

## **GLOBALIZATION, EDUCATION AND EMIRATISATION: A STUDY OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The United Arab Emirates Government has pursued educational excellence for its citizens through the provision of free education for all nationals from K-12 to University. Furthermore, from the earliest days of federation the United Arab Emirates Government has encouraged private education providers to establish educational operations under the governance of the Commission for Academic Accreditation. The growth and globalization of education has contributed to an increase in the number and quality of private and/or international educational institutions entering the United Arab Emirates. These private educational institutions provide gateways to western educational qualifications and ideologies, while generating revenue as new markets are developed. More recently the United Arab Emirates Government has embarked on an affirmative action program to satisfy the employment and career aspirations of its citizens with a focus that links employment and education. In this paper, the author examines the discourse of globalization of a developing nation in the context of the United Arab Emirates education system and examines the implications for the United Arab Emirates Government. The conclusion suggests that education is not the panacea for the problems faced by the United Arab Emirates Government, but recommends the inclusion of health based education into the current curriculum reform along with the acceleration of the articulation and accreditation program.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

While the ambitions of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Government can be realised through the education system, it is difficult to imagine how these objectives can be achieved without a quality and fully integrated curriculum which supports the values of the UAE nation. It cannot be assumed that the education system in the UAE is different to the education systems of other first world nations since superficially both systems are based on the same fundamental precepts. The development of the UAE education system was based on Western models and the current K-12 curriculum in the Government schools is a hybrid of Western pedagogical models. What is different is the cultural and political context which does not permit first world solutions to what appears to be a first world problem. The UAE Government is faced with health problems related to obesity, while the unique UAE population demographics have created employment problems. These two different problems can be attributed to the influences of globalization. The rapid economic growth of the UAE and the reliance on a large expatriate work force has resulted in a situation whereby UAE nationals are a minority in their own country. This situation has reduced the employment prospects of UAE nationals while a Western cultural lifestyle has contributed to an increasing number of health related problems.

This paper has recognized serious issues within the UAE and more significantly the Government education system, which appear to mirror situations experienced by other developing nations. However, possible solutions would require a commitment to curriculum

reform and the political courage to develop and enforce government policies. The value of this study is the practical significance this discourse could contribute to the successful development of an integrated education system. Furthermore, the realization of the long term educational aspiration of the UAE Government through educational reform that embraces candid research and evaluation of its policies.

## 2. AN EMERGING NATION

For the 130 years prior to 1953, the British Government had provided no funds for the Gulf region comprising the Trucial States despite an administrative presence that allowed British appointed officials to rule and govern the region. After this time limited funds were allocated but this was based on the prospects of oil revenues being uncovered in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. Education in this region was limited to a few poorly resourced primary schools with no high school or higher education facilities. In 1962 the Gulf region comprising the Trucial States had 20 schools and by federation in 1971 the number of schools had risen to 74 (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2004). Modern education as recognized by the West was largely unknown in the Gulf region until federation. The United Arab Emirates Government education system was developed under the guidance of the founding president Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. Shaikh Zayed was concerned with the well-being of all people in the UAE and used the oil wealth of the Abu Dhabi Emirate<sup>1</sup> for the benefit of all UAE citizens (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2004). After federation the UAE constitution through Article 23 states that education was to be the engine of national development: "Education shall be a fundamental factor for the progress of society. It shall be compulsory in its primary stage and free of charge at all stages, within the Union." This statement resulted in the building of 1,150 schools by the year 2000, which facilitate the educational requirements of 650,000 students (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2004). The commitment to education is further demonstrated by the 2001 federal budget where the largest single allocation of federal funds was for the provision of education for UAE nationals (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2004). The 2001 educational budget represented a high water mark following a sustained period of educational growth and development during the previous two decades.

