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CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO RESEARCH IN LEARNING INNOVATIONS

# Leveraging Social Capital in Systemic Education Reform

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### INTRODUCTION

The term “social capital” generally refers to expected collective benefits of advantageous treatment and cooperation between individuals within a respective system, or even networks of groups within a broader system. Although many theorists have emphasized diverse aspects of social capital over the years, many share the idea that social networks and contracts have significant value that can ultimately lead to increased (individual and collective) productivity (Putnam, 2000). The development of social capital in schools through the use of collaborative and change-oriented leadership (e.g., transformational, distributed, and pedagogic leadership), organizational culture building and engagement with stakeholders can lead to reduced dropout rates, increased engagement in schooling and lifelong learning, capacity building, and enhanced learning outcomes. With respect to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), particularly Abu Dhabi, the last 10 years have been characterized by tremendous economic and social transformation and educational reform. Using social capital as a theoretical framework, this chapter will partially explore how cooperation, support, and collaboration are being implemented and enhanced in Abu Dhabi schools within a context of change. It will be argued that specific reforms aimed at developing pedagogic practices and school leadership, enhancing professional development and school-based quality assurance and self-evaluation processes, and increasing internal and external collaborative networks, will have a significant impact on developing social capital within schools, school systems, and the broader community they serve. This, in turn, will contribute to various positive educational and societal long-term outcomes in the UAE.

### SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY

Social capital theory is used by theorists from almost every academic discipline and professional field. The benefits of cooperation among people in any system vary and are categorized differently, but the common factor between all forms of social capital is *relationship* (Callahan, Libarkin, McCallum, & Atchison, 2015; Putnam, 1993).

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Scholars have organized social capital into different levels of relationships. *Bonding social capital* indicates relationships of trust and cooperation within networks based on shared social and demographic characteristics (Blakely & Ivory, 2006). When people share relationships of socio-demographic similarity, they support one another more frequently and largely than people with less in common (Levin & Cross, 2004). Since individuals who relate to each other this way share the strongest ties within their system, bonding social capital is considered the strongest type.

On the other hand, *bridging social capital* refers to relationships empowered by mutual respect and understanding among people who do not share socio-demographic characteristics (Blakely & Ivory, 2006). Thus, social capital can be distinguished by whether it is enhanced by commonalities or overcomes differences. Although bridging social capital is considered weaker than bonding, it is also true that it can be the most valuable type. Despite its relative weakness, it allows individuals to gain support and information from people of dissimilar groups – information that would otherwise be inaccessible (Levin & Cross, 2004).

A third concept, *linking social capital*, is introduced to explain the relationships between people at different levels of influence, such as citizens and elected officials (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). It is distinguished from bonding and bridging social capital in that people of different influence levels depend on one another in a unique way, especially in a democratic society where, for example, elected officials depend on support from their constituency while their constituents depend on them to represent their interests. This variation of social capital differs from the others since it pertains to the benefits exchanged by people in positions of power and those who, in a democratic society, impart that power on them. Woolcock and Sweetser (2002) explained linking social capital as a variation that involves “connections with people in power, whether they are in politically or financially influential positions” (p. 26). Thus, linking social capital falls outside the bonding-and-bridging spectrum of social capital.

Social capital in education draws upon two other theoretical frameworks from sociological theory: theories pertaining to (a). social structures and community ties that influence social interactions on a larger scale and (b). theories of social interaction and exchange that inform the study of interpersonal exchange in relationships at a smaller scale (Coleman, 1988). Coleman asserted that the “capital” in question is influential in matters of family relationships and academic settings. Moreover, he used social capital theory in a practical way that focused on mechanisms of success or failure.

Coleman’s definition of social capital consisted of three elements: the obligations, norms, and information accessible by an individual within their network. His goal in exploring concepts related to social capital was to create a conceptual model for explaining social behavior based on the assumption that people are rational actors. When one begins with the premise that people behave rationally it becomes possible to understand social capital as a resource that can be studied and about which predictions can be made.



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Despite the use of these various categories to enhance clarity, some scholars have warned that the term “social capital” has been used without being carefully defined, and has consequently led some authors to suggest that there is a certain degree of ambiguity in empirical studies (Dika & Singh, 2002). Nevertheless, theorists and researchers continue to identify principles and characteristics that enable them to apply social capital theory in specific ways. For example, one guiding principle that has informed thought of social capital is that its underlying elements include aspects such as rapport and trust, and trust requires actors in any situation to make themselves vulnerable to some extent (Hezlett & Gibson, 2007). Beyond this characteristic, other statements have been made about the notion of trust being contextually contingent (i.e., based on the setting in which social capital is being discussed). From these perspectives, trust becomes the basis for social participation, and as such it is a prerequisite for exchange giving value to social capital, since exchange of information and support is contingent on participation (Barbalet, 1996).

However, these observations of the underlying mechanisms affecting understandings of social capital among scholars, although insightful, are nevertheless so diverse that they leave a great deal of room for ambiguity in how the term is used and interpreted. Social capital is the kind of term that is used in so many different ways that readers must be careful when drawing conclusions based on statements about it. For example, in contrast to the explanations given above, other scholars have expressed social capital as a construct comprising social confidence, social participation, and social integration (Tonkaboni, Yousefy, & Keshtiaray, 2013). Tonkaboni et al. asserted that these elements “are in a mutual relationship and they reinforce each other” (p. 42). Confidence, participation, and integration all refer to concepts that present themselves in other descriptions of social capital, with confidence perhaps equating to trust and integration equating to “bridging,” as discussed in other literature. The juxtaposition of different explanations of social capital is complicated further by the potential for different interpretations. It is thus necessary when discussing social capital to be very clear about how the term is being used. In the section below, social capital theory is discussed in terms of how it can be applied in the field of education, and specific concepts are presented to elucidate how the term is used in this paper.

#### *Social Capital Theory and Education*

Within any education system, social capital can be exchanged by actors at all levels, including students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Additionally, an aspect of social capital particularly influential in the process of improving the UAE education system involves relationships between educators within the system and those from Western education systems, which are proving to be a source of information about practices based on the most advanced empirical research. The sections below discuss some of the most important considerations in the complex inter-workings of the various relationships involved in education.



