
THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF A GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY: THE IMPACT OF IMPOSITION, INVITATION AND INNOVATION IN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC)

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Abstract: *How does world culture impact the development of educational policy in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries? This paper begins by describing the ways that the development of the educational system in the GCC is shaped by the global community, and further impacted by the emergence of a global education governance structure. Legitimizing transnational actors frame national, regional and local policy options in GCC countries, which lead to a “global” perspective being the chief priority in GCC educational policymaking often in spite of regional and local needs. However, the global discourse has limits in GCC countries because of the unique ideological traditions of Arab and Muslim culture. Therefore, while ideological discourses frame education policy at each level in GCC countries based on international norms and values for both education and society, educational policy and reform balances these international norms and values with traditional and conservative norms and values. This paper concludes by analyzing how Western rhetoric is harmonized with Arab and Muslim norms and values with seemingly little contradiction and little educational impact as well in the GCC countries’ education systems.*

Key words: *Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Education policy World culture Education governance Transnational actors*

International comparisons of educational systems, policies and practices have become standard practice for most educational policymakers and scholars around the world. While a lot of the attention around international educational comparisons and reform is geared toward “global competition” there is a large discourse focusing on the development and impact of a global educational community, or as some call it, “world culture” (Boli, 2005). There are others who argue that global educational competition and global education community are at odds with each other and with local cultures and communities. These arguments suggest that combinations of various communities and cultures either cannot co-exist or only do so according to imbalanced power hierarchies (Silova, 2010; Silova & Abdushukurova, 2009; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). For example, much has been written about the impacts that “world culture” can have through certain

global institutions, such as mass education (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Resnik, 2006). So, the balance between local cultural context and global educational community is particularly important, especially if there are specific ways of thinking about education that either permeate or are embraced by local communities in spite of, in addition to, or because of a world education culture.

Most troubling to critics of world education culture is the phenomenon of “normative isomorphism”. In particular, normative isomorphism is often dismissed as being a concept that is either too homogenizing or somehow aligned with neoliberal agendas for mass education (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004), but it is short-sighted to mislabel or reduce the complexities of institutional isomorphism to basic “homogenization” and declare that specific regional, national or local conditions are the only valid indicators of culture. One way to think beyond the specifics of parochialism is to consider how global educational community develops across nations based on—rather than in contradiction with—the characteristics of local and regional cultures and communities within nations.

A “global educational community” is an international community of individuals, societies, nations and systems shares common educational expectations, experiences, successes and failures, but not as a result of homogenization. Global educational community is shared not just within each country’s own “closed” system, but is also shared among other systems, schools and individuals worldwide. Shared expectations are not necessarily homogenizing, as some suggest, but are an interesting phenomenon resulting from a dynamic international confluence of expectations and experiences (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997). And, because certain educational expectations, experiences, successes and failures are shared worldwide, there is going to be some variation in the way that these are shared from system-to-system, nation-to-nation, school-to-school, and individual-to-individual. Since variation across systems, nations, schools and individuals is often the focus of comparativists, the context for cross-national or cross-system variation deserves a few moments of explanation here.

The immediate or local context is of special importance in understanding how a global educational community is either received or resisted. For example, many comparative education researchers assert the importance of local cultures in shaping the development and implementation of primary, secondary, and tertiary educational policy and practice (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Schriewer, 2000b). But, the local, indigenous or traditional culture not only resists educational change, it also can embrace it. This fact is sometimes lost when the comparative focus is limited to locating or exposing agents and agency in policy and practice reform. Because so much comparative attention and scholarship has focused on highlighting these differences and on locating resistance to global educational community, the discourse needs to be balanced with some evidence investigating the impact of world culture by examining ways that “global educational community” develops and spreads.

Local culture and context can be resistant, neutral or receptive to change (Schriewer, 1990), and comparison can fuel resistance and lead to local agency

(Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Comparison can also aid receptiveness and diminish resistance (Baker & LeTendre, 2005), and the ebb and flow of resistance and receptiveness is critical to understanding the balance of forces that comprise institutionalization in and of education. This combination suggests the importance of working through the context and framework of the experiences of students and teachers worldwide, but particularly in communities and systems that are traditionally and historically resistant to hegemonic Western ideology and culture. For this reason, it is especially productive to highlight Muslim and Arab societies and systems and, in particular, the countries that comprise the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to see how the process of institutionalization of a global educational community either does or does not seem to be happening. The GCC countries include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. These countries comprise the heart of the Arab and Muslim world, and have traditionally been resistant to the influence of Western culture and ideology.

To get at the complexities inherent in both global and local cultures in the formation of a global educational community, the process of institutional isomorphism is necessary to empirically observe. However, beyond the global expansion of modern mass schooling—and the organizational culture and Westernized ideologies, which accompany it—the empirical investigation of global educational isomorphism has been limited (Schriewer, 2000a). There are indicators, however, that will help to empirically isolate several elements of the institutionalization of mass education worldwide and that contribute to the formation of “global educational community”.

Elements of Institutional Isomorphism

The vagaries of isomorphism have long been both an aid in thinking about how organizational cultures and structures spread across otherwise different systems as well as a weakness in terms of imprecise identification of particular factors contributing to isomorphism. The classic criticism of those whose understanding of educational change is consumed by hierarchies of hegemony and power is that the spread of systems and cultures across nations is a function of dominance and power relations beyond all other factors (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). And, while there is no question that power relationships factor prominently in the ways that culture and structure spread cross-nationally, there is also no comprehensive explanation for why expectations about schooling and experiences of education become institutionalized across otherwise unique communities and local cultures or why these unique communities do not fully resist the spread of shared educational expectations and experiences.

