Zain Innovation Challenge: Powering a youth-led innovation ecosystem

KUWAIT: Zain Kuwait has unveiled the Zain Innovation Challenge, a national platform that reinforces the company's role as a leading innovation enabler and a catalyst for a knowledge-based economy, by turning youth potential into practical, market-ready solutions that tackle nationwide challenges and generate tangible economic impact in the digital era. This initiative is delivered in partnership with ten leading universities and colleges in Kuwait: Kuwait University (KU), Abdullah Al-Salem University (AAU), American University of Kuwait (AUK), Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), The Australian University (AU), Arab Open University - Kuwait (AOU), Kuwait Technical College (ktech), Canadian College of Kuwait (CCK), Kuwait College of Science & Technology (KCST) and Box Hill College Kuwait.



Nawaf Al-Gharabally

- **"Investing in young innovators is an investment in Kuwait's long-term competitiveness"**
- **Company joins forces with 10 leading universities and academic institutions to support the nation's knowledge economy priorities**

By closely collaborating with the country's leading academic institutions, Zain is building a collaboration framework that connects the technology sector with academia and transforms the educational environment into a platform for producing real, deployable solutions to address diverse challenges, especially those facing societies in a rapidly changing world shaped by major advances in artificial intelligence technologies and digital transformation applications.

Zain Kuwait CEO Nawaf Al-Gharabally commented: "Kuwait's ambition to build a thriving, knowledge-based economy depends on our ability to transform talent, ideas, and emerging technologies into meaningful economic value. This requires stronger connections between academia and industry, as well as an environment where innovation is encouraged, nurtured, and translated into tangible outcomes. Through the Zain Innovation Challenge, we are helping create these conditions by empowering young people to apply their knowledge, address real-world challenges, and develop solutions with the potential to shape industries and create new economic opportunities."

He added: "At Zain, we believe our role as a technology leader extends beyond providing advanced connectivity and digital solutions. It is equally about helping build the national capabilities and innovation ecosystem that will drive Kuwait's future growth. By bringing together the strengths of the private sector and academic community, we are investing in a generation of innovators, entrepreneurs, and technology leaders who will not only participate in the digital economy, but actively shape its future."

The Challenge follows an applied model that integrates real market challenges into the accredited curricula of participating universities and colleges. Zain will provide validated data and approved problem statements spanning a broad set of priority areas aligned with sector needs, inviting participants to develop solutions that address current national challenges and anticipate future market requirements. This approach strengthens the translation of knowledge into adoptable, scalable models that can be further developed.

The program stands out for its emphasis on practical deliverables, requiring functional prototypes and testable minimum viable products (MVPs). Report-only submissions are not accepted, reinforcing a sustainable, action-driven innovation mindset grounded in execution, measurable outcomes, and creative connections. The Zain Innovation Challenge also focuses on STEAM innovation (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics), applied research and development, prototyping, raising youth skills and future readiness, and building effective collaboration across the private sector, universities, startups, and students to shape a more resilient innovation ecosystem with stronger value creation capacity.

The initiative's journey will include direct supervision from Zain's Innovation Ambassadors through mentoring, follow-up, and evaluation, ensuring students gain real industry exposure and expertise, along with two-way knowledge exchange that elevates solution quality and readiness for implementation. A group of employees representing different divisions and departments within the company will participate to ensure diverse and rich input. The initiative will conclude with the Zain Innovation Challenge event to showcase demo-ready, testable solutions that address real societal and business challenges, with top teams potentially gaining additional opportunities within Zain's innovation ecosystem.

CCK–TEFL Kuwait Fall Conference champions AI-Driven Innovation





KUWAIT: The 5th CCK–TEFL Kuwait Fall Conference 2026, hosted by the Canadian College of Kuwait (CCK) in collaboration with TEFL Kuwait, concluded successfully on October 18, 2026, bringing together educators, researchers, academic leaders, policymakers, industry professionals, and educational practitioners from Kuwait, the GCC, the wider MENA region, and the international academic community. The conference served as a vibrant platform for advancing dialogue on educational innovation, artificial intelligence, digital transformation, language education, research, and future-ready learning.

