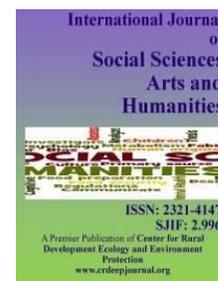


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www.crdeepjournal.org*International Journal of Social Sciences Arts & Humanities (ISSN: 2321-4147)***Review Paper****An Evaluation of the Social and Economic Aspects of Higher Education Policies in the UAE in the 21st Century: Selected Public and Private Universities as Case Studies****Noura AlKaabi**

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The economic theories underlying globalization in the 21st century depend on the existence of free-market structures. These global trends that led to the emergence of globalization had profound effects on education in general and higher education in particular across the world and in the UAE. On the other hand, the free market economy had a stronger impact on the policies, structures and systems of higher education within the UAE and the GCC countries more than anywhere else in the Arab world. On this basis this research study discusses recent changes in higher education policies in the UAE. The study also seeks to discuss the results of the secondary education sector on the types of programs offered at the university level in the United Arab Emirates. The study traces the objectives of higher education, from its humanitarian orientation to its transformation to a social and economic model to meet the requirements of the 21st century. In the context of contemporary changes the higher education policies in the UAE were impacted by the co modification of education focusing on the social and economic benefits of the country and the individual rather than on the personal, intellectual and cultural development of individuals. The paper argues that these changes in educational policies coincided with growth in the global economy and the rise of "globalization" as a major social phenomenon. As a whole, this study examines higher education issues and policies in the UAE and discusses the results of these policies in terms of their duration and within the contexts of the available types of academic programs in selected public/federal, private and commercial universities in the country in order to highlight the impact of the free market economy on the development of higher education policies in the United Arab Emirates in the 21st century.

Introduction

Education across the world has undergone a major revolution over the past fifty years, moving from being limited to relatively small intellectual elites to being open to a much larger sector of students, with a shift in the quality and function of universities. In the past century, educational policies have dominated by humanitarian rather than socio-economic orientations. The rapid expansion of higher education (which took place in the West during the middle and late twentieth century) was based on a philosophy that regarded higher education as a quest for intellectual development of individuals. This philosophy was founded on the idea that societies need citizens with a high degree of culture. The spirit of this stage has been crystallized in the writings of intellectuals such as Raymond Williams and others, who were aspiring toward the existence of rich and luxurious societies that offer great entertainment opportunities. These scholars considered that one of the main roles of education is to prepare the citizen for life in such societies. This attitude toward education may be described as humanist or "Humboldtist"

connoting the German scientist, Alexander von Humboldt. In other words, Raymond Williams (1958) claimed that one of the main roles of education is to prepare citizens for life in such cultural welfare communities. This view of the function of education can therefore be described as a distinct human model.

Obviously, the features of this educational policy combine the view of Humboldt on the intellectual development that emerged in Germany in the nineteenth century and the special preparation of university students derived from the Oxford and Cambridge models according to Clark (2000). This humanist or humanitarian framework for education has focused on the importance of cultural understanding and the formation of knowledge through the study of established academic topics. In this context, the role of education centered on the development of individuals academically and culturally. Examples of this educational policy include liberal arts colleges in the United States and specialized university programs in Britain. Within the contours of this policy, the role of higher education in promoting

economic development according to Simons, Haverhals and Biesta(2007) was secondary and worthless. In the late 20th century, this higher education model was, according to Randall (2007) abandoned and was replaced by a new policy that focused on the importance of education for socio-economic development. After focusing on the development of personal intellectual skills and scientific research in the 20th century, the attitude toward university education has changed. Education policies are geared toward social and economic development. This shift in education policies was reinforced by the belief that an educated society is indispensable in the modernized globalized world and the knowledge economy that accompanies it.

