### Kuwait's Higher Education Libraries: A Descriptive Analysis

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**Abstract:**
The article covers the history of development of academic libraries in the State of Kuwait, a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The establishment of private higher education system has only begun in the second millennium, and therefore new private academic libraries were established only a decade ago. Prior to that, academic librarianship in Kuwait was represented by the state-owned Kuwait University libraries. The evolution of new academic libraries in Kuwait has enriched the research sphere, created new opportunities, and fostered a competitive environment for academic librarians, each working in his/her respective institution. This article examines the development of new private university libraries and their progress in comparison with public institutional libraries. It reviews key studies on academic librarianship in Kuwait and sheds light on new libraries in private sector, their services, facilities and their level of involvement with the Kuwaiti community. It also identifies common constraints faced by those institutions' libraries, and possible solutions.
Public institutions

The Kuwaiti higher education system was established in 1966 with the opening of Kuwait University offering free education to all Kuwaiti citizens. It began as a collection of four colleges and has grown to sixteen colleges offering undergraduate and graduate programs on five campuses.

The Kuwait University Libraries Administration (KULA) administers the central library and seven branch libraries. The College of Medical and Allied Health Sciences functions independently from the main library (Zehery 1997). It is now managed by the Health Sciences Center Library Administration (HSCLA) and supports the academic programs of four colleges including Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy and Allied Health (Health Sciences Center Library Administration, 2014).

In 1982, The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) was established, initially in response to the technical and vocational needs of the country until it has been awarded the status of higher education institution. It includes five colleges; the College of Basic Education, the College of Business Studies, The College of Health Sciences, the College of Technological Studies, and the Nursing College. The five colleges, training institutes, and special training programs offer diploma and bachelor degrees in selected areas including Library Science (Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, 2013).

PAAET has a library in each of its colleges and all libraries are managed by the Deanship of Libraries and Techniques. Therefore, it also has decentralized library system which consists of seventeen branch libraries (Al-Ansari and Al-Enezi, 2001). At PAAET, libraries collections emphasize Arabic language materials since all programs are taught in Arabic.
Libraries of public institutions continued to grow their collections, services and staffing until the Iraqi invasion which had an effect on all libraries of the country, academic, school and public.

Since its establishment and until 1990, Kuwait University Libraries developed a collection of 320,000 non-Arabic titles, 135,000 Arabic titles, and 5,575 periodicals through direct purchases from local and international publishers, booksellers and subscription agents, in addition to materials received as gifts from various institutions. The Iraqi occupation to Kuwait in 1990 caused a loss estimated at $20 million (US). During the years following the occupation the university had to rebuild their collection which included books, periodicals, multimedia items as well as out-of-print and irreplaceable rare materials (Abdel-Motey and Al Hmood, 1992). “Collections in Kuwait suffered from the looting and destruction of the Iraqi occupation; collections in some universities after ten years of rebuilding were less than half of their pre-invasion size” (Lesher and Abdel-Motey, 2009, p.441).

Today, KU Libraries house a collection which represents over 80 percent of all materials owned by academic institutions combined in Kuwait. According to KULA website, information resources consist of 526,464 titles, 651,042 volumes of Arabic and non-Arabic monographs, reference collections, dissertations and other reports and documents. Items looted during the Iraqi invasion were either replaced or remain lost and unrecovered. There are now 76 online database subscriptions, 1,645 print journals, 783 online journals, 20,000 multimedia items, and 22,750 original and copy manuscripts. The Health Sciences Center Library at KU possesses a collection of 15,836 volumes and 1,320 journal subscriptions and represents the largest Health Sciences library in the country in terms of resources, staff and facilities (Al-Ansari and Al-Enizi, 2001).
As the institution which offers the most varied degree programs in the country, its collections is the most diverse with a wide coverage of different areas of knowledge. Though each branch library offers resources pertaining to its affiliated school’s degree courses, the central library houses the widest collections.

As for PAAET, Abdel-Motey and Al Hmood (1992) said that almost all the collections were moved to Iraq during the invasion. It was a wholesale looting and destruction of Kuwait’s treasures by the occupying Iraqi forces. This included ministries, authorities, facilities and residences which were emptied from their content and transported to Iraq, perhaps to be used as leverage in any eventual settlement. Al Fadhli and Johnson (2006) mentioned that collections of PAAET libraries formerly included 143,000 books and 185 periodicals whereas it now comprises of 95,000 books and 170 periodicals, most of which in the Arabic language. According to Rehman and Al-Huraiti (2010), PAAET libraries had the largest number of print journals subscriptions.