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One of the aspects of social capital that is shown by research to be particularly important in education is the relationship between educators and students' families. This relationship is reflected in measures of parental involvement. Parental involvement is positively associated with more desirable educational outcomes (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011). The relationships between parents and teachers can be expected to influence parents' levels of involvement in the educational process, so it is important for educators to consider this aspect of social capital in their professional practice. Specifically, studies of linking social capital are useful because teachers and parents are in a mutual relationship of exchange in which they have different levels of power and influence. Parents' approval or disapproval of teachers can influence their reputations and professional outcomes, and teachers' levels of commitment to families directly affects their students' educational experiences.

Moreover, parents with higher levels of perceived self-efficacy in an academic discipline are more likely to be involved in their children's education (O'Sullivan, Chen, & Fish, 2014). This observation poses a challenge for teachers as they interact with families in the UAE system, where families are highly variable in regard to educational levels. Educators are typically concerned with promoting parental awareness of how to obtain desirable educational outcomes for their children. Among parents with low levels of education, it is possible that a small amount of time spent by teachers helping parents improve their content knowledge of what their children are studying will have large benefits for students. Usually, research assesses the relationship between parental involvement and college enrollment at the individual level, but less attention has been given to the structural factors that affect their involvement and the associated outcomes (Horvat, 2001). However, research by O'Sullivan et al. suggested that structural changes interpreted as improving parental self-efficacy in the context of socio-cultural school demographics may also improve parental involvement and in turn improve educational outcomes.

Research from the United States, a racially diverse nation, shows that a large discrepancy exists between the likelihood of students of majority and minority ethnicities attending college. Even though similar proportions of African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian American students attend high school, a much greater number of Caucasian students can be expected to attend college (Perna & Titus, 2005). Moreover, according to this research, approximately 39% of African American and 32% of Hispanic high school graduates under the age of 24 were enrolled in college, whereas 45% of Caucasian students were enrolled.

The socio-cultural demographics of educators and students in the UAE are fundamentally different, so the concept of social capital as it affects parental involvement must be considered differently. Ethnic diversity is much lower than in many other Western countries. Groups in the UAE consist of Emirati, 19%, Arab and Iranian, 23%, South Asian, 50%, and other groups, including Westerners and East Asian citizens, at 8%. However, social capital between education professionals and students' families cannot be directly compared to countries such as the US, because if Emirati educators have different cultural backgrounds they are not necessarily of



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the majority while the families are of the minority, as in the USA different dynamic is likely among families in the UAE, where most of the students share a common cultural background; therefore, how families view social capital in context of parental involvement is more uniform.

Another aspect of social capital that is extremely important to education systems is the capital possessed by the students themselves. This refers to the relationships that exist within a student's local neighborhood, school system, community establishments, and all the individuals that interact within these social structures. Research has shown social capital to be a factor that improves individuals' sense of well-being (Dorsey & Forehand, 2003; Yamaguchi, 2013). Psychological well-being, in turn, is positively associated with improved educational outcomes.

In the UAE, attempts to link school to community through collaborative and educational partnerships are still embryonic (Blaik Hourani, Stringer, & Baker, 2012). Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly crucial to examine UAE educational social capital in terms of the relationships of educators to one another and other people within the community. For instance, to the extent that Western educators are increasingly influencing the development of the UAE education system, it should be expected that relationships between actors of different cultural backgrounds play an important role in determining outcomes for students and for the entire system. A study by Ekinci (2012) measured social capital as positively associated with the level of organizational information sharing, as indicated by self-reports from teachers. The study participants consisted of 267 teachers from 16 elementary schools in the US, and data collected from the "Scale for Social Capital at Schools" and "Scale for Information Sharing at Schools" was statistically analyzed. Positive relationships were shown in all subcategories of social capital and information sharing (Ekinci, 2012). This and similar research should be considered carefully by all educators and other stakeholders involved with the process of cross-cultural information sharing, as it affects the improvement of UAE education.

In addition to the relationships mentioned above, social capital for an education system should also be considered from the perspective of digital technology. Social media can be expected to have a profound impact on social capital, such that the availability of devices and prevalence of their use by stakeholders from all aspects of the education system will certainly influence outcomes associated with every type of social capital. Social capital theory was widely studied long before the onset of the digital age, so much of the older research should be reconsidered in light of drastically changed circumstances. Empirical research continues to provide new insights in this regard, and findings should be considered in relation to various actors' use of technology in UAE education.

As a starting point for exploring the role of digital technology, the prospect of building a community using social networks has been expounded in research by Hopkins, Thomas, Meredyth, and Ewing (2004). They explained their work as an effort to use social capital theory, "as a way of thinking about the complex interaction of elements which contribute to the functioning of communities, and explore some



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implications for the communities which occupy cyberspace" (Hopkins et al., 2004, p. 369). Continuing with the theme of "well-being" discussed with reference to Yamaguchi (2013), it is useful to connect social capital concepts to what Hopkins et al. referred to as "community well-being" (p. 100). They viewed electronic networks as key resources in improving community well-being.

As one would expect, the research of Hopkins et al. (2004) on electronic networks gave some attention to parental involvement, while the researchers' application of social capital principles emphasized trust's important role. In business, trust is a crucial factor for relationships that will affect profit and loss, but, by contrast, the sort of trust necessary in relationships within an education system is more personal. Trusting a stakeholder positioned along one's supply line, for example, is very different from trusting a teacher with one's child.

However, the relationship between online settings and real-world settings, as the two platforms for social relationship differ significantly, has been questioned. Researchers have explored the relationship between social capital in the online virtual world and the real world (Ye, Fang, He, & Hsieh, 2012). Focusing on Twitter as an online community, Ye et al. (2012) observed that social capital inherited from a person or group's social capital in the real world and that gained within the virtual world both positively affect levels of social capital in the virtual world. Yet, they also observed that public figures and celebrities who use social media, Twitter in particular, may experience a loss of social capital. Twitter has become widely used by celebrities but it may also make them seem less mysterious or exciting, since using it shows that they are just like other ordinary people. This suggests that some people in the highest of leadership positions might be well advised to carefully consider whether to engage in the use of common social media.

Considered within the context of social capital theory, it can be observed that social capital has the potential to strengthen all three types of capital: bonding, bridging, and linking. The most apparent use for social media is to connect people from different groups who might not otherwise be connected, but this is only one of several opportunities provided by digital media. Discussing electronic networks in relation to bonding and bridging versions of social capital, Hopkins et al. observed:

At first glance, online relationships would seem more likely to contribute to the relatively weak ties that constitute "bridging" capital than to the strong, multifaceted, and highly personal relationships which underpin "bonding" capital. But they may also contribute to bonding capital, not only in situations where families and communities are divided by distance, but also when particular media, for instance instant messaging, make a useful and economical addition to people's existing repertoire of communications channels. (Hopkins, Thomas, Meredyth, & Ewing, 2004, p. 370)

To this insight, one might also add consideration of linking social capital, not only because this phenomenon can be expected to play an important role in the relationship between parents and teachers, but also because linking social capital is



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most closely associated with the relationship between community leaders and people within the education system.

