributions are valued, where the goal is clear, where they share in decision-making, and where they sense they are respected (Cook and Friend, 1996). According to the interviewees, centralisation prevented positive interactions between levels. West-Burnham (1994) argues that effective strategic

management demands a variety of approaches, including fewer roles for groups in the formal hierarchy and more groups and teamwork situations at the bottom levels of the hierarchy. This sentiment seems to be aligned with the interviewees' claims that when the top of the hierarchy (represented in this study by the MoE) is solely responsible for decision making, it reduces the chance that team-working principles and opportunities are applied. Meanwhile, Ugboro et al. (2011) argues that where top-level managers, strategic managers, and unit managers work largely in isolation, these individuals might sometimes pursue goals that do not match those set out in the strategic plan. This supports the interviewees' perceptions (such as those of Fahad) that different managerial levels need to collaborate in order to seek additional clarification and other beneficial contributions (as indicated earlier) that fall in line with the statements of Everard and Morris (2004).

Prevention of external collaboration

The second issue is that centralisation in Kuwaiti education inhibits collaboration, and this has to do with the system's failure to involve the institutions and stakeholders from civil society in the development of the strategic plan. The interviewees indicated that centralisation meant that no one from outside the MoE was involved. This also reduced the degree of collaboration between the MoE and the institutions and stakeholders. The problem was evident between all three tiers, depriving them of the chance to benefit from additional ideas and recommendations. Saad, a highly placed leader in the MoE, was the only MoE official who agreed that there should be collaboration and participation from different parties. Saad made the following point:

> …I believe that in very developed education systems, civil society institutions and other parties are completely involved in setting the strategic plan. I believe also that we can benefit from their participation, but the regulations of our MoE prevent that. For certain reasons, we cannot involve them, at least at present, but I hope we can in the future…

The regulations that Saad mentioned refer to the centralisation policy, implying that the MoE was solely responsible for the formulation of the strategic plan, so other

parties (such as civil society institutions) were excluded from this process. According to this and other claims made by the interviewees from lower levels, it seems that the respondents agreed that the centralised strategic plan did not support collaboration between the ministry and other external parties in this process, and it also prevented such collaboration between the three tiers of the Kuwaiti education system. Noor, a deputy head, confirms this by stating that:

> …The MoE imposes that no one from outside can effectively participate in the strategic plan. The only thing they can do is provide information such as statistics that the MoE need for planning issues. I know that in some countries, even pupils could be involved in the strategic plan. I think we need ages to reach that…

The interviewees indicated that the centralised policy prevented the outside community from being involved in the formulation of the strategic plan via a participatory approach. Involving different parties (such as stakeholders) would require that their needs and situations be considered, so as to ensure that the planning process included a broad range of participation (Puanmau, 2006). As defined in the section that discussed theoretical perspectives, it is known that stakeholders are the individuals who share in the interests of an organisation in order to achieve definite aims, either individually or collectively (Johnson and Scholes, 2006). Within the education system, according to this definition, each context includes its own sectors and civil society institutions that hold interests in the educational system's outputs. Accordingly, the interviewees thought that it was necessary to address the institutions, groups, and individuals who have interests in these areas.

Certain authors have expanded upon this concept by suggesting that stakeholders should become more engaged in the strategic planning, and that their involvement should not be limited to consultations. Hendrick (2003) maintained that stakeholders should be involved in planning and decision-making processes in order to allow for continued knowledge exchange between the stakeholders and the organisation; in this way, stakeholders' needs and wishes are more likely to be met. To apply Hendrick's perception here would that stakeholders should be allowed to participate in the strategic plan; this would require that the policy of centralisation be revised in

such a way that allows for wider participation and collaboration from various stakeholders from both inside and outside the MoE. According to the interviewees, since stakeholders were not involved in the strategic plan, the MoE missed many opportunities to benefit from their ideas, which might not have been considered when formulating the strategic plan. Thus, the interviewees believed that excluding stakeholders prevented collaboration with people outside the MoE, and this represented a weakness of the strategic plan.

In contrast to the interviewees who thought that the centralised approach of the strategic plan was against the principles of collaboration and participation, five interviewees believed that the centralised strategic plan did not contradict principles of collaboration and participation. Initially, this seemed to me to be promising in terms of obtaining results that might change the notion that centralisation is a process where the decision-making power is limited to MoE officials. I expected to encounter a degree of decentralisation in the formulation of the strategic plan, especially as the five interviewees in question were from the MoE and its associated districts. However, when looking at the responses, it appears that the policy still represented an extreme application of centralisation.

Nadia was one of the interviewees from the MoE and she did not accept the claim that centralisation in strategic planning does not allow for collaboration and participation. Nadia stated that:

> …Within each district, there is a small department for planning. The MoE established these departments in order to facilitate the planning process and utilise people as much as possible. This is evidence that the MoE allows people from lower levels to contribute on the strategic plan…

When I asked Nadia to be more specific and outline precisely what these departments did in terms of participating in the strategic plan, I did not receive an answer. The other two MoE official interviewees also made the same claim: they relied on the fact that a planning department exists within each district. By comparing this claim to the responses of the interviewees from the districts, especially from within one of

the planning departments within a district, I drew a different conclusion. The planning department interviewee indicated that his department only provided statistics to the Department of Planning and Development, and he stated that he did not participate in the formulation of the strategic plan. In addition, none of the other interviewees within the districts supported the MoE officials' claim that the strategic plan encouraged participation. My interpretation is that the MoE officials interviewed in this study considered providing information as a kind of participation. Furthermore, it is apparent that the MoE officials wanted the strategic plan to be regarded as ideal rather than be criticised.

The two district leaders believed that the MoE involved them in making some decisions in some instances. For example, Hajar indicated that:

> …The MoE sometimes shares with us some decisions about some issues. Some decisions require our approval, and the Ministry is not able to move forward without us…

When I asked about the nature of these decisions, the two interviewees provided examples of regular decisions that were being made (such as maintenance issues and expanding the size of the management buildings), and that did not suggest that there was any form of participation occurring during the enactment of the strategic plan. Maintenance issues require that head teachers contact the district and discuss fixing or redecorating parts of their schools with the department of the maintenance. The district then contacts the MoE and waits for its approval. The only decision that the headteachers make revolves around the time at which the maintenance work is conducted. This issue is clearly related to regular routines rather than to collaboration or participation in the strategic plan.

The results indicated that collaboration does not occur between the three tiers that lie within the education system and the outside community. The following issue may emphasise this result, as it focuses on the communicative capacity of the strategic plan. If communication between the tiers is weak, it emphasises the weak collaboration among them.

5.5.5 Communicative capacity

Communicative capacity focuses on the extent to which the centralised framework of the strategic plan's formulation and implementation depends on healthy communication between the MoE officials, district leaders, and school leaders. According to the results, the centralised strategic plan prevented positive communication from occurring between the three tiers of the education system. The centralisation policy was evident in that the MoE sometimes applied downward communication, which was seen as rather ineffective. The results showed that there should be both upward and downward communication to serve the strategic plan's formulation and implementation.

The majority interviewees (18 out of 22) indicated that communication between the three tiers of the education system was relatively weak (see Table 23). Thus, two (50%) of the MoE officials disagreed with the communicative capacity of the strategic plan, while 66% of the district leaders and 83% of the school leaders felt this way.

The interviewees also indicated that there was a lack of productive meetings or any other kind of contact between the three tiers regarding any educational needs and problems that should have been considered in the strategic plan. For example, according to the interviewees, there was no effective communication, which is essential for supporting student learning and assessment, curriculum development, and the ongoing improvement of teachers' performance. The interviewees think that the centralisation policy affects this issue through two factors:

1. Lack of downward communication
2. Lack of upward communication

Table 23: Interviewees' perceptions of the communicative capacity of the strategic plan

Interviewees' managerial level	MoE officials	District leaders	School leaders	Total
Agree	2	2	2	6
Disagree	2	4	10	16
Total	4	6	12	22

The interviewees emphasised that communication pertains to healthy contact between the managerial levels, and it includes the delivery and receipt of information, while getting feedback from each other. Such practice seems to be normal and leads to positive results, indicating that healthy communication exists between the tiers in the education system. However, the situation in Kuwait seems to be different. Sanad, a deputy head, described how school meetings are only conducted with districts and not with all three tiers in the management system:

> I do not think that what we do is a good example of communication. Even during our meetings, we are mostly in a position of listening rather than speaking. I do not mean that we do not speak at all, but we mostly respond to questions and talk about regular issues such as incidents and problems that occur during our workdays. I believe that we have a lot to say if these meeting were arranged to listen to our ideas, such as how to improve pupils' levels. These meetings take place mostly according to the district's requests and not our wish…

Sanad's quote illustrates that some interviewees focused on a specific kind of communication. This was apparent when the interviewees used the expression "healthy communication" when describing the nature of the discussions they thought should take place. Furthermore, the interviewees indicated that schools mostly communicated with the districts, and there was a lack of communication between

schools and the MoE. This emphasised the fact that the district acts more as a coordinator between the MoE and the schools than as a local authority.

The interviewees indicated that the MoE did not conduct meetings with schools or districts to discuss issues that would be considered in the strategic plan. This was because the plan was formulated by a team that was located at the top of the hierarchy. According to the interviewees, the centralisation of the strategic plan was one of the causes for the weakening of communication between the three tiers. My main focus stems from this result. With further investigation into how this policy impacted the communicative capacity of the strategic plan, I found the following result from the interviewees' responses: According to the lower levels, regular meetings did not take place; if a meeting did take place, it would be arranged by and for the higher levels, mostly between the schools and districts. The same situation was observed between the districts and the MoE. Thus, the lower levels were not in a position to decide the scheduling or subject of any meeting. The interviewees, especially those working within the schools, indicated that because they were only acting as implementers (while the MoE was the policymaker and planner), they waited for higher levels to arrange meetings and to decide the purpose of those meetings. The respondents also emphasised that if they were involved in the construction of the strategic plan, then they would have been engaged in communications throughout the entire process – beginning from the time the plan was initiated, and following through to the implementation and assessment stages. Taibah concisely summarised the issue of communication:

> …Bringing my voice to the Ministry of Education is difficult. You may say that I can tell them what I want during our regular meetings. There is no chance to do so because the purpose of these meeting is not for hearing us. People who meet with us are not those who should listen to us or with whom we should discuss our opinions. I believe that these meetings are important, but nobody can say that this exemplifies good communication between schools and the MoE. I also believe if the meetings involved discussing strategic plan issues, this would be good communication because most if not all educational issues would be discussed between all tiers of the education system…

In this way, the interviewees appear to be seeking a kind of communication that ensured their contribution to the formulation of the strategic plan. According to Windahl et al. (1992), communication involves the sharing of emotions, ideas, perspectives, data, and knowledge. Riches (1994) suggests that communication represents a constant flow of actions, reactions, questions, and answers in a dialogue between minds. These two perspectives indicate that the concept of communication implies that there are reactions between the different sides, and that there is an exchange of knowledge between each of them. From this view, one can understand what the interviewees meant when they said that they wanted "healthy communication", because the meetings they attended with the top levels did not support the exchange or sharing of ideas. Additionally, the interviewees made it clear that they aspired to partake in a kind of productive communication, by which they could discuss and suggest educational issues that might be beneficial to the strategic plan. Riches (1994) commented that through effective and shared debates and dialogue via concentrated communication, mutually agreeable outcomes can be reached.

In addition, the interviewees suggested that the meetings with the higher levels were conducted at the request of these levels. This clearly demonstrated that the MoE was applying *downward communication*, flowing from higher to lower levels of the organisation (Robbins et al., 2010). This approach requires that higher levels keep lower levels informed regarding policies and processes in order to highlight areas that require more work and to provide feedback on the performance of the lower levels. However, the interviewees made it clear that the communication they experienced with the MoE did not match this description. They stated that any of the communications that took place only involved discussing basic issues, rather than addressing any discussions surrounding the strategic plan. Aisha commented:

> …We do not discuss anything relating to the strategic plan in our meetings. When they want us they can easily reach us but the opposite is more difficult…

Thus, the interviewees required more support in understanding the strategic plan via effective communication from the higher levels. Ugboro et al. (2010) supports this conclusion, stating that open and ongoing communication throughout an organisation results in an improved understanding of the direction of the organisation. Interviewees reported that *upward communication* – where information flows from the lower levels to the higher levels, typically in the form of feedback regarding problems or progress updates (Robbins et al., 2010) – did not occur, as communication was organised by the top levels. This reduced lower-level managers' opportunities to inform the top levels about the schools' progress in terms of achieving the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.

Six of the interviewees agreed that the centralisation policy applied during the formulation and implementation of the strategic plan provided additional opportunities for communication. All of the participants mentioned that there were frequent meetings between the three levels, especially between the MoE and the districts, and between the districts and schools. However, it would appear that all of the interviewees were focused on the quality of the meetings, as viewed from their own perspectives, in light of their own goals. As a former science teacher, I attended many meetings with district officials, and occasionally with the MoE. From my own experience of these meetings, I held relatively positive thoughts regarding the communicative capacity surrounding the strategic plan. I was left with this impression simply because I did not consider that the quality of these meetings was based on what should be addressed, nor did I think that these meetings should have addressed the educational issues that were, or should have been, included in the strategic plan. By looking at Farah's response (a district leader), it seems clear that Farah shared my perception of the communicative capacity of the strategic plan:

> …The centralised strategic plan does not contradict communication between the managerial levels of the MoE. I meet with schools frequently, and I meet with officials from the MoE. We discuss many issues related to the educational process. The MoE is keen to meet with us whenever needed. I do that with schools as well…

This quote emphasises the claims made by other interviewees, who said that the top-levels decided the time of the meetings by using downward communication; however, the majority of the interviewees still regarded the meetings as unproductive, as they felt that the meetings should involve deeper levels of communication, including the exchange of ideas and feedback across the three tiers.

In conclusion, the majority of the interviewees view the centralised strategic plan as lacking productive communication between the three ties of the education system. The results indicated that the MoE applies downward communication so that the lower levels are waiting for the timing of these communications to take place in order to discuss any educational issues. In addition, the nature of this communication puts the implementers of the strategic plans in the position of receiving orders, rather than in the position of making decisions. This implicates that there is a degree of bureaucracy within the MoE, which implies that lower levels are not able to handle critical issues such as resource allocation. Alternatively, those in lower-level roles should follow the MoE's regulations and procedures in order to obtain any resources. In the next section, the issues that result from the bureaucratisation of the centralised strategic plan are discussed.

5.5.6 Bureaucratisation

The presentation of the findings in this section is slightly different to that of the other sections. The reason for this is that all of the interviewees agreed that the centralised strategic plan increases the presence of bureaucracy in the education system. This unanimity can also be seen in the quantitative results. However, the investigation in this phase indicated that the interviewees are split into two groups. The first group perceived bureaucracy as a negative phenomenon, whereas the other group perceived it as positive.

In this section, bureaucracy deals with the degree to which an organisation controls resources and time, while making decisions related to resources allocation among the lower levels, including schools. The results suggested that the centralisation policy of the strategic plan increased bureaucracy which, in turn, affected the lower-level

managers' abilities to implement the plan successfully. Bureaucracy was seen as an obstacle to the adequate provision of financial, material, and human resources to the lower levels due to tough regulations.

The findings related to this theme highlighted that the interviewees had different attitudes towards this issue, especially when they talked about concerns that arose from bureaucracy. To elaborate, all of the interviewees agreed that the centralised policy adopted in the strategic planning of the educational system in Kuwait increased levels of bureaucracy. Where they differed on this issue was the degree to which the bureaucracy positively or negatively impacted the strategic plan. The interviewees' description of this influence depended on how they evaluated the consequences of the bureaucracy, which implied that there was a degree of control resulting from the centralised framework underlying the strategic plan.

The first group of interviewees, which represented the majority of respondents, expressed concerns related to bureaucracy that stemmed from the centralised strategic plan. The results showed that the interviewees (16 out of 22), specifically four district leaders and 12 school leaders, regarded the bureaucracy generated by the centralisation as one of the weaknesses of the strategic plan. Further investigation with the interviewees revealed two main reasons as to why the bureaucracy formed in response to the centralised nature of the strategic planning process:

1. Inaccuracy in the amount and types of resources deployed;
2. Obstacles to obtaining resources.

Inaccuracy in the amount and type of resources deployed

The participants indicated that as long as there was a policy of centralisation in place that encouraged bureaucratisation, there would not be equity because the entire decision-making process regarding the amount of finances distributed belonged to the MoE. The centralisation policy demanded that all schools receive the same budget which is, in fact, an example of inequity. To elaborate, the budget provided to schools in most cases is insufficient according to the interviewees, because schools are not able to participate in budget-setting. Moreover, the respondents expressed

opinions regarding equity that were more negative: they stated that providing all schools with the same amount of budgetary resources was unfair because schools differed in terms of size, the number of pupils, the number of teachers, and the number of staff. These individuals believed that it was not logical that schools with a larger number of pupils received the same budget as schools with fewer pupils. They expressed similar opinions regarding the numbers of teachers and the size of their schools. Bader, a primary school headteacher, indicated his disagreement to the equal distribution of financial resources in the context of the centralisation policy, stating that:

> …I do not know why the MoE provides the same amount of money to all schools. Of course there are differences, and I think this is a big mistake. It is unfair to equalise schools with a big number of staff and pupils with schools with fewer staff and pupils. You can find that some schools face shortages in financial resources, and you cannot imagine the long path that we have to follow in order to get more. Ironically, some schools are able to save money at the end of the academic year and more than that; the MoE rewards them for that...

The respondents also voiced their concerns regarding the quality of teachers and staff deployed to various schools, according to the MoE's regulations, which gives all applicants the opportunity to have a job. According to the respondents, this method of deployment adversely affects the quality of work being provided within districts and, most importantly, within schools. The participants noted that some schools and districts required the deployment of highly-qualified staff and teachers; however, the bureaucracy – which places complete power in the hands of the MoE – does not provide schools and districts with the option of selecting or setting criteria for the quality of teachers needed. The interviewees indicated that only the schools and districts really understand the matters concerning the quality of staff and teachers required, due to their direct experience with and knowledge of issues within their own workplaces. The respondents also articulated that the MoE deployed teachers and other employees randomly, resulting in a situation where the majority of applicants are placed to work at specific schools, and as a result, this increased the

possibility that unqualified applicants were deployed as teachers. Fahad, a deputy head, expressed annoyance with this issue, stating that:

> …I am responsible for technical issues within this school; I deal with teachers daily and attend their lessons for assessment purposes. It is disappointing when I find that the performance of some teachers is weak. If I had the authority, I would first fire about ten percent of the schools' teachers and replace them with more qualified teachers, according to the needs of the school…

Thus, the centralised nature of the strategic plan is regarded as reason for inequity between schools. According to the interviewees, the policy of centralisation controls resource allocation, and the MoE is ultimately responsible for this process. This situation is perceived as a negative consequence of the centralised strategic plan high-level officials should take into consideration each school's needs in order to successfully implement the plan.

Obstacles to obtaining resources

The interviewees, at the time of investigation, emphasised the negative impact of withholding resources, which they mentioned as the results about the efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic plan were being presented. The respondents were concerned that following the procedures to obtaining resources acted as an obstacle that prevented resources from being procured and delivered within appropriate timeframes. The interviewees expressed that the MoE should facilitate the process of obtaining resources by reviewing some policies that put schools in critical situations throughout the academic year. Morad, a headteacher, described issues that one school encountered at the beginning of the last academic year:

> …Last year was the first year of this school, which is very new. We came to the school and we found it empty. Would you believe it if I told you that many teachers sat on the floor because they did not have desks? The computer lab was empty, so we could not teach pupils certain lessons. It took a long time before the MoE responded to our repeated requests to fully equip the school. Can you imagine the impact on teachers' motivation to teach lessons and how much tension was created? If I had access to sufficient money and the

> authority to buy resources, I would solve this problem within a few days…

Thus, the centralised strategic plan is seen to increase bureaucracy because the MoE's regulations require schools to follow specific steps in order to obtain resources. The first group of respondents perceived this situation as negative, and suggested that bureaucracy acted as an obstacle in obtaining resources for the plan's implementation.

The other group of interviewees (6 out of 22) – specifically four MoE officials, and two district leaders – perceived bureaucracy as having a positive impact, and they considered it to be a strength of the strategic plan. The justification for this appeared to be that bureaucracy offers a sense of control, which leads to equity; this is similar to the general thoughts and attitudes expressed towards the centralisation policy. The interviewees justified their opinions and argued that the level of control the system provides to the MoE is positive because it ensures the following:

1. Equity in allocation of financial resources;
2. Equity in staff and teacher deployment.

Equity in allocation of financial resources

The first point focused on controlling financial resources in such a way that there were no differences between schools or between districts in terms of the amount of the financial resources received. As mentioned earlier, the MoE allocated all resources (including finances) equally among schools and districts. The MoE adopted a specific approach to obtaining resources, requiring that certain chains of procedures be followed. At the beginning of each academic year, each district receives exactly the same budget funding, but schools are budgeted according to academic stages. All primary schools received the same funding at the beginning of the academic year, and the same principle of distribution is applied to middle and secondary schools. Saad, a manager within the MoE, was an advocate of the centralisation policy, reflecting on his a positive impression regarding the MoE's policies on resource allocation:

> …Believe me, unless all schools are treated equally, there would be inequity in facilities like financial resources. We cannot deal with schools in this way unless we make that decision here at the ministry. If each school asked for a specific amount of money, we would spend double what we spend using our policy. I think the Ministry provides schools with a sufficient amount of money compared to some of other Arabian Gulf countries…

The respondents in this group seem to agree with the policy of centralisation, at least in terms of resource allocation, as well as the specific procedures required to distribute these resources. While these procedures are perceived by the first group as a cause of inequity, this group thinks that utilising this approach will ensure equity between schools. It is clear that this group misunderstands the meaning of equity. While they believe that equity is when schools are provided with equal amounts of resources, it does not make sense that all schools are equal in their needs for these resources. Thus, resource allocation should be based on criteria that ensure that all schools obtain sufficient resources according to their needs (Al-Bustan et al., 2003).

