

POLITICA ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTULUI SUPERIOR DIN EMIRATELE ARABE UNITE

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Prezentul articol este o analiză a politicii învățământului superior urmare a reformelor educaționale cu efect de schimbare instituțională pe termen lung în Emiratele Arabe Unite. Sistemele universitare, ca parte dintr-un proiect mai mare de construire a statelor și a națiunii, leagă material și simbolic oportunitatea individuală de mobilitate economică și socială de modernizare și dezvoltare națională. Guvernele investesc masiv în educație cu obiectivele explicite de naționalizare a forței de muncă pentru a se baza mai puțin pe expatriați și pentru a-și muta economiile către sectoarele de servicii și tehnologie cu înaltă calificare. Politica învățământului superior din Emiratele Arabe Unite este descentralizată, cu politici diferite în diferite emirate. Fiecare emirat își stabilește propriile politici în care guvernează universitățile private. Una dintre caracteristicile unice ale sistemului de învățământ superior din Emirate sunt zonele de liber schimb. Politicile de învățământ superior sunt, de asemenea, marcate de o deschidere izbitoare către expertiza străină și tind să adopte rapid cele mai bune practici.

Cuvinte-cheie: politică educațională, învățământ superior, reforme, sistem educațional, asigurare a calității, curricula, internaționalizare.

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

This scientific article is an analysis of higher education policy as a result of educational reforms with effect of long-term institutional change in the UAE. Higher education is a socio-political institution that links the fates of students and state, recognizing the role and interests of locals, the power of institutionalized practices, and the nature of state educational policy. The established university systems, were as part of a larger states and nation-building project materially and symbolically links individual opportunity for economic and social mobility to modernization and national development. Governments are investing heavily in education with the explicit goals of nationalizing labour forces in order to rely less on expatriates and shifting their economies towards high-skilled service and technology sectors. UAE higher education policy is decentralized, with different policies across different emirates. Each emirate sets its own policies governing private universities. One of the unique features of the Emirati higher education system is its free trade zones. The higher education policies are also marked by a striking openness to foreign expertise, and tendency quickly to adopt best practices.

Keywords: education policy, higher education, reforms, educational system, quality assurance, curricula, internationalization.

POLITIQUE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR AUX ÉMIRATS ARABES UNIS

Cet article analyse la politique de l'enseignement supérieur suite aux réformes éducatives et aux changements institutionnels à long terme aux Emirats Arabes Unis. Les systèmes universitaires, dans le cadre d'un projet plus vaste de

construction de l'État et de la nation, lient matériellement et symboliquement les opportunités individuelles de mobilité économique et sociale à la modernisation et au développement nationaux. Les gouvernements investissent massivement dans l'éducation avec l'objectif explicite de nationaliser la main-d'œuvre afin de réduire leur dépendance à l'égard des expatriés et de réorienter leurs économies vers les secteurs des services et des technologies hautement qualifiés. La politique de l'enseignement supérieur aux Émirats Arabes Unis est décentralisée, avec des politiques différentes selon les émirats. Chaque émirat définit ses propres politiques régissant les universités privées. L'une des caractéristiques uniques du système d'enseignement supérieur émirati réside dans les zones franches. Les politiques de l'enseignement supérieur se caractérisent également par une ouverture marquée à l'expertise étrangère et une tendance à adopter rapidement les meilleures pratiques.

Mots-clés: *politique éducative, enseignement supérieur, réformes, système éducatif, assurance qualité, cursus, internationalisation.*

ПОЛИТИКА ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ АРАБСКИХ ЭМИРАТАХ

Данная научная статья представляет собой анализ политики высшего образования и образовательных реформ с учетом долгосрочных институциональных изменений в ОАЭ. Высшее образование является социально-политическим институтом, который связывает судьбы студентов и государства, признавая роль и интересы местных жителей, силу институционализированных практик и характер государственной образовательной политики. Установленные университетские системы были частью более крупного проекта по строительству государств и наций, материально и символически связывают индивидуальные возможности для экономической и социальной мобильности с модернизацией и национальным развитием. Правительства вкладывают значительные средства в образование с явными целями национализации рабочей силы, чтобы меньше полагаться на экспатриантов и переориентировать свою экономику на секторы высококвалифицированных услуг и технологий. Политика высшего образования ОАЭ децентрализована, с различной политикой в разных эмиратах. Каждый эмират устанавливает собственную политику управления частными университетами. Одной из уникальных особенностей системы высшего образования Эмиратов являются зоны свободной торговли. Политика высшего образования также отличается поразительной открытостью для иностранного опыта и имеет тенденцию быстро перенимать передовой опыт.