Social media should also be considered in relation to the concept of *involvement*, with attention to the various forms that involvement can take. In general, social media has been shown to improve involvement. In a recent study, Baluev and Kaminchenko (2015) showed that Russians were more likely to be involved with political processes if they were exposed to political messages via social media. This same phenomenon is probably generalizable across cultures and likely to be true not only of political systems but also of education systems. The implication here is that any efforts to make social media more accessible can create opportunities for improving commitment to improving UAE education.

Parental involvement was discussed above, and a long term goal should be to make better use of digital technology so more parents can be involved. This will require initiatives and legislation conducive to improving accessibility of technology and improving users' self-efficacy. When parents can access digital devices and have the confidence and knowledge necessary to use social media, there are many possibilities regarding the way it might improve student outcomes by increasing parental involvement. As Stringer and Blaik Hourani (2012) have suggested, education in the UAE needs to focus on developing technological skills for parents as a channel for strengthening parental involvement. This will improve the links between home and schools and eventually positively impact student achievements that mobilize the building of social capital.

Additionally, involvement is a concept that applies to actors at all other levels: the organizational commitment of teachers, the extent to which leaders prioritize educational outcomes and innovation, the amount of funding allocated to it, and so on.

#### *The UAE Education System*

A discussion of social capital in the education system of the UAE should begin with an overview of the characteristics of the social system it represents. The UAE is a federation of seven emirates situated in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula in South East Asia on the Arabian Gulf. The capital and second largest city of the UAE is Abu Dhabi. The UAE Federation was established in 1971. Islam is the official religion and Arabic the official language.

Prior to the 1960s, there was no formal schooling system in Abu Dhabi; it was only in the very early 1970s that schools began to operate officially, beginning with the foundation of the UAE Federation and formation of the Ministry of Education (Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, 2011). Education in the UAE was constitutionalized through Article 17, which states:

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 federation. (United Arab Emirates, 1971)



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Through Article 17, the following was mandated:

- 14 years of education,
- KG (Cycle 1) at the age of 4 to 5 years,
- Primary school (Cycle 2) from the ages of 6 to 12,
- Secondary school (Cycle 3) for another 6 years and finish by the age of 18.

Public schools in the UAE are segregated by gender and coeducation is nonexistent in Cycle 2 and 3 public schools. Though most Cycle 1 public schools are segregated, there are also coed school premises with segregated gender classes and facilities. Both types of coed schools exist exclusively at the KG and Cycle1 levels. The Ministry of Education oversees the entire UAE K-12 school system.

Private education providers in the UAE represent 33% of K-12 schools in the UAE and have 41% of the students (including expatriates). Seventeen percent of the state budget is dedicated to education (but it makes up only 1.4% of the national income). Only 1% of that money is used for scientific research and development while the rest of it goes to salaries and infrastructure. The current education system includes both public and private sectors. The federal government fully finances public education, which is free for all UAE nationals up to university. Nearly 20% of the federal government expenditure is directed to education, valued at roughly US \$2.6 billion in the 2015 budget (“\$90 Billion to be Spent”, 2014).

### *Reform Agenda*

The rapid progress in the development of the UAE’s education system over the last 30 years has been nothing short of miraculous. Nevertheless, its education system has a myriad of problems and continues to undergo significant reform. Some of the problems include an obsolete curriculum, low achievement and substandard performance of students on standardized test. English language and ICT training, and a lack of male Emirati teachers continue to be a problem. Similarly, unqualified school management and poor teaching standards, have also contributed to the current reform agenda (Gaad, Arif, & Fentey, 2004; Litz, 2014; Litz & Scott, in press; Ridge, 2009; Macpherson et al., 2007). In fact, some authors have suggested the biggest challenge facing Abu Dhabi is in the area of educational reform (Kannan, 2008).

Informing the UAE public that one of its key public services is dysfunctional and in need of radical restructuring is unusual. Nevertheless, in early 2006, the Executive Council announced the decision to carry out major educational change based on several 5-year plans. The plans were revised in 2008 and again in 2010 by the UAE Ministry of Education (UAE Ministry of Education, 2010).

The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) oversees the implementation of education reforms and education policies in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. ADEC is a non-federal government authority that, since 2006, has taken charge of developing education. According to HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and the Chairman of ADEC, “the UAE has begun a journey



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of growth and modernization, as far as reforming the educational system" (ADEC, 2008:1). HH Sheikh Mohammad also added that "the Law No 8 of 2008 reorganized the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), so that it incorporates the three education zones, including the city of Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and the Western Region, and thus expanding the autonomy of the education system in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi" (ADEC, 2008:1).

ADEC has taken on the considerable challenge of enabling as many Emirati students as possible to experience high quality K-12 education and pursue higher education. The challenges embedded in the reforms involve developing the quality of education at the school level by means of training both in-service and pre-service teachers, and training and preparing education leaders and school managers (Kannan, 2008). The education system in Abu Dhabi is moving towards an innovative, new educational framework that meets the twenty-first century demands of globalization. Even more importantly, school reforms are encouraging a system of teaching and learning that is in harmony with the visionary Abu Dhabi plan focused on capacity building, enhanced engagement, and the development of key cooperative and collaborative sociocultural networks (Blaik Hourani, Diallo, & Said, 2012).

Human capacity and social capital development are occurring within schools, amongst schools, and between schools and their surrounding communities in many ways. Beginning in 2009, for example, ADEC developed an agenda to enhance changes in education to not only harmonize with modern educational trends, but also to meet the expectations of ADEC's vision for raising education in Abu Dhabi to an international standard (ADEC, 2008). These initial changes emphasized managerial and leadership changes and major curricular changes in the teaching-learning of Math, English, and Science and Technology (ADEC, 2008). One of the key ways to address these issues has been to rely on collaboration with expatriates and other experienced Western and Arab educators for establishing the foundational infrastructures of UAE development and to simultaneously prepare a generation of Emiratis to take on increasingly important roles in the field of education. Additionally, the school reforms and educational changes were shaped in terms of models and guidelines from Western education institutions. Mills (2008) has noted that

Western academics in the UAE (Abu Dhabi included) are deeply involved in the public schools and higher-education systems and work closely with the government officials to fundamentally change the higher education system in the country's seven emirates. (p. 2)

The cross-cultural nature of this collaboration has important implications for leadership development and the ability to leverage social capital.

