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Literature Review on Education Reform the UAE

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1. Executive Summary

With wealth acquired from oil revenues, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has metamorphosed from a barren desert into a thriving metropolis since its establishment in 1971. The UAE used global standards to calibrate its goals and has since reached international levels in areas such as commerce, tourism, aviation and architecture. However, similar levels of progress in education continue to fall behind the country's social and economic development (Harold, 2005).

Data from the Abu Dhabi Education Council's *Road to 2030* states that 95% of graduating seniors in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi fail to meet university standards and require a remedial program. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) detailsthe importance of improving educational outputs in the UAE:

The United Arab Emirates is identified by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as one of the most rapidly improving education systems in the world. However, its students still perform well below the levels expected in advanced economies. The future prosperity of the United Arab Emirates and other countries will depend, to a large extent, on the country's success in strategically developing and optimally using its skills potential (OECD, 2015, p. 3).

With so much at stake for the future of the UAE, a discussion of educational reform efficacy is warranted. The purpose of this literature review is to establish the importance of assessing all levels of education in the UAE by highlighting research and theory on global educational reform and policy borrowing, synthesizing research on reform in the UAE for the purpose of finding common themes, identifying gaps in existing studies, suggesting alternate paths toward improved results and suggesting areas for future study. The limitations of this review include a total reliance on previously published research and therefore a reliance on the agendas and methodologies used by the researchers.

Some common themes from the literature:

- The Global Education Reform Movement increases competition between countries by emphasizing external accountability measures via international benchmarks.
- Competition pushes governments to look to foreign countries' educational policies, and their primary motivator is political; policymakers are often more interested in ideas than implementation.
- A nation's cultural identity has an undetachable influence on educational policy.
- The UAE has developed so quickly, and with such a focus on international status, that considerations such as cultural context of policy origin and impact of English on Emirati culture and learning have been overlooked.
- Policy changes in the UAE are constant, unclear, unsystematic and authoritative.
- Teachers play an instrumental—but often discounted–role in turning policy into practice.

Gaps in current research &suggested areas for further study:

- perceptions of UAE government school teachers
- bilingual curriculum with English and Arabic taught in conjunction
- analysis of foreign educational policy implementation processes in the UAE
- impact of expatriate populations on Emirati culture
- cultural impact of expatriate management and delivery of educational policy
- impact of cultural idiosyncrasies such as the *social contract* and *waste* on education and reform in the UAE
- culture matching—increasing educational policy efficacy by matching cultural elements of lender and borrower countries
- reasons for the UAE's overreliance on foreign labor and expertise
- impact of nationality on identity and teacher philosophy
- social status of teaching in the UAE
- alternative definitions of success in education—the next phase in global educational reform

2. Framework

2.1 The Global Educational Reform Movement Is Here!

In *Education in a Globalized World*, David E. Bloom (2006) discusses the consequences when the world attempts to privatize education. Bloom emphasizes the infectious role competition plays in discourses around globalization and notes how important education has been for the countries seen as "winning" the global competition. The Global Education Reform Movement is driven by some of these key tenets:

- high stakes standardized testing
- international competition
- performance-related pay
- market-driven mechanisms
- corporate capitalism and privatization (Little, 2015).

Perhaps the most widely recognized evidence for and against globalized reform is the case of one of the top-performing OECD countries, Finland. Pasi Sahlberg, Finnish educational scholar and author of *The Finnish Way* (2011), refers to what is happening internationally with education as the Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM, and explains that Finland's spotlighted success in educational outcomes is a result of its steadfast development *away* from global comparisons.

Sahlberg contrasts Finland's education-as-a-public-good approach with the globalized standard of structuring education using business models on his website: "Tellingly, GERM is often promoted through the interests of international development agencies and private enterprises through their interventions" (p. 3). Sahlberg criticizes the functions of GERM when international tests dictate curriculum design. The success in Finland has been "paradoxically" a result of the Finns' ability to allow foreign influence while maintaining the Finnish Way: pragmatism, diplomacy and cooperation reign over competition in the Finnish culture.

2.2 Policy Borrowing

Halpin and Troyna (1995) define educational policy borrowing as "the appropriation of identifiable aspects of another country's policy solutions" (p. 1). There is research to support both sides of the policy-borrowing argument.

Forestier and Crossley (2014) use the mutually influential academic relationship between Hong Kong and England as case studies in an examination of the East-West "multidirectional" policy influence. The United Kingdom has applied Hong Kong's educational successes as justification for their desire to use more traditional "didactic" approaches in teaching in the UK, while Hong Kong aims to push forward, borrowing "progressive discourses" from the West, like professional collaboration and student-centered learning, and (ironically) less formal and traditional methods. The case study demonstrates the multifaceted challenges *and possibilities* involved with the transmigration of ideas between countries.

Global competition has made global comparisons unavoidable in the modern world. Educational researchers use the database from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to extract information to guide policy decisions. OECD's Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General Director Andreas Schleicher encourages policy borrowing by emphasizing its ubiquitous potential: "Our global metrics help countries to see what is possible in education and to set meaningful aspirations in terms of measurable goals achieved by the world's education leaders" (OECD, 2015, p. 2).

Sahlberg (2011) admits that even Finland borrowed innovative strategies such as cooperative learning, problem-based teaching, and portfolio assessment from the United States. These practices are now used regularly inside Finnish classrooms. But *how* they borrowed the practices matters: as Sahlberg explains, they were implemented "systematically" over a long period of time and shaped by Finnish values. "The Finnish way of change preserves the best of traditions and present good practices, and combines it with innovations from others" (p. 8). Once in the hands of Finnish people, borrowed policies are refined to

suit their specific needs.

O'Sullivan (2013) discusses the risks of treating OECD data as wholly formed snapshots of a country's success: "The seductive, easy to understand logic of league tables these assessments generate implies that from the evidence identifying high performers, it is possible…to derive practice that is best, common, decontextualized and transferable" (p. 21). OECD's PISA data, in being easily "digestible," is tempting for policymakers to export, but by making generalized assumptions without a broader understanding of the context within which the data was created, "decontextualized," and "flattened" can superficially inflate an already numbers-obsessed marketplace. "PISA scores render comparison as a form of governance" (Lingard & Rawolle, 2006; as cited in O'Sullivan, 2013, p. 22).

O'Sullivan explains that the UAE's current philosophy of governance is that the role of education is to serve the economy. He argues that the UAE's pointed focus on international status suggests a preference for quantity over quality when it comes to foreign policy:

The UAE's…voluntary embrace of the international policy cape's mantra of education's role as the principal policy lever for achieving increased national economic competitiveness (Marginson, 1999) means it is a rather uncritical consumer of the fare coming through various policy conduits and networks (p. 22).