Equity in staff and teacher deployment

The second point revolved around the deployment of staff and teachers. The interviewees indicated that the centralisation policy provided guaranteed opportunities to obtain jobs, which were distributed equally between staff and teachers. As the MoE was responsible for the deployment process, all applicants who applied for different jobs were deployed and sent to schools or districts, or even to the MoE itself. Schools and districts did not have the authority to reject any potential teachers or staff. This was considered, according to the interviewees, an issue of social justice between Kuwaiti citizens. Nadia, a leader working at the MoE, was one of the supporters of this deployment method, and she perceived bureaucracy as a healthy practice that organised the work effectively. Nadia commented:

> …We as a central authority should deploy employees to provide districts and schools with a sufficient number of teachers or staff. I believe that if this mission were delegated to the districts and schools, many applicants would be rejected. This would lead to some

> problems, such as an increase in unemployment. So it is better if we hold the authority on this matter...

It seems that the bureaucratic structure of the MoE in Kuwait, according to the results, has several characteristics. First of all, the interviewees indicated several times during the interviews that the MoE had a hierarchical structure through which all departments were staffed and equipped. Second, each department included employees who were hired according to their individual specialisations. Third, all departments were required to follow the MoE's rules and regulations in terms of fulfilling tasks and duties, such as enacting the strategic plan. Finally, all members of the MoE were treated equally insofar as tasks were allocated according to specialisation. The bureaucratic structure of the MoE enabled it to maintain greater levels of control over the strategic plan, which also implied that it made decisions regarding the resources and the delegation of authority over the formulation of the plan. The Department of Planning and Improvement, which is fully staffed with personnel and equipped with resources, is responsible for the formulation of the strategic plan.

In conclusion, two groups of interviewees expressed different attitudes towards the control that centralisation provides to MoE. The first group thought that bureaucracy resulting from centralisation affected work positively, while the second group thought that it affected it negatively. This contradiction is examined as a problematic issue in the discussion section.

The results indicated that the strategic plan is not the only area affected by the centralisation policy. The following section demonstrates that the workplace environment is shaped by the centralised top-down approach of the plan's implementation; in this light, it may be affected negatively. The top-down policy implies that the implementation stage should follow the MoE's regulations in terms of any decisions that are made regarding the implementation requirements. Therefore, the workplace can be described as healthy or unhealthy according to the implementers' feelings, which are shaped by the centralised framework of their jobs.

5.5.7 Workplace environment

The workplace environment includes the conditions in which employees work. These conditions may be affected by the policy of the work which, in turn, shapes the individuals' behaviours within the workplace. For example, employees' autonomy may be restricted by the managers' policies; therefore, the workplace can be perceived as a restrictive environment, implying a lack of autonomy.

Thus, this section investigates whether the centralised nature of the strategic plan affects the workplace environment. The results demonstrated that the centralisation policy dominating the strategic plan did not create or maintain a healthy workplace for individuals in the lower levels. The centralisation policy that controlled the strategic plan led to some restrictions across the lower levels that negatively affected the workplace environment.

The majority of the interviewees (16 out of 22) indicated that the work environment was negatively affected by the policy of centralisation (see Table 24). The table indicates that none (0%) of the MoE officials disagreed with the idea that the workplace is healthy; in addition, 66% of the district leaders felt the same way. At the other extreme, all (100%) of the school leaders perceived the workplace as restrictive and unhealthy.

Table 24: Interviewees' perceptions of the workplace environment of the strategic plan

Interviewees' managerial level	MoE officials	District leaders	School leaders	Total
Agree	4	2	0	6
Disagree	0	4	12	16
Total	4	6	12	22

The interviewees, especially those working at the lower levels (such as school leaders), became emotional when they reported how they did not feel as though they were regarded as valuable educators who require a healthy workplace environment. Similarly, the results illustrated that some of the district leaders expressed the same concerns. An interesting result that could be deduced from these concerns is that only those in the lower levels (who are considered to be the implementers of the strategic plan and of the MoE's policies) suggested a need for a healthy workplace environment that did not exist due to the centralised policies that were in place. The features of the workplace were shaped according to the MoE's policies. The interviewees identified several aspects of the workplace, whether in schools or in districts, that reflected the state of an unhealthy work environment:

1. Role ambiguity;
2. Their creativity is discouraged;
3. Their leadership behaviour is diminished.

Role ambiguity

The results showed that role ambiguity was one factor that affected the workplace. Role ambiguity implies that lower levels are not fully aware of their roles in the implementation of the strategic plan. The basic reason behind why these feelings emerge emanates from the centralisation policy that prevents lower levels from participating in building the plan. In addition, the top-down implementation approach causes ambiguity in the actual roles involved, since there is no description for tasks and duties that the lower-level implementers should fulfil.

In this section, however, the respondents reported that this issue also negatively impacted their feelings towards their workplace. They stated that the centralised framework underlying both plan formulation and implementation made their roles relatively ambiguous in the implementation process. They also admitted that they know very little about their roles in the implementation of the strategic plan. One of the most popular interpretations of role ambiguity found in the literature is provided by Kahn et al. (1964), who describe it as being a situation where an employee's job,

responsibilities, or role is insufficiently predictable or not specifically outlined. Tang and Chang (2010) state that lack of clarity of information regarding roles can lead to role ambiguity. It is concerning that the interviewees expressed that the centralised nature of the strategic plan did not clearly set out the distribution of roles between districts and schools. As a result, the implementation process results in an unhealthy workplace because individuals lack the clear roles they need to achieve the strategic plan's goals.

Regarding districts, the participants stated that their currently acted as coordinators between the MoE and the school, and that this situation had existed since the establishment of the districts. The respondents further reported that they lacked knowledge about their actual roles within the district as implementers of the strategic plan; this is what Al-Sakarna (2010) described as "roles distribution", which takes place during the strategy building stage. The participants also said that the MoE did not clarify the districts' roles in relation to the implementation of the strategic plan; rather, the MoE left them to manage their own regular routines and to observe the schools within each district. Ali spoke about his role as a leader within a district:

> …What I am practising is according to the name of the job for which I was appointed. Nothing is clear regarding my role in the strategic plan…

Farah described the same situation:

> Yes I am the head of the mathematics department within this district. But if anybody asks me what I am doing with regard to the strategic plan implementation, I would say I do not know…

The same situation is apparent among interviewees who worked at schools. In my opinion, their current responsibilities are far more critical than the responsibilities of those working in districts because they are dealing directly with pupils' teaching and learning. Moreover, headteachers' responsibilities are even more essential, as they are responsible for all of the elements of the day-to-day running of schools, such as issues related to teachers, staff, and pupils. Furthermore, a headteacher is the professional leader of the school, and he or she is responsible and accountable for

guiding the school to achieve its goals (Wilson, 1999). This distinguishes the position of headteachers from other leaders in the educational system. Latifah, a school headteacher, spoke emotionally about her role within the school:

> …Technically, as I am a headteacher, I should have a clear role in this strategic plan. I am here as an employer, not as a planner and not even as an implementer. Yes, I can say that. I may implement the strategic plan indirectly because I execute orders. But I am not sure what are these orders aimed at in terms of whether they are a part of the plan or not. Things are mixed and I do not know what is expected from me to do…

Another interviewee, Fahad (a deputy head), said:

> Believe me no one knows his role as implementer. Everybody knows his job and tries to do it sincerely. But, it is not clear to us how we should behave as implementers…

It is clear from these responses that some interviewees lack a clear picture about their roles within their workplaces. The respondents articulated that the MoE formulated the strategic plans in a centralised approach, and did not clarify their roles as implementers in order to carry out the plan. According to Schaubroeck et al. (1993), the process of defining roles is dependent on the successful communication between both definers and receivers in the workplace. Centralisation increases the MoE's obligation to clarify the role of the lower levels in the implementation process, but because this obligation was unmet, the interviewees attributed their role ambiguity to their lack of involvement in the formulation of the plan. According to those in the lower levels, if they were involved in the planning process, they would have had a better understanding of their roles. This statement depends on the assumption that increased participation from employees would allow them the opportunity to decide the best ways in which to fulfil their responsibilities (Schultz and Schultz, 2002).

Because of vagueness of their roles, interviewees were concerned regarding the issue of achieving the strategic plan's goals. This was clear when they indicated that it is important for them to achieve the initiative's aims. Unless they understand exactly what is required from them, they are not able to satisfy pupils, parents, and the

media. Consequently, it is clear that they feel under pressure to provide a successful Kuwaiti society for their children's future. Bader provided an interesting statement; as a headteacher, he usually meets parents after issuing exam marks. Bader repeated what one parent told him when she criticised the school because her son's marks were weak:

> …One of the parents told me: what are you people doing? Are you really working to support our pupils' learning? What is exactly your plan? You should tell your teachers to be honest and work sincerely…

Bader continued:

> …I know that she did not know what I was thinking because my answer would be: I do not know what I am really doing…

The interviewees believe that their participation in the formulation of the strategic plan will help them better understand their roles because, according to some interviewees, working together implies making agreements regarding the role of each individual or group. This understanding will make it easier for the lower levels to comprehend the expectations of the top-level managers. According to Fauz (a headteacher), participating in the formulation of the plan will help to clarify the roles of those in the lower levels:

> Headteachers are people in the field; I think they will be more familiar with their roles in the implementation of the strategic plan if they are familiar with the plan itself. I think participating in the plan's formulation is enough for me to understand my role in the implementation stage, especially when the plan expresses exactly what we think are typical educational needs, which we are familiar with from our long time working at schools…

Kalid, a district leader, said:

> …If leaders within the district and representatives of schools worked together alongside the MoE, I think this will lead to a better definition of the roles of each level because people within each level know exactly what they want, and therefore, how to achieve it...

Thus, role ambiguity is seen to affect the implementers within their workplace because the interviewees do not have clear ideas about what should be done regarding achieving the goals of the initiative. The following issue represents another characteristic of the centralised workplace: employees' creativity might be affected by the centralised framework of the work environment.

Their creativity is discouraged

The interviewees perceived the workplace as a stifling environment where they could not apply their creative ideas for the benefit of their work. For example, the interviewees reported that certain aspects of creativity, such as creative problem solving and generating original ideas at work, were not permitted under the current work restrictions. It was common for the lower-level workplaces to receive ideas and approaches about managing their work via top-down policy implementation. Lower levels, therefore, were put in the position of being policy receivers, and they were required to implement the instructions they received from top levels. Aisha, a headteacher, complained about not being allowed to utilise creative ideas:

> …Within the school, there are many minds; sometimes I find creative ideas coming from teachers but we are not able to adopt them. Not only are we not allowed, but if we do something we think is good for our pupils, we might be punished. This happened when some teachers within the department of mathematics developed a new approach as an extra means to support pupils understanding some lessons. The district questioned me about it and reduced my salary for one month. Is this a healthy workplace?

Due to their lack of autonomy in their work environment, restrictions were placed on the lower level employees' actions within these spaces. The workplace environment was one of the factors that the interviewees thought affected the extent to which they could benefit from applying their creative ideas. Indeed, modifying a workplace environment to encourage greater autonomy leads to an increase in the emergence of creative ideas. This is evident in research that suggests that workplace environments either encourage or act as barriers to creativity (Shalley et al., 2000). The interviewees articulated that if those at the top levels provided them with a degree of

freedom to make decisions during the implementation of the strategic plan, more creative ideas would emerge, leading to more successful achievement of the plan's goals and objectives. This claim is supported by Oldham and Cummings's (1996) interpretation of the concept of creativity, where creative performance is interpreted as the ideas, products, and processes that are original and have the potential to be relevant or specific to an organisation. Oldham and Cummings emphasised the difference between organisational innovation and creative performance. In their interpretation, the term "creative performance" refers to definable things – such as ideas or products – that are individually created. In the context of this present investigation, organisational innovation refers to the effective auctioning of these things within the intended organisation. Therefore, the organisation can benefit from creative ideas if it allows the lower levels to make decisions independently. This is reliant on the MoE's ability to put into practice more collaborative ways in which to achieve these goals and objectives, allowing for the encouragement of creative abilities within different levels of the organisation.

Their leadership behaviour is diminished

The interviewees identified another issue that was affected by lack of autonomy in the workplace, and which consequently affected the workplace environment in general. This issue is related to their own leadership behaviours at work. The interviewees described the leaders of their schools and districts as regular employees rather than as true leaders, because the restrictions imposed on them by centralisation did not allow for the presence of leaders (such as headteachers) within these lower levels to act as leaders. Centralisation imposed a hierarchy that placed all authority figures within the higher levels. Moreover, the interviewees indicated that the managers of schools and districts lacked the capacity to take on decision-making roles and responsibilities. This situation, according to the interviewees, did not reflect the concept of leadership roles within the workplace. As a result, there were no advantages available that would encourage leadership behaviour in the workplace in either schools or districts. One of the interviewees provided an example to demonstrate this. Ali, who worked as a leader at one of the districts, believed that he possessed the characteristics of a leader, but he was not able to behave like a real

leader. He had a negative attitude towards being the head of a large department that includes a large number of staff. This department was considered to be the main office for all of the English-language departments within the schools. Ali said:

> …I attended many courses to improve my leadership skills. Ironically, this kind of course is strongly supported by the MoE. It is a waste of money and our time because you will not find a real leader at any of the six districts or even at schools. I do not understand why they want people to attend such courses and at the same time restrict their roles as leaders. But for me, I do not care about the purpose of the ministry in providing such courses. I only care about developing myself…

When I asked Ali to give me an example, he responded:

> Sometimes I feel upset because the district's managers do not let me take full responsibility to lead my department like I want. I am familiar with my job and familiar with my abilities; therefore, I am confident about my approach to managing people working at my department…

The interviewees expressed that they, as leaders, were not satisfying their desire to act like real leaders because of the restrictions and limitations associated with the MoE's policies. The centralisation policy that controlled the strategic planning of the MoE, and that was extended to impose top-down policy implementation, did not support autonomy at work. The respondents articulated that they needed to work independently without being told exactly what to do and how to do it. In addition, the participants explained how school activities were controlled by schools and districts. The MoE was able to change the activities when it felt that changes were required, and schools could not refuse. The districts were required to share their programmes with the MoE, which held all of the authority to make decisions regarding these programmes. The interviewees also discussed how any new ideas that were presented reflected the choices made by the higher levels; this prevented the use of creative ideas that could have potential to benefit pupils' learning. This situation emphasises that the centralisation policy was applied in an extreme manner in certain areas. In some education systems, such as in Qatar, school leaders are provided with a degree

of autonomy to deal with some issues according to their areas of expertise (Supreme Council of Education, 2005). Such autonomy was not provided to any of the schools or districts in Kuwait. It was apparent from their responses that the participants had some level of awareness and knowledge about the roles of headteachers in neighbouring countries, such as Qatar. Bader, a headteacher, indicated that centralisation prevented school leaders from exercising autonomy:

> …Headteachers' careers in other countries are highly considered to be autonomous, but our country does not provide that unfortunately. We need years and years to reach their level of educational practices. You can add this situation to what I told when you asked me to describe the policy of the Ministry of Education…

The implications of the concept of leadership include that leaders require a degree of autonomy that enables them to act like credible leaders. Some authors have provided a general definition for leadership roles, where leaders influence people's behaviour, while setting goals and setting out the process by which these aims are achieved (Yuki, 2006). A broader explanation comes from the meaning of educational leadership, which identifies the main characteristics and tasks of leaders. Southworth (cited in Bollington, 1999, p. 153) illustrated that leadership is related to goal achievement, as groups work and apply authority in an ethical manner. Cheng (1996) described the roles and tasks of leaders, as exemplified by the ways in which they lead and control; from the classical theory of management, a leader's roles are based on the policies, rewards, punishments, instructions, or rules that are employed in order to lead followers. Therefore, it seems that leaders must be able to thoroughly understand themselves, their colleagues, and the institution in which they are working. School leaders in particular are required to maintain flexibility with regard to curricula, schedules, and staffing. As long as head teachers are unable to address staffing issues without having to consider political issues, seniority, and pecking order, they are limited in their ability to staff their schools to most accurately meet the needs of their students (Snell, 2013). Furthermore, it is important that leaders respond to their followers' requirements in order to motivate them to work effectively. Of major concern to an effective leader are the methods and processes by

which they successfully influence their followers. Methods of setting goals, clarifying meanings, and achieving goals are central issues to leadership (Cheng, 1996, p. 104).

It is clear that the interviewees were not able to effectively fulfil their leadership roles at school due to their lack of autonomy. The centralisation policy demanded that the workplace be shaped by Ministry regulations, and that all elements of the schools be controlled by top-level regulations. As a result, the interviewees described their workplace environment as unhealthy due to the lack of encouragement or support for their creativity or their leadership behaviours.

The other group of interviewees (6 out of 22) did not mention any concerns regarding their work environment (see Table 24). None of the participants representing the MoE officials expressed concerns regarding this issue. The most likely for this is that these officials were the policymakers whose working environment was largely unaffected by such regulations. The workplaces most affected by centralisation were those at the bottom of the hierarchy. The MoE applied a top-down approach of policy implementation that, according to the respondents from the lower levels, affected the workplace environment.

Two district leaders did not think that the workplace to which they belonged was affected by centralisation. It seemed that they did not share the same feelings as the other interviewees from the same level. When considering the position of these two individuals, I found that both of them were recommended for appointment as undersecretary assistants within the MoE. These appointments would place them at the top of the hierarchy among the other policymakers within the MoE. I think that these two respondents did not want to expose their feelings regarding the districts that they led, as their current circumstances may have made them reluctant to let their districts appear to be unhealthy working environments. Given their current positions, it seems likely that they would want to present a positive impression of the districts that they led. Additionally, other interviewees indicated that many employees within the districts left their jobs due to dissatisfaction with the strict regulations and with their “boring jobs”, as they described them.

In conclusion, the results indicated that the Kuwaiti education system is extremely centralised; the MoE makes all decisions in a highly top-down approach. Moreover, the results identified a number of great concerns regarding how the strategic plan is controlled by extreme centralisation. Many issues emerged as consequences of the centralisation policy, and these matters fell within the seven main issues under investigation. It seems that most of the district- and school-level leaders are unsatisfied with the current policy that controls the education system. This concern is reflected in their descriptions of the negative issues that resulted from the centralisation policy. The major concerns reported by the interviewees revolved around issues that had an impact on educational outcomes, such as a lack of resources and the need to participate in the strategic plan in order to ensure that it covers most of their needs. In addition, district and school leaders believe that the bottom-up implementation of the strategic plan affects their own performance within their work. The work becomes restrictive when it is run under a highly centralised framework, as lower-level management professionals (in the districts and schools) face difficulties when understanding their roles. A clear understanding of their roles enables them to set goals for themselves and utilise their abilities to fulfil their duties in a creative manner. Consequently, these leaders become unable to attain the plan's goals, which are strongly connected to the schools' outcomes.

In contrast, the MoE officials showed positive attitudes towards the centralisation policy, and they did believe that this kind of policy affects the strategic plan's effectiveness. The MoE officials did not criticise the MoE's policies in the plan's formulation and implementation. This illustrated how the top-level management – as policymakers – did not attempt to showcase the strategic plan in a negative manner. Rather, they attempted to defend the MoE's policy in managing the education system.

The next chapter discusses the policy of centralisation, as adopted by the MoE. It also explores the reasons as to why the government of Kuwait adopted this policy. In addition, the next chapter outlines the seven issues of the centralised strategic education plan, and connects these issues to the literature. Finally, it also investigates

the ways in which the MoE applies centralisation, highlighting the organisation's responsibility as a policymaker, which makes all of the decisions related to education using a highly top-down approach.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The main aims of my research are to address the nature of the current policy that controls the education system in Kuwait and to identify its characteristics. In addition, this research aims to highlight issues associated with the centralisation policy regarding the formulation and implementation of the strategic education plan in Kuwait. Moreover, it aims to address the impact of the centralisation policy on each of these issues. This section discusses the research findings, beginning with a discussion of the extent to which the centralisation policy is employed within the Kuwaiti education system. Afterward, it discusses the issues that resulted from the centralisation policy in the strategic plan.

6.2 Research question 1:

(How do the research participants characterise the education system in Kuwait?)

The findings indicated that the Kuwaiti education system is extremely centralised. All educational issues, such as resources, pupil assessment, and educational planning, are entirely controlled by the people at the top of the educational hierarchy, as represented by the MoE. In many education systems, both centralisation and decentralisation policies appear to be part of a continuum, such as in the Qatari education system, which applies a centralisation policy, while at the same time providing a degree of decentralisation (Supreme Council of Education, 2005). This means that decentralisation can appear within a centralised system, and vice versa. Shah (2010) argues that, as concepts, decentralisation and centralisation are not paradoxical, so applying one does not automatically mean disregarding the other. Centralisation and decentralisation do not necessarily oppose each other and should not be described in black and white terms. The issue, therefore, is not whether to use centralisation or decentralisation; rather, the issue lies in what should be centralised and what should be decentralised (Hanson, 2003). The results of this research suggested that nothing is decentralised in the education system in Kuwait, and there

are no signs of delegating authority to the lower levels of that hierarchy across any of the most vital educational issues, such as for resource allocation and professional development planning. Therefore, it appears that the Kuwaiti system can be described as being extremely centralised.

In order to ensure the credibility of the claims regarding the hyper (extreme) use of centralisation to control educational issues within the Kuwaiti education system, it is important to clarify the meaning of the expression "extreme centralisation", and to consider the characteristics of an organisation that is run under that type of policy.