The reforms that have been implemented reflect insights from educators with backgrounds in Western education. They include various methods, introduced to Abu Dhabi, focusing on differentiated instruction in support of diverse learners, introducing integrated curriculum with best practice models of instructional delivery, implementation of Arabic-English instruction with bi-literate outcomes,



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the introduction of continuous informal and formal assessment of students, and the introduction of multi-sensory educational resources, including software in addition to textbooks.

ADEC has also sought to develop a student-centered learning environment that features world-class facilities that are sustainable, collaborative, and community centered. The plan is to design technology-rich learning environments, putting in place proactive approaches to ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of all students while promoting parental and community involvement through effective and efficient home-school links. In addition, the reforms encourage and support collaboration between schools and parents, leading to improved student outcomes and opportunities for university and business partnerships to extend learning beyond the classroom (ADEC, 2010a).

The Public Private Partnership (PPP) project was piloted by ADEC in 2006. It was designed to lay the foundation for the New School Model (NSM) introduced in September 2010 (ADEC, 2010a). Private operators would help the school to improve students' performance and align teaching practices to international methods (Ahmed, 2011). Essential elements of the NSM are the desire for a bi-literate student-centered learning environment designed to meet the needs of learners through differentiated instruction, application of research-based promotion, and early identification of students with special education needs (ADEC, 2009). The NSM is an important strategy to achieving Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030, a long-term plan for transforming the Emirate's economy, including a reduced reliance, on the oil sector as the main source of economic activity and a greater focus on knowledge-based industries in the future.

The New School Model is designed to improve English literacy and thinking skills by:

- a. assessing what skills and understandings the learner knows and what they must learn and
- b. assessing the learner's comprehension and level of analysis during the learning process. In terms of instilling and enhancing thinking, teachers are expected to reinforce learners' practice of cognitive knowledge and skills to ensure that independent and constructive learning and a concrete understanding of abstract concepts are employed (ADEC, 2012a).

As for instilling a sense of community awareness in learners, which is also emphasized in the NSM, teachers are expected to have learners observe, explain, and evaluate, and to encourage learners to work collaboratively and develop a respect for resources and each other. Moreover, in order to encompass creativity, teachers will encourage students to be innovative. Hence, teachers are expected to find opportunities for children to take risks and create in an unthreatening learning environment. Moreover, principles for overseeing the new transformative and collaborative role of schools are embedded in ADEC's performance standards for teachers'. Teachers, for example, must function professionally within the



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(a) social approach, (b) emotional approach, (c) attitudinal approach, (d) creative and resourceful approach, and (e) technological approach. These approaches are inculcated in the teacher's performance standards, shape the role of the teacher, and necessitate the need for teachers to be communicators, interactive and collaborative community members, managers, leaders, team players, and reflective practitioners (ADEC, 2012a).

In addition to the curricular, pedagogical, and administrative dimensions of reform, NSM's and ADEC's policies have endorsed parental involvement as a core element in shaping social order (Baker & Blaik Hourani, 2014). Policy guidelines have focused on enhancing home-school relationships, recognizing that

close partnerships between schools and families [leads] to improved learning outcomes and ongoing and effective home-school communication. (ADEC, 2009)

The New School Model Policy emphasizes "parent involvement in children's education" (ADEC, 2010a:35) and ADEC's Strategic Plan (2009–2018), underpinning school changes imperatives, focused on "an active teaching and learning environment supported by families and the community" (ADEC, 2010a:2). The Strategic Plan aims at improved learning outcomes and ongoing and effective communication between home and school within the realm of the new curriculum and pedagogy (ADEC, 2010a; ADEC, 2010b).

In ADEC's parental involvement policy rhetoric, school administrators and parents share responsibility for ensuring that parents are involved in their children's education (ADEC, 2010a, p. 35). For example, Article 2: P-12 education, Chapter 2.5.5: The learning environment pillar policy states that, "The government of Abu Dhabi recognizes that an effective education system requires a strong partnership between parents and schools, and will actively seek to involve parents by keeping them informed of their children's progress, encouraging home support in the learning process and consulting with them on entailed issues" and "the purpose of parental involvement is to establish an emphasis on parent involvement in children's education and establish guidelines for the school and parent relationship" (ADEC, 2010a, p. 44). In this regard, ADEC is trying to promote the notion of a parental involvement policy at both the micro and macro education levels. By consolidating home-school relations and empowering parents' roles at schools through both home-based and school-based involvement, ADEC is attempting to energize and revamp the social order within the context of school change and educational innovations (Blaik Hourani, Stringer, & Baker, 2012).

The New School Model is expected to be implemented across all government schools by 2016 and aims to standardize curriculum and instruction, across all Abu Dhabi public schools. Following the launch of the NSM, emphasis has been given to professional growth and development of principals as "leaders of learning," implementing reforms and supporting teachers to improve achievement. Moreover, within the aforementioned scope of school reforms, the roles of teachers and



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principals have not only been redesigned with new expectations that encompass approaches to continuous and lifelong learning, but also focus on meeting the demands of the school reforms, developing human capacities, and enhancing collaboration and community across all levels of the school system.

Building capacities and developing social capital for fulfilling school reforms in Abu Dhabi is a dynamic and multifaceted agenda. More importantly, this process involves the development of key human resource components in order to improve school quality. It is anticipated that this will be achieved through a continued emphasis on and expansion of the country's Emiratization program, enhanced professional development for teachers and school leaders, direct supervising, monitoring, and developing of pedagogic practices, and improved school self-evaluation processes.

#### *Paths of Developing Social Capital: The Context of Emiratization*

Emiratization is a plan to build local and national human power and workforces. It was established in 2000 as a means of catering to the increasing pressures of globalization and a growing economy. Building Emirati human resources is considered a central component to school reforms and the educational change agenda. The ADEC Educational Policy Agenda 1.1.3 was introduced to improve Emiratization capacity within the school sector. Emiratization policy rightly sees the education system as a vehicle for achieving the goal of a diversified economy and improved quality of life for citizens. Educational change and school reforms will improve student outcomes and bolster the development of higher education in the UAE.