2.3 Cultural Dimensions Theory

Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede is considered the global expert on defining culture. In his seminal work, *Culture's Consequences* (2011), Hofstede published the findings from his five-year analysis of data mined from a massive database of employee interviews and surveys regarding people's behavior in large organizations around the world. Hofstede's breakthrough was discovering patterns in responses are distinguishable by culture. These findings ultimately led to *Culture's Consequences*, a book that transformed the way culture is understood. Supplementing his database with theory from a variety of disciplines including psychology and anthropology, Hofstede eventually created four primary categories to describe the categorical responses. The categories, or *dimensions*, include *Power Distance, Individualism, Uncertainty Avoidance* and *Masculinity.*

Countries who score high on the *Individualism* scale value the individual over the group. Individuals are expected only to take care of themselves and their immediate families. In contrast, countries who score high on the *Collectivist* side value group needs over the individual's. In *Collectivist* cultures, absolute loyalty operates like an exchangeable good. In countries scoring high on the *Masculinity* scale, competition reigns. In contrast, their counterparts who score lower on this scale place less value upon status. In countries scoring high in *Uncertainty Avoidance*, people require structure to feel secure and tend to have strong belief systems. Countries receiving low scores in the dimension of *Uncertainty Avoidance* have populations that tend to prefer environments that are not rigidly structured, and religion plays a much less central role than in the countries scoring high in this dimension. For countries who scored high in the *Power Distance Index* dimension, a hierarchy of power—and therefore inequity—is accepted. For countries who scored low in the *Power Distance Index* dimension, more value is placed

on individual empowerment and social justice.

The noteworthy scores on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Scale for the UAE include the *Power Distance* and *Collectivist* dimensions, for which the country ranked very high. The UAE scored low on the *Individualism* dimension. This means that in the UAE people generally accept a clearly defined hierarchy of power: inherent inequities and subordination are culturally accepted. The culture is also group-minded, meaning that socially bound loyalties are powerful commodities influencing every aspect of individuals' lives (Hofstede, 2011).

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory has far-reaching implications for the world of education. Teachers' and students' native cultures and cultural differences between them not only play a vital role in determining behaviors inside the classroom, but, researchers say, serve as *the key to unlocking the black boxof education*. The role of culture can help to explain how formerly unquantifiable inputs?—such as per-pupil spending, class size and years in school—can be correlated without puts such as test scores, graduation rates and future employment (Wursten & Jacobs, 2013). It is impossible to overstate the degree to which culture influences how a teacher teaches and how a student learns.

2.4 High Stakes for the UAE

In OECD's compendium *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives: A Strategic Approach to Education and Skills Policies for the United Arab Emirates* (2015), Director Andreas Schleicher expresses the dramatic monetary value of investing in education for the UAE:

Skills are Infinite-Oil is Not.

If the UAE would raise the performance of its lowest-performing 15-year-olds at least to PISA Level 2, which can be considered a minimum for effective participation in industrialized economies, the additional long term economic output these individuals are likely to generate for the UAE over their working life could be in the order of US $2360 billion (p. 3).

The population growth rate in the UAE is one of the fastest in the world (CIA World Factbook, 2016). The OECD document looks at how the country's changing demographics and diversification away from reliance on fossil fuel revenues underscores the need to develop education: "the coexistence of high unemployment and skills shortages in much of the Arab world illustrates that producing more of the same graduates cannot be the answer" (OECD, 2015, p. 3). The OECD uses the term *knowledge-based economy* to describe the correlative relationship between intellectual ability and economic success in OECD top-performing countries. Most developed countries have knowledge-based economies in that they rely on intellectual capital with influences from information and technology. In these countries intellectual capital takes precedence over natural resources, including agriculture products and fossil fuels (OECD, 2015).

With the steep drop in oil prices in recent years, countries whose economic landscapes are built on hydrocarbon capital (as is the case in the UAE) have had to reevaluate their economic plans and ultimately invest in other fields. The UAE's *Vision 2021 National Agenda* sets forth the country's goals, using *Non-oil, Real GDP Growth* as their number one indicator for future economic development.

Establishing a *Competitive Knowledge Economy* is one of the six national priorities of the Vision's central aim to receive international recognition. Establishing a *First-Rate Education System* is another of the top six priorities, with the target of achieving top international rankings (*Vision 2021*, 2010).

If establishing a *Competitive Knowledge Economy* and developing a *First-Rate Education System* constitute two of the top six priorities of the UAE's National Agenda, *Emiratization* is how the nation hopes to achieve these goals. In 2013 the country announced an initiative for more citizens (Emiratis) to join the workforce in both the public and private sectors, with the aim of pioneering the nation's shift to a knowledge-based economy (*Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030*, 2008).

However, currently more than 80% of the labor force in the UAE is made up of expatriates. Foreign migrant workers are hired from primarily India and the Philippines to meet the UAE's ever-rising skilled and unskilled labor market needs. Emirati Nationals only make up 10–15% of the labor market (UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

Forstenlechner et al. (2012) tested six different hypotheses to explain why private sector employers are not hiring Emiratis in the UAE. The hypotheses (social, cultural, economic, regulatory, educational and motivational) reflect available literature on the subject. The study used statistical and descriptive analysis and relied partly on the Likert scale and Pearson correlations.

This study addresses the importance of the *social contract* for UAE nationals. This *social contract* reflects how the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries along the Arabian Gulf distribute hydrocarbon revenues, "the provision of a very well remunerated and undemanding public sector job to their citizens" (Forstenlechner et al., 2012, p. 408). The social contract rewarded to UAE nationals causes major social division and inconsistencies in employment practices. UAE nationals choose public sector jobs where the salary is several times higher than the private sector equivalent. Emiratis employed in governmental jobs and private companies meet the governmental quota of hiring a specified number of locals, as part of the *Emiratization* program to nationalize the workforce.

As one factor in the discussion of *Emiratization* and employment, the authors of the study explain the impact of *wasta*, an Arabic term to describe the cultural practice of using family and tribal connections in business networks, "to gain unmerited favour." For Emiratis, having to apply to a private sector job means lacking *wasta*. This "socio-cultural idiosyncrasy" is a pervasive component of life in the UAE. Factoringin this cultural habit while reviewing the relationship between Emiratization and employment could help explain some possible "disincentivising factors" for both employer and employee.