Ключевые слова: *образовательная политика, высшее образование, реформы, система образования, обеспечение качества, учебные программы, интернационализация.*

Introduction

Lack of definition notwithstanding, one of the most striking effects of the knowledge discourse is the idea that education at all levels, including higher education, is both possible and desirable for ever larger proportions of youth. This global commitment to access, grounded in a belief in education as a human right and a catalyst for development, has put pressure on country to expand access to higher education. It has also had implications for the content of curricula and pedagogies and is associated with national reforms and initiatives at all levels of education.

Specifically, it is a knowledge associated with the need to develop particular individual traits, including achievement motivation and risk-taking decisions. Scholars are interested in the extent to which education can promote particular outcomes, which are deemed important in helping country prepare their young people to participate in competitive labour markets and knowledge-intensive industries; these attributes include the motivation to succeed and an interest in working in the private sector or in entrepreneurship. Education in the knowledge economy is also associated with high rates of global

labour mobility, which has put a greater emphasis on cross-cultural competencies.

Higher education policy in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a dynamic arena that invokes both normative questions and contentious policy debates. Globally circulating discourses map onto specific national contexts across the region, to identify the diverse ways in which reform is occurring and the ways in which external reform models are presented. Ultimately, higher education in the UAE is a socio-political institution that links the fates of students, state and discussions of reform recognizing the role and interests of local constituencies, the power of institutionalized practices, and the nature of state-sponsored educational reform.

This scientific research contextualizes subsequent analyses of higher education by providing a brief history of higher learning and offering an overview of contemporary higher education. The admission system in country reflect broader socio-political contracts between the state and society. Development actors and foreign experts have pushed country to adopt a particular model of quality assurance in the region. Quantitative indicators of the quality of higher education have a strong bond with the relational and positional aspects of higher education. Is worth to emphasize that country at-tests the rapid growth of private higher education, it reflects and likely reproduces existing demographic situation. Each emirate sets its own policies governing private universities. In UAE higher education policy is decentralized, with different policies in place across different emirates. One of the unique features of the Emirati higher education system is its free trade zones, which are home to private higher education institutions. The international dimensions are imperative for educational system and is synonymous with high quality. Current approaches to internationalization tend to associate prestige with Western models of higher education

in ways that reinforce existing academic and geo-political hierarchies.

Development and higher education

The United Arab Emirates, emerged from a number of traditional tribal sheikhdoms situated on the Arabian Peninsula. In the Arabian Gulf, the British were the primary colonial influence and maintained hegemonic power between 1820 and 1970. European colonization in the Arab Gulf states took the form of control over trade and security, with less missionary activity or cultural imposition. In 1820, after an attack on a ruling family, the British East Indian Company established exclusive control over the entrance to the Persian Gulf, and, in the Perpetual Maritime Treaty of 1853, ruling families surrendered their right to wage war against Britain in return for protection from other external threats to their rule. In the UAE, British influence was formally codified in 1892 through a treaty that granted authority over designated territories to local leaders and created formal truces between sheikhdoms, including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quawain, Ras al-Khaimah and later, Fujairah. Collectively, these sheikhdoms were called the Trucial States by the British.