Since the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 stipulates a gradual reduction of reliance on the oil sector and greater focus on knowledge based industries in the future (ADEC, 2008), it is necessary to produce qualified Emiratis in a variety of economic sectors. This is a platform for school reforms and educational change in which Emiratis are seen as social and economic capital. Accordingly, the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR, 2011) stated that the general development drive in the UAE, and Abu Dhabi in particular, aims at comprehensive human development and stresses the significance of education as an essential and effective means of meeting the needs and requirements of the twenty-first century. In this way, the UAE is moving with full determination towards restructuring and founding an advanced education system that consolidates three entities: school, home, and community. Special emphasis has been given to innovation, cultural identity, values of social peace, tolerance, and progress, a balance between globalization and localization, and an increasing focus on technology-based pedagogic practices. Thus, the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 is intended to move Abu Dhabi from a regional economic power to a major player in the global economy. The focus will be on professional services, tourism, the knowledge economy, and creative human resources. HH Sheikh Nahyan observes that:



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Over half of UAE nationals are now below 15 years old. These citizens are the future of the country and it is our responsibility to prepare them in a way which not only helps them achieve their ambitions and aspirations, but also helps put them in the vanguard of the UAE's development and progress, thereby enabling them to open up to the world and enhance their contribution to global achievement ... I believe our educational system has reached a stage which requires us to clearly determine and agree on those standards of excellence and quality which should feature in every school. (ECSSR, 2011, p. xx)

##### *Paths of Developing Social Capital: Professional Development*

Professional development provides principals with the knowledge and tools to support teachers in adopting child centered teaching-learning approaches inclusive of parents as partners in education (ADEC, 2011a). A series of decrees and policies aimed at enhancing professional principal, vice-principal, and teacher capabilities enforce professional development. For example, Decree No. 53 (ADEC, 2011b), which came into effect on March 17, 2011 stipulates that principals, vice-principals, heads of faculty, and teachers must undergo professional development. In the same year, Administrative Decree No. 92 (ADEC, 2011b) focused on performance evaluation of staff in schools. ADEC's Educational Policy Agenda 1.1.3 states:

Abu Dhabi will provide high quality technical and professional education for all UAE learners by accommodating them through various educational pathways and promoting their readiness for further education, employment and contribution to the economic growth of Abu Dhabi as well as ensuring alignment with labor market needs ... professional education systems will equip learners with the knowledge, competencies and skills for a constantly evolving economy. (ADEC, 2010b, p. 38)

ADEC's Educational Policy Agenda 2.2.3 highlights that "The emirate will develop and fund a professional development system that includes induction and continuous support programs for all public school educators and thus provide ongoing professional development to best equip them to meet the needs of all learners" (ADEC, 2010b, p. 41).

Within the context of school reforms, three aspects of school innovation have been prioritized by the Emirate of Abu Dhabi:

1. professional development for Abu Dhabi public school principals and vice-principals through the Qiyada program,<sup>1</sup>
2. constructing professional standards to evaluate the performance of Abu Dhabi public schools' principals – this happened with the introduction of Professional Standards for Principals – and
3. school Self-Evaluation Irtiqaa (SSE-Irtiqaa).<sup>2</sup>



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### *Qiyada Program*

In order to prepare principals and vice-principals to implement education reforms, ADEC has designed the Qiyada Program. Qiyada Professional Development focuses on leadership training for kindergarten and Cycle 1, 2, and 3 principals and vice-principals. Since September 2012, it is estimated that 800 principals, vice-principals, and faculty heads across the Emirate of Abu Dhabi have participated in this professional development program.

The Qiyada Professional Development program aims to assist and guide development and training in strategic planning for leaders, leadership methods, organizations, and communities, as well as monitoring, guiding, and leading teaching and learning activities related to the NSM and the successful fulfillment of school self-evaluation-Irtiqaa. Qiyada aims to equip principals with the knowledge and skills needed to guide them and help them observe, assess, monitor, and support classroom teachers in their planning and implementing student-centered teaching and learning (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015).

In summary, ADEC links its professional development plan with five professional standards for principals:

- Leading Strategically,
- Leading Teaching and Learning,
- Leading the Organization,
- Leading the People, and
- Leading the Community (ADEC, 2011a).

ADEC standards have been designed to guide school leaders within a context of radical change and train them to strengthen collaborative organizational capacities as well as networks and links to other schools and the broader community. Moreover, they are perceived as fundamental to implementing school reforms and educational changes in line with Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030.

### *Professional Development and Performance Standards*

Policy makers and officials in Abu Dhabi have prioritized improving school quality in recent years (Davies, 1999; Litz, 2014; Litz & Scott, in press; Macpherson et al., 2007; Safran, 1997), for which teachers, principals, and schools have been viewed as conduits of change. Additionally, emphasis has been placed on aligning professional performance standards with professional development, and school self-evaluation. Hence, a process for enhancing schools and implementing changes aligned with the new educational vision on the federal and non-federal levels has begun (Stringer & Blaik Hourani, 2014; Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015; ADEC, 2011a). What follows are the five mandated performance standards that guide the professional development and expectations of school leaders.



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*Leading strategically.* This standard corresponds to visionary leadership. As visionary leaders, principals are expected to “work to create an understanding of the vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders” (ADEC, 2011a, p. 26). Principals are expected to know their school’s political and social context. They are required to create a climate that challenges the school community to improve learning outcomes. Principals are expected to use available information to inform and manage the planning process. Key elements of this standard are vision and strategic goals, leading change, and school planning (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015; ADEC, 2011a).

*Leading teaching learning.* This standard is connected to principals’ roles and responsibilities as educational and instructional school leaders. In this respect, principals are required to set high standards for teaching practices and student achievement. They are expected to demonstrate an understanding of curriculum, and are one source of wisdom and professional knowledge for teachers. Using their knowledge, principals are expected to create collaborative and accountable structures that facilitate quality teaching and assessment practices and strong student learning outcomes. This standard focuses on curriculum, teaching effectiveness, student achievement, and learning environment (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015; ADEC, 2011a).

*Leading the organization.* This standard focuses on principals as organizational leaders. They are expected to promote the success of all students through insightful management of the organization, operations, and resources leading to development of a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. This standard embodies development of policies, procedures, finances, and resources and facilities (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015; ADEC, 2011a).