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) sociological explanation of the coercive, mimetic and normative characteristics of isomorphism covers the basics of why institutional change occurs. Coercive isomorphism suggests that force or agency is a factor, which certainly leads to educational systems and practices becoming increasingly similar over time. Mimetic isomorphism, likewise, suggests that copying or mimicking

educational policies and practices of one educational system by another leads to similarity, but the factors pushing mimicry are much more complex than mere force. Finally, the isomorphic impact of norms on educational policy and practice is perhaps the least well understood element of the world institutionalization of education. In spite of its flaws, this basic outline of isomorphism, accompanied by often-sophisticated analyses, has served for several decades as the foundation for understanding how global institutionalization of education occurs (e.g. Kamens, Meyer, & Benavot, 1996; LeTendre et al, 2001; Ramirez & Ventresca, 1992). Yet, there are additional characteristics of institutional change that either stretch or add to these. In particular, a "global educational community" may be institutionalized through (1) imposition, (2) invitation, and (3) innovation.

Imposition may occur when a system or set of expectations that are foreign or unwanted in the target culture or society is "imposed". Imposition closely resembles "coercive isomorphism" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and is often easy to identify in post-colonial systems (Quist, 2003). Imposition is also widely spread through policy dominance by multinational organizations, which are active across the globe and in all nations and systems (Martens, Rusconi, & Leuze, 2007). So, for example, if an influential international organization suggests that countries it works with should participate in an international educational assessment of math and science performance (such as the Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA, or Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, TIMSS) as one more piece of evidence to track human capital development, and then a developing country either wholly or partly decides to participate in PISA or TIMSS because of this suggestions, then it is a form of imposition even though a country's own educational policymakers may make the final decision to participate in these international assessments. This coercive pressure may bring countries into the global testing community and even builds their national capacity for educational standards development, accountability tracking and large scale testing, but for very different reasons and under very different conditions than politically, economically, and socially influential nations like the US or Japan participate.

A "global" perspective in the policy priorities at the national, regional, and local levels characterizes *invitation*. Ideological discourses that frame education policy at each level are globalized. Legitimizing transnational actors frame national, regional, and local policy options (Lawn & Lingard, 2002), but they do so to varying degrees and with adjustment for cultural and community context even while retaining the core shared elements of the organization's agenda or mission (Chabbott, 2002). In the case of invitation, there may have been an original coercive element to participation in a particular educational event, practice, or policy, but the continued participation or shared experience is not directly the result of coercion anymore (Kijima, 2010). It becomes taken-for-granted that a particular teacher, school, or educational system will do or participate in a particular way or for a particular reason, which is common to what other teachers, schools or educational systems may be thinking or doing around the world (Baker & Taylor, 1995). The availability and commonness of international educational information and data can be a major

contributor to the phenomenon of “invitation” (Wiseman & Baker, 2005).

Finally, there is *innovation*. This occurs when new ideas or systems are developed within countries or educational systems. Innovation is often tied to “best practices” and overlaps with both imposition and invitation (Carnoy, 1998; Rogers, 2003). Innovation may be a form of local agency or resistance, but is more importantly a way for local educational policymakers and educators to solve immediate and real problems regardless of the cultural, ideological, or political baggage that a particular solution may bring. This is especially true if “best practice” relies on an idea, program or process that has its origins in another system or culture, which may even be a hegemonic system or culture (Westney, 1987). The importance of innovation to understanding normative isomorphism in education is that it allows for individuals and communities to be agents determining their own path. Ignoring or not allowing for this agency in research on “world culture” by implying that “borrowing” is only a coercive process orchestrated by dominant, hegemonic decision-makers and never recognizing that individual agency is often at work in both more or less imbalanced power hierarchies, subverts and disempowers those educators and policymakers in systems at the periphery and semi-periphery.

It is, therefore, a mistake to only leave comparativists with a dichotomous choice that swings between two extremes by asking: Is a global educational community the product of (1) agenda-driven agency or of (2) normative isomorphism? This is, of course, a flawed question since agency and isomorphism are not necessarily contradictory, yet some comparativists have largely focused on the role of particular agents in dictating or producing agenda-driven educational change. For example, Resnik (2006, p.173) asserts that certain forms of educational change are “promoted by specific agents, be they scholars, experts, research institutes, or national or international organizations”. Others provide evidence that global educational competition and global education community not only co-exist, but often align. Meyer and Ramirez (2003, p.131), for example, have noted that even without or in spite of diverse agents, agendas and agency, “types of programs, and educational sequences seem strikingly homogenous and change in similar ways around the world”. And, while alignment in structure or sequence is not necessarily proof of global educational community, it is an interesting indicator.

This still leaves the question of whether global educational community is the product of agenda-driven agency or of normative isomorphism. The concept of scientific rationalization applied to educational decision-making and information sharing provides some foundation for answering this question and understanding the ways that agency and isomorphism are able to coexist and even integrate in the development of a global educational community.

Scientific Rationalisation

Given the debates surrounding agency and isomorphism, how do “global educational communities” form? In societies around the world, education is not just about academic learning or individual opportunities for development. The scope of the discourse around education includes academics (of course), but is also tied to expectations for social, political, emotional, and economic assistance, progress and solutions in spite of what education—at any level—is actually able to provide. What different kinds of discourse lead to in education is a certain level of legitimacy, which (for better or worse) creates both a familiarity with and an acceptance of educational forms, practices, and expectations that might otherwise be resisted or questioned rather than embraced (Charle, Schriewer, & Wagner, 2004). And, the discourse surrounding education also gains legitimacy from those who contribute to the discourse itself.