Centralisation and decentralisation are policies that deal with authority or power inside any organisation. The word "power" is connected to the control of making decisions regarding the organisation's components, policies, and inputs. For educational organisations, power is connected to the control of decision-making processes with regard to financial, material, and human resources (Gibton, 2003). In order to confirm that the education system in Kuwait is centralised, it is necessary to locate the power within the education system and to identify whether a higher or lower level within the hierarchy holds that power. According to the results, all decisions, such as those indicated by Gibton, are made by the MoE which, in many education systems, is commonly considered to be the top responsibility of the educational hierarchy. Therefore, in this study, the results indicate that the MoE holds the decision-making power within the Kuwaiti education system, and it is the absolute system controller. As Weber (1947, p. 152) notes, this situation clearly occurs when:

> The probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.

The emphasis on hierarchical decision-making also appears in the literature that describes the concept of centralisation. For example, Al-Ahmad et al. (1994) defined centralisation as a style of authority in which the educational departments are arranged hierarchically from the higher levels to the lower levels, with each level receiving decisions and tasks from the level above. This is characteristic of a

centralised organisation that adopts a hierarchical structure. Therefore, the direction of authority travels from the top levels to the lower levels, as a form of top-down decision making. This description precisely illustrates the decision-making policy used within the Kuwaiti education system: the MoE applies a strict top-down approach in which it makes and disseminates decisions that affect people in the lower levels of the hierarchy. I would suggest that this does not explain whether the decision is made entirely at the top level, or if it is sometimes delegated to the lower levels (which, in turn, may pass the decision on to even lower levels). However, in order to describe an organisation's policy as being one of "extreme centralisation", it is still necessary to determine the location of the key decision-making authority and to examine whether or not that authority is concentrated entirely at the top level, putting lower levels in a position of only receiving and implementing the decisions made by others. Lauglo (1995) explains the policy of centralisation from this perspective, pointing out that the central authority concentrates on decision making in a wide range of matters, "leaving only tightly programmed routine implementation to lower levels in the organisation" (Lauglo, 1995, p. 6). Al Jaber (2002) also confirms this point by specifying the location of authority, indicating that the decision-making process is, therefore, principally controlled through centralisation by the highest authority within the overall hierarchy.

Taken together, these three interpretations to the concept of centralisation provide a clear perspective as to how to determine whether an organisation is hyper-centralised. One can do so based on the role that top-level management plays as the absolute authority, as well as on the role that the lower levels play as decision receivers. This top-down approach is the decision-making approach that most resembles the decision-making structure that the results of this research identified within Kuwait's MoE. It seems that the MoE in Kuwait applies an extreme centralisation approach because the MoE is the absolute controller of any decisions that are made, and the people working at the lower levels of that educational hierarchy, such as the people who work in the districts (and even lower, the in the schools) are the recipients of the MoE's decisions that are handed down in a top-down direction. This result is in line with earlier reports about the nature of policies

that control the education system, as outlined by Al-Jabr (2002), Helal and Al-Sharidah (1999), Al-Sarraf (1997), Al-Hadhood (1996), Al-Ahmed et al. (1994), Al-Hamdan (1992), and Al-Mesaileem and Jassim (1992).

In looking for an example to cite that serves as an adequate comparator to Kuwait, I found an apt case in France. In that country, aspects of centralisation fully control the general structure of the education system, including school building maintenance, the setting of national examinations, curricular content, and teachers' recruitment and training (Cole and John, 2001). I would argue that this situation is in line with the results of this research in that resource allocation is totally controlled by the MoE; this will continue to be the case as long as the MoE continues to act as the sole decision makers, and as long as lower levels of management simply remain in their positions as implementers. However, in the French education system, initiatives towards decentralising the education system took place and the government started to apply partial decentralisation to help manage education (Derouet and Normand, 2009).

Another point about such policies can be found when examining more decentralised systems, such as the British education system. Schools in Britain have greater autonomy than schools in Kuwait. British educational reform culminated in the establishment of self-managing schools that operate within "collaborative school management." This approach involves the integration of goal setting, policymaking, planning, budgeting, implementing, and evaluating. Collaborative school management, where appropriate, encourages the involvement of staff, students, and communities in decision making, and focuses on the primary functions of schools: teaching and learning. It enables school management to be organised around programmes that facilitate and support optimum school working patterns (Caldwell, 2002). This situation, which is contrary to what occurs in the Kuwaiti education system, supports the claim that the educational system in Kuwait is centralised, particularly when considering the facilities that decentralised systems provide to schools, as can be seen in the British approach to education management. Thus, the

British and Kuwaiti education systems are on opposite ends of the centralisation-decentralisation spectrum.

The reason why centralisation is adopted in Kuwait appears to be politically based. Since the establishment of the state of Kuwait, one ruler has led the country, and all political issues are controlled by the "Shaikh." Furthermore, this model of national leadership remained stable until the discovery of oil in Kuwait. Oil production quickly transformed the nation from being a very poor country into being a very wealthy country, and the Ministry of Finance became responsible for billions of dinars. The ruler of Kuwait was the only person who was able to make decisions about any economic and financial issues; therefore, it can be seen that the need to control the massive wealth with which the country was previously unfamiliar has increased (Crystal, 1995).

It seems likely that the increase in wealth in Kuwait paralleled the increase in the government's control over the financial income of the country. As a result of the absolute control of the ruler of Kuwait, the culture of centralised control increased, especially within the different sectors of the country, and the government adopted control over the ministries, including the MoE. Therefore, the concept of centralisation stems from the dominance of the Kuwaiti government. Consequently, other sectors have started to apply centralisation, beginning from their establishment, mirroring the dominant culture of centralisation of control (Al-Sharrah, 2002).

In conclusion, the education system in Kuwait is clearly managed according to an extremely centralised policy. Although there are some calls from scholars (and especially in the 1990s) to start thinking seriously about decentralisation, the government is still not responding and is maintaining its use of centralisation.

After discussing the current policy of controlling the education system in Kuwait, the following section presents a discussion of the issues that were regarded as the results of centralisation policy on the strategic plan's formulation and implementation.

6.3 Research questions 2, 3, and 4:

- What issues does centralisation in educational policy raise for the formulation and implementation of strategic education planning in Kuwait?
- What are managers' perceptions about the implications of these issues for both policy and practice?
- What reasons do managers provide for their perceptions regarding the centralised strategic plan?

6.3.1 Efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic plan

The results of this research demonstrated that the centralised strategic plan is both inefficient and ineffective in terms of producing a high level of outcomes. As mentioned earlier, the issue of effectiveness emerged during the in-depth interviews, when the efficiency of the strategic plan was discussed. Therefore, there are no quantitative results regarding the effectiveness of the strategic plan.

6.3.1.1 Efficiency of the strategic plan

The questionnaire results revealed that there are significant differences between the respondents within the three managerial tiers of the education system (the MoE, district, and school levels). When asked whether the current educational system in Kuwait is effective and efficient, the MoE officials maintain a position of being "undecided" about this issue, whereas the district and school leaders maintain their position where they are in disagreement with this sentiment. These findings were confirmed by the interviews, where it was found that only the MoE officials differ from the other groups in the same way, as revealed by the questionnaire responses.

In general, the questionnaire indicated that the majority of participants disagree with the idea that the strategic education plan is efficient. This finding is also confirmed by the interviews, where the majority of the interviewees also disagreed with the issue of the efficiency of the strategic plan.

Regarding the causes of the inefficiency of the strategic plan, as identified in the interviews, the results highlighted that the centralised strategic plan negatively

affects school outcomes, as evidenced by pupils' low levels of achievement (Al-Humood, 2012; Al-Ramzi, 2009). In addition, the results suggest that there is a gap between the given resources and the quality of school outcomes because the resources are insufficient and inadequate for teaching the lessons. In this way, the results demonstrated that the resources given have failed to produce a high level of outcomes. Here, the concept of efficiency refers to the ratio between outputs (as represented by pupil achievement) and inputs (as represented by the lowest cost of resources) (Levačić, 2002; Anderson et al., 2001; Bell, 2000). I would argue that, if the available (minimum) resources can be used successfully to produce positive results, this would suggest that the quality of these resources is acceptable. However, the results showed that the minimum level of resources provided is insufficient and inadequate. The problem of inefficiency, therefore, seems to lie in both the quantity (minimum) and the quality (type) of the allocated resources because the available resources cannot be employed successfully to the benefit of pupil achievement levels. According to the definition of efficiency, as previously mentioned, the education system can be efficient when it reaches positive outcomes, which result from using the least amount of resources. The situation in Kuwait identifies that using the least amount of resources failed to deliver high-level outcomes. At this point, it is important to question the impact that the centralisation policy has on the efficiency of the education system. In other words, why does the centralised strategic plan not ensure that high-quality resources be provided, which could ultimately produce good results? In Kuwait, the policy requires that the MoE decide the amount of funding and the material resources to allocate to each school. The MoE distributes funds to schools equally at the beginning of every academic year. In my opinion, it does not make sense that all schools should receive the same amount of financial resources; there is no doubt that there are differences in each school's needs. In addition, material resources may fit specific schools' needs and not fit other schools' needs. Furthermore, schools with large numbers of pupils and staff differ in their needs when compared to schools with smaller numbers of pupils and staff. From this perspective, the policy of centralisation seems to impede the ability to obtain appropriate resources for each individual school. Therefore, at least some schools

will fail to successfully apply available resources to meet the needs of their pupils and to enhance their learning.

The interviewees attributed this problem to the centralised nature of the strategic planning, which does not ensure that the schools will obtain a sufficient quantity and high quality of resources because the MoE currently allocates resources to all schools according to its own method, regardless of the actual needs of the schools. When the top authority applies this type of approach, lower-level management personnel are unable to make decisions regarding the amount of resources they need during action planning, which requires consideration and decision making regarding the resources required to meet the goals of the plan (Glover, 2000).

The findings from this research suggest that if the strategic plan allowed lower levels in the hierarchy to participate in making decisions regarding the resource allocation process, their actual needs would be better estimated and, therefore, resources could be applied more accurately in order to support the achievement of high-quality results. Cheng (1996) argues that by involving schools in making decisions, the tasks required of school management are decided based on the characteristics of each individual school, and so they are more likely to meet each school's specific needs. Bush (2000) supports the idea of allowing schools to make decisions regarding financial resources. He indicated that in some decentralised systems, there is a belief that individuals working in field directly – such as teachers in the education system working directly with pupils – are more likely to make relevant and accurate decisions regarding spending, in comparison to management, whose work is far removed from where the money would actually be spent. Scurati and Paletta (2009) support this perspective, commenting that allowing schools to make decisions regarding the quantity and quality of financial resources would lead to improved efficiency at those schools. They emphasise that participation would require the enabling of headteachers to lead dialogues and debates during decision-making processes, and to take into account board and faculty decisions; it would also require that the necessary resources for projects and initiatives be provided. These comments are in line with the results of this research, which suggests that schools need to make

decisions regarding the quantity and quality of resources because they are familiar with their own needs and are aware of the best ways in which to apply these resources to meet those needs.

Even if lower levels were able to address the amount and kind of resources they need, it is important to consider whether affording them that type of decision-making authority would necessarily ensure good use of those resources and successfully support high-quality outcomes. Hanson (2003) disagrees with this notion, commenting that decentralisation in resource allocation allows schools to purchase resources freely, as they desire. This freedom can lead to unstructured management and a lack of control over finances (Hanson, 2003). Moreover, Lyones (1985) commented that centralised planning ensures efficient management, as the MoE will be able to allocate resources in a way that conserves resources. It is obvious that these perceptions are focused on saving resources rather than on ensuring the appropriate use of resources in order to support high-quality outcomes. The issue of efficiency is not merely limited to saving resources; it also implies using the least amount of resources possible to deliver positive outcomes. As mentioned in the presentation of the findings section, Ofsted describes efficiency as the effective use of available resources in order to achieve the best possible educational outcomes for all pupils (cited in: McAlees, 2000). Therefore the least available resources should be accompanied by their "best" use. Consequently, it can be seen that those who work directly with pupils are more likely to know the best ways of utilising resources for their teaching process (Bush, 2000; Simkins, 1998). However, there is no guarantee that all teachers are uniformly committed to ensuring the best use of resources in order to produce high levels of achievement. I would suggest that the solution is to apply a system of accountability, whereby teachers are accountable to the MoE and other stakeholders in order to achieve the goals of the strategic education plan.

6.3.1.2 Effectiveness of the strategic plan

The issue of the effectiveness of the strategic plan is similar to the issue of the plan's efficiency. However, the effectiveness of the plan focuses on reaching the desired outcomes without focusing on the costs of the resources dedicated to that purpose

(Shcreens, 2000). The results indicated that the outcomes do not reflect the desired goals of the strategic plan of the MoE, which represent the desired goals of the Kuwaiti society.

The participants focused on one factor that affects school outcomes: the centralised in-service programmes. The strategic plan of the MoE includes several goals that are required to guide efforts towards increasing pupil achievement. According to the results, the professional development policies follow the general policy of the (highly centralised) plan. Therefore, the MoE's in-service professional development programme remains centralised.

The results confirmed that the centralisation policy that currently controls the in-service programmes has affected the quality of teachers and, as a consequence, it has affected pupil achievement levels. Therefore, it can be seen that a relationship exists between teacher training and positive pupil achievement (Caena, 2011; Rahman et al., 2011; Santagata et al., 2011; Swington et al., 2010; Colbert, 2008).

The in-service programmes are designed in a centralised manner. It is logical that a systematic process be employed to identify any needs that should be met by specific types of programmes. The MoE's top-down approach requires that the Department of Development and Improvement accurately identifies the needs of the educational system, and that it designs a variety of programmes to meet those needs. However, the evidence illustrates that relatively few in-service training programmes take place each academic year, and those programmes are broadly similar in content (MoE, 2000). This can be attributed to the inadequate way in which these programmes address the schools' needs, because excluding schools from suggesting the kinds of programmes they think they need impedes the provision of sufficient programme variety. While schools are able to address the actual needs of the training programmes for staff and teachers (Metwali, 2004), there is no evidence that the MoE allows schools to suggest the training programmes they need. Consequently, the MoE policy regarding its training programmes does not appear to meet the actual needs of the schools. Therefore, the top-down policy applied in Kuwait can be seen as impeding the provision of adequate teacher training programmes.

This finding suggested that there should be wider participation from the lower levels (such as the schools) to participate in designing the training programmes based on their knowledge of their actual needs. This is supported by Al-Hamdan and Al-Shammari (2008) whose study in Kuwait examined the potential to involve headteachers of secondary schools in the planning of in-service programmes; their results highlighted that there is a need to involve headteachers in planning these programmes, while developing productive relationships between schools and the personnel responsible for planning the in-service programmes.

The results of Al-Hamdan and Al-Shammari's (2008) study, alongside the results of this research, suggest that schools should have a voice in deciding the nature of the in-service programmes. I would argue that this approach does not necessarily guarantee high pupil outcomes. Even if schools were empowered to decide the nature of the training programmes in cooperation with MoE, it would not automatically guarantee that pupil achievement levels would increase. This is due to the fact that when designing the content of the in-service programmes (in addition to the content that is developed, which is informed by the actual needs of the teachers), other factors should be considered. These other factors include choosing qualified and appropriate instructors, utilising technology for training, and supporting the programmes with appropriate resources. These elements can all be considered as characteristics of an effective in-service programme (Yigit, 2008; Teacher Training Agency, 2005). It seems likely that if decentralised training programmes do not address these types of issues to improve teachers' skills, this would affect the teachers' learning and, consequently, it might affect pupils' learning. Therefore, the development and provision of in-service training programmes is not only a matter of the policy employed to control the in-service programmes; it is also a matter of meeting the actual needs of the teachers and students while employing the best means through which to improve skills and knowledge. Programme quality is a concern that would be shared by both centralised and decentralised in-service programmes.

However, the current situation in Kuwait seems to be that the Department of Development and Improvement failed to provide appropriate programmes because the needs of the schools were insufficiently surveyed. It was found in this research that lower levels, such as schools, believe that they can address these needs more accurately. As the schools' needs are not met by the top-down approach, this situation has generated a desire in the interviewees to be able to handle the task of deciding the nature of the programmes, especially given that the schools are strongly familiar with their own training needs. The lower levels in the hierarchy are not empowered to participate, so it is easy for them to blame the MoE's policy of centralisation for their poor professional development.

6.3.2 Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan

As revealed by the questionnaire results, significant differences exist between the MoE officials, district leaders, and school leaders' perceptions with respect to the comprehensiveness of the strategic education plan. While both district and school leaders maintain a position of being in disagreement with the idea that the strategic plan is comprehensive, the MoE officials hold a position of agreement in this regard.

The interview findings differed slightly from those of the questionnaire. Although the questionnaire results indicated that the MoE officials believe that the strategic plan is comprehensive, they adopted the opposite position during the qualitative study. However, the district and school leaders remained at the same position of disagreement throughout both processes (the interviews and the questionnaires).

I would suggest that the reason for this finding might be that the MoE officials failed during the interviewees to provide realistic evidence to support the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan. Asserting that the strategic plan is comprehensive requires evidence and examples that demonstrate the aspects of comprehensiveness, and this is one area that the interviews attempted to investigate. For example, during the discussion of various issues, such as complaints relating to the curricula, pupil achievement levels, and teachers' qualifications and training issues, the interviewees began to highlight problems related to those areas. In this

way, the MoE official interviewees conceded to the incomprehensiveness of the strategic plan.

The majority of the questionnaire participants disagreed with idea that the strategic plan was comprehensive; this result was confirmed by the interviews. The interviewees attributed their disagreement to the notion that the centralisation policy affects the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan through three points. First, educational needs are incorrectly estimated. Second, the strategic plan cannot cater to society's problems. Finally, the strategic plan impedes learning from the outside.

In relation to the needs and problems of society, it seems that the top of the hierarchy of the education system in Kuwait did not accurately address the actual needs and problems when analysing the internal and external environments of the education system. I think this issue is strongly linked to the centralised approach of holding the planning process within the top levels of authority, because the MoE does not allow participation from anyone inside or outside the education system. Ghenem (2008) comments that gathering data about needs and problems should depend on utilising different sources of information, such as schools, civil society institutions, and parents. I would argue that as long as centralisation prevails to the extent that it prevents members of a society from participating in the formulation of the educational strategic plan, it is reasonable for the findings of my research to conclude that the MoE's current strategic plan is not comprehensive.

To ensure the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan, the planning group should include members from various specialisations, positions, and with a wide variety of experiences (Bantel, 1993). In my opinion, the most vital stage of the strategic planning process, which ensures the comprehensiveness of the strategic plan, is data collection and the analysis of the organisation. This stage includes the process of identifying the needs, problems, and priorities that will be addressed by the plan through the development of adequate objectives. I would argue that this stage requires the involvement of personnel from several levels of the organisation in order to accurately identify and address all the needs and problems in the plan. In addition, the members of a civil society and a number of experts can provide information and

recommendations regarding areas that could be essential to society; therefore, these perspectives could be included in the strategic plan. Consequently, the plan could be described as being comprehensive once it covers all the needs and problems that have been raised by people in different fields and positions, and who have various interests in developing the education system. Al-Hareeri et al. (2007) support this result, stating that in order to be considered comprehensive, the strategic plan should include input from all organisational levels and, therefore, it should identify and address a wide range of issues, potential problems, as well as general and specific needs, and it should also consider all available resources.

In order to benefit from the experience of other education systems, it may be useful to consider what approaches those systems found to be successful or unsuccessful. This is what Korea accomplished when its education system benefited from considering the opinions of different parties when it attempted to reform Korean language textbooks. The Korean MoE collected information from teachers, principals, parents, and the education systems of other countries in order to comprehensively canvas the need for reform (Lee, 1997). The Korean experience indicates that utilising people from different levels from both inside and outside the organisation made the project more comprehensive and, therefore, a similar approach could make the strategic plan more comprehensive. Of course, this cannot be achieved without involving a wide range of people and the sharing of decision making through a bottom-up approach.

The third reason for the incomprehensiveness of the centralised nature of the strategic plan is that it impedes learning from outside sources. In the Kuwaiti context, evidence of this can be seen in the refusal of officials within the MoE to accept Tony Blair's report about the education system in Kuwait (Al-Moqatei, 2010). Blair's report suggests that the education system in Kuwait is weak and that those responsible for education should think about how to improve the situation. It is likely that because Blair is British, and therefore coming from a different culture, educational officials in Kuwait did not acknowledge his recommendations regarding improving the education system in their country. This may relate to the belief that

any analysis of the education system is more accurate when it comes from insiders rather than from outsiders. Moreover, one MoE official argued that Blair's report failed to reflect the reality of Kuwait's education system; that is, it drew a veil over the system's positive aspects (Al-Moqatei, 2010). This argument illustrates, to some extent, that MoE officials believe that any criticism of the education system would be more effective if it accounted for both the strengths and weaknesses of the education system; this can be achieved if the individuals evaluating the education system fully understand how the system operates in daily life.

The results indicated that the centralised strategic plan is regarded as a barrier, as it does not allow the educational system to benefit from technology that other contexts, such as Western countries, utilise in their education system for teaching and learning. With this centralisation, experts and stakeholders are excluded from addressing the best means by which to help achieve the plan's goals (Hussain, 2006). This situation seems to be similar to the Kuwaiti context. I suggest that benefiting from outside experience is important enough to be included in the strategic plan's agenda, especially if it leads to the enhancement of pupils' learning. Davies and Ellison (2004) concur, commenting that successful planning considers the experiences from outside of an organisation's own environment. Additional perceptions demonstrate that using technology, such as computers, in teaching pupils increases opportunities for pupils to look at global information which, in turn, can have a direct and positive impact in the classroom (Carnoy, 2005). Therefore, allowing such opportunities requires being open to a variety of perceptions and suggestions regarding which technologies are most appropriate; these perspectives may emanate from different stakeholders. However, decisions regarding the use of technology cannot be achieved within an extremely centralised system such as Kuwait.

Some authors, such as Lahloob (2012), think that decentralisation, which often considers outside experiences, may lead to losses in local identity. This may be a reason for the continued centralisation in many conservative countries in the Middle East, such as in Kuwait. Yamani's (2006) comparative study of the national education development paradigms in the Middle East highlights a challenge that

educational experts, who are seeking to promote educational reform, should pay close attention to when attempting to move towards a process of decentralisation. At the heart of the issue is the fear that the widespread acceptance of ideas from Western contexts may not be appropriate for education systems in certain Middle Eastern countries. Therefore, these systems prefer to maintain their centralised policies as an attempt to protect local culture and religious beliefs. Middle Eastern educators have long held fears that if future generations are too heavily influenced by the West, the culture and religion of their own countries may deteriorate (Yamani, 2006).