*Leading the people.* Principals are positioned at the apex of school leadership teams. In this role, they are expected to promote success for all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining integrated communities of professional practice and achievement. They are expected to model best practice in terms of their own personal and professional behavior and are considered the force behind collaboration and cohesion around school goals and commitment to achieving them. Elements of this standard focus on continuous learning, professional development, principal as leader, conflict management, and distributed leadership (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015; ADEC, 2011a).

*Leading the community.* This standard positions the principal as the leader of the school community. It acknowledges that principals hold important roles in leading the wider school community because they understand the community profile and the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. Principals are expected



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to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources. This performance standard includes elements associated with parental involvement, collaboration with community stakeholders, and sharing learning (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015; ADEC, 2011a).

### *Evaluating Performance*

Assessing and monitoring Principal performance is fundamental to school development and improvement. It provides a mechanism to manage change efficiently and accountably. School principals are transformative agents through which the quality of teaching-learning, monitoring, and leading of change are achieved. Performance evaluation offers principals opportunities to self-assess and reflect on their practice to improve themselves, and improve teachers and attainment of students' learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

The Principal Performance Evaluation can be considered an evidenced-based instrument that measures school performance standards as a key indicator of school change and innovation in times of reform (ADEC, 2012b). By the end of the 2010–2011 school year, and for the first time, ADEC principals were evaluated against the Professional Standards for Principals using the Principal Performance Evaluation document. For the 2011–2012 period, the evaluation process occurred over the full school year, thereby providing opportunities for continuous development and improvement (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2015).

Principals and school administrators were evaluated across various performance categories. This evaluation was conducted to ensure that principals, school managers, and school administrators were on the correct track with the school reform agenda. In addition, it aimed at diagnosing the need for further professional growth in terms of building the Emirati human capital for maximizing professional performance in times of change. Each element contains sub-elements that serve as guides or measures for task fulfillment according to respective standards. A lack of significant quality evidence in any one particular standard and/or element is considered a useful gauge in determining recommendations for future growth and professional development (ADEC, 2012a). Professional elements are illustrated in Table 1.

In times of educational reform, setting performance standards and organizing social capital development and human capacity building projects at the level of school management and leadership is necessary, but insufficient. Teachers are critical to the teaching-learning process and as agents of school reform and enrichment. Pennington (2014) noted that a new UAE-wide teacher qualification system will be introduced by the 2015–2016 academic year. Teachers across the UAE will be subject to a standardized licensing system developed by the National Qualifications Authority. The system will regulate qualifications for both Emirati and expatriate teachers in private and public schools. The National Qualifications Authority, Ministry of Education, Abu Dhabi Education Council, Dubai Knowledge and



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*Table 1. Professional standards for principals and principal performance evaluation links (ADEC, 2011a; Blaik Hourani & Stringer 2015)*

<i>Standard: Leading strategically: Principals are visionary leaders of schools</i>			
<i>Leading Strategically</i>	<i>Element 1: Vision and Strategic Goals</i>	<i>Element 2: Leading Change</i>	<i>Element 3: School Planning</i>
<i>Standard: Leading teaching and learning: Principals are the educational and instructional leaders of schools</i>			
<i>Leading Teaching and Learning</i>	<i>Element 4: Curriculum</i> <i>Element 7: Learning Environment</i>	<i>Element 5: Teaching Effectiveness</i>	<i>Element 6: Student Achievement</i>
<i>Standard: Leading people: Principals are the apex of school leadership teams</i>			
<i>Leading People</i>	<i>Element 8: Continuous Learning</i> <i>Element 11: Conflict Management</i>	<i>Element 9: Professional Development</i> <i>Element 12: Distributed Leadership</i>	<i>Element 10: Principal as Leader</i>
<i>Standard: Leading the organization: Principals are the organizational leaders of schools</i>			
<i>Leading the Organization</i>	<i>Element 13: Policies and Procedures</i>	<i>Element 14: Finances</i>	<i>Element 15: Resources and Facilities</i>
<i>Standard: Leading the community: Principals are the leaders of school communities</i>			
<i>Leading the Community</i>	<i>Element 16: Parent Involvement</i>	<i>Element 17: Collaborating with Community Stakeholders</i>	<i>Element 18: Sharing Learning</i>

Human Development Authority, and Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education Training are developing the system.

Under this system, teachers will take training courses, pass an exam, or obtain a federal license to work in the UAE. In addition, a guidebook is being written that is expected to encourage more Emiratis to choose the teaching profession as a career and acquire the teaching skills needed for school improvement. This new policy, exemplified by teaching licensure, will help mitigate the professional challenges facing teachers in the midst of educational changes and innovations. The teachers' licensure policy tends to reinforce the fundamental and vital role teachers have in revamping the social order, as well as the economic demands of twenty-first century education.



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In terms of Professional Performance Standards for teachers and within the context of teachers' licensure and Abu Dhabi public school reforms, the UAE National Qualifications Authority (2015) state that teachers will be evaluated on four different standards:

- Professional Standard-1: Profession and Ethical Conduct
- Professional Standard-2: Professional Knowledge
- Professional Standard-3: Professional Practice
- Professional Standard-4: Professional Growth

Table 2. ADEC indicators for teachers' performance standards

<i>Performance Standard-1: Professional and Ethical Conduct</i>	<i>Performance Standard-2: Professional Knowledge</i>	<i>Performance Standard-3: Professional Practice</i>	<i>Performance Standard-4: Professional Growth</i>
<i>Indicators</i>			
1. Respect and promote UAE Values	1. Demonstrate knowledge of learning development and diversity	1. Promote positive learning environments	1. Reflect on own practice
2. Demonstrate personal and professional ethics	2. Demonstrate knowledge of curriculum	2. Demonstrate learner-centered teaching	2. Engage in professional growth
3. Be accountable for and to learners	3. Demonstrate knowledge of theoretical basis of teaching	3. Use assessment for learning	3. Determine impact of learner achievement.
4. Comply with national and organizational expectations			
5. Establish communication and collaboration			

These standards embody various indicators of the numerous conditions teachers are expected to meet during their evaluation. Additionally, teachers will be expected to be knowledgeable about these professional standards, as they are seen as fundamental to their professional success. This necessitates professional self-reflection on these standards for them to recognize and self-assess their professional strengths and areas needing development. The performance standards and their indicators are illustrated in Table 2 (National Qualifications Authority, 2015).



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*Performance Standard-1: Professional and Ethical Conduct.* This standard is demonstrated by:

- a. commitment to UAE heritage and cultural values,
- b. personal and professional ethics, exemplified by integrity, respect, fairness, and commitment,
- c. collaboration and professional communication with stakeholders to promote and support learning, and
- d. complying with legislative and organizational requirements (National Qualifications Authority, 2015).