The authors suggest internship programs to encourage and train UAE nationals entering the workforce and to provide educational opportunities for UAE citizens so that they can better prepare for the realities of working life. The study also recommends revising Emiratization regulations to diminish the disparities between Emirati and non-Emirati laws. Salary should be based primarily on experience and merit, with on-site training provided as support and, most importantly, incentives for businesses not just to hire nationals, but to train them.

2.5 Brief History of Reform in the UAE

Since the early 1990s, at a time of widespread economic and social changes in the UAE and increased influence from foreign cultures, the UAE's Ministry of Education (MOE) has initiated a variety of educational reforms (UNESCO, 2016).

The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) was established in 2005 and is the governmental agency responsible for administering public education within Abu Dhabi, the largest and wealthiest of the UAE's seven emirates. As its most substantial reform effort, ADEC created the New School Model (NSM) in 2009. This reform was to be released over a span of six years beginning in 2010. NSM borrowed structures from the global reform movement, such as organizing curriculum around learning standards and outcomes and focusing on ongoing assessments and standardized testing (ADEC, 2009).

A defining part of the reforms was the introduction of the Public Private Partnership (PPP) in 2006. Foreign consultants were contracted to advise schools on professional development, thereby helping to improve pedagogical outputs. The first wave of PPP was the adoption of a curriculum from Australia. On-site advisors were provided to train local teachers in this new educational infrastructure, with a focus on increasing English proficiency. ADEC's comprehensive strategic plan revolved around their mission to standardize education in order to surpass international performance benchmarks (Dickson, 2012).

Along with ADEC, the MOE in the UAE continues to defer to foreign expertise for the development of educational policies. Tenets of the global reform movement—including an emphasis on standardization, competition and external accountability—shape policy in the UAE (O'Sullivan, 2013).

With the creation of NSM in 2009, ADEC hired thousands of teachers from English-speaking countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland and South Africa (Dickson, 2012). ADEC has been consistently open to influence from other countries and in fact discusses at length their vision for Global Partnerships (ADEC, n.d.). ADEC's considerations before committing to a partnership reveal their priorities, clearly influenced by the global reform movement:

- What is the value of the partnership for Abu Dhabi, or what contribution does it make to the institution? Will this partnership link with the key development areas for the 2030 plan?
- What overseas operations and mechanisms for transferring knowledge would the partnership entail?
- How does the partner institution rank academically?
- Under the given partnership, what are the terms for termination, renewal, and dispute resolution?
- What is the proposed business model for the partnership?

3. Leadership

3.1 The Road to 2030

ADEC addresses the urgent need for improvement in their P-12 schools in their document *Abu Dhabi Education Reform: The Road to 2030*. The Immediate Improvement Imperatives include the following:

- By the time the reform is fully implemented, 67,000 students are expected to graduate from high school.
- The academic performance of high school graduates is unsatisfactory. About 35% are not able to gain admittance at universities. Over 95% need bridge programs.
- ADEC will rely on the expertise of best-in-class international operators to drive the reform.

Improving outcomes for Emirati students entering universities is a priority of *The Road to 2030* as it prepares students for the workforce. *Human Capital* is one of the five objectives of ADEC's Higher Education System. Short-term goals include:

- Academic Achievement is apparent through individual and collective learner performance.
- Labor Market Achievement is apparent in employability, labor productivity and employment.

Under the subtitle *Social and Economic Gains*, Long-term goals include:

- Achievement is apparent at different levels: community, country, region and the world.
- Improvements can be measured quantitatively through increased employment rates, higher per capita income, increased GDP, etc.
- Improvements can also be measured qualitatively through more entrepreneurship, increased private sector involvement, increased public sector effectiveness, improved quality of life, etc.

The influence of the Global Education Reform Movement appears throughout *The Road to 2030*and also informs the country's plan to continue adopting foreign educational practices by acquiring partnerships with universities from other countries. Abu Dhabi's mission statement for higher education calls for *lay[ing] the foundation for an innovation-based, knowledge-producing society* by:

- elevating the quality of higher education to international standards through partnerships with world class universities, high licensing and accreditation standards, requirements and incentives for continuous improvement
- promoting and incentivizing innovation, scholarship and discovery through major research funding in areas of strategic importance to Abu Dhabi, thereby building a strong community of scientists and scholars
- carefully aligning higher education with labor market and socio-economic needs, guided by the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 and Abu Dhabi's policy agenda.

The *Road to 2030* maps out the misalignment between labor market demands and the current academic level of UAE university graduates. Higher education institutes, such as Abu Dhabi University and the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), have comparatively low international rankings (*Times Higher Education*, World University Rankings, 2015).

One of ADEC's recommendations is for the government to establish a *Committee for Human Capital Development* with a focus on both academic and "commercial" outcomes.

As is described in detail in *The Road to 2030*, the primary goal of educational policymakers in the UAE is to develop students' skills so they may contribute to the national workforce. Although the country's goals are to rely less on hydrocarbon capital and expat labor (Forstenlechner, Madi, Selim, & Rutledge,

2012), the reality is that: 1) only a small percentage of the labor market in the UAE is made up of nationals; and 2) graduating students' skill sets are currently substandard, and re-addressing the needs of students is at a critical stage for this still-emerging industrial economy (OECD, 2015).

3.2 Leadership & Vision

Leadership at the school level determines the rate of success when it comes to national changes in education (Leithwood & Levin, 2010). Leadership concerns and overall "poor quality of the [Arab] region" are covered in UNESCO's report *Leading Better Learning: School Leadership and Quality in the Education 2030Agenda*(2016).The power hierarchy and authoritative leadership style prevail in Arab countries, yet little research exists on what—if any—types of professional development are used to train school administrators in these countries. Government investment in training school leaders lacks systematic planning (UNESCO, 2016). Principals are powerful figureheads within schools and generally possess authoritative styles of leadership. But while a school's principal acts as a "one man show," the reality is that principals are themselves merely gatekeepers for the directives handed down from the higher rungs of the hierarchical ladder (Al Jammal, 2013). Within the UAE, the MOE and ADEC dictate both managerial and pedagogical decisions ranging from curriculum to teacher salary.

Qualifications of principals within the Arab region are also a concern, especially when the power structure is organized in a bureaucratic, top-down manner. Principals in most Arab countries are not expected to possess more than a bachelor's degree. Arab Ministries use exam scores as the primary evaluation of a school's efficacy, and because of that, schools are not made accountable for the day-to-day elements of how they are run (UNESCO, 2016). Yet the role of the principal in determining a school's success is crucial: research has shown that in successful schools, principals are open and responsive, clearly communicating and including faculty in decision-making (O'Sullivan, 2015).