To contextualize the United Arab Emirates education system it is necessary to examine the demographics of the population with a statistical analysis of the various groups. The demand for educational services by UAE nationals has grown rapidly due to a fertility rate<sup>2</sup> of 6.5 percent recorded in the 1980s. However, this has fallen in more recent times with a 4.0 percent fertility rate recorded in 2003 (UAE Ministry of Information and Culture, 2004). The high fertility rate is attributed to the absence of birth controls based on religious teachings and Government incentives to increase the population of UAE Nationals (UAE Ministry of Information and Culture, 2004). The population of the UAE was recorded at 4.04 million at the end of 2003, of which 25 percent are UAE Nationals and the remaining 75 percent are expatriate workers and their families (Middle East Online, 2004). Of the approximately one million UAE Nationals, 250,000 are school children in the K-12 education system; with a further 15,000 in the Higher Colleges of Technology; 16,000 at UAE

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<sup>1</sup> The state or nation ruled by the emir or royal family.

<sup>2</sup> The fertility rate of a population is the average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime if she were to experience the current age-specific fertility rates through her lifetime.

University; and 2000 at Zayed University. An estimated 5000 UAE Nationals are studying in non-government funded educational institutions or as overseas students in America, Britain and Australia (United Arab Emirates University, n.d.; Central Student and Academic Services, 2003; Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2005). Whilst no official figures are available, anecdotal evidence suggests that the UAE Defense forces recruit young Emirati<sup>3</sup> males directly from secondary school, which accounts for the disparity in student numbers in the Government secondary school system. The anecdotal evidence is based on the authors four and half years of teaching experience in the UAE Government post secondary education system, during which time numerous casual interviews were conducted with Emirati male students. This disparity is illustrated by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries census figures; in 2002 the number of Emirati girls in secondary school was 25 percent higher than the number of boys (Cooperation Council for the Arab States, 2004). At a national level the number of UAE Nationals and expatriate children under the age of fifteen is 955,000 and with a predicted population growth of 7.6 percent the Ministry of Education will be challenged in providing educational opportunities for this growing number of children (Omeish, 2004; Middle East Online, 2004).

The economic development in the UAE was initially based on the oil and gas industry but has diversified into manufacturing, construction and commerce. The oil and gas sector, which accounts for two thirds of the UAE's revenue, employs one percent of the work force while the Trades and Repairs Services, Construction and Manufacturing account for 50 percent of the work force (Omeish, 2004). The high population growth in the UAE has been accompanied by high economic growth with a six percent national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the 2005 fiscal year (World Trade Organization, 2006). Economic forecasts indicate the high GDP for the 2005 fiscal year will be sustained for the next few years (Brooks, 2004; World Trade Organization, 2006). The overall economic outlook for the UAE is for continued growth with faster development than any other major Gulf State. The major areas of growth are expected to be the tourism, manufacturing and the financial sectors. This growth is based on liberal trade policies and an open business environment created by a stable government structure; the UAE Government has developed fiscal policies to ensure strong economic growth while moving towards the adoption of IMF recommendations (Brooks, 2004; International Monetary Fund, 2004; World Trade Organization, 2006).

### **3. THE EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION**

Whilst some Gulf states have centralized their oil wealth around the governing royal family, the UAE under the Al Nahyan ruling family has distributed and invested the wealth derived from the nations' natural resources into the infrastructure of the nation (ECSSR, 2004). For example, the UAE Government has developed a sophisticated road network that links all corners of the Emirates. Before federation the journey to travel the 140 km between Al Ain and Abu Dhabi took three days; today the two cities are linked by a dual carriage three lane highway. At the citizen level the oil wealth filters into the homes of average Emirati families through the UAE Governments various agencies that provide employment and financial assistance to all nationals (UAE Federal e-Government Portal, 2005). This wealth distribution method allows UAE citizens access to a vast array of telecommunication technologies, health

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<sup>3</sup> A person who is a United Arab Emirates national and holds a United Arab Emirates passport.

care, education and financial support for housing and business enterprise (United Arab Emirates Yearbook, 2002). As a developing nation the UAE has not encountered the same economic hardships of poverty usually associated with development in third world countries (World Bank, 2003). The UAE is classified by the World Bank and the United Nations as a developing country with a high income; which refers to the personal income level of UAE citizens. This classification is based on a number of factors which includes the average personal income, the trading of agriculture, natural resources and manufacturing, and political representation. However, the UAE has been criticized for human rights violations regarding discrimination in the workforce as strikes and workers unions are banned. Furthermore, the UAE Government has a feudal political structure where all representatives are selected according to the directives of the ruling families. This leaves the entire UAE population powerless to influence the direction of their own country.