Private institutions

Prior to 2002, the Kuwaiti government had not yet allowed the establishment of a private education system. Lesher and Abdel-Motey (2009) suggested that “several factors justified the evolution of private universities in the Arab world including the inability of state universities to accommodate the students desiring higher education, the resultant higher grades demanded for admissions, the limited number of non-national students accepted into state universities, and other social, cultural and economic factors” (p.440). In 2003, five licenses were granted to private institutions. The main requirement for a private institution to obtain a license is an international
affiliation with qualified universities or colleges. Currently there are seventeen licenses, with eight of them are operational (Private Universities Council, 2014). These include:

- American University of Kuwait (AUK)
- American University of the Middle East (AUM)
- Arab Open University (AOU)
- Australian College in Kuwait (ACK)
- Box Hill College Kuwait (BHKC)
- Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST)
- Kuwait International Law School (KILAW)
- Kuwait Maastricht Business School (KMBS)

Table 1 provides comparative data on the size of collections, population, staff and programs of the eight institutions. Collections, staffing, services, technologies and conduct varies from one library to another depending on the level of population served, taught programs, teaching format, library policies. etc.

Table 1

| General Profiles of Academic Libraries Associated with Private Institutions |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aspect                      | GUST | AUK | KMBS | BHKC | ACK | AUM | AOU | KILAW |
| Print Collection            | 16,733 | 42,236 | 1,300 | 7,059 | 6,500 | 6000 | 2536 | 9,500 |
| Databases                   | 75 | 42 | 4 | 70 | - | 12 | 6 | 4 |
| Number of Students          | 3,400 | 2,446 | 400 | 534 | 2,557 | - | 8062 | - |
| Number of faculty           | 150 | 112 | 10 | 36 | 131 | - | 123 | - |
| Undergraduate Programs      | 11 | 14 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 1 |
| Graduate degree Programs    | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
As private institutions are relatively new compared to their public counterparts, the total size of their collections does not exceed a maximum of 20 percent of KU Libraries holdings. Given the fact that they appeared after four decades from the establishment of public higher education, their smaller size is to be expected. More recently established libraries tend to invest more on electronic resources and so most of their content is available online and can be accessed through university portals. Most of these institutions have one library, with the exception of the AOU which maintains two facilities, one for male and another for female students.

All private university libraries combined hold a total collection of 90,000 book titles. However, the previous table shows that the American University of Kuwait owns the largest collection of print resources. Following is the Gulf University for Science and Technology which houses a collection of 16,733 print titles, and 75 online databases - the largest number of online subscriptions among all. The AUK Library has a total of 42,236 print titles and 42 online database subscriptions. At BHCK, ACK and AOU online databases are offered through the parent/partner institution.

These university libraries vary in their subject coverage based on the academic programs offered by each. Their main objective is to support the academic programs taught at their institutions, therefore most of the materials are relevant to course levels and content. The majority offer degrees in Arts, Science, and Business studies at the undergraduate level. The Box Hill
College, however, “offers six diploma programs in the fields of Management, Marketing, Banking Services Management, Graphic Design, Interior Design and Decoration and Website Development” (Box Hill College Kuwait, 2013).

The number of postgraduate programs offered by private institutions in Kuwait is small and is represented by one at each of GUST, AUM, KMBS and KILAW. As specialized schools, KILAW develops a collection that supports the undergraduate and graduate law degrees, whereas KMBS invests in business subjects to support the curriculum of the MBA program offered. ACK is a technical college and it offers vocational educational programs in Business, Engineering, Aviation and Maritime.

Almost all Kuwait academic libraries arrange their English-language collections (non-Arabic resources) according to the Library of Congress Classification Scheme (LCCS), since most of them focus their acquisitions on English-language materials. KU and PAAET use the Dewey system for Arabic materials as they acquire large collections of Arabic materials. In addition to that, they use Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). But as LCSH coverage of Arabic and Islamic subjects is limited, Arab librarians have worked to come up with an Arabic list of subject headings represented by Al-Khazindar list, which was developed by Ibrahim Al-Khazindar and is used widely in the Gulf region (Zehery, 1997). HSCL uses WHO Medical Subject Headings in Arabic. AUK uses the Arabic Union Catalog for the cataloging of Arabic Records.