This shift in higher education has been crystallized by studies accomplished by Olsen and Peters (2005) where emphasis on traditional culture has been replaced by open intellectual research and personal development of individuals with institutional focus on vocational and professional programs required by the new economy. In other words, universities in the twenty-first century have become a major engine of the knowledge-based economy because of the need for high-skilled labor to cope with the requirements of the current knowledge-based economy. There is no doubt that economic development is associated with phenomena such as globalization and the knowledge economy. Higher education is seen as a major factor playing a central role in the development of the knowledge economy and is therefore one of the engines of economic development. Thus, globalization and the knowledge economy have become the central pillars underpinning the socio-economic model of higher education. Current views on economic prosperity are based on the fact that the economies of the 21st century will increasingly depend on the use of cognitive skills rather than on agricultural or industrial production. Recent educational policy makers are aware that the skills involved in processing of knowledge are more important than knowledge itself. To support knowledge economies, communities will need more educated and highly skilled employees in modern technology and the so-called "knowledge industries".

Thereupon, one of the main objectives of university education policies is to prepare the individual for the work market, which requires focusing on applied knowledge and vocational studies rather than on traditional subjects and intellectual development. In this context Cohen (1998) refers to the growing "vocationalism" in university studies in the United States to the extent that many of the colleges of humanities are offering more professional programs than humanities programs. This emphasis on professional topics has enhanced the attitudes of university students towards vocational studies. A research performed by Astin and Saxe (1998) on the humanities colleges examined students' attitudes towards studying at these colleges. The researchers noted a sharp increase in materialistic tendencies among university graduates between 1966 and 1996. The increased interest in professional studies has given priority to economic factors (economization of education) which has reduced the importance of some other social issues. While scientific and technical issues are seen as important for economic development, it is clear that the impact of social and human sciences is not of equal importance, according to Benneworth and Jongbloed (2007). On the other hand, the issue of "free market" is another concept which has an impact on educational

policies and has a close association with globalization. Researchers identified many shortcomings associated with the benefits of the neo-liberal agenda of an emerging free-market economy underpinning globalization. They categorize free market and globalization as part of the authoritarian approach of developed countries (Stiglitz, 2006). However, researchers point to a growing impact of the free-market economy's power on higher education, referred to as the "economy of resources" (Jones, 2004) or the "co modification of education" (Häyrynen-Alestalo and Petola, 2006).

Other researchers have expressed great concern about the impact of the strength of free market economies (Robertson, 2005) on individuals, higher education systems, institutions, and the quality of subjects presented in the curriculum and conflated with the free market requirements (Marshall, 2008). In a related study, E. ST. George questioned the value and importance of the neo-liberal model of higher education with regard to the new Asian economies confirming the superiority of models based on state governance rather than on free market in these successful economies (George, 2006).

There is no place in the world where this movement towards free market economies in higher education can be seen more than the UAE and the other GCC countries. In Europe and North America, there are many ancient universities that firmly established value systems and strong administrative and organizational structures. Although the changes in the philosophy of higher education will have implications for the qualitative spread of education programs in the West, these changes will not have tangible results in reality. Nevertheless, the United Arab Emirates (and the other GCC countries) have established their own higher education systems within the socio-economic model and within the framework of globalization and the neoliberal frameworks associated with free market economies.

Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates

The curricula of higher education institutions, as presented on the website of the Council of Academic Accreditation of the UAE Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, clearly show the impact of the socio-economic model on educational policies in the country as follows: Knowledge means power: the power to shape our economy is the power to shape our society and to shape our future. Colleges and universities in the UAE, both governmental and private, play a vital role as we seek to capitalize on the vast potential of the knowledge-based future. It is therefore important that educational institutions in the United Arab Emirates provide the best academic programs with a high quality recognized within the State and at the international level of excellence¹. In addition, universities in the United Arab Emirates adopt this socio-economic model of education, especially the professional educational programs offered at universities. Discourse analysis of UAE higher educational tendencies is one of the ways in which one can provide important insights into the way education policies are viewed in the country. Research on the objectives of private universities in the UAE clearly indicates the importance that universities attach to preparing students for work and contributing to the economic development of society. According to the Zayed University

¹<https://www.caa.ae/caa/DesktopDefault.aspx>

website, the university was founded to prepare male and female leaders who will provide the knowledge and capabilities that the state needs to enjoy a future of security and prosperity². According to the website of the University of Abu Dhabi, the University is an educational institution that drives regional economic development forward and its mission is to provide undergraduate and postgraduate programs focusing on the professional future of graduates in line with the needs of the UAE and the region as a whole³. The American University of Dubai (ADU) caters to the needs of students seeking world-class education that focuses on the professional future of students. It is clear that the United Arab Emirates has a complex pattern of higher education that includes a large proportion of private institutions and a few relative institutions of traditional and federal institutions supported by the state.