The limitations of scientific rationalization and normative isomorphism discourse are important to address as well. For example, coercive and mimetic agents are relatively easy to identify because evidence often points to individuals and organizations that either force or copy based on their identifiable needs and agendas. This scholarly finger-pointing is done frequently in the field of comparative and international education. For example, noted educational comparativist and World Bank critic, Steven Klees (2010) has suggested that many of the problems with education worldwide might be solved by getting rid of the World Bank’s coercive influence and role in education development. While this may be true (even if impossible to accomplish) this proposed solution would predominantly address only the coercive and mimetic impact that international organizations and others have. What about normative forces that lead to change and evolution in education policy, reform and delivery worldwide?

This is where the process of scientization comes in. It is important to note that scientization is neither celebrated nor demonized here, but it is identified as an important factor shaping the development of a global educational community. The process of scientization is largely an isomorphic process of scientific rationalization, which occurs in three normative dimensions (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). First, scientific rationalization is characterized by specialized technical knowledge—often like that produced in empirical research coming out of universities. Second, it will have the characteristic of tightly-coupled management techniques, which emphasize the role of market-driven reforms in the public education sector. Finally, it will often be increasingly inclusive and flexible in spite of traditional norms and values.

There are several “de facto” assumptions that provide us with a rationale for why education is the focus of national reforms across social, political, and economic sectors (LeTendre, 1999; Smith & Baker, 2001; Wiseman & Baker, 2005). The first assumes that “good” school systems develop human capital. This suggests that “good” schools give exchange value to schooled people. The second assumes that

the more human capital (exchange value) that people have, the more competitive their nation is. In other words, schools improve aggregate exchange value. The third assumption is that how “good” an educational system is can be measured with standardized test scores (which are commonly available, but often misused). The fourth assumes that the quality of national educational systems can be determined by comparing national average scores on standardized tests. Finally, the fifth assumption is that those nations at the top of the comparative ranking will be the most competitive –not just in education– but in each of the sectors mentioned before: society, politics and the economy.

These de facto assumptions often drive the use and promulgation of internationally comparative assessments of educational achievement (Kamens & McNeely, 2010; Wiseman, 2010). Two international tests typically dominate the discussion. These are the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). TIMSS and the IEA have a longer history and a wider impact and national participation worldwide, so will be used as examples here.

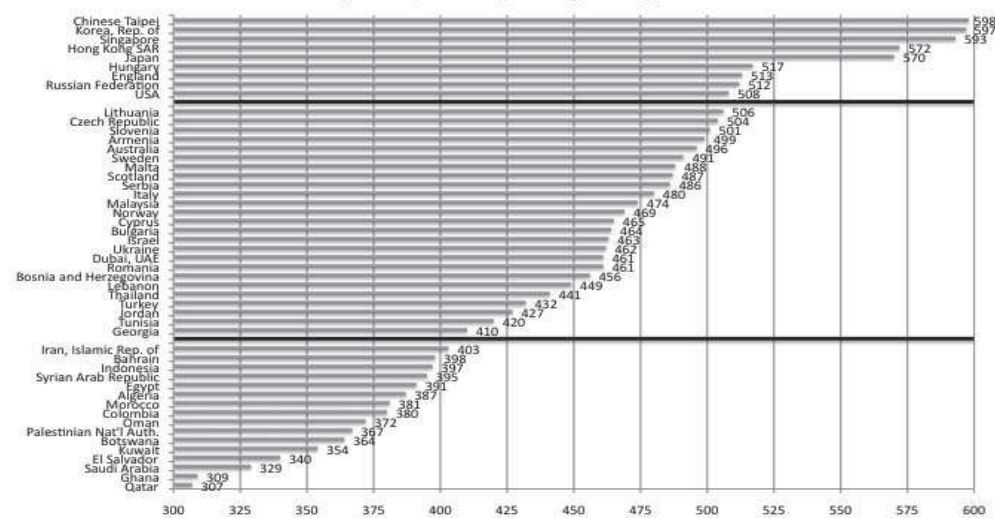


Figure 1. 2007 TIMSS 8th grade mathematics scores by country (Mullis, Martin, & Foy, 2008)

The global institutional context for scientific rationalization, which is generated around international achievement tests, is demonstrated by the basic country rankings of national average achievement. Figure 1 shows the rankings from highest to lowest for all participating countries in the 2007 TIMSS 8th grade math test. The five highest scoring countries are Chinese Taipei (598), Republic of Korea (597), Singapore (593), Hong Kong SAR (572), and Japan (570), but there is also

large “below average” group. Specifically, there are many GCC and Arab nations in this lower group, including Bahrain (398), Syrian Arab Republic (395), Egypt (391), Morocco (381), Oman (372), Palestinian National Authority (367), Kuwait (354), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (329) and Qatar (307).

Figure 2 shows the rankings from highest to lowest for all participating countries in the 2007 TIMSS 8th grade science test. Note again the five highest scoring countries are Singapore (567), Chinese Taipei (561), Japan (554), Republic of Korea (553), and England (542). There are some obvious consistencies between the highest scoring nations in both mathematics and science. But, again there is a large “below average” group that includes many GCC and Arab nations. In science, the low scoring GCC and Arab countries are Oman (423), Kuwait (418), Lebanon (414), Egypt (408), Algeria (408), Palestinian National Authority (404), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (403), Morocco (402), and Qatar (319).