In the case of Kuwait, I do not think that the education system needs to be too concerned about this issue, as can be seen from the Western-based K12 schools that exist throughout Kuwait, the scholarship plans that send hundreds of Kuwaiti students to the West to obtain the most up-to-date education, and the various local projects that adopt Western paths of working and business management methods. Kuwait has also adopted new plans in which higher education institutions based on Western education systems are welcomed into the country. Some examples are the American and Australian Universities in Kuwait that were established years ago. Therefore, openness to Western experiences does not seem to threaten the Kuwaiti society and, in fact, it can be useful for the development of the Kuwaiti education system, as certain technologies can be employed, experts can facilitate educational planning.

Thus, a centralised strategic plan can be regarded as an obstacle to identifying the needs and problems of society and the country's education system. In addition, the educational system may be failing to benefit from outside experiences. An alternative policy that has the potential to better facilitate these issues would utilise a degree of decentralisation that could ensure that the needs and problems within the system are more accurately addressed, and this would increase the comprehensiveness of any strategic education plans. In addition, that type of policy employed would provide more effective consideration to outside experiences which, in turn, could be applied to benefit the education system.

6.3.3 The implementability of the strategic plan

The questionnaire results indicated that there is a significant difference between the three tiers of the education system in Kuwait with regard to the implementability of the strategic plan. The MoE officials were undecided about whether the plan could be implemented, while the other groups (district and school leaders) rejected the possibility that the strategic plan could be implemented properly.

The results of the interviews differed slightly from the results of the questionnaire, as only the position held by the MoE officials was different. While these individuals were unsure about whether the strategic plan was implementable during the questionnaire, they largely supported the idea that the plan could be enacted successfully during the interviews. The other two groups maintained their position that the plan could not be implemented successfully – a belief that was reflected in both the interviews and the questionnaire.

The overall understanding of these results is that it seems that the MoE officials fluctuate in their opinions regarding whether it was possible to implement the centralised strategic plan. When it comes to the questionnaire, these individuals seem to conceal their feelings regarding this issue. In the interviews, however, they were required to reveal their position directly to me. I would, therefore, suggest that they preferred not to describe the strategic plan as being difficult to implement because they are responsible for its formulation. This speculation is supported by Al-Ajmi (2008), who stated that in some cases, planning leaders lack transparency regarding how they describe any of the weaknesses of their plans. Al-Ajmi suggests that the reason for this is that they do not want to highlight any weaknesses because they do not want to be blamed for them, and they do not want these weaknesses to be used against them. Thus, it is possible that the reason behind the participants' perceptions lies in the idea that MoE officials are focused on satisfying the government, as represented by the Supreme Council of Planning, which requires that the MoE set the strategic plan. Therefore, it is not possible that these individuals would establish a plan and then indicate that the plan as unable to be implemented. I would suggest that more credible comments would come from people who are responsible for

implementing the plan (districts and schools), because they are directly exposed to the difficulties and constraints associated with the plan.

The general result of the questionnaire regarding the whether the strategic plan can be implemented falls in line with the general result of the interviews: the participants think that the strategic plan of the MoE is difficult to implement. The reason behind this perception can be described in three points. First, the strategic plan lacks clarity, resulting in the implementers being unfamiliar with the components of the plan because of centralisation. Second, the centralised nature of the strategic plan impedes the ability of schools to obtain the appropriate and sufficient resources needed for implementation. Third, the centralised strategic plan is rigid in nature and does not adequately respond to change.

Regarding the impact of centralisation on the clarity of the strategic plan, it is largely agreed that in order for the plan to be successfully implemented, it is logical to assume that the plan and its objectives should be clear to the implementers (Mohammad, 2011; Al-Sakarna, 2010; Al-Ajmi, 2008). Therefore, this increases the MoE's responsibility to clarify the plan for implementers, such as schools and district managers; furthermore, the MoE must also clarify the plan to society and other stakeholders. Lower levels are responsible for implementing the strategic plan and for meeting its objectives and goals; therefore, they must accept a plan in order for it to be implemented efficiently (Al-Sakarna, 2010). Consequently, top-level management should enable lower management levels to review the strategic plan in order to be sure that they clearly understand its strategy, goals, and objectives. In the Kuwaiti education system, the MoE is the only authority responsible for developing the plan, and it does not apply noticeable methods to deliver the plan to districts and schools. It is not reasonable to expect that a plan be effectively implemented when those who are responsible for its implementation do not fully understand its components and objectives – or, indeed, their own roles.

The findings from my research supported the idea that the centralised framework that controls the formulation of the strategic plan is one of the reasons for the vagueness of the plan. The results also suggest that participation from various levels within the

education system would ensure better lucidity of the plan. This is supported by Al-Qatameen (2002), who indicated that with participation, staff, teachers, and stakeholders will be aware of the plan's objectives, as well as aware of the general standards of the MoE, which is the guiding "map" for establishing the school's plan. Al-Ajmi (2008) stated that tensions during the implementation stage might result from the exclusion of lower levels from the process of the plan's formulation. He argued that the people required to implement the plan should accept and understand it before the implementation phase, and this can be achieved by involving them in the plan's formulation. Al-Hareeri et al. (2007) also suggested that the strategic plan should not be built in isolation from those who are required to implement it. They described that broader consultations should take place between senior managers and implementers during the formulation stage. According to Al-Hareei et al. (2007), this will increase opportunities for the implementers to accept the plan and, as a result, task ambiguity could be avoided during the implementation process. Consequently, participation in the formulation of the strategic plan helps the implementers develop a wider understanding of the plan, and this can be regarded as a factor that facilitates effective implementation of the plan.

I would argue, however, that it is unfair to generalise and to level all blame for the difficulties experienced during implementation of the plan at the centralisation policy. It is important to consider how senior managers deliver plans to the lower levels. Mohammad (2011) states that several methods could be employed to introduce strategic plans to the implementation body. First, conferences may take place to discuss the strategic plan. Second, meetings with the implementers' representatives can be conducted in order to provide a wider explanation of the plan's objectives and the implementers' roles (Al-Tabeeb 1999). Third, the MoE can create manuals that include guidance for those who are required to implement the plan.

The research findings have also highlighted that none of arrangements noted above is currently applied. In fact, there is no evidence that the MoE follows any specific approach or uses any specific method by which to clarify the plan. It can, therefore,

be seen that the top educational authority in Kuwait has failed to introduce the plan to lower levels in a clear and effective manner. Consequently, it could be suggested that the top authority ignored the fact that introducing the plan clearly to those who are required to implement it is essential to the success of the plan. At this point, I would suggest that the problem seems to lie with the people at the MoE rather than with centralisation itself, because as long as they are holding authority over the plan's formulation, they are responsible for finding best ways to deliver the plan to implementers. It appears that certain individuals are reflecting one of the negative features of centralisation, as they are not fulfilling their duties properly. Al-Farra (2003) believes that the strategic plan's implementation calls for senior managers who believe in the values of the strategic plan, and who can facilitate the means that will ensure good implementation. Windham and Peng (1997) reported that education plans fail when the authority is concentrated at the centre and, specifically, with individuals who are not interested in achieving its goals or attaining educational success. I would suggest that centralisation becomes damaging when centralised authority is practiced in negative ways, as indicated by Windham and Peng (1997). If the top authority utilised effective methods to clarify the plan, it is likely that there would be fewer concerns surrounding centralisation.

It is also likely that negative behaviour exhibited by the personnel within the MoE who are responsible for the formulation of the plan leads the implementers to believe that the centralisation policy impedes clarification of the strategic plan. It can be seen that in most situations, the implementers tend to criticise policy rather than criticise behaviour. This perception is supported by Al-Ateeqi (2004), who stated that Kuwaiti top-level managers that work at the MoE keep themselves busy with managerial tasks. In addition, she argues that within the policy of centralisation, it is difficult for those who act as ultimate policy and decision makers to maintain a focus on all educational issues. Therefore, Al-Ateeqi suggests that top-level managers allow low levels, such as schools, to handle more of the duties. Al-Ateeqi views decentralisation as the solution, and she does not suggest other solutions. It is also likely that people in the lower levels, who act as implementers, know how they are best able to understand the plan. Therefore, the implementers believe that if they

participated in the formulation of the strategic plan, they would be more familiar with it and would, therefore, understand what is required of them; this is highly apparent in the results of this research.

The findings further demonstrated that the centralised strategic plan of the MoE caused a lack of appropriate resources needed for the plan's implementation. One of the most vital issues to the success of any plan is the availability of appropriate resources (Al-Sakarna 2010; Al-Ajmi 2008; Devi 2005). From the points articulated in my research, it is evident that the education system failed to produce a high level of outcomes across public schools because of the centralised nature of the strategic plan. This is in line with the issue of the plan's implementability. As long as schools are required to implement the strategic plan, several kinds of resources (such as financial, material, and human resources) need to be dedicated to teaching and education activities.

Regarding the issue of resource shortages, the findings supported the idea that centralisation acts as an obstacle to obtaining appropriate resources dedicated to the purpose of implementation. This situation is supported by Al-Sharrah (2002), who argued a decade ago that one of the problems of educational planning in Kuwait is a lack of resources, such as qualified teachers and staff, in addition to insufficient financial resources for schools. Al-Melaiji (2011) reports that strategic planning requires the presence of leadership that supports the implementation stage by providing resources according to the plan's goals and objectives. Yet, evidence in Kuwait indicates that the MoE, which is responsible for resource allocation, does not consider providing resources according to the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.

An example of this can be found in the objective that seeks to improve the ability of Kuwaiti pupils to use technology in order to be equipped to work with global technological development (MoE, 2003). Ayoub (2012) has studied problems in the education system in Kuwait and has indicated that the MoE has shown ignorance towards providing pupils with the means to learn how to use information technology. Ayoub has raised a problematic issue, noting that even though the MoE's education

budget is quite large, the Kuwaiti education system fails to produce high outcome levels. To return to the earlier results of this research (see pages 163-164); I would note that while resources are available, they are beyond the reach of the schools. This is because the MoE provides schools with a fixed budget every academic year, which is insufficient (as indicated by the results). In addition, while the schools are required to request material resources, such as technology, from the MoE when they need them, the MoE does not properly respond to most of those requests. It would, therefore, seem that the centralisation policy totally controls the allocation of resources, to the extent that schools are unable to obtain resources according to their needs.

The way in which centralised resource allocation affects the ability to obtain sufficient resources in Kuwait is likely to be due to the gap between the MoE officials and those who are required to implement the plan. Previous research in Kuwait, which has investigated whether there is a productive relationship between the MoE and the implementation system, has confirmed the results of the current study. Two decades ago, Al-Hamdan (1992) reported that there was a need to establish an effective relationship between the MoE and the schools in order to solve the schools' problems and address their needs regarding the implementation of the strategic plan. Al-Hadhood (1994) has also stated that there is a gap between the MoE and those who are required to implement the plan. Al-Sharrah (1997) has emphasised that the needs of the implementation process seem to be neglected, as there is a gap between the MoE and the schools. Al-Sharrah (2002) has confirmed this perception when noting the problems in educational planning in Kuwait. He has also argued that there is weak communication occurring between the MoE and the implementers of the strategic plan, which ultimately weakens the implementation process, because many needs (such as a need for qualified teachers and financial resources) are not met. Therefore, it seems that while the situation is stable, the top authority is still not meeting the needs of the lower levels, as they are unable to provide material resources and qualified human resources, which would ensure successful implementation of the plan.

This finding is somewhat ironic given that Kuwait is a wealthy country and the MoE has billions of funds in its budget (Ayoub, 2012; Al-Ramzi, 2009). It does not make sense that such a rich country, which spends billions on education, has schools complaining about resource shortages. Dietrichson (2011) indicates that when resources are insufficient, public organisations are not expected to spend more than their allocated resources. Dietrichson has argued that the organisation as a whole lacks resources and, therefore, it allocates resources in limited amounts. However, the situation in Kuwait indicates that the MoE controls a significant portion of the budget, but the schools do lack resources, as indicated by the results of this research. Therefore, it seems that the problem lies in the centralised method of resource allocation that has been adopted by the top authorities. Thomas (2001) comments that the key disadvantage of centralised policies of this sort is that the allocators are distanced from the receivers, and so they lack the detailed knowledge required to understand the needs of individual departments.

In the UK, the situation in the education system is quite different from the situation described above. The UK education system applies a decentralised resource allocation method, which responds to the need for resources throughout the academic year based on the schools' needs. The UK approach to resource allocation is centred around local authorities, and schools are enabled to make spending decisions (Anderson, 2002; Levačić, 2002; Thomas, 2001; Blandford, 1997). It seems that a move towards decentralised resource allocation would offer a better response to a school's needs (Brown, 1990). The results of this research suggest that the research participants perceive decentralisation to be a solution to their problem.

Regarding the third issue, which is the rigidity of the strategic plan, the findings supported the notion that the centralised strategic plan is rigid and inflexible because the top authority did not involve wider participation from the lower levels and the stakeholders during the plan's formulation or implementation.

Strategic plans should be flexible and responsive to environmental changes from both within and without the organisation (Al-Ajmi, 2011; Mohammad, 2011; Al-Sakarna, 2010; Rudd et al., 2007). According to the participants' responses, there is

no evidence that the MoE made any changes to the objectives of the strategic plan between its preparation of the final document and the time that my research was conducted. It seems that given the extremely centralised education system in Kuwait, the strategic plan cannot be modified or changed, except if the top authority desired to so initiate these revisions. In addition, the results indicated that the recommendations made by people in the lower levels of the hierarchy are not taken into account during the plan's implementation. The centralised nature of the strategic plan appears to neglect many recommendations for changes and revisions because the decision-making authority is concentrated at one level (Ghenem, 2010). It is likely that a greater diversity of opinions is required in order for the plan to be described as being responsive to the internal and external environment. Indeed, diversity of opinions is reduced in the case of a centralised strategic plan because the scope of participation is reduced (Mohammad, 2011). Andersen (2000) states that despite the claim made by certain components of the strategic plan, planning is still required in order to develop new initiatives and to oversee adaptive strategic actions; dependency on a centralised strategic planning process does not sufficiently support the plan's goals. Anderson supports the results of this research in emphasising that lower-level managers in a centralised education system cannot make decisions that support improved responsiveness to changes.

It is possible that the problem of rejecting changes to the strategic plan originates from the weak planning skills of individual MoE officials. An interesting study that supports this possibility was conducted in Kuwait by Al-Hamdan and Al-Bakheet (2007). They investigated the degree of awareness that MoE officials demonstrated regarding strategic planning implications and concepts. Their research revealed that the MoE officials had weak knowledge of planning requirements, along with weak planning skills. Al-Hamdan and Al-Bakheet's study notes that the lack of knowledge amongst the education planners in Kuwait might be the reason for the lack of resources and the vagueness of the plan. This implies that when authority is given to poorly trained and poorly skilled people, these types of problems are more likely to occur. Again, the problem seems to stem from the people who hold the authority rather than from the centralisation itself. I would suggest that when the top authority

that formulates the plan lacks planning skills, wider participation can be useful, especially from those who have been trained to manage strategic planning. The interviewees in my research emphasised repeatedly that they are able to enrich the plan if they are allowed to participate in its formulation, especially if the MoE provides training programmes for school leaders and teachers to learn strategic planning skills. Thus with decentralisation, the chances of involving qualified planners might be increased.

Another study conducted by Al-Duaige (1994) in educational districts and schools, revealed that education district managers and school headteachers are capable of conducting education plans according to their knowledge and skills. Although the Al-Dauige study was conducted about 20 years ago, I would still consider its findings to be valid, as the MoE provided district leaders and schools with training programmes aimed at improving planning skills. In addition, many of the interviewees in my research confirmed that they have attended training programmes in order to improve their planning skills. Therefore, the evidence supports the need to shift some authority to those people in the lower levels who show acceptable planning abilities. That finding is supported by Al-Dauige's (1994) study of people, within districts and schools, who showed good planning skills, as well as by Al-Hamdan and Al-Bakheet's (2007) study.

Based on the results and evidence from researchers and authors, it seems that the strategic plan of the MoE is encountering some difficulties that directly affect implementers within Kuwaiti schools and districts, and that these difficulties result from the centralisation policy and the working practices of those who hold authority over the formulation of the plan.

6.3.4 Collaborativeness and participativeness

Regarding this issue, the questionnaire findings revealed that the MoE officials agreed that the centralised strategic plan allows for collaboration and participation from lower managerial levels, such as schools and districts, in addition to allowing

for participation from outside parties and stakeholders. The research also indicated that the other two groups (district and school leaders) disagreed with this issue.

The interview findings confirmed this result, demonstrating that all three tiers hold the same position they held in the questionnaire.

The general understanding of this finding is that the MoE officials tend to see the strategic plan as being built according to a collaborative approach, whereas the district and school leaders perceive the strategic plan as being very closed and unsupportive of wider participation from other levels of the education system or from outside stakeholders. This is interesting given that collaboration and participation are issues that cannot be proven or denied, as these elements are dependent upon individual perceptions. I would argue that this view depends on each level's understanding of the concept of collaboration and participation, or the degree to which they utilise each process.

The general finding of the questionnaire regarding this issue indicates that the whole sample perceives the centralised strategic plan as an impediment to collaboration and participation. The interviews also indicated the same general results: the majority of the interviewees disagree with the collaborative and participative nature of the strategic plan. The interviewees described two kinds of collaboration that are prevented by the centralisation policy that controls the strategic plan. First, internal collaboration with stakeholders within the MoE is limited. Second, external collaboration with stakeholders is also limited. Thus, the MoE's policy prevents participation from wider stakeholders in the strategic plan's formulation. This situation reflects how the extreme centralisation adopted by the MoE prevents participation from different stakeholders. Most of the research conducted in Kuwait that analysed the strategic plan emphasised this result, indicating that the MoE should allow for wider participation from stakeholders inside the education system (such as from teachers, headteachers, and district leaders), in addition to stakeholders outside the education system, such as religious societies (Al-Sharrah, 2002; Al-Sahrrah, 1997; Al-Hadhood, 1994; Al-Hamdan, 1992). Therefore, it appears that

these studies tend to recommend that the MoE's policy of educational planning should be revised by inviting wider participation from different parties.

The tendency towards making revisions in order to allow participation from other levels has been confirmed by a recent study that was conducted to investigate the reality of the strategic plan of the MoE in Kuwait from the perspectives of headteachers (Al-Mathkoor, 2011). That study's findings indicated that there is a need to spread a culture of participation among officials within the MoE, as a response to the need to involve a broader range of participants in the formulation of the strategic plan. In addition, that study supports the results of my study insofar as the centralised nature of the strategic plan causes a lack of inclusion of the actual needs of the Kuwaiti society (Al-Mathkoor, 2011). As such, it seems that collaboration with different parties will increase the chances that the plan will accurately meet the needs and problems of the Kuwaiti society.

The quantitative and qualitative results of this research indicate that the strategic plan is not comprehensive, and it does not include all the needs and problems of the education system, or of Kuwaiti society. It seems likely that one of the solutions to this problem would be to adopt a collaborative and participative approach to building the plan. This proposed solution is supported by a number of studies that encourage the idea that strategic planning should be based upon a collaborative and participative approach (Ugboro et al., 2010; Lumby, 2009; Hendrick, 2003; Kim, 2003).

Although studies in Kuwait have recommended wider participation from stakeholders, I would consider such a step to be critical and deserving of careful consideration, for several reasons. First, there is no evidence that stakeholders in Kuwait (such as families) are aware of education planning and the importance of building networks with schools. The aim of network development is to involve stakeholders in order to increase participation in such a way as to enrich the strategic plan. If a lack of awareness exists among the stakeholders, their participation would be pointless. Second, involving stakeholders requires accessing information systems across the three tiers of the education system. According to Al-Mathkoor (2011) the

information system in the education system in Kuwait is weak and needs to be improved. It is also important to consider developing the information system within the MoE, districts, and schools. Third, since the participation of stakeholders requires a degree of decentralisation in decision-making (Wholstetter, 2003), it is difficult to assume that stakeholders will make decisions effectively without being aware of the effects of decentralisation and the sharing of power. Productive collaboration with stakeholders requires preparedness (Adelman and Taylor, 2006); therefore, awareness of participation and its values should be spread amongst all the stakeholders.

According to my research findings, and the findings from studies conducted in Kuwait about the importance of collaboration and participation, it seems that this issue of collaboration among stakeholders would solve some of the current problems in the education system which would, in effect, better meet the needs of society. In this case, there is a need to switch the current policy of centralisation in strategic planning to decentralisation, in order to enable wider participation from different parties. A central aim of decentralisation is to increase the roles of individuals working outside of the central field of education, especially those of parent or community representatives and elected local authorities (De Grauwe et al., 2005). Adelman and Taylor (2006) support this argument, indicating that collaboration between families, communities, and schools allows for all of these elements to be better positioned, so as to reduce problems and optimise results. Consequently, it can be seen that collaboration enables communities and schools to develop essential strategies and resources that support caring and safe schools and communities. In turn, such organisations promote success within and beyond the classroom for young people and their families (Adelman and Taylor, 2006, p.1). In order to accomplish this in Kuwait, the current policy of centralisation in strategic planning needs to be changed to a decentralised system so as to enable wider participation from different parties.

Some theories fall in line with the collaboration principles that facilitate participation from different stakeholders. For example, the MoE in Kuwait may apply the

principles of social capital theory, which states that benefits may be offered from different parties in the strategic plan's formulation. Social capital theory is one of the theories that strongly support collaboration and participation. Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) has defined social capital as follows:

> The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possessions of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, or in other words to membership of a group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.