Automation and electronic services

Library automated systems appeared in Europe and North America in the early 1970s. However, the inability to support the Arabic character set and the lack of Arabic capabilities made
it difficult for libraries with Arabic collections to benefit from or work with those early systems. Libraries in the Middle East evolved their systems in the 1980s with the University of Yarmouk in Jordan being the first to use an automated system (Lesher and Abdel-Motey, 2009). Of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) institutions, the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) was the first to implement an automated system for its libraries (Rehman and Al-Huraiti, 2010). Alqudsi-ghabra (1999) indicated that although Kuwait has suffered destruction of its information infrastructure by the Iraqi invasion, it has made efforts to rebuild the information infrastructure and also was the first Middle Eastern country to afford Internet access to its institutions and citizens.

Kuwait University libraries installed the Virginia Tech Library System (VTLS) in the late 1990s (Alqudsi-ghabra, 1999). PAAET, the second largest educational institution automated its libraries in 1998 with the implementation of the Horizon Integrated Library System by SirsiDynix (Rehman and Al-Huraiti, 2010). Most newly founded private universities had automated systems on opening day. There was no agreement between major libraries in Kuwait at the time of selection to choose one library automation system which would have supported resource sharing and cooperation among the three libraries (Aman, 1992).

By visiting Kuwait’s institutions websites, it was found that most public and private libraries have implemented an Integrated Library System (ILS). Six libraries are using the SirsiDynix products and two libraries are using an open source to handle library operations. Two others are not using an automated system, possibly due to budget constraints or to the nature and size of their collections. Table 2 shows ILS associated with each academic library.

Table 2
Integrated Library Systems Implemented in Academic Libraries
All libraries that implemented an ILS provide Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) for their users. Of those using SirsiDynix systems, three are using Horizon including KU, PAAET and HSCL, while the other three have migrated to the Symphony system, a newer version of the Horizon; these are AUK, ACK, and GUST. The AUK Library was the first to migrate from the Horizon which was used since its establishment in 2004 to Symphony in 2011. The availability of support to the SirsiDynix solutions could be the main factor as to why most libraries acquired the Symphony or the Horizon system.

The provider for SirsiDynix solutions in the region is Naseej, previously called Arabian Advanced Systems, which was established in the GCC region with headquarters in Saudi Arabia and branches in Kuwait, Lebanon, UAE, Qatar, Egypt and Syria (Naseej, 2014).

Generally, Kuwaiti academic libraries started developing their system with cataloging, OPAC and circulation functions. The other applications such as acquisition and serials control were automated at a later stage (Rehman and Al-Huraiti, 2010).
The main and most important service offered by public and private academic libraries in Kuwait is either circulation or access to information resources. This depends on whether the institution puts emphasis on print or electronic resources and also on the learning system adopted by each institution. An institution that provides a face-to-face learning environment such as KU, PAAET, GUST or AUK houses larger print collections and provides circulation, reference and reserve services on a daily basis.

AOU is partnered with Open University (UK) and provides a blended learning system of face-to-face tutoring and distance learning via electronic learning applications. At this institution where only 25 percent of instruction is conducted in classrooms, students at all branches of the AOU have access to the e-Library collectively (Arab Open University, 2014). Libraries at ACK, BHCK, KMBS and AOU are in the form of Learning Resource Centers. Some of them have a fair number of print collections but more of e-resources.

Almost all academic libraries in Kuwait provide off-campus access to online resources. KU, GUST and AUK show emphasis on information literacy and the provision of library instruction sessions and workshops as presented on their websites. The emergence of different new tools has made it necessary for librarians to provide instruction, not only on general research, but also on how to use the different new tools available online or through their libraries. While most of these sessions are based upon faculty/student requests, the AUK library offers mandatory sessions for the First Year Experience course called “Essentials of Learning.” All new students are required to attend.

Web-based services
Among web-based services seen at Kuwaiti academic libraries are web-scale discovery service, mobile applications, online subject guides and tutorials. Current awareness services are offered at a very low level, mainly by Kuwait University, HSCL and PAAET. It is worth noting that the Library at American University of Kuwait is the first to introduce a self-check kiosk and provide self-service for the circulation of materials.