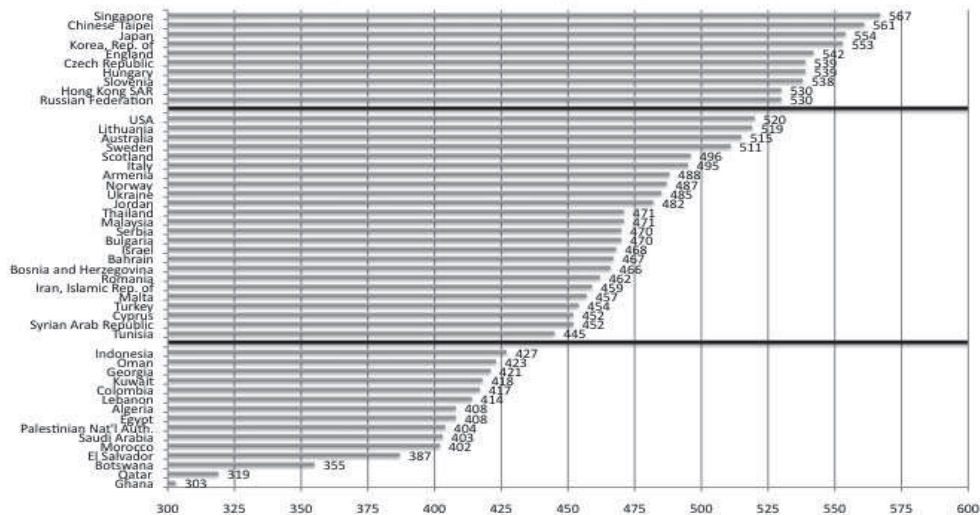


Figure 2. 2007 TIMSS 8th grade science scores by country
(Mullis, Martin, & Foy, 2008)

The questions are: (1) if so much of the comparative understanding of educational systems in the GCC and wider world are based on this sort of competitive ranking system, and (2) if countries that are “losers” in the rankings are also ideologically and culturally resistant to hegemonic Western ideology and culture, then how is a “global educational community” formed, especially in the GCC countries? Or how is it even an option or consideration? The more critical expectation would be the linear argument that global educational community cannot form under these conditions because the Western hegemony that drives it would not have any “power” over Gulf Cooperation Council countries in this situation. However, the evidence instead suggests that both rankings “winners” and “losers” from both Western and Islamic societies participate in global educational community – for different reasons perhaps – but they all participate. In other words, all nations are

seemingly able to scientifically rationalize participation in shared experiences and activities, which indicate participation in a global educational community. And, if we have basic evidence that countries around the world participate in global educational community, then how does this global educational community become institutionalized worldwide?

The GCC in International Comparison

In order to show how the comparative data that leads to so much global competition focused on schools and academic performance can be used to also identify global trends and provide indicators of “global educational community”, data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and additionally the Ministry of Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be analyzed. It is important to note that although much of the evidence presented here is quantitative, it is not valid simply because it is quantitative. There are many alternative forms of evidence, but quantitative data is used here because of the breadth of coverage and nature of the analysis.

TIMSS is an internationally comparative assessment dedicated to improving teaching and learning (Martin, Mullis, & Foy, 2008). It provides information between cycles, across countries, and to address specific teaching and learning issues in participating countries. TIMSS collects educational achievement data to provide information about trends in performance, and extensive background information to address concerns about the quantity, quality, and content of teaching and learning (International Study Center, 2010).

In 2003, 49 countries and 4 benchmarking communities participated in TIMSS. Of those countries and communities, 10 (19%) were Arab. In 2007 the number of participating countries rose to 60, and were accompanied by 8 benchmarking communities. Of those 60 countries and communities, 15 (22%) were Arab. In 2011, 64 countries and 4 benchmarking communities are participating of which 15 (22%) are again Arab.

The IEA, which administers the TIMSS, is careful to emphasize that national policymakers, researchers and educators have the “greatest insight into their own system” and are “able to make informed decisions most skillfully” (IEA website, 2010). The TIMSS data can be used to develop descriptive empirical indicators of imposition, invitation and innovation. In particular, the idea of “global educational community” can be investigated using comparative evidence specific to the experiences of students and teachers in schools in the GCC, other Arab educational systems and broader international trends. These TIMSS survey indicators are:

- Speaking the language of the test at home
- Visiting other teachers’ classrooms to observe teaching
- Time students spend listening to lecture-style presentations
- Time students spend working in small groups

These indicators are explained below, including how they provide evidence of the existence or spread of global educational culture in GCC countries.

Language of instruction is a key indicator of *imposition*. In other words, if students in GCC countries are being instructed in a language other than what they speak at home this can be an indicator that a system that is foreign to the local culture or society is being imposed on individual students through schooling. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule. For example, many GCC countries have large non-national (and non-Arabic speaking) school populations. This is important to remember as we interpret this data.

Figure 3 gives the percent of 8th grade students reporting that they “always” speak the language of the test at home in each of the participating GCC countries/communities, the GCC mean, the Arab mean and the international mean.

