

PREFACE

The global shift toward a knowledge society and information-based economy requires educational policymakers to re-evaluate their understanding of the knowledge and skills students need in order to achieve national development goals. This shift has influenced curriculum development, teacher preparation, and the role of formal schooling in creating lifelong learners and an educational culture, which reflects both national development interests and global norms. The Arabian Gulf countries, which largely comprise the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries, include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Most of these Gulf countries have embarked on bold national experiments to pilot technology and teaching in their schools as a way to transition to knowledge societies. Their national interests and expectations have increasingly focused on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and both the regional and global context in which Gulf societies, economies, and political systems operate.

This volume of the *International Perspectives on Education and Society* series investigates the contexts, agendas, and initiatives for using education to transition Gulf communities from economies dependent on natural resources into knowledge societies. The goal of this volume is to present information, case studies, and empirical research about the development of information-based economies and knowledge societies across the Arabian Gulf as a whole, and in countries or educational systems within the Gulf as well by specifically focusing on GCC member countries. Through an examination of the education sector's development in the Gulf, this volume uniquely explores the region-wide, country-specific, and system-level contexts, policies, and conditions that drive both the creation and reform of education geared toward establishing and sustaining a knowledge society in the Arabian Gulf.

This volume is organized into three parts. Part I addresses the challenge of translating the infrastructure and culture of a knowledge society to the Arabian Gulf countries. Specifically, this first part looks at how the unique conditions of the Arabian Gulf countries contextualize and challenge traditionally Western expectations for knowledge economies and knowledge

societies. This is done more conceptually in the first three chapters by Ismail, Weber, and Lightfoot, respectively, and more specifically in the fourth chapter by Winokur. For example, Ismail's opening chapter examines the nexus of Islam and education by specifically investigating language policy in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, broadly speaking, and Saudi Arabia, specifically. Weber follows by highlighting the case of Qatar. His case study looks at Qatari educational policy and economic development in light of Qatar's goal of shifting from a national resource-based economy to a knowledge-based one. Lightfoot's chapter suggests that traditional and progressive cultures potentially conflict to some degree in the Gulf, especially in regards to the development of a knowledge society.

A theme threaded through each of these three chapters in Part I suggests that there are contrasting perspectives between Arabian Gulf-based policy-makers, educators, and business leaders and development organizations and other influential voices from outside of the Gulf. The final chapter in Part I, by Winokur, takes a close look at the ways that international comparative education data influences shifts in the culture of Kuwait's education system by developing an entrepreneurial mindset through repeated efforts at policy borrowing.

The chapters in Part II look more closely at the different transitions and contributions to the development of knowledge economies in the Arabian Gulf and some of the more influential North African Arab communities as well. Kirk and Attia each examine the development of knowledge economies in Gulf countries, albeit from different perspectives. Kirk looks at the role and attractiveness of the Singapore model and the influence that the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) has on educational borrowing in the Kingdom of Bahrain, in particular. Attia looks at students' perceptions of online assessment at a Saudi Arabian university. Both of these cases elaborate on ways that STEM education and ICT contribute to the development or transition to a knowledge economic in the Gulf. El-Halawany and Bohlila carry the conversation further by stretching the TIMSS, STEM, and ICT discussion to the Gulf's fellow North African Arab countries as well.

Finally, the Part III chapters examine ways that Arabian Gulf countries transition from a knowledge economy to a knowledge society. Patrick's chapter addresses this theme directly by exploring the challenges that Saudi Arabia faces in making this transition; whereas, Powell's examination of Qatar's international universities provides a way to contrast this transition from knowledge economy to society by applying various versions of globalization. Finally, Wiseman's chapter concludes the volume by looking at

ways that Gulf countries can and do strategically plan for shifts to a Gulf knowledge society. In particular, he contrasts the various ways of conceptualizing knowledge economies, societies, and cultures within the Arabian Gulf and more broadly.

The audience for this volume includes and expands beyond the scholars and professionals who already consider themselves part of the field. This volume, for example, brings together scholars, professionals, and the stakeholders connected to education at the local, national, and international levels to highlight those developments in the field that are of particular relevance to knowledge economy development. This makes this volume particularly important not only in the academic community, but for government or ministry-level policymakers, international development education professionals in aid or development organizations, research institutes, professional educators, and others. It is the development of relevant theory to research to policy to practice that connects comparative and international education scholars and professionals to knowledge economy stakeholders beyond the scholarly field alone.

The volume editors extend a sincere and heartfelt thank you to the many supporters, critics, and reviewers who made this volume possible, and who contributed to enhancing the quality and rigor of each chapter, the volume, and the *International Perspectives on Education and Society* series as a whole. Particular thanks go to Emily Anderson, Emily Gu, and Xiaoran Yu for their input into the conceptual development of this volume, and constructively critical comments supporting the development of each chapter included in the volume. The shift from natural resource-based economies to knowledge economies and societies is not only important to those of us who do the work relevant to the field, but to all who are invested in youth and dedicated to the development and improvement of education worldwide. It is our sincere wish that this volume will serve as a meaningful tool for reference, reflection, and understanding about how mass formal education, in particular, can and does contribute to the development of a knowledge society in the Arabian Gulf and beyond.

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