Globalization can be defined as an umbrella term for a complex series of economic, social, technological, and political changes that has the tendency to move investment funds and businesses beyond domestic and national boundaries. This has the effect of increasing the interdependence and interaction between people and organization in different locations into global markets. A world view of globalization suggests that nation states are not undermined because they are the major actors, and are charged with identifying and managing problems on behalf of their societies (Guillen, 2001). This view is partially corroborated by the rapid development of the UAE during the past 35 years. Social services and health care for Emiratis are provided free, or at a minimal cost, as a result of the benevolent policies of the UAE Government. The success of these policies is supported by public announcements of a reduced infant mortality rate and a higher level of general health care (Ministry of Health, UAE, 2005; UAE Interact, n.d.c). However, in recent times this record has been tarnished by the UAE Government's inability to avoid the health problems normally associated with developing nations, most notably obesity and diabetes. With the adoption of a Western lifestyle and under the influence of globalization the UAE has experienced extremely high rates of diabetes, obesity, road traffic deaths and diseases resulting from smoking (World Health Organization, n.d.). Access to cheap cigarettes and fast food has developed health concerns, while high salaries and low interest finance has provided easy access to fast cars and a luxury lifestyle.

The UAE Ministry of Health is challenged to provide effective policies that will address the 25 percent of the UAE population that are at risk due to obesity. The reasons cited for the increased level of obesity are physical inactivity and unhealthy diets (Stensgaard, 2004). The growing problem of obesity in developing nations is commonly referred to as New World Syndrome (Shell, 2003) and is usually caused by the rapid Westernization of traditional cultures. The health problems of obesity are further exacerbated by the low cost of tobacco products. Tobacco is exempt from import tariffs and while the UAE is effectively a tax free zone the cost of a packet of cigarettes will remain below five dirhams (1.30 US dollars) (Omeish, 2004; Brooks, 2004). The low cost of tobacco and limited advertising restrictions have worked against the government's anti-smoking campaign.

With a population of only four million people the road death toll is now amongst the highest in the world, with an average of one road accident death every 15 hours (Boulton, 2005). Concern by the UAE Government has resulted in a media campaign to educate the UAE population to the dangers of high speed driving on the roads (UAE Interact, 2005a). This road safety campaign struggles against a public perception that views the road traffic police officers as lethargic and not proactive. Whilst the road traffic police are generally visible on all major highways they rarely intervene when faced with speeding motorists (Abdullah, 2003).

The predominant political systems of the Middle East are all non democratic and the UAE is no exception, after the consolidation of the seven independent Emirates the UAE political system is defined as a feudal federation. UAE Nationals have no political voice at any level of government, as a system of feudal modernity has ensured the ruling Al Nahyan family remains in power (UAE Interact, n.d.b). A sophisticated tribal structure based on traditional Emirati culture allows the ruling family to distribute financial gifts to the citizens and acts as a pseudo social security payment system. With free education, health and housing the average Emirati citizen does not need to work or pursue a career as the state will provide support through the tribal hierarchy or government agencies (UAE Federal e-Government Portal - Political System, 2005). Short term political stability has been ensured with the successful transition of leadership to Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan following the death of his father Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. However, there are still a number of potential internal conflicts between the two major emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai that could threaten the future stability of the federation (Brooks, 2004). It remains to be seen if the new leadership can foster a continued sense of unity to enable further prosperity.

Globalization for the UAE has resulted in a mixture of challenges some of which are faced by developing nations and the rapid Westernization of a traditional culture. Other concerns have emerged related to the distribution of the nation's wealth and the high levels of personal income. While the issues of poverty and wealth have been addressed by the UAE Government, secondary problems have arisen concerning the health problems associated with obesity, tobacco and the high road death toll due to traffic accidents.

#### **4. EDUCATION**

Education in the UAE has remained unchanged since federation, having originally developed in the early 1970s as a four tier structure covering 14 years of education (UAE Interact, 2005c). Initially all children enter the education system at kindergarten level for the age level of 4 to 5 years, then advance to primary school for 6 years and exit at age 12 years. At the conclusion of primary school, pupils must decide between a technical education or an academic education both of 6 years duration. The academic program consists of 3 years preparatory school followed by 3 years of secondary school. In both cases graduating students would exit their compulsory education at age 18 years (UAE Interact, 2005c).