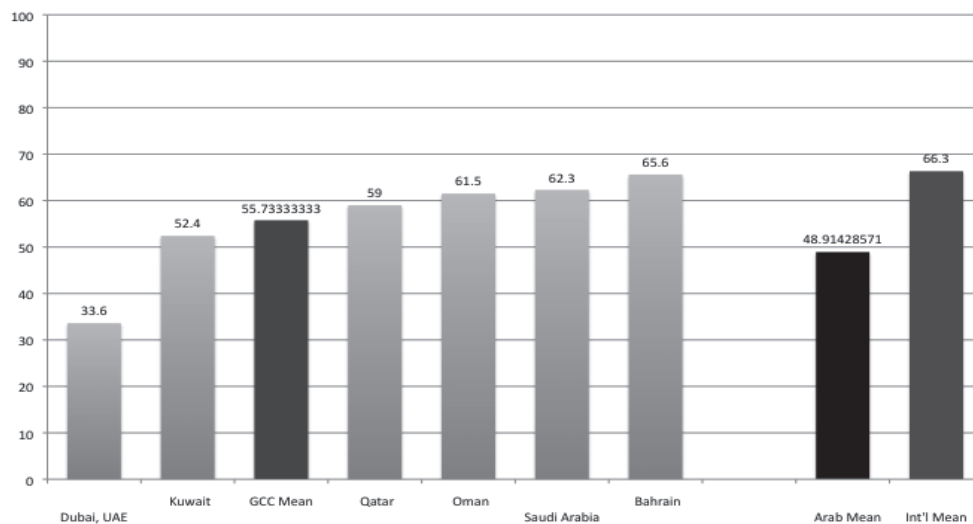


Figure 3. Percent of 8th grade students “always” speaking language of test at home (TIMSS 2007)

Five GCC national systems participated in TIMSS (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) and one system (Dubai) participated as a benchmarking community. The Arab mean is the average for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the following countries: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian National Authority, Syrian Arab Republic, and Tunisia. The international mean is the average for all 60 countries worldwide that participated in TIMSS 2007. Figure 3 specifically shows that in all but one GCC system, the language of instruction (and testing) is the same as the language spoken in the home for more than half of the students who took the test, which is above the Arab mean but below the international average.

In the case of the GCC, this suggests that there is perhaps some imposition of culture through schooling, but that it is more than likely imposition of unique Arab or Muslim culture on international and non-national students rather than vice versa, which is interesting because it runs counter to the critical lament that national or ethnic cultures are being suppressed or abolished by dominant Western ideologies

spread through mass education. Instead, this evidence suggests that non-Western culture has co-opted Western models of mass education to its own advantage, and is used as a tool for imposition itself instead of in the favor of Western culture or ideology.

The percent of time teachers visit other teachers' classrooms and observe their teaching is an indicator of the degree to which teachers are willing to *invite* new methods, systems or ideas into or alongside their own culture or ideology. Figure 4 shows the percent of students whose 8th grade math teachers "never or almost never" visit another teachers' classroom to observe teaching. In other words, it measures how much *invitation* is either resisted or ignored in the GCC compared to Arab and International means.

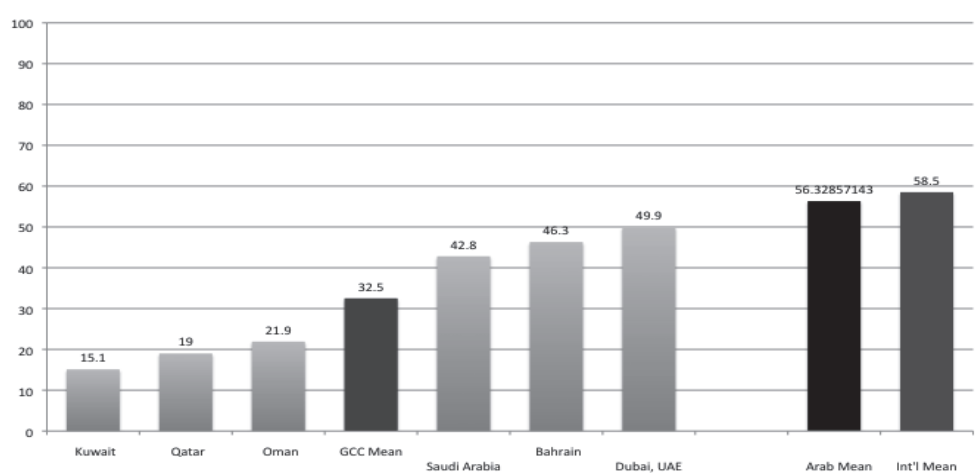


Figure 4. Percent of 8th grade math teachers "never/almost never" visiting another teachers' classroom to observe teaching (TIMSS 2007)

Variation across the GCC is quite large for this variable ranging from about 15% in Kuwait to almost 50% in Dubai. The GCC average of about 33% is significantly below both the Arab and international means. This suggests that Kuwait, Qatar and Oman are perhaps the most open to inviting new methods, systems or ideas into their schools and classrooms, while Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Dubai are the most resistant to invitation.

Figures 5 and 6 deal with the type of instruction that students receive in their classrooms, and are indicators of *innovation*. Specifically, Figure 5 shows the percentage of time 8th grade students in the GCC spend listening to lecture-style presentations, and Figure 6 indicates how much time students spend working in small groups. In other words, Figure 5 indicates how little innovation there is in teaching, while Figure 6 indicates how much.