The link between Bourdieu's assertions and the results of my research appears in the implications of his definition to social capital theory, as he focuses on the distribution of power, either within or between societies, by applying social capital principles. Catts and Ozga (2005) note that social capital leads to connect social life's fragmentations by linking communities from their own environment to wider one. Thus social capital enables collaboration between all participants that are capable of enriching the strategic plan from inside and outside the education system would be an ideal way to apply social capital theory to strategic planning in education. This would lead to improved participation through collaboration, which might enhance collaboration between the stakeholders and enhance the reciprocity of responsibilities.

Social capital theory implies that individuals work better together in an environment of mutual trust (Tsang, 2009; Coleman, 1988). I think this is a critical issue in the case of building strategic plans. During the exploratory interview phase of my research, I gained the impression that the MoE officials do not trust the people in the lower levels, especially the head teachers, to participate in the formulation of the strategic plan. One of the MoE officials commented:

> …Who are headteachers to participate in strategic planning? We are talking about strategic planning not a simple plan. Head teachers are not qualified to participate in such big processes…

This quote emphasises that certain MoE officials do not believe in the stakeholders' abilities to contribute to a strategic plan. This culture of exclusion seems to be one reason why schools are not involved in the decision-making process related to the formulation of the strategic plan. This is supported by the tendency of people in the lower levels to recommend decentralisation of the education system in Kuwait – a tendency that is also found in the recommendations made by education scholars. Although most of the interviewees have recommended that decentralisation should be taken into consideration, this does not appear to be the norm.

Indeed, social capital theory requires that productive communication occur between education entities, while support is provided from the wider community, in order to build productive relationships aimed at unifying efforts for the sake of developing a strong strategic plan. The following section discusses the communicative capacity of the MoE's strategic plan.

6.3.5 Communicative capacity

The quantitative results of the communicative capacity of the strategic plan indicate that there are significant differences between the three tiers of the Kuwaiti education system. The MoE officials agree with the issue of the communicative capacity of the strategic plan, whereas the district and school leaders disagree with this issue. The findings from the interviews confirmed this, and the three groups maintained the same positions they held in the quantitative study.

The MoE officials seem to have a positive impression regarding the plan's communicative capacity, as they think that the centralised strategic plan does not present an obstacle to facilitating communication across the different levels of the MoE, nor does it affect the MoE's communication with the outside community. The district and school leaders believe that communication is ineffective; they think there is a need to enhance productive communication between the three tiers of the education system.

In addition to the interview findings, the results from questionnaire indicated that centralised strategic planning does not ensure productive communication between

levels within the MoE. Although strategic planning is an ideal means of communication by which the organisation can share information via a reciprocal process with the stakeholders (Al-Hareeri et al. 2007), there is no evidence that the MoE officials utilise this aspect in the development of the strategic plan. I question how a strong strategic plan could be formulated without building a wide network of communication across all levels of the organisation. I suggest that in most extremely centralised systems, top-level managers still need to communicate with all levels of the organisation in order to effectively reach every level that may affect or be affected by the plan. In addition, it is impossible for an individual, a group, or an organisation to exist without communication that supports the exchange of meaning (Robbins et al., 2010). This raises an essential issue, which is how a strategic plan characterised by unproductive communications can include the actual needs and address the actual problems of the plan without engaging in productive communication between all levels within an organisation.

Based on the findings, in Kuwait, downward communication takes place between levels of the education system because the MoE's officials hold responsibility for deciding the time and nature of the communication. Yet, the findings indicated that despite the existence of this approach, communication remains unproductive and it is simply used to respond to routine issues, rather than for being proactive. The nature of downward communication is that top-level managers actively communicate to lower levels regarding the assignation of goals and the provision of task instructions, employee information, policy and procedural communications, and the provision of feedback regarding problems and performance (Luneburg, 2010; Robbins et al., 2010; Cunneen, 2008; Hanson, 2003). I suggest that these issues cannot be seen to represent unproductive communication simply because such issues are crucial and reflect the healthy use of communication. Therefore, it seems that the nature and implications of communication reflect the top-level managers' awareness of what should be done. Thus, when managers utilise communication to discuss technical issues rather than regular routine issues, this indicates that these individuals (who have the authority to communicate) are aware of the organisation's priorities. In effect, this means that discussions surrounding these issues should take place with

other tiers within the organisation. As long as these issues are not included during the process of communication between the organisational tiers, MoE officials seem to neglect engaging in productive communication. As a result, issues can stem not only from centralisation, but also from ineffective communication emanating from the people who hold authority and who are required to communicate effectively with people in the organisation's lower levels. In addition, centralisation is seen as a policy that increases communication between levels of the organisation (Al-Ajmi, 2010; Ghenem, 2008). This is because all organisational levels should receive instructions from the top authority, which provides information and reports about its progress, and arranges meetings for discussions. Therefore, it seems that productive communication is dependent upon the MoE officials' beliefs about the nature of the issues that should be handled through effective communication

I again refer to Al-Hamdan and Al-Bakheet's (2007) study about MoE officials' awareness and skills with respect to planning. The authors' results showed that MoE officials lack the awareness and skills necessary to formulate educational plans. The authors recommended that MoE officials undergo specific training programmes in order to develop their knowledge about educational planning. One of the essential strengths of effective planners is their ability to communicate with the wider organisation and to build effective cross-organisational networks in order to attain the goals of the plan (Ghenem, 2008). Centralisation is, therefore, likely to present a barrier to communication if the top authority does not make decisions regarding the crucial issues that should be included in direct or indirect communication. The point here is that the top authority is the only tier empowered to decide how and when to communicate with the organisation's lower levels. Therefore, they are required to utilise their authority to conduct productive communication; otherwise, it is likely that the centralised authority will appear to impede the ability of lower-level management to communicate with the top-level officials.

The findings of my research demonstrated that the other kind of communication (upward communication) is not utilised because of the centralised nature of the strategic plan and its top-down implementation. Again, one cannot generalise such

findings, especially as MoE officials expect feedback from the plan's implementers. I would argue that upward communication should be conducted, even in centralised systems. The upward approach implies that the lower-level managers inform the top tiers about their progress towards achieving the organisation's goals, while expressing their feelings about the work to their direct managers and informing them about their ideas for improvement (Luneburg, 2010; Robbins et al., 2010). Clearly, such an approach enables the people in the lower levels to practice participation in a democratic framework, as long as they are able to offer suggestions for improvements to the top-level managers.

However, my research findings revealed that the lower levels are not empowered to make decisions regarding improvements. In this case, suggestions for improvements are often eliminated during communication; yet, the MoE still needs to support upward communication for other purposes, such as for addressing problems and obtaining information about available resources (Puanmaum, 2006; Hajji, 2002). If the MoE does not create specific events to communicate these issues, communication within the system is regarded as weak. Consequently, it can be seen that upward communication is impeded by the policy of centralisation.

I suggest that both downward and upward forms of communication are required in order to formulate the strategic plan and to invite others to participate in the process. The strategic plan's formulation requires the MoE to communicate with the people in the lower levels as implementers in order to deliver their policies and instructions, as well as to clarify their expectations. The implementers need to communicate with the MoE officials in order to discuss their progress, problems, and resource issues. Regardless of the policy adopted in the strategic plan's formulation, I think both approaches can be utilised.

6.3.6 Bureaucratisation

The questionnaire findings indicated that the respondents from across all three tiers (MoE officials, district leaders, and school leaders) agreed that the centralised strategic plan established the bureaucratic control over resources allocation. This

result was confirmed in the interviews, in that all of the interviewees agreed about the strategic plan's bureaucratisation.

The general findings of the questionnaire regarding bureaucratisation have been confirmed by the results of the interviews. The results indicated that all of the interviewees agreed that the MoE's education planning policies represent that bureaucracy has prevailed within the MoE's departments. However, there is variation between the interviewees' responses in how they perceive the impact of bureaucracy on education. The two different perceptions revolved around resource allocation and equity – the majority of the interviewees perceived bureaucracy as negative policy that affects the level of equity in obtaining resources; in addition, schools also face difficulties when trying to obtain resources. The minority think that the bureaucratic structure of the MoE ensures equity between schools in terms of resource allocation; furthermore, they also believe that bureaucracy ensures equity across human resource allocation.

Regarding equity in resource allocation, schools and districts receive financial, material, and human resources depending on the MoE's policies and regulations that control this process. The hierarchical structure of the MoE includes specific departments and experts that make decisions regarding resources. The establishment of these departments, which are fully staffed and equipped, enable the MoE to maintain greater control over the strategic plan, which also implies that the MoE makes decisions regarding resource deployment and the delegation of authority in the formulation of the plan. The bureaucratic structure of organisations ensures that any supports and problems associated with resource allocation are identified more efficiently (Robbins et al., 2010, Hanson, 2003). The idea is that with large organisations, there is a need to ensure that decisions are made within specific departments in order to make decisions within a short period of time through the establishment of a standing operating system (Hanson, 2003). Generally, centralised resource allocation is regarded by some authors as a policy that provides equity between schools, because each school should follow the same regulations and procedures set out by the top authority (Ghenem, 2010; Al-Bustan et al., 2003).

At first glance, it appears that the MoE benefits from the bureaucracy that resource allocation requires, as this approach uses experts from specific departments who ultimately deal with this process in order to ensure the best ways to determine resource allocation. Yet, the interviewees indicated that bureaucracy tends to generate the greatest amount of inequity between schools regarding the kind and amount of resources used.

My research findings addressed the MoE's policy of resource allocation among schools. All schools receive the same amount of resources according to its educational level (i.e., all primary schools receive the same amount of resources). This issue is perceived by the minority of interviewees as an issue related to equity between schools with respect to resource allocation. Moreover, teachers and staff are deployed according to the MoE's criteria. The staff and teachers are distributed to certain schools without any clear or apparent method. According to the minority of interviewees, there is also a kind of equity evident when the MoE provides all applicants with the opportunity to be deployed, and all schools should receive sufficient numbers of staff and teachers. Equity implies that when schools have similar needs, they should be provided with similar resources (Levačić, 2000); conversely, when schools have different needs, they should be provided with different resources that are best aligned with each school's needs (Levačić, 2000). Thus, "needs" are regarded as the foundation upon which resource allocation processes should be built (Anderson, 2002; Levačić, 2002; Levačić, 2000). While the minority of interviewees believes that the MoE's approach in resource allocation ensures equity by proving schools with the same amount of resources, it seems that these individuals lack of knowledge about the meaning of equity. I would argue that what is regarded as equity by the minority of interviewees is not valid. In my point of view, it is impossible to treat all schools as though they have similar needs and should get the same amount of resources. Indeed, the numbers of pupils and staff members within a school, as well as the actual size of a school's building, should be taken into consideration when allocating resources. Yet, the MoE does not consider these differences in the deployment of resources. Equity is simply "analogous to fairness and justice" (Levačić, 2000, p. 14); the injustice associated with providing

schools with fixed types and amounts of resources (as provided to the school each academic year) may fit some schools but not others due to the differences in each school's needs. In this case, bureaucracy seems to produce inequity in resource allocation among schools in Kuwait. Thus, the centralised strategic plan is unable to allocate resources fairly to each school in order to achieve the plan's goals.

The findings illustrated that bureaucracy impedes a school's ability to obtain resources in an appropriate amount of time they need to follow long and time-consuming procedures to accomplish this. Bureaucracy is seen as a process where the lower level's needs are met after long routines and procedures are completed (Robbins, et al., 2010; Al-Bustan et al., 2003). This perception supports the results of my research, which revealed that bureaucracy is a barrier to obtaining resources in an appropriate amount of time. In addition, through my own experience in working as a science teacher in a school for seven years, I would like to outline some problems encountered by that particular school as a result of centralisation. The following examples also reflect the limited roles of school leaders in Kuwait, and they demonstrate how bureaucracy acts as an obstacle to resource acquisition. Specifically, there were difficulties experienced in the effective provision of equipment for science laboratories, due to delays that often resulted from the bureaucracy that arose as a consequence of centralisation. First, science teachers evaluated the requirements of their schools' laboratories and informed the headteacher at their school, who wrote a letter to the educational district, which then transferred this letter to the MoE. The MoE then studied the proposal before making a decision, and they distributed the appropriate resources in response. These procedures required long periods of time to complete, which led to difficulties when teaching lessons due to a lack of scientific materials in the laboratories. This situation was confirmed by one of the interviewees who encountered the same problem (see page 206). Thus, this problem seems to be prevalent within the education system, and it appears to be a consequence of the highly bureaucratic structure of the MoE.

It seems that the problem of resource allocation is referred to that the MoE does not apply bureaucracy to ensure control and equity. Although the results indicated that

there is inequity in resource allocation because of the bureaucratic structure of the MoE, there might be another reason behind this problem. I wonder about how an organisation such as the MoE in Kuwait, which established a hierarchical structure that includes fully staffed and equipped departments in each tier, makes decisions about resources in the same way each academic year. From the interviews, I obtained a clear picture about the nature of the structure of the MoE. First of all, the interviewees indicated several times during the interviews that the MoE had a hierarchical structure through which all departments were staffed and equipped. Second, each department included employees who were hired according to their individual specialisations. Third, all departments were required to follow the MoE's rules and regulations in terms of fulfilling tasks and duties, such as those associated with the strategic plan. Finally, all members of the MoE were treated equally insofar as tasks were allocated according to an individual's area of specialisation. With all of these departments and experts, the MoE still allocated resources equally for each school each academic year. The issue lies in that the MoE utilises the same approach and allocates the same amount of resources, but it has not identified clear criteria associated with staff deployment, although the deployment does involve specific departments and experts. In my opinion, this practice does not require the establishment of tens of departments or the deployment of hundreds of experts. This contradiction in the MoE's policies and practices raises an important question: If the MoE adopts the experts' roles within the departments involved in resource allocation in a clear, bureaucratic framework, will that ensure equity and provide sufficient resources in an appropriate timeframe?

The answer to this question may help identify the actual cause of inequity in resource allocation, and it may help determine whether this cause stems from the bureaucracy itself, or from other factors such as political agendas. In both cases, the main obstacle to resource deployment is centralisation, which ultimately controls this process.

6.3.7 Workplace environment

The questionnaire findings highlighted that the MoE officials hold positive attitudes towards their workplace, whereas district and school leaders have negative attitudes

towards their workplaces. This finding is confirmed by the interviews, during which all groups reflected the same attitudes that they had expressed in the questionnaire.

The overall understanding established from this finding is that the MoE officials, as decision makers, are not affected by the workplace, which is run under a centralised framework. The MoE officials, who hold the power and control, are not the implementers of the strategic plan, and in this way, they are not affected by its policies during either the formulation or the implementation processes. Therefore, the strategic plan's implementers (district and school leaders) perceive the workplace in a different way than the MoE officials do. The implementers of the strategic plan receive orders and tasks, which flow from the MoE, and they are required to fulfil them in accordance with the MoE's policies. Therefore, the workplace reflects a framework that is shaped by the centralisation policy, which may affect the implementers of the strategic plan. As a result, those who implement the plan in a top-down approach have different perceptions about the workplace than those who formulate the approach.

The general findings of the questionnaire regarding workplace environment illustrated that the sample population in the study displayed negative attitudes towards their work. The same finding was found during the interviews. The interviewees identified three conditions associated with the workplace that result from a top-down plan of implementation: role ambiguity, discouragement of their creativity, and diminishment of their leadership behaviours.

Regarding role ambiguity, the interviewees from districts and schools reported that their workplace, which is run in accordance with a highly centralised framework, renders their roles as implementers of the strategic plan ambiguous. They feel that they lack the knowledge of how to meet the goals of the plan. The interviewees also expressed that school leaders do not receive sufficient information about the strategic plan, nor do they know what the MoE expects from them as school leaders. This means that they do not have a clear understanding of their roles in the implementation process. District leaders do not receive adequate information about the various components of the strategic plan, and the MoE does not clearly

communicate the role that the district should be playing in the implementation process. This vagueness make implementers feel that they are unable to meet the MoE's expectations because they cannot clearly determine their roles and responsibilities. This finding is supported by many researchers, who found that a correlation existed between role ambiguity and an inability to achieve goals related to the job (Tang and Chang, 2010; Eys and Carron, 2001; Gist and Mitchell, 1992).

The findings also demonstrated that participation in the formulation of the strategic plan increases the districts' and schools' knowledge about the goals of the plan, as well as their own roles, supporting a healthier workplace. With participation, the strategic plan's implementers will be able to discuss, suggest, and recommend issues relating to and included in the plan. They will be able to find the best ways in which to achieve the plan's goals according to their level of familiarity with the plan's aims and their own roles. This finding is supported by researchers who argued that increased participation from employees would allow them the opportunity to decide the best way in which to fulfil their responsibilities (Singer, 2011; Schultz and Schultz, 2002; Smith and Brannick, 1990). Therefore, it can be seen that the workplace environment seems to be more healthy and productive when the implementers of the strategic plan have a clear idea about their own goals and responsibilities. Supporting this idea, researchers have addressed the remarkable link between the establishment of clear goals and roles within the workplace. For example, Lunenburg (2011) argued that the establishment of clear goals allows employees to grasp what achievements to work towards, as well as to determine how to reach those aims. Locke and Latham (2002) added that clear and specific goals have a positive impact on employees' attitudes towards their jobs. Al-Mehailby and Al-Jabr, (2002) indicated that headteachers, who have clear goals and roles, demonstrate a high level of performance in their jobs. These perceptions are in line with the findings of my research, which suggest that the workplace environment will be more positive when the implementers have clearly defined responsibilities. Therefore, it seems that the centralised framework of the strategic plan, in terms of both its formulation and implementation, shapes the negative workplace environment that arises as a consequence of the development of ambiguous roles. The

implementers need to participate in the plan's formulation in order to become more familiar with the goals of the initiative, as well as to determine their own roles in the enactment of the plan.

According to Kahn (1964), role ambiguity creates a situation where a given employee's job, responsibilities, or roles are insufficiently predictable or not specifically outlined. The problems of role ambiguity seem to result from the fact that the top-level managers, who formulate the strategic plan, do not provide districts and schools with clear information and guidance about how to implement the plan. Therefore, the centralisation policy increases the obligation of the MoE officials to clarify the expected roles of lower-level managers in the implementation phase of the strategic plan. Again, it seems that the problem of role ambiguity is not only caused by the centralisation policy; it is also caused by the MoE officials failing to consider role clarification for implementers. The nature of the centralised strategic plan implies that the MoE officials are responsible for the plan's formulation; in addition, the plan's implementation process is conducted in a top-down approach. Given that the MoE officials are decision makers, they hold full responsibility for finding an appropriate means through which to deliver the plans to the implementers, while defining the lower-level managers' roles and tasks. The negative aspect of the centralisation policy can be seen in situations where individuals at the central level do not accomplish their roles effectively. The successful definition of a person's role is dependent on a smoothly-run working environment, and on the effective communication between role definers and role receivers (Schaubroeck et al., 1993). In this way, it is possible to criticise a centralisation policy where decisions are made by people who do not communicate effectively with lower levels, or who fail to provide individuals in the lower levels with clearly identified tasks and goals. In addition, if the MoE adopted a bottom-up approach to policy implementation, it is likely that the implementers of the strategic plan will become more familiar with their roles. In general, bottom-up approach first identifies key agents at a local level, and then engages them in discussions about their goals, strategies, activities, and contacts (Morris and Scott, 2003; Sabatier, 1986). In doing so, the bottom-up approach develops a network of contacts, which can be used to map the individuals

at local, regional, and national levels who are engaged in both governmental and non-governmental programmes, particularly in the areas of planning, financing, and execution (Sabatier, 1986). Thus, it seems that the bottom-up approach enables the implementers to become vital players when deciding upon the appropriate methods of implementation that are required, and that are aligned with their abilities within the workplace, especially since these implementers tend to be more aware of their own needs. Consequently, this likely has a positive impact on their performance within the workplace.

Regarding the second point related to creativity in the workplace, my research findings revealed that the workplace is restrictive to the extent that creative ideas cannot be employed because the implementers lack autonomy at work. It seems likely that working independently leads to the emergence of more creative ideas. In addition, working in a centralised environment that is focused on top-down implementation of the strategic plan impedes the plan's implementers from utilising creative thinking; however, it should be noted that creative thinking may produce ideas that will be beneficial to the achievement of the plan's goals. Hirst et al. (2011) argued that centralisation, formal rules, and procedures regulate and control employees' behaviours and discretions in their work. The authors' perception supports the interviewees' claims, insofar as the centralised framework adopted in the workplace obliges employees to follow the MoE's regulations; the employees are unable to behave and think independently, and they cannot produce creative ideas in the workplace. Moreover, my research highlighted that the MoE adopts a top-down approach to the strategic plan's implementation. Furthermore, the MoE sets formal rules, and it requires that districts and schools follow them. When following formal rules, implementers' freedom is decreased, and the chance that the MoE can benefit from creative ideas is reduced (Raub, 2007); Craft (2010) states that it does not make sense that the education system encourages teachers to work creatively while finding creative solutions to problems, yet officials still enforce and adopt centralisation and bureaucracy to manage the system. In Craft's view, creativity at work requires a certain degree of freedom so that the implementers of the strategic plan can think creatively. It seems that decentralisation would better support independent thinking

amongst implementers, who could then produce more innovative ideas. Researchers support this opinion, indicating that the high demand for creativity in the workplace also requires that a high degree of autonomy within the workplace be present (Hirst, et al., 2011; Shalley, et al., 2001).

The centralised nature of the workplace environment does not encourage autonomy, and as a result, creativity is effectively discouraged. According to my experience as a science teacher, I noticed a situation that reflected how centralisation affects the production of creative ideas. In response to a lack of substitute teachers, the school's headteacher suggested a useful way to benefit from the classes of absent teachers by preparing a room inside the school provided with proper educational resources so that students might independently develop effective skills – including thinking skills. The intention behind this idea was to encourage pupils to employ their time usefully, rather than leaving the pupils without lessons when the teacher was absent. This idea was declined entirely by the ministry because any ideas regarding educational activities should originate from the MoE, and schools are only required for activity implementation. Another reason for the refusal was that the idea would require providing resources, and the headteacher is not able to make decisions regarding resource allocation.