*Performance Standard-2: Professional Knowledge.* This standard is demonstrated by

- a. understanding learning and development in relation to the diversity of learner characteristics and needs,
- b. understanding and implementing curriculum in area(s) of responsibility,
- c. knowing educational research, learning theories, pedagogical approaches, cultural values, and relevant policies, and
- d. applying knowledge in practice (National Qualifications Authority, 2015).

*Performance Standard-3: Professional Practice.* The professional practice standard is characterized by

- a. creating learning environments that are safe, supportive, and motivating for learners,
- b. planning and implementing effective learner-centered teaching responsive to the characteristics and needs of individual learners,
- c. incorporating appropriate resources and making innovative use of technology, and
- d. using varied assessments to inform teaching, evaluate progress, and provide feedback on student learning (National Qualifications Authority, 2015).

*Performance Standard-4: Professional Growth.* This standard is demonstrated by

- a. taking personal responsibility for professional growth by reflecting on performance,
- b. identifying development needs,
- c. planning and engaging in professional development, and
- d. evaluating impact on teaching and learning (National Qualifications Authority, 2015).

The performance standards are expected to conceptualize the framework of teachers' roles, responsibilities, and deliverables at the school system level. Building social capital activates these performance standards towards the anticipated aims and goals set by the National Qualifications Authority.



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*Professional Principal and Teacher Performance Standards:  
Building Social Capital*

Social capital plays an important role in efforts to improve collaboration and collegial leadership. Educators work in collaboration to pool their knowledge and ideas as they engage in multiple forms of information sharing. At the same time, information is shared between various education systems at the macro level. Actors at the micro level within individual schools also must share information about circumstances facing individual students, suggestions for school improvement, innovation, and all aspects of instructional practice. The concept of collegial leadership is important in discussions of social capital among teachers and between teachers and principals (Graham, 2014), especially when many of them might have different teaching philosophies and different values.

Authors such as Evans (2003) have stressed the role of educational leaders in creating an ethos of teamwork amongst followers in addition to promoting positive working relationships by maintaining a balance between individualities, work culture, and common goals. Alternatively, Graham (2014) emphasized the importance of educational leaders in indirectly improving student outcomes by giving support to teachers. Support also implies teacher autonomy and empowerment, so it is important to cultivate mutual respect despite teachers and administrators having different levels of influence and power within the education system. Unlike simpler leadership contexts, in which one person gives instructions and another carries them out, leadership in an education system requires special consideration because of the work's consequential nature and teachers' and administrators' complex roles. Although administrators are generally considered the leaders of teachers, and have the final authority over important decisions, it is also true that the teacher is the most important person in improving educational outcomes for students (Hoerr, 1996). In the absence of a strict hierarchy of responsibility and authority, educators must develop trust among colleagues to improve confidence and participation. Increasing teacher involvement requires teachers to be motivated and uninhibited, so they can confidently take initiative and contribute to continuous improvement and innovation.

"Linking" capital takes a special form in the relationship of parents to teachers and in the relationship of teachers to administrators. One theme that emerged multiple times during the completion of this chapter was the notion of *involvement*, typically parental involvement but also stakeholders at all levels within the education system. At the teacher level, involvement can manifest as teachers taking initiative and assuming leadership roles among colleagues, students' families, and community members. When teachers assume leadership roles, both administrators and teachers share responsibility for the proactive effort that leads to growth and improvement.

At the teacher or administrator level, the same overarching goal of educational improvement is significant, but perspectives may differ. Research from the US



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shows that teachers and principals have different opinions and perceptions of teacher leadership (Akert & Martin, 2012). These naturally diverse perspectives can be a source of both insight and conflict. Social capital between teachers and principals, particularly trust, can help to mitigate differences of opinion and perception.

#### *Paths of Developing Social Capital: School Self-Evaluation – The Irtiqaa Framework*

In addition to providing performance standards upon which professional development, design, content, and processes rely for developing human capacities, school self-evaluation-Irtiqaa (SSE-Irtiqaa) has also regulated Abu Dhabi school performance standards. The SSE-Irtiqaa process has been shaped and formed by the nature and content of professional growth and is needed to improve school quality and to synchronize this improvement with capacity building and social capital in times of educational change.

School self-evaluation is a way to guide principals and teachers through appraising and improving school effectiveness. It involves detailed quality checks, reporting, documenting, developing school enhancement plans, and the eventual improvements needed for achieving satisfactory school performance levels. This process underpins skills and knowledge for which schools' human capacities were not necessarily equipped previously. However, with the advent of new professional performance standards for principals and teachers, both educators and school leaders will be expected to participate in self-evaluation in coming years, and training has already begun. For instance, cluster managers, in collaboration with ADEC's Professional Development unit and P-12 Sector, have developed a mentoring and training program to prepare school administrators to conduct SSE-Irtiqaa (ADEC, 2009; ADEC, 2012c; Stringer & Blaik Hourani, 2014).

Additionally, as part of SSE-Irtiqaa, schools have been mandated to conduct quality assurance and are required to participate in inspection, monitoring, and accreditation processes, and to conduct self-studies and self-evaluations leading to the development of annual School Improvement Plans (SIPs). These measures are linked to inspection processes, and schools are expected to use standardized key performance indicators to drive school reform and improvement policies.

Thus, the central feature of ADEC's Irtiqaa approach is to encourage self-evaluation as a management and performance tool. Schools are expected to inspect themselves and record their findings electronically using the school self-evaluation form. Apart from assisting with this inspection process that ensures accountability, SSE-Irtiqaa is expected to be undertaken regularly to help schools monitor their education quality and explore means of improvement (Stringer & Blaik Hourani, 2014).

Policy makers consider school self-evaluation and inspection to be key drivers of quality assurance and effectiveness and improvement. SSE-Irtiqaa provides an opportunity for schools to examine their own practices and to report on their



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strengths and weaknesses, as well as areas for improvement to their communities and stakeholders. With SSE-Irtiqaa, schools will explore their drawbacks to develop an SIP.

The core values underpinning SSE-Irtiqaa are an unrelenting commitment to high quality and continuous improvement, transparency and integrity, and cooperation and partnership. The objectives of implementing SSE-Irtiqaa as a measuring tool for school standards include

1. identifying levels of performance quality in schools within the Emirate of Abu Dhabi;
2. providing schools with clear recommendations for improvement;
3. informing policy making at sector level; and
4. encouraging the sharing of best practice in education and the exchange of professional expertise" (ADEC, 2012c, p. 4; Stringer & Blaik Hourani, 2014).