At public universities, leadership issues accompany the challenges associated with English immersion. In a country such as the UAE, where authoritative styles of leadership prevail, control is left to bureaucratic entities. In the case of higher education, there is little autonomy. The managerial structures reflect traditional modes of power. This lack of localized control at the university level is described as inhibiting progress (UNESCO, 2016). Government control includes admissions decisions, which means a student's chance of acceptance could be swayed by governmental policy.

3.3 Partnership with Finland

As part of Abu Dhabi's *Road to 2030* mission of establishing partnerships with foreign institutions, in 2010 ADEC partnered with EduCluster Finland Ltd. to use the top PISA-scoring Finnish educational model in select ADEC schools. The goal was to use Finnish best practices to train teachers and administrators (*UAE Interact*, 2010). Finland sent principals and teachers to Abu Dhabi to help develop an "Emirati-Finnish fusion" with 20 Emirati teachers who attended a series of Finnish-led professional development trainings. As a part of their partnership and ongoing collaboration agreements with countries from all over the world, Finnish delegates traveled to Abu Dhabi to conduct research and conferences, along with developing training networks and international seminars. The Educational

Partnership Programme (EPP) ran from 2010 to 2015. One gap in the research includes studies on this Emirati-Finnish fusion.

While there is no research available on the results of implementing Finland's pedagogical infrastructures within Abu Dhabi, research does exist on the efficacy of the United Kingdom's attempt to acquire Finland's teacher training model, which can be applied to the situation in the UAE. Research analyzing two different teacher preparation programs in the UK (Chung, 2016) found that borrowing *uncritically* or attempting to adopt policies that are *decontextualized* from Finnish values fails to yield desired outcomes. The importance of cultural context when attempting to import a country's educational structures is highlighted once again. Research shows that Finland's and the United Kingdom's *philosophies* and cultural *ethos* **do not match**, and because they do not match, more careful considerations are required if there is to be successful policy transferal. Without careful consideration, policy borrowing is nothing more than looking for a "quick fix" from a high-performing country such as Finland (Chung, 2016).

One of the lessons the UAE could learn from Finland is that Finnish policymakers, unlike other top performing OECD countries, do not develop policy around the marketplace and the knowledge economy tenets undergirding GERM. As Sahlberg (2011) has argued, "Consistent focus on equity and cooperation—not choice and competition—can lead to an educational system where all children learn well" (p. 12).

4. Literature Review

4.1 Uncritical Policy Borrowing

In his examination of policy borrowing in the UAE (O'Sullivan, 2013) adds insight to the phenomenon of policy transferal in the UAE. The study signifies terms to distinguish between the ways in which developing countries implement foreign policies. The UAE's "policy transfer trajectory" is categorized as *compelling*, meaning that *policy adoption is tied to international assistance*.

While the UAE is open to adopting policies from all parts of the world, the influence of the Western model dominates. Analysis of UAE policy documentation has revealed the presence of Western-influenced global educational reform movement concepts, such as competition and external accountability (O'Sullivan, 2013).

A common theme of reviews dealing with education reform has to do with the tendency for policymakers to treat educational policy as "the magic recipe for success" (Thorne, 2011). O'Sullivan addresses the impact of wealth on the UAE's options, distinguishing the UAE from other developing countries looking to substantiate their governments. Citing Thorne (2011), O'Sullivan (2013) refers to the UAE as an "uncritical purchaser of policy options" and uses a consumerist metaphor to describe the country's approach to adopting foreign educational policy as the equivalent to "'sampling' a variety of educational 'products' before deciding which to choose" (p. 7).

But while the UAE's wealth allows them the luxury of sampling policies, the study also emphasizes the urgency for the UAE to find a system that meets the demands of the country's escalating graduate and unemployed population (Croucher, 2014). The GCC states (Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman) have witnessed a population explosion of citizens under the age of 25. This "youth bulge" represents the largest population of youth in the world. The population trend presents a troubling challenge for labor markets in these countries (Oxford Business Group, 2016). In the UAE, the youth population issue acts as a pressurizer on the lid of education reform. Policymakers are burdened with the task of finding a solution to this "unemployment tsunami" (Braxton, 2011, p. 67).

Perhaps the UAE can afford to be selective when shopping for the best foreign educational policies, but what the country cannot afford to waste is time.

4.2 Implementation Issues

Volumes of literature exist on educational policy borrowing. Comparative Education has evolved into a branch of educational theory and continues to expand its reach as its own academic field of study. One of the common themes uncovered in the research is concern for what happens to the policy after it is chosen. Even when similarities exist, the act of turning ideas into practices inevitably configures policy, and what first appeared symbiotic become disparate fragments (Levin, 1998). Burdett & O'Donnell (2016) argue that while idea-sharing between different cultures can and should be a strategy of all countries aiming to improve their educational outcomes, thoughtful examination of each stage of the transferal of ideas from one context to another is equally critical in order to ensure nothing is "lost in translation."

Losing contextual substance from lender to borrower is only one part of the equation. What further confounds policy transference is when—as is so often the case when educational policy goes global—politics influences policy formation, and policy is structured around what's best for the government. The surrounding "sociopolitical milieu" of a given policy often has more of an influence than the policy itself. Borrowing educational narratives from systems organized and arranged inside the cultural nuances of a foreign country is further complicated when the motivation for change is enmeshed with political goals (Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016).

Hall and Hord (2001) argue that successfully implementing a pedagogical strategy requires very high levels of skill and experience. Policy borrowing is not like other traded goods: you cannot simply import an educational template that took years to develop and begin to manufacture a product (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). In addition to cultural differences, governance structures, governance changes, management styles, jurisdiction issues, levels of community involvement, levels of localized control and council membership are just some of the other considerations impacting policy experiences (Levin, 2010).

Implementing real, substantive change requires consistency, especially as obstacles arise. The literature suggests that those involved during the policy development phase often "lose interest" during implementation (Hall, 2008, as cited in Buchler-Eden, 2012). Research reveals the surprisingly

unsubstantial role in-depth analysis of policy implementation experiences plays for borrower countries. The implication of this finding is that the search for best practices in foreign systems is largely a symbolic one (Levin, 2010; Aydarova, 2012). Analysis of reform efforts should include a review of policy managers' metacognitive skills: *How well were new objectives assessed? How thoroughly were strategies examined post-implementation?*

For countries like the UAE, whose mission statement is to acquire policies from top-performing countries (*Vision 2021*, 2010), more weight should be given to *how* the origin country executed an idea rather than how well that idea translated to international benchmark data. But looking at data and developing a theory based on that data is much less involved than conducting in-depth analysis of the visible *and invisible* components of day-to-day minutiae. The level of organization required to take an idea and work backward to realize goals is beyond the ability or willingness of most governments (Gaad, 2006).