The development of the K-12 school system and the establishment of several universities and the Higher Colleges of Technology have provided the United Arab Emirates with a comprehensive educational system which is one of the cornerstones for the continued growth and future development of the country (Government of United Arab Emirates, 2004). UAE nationals pursuing post secondary education after graduating from the Government K-12 school system have two alternatives (a) pursue training through the Higher Colleges of Technology which is a vocational based institution, (b) or apply for university admission. The UAE education system has two distinct aspects which are: the Government system that provides free education exclusively to UAE nationals; and a private full fee system that caters primarily for the expatriate population. This educational dichotomy is further divided by gender segregation in both the Government high school system and the higher education system. The private education system provides a diverse range of educational services that mirror the various national curricula of the expatriate workforce. This private system is a co-educational system with mixed gender schools at all levels which is distinct from the Government education system.

Criticism of the education systems in the GCC countries has come from international organizations like the Middle East Policy Council who have suggested that a greater emphasis must be placed on improving education and providing training for GCC nationals (Klein, Jbili, Taecker, and Ghabra, 2001). In the UAE, the K-12 Government education system is governed by the Ministry of Education which is distinct from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research which governs all Government post secondary education. However, concerns about the UAE Government K-12 education system have raised a series of criticisms (Mograbay, 1999) and have resulted in the recent appointment of the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research to the position of Minister of Education. This appointment has placed all Government funded education under the authority of a single Minister. Prior to the amalgamation of the two educational ministries, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research had raised doubts about the quality of the K-12 Government education system and the curriculum in particular.

#### **4.1 Educational Reform**

In November 2004 Shaikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan took responsibility for both the education portfolios of K-12 and Higher Education. Shortly after his ministerial appointment Shaikh Nahyan publicly announced a restructuring of the K-12 school system which primarily targeted teaching methods and assessments procedures (Al Nowais, 2004). Education in Government schools is controlled by the Ministry of Education which dictates the curriculum according to Islamic beliefs and enforces compulsory single sex secondary schools. Gender segregation is imposed at all Government colleges and universities; however this policy has been relaxed with some post secondary educational programs offering mixed gender classes. All K-12 schools in the UAE must adhere to strict codes that govern public holidays and the compulsory teaching of the Arabic language, while Government schools enforce Islamic religious studies up to graduation (International Bureau of Education, 2005; Government of the United Arab Emirates, n.d.a). Several major content areas are deliberately removed from the UAE Government curriculum, namely political studies, evolution, and all topics that relate to sexuality. However, the inclusion of topics on health education and road safety are encouraged as they support the UAE Governments campaign in these broad areas. Curriculum reform is fully supported by the Minister of Education who seeks to implement an advanced curriculum that will cover the study of modern subjects relevant to the UAE while including topics on Islamic and Arabic heritage (Al Nowais, 2004). Missing from this educational reform proposal is a holistic approach to a healthy lifestyle with the inclusion of health and sports curriculum. The impetus for change has arisen as each year a new cohort of graduating students from the Government K-12 educational system seek higher education and fail to meet the minimum entrance requirements for Government colleges and universities (Al Nowais, 2004).

The educational changes described by the Minister of Education entail setting performance targets and implementing a system to measure, monitor and record the progress (Al Nowais, 2004). This strategy follows a course advocated by Fullan (2001) whereby a government authority responsible for education announces an initiative and then monitors its progress in order to provide an evaluation of the success or failure of the initiative (Fullan, 2001). Similar methods have been used in Western education systems to improve a nations' literacy and numeracy levels by monitoring and benchmarking particular levels of education. The most obvious omission regarding the proposed educational changes to the UAE Government K-12 school system is the lack of provisions for the professional development or training of teachers.