SSE-Irtiqaa is facilitated by teams of school administrators. To implement SSE-Irtiqaa, school administrators must archive and present evidence-based documents using qualitative and quantitative methods to assess and measure their own performance and stakeholders' and to meet the criteria indicated in the eight school performance standards areas (ADEC, 2012c).

SSE-Irtiqaa has been implemented for Cycle1 (Cycle2 and Cycle3 were to follow during the 2014–2015 academic year). Documentation of evidence of school performance is key to preparing for inspection and tracking performance standards. School inspection has been conducted as an integral part of self-evaluation following the implementation of Irtiqaa. Three to five evaluators are assigned by ADEC to each public school. Their mission is to review school effectiveness, measure school performance levels, and uncover any inconsistencies in school self-evaluation documents. ADEC evaluators inspect the school over a period of 4 days. The number of evaluators in each school varies from 3–5 depending on the school population. Schools are evaluated on an 8-point scale with 1 being the highest and 8 being the lowest: (1) is outstanding, (2) is very good, (3) is good, (4) is satisfactory and improving, (5) is satisfactory, (6) is unsatisfactory, (7) is very unsatisfactory, and (8) is poor (ADEC, 2012c; Stringer & Blaik Hourani, 2014). Upon earning level 6 or below, schools are revisited after 2 years, during which time an SIP must be submitted and implemented. Schools earning level 7 or 8 are revisited after a year, during which time an SIP must be implemented.

School performance standards are tied to the expectations for school teachers, administrators, managers, and leaders with regard to not only meeting professional standards and performance evaluation criteria, but also fulfilling SSE-Irtiqaa requirements. The professional growth and development stipulated by Irtiqaa has mainly focused on Emirati development in the education sector in order to envisage the larger agenda of Emiratization and school development. This will affect not only the enhancement of social capital but also the economic sector, in line with Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030.



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##### *Paths of Developing Social Capital: The Context of Bilingual Teaching-Learning*

In 2005, HH Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan declared that English would be the medium of instruction in higher education, paving the way for not only a linguistic shift but also a cultural transformation since language and culture are interwoven entities. From the same perspective, he stated:

Interest in foreign languages is not in any way inconsistent with our loyalty to our culture, since we ensure at the same time that our graduates master Arabic and are aware of their Arabic and Islamic heritage, and are eager and capable of keeping abreast of the latest developments in the UAE and the region, each in their respective disciplines as well as other branches of knowledge. (ECSSR, 2011, p. xxiv)

This linguistic component of educational innovation and enhancement in schools and higher education necessitated that English become a key element in human capacity building.

However, it is anticipated that one of the greatest and most relevant tests of school reform may well be the introduction of bi-literate learning. Essentially, the school reform agenda has called for the medium of instruction in schools to shift towards Arabic-English bilingualism. It is a pragmatic move that has marked the beginning of a cultural transformation accompanying the overall educational changes. This process has subverted traditional educational practices and orientations, and forced schools and UAE society to accept new multi-layered and complex changes that revolve around building capacities, and imply a new social order.

The introduction of English as a medium of instruction for several school subjects (e.g., math and science) has not only been a challenge for Emirati students, but also for Emirati teachers and Arab expatriates who have been in the profession for decades and are familiar with certain patterns of teaching and modes of practice. Using English as a medium of instruction has created an additional layer of complexity to the pedagogical and curricular changes in schools. These complexities have affected the challenges that teachers face in praxis, in addition to creating new forms of professional quality assurance criteria they have to meet given the professional performance standards prescribed for them. Thus, while bilingualism is becoming a tool for materializing reform and building Emirati capacities in the realm of globalization and international economic demands for education, it has contributed to a professional dilemma with respect to building capacity. This poses questions related to the following:

1. whether building capacities requires English as a medium of instruction;
2. whether introducing English into education is efficiently and successfully contributing to building the economic capacity and manpower envisaged by Abu Dhabi 2030; and
3. whether building capacities should revolve around economics and business rather than socio cultural constructs.



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The use of English in professional development and as a medium of instruction for building capacities and developing social capital has been controversial, as it has potentially caused two things:

1. Emiratis leaving the teaching profession and
2. more dropouts in higher education due to English becoming the medium of instruction.

Conclusively, this can only hinder UAE aspirations to achieve Emiratisation, but also, paradoxically, school reforms and the development of social capital.

To elaborate, there is now a social order characterized by the involvement of different players ranging from individuals from traditional sociocultural segments of the UAE (i.e., Emiratis) to expatriates acting as catalysts in shaping required developmental changes. Therefore, different if not opposing education paradigms are altering pathways and models of how change is conceived. Bilingualism has also dictated a shift in schools' staffs and human resources whereby expatriate teachers have been introduced into the school system. As such, this linguistic dimension, by intervening in building human capacity, has brought about an ambiguous sociocultural construct which is a potentially resistant agent to positive change and the creation of collaborative networks.

#### CONCLUSION

In the context of the educational changes in the UAE an inevitable cross-pollination of ideas is needed to revamp the education system (Davis, 1999). Moreover, the immediate challenge facing school reform is generating job skills to support the Emiratisation policy and the demands of diversified economic sectors. Schools are a catalyst to meeting the national strategic priorities hence the need for school reforms and educational change. Moreover, education reform as a long-term commitment is also characterized by rethinking local needs in light of national expectations.

The retention of traditional teaching practices and other substandard aspects of the education system for so long has contributed to the complexity of implementing educational changes in support of Emiratisation. Additionally, Emiratisation has created its own perplexities and dilemmas, which have yet to be resolved.

Emiratisation has also been a challenge in terms of the wide-ranging spectrum of educational elements it encompasses. This includes the introduction of a foreign language (i.e., English), the embodiment of sociocultural diffusion, the multiple layers of professional development that are required to improve the school system, altered teaching and learning practices, a revised curriculum, human capacity-building, and enhanced school performance and evaluation procedures. Therefore, different paths and modes of change have been involved and adopted to develop social capital in Abu Dhabi schools.



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### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Qiyada: an Arabic word meaning “leadership.”
- <sup>2</sup> Irtiqaa: an Arabic word meaning “elevating quality”; in the context of evaluation it means improving school quality through schools’ self-evaluation.

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