In 1968 the British agreed to leave the region and the UAE was established as a federation of independent emirates in 1971, when six of the Trucial States unified. In 1972, Ras al-Khaimah joined as the seventh emirate. For the UAE, the discovery of oil dramatically altered their course of development. Nation-building in the Arabian Gulf was occurring during a period of not only states consolidation and development but also tremendous social, cultural, and economic changes. Oil was discovered in the 1930s, leading to rapid and dramatic demographic and economic changes. The ruling families of the region started to amass significant wealth, and huge numbers of labour migrants began to arrive from South Asia. The country transformed from sparsely populated she-

ikhdoms to nation states with dense urban centers, large immigrant populations, and among the highest per capita income in the world. Given the wealth of their natural resources and the early influx of migrant labour, the social contract in the UAE involves the direct redistribution of wealth towards citizens to assure their relative material comfort in exchange for political acquiescence and stability. This social contract stands in contrast to the more symbolic construction of meritocratic pathways of opportunity in the region's middle-income nations.

At the time of their independence, there were no universities in the Arab Gulf states. Ruling families invested significantly to rapidly develop national higher education systems. The emir of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, the visionary leader behind the unification of the UAE, and the first president of the country, stated: "The real asset of any advanced nation is its people, especially its educated ones, and the prosperity and success of the people are measured by the standard of their education" [1, P. 143]. After independence, the UAE made impressive commitments to expanding public education system and establishing national universities. The United Arab Emirates University was founded in 1976, followed by the Higher Colleges of Technology in 1988. The established university systems, were as part of a larger states and nation-building project that materially and symbolically linked individual opportunity for economic and social mobility to modernization and national development.

Historical legacies of higher education

The UAE share a number of important characteristics, including a history of British control, natural resource wealth, large expatriate populations, and kinship-based monarchical political systems. The distinction between national citizens and foreigners is an important social category as national citizens constitute a small minority in the UAE. Nationals

have access to subsidized housing and education and receive preferential treatment in the labour market through labour market nationalization policies known as Emiratization.

Throughout the sub-region, governments are investing heavily in education with the explicit goals of nationalizing their labour forces in order to rely less on expatriates and shifting their economies towards high-skilled service and technology sectors. These reforms require long-term institutional change, and in the meantime to continue to provide their citizens with significant monetary benefits and public-sector jobs. The higher education policies are also marked by a striking openness to foreign expertise, and tendency quickly to adopt best practices that are popular with technical specialists and consultants. As part of national development initiatives, many of the states have invited international universities to set up branch campuses in large-scale initiatives such as Dubai's Knowledge Village, and Sharjah's University City.

The UAE is a high-income federal state (GDP per capita of USD 44,000), composed of seven emirates, each with its own ruling sheikh. Today the UAE's population is more than ten million, roughly 80 per cent of which is non-national. More than half of the country's population live in its two largest emirates, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, while the other five emirates account for the rest of the country's residents. Since its independence in 1971 the UAE has transformed from having no universities to being home to more than one hundred universities today, including elite branch campuses such as those of the Sorbonne University and New York University. The guiding vision for higher education in the UAE has always been primarily vocational, and higher education policy in public and private institutions is explicitly linked to training youth for both a future knowledge economy and the nationalization of the labour market, as part of the same policy known as Emiratization.

There are three federal universities, which are funded by the federal government and provide free undergraduate education to all eligible nationals. The first federal university, United Arab Emirates University, was founded in al-Ain in 1976, five years after independence. Its language of instruction is primarily English, although certain courses are offered in Arabic. It has grown to offer programs at all levels and remains the only federal university offering doctorates. In 1988, the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCTs) were founded as a single but decentralized institution to provide primarily applied and vocational education [Ibidem, P. 198]. As of 2017, there were seventeen branches of HCTs throughout the country, which were all gender-specific, with nine branches for females and eight for males. In 1998 Zayed University was founded to be a more globally oriented university and has campuses in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Initially a female-serving institution, starting in 2010, Zayed University began enrolling male students and also welcomes international students.