Educational reform generally occurs over an extended period of time and during this transformation period those students who will exit the high school system must be provided for. The college and university systems have limited budgets; however the UAE Government does mandate a free education for all nationals and stipulates that all those who meet the entrance requirements will be given a place in higher education. But what is to be the fate of those who do not reach the entrance requirements? This group generally seek employment opportunities through the military or government civil service as they are unsuitable for private employment because of their limited educational qualifications (International Monetary Fund, 2006). A recent initiative in February 2005 saw the UAE military and the Higher Colleges of Technology signing a funding agreement for the provision of a network of Applied Technology Institutes that would begin enrollments for the 2005-06 academic year (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2005). This arrangement would place the Technical Schools under the guidance of the Higher Colleges of Technology; coupled with funding from the UAE Military this partnership has the potential to provide highly skilled technicians to the defense forces and private industry. Current anecdotal evidence based on interviews with Emirati administrative staff from the Higher Colleges of Technology suggested that the Technical Schools are under-performing and act as a day care center for disaffected under-achieving Emirati teenagers.

Educational reform in the UAE should not be restricted to the Government K-12 educational system as the development of articulation processes between the Government's higher education institutions is still problematic. At present, students face difficulties when transferring between the Higher Colleges of Technology and the Government universities. Furthermore, UAE post-secondary education is not fully articulated to overseas educational institutions, which severely restricts continued life-long learning. Government education at all levels is not internationally accredited and graduating students are faced with repeating qualifications overseas, thus extending their academic studies. Within certain academic programs at the higher education level there is limited accreditation available in some selected courses. In order to address the problems of articulation between government and private educational institutions the Minister for Education has authorized a program of international accreditation. While the Government universities have considerable articulation agreements with various international educational institutions, the Higher Colleges of Technology is currently in the process of gaining international accreditation for its programs and colleges ("Academic Alliances and Accreditation," n.d.). Private education providers remain unaffected by the problems of accreditation and articulation as they offer accredited programs with internationally recognized qualifications, and whilst these educational pathways are limited they do offer viable models for the UAE education system. The quality of the qualifications issued by private providers is dependant on the issuing institution and will vary accordingly.

#### **4.2 Private Education Providers**

The Commission for Academic Accreditation under the Ministry of Education grants licenses to private education providers to operate an educational institution within the UAE national boundaries. The number of private education providers continues to increase in the education market; currently they represent more than 30 percent of all K-12 schools in the UAE (Cooperation Council for the Arab States, 2004). At the higher education level there are three UAE Government universities and the Higher Colleges of Technology; a single college system which has 12 campuses distributed around the Emirates. In addition to the UAE Governments higher education system, there are six private universities and eight private colleges competing for students from the pool of eligible UAE nationals (UAE Federal e-Government Portal, 2005). Whilst there are more private providers in the higher education

system, the free Government institutions currently enroll the vast majority of all eligible students.

Private education providers are expected to adhere to the standards of the parent organization or the policies of the nation issuing the certification, by monitoring the integrity of the curriculum and assessment to ensure the educational certification is above criticism. These private educational institutions are also monitored by the Commission for Academic Accreditation and the Ministry of Education to ensure the integrity of the system. However, the Ministry of Education and the Commission for Academic Accreditation have failed to fully monitor the quality of private schools which has led to a private educational service that is less than satisfactory (Mograby, 1999). Despite the questionable quality of this private education the UAE Government continues to encourage private providers. While not funding UAE nationals directly, non-government education is obtainable through scholarship programs like EDAAD, Adu Dhabi Investment Authority and Career Gate UAE (EDAAD, 2005; Career Gate UAE, 2005; Higher Education, 2004). The private education system is open to the entire UAE population and private providers demand full fees for their educational services. Therefore, a UAE national who does not qualify for a scholarship must pay the same educational fees as an expatriate student. The growing demand for secondary education and a desire for the best educational services has driven a small but growing percentage of UAE citizens into the private education sector (Higher Education, 2004; Mograby, 1999).