Held under the patronage and support of key educational and scientific stakeholders, the event reinforced Kuwait's growing position as a regional hub for educational excellence, professional development, and international collaboration. Held under the patronage and support of leading educational and scientific organizations, Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences and the General Secretariat of the Private Universities Council, the conference underscored Kuwait's growing role as a regional hub for educational excellence, professional development, and international collaboration.

The event welcomed distinguished dignitaries from academia, government, diplomatic missions, and industry, reflecting a collective commitment to strengthening education and preparing future generations for the opportunities and challenges of a rapidly evolving digital era. Under the theme, "AI-Driven Innovation in ELT: Bridging Diverse Pedagogies for Digital Classrooms," the conference offered an intellectually rich and academically rigorous program focused on the future of education in an increasingly digital world.

A defining feature of the conference was its emphasis on artificial intelligence, digital transformation, educational technology, future-focused pedagogies, research-informed practice, and the development of skills necessary for success in the twenty-first century. The conference commenced with opening remarks by Othman Boodai, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Canadian College of Kuwait, followed by addresses from Dr Jassem Mohammed Al-Ali, Undersecretary-General of the Private Universities Council (PUC); Guest of Honor Shaikh Mohammed Ahmed Al-Sabah, Chairman of AAIoT; Dr Bassam Alfeeli, Acting Chief Science Outreach Officer at Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) and Rana Khan, President of TEFL Kuwait and Conference Organizer.

A recorded message by Dr Khalid AlBegain, President of KCST, further emphasized the importance of innovation, digital transformation, and the role of emerging technologies in advancing education and research. The conference was further honored by the presence of distinguished dignitaries and leaders from higher education, government, research institutions, and diplomatic missions, including Tara Scheurwater, Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait. Their participation reflected a shared commitment to educational advancement and international cooperation in addressing the evolving needs of learners and institutions.

A major attraction of the conference was its distinguished lineup of keynote speakers, featured speakers, and panelists representing leading institutions from Kuwait, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and beyond. The conference featured keynote addresses by Dr Stavros Hadjisolomou, Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Programs in the Information Science Department at Kuwait University; Dr Zainab Al Meraj, Associate Professor of Psychology at the American University of Kuwait; and Dr Okon Effiong, President of TESOL International Association and Assistant Professor (Adjunct) at Lusail University, Qatar.

Their keynote presentations addressed critical issues facing educators today through sessions entitled "Ethics and Digital Assessments in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Challenges and Solutions," "Teaching Language in the Age of Agentic AI," and "TESOL Research: Professional Learning, Technology, Ethics, and Context." Collectively, these keynote sessions examined the ways in which artificial intelligence is reshaping educational practice while emphasizing the importance of ethical implementation, responsible assessment, academic integrity, contextualized teaching, and continuous professional learning.

The conference further benefited from an exceptional roster of featured speakers whose expertise enriched discussions across a broad range of educational disciplines. These included Dr Rita El-Haddad, Assistant Professor of English at Al-Faisal University, Saudi Arabia; Dr Christopher Hastings, Professor at the Emirates College for Advanced Education, UAE; Dr PlamenKushkiev, Professor of EAP and Adult Education at Centennial College and Seneca Polytechnic, Canada; Dr Wafa Zoghbor, Associate Professor at Zayed University, UAE; Dr Fajer Bin Rashed, Assistant Professor at the Australian University, Kuwait; Dr Kay Gallagher, Associate Professor of Psychology at the American University of Kuwait; and virtual featured speaker Dr Naghameh Babaee.



Through their presentations and scholarly contributions, attendees gained valuable insights into educational technology, language learning, curriculum innovation, learner psychology, digital transformation, teacher development, and emerging research methodologies. Throughout the day, participants engaged in discussions that explored the opportunities and challenges presented by emerging technologies and examined how educational institutions can adapt to meet the changing expectations of learners, educators, and employers.

Another important highlight of the conference was the expert panel discussion entitled "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Academic Research: Opportunities, Challenges and Beyond." The session brought together prominent academic and technology leaders from Kuwait to examine the transformative influence of artificial intelligence on scholarly research, academic publishing, institutional effectiveness, digital governance, and higher education leadership.