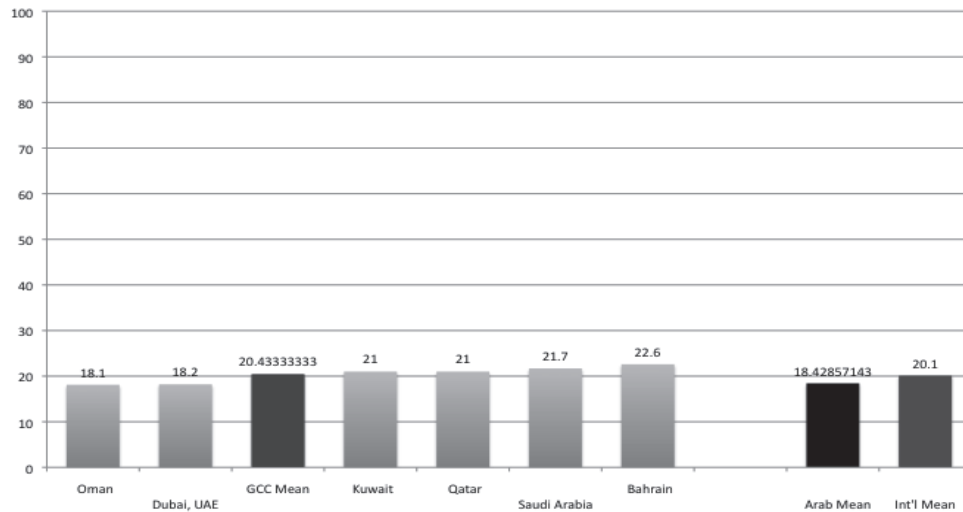


Figure 5. Percentage of Time 8th grade students spend listening to lecture-style presentations (TIMSS 2007)

Figure 5 shows that the lecture style of teaching is only prevalent in about 20% of the classrooms in the GCC, participating Arab nations and around the world. In fact, even when individual nations' averages are reported, there is not significant variation in how much time GCC students listen to lecture-style presentations versus the Arab and International mean. This may mean that classrooms around the GCC and the world really are moving away from traditional methods and innovating more in the classroom, or at the least it suggests that when teachers and students respond to these items on a questionnaire they at least know that the lecture style should not be the dominant model of teaching.

Conversely, Figure 6 tells us the percentage of 8th grade students spending "every or almost every" lesson working in small groups. This can signal either innovative teaching methods and decision-sharing in the classroom, or it could indicate that teachers in these schools are no longer monitoring or keeping accountability for their learning. There is again significant variation across GCC nations with Bahrain averaging about 7% of their students working in small groups every or almost every lesson, while Qatar reports about 42% of its students spending every or almost every lesson working in small groups. Overall, the GCC mean (18.6%) is significantly more than both the Arab and International means, which suggests that innovation in teaching is greater in the GCC compared to the rest of the world. This is a significant finding given the low performance of GCC students on international tests and widespread overt resistance to dominant Western ideology and culture.

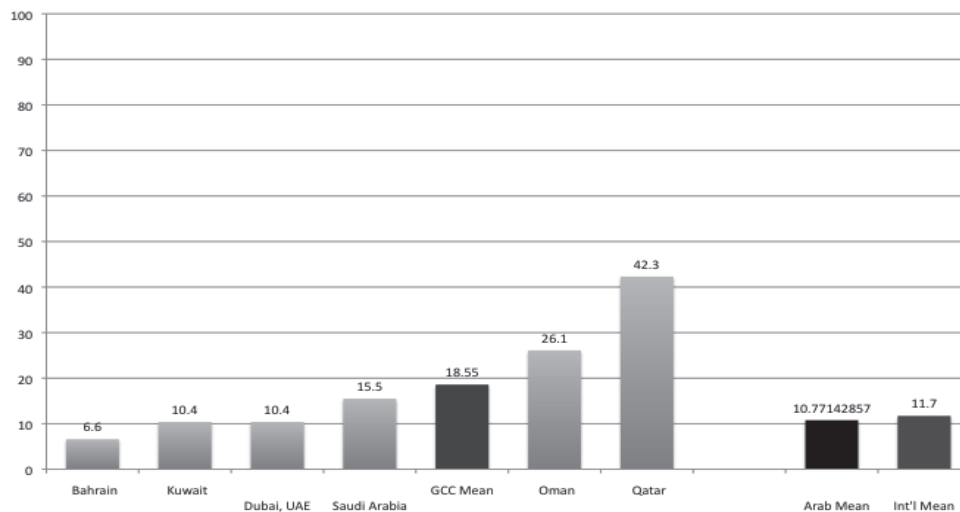


Figure 6. Percentage of 8th grade students spending “every/almost every” lesson working in small groups (TIMSS 2007)

In summary, the TIMSS indicators for language of instruction, teachers visiting other classrooms to observe instruction, and students participating in lecture-style versus small group learning in the GCC compared to the Arab and international means suggest that: (1) imposition of culture and ideology is shared between Western models of mass education and instruction given the prevalence of Arab-language instruction in the GCC delivered in mass education classrooms; (2) invitation of ideas and models indicated by teachers’ propensity to share ideas by visiting their colleagues’ classrooms is low across the GCC in general, which suggests that invitation is not as common a method of creating global educational community as imposition is in the GCC; and (3) innovation representing the likelihood that students will receive lecture-based or small group instruction suggests there is both reception and resistance to the traditional culture or norms of both the local and global communities.

Global Educational Community in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Given the context of culture and the normative rationalization that characterizes scientization, some specific examples are needed to show how traditional culture and scientization come together to form global educational community in spite of the ebb and flow between resistance and receptiveness. In particular, there is one case, which is simultaneously extreme as well as representative of normative trends. This is the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). There are three elements of the KSA’s educational development and system, which particularly exemplify the global spread of scientific rationalization and its contribution to participation in a global educational community. These elements include the KSA’s participation in

the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the relatively recent King Abdullah Public Education Development Project (Tatweer), and the impact or role of gender in primary, secondary and tertiary education in the KSA.