Competition between private education providers is expected to raise the standards of educational services in the UAE as they vie for student enrollments by promoting the quality of their qualifications. The UAE Government's commitment to quality education was confirmed with the formation of a new Emirates Foundation which will provide funding and support to educational institutions of distinction (Gulf News, 2005). Furthermore, a multi-university complex has been commissioned and developed in the Dubai Emirate that is expected to accommodate between 20 to 30 international universities. The new complex known as Dubai Knowledge Village will have housing facilities to accommodate 40,000 students when completed (Dubai Knowledge Village, 2005). In recent years the number of Emiratis traveling abroad in pursuit of education has declined, placing an increased burden on the existing UAE education system. Therefore, the immediate benefits will be to those UAE nationals who are unable to travel abroad to pursue higher education qualifications. The economic benefits to the UAE are considerable as Arab families spend more than three billion Dirhams on overseas education in the United States of America every year. Approximately 40,000 students from the Arab world attend American educational institutions of which 2,000 are UAE nationals (Rahman, 2003). The Dubai Knowledge Village initiative presents an attractive proposition for international universities as the conditions allow for 100 percent foreign ownership within a tax free environment.

## **5. EMIRATIZATION**

Emiratization is an affirmative action quota driven employment policy that ensures UAE nationals are given employment opportunities in the private sector. The policy is a UAE Government decree which imposes employment quotas on various business sectors with financial penalties for non compliance. The UAE Government has generated enormous publicity concerning the placement of young Emiratis into employment, but these policies have caused concern from both local and transnational companies as the UAE Government enforces employment quotas on companies with a work force of more than 50 employees (Brooks, 2004). However, the business sector has been slow to adhere to the quotas and



anecdotal evidence from the newspaper media suggests that the Emiratization policy is treated as a form of taxation. The Emiratization policy has been implemented through the UAE Government employment ministry and the Tanmia agency; the Tanmia agency is a fully funded but independent Government authority. The main objectives of Tanmia are to create job opportunities for UAE nationals and recommend employment policies to the UAE Government (National Human Resources Development and Employment Authority, 2005).

The UAE Government has applied the same Emiratization policies to its own government ministries by gradually replacing expatriate employees with UAE nationals. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has announced that its departments will have attained 100 percent Emiratization by the end of 2005 (UAE Interact, 2005d). The success of the Emiratization policies in government agencies has not been reflected in the private sector, as the UAE Government continues to urge private companies to contribute to the reduction of the unemployment level of UAE nationals (UAE Interact, 2005d). Currently, the unemployment rate for UAE nationals is 16 percent, while across the Gulf region the unemployment rate is approximately 15 percent, however, not all Gulf countries have booming economies like the UAE (Stevens, 2002; UAE Unemployment, 2004). The banking and insurance sectors have been targeted as two areas that have failed to comply with the UAE Government's Emiratization policies. The initial Ministerial Decree No 10/98 required a four percent Emiratization per year in the banking sector, but this target has not been achieved. The banking sector was directed to hire UAE nationals in all branch manager positions before the end of 2004, which follows a directive dating back to April 2002 (UAE Interact, 2005d). While this directive has been difficult to achieve, the lack of compliance can be blamed equally on both UAE owned banks and foreign international financial corporations. In the insurance sector the Cabinets decree for a 15 percent Emiratization quota has been ignored and the sector may possibly be subject to work permit cancellation (Al Nowais, 2005). Only one of the 47 insurance companies had complied with the UAE Government Emiratization policy while the remaining companies had extremely low employment levels of UAE nationals (UAE Interact, 2005d). The failure of private companies to meet employment quotas is proving to be a difficult problem; imposing financial penalties will reduce the viability of the company, while the cancellation of work permits will reduce possible employment opportunities.

UAE nationals prefer to work in the government sector due to higher salaries and better employment conditions, which has resulted in a very small percentage accepting employment in the private sector. The International Monetary Fund has suggested that the UAE Government reduce the benefits to government employed Emiratis in order to discourage them from seeking cradle to grave government jobs (International Monetary Fund, 2004). The gradual alignment of government salaries and conditions to those in the private sector would encourage a shift away from government employment. Despite these recommendations, in May 2005 all Emirati government employees received a 25 percent pay increase in order to offset the high levels of inflation (Khalifa Orders Salary Hike, 2005). Government employment is still the only option for the majority of Emiratis as their level of education is below that of expatriate workers and the UAE Government provides higher financial benefits than the equivalent private organization (International Monetary Fund, 2006). The salary increase decreed by the UAE Government has inflationary implications for the economy and creates further difficulties for the Emiratization program.