Panelists included Dr Anwar AlKandari, Head of Business Management School at Kuwait Technical College; Dr Ali Alfayly, Board Member of the Association of Artificial Internet of Things (AAIoT) and Assistant Professor at PAAET; Dr Ahmad Al-Hunaiyyan, Assistant Director General for Digital Transformation and Governance at PAAET (virtually) and Dr Ahmad AlSaber, Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at the American University of Kuwait. The discussion was moderated by Dr Shaikhah Alainati, Head of the Management Department at the PAAET. The panel offered important perspectives on the responsible adoption of AI in research and higher education, emphasizing ethical considerations, governance frameworks, data management, academic integrity, innovation, and institutional readiness for technological change.

Particular attention was devoted to the role of artificial intelligence and digital transformation in shaping the future of education during the conference. Presentations examined AI-assisted assessment, AI-ready classrooms, AI-integrated academic writing support, learning analytics, educational data use, digital pedagogy, adaptive learning systems, and responsible technology implementation. Speakers discussed how institutions can leverage emerging technologies to create more engaging, personalized, and effective learning experiences while preserving the essential human dimensions of education.

Discussions consistently emphasized that artificial intelligence should serve as a tool to enhance learning and teaching rather than replace the critical role of educators as mentors, facilitators, and guides. As educational institutions worldwide prepare students for increasingly complex and technology-driven careers, conference presenters highlighted the importance of equipping learners with future-ready competencies.

Discussions focused on the need to develop critical thinking, digital fluency, creativity, collaboration, communication, adaptability, problem-solving abilities, ethical reasoning, and lifelong learning skills. Speakers stressed that these competencies are essential for success in both academic and professional environments and must be integrated into educational programs to ensure graduates remain competitive in a rapidly changing global economy.

The conference also demonstrated a strong commitment to international and regional collaboration. Researchers, educators, and practitioners from Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other countries shared research findings, innovative practices, and institutional experiences. Their participation enriched the conference through the exchange of diverse perspectives and practical insights drawn from different educational systems and contexts.

Moreover, the presence of keynote and featured speakers from Canada, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait strengthened the conference's international profile and reinforced the value of global academic partnerships in advancing educational innovation and excellence. Beyond its academic program, the conference provided a valuable platform for networking, professional development, and collaborative engagement.

Participants connected with colleagues from across the region and beyond, explored opportunities for institutional partnerships, and exchanged ideas on addressing current challenges facing education. The event fostered meaningful discussions on educational policy, digital transformation, workforce preparedness, research collaboration, and the role of higher education in supporting national development priorities and sustainable growth.

The organizers expressed their deepest gratitude to all sponsors, supporters, and institutional partners whose contributions played a vital role in the conference's success. Special appreciation was extended to the Private Universities Council (PUC), the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), the Canadian College of Kuwait, and TEFL Kuwait for their steadfast support of educational excellence, innovation, and professional development. Their commitment to advancing research, fostering innovation, and supporting lifelong learning continues to create meaningful opportunities for educators and learners throughout Kuwait and the wider region.

The conference committee also recognized the invaluable efforts of its sponsors, exhibitors, academic partners, volunteers, moderators, session chairs, presenters, and student assistants. Their dedication, professionalism, and collaborative spirit ensured the successful delivery of a world-class educational event. Special acknowledgement was extended to the members of the TEFL Kuwait Board of Directors, the conference organizing committee, and the leadership and staff of the Canadian College of Kuwait, whose collective efforts contributed significantly to the planning, organization, and execution of the conference.

Their commitment to serving the educational community helped create an engaging and intellectually stimulating environment that supported meaningful dialogue, knowledge sharing, and professional growth. As education continues to evolve in response to technological advancement, digital transformation, and societal change, the 5th CCK–TEFL Kuwait Fall Conference 2026 demonstrated the vital importance of collaboration among educators, researchers, policymakers, industry professionals, and institutional leaders.

By bringing together internationally recognized scholars, educational innovators, and thought leaders, the conference provided an invaluable forum for exploring the opportunities and responsibilities associated with artificial intelligence and emerging technologies in education. Through its focus on innovation, ethics, research, inclusion, and future-ready learning, the conference made a significant contribution to ongoing discussions about the future of education while reinforcing Kuwait's growing reputation as a regional center of excellence in educational innovation, academic scholarship, and international collaboration.