Saudi Arabia is a good example because their educational system represents both extreme cultural differences between traditional and indigenous versus global and largely Western culture as well as being an interesting example of the impact that legitimizing discourse can have on the development of education within systems where global and local culture both intersect and contrast. The KSA's participation in TIMSS in 2003, 2007, and 2011 is one example of scientific rationalization given the fact that thus far participation in TIMSS and actual functional use of the data or reported results to inform educational policy and decision-making have been largely de-coupled in the KSA, yet national educational decision-makers continue to recommend participation in TIMSS cycle-after-cycle.

First of all, the KSA's participation in TIMSS is neither an example of coercive nor mimetic isomorphism because there are few actors or stakeholders in the position or having authority to force the KSA's participation in TIMSS, nor are there any overt actors pushing for KSA participation particularly. Indeed, there is still some confusion among the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education as to why they participate and what they should do with the results. In short, the discourse around the importance of knowledge and data production has gained increasing legitimacy in the KSA through their participation in TIMSS.

The second characteristic of scientific rationalization is the introduction of tightly-coupled management techniques, specifically those that resemble New Public Management (Lawn & Lingard, 2002). The King Abdullah Public Education Development Project (Tatweer) is an example of how culture, discourse, and scientific rationalization manifest themselves in newly-developing educational policy, reform and implementation structures in the KSA. In particular, the Tatweer Project is coupled with a public holding company that gives the educational reforms it is trying to implement a market-orientation. This is the epitome of market reliance in a public sector institution because the implementation of any reform or development idea created by the Tatweer Project results in a request for proposals, which is then submitted to the Tatweer Holding Company. This holding company then solicits proposals from different companies or service providers who are able to implement the created reform in the most cost-effective, efficient way.

Finally, the expansion and inclusion of girls and women in primary, secondary and tertiary education in the KSA is one of the most interesting and complex examples to be found of the impact of alignment with and participation in a global educational community. The unique challenge of gender-segregated schooling in the KSA's secondary education system has been discussed elsewhere (Wiseman, 2007; Wiseman 2008), but the persistence, attainment and achievement of girls and women in the Saudi educational system into and through higher education is unique and especially relevant to this discussion.

One of the hallmark characteristics of the scientization of education worldwide is the social rationalization that is both attached to and achieved through education.

At the primary and secondary levels there is evidence that access, achievement and opportunity to learn are the same or favor girls in the KSA (Wiseman, 2007), but because of the strong Saudi cultural requirement of complete gender segregation outside of immediate family communities, the expansion of women’s access, achievement and opportunity to learn in Saudi higher education is an important piece of evidence that social rationalization is occurring throughout the Saudi educational system and into Saudi higher education in spite of as well as alongside otherwise resistant Saudi culture.

For example, evidence on new student enrollment at the KSA’s flagship public university (King Saud University) shown in Figure 7 shows female enrollment by faculty major. While male students still dominate engineering, tourism, applied medical science, and architecture (meaning that the gender ratio in education and nursing is not surprising), the expansion of female students into business, science, computer and information science, and agricultural science suggests that even where post-education opportunities are limited women are moving into previously male-dominated subject areas—and even specializing in these areas in spite of limited opportunities beyond higher education. This evidence suggests that shared expectations and experiences of schooling can be and are highly decoupled from the reality of real world chances and careers for Saudi girls and women in the labor market and Saudi community at large.

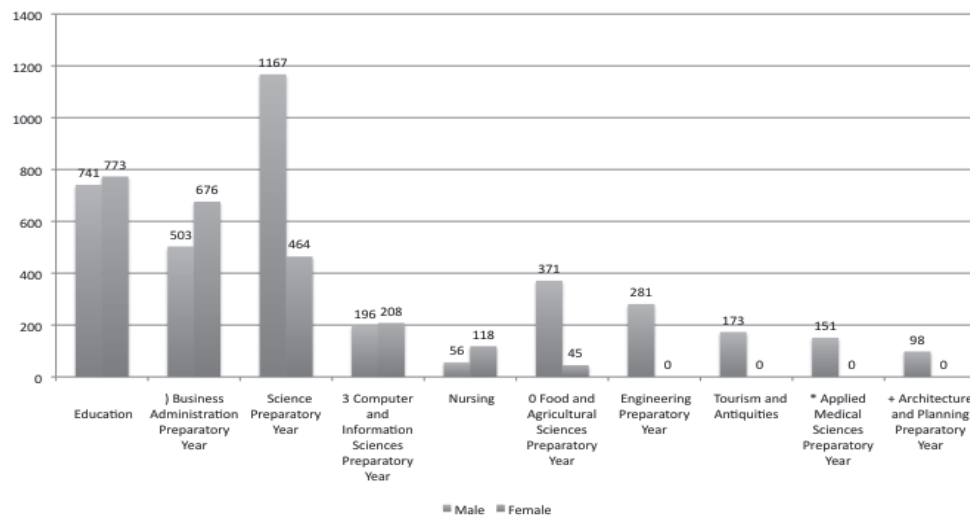


Figure 7. New students enrolling at King Saud University by faculty/major (2008-2009)

A more basic look at new student enrollment in higher education across the KSA shown in Figure 8 suggests that an overwhelming majority of students going to university in the KSA are female, and although the examples here are limited to the KSA, this female surge in higher education enrollment has been documented in other countries and regions around the world, too.