The findings revealed that the interviewees (as implementers) expressed their desire to work independently and creatively. In my opinion, whether or not these needs are met depends on individuals' needs within the workplace. It seems likely that the workplace is unhealthy for those who feel that their work is restrictive. Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory also seems to support the perception that autonomy has a positive influence on job satisfaction. According to Maslow (1970), self-actualising people do not depend on the world around them, other people, cultural factors, or general extrinsic satisfaction for their own satisfaction; instead, they depend upon their own development and the ongoing growth of their own potential. In this respect, Maslow's theory emphasised that individuals require freedom at their workplace to encourage creativity. Research also indicates that to satisfy the need for self-actualisation, employees should exercise their full abilities (Robbins et al., 2010;

Hanson, 2003; Schultz and Schultz, 2002). Other researchers perceive autonomy as the main factor that facilitates creativity (Craft, 2010). These perceptions align with my research findings in that the centralised workplace restricts creativity.

Regarding the third finding, interviewees asserted that their leadership roles are diminished because of the top-down approach used to implement the strategic plan. This finding implies that the workplace becomes unhealthy when it does not provide the managers with the freedom to behave as real leaders. All of the interviewees are leaders within their workplaces; they reflect a high desire to control their employees and staff. Leadership implies that the leader can influence his/her followers (Bush, 2007; Cheng, 1996). In examining education leaders in Kuwait within the implementation body, one can notice that they are not empowered to manage their schools or to control human and financial resources. They are not able to suggest the ways in which school budgets are spent, and they are not allowed to manage teams in order to set plans or make decisions regarding their schools' improvement. It seems that leaders lack influence over their followers. The workplaces in both the districts and schools are controlled by the MoE's policies and regulations. When considering leaders' roles, it can be seen that they are only implementers of the MoE's policies, and they do not have a voice or control over the methods used to achieve goals. School leaders (as implementers) cannot build teams within their workplaces to achieve the strategic plan's aims. This situation demonstrates how in their workplaces, the interviewees appear to be followers rather than controllers. It seems that the interviewees (as leaders) seek autonomy in order to feel that they are leaders in their workplaces. In general, Palestini (2011) notes that an individual who seeks autonomy or supervisory responsibility in his/her work is likely to demonstrate a need for power. This power enables managers to act as real leaders and to become the ultimate controllers of their own jobs (Western, 2012; Schultz and Schultz, 2002; Hanson, 2003). It seems likely that power cannot be achieved, except if top authorities change their policies and regulations in such a way as to provide leaders with the power necessary to lead their workplaces.

Given that the interviewees indicated that they need autonomy to act as real leaders, I would suggest that empowerment is needed to create a healthy workplace, and it is also required when responding to leaders' desires to behave as real leaders. It is possible that leaders as implementers will complete several actions. First, they will be able to set goals and guide staff to achieve them collaboratively. This is because one of the characteristics of good leaders is the ability to work collaboratively (Moos, 2012; Cardno, 2009; Bush, 2007; Lumby, 2002; Bollington, 1999). Second, leaders will be able to select staff according to specific needs. Third, they will able to inspire their followers and guide them to achieve the strategic plan's goals (Al-Mehailby and Al-Jabr, 2002). Fourth, they will be able to employ resources according to a school's particular needs. These features can only be achieved if the MoE moves from highly centralised policies to decentralisation, or even to a lesser degree of centralisation; as a result, districts and school leaders would be afforded more freedom (Schultz and Schultz, 2002). The centralised nature of the strategic plan's formulation and implementation seem to affect the workplace insofar as implementers (such as district and school leaders) are not able to behave as real leaders, as they do not have much, if any, autonomy over their own work.

In conclusion, centralisation and decentralisation are policies that are utilised to manage education systems. It is difficult to make judgements about whether a given policy is successful or not. The education systems should utilise the policy that best fits their specific contexts, while defining the responsibilities of all the parties involved in the education system. On the one hand, when education systems adopt centralisation, the top tiers of the educational hierarchy are largely responsible for any decisions that are made, and they have to clarify these decisions to the lower levels; they also have to facilitate the processes associated with enacting any of these policies and decisions. On the other hand, when education systems adopt a decentralised approach, the individuals in lower-level management positions are increasingly more responsible for meeting the goals and standards set by individuals in the top levels. In effect, district and school leaders become accountable for meeting the general goals and aims of the education system, as these individuals are now a part of the decision-making process.

Chapter 7: Recommendations and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of my research was to explore MoE officials', district leaders', and school leaders' perceptions about the effectiveness of Kuwait's strategic education plan policy and processes. First, my research aimed to identify the nature and characteristics of the policy that controls Kuwait's education system in general, and the strategic education plan in particular. Second, my research sought to identify the issues that resulted from the use of centralisation to formulate and implement a strategic plan. Third, this research aimed to explore the research participants' perceptions regarding the seven issues associated with the centralised strategic education plan. Finally, this research aimed to identify the reasons behind each of the issues that resulted from the centralisation policy by obtaining the interviewees' justifications to their perceptions.

My research addressed the following questions:

1. How do the research participants characterise the education system in Kuwait?
2. What issues does centralisation in educational policy raise for the formulation and implementation of strategic education planning in Kuwait?
3. What are managers' perceptions about the implications of these issues for both policy and practice?
4. What reasons do managers provide for their perceptions regarding the centralised strategic plan?

This chapter consists of five sections. The first presents the main results of the research. The second section presents a number of recommendations for improving the strategic plan of the MoE in Kuwait based on the research findings. The third section presents suggestions for future research. The fourth section presents the limitations of the current research. Finally, the chapter presents a summary of my research findings. The final section presents the summary of the research.

7.2 Contribution to knowledge

Initially, this research focused on the effectiveness of Kuwait's strategic education plan in light of the policy that controls it. This research adds knowledge regarding the reality of educational planning in developing countries, specifically in the Kuwaiti context with a centralised system of control of educational planning. Research in Kuwait (such as Al-Hamdan and Al-Bakheet, 2007; Al-Sharrah, 1997; AlHadhood, 1994; Al-Hamdan, 1992) has investigated some issues regarding the strategic plan in general. However, my own research is more specific, and it is the first study to link issues pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of the strategic education plan to the centralised policy that enacts it.

This study investigated the effectiveness of Kuwait's strategic education planning initiative from different perspectives across different levels in the Kuwaiti education system: among MoE officials, district leaders, and school leaders. Thus, this research includes diverse perspectives from both the education policymakers and those who implement the plan day by day. As a result, this research ensured that the issues regarding the effectiveness of the strategic education plan would be associated with its formulation and implementation processes, as well as with the plan's implementers themselves – all in light of a policy that controls the education system in Kuwait. This provides researchers rich information about how strategic education plan in Kuwait is formulated and implemented.

This study reveals how policymakers and the strategic education plan's implementers perceive the policy that controls this process, according to these individuals' positions in the system. Thus, researchers can benefit from these findings in identifying the best way forward when formulating and implementing an education plan.

7.3 Main findings of the research

Initially, the research findings confirmed the current policy that controls the education system in Kuwait. The results highlighted that the centralised education system in Kuwait is extreme, and that the MoE is the ultimate decision maker. The MoE adopts a centralised approach to control resource allocation, in-service

programmes for teachers and staff, pupil assessments, curriculum development, and educational planning.

My research identified seven issues of the centralised strategic education plan in Kuwait:

1. Efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic plan
2. Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan
3. Implementability
4. Collaborativeness and participativeness
5. Communicative capacity
6. Bureaucratisation
7. Work environment

These issues are seen as problems that result from the centralised nature of the strategic plan that affected the education system's outcome. Within each issue, the research results identified a number of reasons as to why these issues can be viewed as weaknesses in the centralised strategic plan. Thus, my research found that the centralisation policy, in both the formulation and implementation of the strategic plan, is an obstacle to the strategic plan's effectiveness. Additionally, it identified the relationship between the weaknesses of the strategic plan and the MoE officials' practices as the ultimate decision makers. Finally, it was concluded that the implementers of the strategic plan tend to participate in decision-making activities to obtain a degree of autonomy within their workplace in order to identify the best ways to achieve the strategic plan's goals.

7.4 Recommendations from the research

According to my research findings, I would recommend the following actions:

1. The strategic education plan should be constructed in a participatory framework. Districts, schools, outside stakeholders, and community members should participate in the strategic plan's formulation.

2. There is a need to establish an effective information system within the MoE, districts, and schools in order to provide the strategic plan with realistic information stemming from stakeholders in the field.
3. There should a precise estimation of the schools' needs, and resources should be allocated to schools based on these needs, thereby ensuring equity between the schools.
4. Schools should spend their resources based on their needs, instead of following the MoE's strict regulations on how to spend these resources.
5. The MoE should appoint teachers based on their qualifications. It would be useful if teachers are appointed within each district. In this way, the districts would be able to appoint the appropriate teachers and allocate them to schools according to the school's needs.
6. The in-service programmes for teachers should also be designed according to the schools' needs. Schools should participate in planning the in-service programmes in order to ensure that these programmes fit their specific needs.
7. The MoE should develop methods to deliver the strategic plan to both implementers and outside stakeholders.
8. The MoE should identify appropriate stakeholders who can effectively enrich the strategic plan.
9. There should be effective collaboration between the three tiers of the education system, and there should also be collaboration between the education system and its outside stakeholders.
10. The MoE should communicate with the lower levels effectively, engaging in both downward and upward communication between the three tiers.
11. Bureaucracy should be reduced, especially in regard to the allocation of resources; the number of routine procedures should also be reduced.
12. For plan implementation, lower levels (such as districts and schools) should obtain a degree of autonomy to set their own directives based on their knowledge of the best ways to achieve the plan's goals.

13. The MoE should activate a system of accountability where lower levels are accountable for ensuring that positive results are obtained in the strategic plan.
14. MoE officials should be enrolled in training programmes to develop their planning skills.
15. The Department of Planning and Improvement should deploy experts in educational planning, rather than rely on regular employees, in order to ensure that the strategic plan is formulated by well-trained individuals, as well as by stakeholders in the field.
16. Information about the components of the strategic plan and the MoE's policies, visions, and goals should be disseminated occasionally among all of the organisation's tiers in order to build an awareness of the plan and its goals.
17. An evaluating system should be established in order to follow up on the strategic plan's progress, while identifying the problems and assessing the achievements of the plan's goals.

7.5 Suggestions for future research

This research identified several issues that were seen as consequences of the centralised strategic plan. I suggest that future research could investigate the impact of centralised strategic planning on each of these issues. For example, a study could investigate the impact of centralised strategic planning on schools' efficiency and effectiveness in greater depth and with more focus. The same approach could also be applied to the rest of the issues discussed in this research.

There is a need to conduct an analysis of the stakeholders in Kuwait in order to precisely identify those who are especially interested in education. In addition, future research could investigate the potential benefit of involving stakeholders in the strategic plan's formulation.

There is a need to investigate the best way forward with regard to the policy of controlling the education system in general, and the strategic plan in particular.

Future research might investigate the potential advantages of the decentralised education system in Kuwait. It might also examine the potential advantages of decentralised strategic education planning in Kuwait.

While the policy guiding the implementation of the strategic plan adopts a top-down approach, there is a need to investigate the impact of this approach on achieving the plan's goals. Future research might also delve into the potential advantages and disadvantages of the bottom-up implementation approach of the strategic education plan. It might investigate how the implementers respond to the policy of centralisation in terms of job satisfaction.

7.6 Limitations of the research

This research included several limitations:

1. There were difficulties in accessing information within both the MoE and the districts, because of the strict procedures for this imposed by the MoE. These procedures have to be followed before each visit. Moreover, the head of the Department of Information Systems has to personally sign his approval giving access to the information systems. This was time consuming and especially difficult since my time was limited (I had to finish my field work and return to the UK in a specified timeframe).
2. Some of the interviewees were only able to meet with me for a short time because of their busy schedules. This resulted in few interviews, which were relatively condensed, and required careful time management. Other interviewees asked me to split the interview into two so that they could be conducted at different times.
3. The research sample included leaders in the MoE, the districts and schools. The schools included head teachers, deputy heads and department heads. Teachers were not included in this research. I hoped that all of the leaders at the various schools would provide informative responses, as they represented the lowest level in the education hierarchy. The heads of the departments work as leaders and as teachers within the school, so I hoped that the heads of

the department would represent teachers; however, teachers (as representative of lower levels of management) may have different thoughts.

7.7 Summary

This research sought to identify the issues that resulted from adopting centralised strategic education planning in Kuwait. The findings demonstrated that the strategic education plan of the MoE in Kuwait has several weaknesses. In addition, my research revealed that there is a need to consider every individual, whether from inside or outside the education system, who can enrich the strategic plan. It is hoped that the formulation of the MoE's strategic plan will involve the input of qualified experts in education planning so as to further guide the development of this initiative, rather than depending solely on the insights of MoE officials, whose qualifications and level of awareness of the issues at hand may not be of benefit to the overall aims of this directive.

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Appendices

Appendix (1): Research design

<table>
<tr><th rowspan="2">Research Question</th><th colspan="3">Phase (1) Qualitative</th><th colspan="3">Phase (2) Quantitative</th><th colspan="3">Phase (3) Qualitative</th></tr>
<tr><th>Method of Inquiry</th><th>Sample</th><th>Time</th><th>Method of Inquiry</th><th>Sample</th><th>Time</th><th>Method of Inquiry</th><th>Sample</th><th>Time</th></tr>
<tr><td>1. How do the research participants characterise the education system in Kuwait?</td><td>Semi-structured interviews</td><td rowspan="2">(12)
(2) MoE Officials
(4) D. Leaders
(6) S. Leaders</td><td rowspan="2">August-November 2010</td><td colspan="3" rowspan="2">*****</td><td>Semi-structured interviews</td><td>(22)
(4) MoE Officials
(6) D. Leaders
(12) S. Leaders</td><td rowspan="4">October-March 2012</td></tr>
<tr><td>2. What issues does centralisation in educational policy raise for the formulation and implementation of strategic education planning in Kuwait?</td><td>Semi-structured interviews + Literature</td><td>*****</td><td>*****</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. What are managers' perceptions about the implications of these issues for both policy and practice?</td><td>*****</td><td>*****</td><td>*****</td><td>Questionnaire</td><td>(188)
(30) MoE Officials
(48)D. Leaders
(120)S. Leaders</td><td>December-March 2011</td><td>*****</td><td>*****</td></tr>
<tr><td>4. What reasons do managers provide for their perceptions regarding the centralised strategic plan?</td><td>*****</td><td>*****</td><td>*****</td><td>******</td><td>*****</td><td>*****</td><td>Semi-structured interviews</td><td>(22)
(4) MoE Officials
(6) D. Leaders
(12) S. Leaders</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix (2): Phase 1 interview schedule

Pre-pilot Interview schedule (A)	Post-pilot interview schedule (B)
• **Brief description about the interviewee's job:** - Years of experience - Daily routine - Duties - Responsibilities - Roles • **Description of current strategic plan:** - Means of formulating the strategic educational plan - Means of implementation - Policies and regulation of the strategic educational plan - Strengths - Weaknesses	• **Brief description about the interviewee's job:** - Nature of the job - Years of experience - Daily routine - Responsibilities - Roles • **Description of Kuwaiti educational system:** - Managerial structure - Policies formulation approaches - Ways of making/delivering decisions • **Description of the strategic planning of the MoE:** - Policies and regulations of the strategic plan - Nature of the plan's policy - Policy of formulating the strategic plan - Their roles, if any, in the plan's formulation - Ways of implementation/role distribution • **Implications of the strategic plan:** - Concerns/general complaints - Justifications

Appendix (3): phase 3 interview schedule

Pre-pilot interview schedule (A)	Post-pilot interview schedule (B)
• **The policy of leading the Kuwaiti education system** • **Discussion of the issues being investigated:** - Efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic plan - Comprehensiveness of the strategic plan - Implementability - Collaborativeness and participativeness - Communicative capacity - Bureaucratisation - Work environment • **Alternatives**	• **The policy of leading the Kuwaiti education system:** - Nature and extent of the policy. - Ways of making decisions/who makes them? Examples. - Characteristics of the centralisation. - Description of the framework of strategic plan. Formulation/ways of delivery/implementation policies. • **Discussion to the issues of investigations: (questions/follow-up questions/probes)** - Efficiency of the strategic plan - Comprehensiveness - Implementability - Collaborativeness and participativeness - Communicative capacity - Bureaucratisation - Work environment (feelings/concerns) • **Impact of centralisation** - Consequences of centralisation for each issue

Appendix (4): the questionnaire

Questionnaire to obtain views on strategic educational planning in the State of Kuwait

The aim of this questionnaire is to get to know your opinion regarding the pros and cons of the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education, which is within the requirements for obtaining a doctoral degree in educational planning.

Your participation in answering the sections of this questionnaire may lead to finding the most appropriate methods and policies to reform the educational planning in Kuwait. Please answer all the questions starting from the cover page which contains questions related to your personal data, moving to the following pages and try to provide answers to each of the sections of the questionnaire.

Thank you very much for dedicating some of your time to fill in this questionnaire.

Name (optional): ----------

The managerial level of your position (Ministry/ Districts/ School):----------

The Job: ----------

Educational District: ----------

Gender (male / female): ----------

Researcher: Eisa Mohammed Al Kandari

University of Leeds (UK)

School of Education/Educational Management

NO	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Centralised strategic planning has succeeded in solving increasing pupils' achievement.					
2	There is a significant integration between the inputs of the plan (sources and potential) and its outputs of qualified graduates.					
3	The centralised strategic plan had succeeded in providing educational outcomes appropriate to the requirement of the local market in Kuwait.					
4	The Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education lacks clarity.					
5	The objectives of the centralised strategic plan lack full clarity.					
6	The Ministry of Education provides executive bodies with the necessary information and instructions on how to implement its strategic plan.					
7	The Central Authority symbolised by the Ministry of Education lacks clear vision relevant to the strategic plan**.**					
8	The executive bodies are not fully aware of their role on the implementation of the strategic plan developed by the ministry.					
9	The ministry does not provide the executive bodies with all the resources needed for implementing the strategic plan.					
10	The centralised nature of the Ministry of Education's strategic plan can be described as difficult to implement.					
11	The strategic plan based on centralisation reflects accurately the needs of the Kuwaiti labour market.					
12	The centralised strategic plan ensures covering the essential needs of the executive bodies.					
13	The strategic plan based on centralisation does not reflect the aspirations of the Kuwaiti society.					
14	The centralised strategic plan is incompatible with international modern trends in education.					
15	The centralised strategic plan does not benefit from other countries' experiences.					
16	The centralised strategic plan does not prevent complying with the international technological development.					
17	The centralised strategic plan limits the creativity of the executive bodies' personnel.					

No	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
18	The centralised strategic plan does not serve independency at work.					
19	The centralised strategic plan has a negative influence on the employees' performance at work.					
20	The centralised strategic plan changes according to the changing needs of schools and educational departments.					
21	The centralised strategic plan does not respond to the constant changes in the educational field.					
22	The centralised strategic plan is subject to modification of the monitoring committees.					
23	One of weakness of the centralised strategic plan is not engaging the educational departments in the planning process.					
24	One of weakness of the centralised strategic plan is not engaging schools in the educational planning process.					
25	There MoE involves the civil society's organisations in the strategic plan formulation process.					
26	The channels of communication between the Ministry and the executive bodies can be considered relatively weak.					
27	The Ministry follows up regularly on the implementation of the educational plans.					
28	The Ministry provides an effective alternative mechanism to meet with the executive bodies.					
29	The centralised policy for the strategic plan ensures justice among all the educational entities, such as justice in the distribution of financial and human resources.					
30	The centralised planning policy avoids overlap in of the executive bodies' roles.					
31	The centralised planning policy does not ensure providing a healthy working environment.					
32	The centralised planning policy controls financial resources.					
33	The centralised planning policy helps save efforts.					
34	The centralised strategic planning policy responds to the lower levels needs quickly.					
35	The centralised strategic plan takes into account all aspects of educational development in Kuwait.					

No	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
36	The centralised strategic plan does not ensure using the entire means of data collection necessary for developing educational plans.					
37	The centralised strategic plan contributes to solving most of the educational problems in Kuwait.					

This research requires carrying out personal interviews with a sample of executives and employees in the Ministry of Education based on the results of this questionnaire. If you are willing to participant in these interviews, please insert a mark in the box: agree ☐ disagree ☐

Appendix (5): the information sheet

Research Information Sheet for Participants

Title of my Research:

"Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Kuwait's Strategic Education Planning Policy and Processes''

- You are invited to participate in this research, as is explained below. Please spend a few minutes reading this explanation in order to understand the reason for conducting this research. This may help you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you need any further explanation, please do not hesitate to ask at any point.
- In this research, I will try to obtain a full description to the policy which controls education system in Kuwait including the characteristics of this policy. Moreover, I will analyse the current process of educational strategic planning in order to identify issues of strengths and weaknesses, which may are resulted from the Ministry of Educations policy in the management of this process. This research will be conducted in three phases. The first and third phases require using interviews for data collection whilst the second phase depends on a questionnaire. The duration of the three phases is approximately 12 months.
- You have been chosen as a participant of a sample, which is believed, will enrich the research data.
- You have the right to decide whether you wish to participate in this research or not. Also, you have the right to withdraw from this research at any stage. This will not affect any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason for your withdrawal.
- You might be involved in this research three times according to the three phases of the research and according to the selection of the research sample. Each interview may take an hour, as it requires answering open-ended questions, while the questionnaire may take 30 minutes to answer the close-ended questions. It is expected that you will give clear answers without any bias, and support your answers with evidence and relevant examples.
- Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people who participate in the research, it is hoped that this work will help to improve the best practice of educational planning in Kuwait that will lead to providing the community with the best quality of graduates.
- This research will try, as much as possible, to protect your identity and retain your anonymity. Pseudonyms will be given to all of the participants in this

research. All of the information will be utilised only for the benefit of this research. However, you should be aware that there is still some possibility of you being identified, please bear that in mind while giving your accounts.

