**The Power of Connections:**

**A Qualitative Study of Nepotism and Meritocracy in Higher Education**

Khadija M. H. Althuwaimer Alrashidi

The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training

[Km.alrasheedi@paaet.edu.kw](mailto:Km.alrasheedi@paaet.edu.kw)

Nepotism, or as satirically called Vitamin W in many regions in the Arab world, forms powerful magic that opens the doors wherever you go. If you own Wasta, then you will have a strong base of power, referred to as social connections for short. It can play as a skeleton key to jobs, promotions, scholarships, university positions, and myriad rewards, even If you are not qualified enough. Meritocracy, on the other hand, means to fit the right person in the right place. That is, to choose applicants for jobs, positions, or even university places on the basis of their merits and qualities that matches the scientifically and institutionally pre-set criteria. This study, has one main question: How are nepotism and meritocracy enacted in higher education? The study is conducted in Kuwait. I intended to interview college professors and graduate students at Kuwait University, as it plays the main pillar for higher education in Kuwait. The study follows Creswell’s criteria in analyzing qualitative data. This study may depict a realistic picture of higher education in Kuwait. It draws educational leaders’ attention to people's perceptions toward the existence of nepotism and meritocracy and how they shape communities’ future. It offers recommendations for higher education reform and how to achieve justice.

**Keywords**: Power; Nepotism; Meritocracy; Higher Education; Qualitative research