## **6. THIRD WORLD STATUS - FIRST WORLD MONEY**

Globalisation for the UAE has produced a mixture of challenges some of which are faced by developing nations and the rapid westernization of a traditional culture, while other concerns

have emerged related to the distribution of the nation's wealth and the high levels of personal income. As a developing nation the issues confronting the UAE Government are unique due in part to the oil wealth and a benevolent government. Underlining all these issues is the necessity for an education system that will provide Emirati citizens with academic opportunities that leads to employment.

UAE traditional life appears to be absolutely defenseless against the influences of modernization and westernization. The annually published United Arab Emirates Yearbook documents the economic and social progress achieved each year (United Arab Emirates Yearbook, 2002). In these volumes Emirati citizens can reflect on the development of their country and view the results of UAE Government policies that have encouraged rapid westernization. Furthermore, the growing population consumes more land for urban development and agricultural cultivation while major cities have designed and built free-trade zones that will encourage international investors and further boost economic growth. Traditional life for young Emirati citizens is now free from the hardships and perils experienced by their fathers before federation. However, the rapid development of the UAE has brought with it a range of new health related issues and social problems. Obesity and diabetes are now considered by the UAE Ministry of Health to be the biggest health issues facing the population. Prior to federation the health problems in the gulf region were primarily associated with child mortality and nutritional deficiencies. With the generous distribution of oil wealth, social service infrastructure and lucrative government employment, Emirati citizens have access to financial resources that enable them to purchase a wide range of luxury goods including high powered vehicles. This access to high powered vehicles and a modern road system has contributed to a road accident death toll that ranks amongst the highest in the world.

During the past 35 years the UAE Government has developed infrastructure for the Emirati population that encompasses housing, water, electricity, transport, hospitals and telecommunications, all of which are heavily subsidized (United Arab Emirates Yearbook, 2002). An open economic policy has encouraged multinational corporations to build and operate a wide range of commercial and industrial businesses; coupled with the infrastructure this has created a dynamic society. On closer examination the UAE has taken the technological assets and commercial resources offered by the West and assimilated them into their economy. Urban and commercial development in all the major UAE cities is influenced by Islamic architecture which has given these centers a distinct Arabic flavor. Whilst traditional UAE culture has changed, each new period of social development and technological advancement in western society has also been accommodated into Islamic society. The traditional values of the Gulf region have been adaptive to the influences of globalization, so today the youth of the UAE have all the lifestyle advantages offered in the west. However, the need to retain a cultural heritage is best demonstrated by the directives by the Minister of Education to develop a K-12 curriculum which includes Islamic and Arabic heritage.

The Government funded Tanmia agency has employment programs that offer UAE nationals education and training opportunities that will enhance their employability (UAE Interact, 2005d). This situation would call into question the effectiveness of the UAE Government post secondary education system, whose purpose is to provide education and training for employment purposes (Benjamin, 1999). Tanmia provides financial funding to train UAE nationals in order to accelerate the Emiratization process and help private employers fulfill their Emiratization quota. It would appear that the Tanmia authority is operating as an alternative to the Government higher education system, a situation that should be addressed by the Minister of Education and each of the government's higher education

institutions. The success of Government policies to Emiratize the workforce is problematic without the support of UAE nationals, since they are envisaged as a burden on the efficient operation of private companies (Al Nowais, 2005). The impetus for Emiratization must be a desire by Emirati citizens to engage in employment activities that will give them control of their own country and ultimately their destiny.

Cultural imperialism as a Western ideology has not destroyed UAE traditions, it has instead, blended into the Islamic and Arabic culture of the gulf region. As the president of Iran Mohammad Khatami argues: "True Islam has nothing to fear from contact with the outside world" and his sentiments have certainly been adopted by the UAE Government (Halliday, 2002, p. 30). The economic and social developments in the UAE now boast a high level of economic growth with a progressively reduced reliance on oil revenues. The diversification of the economy has created business and employment opportunities for Emirati citizens despite their reluctance to engage in careers in the private sector.