- You will be asked to provide information about the Ministry of Education's policy in the strategic plan's formulation and implementation. This information will help in establishing the strengths and the weaknesses of this process. As a result, this information might be useful in improving the current strategic planning in Kuwait.
- You will be informed about the research results in the final stages of this research.
- The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration during conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.
- If you require any further information or explanation, please contact me via the following telephone number or email address:

Eisa M A AlKandari
Tel: 99612355
E-mail: alkandari11@yahoo.com

Appendix (6): the consent form

Title of my Research:

‘‘Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Kuwait’s Strategic Education Planning Policy and Processes’’

Researcher Name: Eisa AlKandari

1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.
2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.
3. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study.
4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out on the information sheet.
5. I am aware that my answers might include some criticism of the Ministry of Education and I agree to provide such answers.
6. I wish to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
7. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study to be used for any other research purposes .

Participant’s name	
Participant’s signature	
Date	
Contact details	
Researcher’s name	
Researcher’s signature	

Appendix (7): Details of the exploratory sample

Phase (1)

Pseudonym	Gender	Tier	Status In Institution
Ahmad	Male	MOE (1 male/1 female)	Leader
Huda	Female		Leader
Hassan	Male	Educational districts (2 males/2 females)	Leader
Ali	Male		Leader
Sara	Female		Leader
Mariam	Female		Leader
Yousif	Male	Schools (3 Male/ 3Female)	Head teacher
Salman	Male		Deputy Head
Jassim	Male		Head of Department
Zainab	Female		Head teacher
Laila	Female		Deputy Head
Dana	Female		Head of department

Appendix: (8) Details of the in-depth interviews sample

Phase (3)

Pseudonym	Gender	Tier	Status in Institution
Saad	Male	MoE (2 males/2 females)	Leader
Majed	Male		Leader
Nadia	Female		Leader
Norah	Female		Leader
Khalid	Male	Districts (3 male/3 female)	Leader
Ali	Male		Leader
Nasser	Male		Leader
Abeer	Female		Leader
Hajar	Female		Leader
Farah	Female		Leader
Morad	Male	Schools (6 males/6 females)	Head teacher
Bader	Male		Head teacher
Sanad	Male		Deputy Head
Fahad	Male		Deputy Head
Adel	Male		Head of Department
Waleed	Male		Head of Department
Fouz	Female		Head teacher
Aisha	Female		Head teacher
Taibah	Female		Deputy Head
Noor	Female		Deputy Head
Latifah	Female		Head of Department
Nawal	Female		Head of Department

Appendix (9): A part of interview with MoE official (Arabic version)

عيسى: كيف حالك، أشكرك على إعطائي هذا الوقت لإجراء المقابلة.

سعد: أهلا بك، يسعدني المشاركة في بحثك واتمنى أني أستطيع إعطائك ما تحتاج.

عيسى: كما عرفت مسبقا. إسمي هو عيسى الكندري وأريد إجراء مقابلة معك لمناقشة بعض القضايا المتعلقة بالنظام التربوي في دولة الكويت بالإضافة إلى التخطيط التربوي الاستراتيجي. المقابلة تنقسم إلى قسمين: أولا أريد أن أتناقش معك عن طبيعة السياسة التي تتحكم بالنظام التربوي، ثانيا سوف أتوجه لمناقشة بعض القضايا المتعلقة بفاعلية التخطيط التربوي الاستراتيجي.

سعد: طيب، مثلما تريد، أنا حاضر وجاهز إن شاء الله.

عيسى: هل من الممكن أن تخبرني عن طبيعة عملك والمهام والمسئوليات التي تقوم بها؟

سعد: (تم حجب الإجابة لاعتبارات بحثية أخلاقية).

القسم الأول: مناقشة حول طبيعة السياسة التي تتحكم في النظام التربوي في دولة الكويت.

عيسى: ما هي السياسة التي تستخدمها وزارة التربية للتحكم في النظام التربوي؟ أقصد كيف تقوم الوزارة باتخاذ القرار فيما يتعلق بالقضايا التربوية؟

سعد: هل تقصد هل نحن نستخدم المركزية أو اللامركزية؟

عيسى: نعم أقصد ما هي طبيعة هذه السياسة.

سعد: طيب، منذ تأسيس النظام التربوي في الكويت، تقوم الوزارة بتحمل جميع المسئوليات فيما يتعلق بالقضايا التربوية. الوزارة تحتوي على خبرات عديدة في مختلف المجالات وهم قادرين على اتخاذ جميع القرارات التربوية، هذا يجعل من الوزارة مؤهلة لقيادة النظام التربوي وتغطية جميع احتياجاته عن طريق تقسيم العمل على مجموعة من الإدارات المتخصصة. بالتالي تتخذ الوزارة جميع السياسات والمسئوليات التي يجب أن تنفذ من قبل المناطق التعليمية والمدارس.

عيسى: هل من الممكن أن تشرح لي ما هي هذه القضايا التربوية وكيف تقوم الوزارة بالتحكم بها؟

سعد: أعني بالقضايا التربوية كل ما يتعلق بالتربية في الكويت مثل المناهج والمصادر المختلفة وتقويم التلاميذ.

عيسى: هل من الممكن أن تحدثني عن الطريقة التي تقوم بها الوزارة باتخاذ القرارات فيما يتعلق بهذه الامثلة؟

سعد: نعم، وزارة التربية مسئولة عن بناء المناهج الدراسية لجميع المناهج الدراسية، إدارة المناهج التابعة للوزارة (مبنى رقم 2) مسئولة عن هذا الشيء، لدينا أيضا إدارات فرعية مختلفة والتي تحتوي على مختصين مرتفعي الكفاءة لبناء المناهج حسب اختصاصات كل منهم. هذه الإدارات الفرعية تقوم بتشكيل لجان تحتوي على أشخاص متعددين للعمل على بناء المناهج. كل هؤلاء الأشخاص ينتمون لإدارة المناهج بالإضافة إلى أن بعضهم يتكون من موجهين تم الاستعانة بهم من المناطق التعليمية كمتخصصين في بعض المواد الدراسية.

عيسى: هل يعني ذلك أن هؤلاء الموجهين يشاركون في بناء المناهج؟

سعد: نعم يشاركون، لكن تم اختيارهم من قبل إدارة المناهج وهم مكلفين باتباع سياسات الوزارة فيما يتعلق ببناء المناهج، وزارة التربية عينتهم لهذه المهمة لأنهم من أصحاب الخبرات القديمة في مجالاتهم، وهؤلاء الموجهين من المفترض أن يكونوا خبراء معروفين جيدا وإدارة المناهج حذرة جدا في تعيينهم لأنهم يملكون القدرة على إثراء المناهج الدراسية.

توزيع المصادر أيضا يعتبر أحد مسئوليات وزارة التربية، نحن نقوم بتوظيف المدرسين بالإضافة إلى باقي الموظفين سواء في المناطق التعليمية أو المدارس.

عيسى: هل من ممكن إخباري كيف تقوم الوزارة بعمل ذلك؟

سعد: على سبيل المثال، المدرسين الذين يرغبون الحصول على وظيفة يجب ان يقدموا الطلب في الوزارة وتحديدا في إدارة القوى البشرية التي تضع السياسات والشروط اللازمة للتعيين، بعد دراسة جميع طلبات التعيين، تقوم إدارة القوى البشرية باتخاذ قرارات القبول. بعد ذلك تقوم إدارة القوى البشرية بإرسال جميع المقبولين للمناطق التعليمية والتي تقوم بدورها بإرسال المدرسين إلى المدارس حسب الحاجة.

عيسى: ممكن أن تشرح لي ما هي هذه الاحتياجات؟

سعد: نعم، أقصد المتقدمين للوظيفة يتم توزيعهم غالبا على المدارس حسب النقص الموجود في كل مدرسة. مثلا، عندما يكون هناك نقص في مدرسين اللغة الانجليزية في إحدى المدارس، تقوم المنطقة التعليمية بإعطاء الأولية لهذه المدرسة للحصول على مدرسين اللغة الإنجليزية الجدد، وهكذا.

عيسى: ماذا لو رفضت إحدى المدارس قبول أحد المدرسين المعينين؟

سعد: لا تستطيع المدارس رفض المدرسين الجدد لأنهم تم تعيينهم مسبقا عندما قبلتهم الوزارة للعمل كمدرسين. لذلك يجب أن يكون هناك أسباب قوية للرفض مثل السلوكيات السلبية والإجرامية أو في حالة أن أحد المدرسين لا يتعاون مع الإدارة المدرسية. لكن هذا يحتاج القيام بإجراءات معينة والتي عن طريقها تقوم المدرسة بمخاطبة المنطقة عن هذا الموضوع. تقوم المنطقة بعد ذلك بمخاطبة وزارة التربية وتشرح الأسباب. تقوم الوزارة باتخاذ القرار المناسب حول هذا الشأن عن طريق إدارة الشئون القانونية.

تقويم الطلبة أيضا هو من اختصاص الوزارة، جميع الاختبارات خصوصا للمرحلة الثانوية موحدة وتقوم إدارة المناهج داخل الوزارة ببناء الاختبارات في نهاية كل فصل دراسي. من يقوم ببناء الاختبارات هم خبراء معينين يعملون على تصميمها بالتعاون مع الموجهين في المناطق التعليمية.

عيسى: ماذا عن الاختبارات خلال السنة الدراسية، مثل الاختبارات الأسبوعية والشهرية؟

سعد: هذه الاختبارات مصممة في المدارس. لكنها لا تمثل التقويم الأساسي للطلبة لأنها تمثل نسبة بسيطة لمعدل كل طالب، النسبة الأكبر يحصل عليها الطالب من خلال الاختبارات الموحدة التي تصممها الوزارة.

عيسى: هل تعتقد أن الاختبارات الموحدة فعالة، ولماذا؟

سعد: نعم أعتقد أنها فعالة لأننا يجب أن نضمن مصداقية الاختبارات ,ان تكون معبرة فعلا عن مستوى الطلبة. تقوم وزارة التربية تقوم بتعيين خبراء خصيصا لهذا الغرض واعتقد اننا بهذه الطريقة نستطيع متابعة المستوى التحصيلي لطلبتنا، لذلك، نستطيع أن نحكم فيما إذا المدارس تؤدي دورها كما يجب فيما يتعلق بتدريس الطلبة أم لا. ببساطة نستطيع أن نحصل على ذلك عن طريق النظر لنتائج الاختبارات الموحدة، أعتقد أن أكثر الدول المتقدمة التي لديها أنظمة تربوية قوية تستخدم الاختبارات الموحدة المركزية بفاعلية وهم يشعرون بالراحة والرضا عن نتائجها.

عيسى: ماذا عن التخطيط التربوي الاستراتيجي؟ هل لك أن تخبرني عن سياسة بناء الخطة الاستراتيجية؟

سعد: الخطة الاستراتيجية تدار أيضا عن طريق إدارة التخطيط داخل الوزارة والتي تقوم بتشكيل لجان التخطيط التي تتكون من عدة خبراء مخصصين لبناء خطة استراتيجية قوية.

عيسى: هل لديك فكرة عن أعضاء هذه اللجان؟

سعد: هؤلاء أشخاص يعملون في إدارات مختلفة داخل وزارة التربية مثل قطاع المناهج وقطاع التخطيط وقطاع التعليم العام وقطاع الأنشطة التربوية. تقوم اللجنة أحيانا بتعيين أشخاص من المناطق التعليمية مثل بعض الموجهين وذلك للاستفادة من خبراتهم.

عيسى: هل لك أن تشرح لي تحديدا ما هي أدوار هؤلاء الموجهين؟

سعد: هؤلاء الموجهين يقومون بمساعدة اللجنة للكشف عن الاحتياجات التربوية وذلك لتضمينها في الخطة الاستراتيجية نظرا لقربهم، إلى حد ما، للمدارس.

عيسى: هل بإمكان هؤلاء الموجهين اتخاذ قرارات فيما يتعلق بأهداف الخطة؟

سعد: لا أعتقد ذلك، هم يقومون فقط بتزويد اللجنة بالمعلومات والاقتراحات اللازمة، لكن اللجنة هي من تقرر أيا من هذه الاقتراحات ملائم أم غير ملائم.

عيسى: أخبرني لو سمحت عن عملية تنفيذ الخطة الاستراتيجية؟ كيف تقوم المدارس تنفيذ الخطة؟

سعد: أممم، المدارس تنفذ الخطة حسب معايير وزارة التربية.

عيسى: هل بإمكانك شرح ذلك أكثر؟

سعد: على سبيل المثال، تقوم الوزارة عن طريق المناطق التعليمية بتزويد المدارس بالخطط السنوية كجزء من الخطة الاستراتيجية وهذه الخطط السنوية يجب أن تحقق أهدافها. تقوم الوزارة بتزيد المدارس بالمصادر اللازمة بغرض تحقق الأهداف كما أخبرتك. هذه المصادر يتم التحكم فيها بواسطة الوزارة.

عيسى: هل تستطيع المدارس بناء استراتيجياتها الخاصة وذلك لتنفيذ الخطة الاستراتيجية؟

سعد: لا أعتقد أنهم قادرين على عمل ذلك لأننا نتحكم بتوزيع بالمصادر وجميع الأمور التربوية الأخرى، لو كانوا قادرين على بناء استراتيجياتهم الخاصة للتنفيذ، هذا يعني أنهم سوف يتحكمون بتحديد كمية المصادر اللازمة، هذا غير ممكن في الوقت الراهن.

عيسى: إذن، وزارة التربية تتحكم بعمليتي بناء وتنفيذ الخطة الاستراتيجية؟

سعد: نعم.

القسم الثاني: مناقشة القضايا التي تم الحصول عليها من خلال الدراسة الاستطلاعية

عيسى: طيب، في ضوء هذه السياسة المركزية للتخطيط الاستراتيجي، أود مناقشتك بعض القضايا المتعلقة بعمليتي بناء وتنفيذ الخطة الاستراتيجية.

سعد: طيب.

عيسى: هل من الممكن أن تحدثني عن كفاءة الخطة الاستراتيجية؟

سعد: نعم أعتقد أننا لدينا خطة استراتيجية فعالة.

عيسى: ممكن أن تفصل إجابتك؟

سعد: طيب، الخطة الاستراتيجية بنيت عن طريق خبراء ذي كفاءة عالية ووزارة التربية خصصت ميزانية ضخمة لضمان أن الخبراء والامكانيات سيتم توفيرهم لصالح الخطة. بالإضافة إلى أن إدارة التخطيط لا تستطيع اعتماد الخطة الاستراتيجية إذا كانت ليت ذات كفاءة عالية.

عيسى: طيب، ما هو رأيك بخصوص معدل تحصيل الطلبة؟

سعد: أنا أتفهم أنه هناك بعض القلق حول ذلك، لكن اعتقد أن هذا يرجع إلى أسباب عديدة منها أن المدرسين لا يؤدون أدوارهم كما يجب فيما يتعلق بتدريس التلاميذ ونحن نعاني من مستواهم التدريسي. وزارة التربية زودتهم ببرامج تدريبية عديدة وهي جيدة جدا من ناحية المستوى لكن مستواهم التدريسي لا زال ضعيفا، تستطيع أن تجد خبراء تربويين كثيرين يشتكون من مهارات المدرسين في التدريس، هم حتما لا يؤدون أدوارهم كمدرسين حقيقيين.

عيسى: لكنك ذكرت مسبقا أن تعيين المدرسين يتم عن طريق الوزارة، لماذا لا يتم اختيار المدرسين ذو الكفاءة العالية؟

سعد: هذه واحدة من أزمات التربية في الكويت، نحن مجبرين على قبول جميع المتقدمين الراغبين للحصول على وظيفة لأن سياسة الدولة تتطلب أن جميع المواطنين الكويتيين لديهم الحق أن يحصلوا على وظيفة في اي وظيفة يختارونها وأنت تعلم أن فرص المدرسين للحصول على وظيفة في وزارات أخرى تعتبر محدودة باستثناء في وزارة التربية.

عيسى: هل تعتقد أن سياسات وزارة التربية تضمن فعالية وكفاءة التخطيط الاستراتيجي؟

سعد: أنظر، كما قلت لك، هذه الخطة الاستراتيجية بنيت اعتمادا على خبراء ذي كفاءة عالية، كما أن الوزارة أنفقت أموال ضخمة على ذلك، أعتقد أنه من غير العدل أن نوصف الخطة على أنها غير فعالة أو ليست ذات كفاءة خصوصا أنها أخذت وقت وجهد كبير لإنجازها، جميع الخطوات اتخذت بحذر لضمان أن الخطة يجب أن تثمر عن نتائج جيدة.

عيسى: هل لديك فكرة عن آراء المدارس عن كفاءة وفاعلية الخطة الاستراتيجية؟

سعد: لا لكن أعتقد أنه يستحق معرفة آراءهم ومعرفة اقتراحاتهم.

عيسى: قمت بجمع معلومات من قادة متعددين في المناطق التعليمية والمدارس حول التخطيط الاستراتيجي، وهم يعتقدون أن سياسة المركزية تمنهم كمنفذين من الحصول على مصادر مالية كافية للتنفيذ لأن الحصول على المصادر تعتبر عملية بيروقراطية شديدة. وقد ذكروا أيضا أن الطبيعة المركزية لبناء الخطة الاستراتيجية سبب عدم تلبية احتياجات تنفيذ الخطة. هم يعتقدون أن هذه القضايا أثرت على فعالية وكفاءة الخطة الاستراتيجية باعتبار أن معدل تحصيل الطلبة ضعيف.

سعد: طيب، أعتقد انه هناك عدد من القضايا يجب أن تؤخذ بعين الاعتبار عندما نبني الخطة الاستراتيجية. أعتقد أنه يجب أن يكون هناك تقدير دقيق للاحتياجات ووزارة التربية يجب أن توفر المصادر حسب هذه الاحتياجات وذلك في سبيل مصلحة الطلبة. أنا لا أقول أن الخطة غير فعالة بالرغم ان هناك مشاكل. لكن الاحتياجات تتغير من وقت لآخر. ونحن يجب أن نلبي هذه الاحتياجات في أسرع وقت ممكن. أنا أدرك أن المستوى التحصيلي لطلبتنا ضعيف ونحن يجب أن نعمل شيء تجاه ذلك والخطة يجب أن تضمن ذلك أيضا. لا

يزال المدارس يشتكون من قلة المصار وأعتقد أننا يجب أن نفكر بذلك بجدية لأني أعتقد أن ذلك لم يأتي من فراغ.

عيسى: ما هو رأيك حول هذي الشكوى؟ ما هو السبب لذلك؟

سعد: لا أستطيع أن أصدر أحكاما في الوقت الراهن لأن هذا يحتاج دراسة يتم عن طريقها تقييم الوضع. يجب أن نعرف مدى ملاءمة هذه المصادر وأن نفكر بأفضل السب لتوفيرها فيما لو كان هناك حاجة فعلية لها. لكن، في الوقت الحالي، لا نستطيع القول أن سياستنا في توزيع المصادر خاطئة فقط لأن المدارس قالوا ذلك. وفي نفس الوقت، أعتقد أن هناك مشكلة ونحن يجب أن نبحث عن حل.

عيسى: طيب، سوف أنتقل إلى القضية الأخرى الآن. هل لك أن تحدثني عن شمولية الخطة التربوية الاستراتيجية الحالية؟

سعد: أممم... في رأيي بالرغم أن وزارة التربية حريصة جدا على جعل الخطة شاملة قدر الإمكان، أعتقد لا زلنا بحاجة لإدراج كل شيء قدر الإمكان بحيث نجعل هذه الخطة ثرية وتغطي جميع احتياجاتنا وذلك لإعداد طلبتنا للمستقبل. أعتقد أن هناك أشياء كثيرة ممكن أن تجعل هذه الخطة تتميز بشمولية أكبر. لكن أنتبه، أنا لا أقول أن الخطة فقيرة أو سيئة، ما قصدته هو أن هناك أمور كثيرة ربما تحسن من الخطة بحيث تجعلها أكثر شمولية.

عيسى: هل بإمكانك إخباري ما هي هذه الأمور؟

سعد: على سبيل المثال، الخطة الاستراتيجية لم تلبي احتياجات السوق المحلي الكويتي، وكما ترى، لازال هناك نقص في تزويد السوق المحلية بالخريجين القادرين على العمل في مجالات مختلفة. الحكومة لا زالت تستورد الخبرات من خارج الكويت للعمل في القطاعين الخاص والحكومي لتلبية احتياجاتهما. أعتقد أن هذا الأمر يبرز نقطة أن النظام التربوي يجب أن يعمل على تزويد السوق المحلية بالخبرات المتنوعة وذلك لتغطية الاحتياجات من الكفاءات الكويتية. إضافة إلى ذلك، لا تزال هناك كثير من المشاكل الاجتماعية بحاجة لإيجاد حلول عن طريق التربية، عل سبيل المثال ارتفاع معدل الجريمة وتعطي المخدرات لدى شبابنا. هذه القضايا يمكن حلها فيما لو ركز النظام التربوي عليها بجدية وخصص جهدا أكبر لدراسة الأسباب وإيجاد أفضل الحلول.

عيسى: طيب، ماذا تقترح لجعل النظام التربوي يغطي هذه القضايا والمشاكل؟

سعد: أممم... أقترح عمل دراسة موسعة حول احتياجات المجتمع ومشاكله. طبعا، هذا الشيء قامت به وزارة التربية مسبقا عند بناء الخطة الاستراتيجية، لكن ربما تكون هناك مشاكل أخرى ووضع حلول جذرية لها. من هنا أنا أقترح عمل أن تكون هناك أهداف مباشرة موجهة لحل هذه المشاكل بالإضافة إلى قضايا أخرى بحيث تكون هناك دراسة تتبعيه لها خصوصا فيما يتعلق بالسلوكيات السلبية مثل الجرائم. بهذه الطريقة، نستطيع أن نقول أن هناك دراسو موسعة تم أجراؤها بغرض الكشف عن القضايا والمشاكل بالإضافة لإيجاد عدد من الحلول.