Given the UAE's federal system, higher education policy is decentralized, with different policies in place across different emirates. Each emirate sets its own policies governing private universities. One of the unique features of the Emirati higher education system is its free trade zones, which are home to a large, diverse, and ever-changing array of private higher education institutions of varying quality. Free trade zones for private universities currently exist in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Ras al-Khaimah. Initially, private universities operating in these zones had little to no regulation, although over the past few years all three emirates have been increasing regulation of the higher education institutions operating in the free trade zones. Owing to this supportive regulatory environment and its large population of non-citizens, who cannot study in public universities, the UAE has one of the most privatized systems in the

region: nearly 73 per cent of all students in the UAE are enrolled in the private sector.

The quality assurance of higher education

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, which was established in 1993, is responsible for licensing higher education institutions and programs in the country. Starting in 1999, it founded the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) as a fully independent body to accredit all degree programs of private universities operating outside of free trade zones. As in other countries, accreditation is required for the ministry to recognize degrees. Since the commission's founding, public university programs have been required to obtain accreditation, and many of the private universities in free trade zones have sought accreditation to validate their programming. As of 2018, roughly 950 programs in the UAE had been accredited by the CAA.

The UAE have taken a different approach in comparison with other Arab countries, they have brought in external consultants to align their higher education systems to global best practices. Nonetheless, their reforms to improve quality are similar to those in other countries, centered on enhancing "rigour" through independent commissions and on raising admissions standards.

In the early 2000s the UAE established the CAA as a fully independent body that licenses the country's many public and private universities and accredits each of their academic programs. The CAA aims to ensure that programs in the UAE meet international standards of accreditation. Its mandate includes licensing private universities, accrediting programs, and supporting institutions in their development of quality assurance mechanisms. As a high-income nation, the UAE is not influenced by the possibility of World Bank funding but nonetheless relies extensively on foreign consultants, and it has a history of importing the best practices

articulated in international higher education development discourses.

In the UAE, the CAA was considered unique in the region because it was established as a fully independent body and given power to shut down poorly performing universities. Yet the creation of the quality assurance agencies was one way in which the government could enhance employment of Emirati nationals, a policy priority for the country [2, P.112-114]. In 2016 the UAE required all professors to undergo a certification of their university credentials and establish their equivalency in the Emirati system. This policy was framed as an attempt to ensure the integrity of academics' credentials. Many faculty members who had completed their doctorates abroad were critical of the policy and insisted that the degree-certification process was simply time consuming. In this regard the UAE, a country with a significant expatriate labour force, the role of foreign faculty members was a constant source of tension.

Private higher education

The practice of selective subsidies is found in the UAE, country that conceptualize students as being divided along lines of ethnicity, religion, or citizenship. In each case, public-sector funding serves particular groups, while private higher education has emerged and expanded to serve all. Private higher education has flourished but, in doing so, it undermines the state's ability to create a common national identity through its higher education system. In these cases, even when the existence or growth of private higher education is not questioned, its expansion raises educational and political debates. Seemingly technical issues regarding admissions standards or university board composition actually raise fundamental questions concerning the role of the market in providing higher education. Partially in response to seeming consensus in global development, private higher education in the Arab world has grown sub-

stantially over time. At the same time, within the region the percentage of students in the private sector varies significantly.

In the UAE, the free public federal universities and HCTs cater to Emirati citizens, while private higher education has emerged to educate non-citizens, who constitute the majority of residents. Data available from the UAE Ministry of Education shows that in the 2018–19 academic year, 93 per cent of all students enrolled in the public federal universities were Emiratis, while only 44 per cent of students in non-federal institutions, which are largely private, were Emirati. The growing and diverse private sector caters to a large non-national student body, which includes both resident non-citizens and an increasing number of foreign student-visa holders. Encouraging the growth of private higher education is part of the country's commitment to developing what it characterizes as homegrown and highly skilled talent for the labour force, which the UAE hopes will reduce its dependence on costly recruitment of those educated abroad. In 2012, the minister of higher education and scientific research stated that both the public and the private sector will “play an essential role” as the UAE transitions to a knowledge economy.