A gradual drift of students towards the Western education system allows cross cultural exchange and the adoption of Western lifestyles and modes of dress. Within the UAE, Emirati youth have access to the same entertainment experiences commonly available to their counterparts in the West. Both enjoy Western movies and electronic games, both follow sporting events in local and international arenas. Globalization has influenced the Gulf states particularly the UAE, with modern high rise buildings lining the major roads of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Globalization has been unable to influence or alter the political ambitions of the Emirati population, but the democratization processes is beginning to effect changes to the political landscape in Oman, Qatar and Kuwait, while the government in Saudi Arabia is taking its first steps with the introduction of municipal elections (Kechichian, 2004). The ruling Al Nahyan family in Abu Dhabi have promoted conservative policies and have used their hold on the nation's oil wealth to ensure political stability (Omeish, 2004). It is unclear what the long term results will be as gulf autocracies respond to the challenges of democracy.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The UAE government education system has grown rapidly following federation in 1971, however despite high levels of economic growth and an increasing population this growth in educational infrastructure has slowed following a peak in 2001. The demand for education has continued to increase due to the high fertility rate and government incentives that support UAE nationals. With UAE Government encouragement private educational providers have grown by absorbing the extra students who are moving away from the free government system or postponing overseas education in favor of attending a local subsidiary of an international university. Since the quality of graduates from the government school has been called into question, UAE nationals have turned to private schools which are perceived as delivering a higher quality education. In order to address the perceptions created in the public domain the Ministry of Education has embarked on a program of educational reform in the K-12 sector. This reform is designed to rectify the low standard of high school graduates and renew the curriculum to accommodate the requirements of the nation and the employability of UAE nationals.

With the gradual drift of students towards Western education system, UAE nationals are expressing a desire for high quality educational services and Western qualifications; these competing factors leave the UAE Government with difficult decisions. The Ministry of Education has advocated the teaching of Islamic and Arabic studies to preserve the cultural and religious heritage of the UAE, while renewing the curriculum to support the needs of a

modern and dynamic economy. These measures are also necessary to tackle the high unemployment amongst UAE nationals and reduce the reliance on expatriate workers. Underlying these changes the government educational institutions are engaging in the registration and acquisition of international accreditation

Globalization has economic roots and political consequences, so after the initial wave of globalization the UAE landscape has changed into a modern pseudo-western society, but there have been problems. The challenges for the UAE Government are numerous, but three main issues require immediate attention; health, education reform and employment. The UAE Government needs to address obesity and its associated health issues with a holistic public education program that encourages and promotes an active lifestyle. Furthermore, this education program should encourage sporting activities in K-12 schools and higher education institutions. Therefore, the first recommendation would be the inclusion of a physical education and sports curriculum in the K-12 reform process. The curriculum reform as advocated by the Minister of Education does not address the professional development for those teachers charged with the classroom implementation. This topic offers opportunities for future research and investigation as the implementation of the proposed advanced curriculum would necessitate the employment of suitably qualified teachers. Furthermore, if professional development and re-training is not offered to the current cohort of teachers, where will the Ministry of Education source suitable qualified teacher?

Economic wealth must be balanced with social responsibility; therefore, the UAE Government must follow their political rhetoric with tough policy enforcement that encourages UAE nationals to take control of their country. As the minority cultural group the UAE Government has a responsibility to ensure Emiratis are given opportunities to participate in the economic endeavors and prosperity of their nation. To assist in this process, the higher education system must respond to the requirements of the business world by providing education and training suitable for the economic requirements of the nation. The current inadequacies of the higher education system are reflected in the necessity for the UAE Government to establish the Tanmia agency. The second recommendation arising from this study is an acceleration of the process that will develop links between the higher education system and the business sector. This development should focus on the rapid articulation and accreditation of UAE Government education systems from K-12 through to university. Whilst, this accreditation and articulation process has been on-going for several years, the private education providers are continuing to increase their market share by developing a profile as a viable alternative to the Government education system. The urgency of this recommendation should not be understated, as delays will further erode the confidence of UAE citizens in the Government education system.

The UAE Government has an opportunity to ensure long term political and economic stability through a reformed education system that is articulated between all educational levels. The education system offers opportunities for the UAE Government to address issues which result from globalization and to create a curriculum that has the cultural and social values of the UAE people. In addition, the education system will need to be responsive to the social and economic needs of the UAE while engaging with the West. While education is not the panacea, it can become the major factor in addressing the problems now facing the UAE Government.

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