عيسى: فيما يتعلق باحتياجات عناصر التربية (الطالب، المنهج، المدرس) هل تعتقد أن الوزارة قادرة على الكشف عن جميع احتياجات النظام التربوي بخصوص هذه الأمور، وبناء خطة استراتيجية تلبي هذه الاحتياجات؟

سعد: أعتقد ان العناصر الأساسية للنظام التربوي تمت تغطيتها خلال الخطة الاستراتيجية والمناهج هي من ضمن هذه العناصر. على سبيل المثال، قطاع المناهج قام بدراسة احتياجات التربية لمناهج ملائمة لطلبتنا ونتيجة لذلك، أعتقد أن النظام التربوي قام بتزويد المدارس بمناهج متقدمة بحيث تتماشى مع التطور العالمي. فيما يتعلق بالمعلمين، لا يمكننا ضمان نتائج جيدة بدون الاهتمام بهم. المعلمين هم من أهم العوامل التي تؤثر على تعليمي طلبتنا ونحن على دراية عن الطرق اللزمة لتلبية احتياجاتهم. لكن أعتقد أن هناك طرق أفضل تضمن تعيين معلمين ذو كفاءة عالية بداية عن طريق مراجعة قوانين وشروط قبول الطلبة في الجامعات ثم طرق إعدادهم للعمل كمعلمين ثم اختيارهم بعد التخرج ثم تحسين برامج تطوير المعلمين التي تنمي مهاراتهم. من هنا أعتقد أن الخطة الاستراتيجية يجب أن تضع في اعتبارها هذه الأمور. هذا لا يعني أن الخطة الاستراتيجية ضعيفة، لكن أعتقد أنها لا زالت بحاجة إلى تحسين وأعتقد هذا الشيء سوق يتم التعامل معه طالما أن الوزارة لديها الوعي عن جوانب القوة والضعف.

عيسى: هذا يعني أن وزارة التربية غير محتاجة لتفعيل مشاركة أوسع للكشف عن الاحتياجات التي ممكن إدراجها في الخطة الاستراتيجية؟

سعد: أممم... طيب، المشاركة شيء جيد لكني أعتقد أنها تعتمد على من سيشارك في هذه المهمة، أعتقد أننا وظفنا أشخص لديهم كفاءة عالية القادرين على إجراء دراسات للاحتياجات وكل شيء يعتبر من متطلبات بناء خطة شاملة. المشاركة الواسعة سوف تسبب توترا وضياع للوقت. المسألة هي مسألة بناء خطة قوية. المشاركة هي اداة وليست غاية. عندما تفكر أنك تملك هذه الأداة مسبقا لذلك ليس هناك معنى لتوسيع المشاركة وأعتقد أن سياسات الوزارة فيما يتعلق بالتخطيط الاستراتيجي ملائمة.

عيسى: طيب، دعني أنتقل الآن للقضية الثالثة. هل تعتقد أن هناك مشاكل فيما يتعلق بقابلية الخطة الاستراتيجية للتنفيذ؟

سعد: لا تزال هناك مشاكل في جميع جوانب حياتنا وجميع أنشطتنا التي نعملها، والتنفيذ هو أحد أنشطتنا.

عيسى: هل تقصد أ الخطة غير قابلة للتنفيذ؟

سعد: أووو... لا لم أقصد ذلك نهائيا. ما قصدته أنه ربما تكون هناك مشاكل بحيث تحثنا على التحسين. أعتقد يجب أن لا تقول ذلك، يا أخ عيسى لا تحاول أن تتصيد مني بعض الكلمات وتبني عليها أحكاما. هذه الخطة كلفت مالا كثيرا وأخذت وقتا وجهدا طويلا، هل تتوقع أننا بنينا خطة غير قابلة للتنفيذ.

عيسى: لا يا سيدي، أنا لم أبني حكما، لكن هذا ما فهمته من إجابتك في البداية ثم وجهت لك سؤالا وليس حكمت، لكن طيب، هل لك أن تكلمني عن هذه المشاكل إن وجدت؟

سعد: قلت أنه من المحتمل أن تكون هناك مشاكل لكن في الوقت الحالي، لا أجد أية مشاكل مباشرة في عملية التنفيذ. أعتقد أن وزارة التربية حريصة على أن تكون خطتها الاستراتيجية قابلة للتنفيذ بكل سلاسة.

عيسى: طيب، أريد أن أذكرك أنك ذكرت مسبقا أنك تؤمن أن وزارة التربية يجب أن تلبي احتياجات المدارس فيما يتعلق بالمصادر لأن هناك شكاوى لم تأتي من فراغ حسب قولك. هل تعتقد أن هناك مشكلة مع ذلك فيما يتعلق بالتنفيذ؟

سعد: نعم أنا أعتقد ذلك، لكن هذا لا يعني أن الخطة لا يمكن تنفيذها، ما قصدته مسبقا أنه من الجدير دراسة احتياجات المدارس من المصادر وذلك لتلبية احتياجاتها خصوصا أنها من الممكن أن تواجه مشاكل تتطلب بعض المال والأدوات التدريسية ولو كان هناك نقص في ذلك، حينها يمكن أن المدارس ستواجه مشاكل في تعليم الطلبة أو أي قضية أخرى داخل المدرسة. كما أني أقصد أن وزارة التربية يجب أن تعمل شيئا ما عندما تشتكي المدارس عن نقص في المصادر وفي نفس الوقت، مستوى الطلبة التحصيلي منخفض. من الممكن أن تكون المدارس محقة في ذلك، لا أعلم، لكن هذا لا يعني أن الخطة ليست قابلة للتنفيذ حتى لو كانوا محقين بهذا الشأن لأنه من المحتمل أنك قد تجد أسباب أثناء التنفيذ مثل نقص المصادر لكنك تبحث عن حل سريع لها لتجنب المشاكل.

عيسى: هل حاولت وزارة التربية بحل مشاكل المصادر أو درست ذلك مسبقا؟

سعد: لا إلى الآن، لكني متأكد أن أن وزارة التربية سوف تقوم بذلك بأسرع وقت حالما تشعر بوجود مشكلة كهذه.

عيسى: طيب، هل تعتقد ان المدارس قادرة على تحديد كمية ونوعية المصادر التي تحتاجها؟

سعد: نعم، لكن يجب أن نكون حذرين أن المدارس تطلب المصادر باستمرار فيجب أن نكون حذرين بأنه يجب أن لا يكون هناك فوائض في المصادر سواء المالية أو المواد داخل المدارس لأن ذلك يتعارض مع سياسة توفير المصادر التي تشجع عليها وزارة التربية باستمرار. أعتقد ان أفضل الطرق لتوفير المصادر هو جعل هذا الأمر من ضمن الوزارة سلطات الوزارة. إذا كان هناك مورد للمصادر بحيث يتحكم بتوزيعها بنفسه سوف يؤدي ذلك إلى منع هدرها طالما هم المورد الوحيد لها. بالطبع يجب أن تكون المصادر كافية وملائمة ولهذا السبب أنا قلت مسبقا أن وزارة التربية يجب أن تفعل شيئا حيال ادعاءات المدارس بعدم توفر تلك المصادر.

Appendix (10): A part of interview with MoE official (English version)

Eisa: Hello, sir. Thank you for giving me some time to conduct this interview.

Saad: You're welcome. I'm pleased to participate in your research and I hope I can give you the information that you need.

Eisa: As you know, my name is Eisa AlKandari, and I would like to interview you in order to discuss some issues regarding Kuwait's education system and the strategic education plan. This interview is divided into two sections: first, I would like to discuss with you the nature of the policy, which controls the education system in Kuwait; and second, I will discuss with you some issues regarding the effectiveness of the strategic education plan.

Saad: Okay. As you wish; I'm ready.

Eisa: Could you please tell me what your job, duties, and responsibilities are?

Saad: (This response is withheld in the interests of preserving interviewee anonymity).

1. Discussion of the nature and extent of the current policy that controls the education system in Kuwait

Eisa: What is the policy that the MoE utilises to control the education system in Kuwait? I mean, how does the MoE make decisions regarding education issues?

Saad: Are you referring to whether we are utilising centralisation or decentralisation?

Eisa: Yes. I mean what's the nature of this policy?

Saad: Well, since the establishment of the education system in Kuwait, the MoE holds all responsibility with regard to all education issues. The MoE includes experts in different specialisations who are capable of making all decisions regarding education. This makes the MoE capable of leading the education system, while covering all its needs by distributing the work across several specialised departments. Thus the MoE takes care to make all decisions regarding the education system in

Kuwait, while drawing education policies, which should be implemented by districts and schools.

Eisa: Could you please explain what the education issues are and how the MoE controls them?

Saad: By education issues, I mean everything related to education in Kuwait such as the curriculum, different kinds of resources, and pupils' assessments.

Eisa: Could you tell me about the ways in which the MoE makes decisions regarding these examples?

Saad: Okay. The MoE is responsible for creating the curriculum for all subjects. The Department of Curriculum within the ministry (building number 2) is responsible for this item. We have different sub-departments for all subjects. These departments include experts who are highly qualified in curriculum development. These sub-departments construct committees that include different individuals in order to work on curriculum projects. All of these people belong to the Department of Curriculum, as do some directors who were derived from districts as specialists in some subjects.

Eisa: Does that mean that these directors participate in curriculum design?

Saad: Yes, but they're selected by the Department of Curriculum and they're required to follow the MoE's policies regarding curriculum design. The MoE hires these individuals because they have extensive experience in their subjects. These people are supposed to be well-known as experts, and the Department of Curriculum is very careful to hire them, as they are able to enrich the curriculum. Resource allocation is one of the MoE's responsibilities. We deploy teachers and all employees within the districts and schools.

Eisa: Could you explain how this is conducted?

Saad: For example, teachers who want to have a job should apply at the Department of Human Resources, as this is the department that sets all the policies and conditions of teachers' deployment. After studying the applications, the Department of Human Resources make decisions regarding the applicants' acceptance. After that, the

department sends the candidates to districts that, in turn, send them to schools according to the school's needs.

Eisa: Could you explain these needs?

Saad: Yes. I mean the candidates mostly distributed among schools according to the shortage. For example, when schools lack teachers of English, the district will give that school the priority to receive new deployed English teachers, and so on.

Eisa: What if schools reject a specific, newly deployed teacher?

Saad: Schools can't reject any new teacher because they already got the job when the MoE accepted them to work as teachers. So there should be a strong reason for rejecting them, such as criminal behaviour, or in the event that teachers don't co-operate with the school's management. But this requires specific procedures where schools write letters to the district to which they belong; the district writes a letter to the MoE explaining the case. The MoE then makes a decision regarding this issue via the Department of Statutory Affairs.

Pupils' assessment is the responsibility of the MoE. The different exams, especially for secondary schools, are unified, and the Department of Curriculum within the MoE designs these exams at the end of first and second semesters. The exams are designed by experts who design them with the cooperation of directors within the districts.

Eisa: How about the exams during the academic year, such as those that take place weekly or monthly?

Saad: The schools design these, but they don't represent pupils' major assessment because the bulk of marks can be obtained by the centralised exams, which are designed by the MoE.

Eisa: Do you think the MoE's policy of pupils' assessment is effective- and why?

Saad: Yes, I think it is effective. We should guarantee that the exams are valid and highly reflective of pupils' achievements. The MoE hires experts especially for this purpose. I think we are able to follow up pupils' level of achievement; as a result, we can make a judgement as to whether schools are doing well with teaching pupils or

not. This can be obtained simply by looking at exam results. I think a lot of countries with strong education systems use centralised exams effectively, and they're happy with its results.

Eisa: How about the strategic education planning? Could you tell me about the policy of formulating the strategic plan?

Saad: The strategic plan is also managed by the Department of Planning within the MoE, which constructs committees from different qualified personnel in order to formulate a strong education plan.

Eisa: Do you have an idea about members of this committee?

Saad: Those are people who represent different departments within the MoE, such as the Department of Planning and Improvement, Department of Curriculum, Department of Finance and Department of General Education. The committee sometimes hires people from districts, such as directors, in order to benefit from their experience.

Eisa: Could you explain – what are the actual roles of these directors?

Saad: These people help the committee identify education needs in order to include them in the strategic plan because they are, to some extent, close to the schools themselves.

Eisa: Can they make decisions regarding the plans' goals and objectives?

Saad: I don't think so. They only provide the committee with information and suggestions. But the committee decides which suggestions are appropriate or not.

Eisa: Tell me about the implementation process. How do schools implement the strategic plan?

Saad: Mmm, schools implement the plan according to the MoE's standards.

Eisa: Could you explain that further?

Saad: For example the MoE, via districts, provides schools with annual plans, as a part of the strategic plan. This annual plan should be met. The MoE provides schools

with resources in order to meet the objective of the annual plan and, as I told you, the MoE controls resource allocation.

Eisa: Can schools set their own strategies to implement the strategic plan?

Saad: I don't think they're able to do that because we control resource allocation and all other education issues. If they're able to set their own strategies for implementation, this means that they'll be able to decide on the amount and type of resources. This is not possible at this time.

Eisa: So, the MoE controls both the strategic plan's formulation and the implementation processes?

Saad: Yes.

2. Discussion of issues that were identified in the exploratory study

Eisa: Okay, in the light of this centralised strategic planning, I would like to discuss with you some issues regarding both the formulation and implementation processes.

Saad: Okay.

Eisa: Can you tell me about the efficiency of the strategic plan?

Saad: Well, I think we have a strong and efficient strategic plan.

Eisa: Could you elaborate on that?

Saad: Okay. The strategic plan was formulated by highly qualified experts, and the MoE dedicates a large amount of the budget to ensure that all experts and facilities will be provided to the benefit of the strategic plan. In addition to that, the Department of Planning cannot approve a strategic plan that is not potentially efficient.

Eisa: Okay. What do you think about pupils' levels of achievements?

Saad: Mmm... I understand that there are concerns regarding this, but I think there are many reasons for that. I think teachers are not doing well with teaching pupils and we are suffering from their levels. The MoE provides them with many high-quality training programmes, but they're still weak. You can see how educational

experts complain about teachers' skills. They're certainly not playing the roles of real teachers.

Eisa: But you have mentioned earlier that the MoE is responsible for teachers' deployment. Why can't you just choose qualified teachers carefully?

Saad: This is one of education's crises in Kuwait. We are forced to accept all applicants who want to have a job because national policy requires that all Kuwaiti citizens have the right to be employed in any job they want, and you know that teachers' chances to work as teachers in the other ministries are limited. This is a clear article in Kuwait's constitution.

Eisa: Do you think that the MoE's policies ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic plan?

Saad: Yes, look, as I told you, this plan was formulated depending on highly qualified experts, and the MoE spent a large amount of the budget on that. I think it's unfair to describe the plan as inefficient or ineffective when it's taken a long time and hard effort for it to be formulated. All procedures were carefully adopted in order to ensure that the plan would yield good results.

Eisa: Do you have an idea about the schools' perceptions of the strategic plan regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the strategic plan?

Saad: No, but I think it's worth investigating their perceptions and finding out their suggestions.

Eisa: I gathered information from many districts and school leaders about the strategic plan, and they think that the centralisation policy prevents them, as implementers, to obtain sufficient resources because resource acquisition is highly bureaucratic. They've also mentioned that the centralised nature of the strategic plan's formulation led to the fact that many needs are unmet in the plan. They think that these issues have affected the plan's efficiency and effectiveness given that the pupils' levels of achievement are low.

Saad: Well, I think there are number of issues that should be considered when we formulate the plan. I think there should be a precise estimation of the various needs,

and the MoE should provide resources according to these needs in order to benefit pupils' learning. I am not saying that the plan is inefficient, although there are problems. But it needs changes from time to time, and we should respond quickly to these changes. I know that our pupils' achievement is low and we should do something regarding that, and the plan should ensure that as well. Schools still complain about resource shortages. I think we should think seriously about this because I believe that this complaint did not come from a vacuum.

Eisa: What do think about this complaint? What's the reason for that?

Saad: I can't make a judgement right now. This needs to be studied in a way where we can evaluate situations. We should know whether resources are adequate and we should think about the best ways of providing them if there is really a need for them. But, at this time, we can't say that our policy of resource allocation is wrong just because schools complain about that. At the same time, I believe that there is a problem, and we should look for a solution.

Eisa: Okay. I'll move to the second issue now. Could you tell me about the comprehensiveness of the current strategic education plan?

Saad: Mmm… In my opinion, although the MoE is keen to make the plan as comprehensive as possible, I think we still need to include as much as we can in order to make the plan rich and cover all we need in order to prepare students for the future. I think that many things can make this plan more comprehensive, but note that I am not saying that the plan is poor or bad. What I meant is that there are many things that might improve this plan and make it more comprehensive.

Eisa: Could you tell me what these things are?

Saad: For example, the plan didn't respond to the local market in Kuwait and, as you can see, there's still a shortage in providing the local market with graduates that work in many fields. The government is still importing different personnel to work in some public and private sectors in order to respond to their needs. I think this raises the point that the education system should provide the local market with graduates in order to cover the needs of different Kuwaiti qualifications.

In addition to this point, there are still social problems that need to be solved by education, such as crime and drug addictions, within our youth. These issues can be solved if the education system focuses on them seriously and dedicates much effort, studying the reasons for these problems and finding the best ways to solve them.

Eisa: Okay. What do you suggest is needed in order for the education system to address these issues and problems?

Saad: Mmm… I suggest that a thorough study about our society's needs and problems should be conducted. Of course, this has already been done when the MoE formulated the plan, but there might be problems with the ways of solving these problems. I suggest that there should be direct goals and objectives that target these and any other issues directly, and there should also be longitudinal studies of these issues, especially with regard to negative behaviour such as crimes. In this way, one can say that a thorough study was conducted in order to identify issues and problems, in addition to identifying ways to solve them.

Eisa: Regarding the needs of various elements of the education system such as pupils, curriculum and teachers, do you think that the MoE was able to identify all of the education system's needs, with regard these elements, and formulate a strategic plan that responds to these needs?

Saad: I think that the basic elements of the education system are covered in the strategic plan, and curriculum is among these elements. For instance, the Department of Curriculum studied the needs of appropriate curriculum to our pupils and, as a result of that, I think the education system provided schools with an advanced curriculum that copes with global development. With regards to teachers, we cannot ensure good results without taking care of our teachers. Teachers are one of the vital factors that influence our pupils' learning, and we are aware about ways to respond to their needs. But I still believe that there are better ways that ensure we can deploy highly qualified teachers, beginning with reconsidering the criteria used when accepting students in universities, then examining the ways in which we prepare them to work as teachers, then we can select teachers who will potentially work in schools, and then we can improve the quality of the programmes to improve their

skills. Here, I think the strategic plan should consider these things. This doesn't mean the strategic plan is weak, but I think it still can be improved and I think this will be sorted out as long as we're aware of these strengths and weaknesses.

Eisa: Does that mean that the MoE is not in need of allowing wider participation in identifying various needs that might be included within the strategic plan?

Saad: Mmm… Well, participation is a good thing, but I think it depends on who should participate in this job. I think we employed qualified personnel who ensured that a comprehensive study of the various needs, as well as everything else that was demanded, was conducted in order to build a comprehensive plan. Wider participation would lead to tension and be a waste of time. It's a matter of formulating a strong plan. Participation is a tool, not a goal. When you think that you already own this tool, then there's no point in widening participation, and I think the MoE's policies regarding the strategic plan are appropriate.

Eisa: Okay. Let me now move onto the third issue. Do you think that there are problems with the strategic plan's implementation?

Saad: There are still problems with all aspects of our lives and all actions that we are doing. And the implementation is one of our actions.

Eisa: Do you mean that the plan is not able to be implemented?!

Saad: Ooh… No I didn't mean that at all. What I meant is that there might be problems that stimulate us to improve. I think you can't say that, Eisa. Don't try to put words into my mouth. This plan cost a lot of money and consumed a lot of time and effort. Do you think we constructed a plan that isn't implementable?

Eisa: No, sir; I wasn't misconstruing your meaning, but this is what I understood from your response at the beginning, then I framed my question accordingly. But okay. Can you tell me about these problems if they exist?

Saad: I said that there *might* be problems, but right now, I can't find any direct problems with the implementation process. I think the MoE is keen that its strategic plan can be implemented smoothly.

Eisa: Okay. I'd like to remind you that you mentioned previously that you believe the MoE should respond to the schools' needs regarding resources, as their complaints, as you said, didn't come out of a vacuum. Do you think resource shortages might cause problem with the plan's implementation or not - and why?

Saad: Yes, I do believe that, but this doesn't mean that the plan can't be implemented. What I meant previously is that it's worth studying schools' resource needs in order to meet their needs, especially as they might face problems that require money or materials, and if schools lack these resources, then this might affect pupils' learning, or any other issues within the schools. I also meant that the MoE should do something when schools still complain about lack of resources and, at the same time, when pupils achievement is low. They might be right about that, I don't know, but this doesn't mean the plan is unable to be implemented, even if they're right, because you might find problems during implementation, such as resource shortages, and you must solve this problem as soon as possible.

Eisa: Did the MoE try to solve resource shortages or study the reasons for that?

Saad: No, not yet, but I'm sure the MoE will do so as soon as it feels there are such problems.

Eisa: Okay. Do you think schools are able to decide on the amount and types of resources they need?

Saad: Yes, but you should be careful that schools that still ask for resources, and we should make sure that there would not be redundancies in the money or materials provided in schools, because this is against our resource-saving policy that the MoE always encourages. I think the best way to perform resource allocation is to maintain this responsibility among the MoE authorities. If there's a resource provider who controls the amount of resources provided, this will prevent resource wastage, as long as the person provides resources according to the criteria. Of course, the resources should be adequate, and this is why I said that the MoE should do something regarding the schools' claims of resource shortages.