Most libraries offer an online public access catalog (OPAC) through their websites, except those which have not automated their libraries or are relying on online subscriptions such as the AOU and KILAW. It is worth noting that KU still uses a card catalog in addition to the online. A visit to those universities’ websites shows that web-based reference services are offered in the form of email and web-form reference rather than web chats. Web-based information literacy services have not been offered as webcast or synchronous online sessions. This area has yet to be developed. Interlibrary loan (ILL) and document delivery (DD) requests are mainly received via email or web-forms. Thus, enhanced and fully interactive library websites have to cover the various set of services offered. Presently, KU and GUST maintain standalone library websites. Others tend to provide library webpages within the main university website.

Cooperation and resource sharing

Cooperation among libraries could come in various forms including the establishment of a region/country-level consortium, resource sharing, committees and discussion forums, cooperative training programs, union catalogs and linking of library catalogs. In fact, cooperative activities bring a lot of benefits to participating institutions once explored and implemented effectively, from increased access and services to budget savings and professional development opportunities.
Lesher and Abdel-Motey (2009) mentioned the Saudi consortium for academic libraries which was launched in 2003 as one example of cooperation on the country level. There were hopes to expand the consortium to include other GCC academic libraries. However, it has grown only within the Saudi borders. It is now known as the Saudi Digital Library (SDL) and consists of over 30 academic institutions (Saudi Digital Library, 2015).

There is no mention in the literature of any cooperative projects among academic libraries in the form of resource sharing. No information has been found in the news or on universities websites to indicate that this has existed. There were some attempts and aspirations but none have found their way into existence. This could be due to the lack of communication or formal networking among such institutions. Generally, Zehery (1997) noted that all academic libraries in the Gulf region are interested in cooperative programs in the area of interlibrary loan and document delivery. However, there are no such agreements in an official form.

KU libraries have been involved in resource sharing activities with the GCC academic libraries since the 1990s. During this period, KU was rebuilding its collection after liberation and therefore, depended on ILL services to obtain materials from the Gulf libraries and the British Library Document Supply Center (BLDSC). When compared with GGC countries, Kuwait provided the lowest number of ILL transactions to libraries in the region although it maintained the largest serials collection (Zehery, 1997).

Al Fadhli and Johnson (2006) mentioned that PAAET also provided interlibrary loan services mainly through KU and the British Library Document Supply Center (BLDSC). None of these activities were based on formal agreements and such activity was suspended in 2004.
There were some factors which could contribute to the creation of possible collaborative projects in the area of resource sharing. For example, Kuwait was the first country in the Arab world to connect to the Internet in 1994 as indicated by Al Fadhli and Johnson (2006). Improvements in telecommunications could facilitate cooperation between academic institutions. In the late 1990s, KU libraries were merged as a result of automation at the same time PAAET and other libraries automated their functions thus creating opportunities for cooperation.

Another early example of resource sharing among Kuwait libraries is that of KU, PAAET and the National Scientific & Technical Information Center at Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (NISTIC) through the Union Catalog of Periodicals which consists of English-Language periodicals of the three institutions (Alqudsi-ghabra, 1999).

GUST, PAAET and AUK linked their catalogs without any commitment or agreement to share resources between the three institutions. There is nothing in literature about any type of cooperation among libraries associated with private institutions in Kuwait except that of catalogs linking between AUK, GUST and PAAET. However, after AUK and GUST migrated their systems to Symphony, the linkage was dissolved automatically for all and has not been re-established or restored.

There seems to be lack of communication and cooperative programs between academic libraries in Kuwait. Older institutions with the larger collections do not seem interested in initiating cooperative projects with smaller and newly founded private institutions. Private institutions, on the other hand, are operating in a competitive environment in which each institution offers collections and services exclusively to its own community.
The only formal agreement to date is that between the American University of Kuwait and Mubarak Al-Abdullah Joint Command and Staff College (MAJCSC) whereby AUK Library grants access and borrowing privileges to 130 students and staff at MAJCSC (“AUK library,” 2013).

Anwar and Al-Jasem (2001) recommended the establishment of a National Task Force by the National Council for Cultures, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) to develop a plan for a national resource sharing network. However, the formation of such a network was hindered by a lack of a practical plan and the attitudes of some library managers.

LIS professionals/education

In 1975, Zehery noted that with the absence of a library school in Kuwait, libraries in their early stages depended mainly on graduates from the library science department at Cairo University. Library education was introduced for the first time by the PAAET in 1977 with the establishment of a two-year program to provide the manpower for all type of libraries in the country. The program was expanded to a bachelor degree program in 1986 (Abdel-Motey and Al Hmood, 1992). In 1996, Kuwait University established a master’s degree program in librarianship. Since then LIS education in Kuwait is offered on both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Qari, 1998). It was noted that LIS graduates from both PAAET and KU do not meet the increasing need for professional librarians in Kuwait.