The study *Education Reform in the UAE: An Investigation of Teachers' Views of Change and Factors Impeding Reforms in Ras Al Khaimah Schools* (Tabari, 2014) interviewed 96 teachers and students within the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah in order to assess teachers' views of reform measures. As justification for the study, the author states that under pressure to receive international recognition, the UAE government began to look elsewhere to acquire policies. He cites Harold (2005), who noted, however, that the UAE adopted the policies "without considering the cultural context in which they would be applied" (p. 7).

The Tabari study aims to examine why public school teachers in Ras Al Khaimah are not responding positively to reform measures. The key findings showed that teachers were optimistic about reform in theory but critical of several aspects of its implementation related to poor communication with teachers. The study concluded that without teacher buy-in resulting from their participation in reform initiatives, teachers will not feel a sense of ownership in relation to the curriculum, and effective implementation will be unlikely to result in desired outcomes. Tabari recommends similar studies throughout the other emirates in the UAE.

Research continues to demonstrate the damaging impact disorganization and unclear communication have on teacher output. When communication lacks structure and cohesion, instability often follows (O'Sullivan, 2015). The history of education in the UAE is a history of constant change. Studies highlight "operational deficiencies" (Abbas, 2012) and leadership problems amidst these changes. Communication problems, conflicting goals and organizational issues within ADEC appear at all levels. As a very public example, at a national conference in 2011, ADEC announced plans to hire thousands more English teachers from foreign countries. But Dr. Mugheer Al Khaili, ADEC Director General (at the time), announced at the same meeting that hundreds of teachers were being fired due to ADEC's Emiratisation programme (Ahmed, 2011). Again in 2016, hundreds of foreign teachers were unexpectedly terminated. ADEC cited the new paradigms conveyed in the New School Model as the reason (Pennington, 2016).

4.3 Cultural Concerns

Globalization redefines cultural traditions as the world becomes increasingly interconnected (Mao & Chang, 2005). But decontextualizing policy from its culture—even if the policy is evidential and data-driven—is like selectively applying parts of a formula. "This piecemeal, 'pick "n" mix' approach to education policy reform ignores the fact that educational policies and practices exist in ecological relationships with one another and in whole ecosystems of interrelated practices" (Chung, 2016; para. 2). Overwhelmingly, research proves that a country's educational performance must be put into cultural context and cannot be detached from the bigger picture of societal networks (Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016).

Maintaining Abu Dhabi's Values, Culture and Heritage is one of the nine pillars of Abu Dhabi's Policy Agenda outlined in both the *UAE Vision 2021* and *The Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030*. Considering the numbers—Emiratis currently make up only 10% of the population (*United Nations,* World Population Prospects)—the UAE faces a legitimate risk of losing its Bedouin traditions, Emirati cultural practices, and Islamic values.

Foreign influence on Emirati culture coincided with oil commercialization in the 1960s. However, the small percentage of Emiratis within the population lacked the skills required to fill industry positions. Contracting foreign, expatriate laborers was thus established as a trend (Krishna-Hensel, 2012). As the UAE has developed, so has community concern over education models based on Western ideals.

Along with the commercialization of oil and migration of expatriate laborers came the proliferation of the English language to the UAE. English has historically played an essential role for the modernized Arab world. However, English—and the values it represents—has become a controversial issue within a culture dominated by Islamic traditions (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2015). English might act as a connecting bridge to the outside, international community, but as such it replaces Arabic as the primary means of communication among local people. "English is often employed across the Arab world as a high stakes gatekeeper of educational and social success in contexts where the language itself is not used, outside of a handful of cities, for everyday communication" (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2015).

Language is not only a national issue for the UAE but also an indicator of future problems(Ahmed, 2010). Because of the language controversy, as the UAE pushes toward locking in its global position, English has begun to symbolize a cultural crossroads. The ramifications of English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) in the Arab community need to be addressed systematically and studied further (Ahmed, 2011).

In addition to ideological issues, English as the primary language through which content is delivered presents significant impediments for students. Belhiah and Elhami (2014) surveyed 500 students and 100 teachers from six universities from each of the six emirates. The authors found that EMI is a problem for students attempting to learn subject matter taught in a language in which they are not yet proficient. The study illustrates how the prevalent use of English provokes conflict between the UAE's goals of establishing a knowledge economy and maintaining a strong cultural heritage. The authors of

the study discuss how the country has progressed so rapidly that issues of social impact have been largely unaddressed. Developing countries such as the UAE, with a vision of globalized, big picture ideals, are so intent on the international mobility the English language represents that they lose sight of what might be sacrificed in their own cultures (Baldauf, Kaplan, & Kamwangamalu, 2010, as cited in Belhiah & Elhami, 2014).

The study revealed that due to EMI, students reported improvements in their English reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. However, the study also found that receiving instruction solely in English comes at a price. Both students and teachers reported a great awareness that English is beneficial for future job opportunities, but that perhaps the use of Arabic is also beneficial, as students are likelier to master core skills. The authors discuss the advantages of using both English and Arabic to optimize outcomes, ultimately suggesting a bilingual curriculum.

If the goal is to progress national ideals without losing important traditions and values (Ahmed, 2011), then an English and Arabic curriculum is something for policymakers to consider, particularly at the higher education level.

4.4 Higher Education

Despite the government's focus on education in the UAE, the majority of high school graduates lack appropriate English literacy skills (Hatherley-Greene, 2012). Much pressure is placed on higher education to bring about the long-term economic changes governments seek; indeed, higher education is where the values and skills of a nation's workforce are crystallized (Harrison & Huntington, 2006). UNESCO (2016) places great weight on the shoulders of higher education as a gauge of how well reform initiatives will work for any society, but especially the Arab countries currently undergoing restructuring.

There are many partnerships between the UAE and foreign school systems at the university level. Current international partnerships include the Paris Sorbonne University, the Lycée Louis Gran (LLG) School, the Finnish Managed Schools and Vanderbilt University (ADEC, 2017). There are around 58 private universities in the UAE from Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and France (Belhiah & Hussein, 2015). In a manner similar to what happens at the primary and secondary levels, curriculum models from overseas institutions hope to replicate the success of these private universities.

Drawing from a four-year study, Annemarie Profanter (2011) discusses the current state of educational opportunities for women in the Arabian Gulf in the early 21st Century. One of the study's findings highlights the problems emerging from extracted curriculum models. Again, the issue is not with English being taught as a core subject, but with the practice of using English to teach all core subjects.