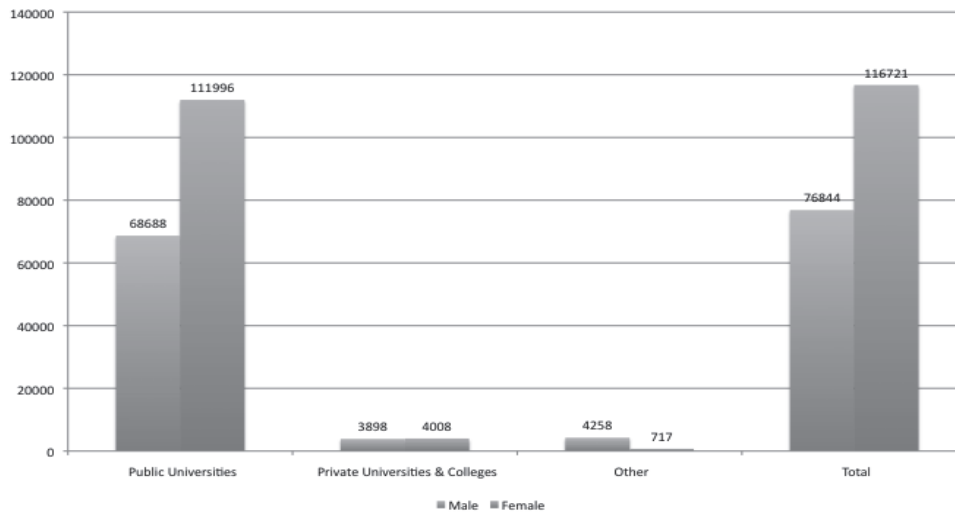


Figure 8. Summary of new entrants in higher education institutions for the academic year 2008-2009 by sex

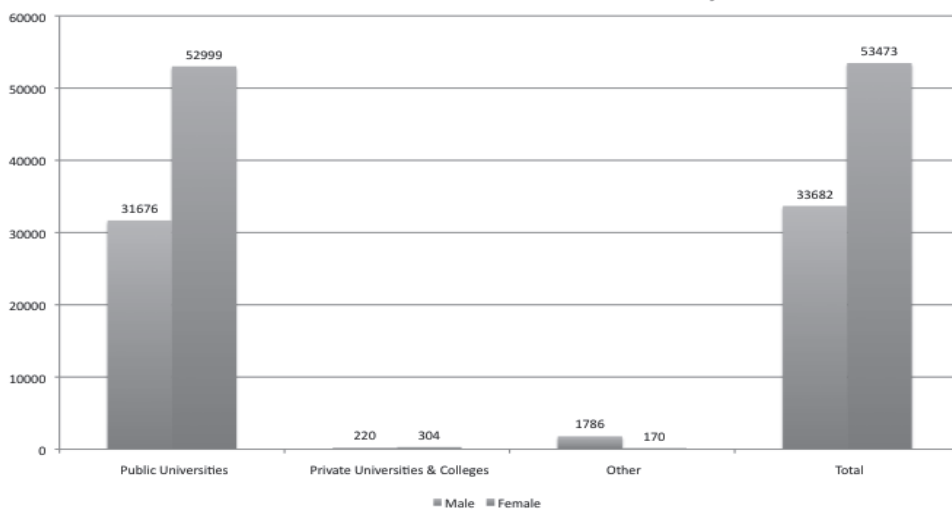


Figure 9. Summary of graduate students in higher education institutions for the academic year 2008-2009 by sex

Finally, evidence shown in Figure 9 suggests that female advantage in enrollment in Saudi Arabia at the graduate level is also prevalent in spite of opportunity structures beyond higher education. So with these summary examples of the expansion and advantage of female enrollment overall and the prevalence of female enrolled students in previously male-dominated subject areas or majors, the social rationalization characteristic of scientization is evidenced in Saudi higher education.

In other words, the construction of and participation in a global educational community in part occurs as a process of scientization—specifically scientific rationalization. This process is contextualized by a contrast or balance between local and global educational cultures, and is moved forward in part by normative discourses on education that take place in alignment with traditional society or local cultures that may differ from world culture, but are not necessarily shifted or replaced by it.

Balancing Imposition, Invitation and Innovation in the GCC

Unique phenomenon of national versus non-national students in the GCC makes imposition flipped from its traditional “outsider” reputation, but evidence presented above suggests that on average GCC countries themselves are imposing their own version of a global education community on their students more than other Arab nations, but less than the rest of the world. Invitation as a way into a global education community was indicated by GCC teachers’ willingness to seek and share with other teachers more than in other Arab nations or around the world, although special recognition goes to Kuwait, Qatar and Oman for being particularly inviting. Finally, innovation was evidenced by the low overall use of traditional lecture-style teaching in favor of small group work, but Qatar and Oman are either particularly innovative or particularly daring in their willingness to innovate in the classroom.

These findings suggest that overall GCC countries have embraced a “global educational community” perhaps more so than their Arab neighbors and global competitors and in spite of their performance on international tests or resistance to hegemonic Western culture and ideology, which permeates modern mass schooling. This is an important finding because it suggests that the GCC is particularly good at incorporating otherwise foreign or new ideas and ways of doing things into their own systems. It also suggests that they are poised to compete better between nations and internationally as a result of their involvement in the global educational community, but there is certainly much more data and discussion needed to confirm this.

In short, local culture and global discourse uniquely frame the creation of a global educational community. This is especially striking in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) because of the overt and rapid development of this community over the final decades of the 20th century. Further research might ask, why is education so important to social, political, and economic reform in the GCC? The evidence presented here suggests that the answer is because of the institutionalization of a global educational community throughout the countries of the GCC, which embraces and is embraced by even those nations and systems that rationally should resist.

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