Interestingly, a significant number of Emiratis are also now enrolling in the private sector, complicating the traditional sectoral division. In 2017, statistics show that Emirati nationals made up more than 22,000 of the roughly 60,000 students enrolled in Dubai's branch campuses, representing more than a third of all students and suggesting a growing demand for private higher education among Emirati citizens. Seemingly in response to this growth, the regulation of private higher education has recently become a policy priority [3, P. 78]. Stricter regulation of the private sector seeks to ensure that students and families trust the higher education system and also supports the government's goals of training a highly skilled labour force locally. Accordingly, a

number of emirates have been tightening regulations on private higher education in the name of quality assurance. For example, in 2017, Ras al-Khaimah announced that it would be introducing stricter policies for private universities, and some institutions have been forced to close as a result.

Internationalizing the National University

The gleaming new campus of New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) is located on Saadiyat Island, a natural island off the coast of Abu Dhabi and a cultural and tourist hub for the emirate. Saadiyat's cultural district will include the Zayed National Museum, the Louvre Abu Dhabi, and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. The campus's architecture combines the country's Arab and Islamic heritage with the most up-to-date environmental practices; the spacious and green campus includes high-end libraries, facilities, and computer labs. Roughly a decade after its launch, there is no doubt that NYUAD has made an impact: its acceptance rate of 2–4 per cent of applicants makes it as competitive as any American Ivy League university, and it has attracted a diverse faculty of the highest caliber from elite universities around the world.

On the one hand, NYUAD is a clearly Emirati project; it has been funded almost entirely by the Nahyans, the ruling family of Abu Dhabi, which is the largest of the seven emirates in the UAE. Campus construction alone is estimated to have cost a staggering USD 1 billion, and, post-construction, the government of Abu Dhabi continues to provide generous financial aid to qualified students to lure them away from Ivy League universities and other top colleges.

On the other hand, there is very little about NYUAD that speaks to it being a national project. Rather, it feels like a global project that just happens to be located in Abu Dhabi. The sparkling new campus, which integrates cultural and architectural traditions from Abu Dhabi with those of New York City. Simi-

larly, its brand is self-consciously “global.” NYUAD calls itself “the world’s honors college” and seeks to educate “global leaders.” Its home university, New York University (NYU), also calls itself “a global university” and insists that NYUAD is not simply a branch of the original campus in Lower Manhattan. Instead, along with its other coequal campus in Shanghai, the three campuses make up what NYU calls a globally networked university [4, P.305-306].

NYUAD is only one of many symbols of international higher education in the Arab Gulf states. Meanwhile, Abu Dhabi’s larger and more cosmopolitan, Dubai, has created a hub for branch campuses, known as Academic Village. Unlike NYUAD, Dubai’s Academic Village targets the roughly 90 percent of Dubai residents who are non-citizens. It hosts dozens of branch campuses of varying levels of quality to educate a large and diverse non-elite for the labour market.

Conclusions

A recurring argument is that development discourses of higher education in the UAE take an instrumental view. Reforms draw on generic and globally circulating policy prescriptions that emanate from powerful donors and intergovernmental agencies. Definitions of development must make space for individuals’ social, psychological, and spiritual well-being. In higher educational development, recognized experts are engaged in diagnosing the problems of higher education. They suggest best practices such as autonomy and accountability, which then become diffused among transnational policy communities, including think-tanks, and academia. In most discussions of reform, higher education policy is depoliticized in the name of pursuing these best practices on the grounds of their internal or assumed logic.

Fundamentally, higher education development has conceptualized the purposes of higher

education. The deep focus in international development on the university's role as a producer of labour and a producer of research focus its role as a producer of citizens. The role of universities in supporting young people's engagement in civic life is a fundamental question for development. The approach begins by centering the university's civic mandates. This article tells many stories about higher education reform in the UAE, it reflects challenges faced by higher education system including how to balance access, quality, equity, and financing.

Meanwhile, significant privatization has meant that students and families are treated as "consumers". Beyond specific policy domains lie broader questions of the role of the university's contribution to social and political life, or what is called the public sphere. Higher education in the UAE trains creative, diverse, multilingual, and mobile students to be economically productive and civically engaged amid difficult social and political conditions. In rejecting the

natural superiority of Western higher education, the scientific work calls for a new approach to higher educational development.

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