The immersion of higher education with Western concepts emanating from the predominantly expatriate and Eurocentric faculty [has] challenged recent generations to find a way to balance the Western frameworks being imposed throughout their higher education and … traditional tribal frameworks. (p. 1259)

Profanter proposes that the period of borrowing policies from other countries should end, making room for original, more culturally appropriate pedagogy, created by and for Emiratis.

In an analysis of the impact of implementing four years of Australia's practicum in a teacher education program at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, Harold (2005) discusses foreign influence within UAE's private universities, where the professors' and administrators' culture affects all facets of pedagogical inputs and outputs. This analysis relates to O'Sullivan's (2013) categorization of the UAE's policy-transferal as *tied to international assistance*. With education reform, issues of power are often involved and in turn raise questions regarding motivations.

There is evidence to suggest that the government of the UAE is so intently focused on power acquisition within international markets that possible social ramifications of an expatriate population administering policy at the university level are not considered (Aydarova, 2012).

Peter Hatherley-Greene (2012) illustrates the multifarious realities of being an Emirati university student in the UAE. In one of the most comprehensive studies available on the subject, Hatherley-Greene documented the life of first-year male Emirati university students. Using observations, case studies, interviews, journals, student narratives and focus groups, the author uses the metaphor of crossing borders from Giroux (2005) to create a Border Crossing Index (BCI) correlating students' English proficiency with their likelihood of dropping out of university.

The findings of the study indicated that the cultural changes local students encounter as they transition from secondary to post-secondary school can be insurmountable for certain individuals. The BCI revealed that students placed in the lower levels of the university's Foundations Program were likelier to leave college the first semester, and in fact 66% dropped out of school that year. Students with low English proficiency are then statistically at a greater risk of failure, as English is used as the primary instrument of communication within the university, in contrast to high school, where English is the only subject not taught in the students' native tongue.

The author suggests focusing on improvements in UAE high schools and poses this question to policymakers: *Whose interests are being served (or not) by compelling first-language students to cross cultural borders into higher education colleges and asking them to study using the dominant and hegemonic second-language of English?*

The study concludes that educational reform in the UAE creates additional obstacles for Emirati university students, who must also navigate the realities of a country in transition. The author goes on to suggest that perhaps the most fragile components of the UAE's indefinite future are concealed, as "The Emirati society seems to be in trouble, though this is sometimes difficult to see through the glitz and conspicuous consumption" (p. 277).

For male Emiratis, success at the university level largely depends on their high school experience, and the unfortunate reality is that the majority of graduates are not prepared for the freedoms and demands that come with university life.

The author's suggestions include:

- Allow the use of Arabic in university classrooms.
- Review the research on individual motivations for students learning a second language, and consider applying individualized support, versus whole sale framework.
- Develop a culturally sensitive Emirati pedagogy.
- Analyze the impact of globalization, migration of foreign workers on the UAE community.
- Examine the connections between second language competency and cultural border crossing experience to help Emirati students adjust to their first year of college.

4.5 Teachers-in-Training

One well researched aspect of education reform in the UAE is university teacher-training programs.

A study by Dickson (2012) surveyed two groups of students who were teachers-in-training at a higher education institution in Abu Dhabi—58 first-year and 80 final-year students—in order to generate quantitative data regarding the impact of reform efforts on students' feelings about becoming teachers. Statistical analysis was applied to the results of both groups, with additional qualitative commentary amended to each section of the questionnaire results.

The study compared responses to questions between first-and final-year students within a teacher training program. The study presupposed that graduating students who entered the program before the reform began view the future landscape for Emirati teachers in a different light from students already familiar with the New School Model (NSM).

The author uses the goals of *Abu Dhabi Economic Vision of 2030* of increasing the number of local Emirati teachers in the workforce (Emiratization) as further justification for analyzing career-related motivational factors for young Emiratis.

The findings showed remarkable contrasts not only in the attitudes toward teaching but also in the level of buy-in between incoming and outgoing students. First-year students, already with five years' experience with NSM, showed optimism toward the teaching profession and credited reform components with encouraging their efforts. Almost all of these first-year students said they planned to apply for jobs as teachers post-graduation. In contrast, half of the graduating students reported they would not have even entered the field if they had been aware of the increasing demands placed on teachers by reform changes. Unlike incoming students, outgoing students gave responses that conveyed disapproval about teaching Math and Science in English; they also expressed concern for the diminishing effects college instruction in English can have on Arabic language and culture. Graduating students also expressed frustration over having to earn higher scores on the Academic International English Language Testing System (IELTS), one of the many new requirements placed on these students, and they held this new standard up as an example of how they felt adversely impacted by reform changes.

The variance in responses between the two groups of students illuminates the divisive impact of reform at the ground level. As was demonstrated by the contrast between the two groups, if the UAE is to

reach its Vision 2030 goals of becoming a knowledge-based economy, a paradigm shift must occur in the minds of Emiratis entering the workforce.

In order to encourage such a shift, a continued analysis of Emirati university students is recommended. A study by Matthew Clarke (2006) explored the impacts of teacher training reforms in research gathered over two years using individual interviews, focus groups and online conversations with Emirati student teachers from the first cohort of graduates from a teaching program at a the Higher College of Technology (HCT) in the UAE. Clarke uses Kazim's (2000) identification of attitudes, or *discourses*, regarding change. A *conservative* discourse seeks preservation of tradition, a *progressive* discourse embraces globalization-influenced change and a *moderate* discourse seeks a balance of tradition and progression.

Clarke's research is based on discourse theory, which he defines as *logics of equivalences* and *logics of differences*. The research findings showed connections between the way Emirati students identify themselves and their place within the community. Where students fall on the discourse spectrum—how individuals intellectually position themselves and their culture—impacts every facet of their attitudes and actions toward teaching and learning.HCT student teachers can be separated into two "binary oppositions": active/passive learning, teacher/student-centered and past/future, where the "new" teacher uses modern methods and the "traditional" teacher uses traditional methods.

4.6 Private Schools

Private schools using curricula from foreign countries are an increasingly popular alternative to government schools in the UAE. In 2014, the percentage of Emirati students enrolled in private schools rose to 34%.Clive Pierrepont, Director of Education and Performance at *Taaleem*, an international school system based in Dubai, says that with increased government school closures and increased pressure toward competition in the global academic marketplace, families look to international schools offering globally recognized accreditation and placement tests, such as the Advanced Placement tests in American schools, A levels in British schools and the International Baccalaureate in IB schools (Pennington, 2016).