In their study, Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Muomen (2012a) revealed that a total of 167 students graduated from the Kuwait University’s master’s degree program. Of these, 41 were men and 126 were women. In a later study, they pointed out that enrollment is increasing especially after the
Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) started an undergraduate minor program in Information Studies (Alqudsi-ghabra and Al-Muomen, 2012b).

Kuwait MLIS graduates did not exhibit great interest in the field in terms of career, as their main purpose of the degree was to gain a master’s degree or develop professionally. They were concerned with the underestimated status of the profession in Kuwait and had negative views of the image and the title of the degree. In his study, Alansari (2011) suggests that the negative image of librarians has never been an Arab phenomenon but rather a concern for librarians worldwide. The study identified the major factors affecting librarians’ image. These include: the public ignorance of the work of librarians, the poor quality of service in some libraries, lack of appreciation to the useful services provided by librarians, the low level of funding libraries receive and the lower salaries compared to other professions. Lesher and Abdel-Motey (2009) suggested that unless academic libraries provide teaching status and salary to professional staff, librarianship will continue to be regarded as a low status career in the region, especially when compared to other highly visible professions such as medicine, law and engineering.

Zehery (1997) indicated that Kuwait University libraries had the highest number of staff (131) among all university libraries in the GCC. A year later library staff have increased to 181 (Qari, 1998). While most of the staff holds graduate and undergraduate professional degrees, 40 percent do not hold a college degree. Table 1 shows that the number of staff is much smaller in private academic institutions in Kuwait due to their smaller populations and collections. A number of private institutions are maintaining a one-man show such as KMBS and KILAW; others are functioning
with a maximum of six full-time employees. This creates fewer but more competitive career opportunities in libraries of the private sector.

The reluctance of Kuwaiti professionals to enter the field resulted in more expatriate staff, mostly Arabs and Indians residing in Kuwait. By visiting private institutions of higher education, one can notice that 85-90% of librarians in those institutions are expats. Indigenous professionals are also less motivated to enter the profession due to the gap in salaries between indigenous and expatriate staff, especially in the public sector. The emergence of new colleges and universities creates chances for growth and diversity of professionals in the country and especially because those institutions offer competitive compensation to both indigenous and expatriate staff.

Continuing professional development (CPD) activities for librarians are very limited in the country. There is no systematic program for CPD offered at any of the academic/research institutions, the national library, or the local library association which are all considered as key potential providers for professional development. Therefore, most of the LIS professionals seek out opportunities in neighbor countries, Europe, or America.

Conclusion and recommendations

Academic libraries in Kuwait face several obstacles to development such as shortage in staffing, lasting effects from the looting of resources during the 1990 invasion, lack of cooperative initiatives, and reluctance of local professionals to work in the field.

The establishment of the first library association in the country in 2005 could facilitate conversation among libraries and create chances for networking. It is worth noting that the Library
Information Association of Kuwait (LIAK) is the second library association in the Gulf region after the Saudi association (Aman, 2005).

The lack of professional librarians remains a critical problem facing libraries in Kuwait. If the need is not met locally, Kuwait will continue to look for professionals from other countries. LIAK again can play a vital role in raising the status of librarians in the country and attracting more professionals to the field.

While access could be an alternative to ownership for some small and limited resource centers, ILL and DD are still not very well developed and used between academic libraries in Kuwait. It is important to maximize resource sharing among Kuwaiti institutions to reduce costs and minimize reliance on outside suppliers.

Some libraries are benefiting from international consortiums to cut costs and expand in resources and services, such as the AUK Library which is a member of the American International Consortium of Academic Libraries (AMICAL). However, a country-level consortium would boost collections and services and bring savings which would benefit the academic and research communities. An agency to coordinate and govern cooperation seems to be a must. Candidates include the National Library of Kuwait (NLK) and the Library and Information Association of Kuwait (LIAK).

Now that LIAK has been in existence for almost ten years, a branch or committee for academic libraries could be formed to bring academic professionals together. Listservs, blogs, online forums and social networking sites must be used to bridge the distance and foster discussion and new collaborative ideas.
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