Whether or not private schools have successfully replicated the same high quality of instruction as exists in the origin program is unclear. O'Sullivan (2015) examines the misalignment between policy and practice in a case study of an American private school in Dubai. This study addresses the growing trend among local Emirati families of sending their children to private schools because of the perception that private schools are of higher quality and offer better English language instruction than public schools. In 2014, the British Curriculum was the most dominantly used framework in private schools in Dubai, followed by Indian and American curricula. O'Sullivan argues that while these international private schools are growing in popularity among Emiratis, they have yet to statistically prove markedly enhanced results.

The case study interviewed 15 teachers and 15 students at an American private school in Dubai with about 500 students of 49 different nationalities. The findings of the interviews expressed participants'

concerns about the frequency of change and the lack of consistency. In addition, participants commented that educational policy needed to be more planned and less reactionary.

Two common responses include:

- Lack of resources—"Everyone talks about the knowledge economy, yet there is so little technology available in the classroom, or, sometimes even when it is there, it doesn't work properly, and only when there's an inspection due are things fixed. We have to buy so many things ourselves if we are to help these students, when the owners are taking in a lot of money in fees" (Grade 1 teacher).
- Need for Structured Professional Development—"It was a disaster! In the PD we did after school, it seemed so easy and I couldn't wait to try it out. However, I didn't go to the second PD session, and then the consultants weren't there. So I couldn't ask anyone. I didn't prepare carefully, and the whole thing was a mess. The students were embarrassed for me, I think" (Grade 9 teacher).

The lack of quality communication to teachers negatively impacts reform changes. Based on the nature of the teachers' responses in O'Sullivan's study of private school teachers, this review suggests similar studies interviewing public schoolteachers.

Teachers interviewed during the course of this research all felt that they are being subjected to reform after reform and a raft of different educational policies. As all stakeholders review policies, with a view to quality improvement, teachers, as one of the stakeholder groups most concerned, need to be informed as to what these changes mean. While most teachers felt that some progress had been made, they unanimously agreed that they have received a number of confusing messages, or mixed signals, in regard to the reform, that they need support with interpreting and implementing. Many expressed the view that their work is continually criticized, with administrators and policy makers placing the blame squarely on teachers for their work and students' poor academic performance (p. 317).

O'Sullivan determined that teachers and students—as the chiefmobilizers of change—should have equal access to high quality training and receive clear communication, with thoroughly outlined goals, from administrators.

5. Suggestions for Further Study

5.1 Teachers: The Missing Ingredient

Pasi Sahlberg (2011) has emphasized the role teachers play in the Finns' educational success: "one factor trumps all others: the daily contributions of excellent teachers" (p. 70). Noting the esteemed position teaching has in Finland, where it has evolved into a highly competitive field conferring "professional dignity and social respect" to its practitioners throughout the entire system, Sahlberg points to the government's strong support of the teaching profession. The Finnish government places top priority on training teachers and spends government funds on professional development rather than standardized tests.

Research indicates that teachers are key to improvements in large-scale reform (Senge, 1999). Educational researcher and social scientist Andy Hargreaves emphasizes the massive expectations put

on teachers, who are on the frontlines of reform. As primary stakeholders in the *processes* of reform, teachers' level of involvement is critical to carrying out reform initiatives effectively (Tabari, 2014). Hargreaves (2010) offers a counter discourse to cognitive discussions by emphasizing the role emotions play for teachers, and finds that the most important factor in teacher buy-in in the reform process is whether or not, and the degree to which, teachers feel included in the process. As Sahlberg (2011) argues, "it is paramount that teachers' workplaces allow them to fulfill their moral mission. In Finland…a teaching career is a result of an inner desire to work with people and help them" (p. 76).

In the former US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's speech entitled Lessons from high-performing countries at the National Center on Education and the Economy National Symposium in 2011, Duncan discussed the findings of the OECD's report entitled *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States.* Teachers, teacher incentives and high quality teacher training programs were prevailing motifs of Duncan's speech:

Virtually every education minister and union leader who spoke at the Summit affirmed the singular and urgent importance of elevating and strengthening the teaching profession in a knowledge economy. Throughout the globe, education is now recognized as the new game-changer that drives economic growth and social change. And it is great teachers who help build the higher-order skills that students need to succeed in the 21st century.

The overwhelming sentiment at the Summit was that teachers today need to be treated more as professionals and knowledge workers, and less as interchangeable cogs in an educational factory line out of the last century.

Teachers need and deserve more autonomy and respect—and they must become real participants and partners in reform if outcomes for children are to dramatically improve (Duncan, 2011).

In their analysis of education within a cultural framework of countries from around the world, Wursten and Jacobs (2013) concluded that there are two essential commonalities among top performing countries:

a. a supportive culture for education, and

b. high status of teachers.

Establishing a culture in which education is elevated so that teaching is treated with the same prestige as other highly respected fields is a common feature of academically top performing countries. Two top-ranked PISA-scoring countries, South Korea and Finland, are in many ways cultural opposites, as demonstrated in the personal and academic lives of their students. Finnish students have little homework because the system encourages after-school playtime; South Korean students spend every moment of their free time studying in a high-pressured environment. While the Finnish system uses instruction to drive assessment, the South Korean education system operates around tests, with a comprehensive, high-stakes secondary school entrance exam. However, both countries' cultures invest heavily in education, with teaching as an esteemed career choice encouraging highly motivated teachers (Dalporto, 2013).

Yet in Abu Dhabi, there is little available information regarding public school teachers' perceptions and community status. While studies exist that analyze the perceptions of student teachers, male Emirati university students and private school teachers, the most notable gap in educational reform research in the UAE has to do with the opinions of government-funded school teachers. In addition, the cultural attitudes toward teaching and the perspectives of government teachers—Emirati and expat—are largely unknown. A 2009 ADEC survey demonstrated that teachers within public schools do not feel included in school decisions (ADEC, 2009). If teachers are critical to the success of reform measures, then research on this topic is a missing puzzle piece that is needed to understand the educational needs in the UAE.

It is critical for the UAE to work toward improving its methods of communicating with teachers about policy and encouraging feedback and cooperation. Hargreaves (2010) emphasizes the importance of feelings of inclusion among all stakeholders involved in reform. Gaps between policy and practice occur when policymakers issue change as one-way directives rather than shared visions and collaborations with teachers, who are the primary implementers of change. Investing in teachers is a recommended goal for all Arab States (UNESCO, 2015).

5.2 Culture Matching

As a fundamental part of its development plan, the UAE partners with foreign nations and attempts to adapt or imitate their designs, from architectural to educational, with various degrees of success. The ministries of education construct systems based on what has worked in foreign countries, especially those espousing the tenets of the Global Educational Reform Movement. However, the common themes emerging from available literature related to educational outcomes in the UAE reveal problems at every stage of "borrowing" from these systems. If the UAE's strategy is to continue looking to other countries in order to expedite national targets, this review suggests that the educational policymakers of the UAE base their international policy-borrowing considerations less on developing political alliances and replicating foreign countries' best practices, and more on the **culture** of the country from which they would like to borrow.

Importing pedagogical features from a country like Finland, a fiercely independent democratic republic, does not make sense for an absolute monarchy like the UAE. Dr. Peter J Hatherley-Greene, Director of Learning at Emarise and expert on Middle Eastern culture and education, has written about Finland's reform measures in the UAE, using Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory to compare the Finnish culture with the culture of the UAE: "Finland appears to favour independence and egalitarianism, and employee consultation in decision-making. In contrast, Emiratis tend to accept a social hierarchy and deference to figures of authority" (p. 15).

Adhering to a strict authoritative power structure is only one aspect influencing Emirati culture, which contrasts that of the Finnish culture. Hatherley-Greene adds to Hofstede's schema by factoring in other defining facets of countries, such as geography, history and lifestyle. He argues that the Finns prefer to "live simply" and explains that a culture's values are a result of their capacity to adapt to the

environment and survive. Where the Finns have developed a strong sense of self-reliance and independence due to their geographical isolation and harsh climate, the Arab people, who have survived their own severe geography for 8000 years, have developed a firm but functional social hierarchy in response to the often inhospitable desert. Educational systems (like social hierarchies)are shaped in response to the environs in which they were grown and therefore may naturally reject cross-pollination; the same traits enabling one cultural species to thrive could in fact be toxic to another.

Understanding the way nationality influences behavior in the UAE could be a starting point for further research. National policies must submit to the behavioral and social constructs of the nation if the policies are to be viable.

In the UAE's commitment toward developing a knowledge economy using the marketplace models of the global reform movement, policymakers would be better served by looking to countries with analogous marketplace—and cultural—structures, such as China. Hutchings and Weir (2006) have demonstrated the culturally specific nature of networking in Chinese and Arab cultures. In addition to being *Collectivist* cultures with *High Power Distance*, both are cultures where religion (Confucianism and Islam) forms the basis of historically dominant political ideologies around which the culture functions. The Chinese and Arabic custom of establishing relationships *before* conducting business sin opposition to the global norm. The dynamics of networking extends inward from the family to business and, for both cultures, involves deeply rooted familial connections. What makes this cultural idiosyncrasy in Chinese and Arab cultures even more distinctive is that despite the other ways in which globalization has altered these societies, when it comes to how people relate to each other in social and professional contexts, both the Chinese and Arab cultures have been able to "resist" outside influence.

Methodically implementing policies developed in more culturally similar contexts could increase the likelihood of future success. Finding a better cultural "match" for the UAE is therefore a suggestion of this review.

5.3 The Fourth Way

Educational policies in the UAE reflect the country's priority to be comparable to top-performing countries. Governmental decision-makers have been pressured to use global calibrations as standard metrics. The current international trend in education is to apply models similar to those used in business, with emphasis on external accountability. As was demonstrated in the case of Finland, however, prioritizing economical needs over the individual learner does not work as a blanket approach. In addition, Finland developed its educational narrative by *not* focusing on international comparisons. If the UAE wants to borrow anything from Finland, it should be the Finns' tendency to think independently without heedlessly following the lead of global competitors.

Hargreaves that Shirley (2009) argue in their book *The Fourth Way* that it is time for change within the global reform movement. The authors discuss the historical reasons for previous phases of reform, where political and economic downturns pushed government leaders to treat education as a marketplace where

"customers" and "consumers" passively participated. The global reform movement in the third phase refers to the phenomenon where data from standardized tests are benchmarks around which countries compete, and students' scores symbolize a nation's economic (in)stability. The third phase is what Sahlbergrefers to as GERM and likens to an epidemic, spreading like an infection throughout the entire educational system.

The Fourth Way suggests a need to "reconceptualize the fundamental nature of teaching and learning itself, and not just the mechanisms for delivering it" (p. 85). This innovative way of thinking about education is based on Hargreaves's (1996) research on teachers. He found that the primary motivating factor for teachers is not external components such as salary or community status. Rather, good teachers are driven by an internal set of values despite the seemingly insurmountable expectations. *The Fourth Way* involves the human element and "acknowledges our needs for emotional engagement, our quest for excellence, and our craving for relatedness and purpose" (p. 85).

The *Fourth Way* discusses a project in the Boston Public School system called The Mindful Teacher, where teachers created their own *synergies of mindful teaching*. One of the synergies the teachers created was *Collective Responsibility*. The attitude and approach behind this mindful teaching present in The Mindful Teacher Project and *The Fourth Way* correspond to Sahlberg's suggestions to other countries who wish to learn from the Finns' highly effective– and humane—approach to education. The human element distinguishes *The Fourth Way* from GERM. In *The Fourth Way*, education is about treating students as individuals and not labor market commodities, and learning is truly differentiated. Students are encouraged to explore their differences rather than conform to a standardized, homogenized world, and diversity is recognized as a condition for innovation.

Since maintaining a strong national identity is one of the top national priorities for the UAE, perhaps policymakers should capitalize on the unique components of Emirati culture and use these characteristics as the foundation upon which they develop their educational systems. The term "best practice" is, after all, culture-dependent.

6. Conclusion

If the goals of the UAE are to raise the academic performance of their students in order to reach internationally competitive levels and conform to the subsets of a knowledge economy, then alongside education reform there must be a cultural shift as well. UAE policymakers can learn from suggestions for improvements from available research: Schools and teachers should be granted autonomy, students should be encouraged to think critically using English *and* Arabic, and most importantly, collaboration between *all* stakeholders should be encouraged, with teachers' input included at every stage of the reform process. Like Finland, UAE policymakers might consider using the values important to their culture in defining educational success rather than measuring success according to the values extolled by the global reform movement. It is the conclusion of this review that UAE policymakers met cognitively—and with clearly delineated systems in place—produce their own **original** policies using discourses tailored to the

unique progressive *and* traditional aspects of its citizenry. There is nothing inherently wrong with learning from others, but perhaps PasiSahlbergis right when he says, "It is better to have a dream of your own than rent one from others" (p. 8).

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