The education sector in the UAE faces several issues, including academic accreditation, quality assurance, finance and the complexities of the administrative system. These issues accumulate together to form a complex picture of the higher education landscape in the UAE. But these issues are not limited to the UAE but are common in many Arab countries (Al-Hamarneh, 2009). In this regard, researchers classify the Arab countries into four types in terms of ownership of educational structures: Countries with higher education institutions that are mainly owned by the government and countries in which the private sector possessed most of the higher education institutions and countries with well-established governmental and private higher education institutions. In this classification, the capital city of Abu Dhabi lies at the second category where private higher education institutions are increasing. Dubai lies at the category where private sector dominated the majority of institutions of higher education. In the United Arab Emirates in general, it is clear that the private higher education institutions play a pivotal role in the higher education sector.

In this study of the UAE universities, the researcher was able to identify ninety institutions of higher education, including three federal universities funded by the government. The current state policy emphasizes that the free market economy system provides the best way to develop the higher education system in the UAE (Bearsdsley, 2010). However, one of the problems facing research in higher education in the UAE is the difficulty in obtaining data because higher education institutions are not entitled to meet academic accreditation criteria when they are established. Although there is a council for academic accreditation in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research that grants licenses to institutions and adopts academic degrees, academic accreditation in the Ministry is voluntary. It is worth mentioning that the United Arab Emirates is encouraging the establishment of private universities and is increasingly encouraging foreign educational institutions to establish branches in the country.

Within the framework of this policy, foreign higher education institutions have established branches in the free zones of the

country in accordance with the economic philosophy of free zones. These institutions are not subject to governmental regulatory intervention and therefore their submission to academic accreditation procedures through the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is a voluntary decision for each institution. The result was a lack of a central register/record of higher education institutions in the country and there was no need for these institutions to provide data on the number of students and courses they were studying in the relevant universities. Moreover, the Council of Academic Accreditation (CAA) has more than 85 licensed institutions, 66 of which offer 475 active education programs. Dubai Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) is developing the modernization and inspection of educational institutions in Dubai and has more than 60 universities and university branches in the Emirate, of which 35 are not registered with the Academic Accreditation Authority.

Academic accreditation aims at achieving quality assurance. The academic degrees offered by institutions accredited by the (CAA), including the federal universities, follow accreditation procedures that include evaluating the validity of the degrees awarded by these institutions through an external committee of international experts. However, universities in the United Arab Emirates are subject to various procedures to assess the quality of their degrees. Some universities are branches of foreign educational institutions abroad and offer degrees identical to those offered at their headquarters. The courses of these degrees are sometimes taught directly by faculty members from foreign institutions or taught by faculty members employed in the UAE. There are also other educational institutions and universities seeking academic accreditation from external international associations and agencies. Historically, profit was not a big issue for universities in the West because they were mainly funded by local governments and a university's income was determined by grants from the central government. Even in the United States, many independent universities usually receive financial support in the form of grants from charities and operate on a non-profit basis. But the situation is different in the United Arab Emirates, where the financial allocation available to universities in the UAE is an important factor highlighting the disparity in the funding of universities in the country. In the UAE, there are many educational institutions that do not aim to achieve profits, but others are aimed at profitability. The financial regulation of universities is therefore an important factor to be considered when studying the higher education policies in the UAE.

Evaluation of the Academic Programs at UAE Universities

In light of the above argument, the study primarily seeks to examine the impact of the higher education policies, affiliated with the privatized educational sector on the dissemination of certain types of university studies programs in the UAE. In the more traditional higher education sectors in Europe and North America, and unlike the situation in the UAE, governments have a great deal of control over university programs through the use of grants from central governments to fund the educational process. In the United Arab Emirates, the central government's control of programs outside federal institutions in terms of academic accreditation is absent. Further, the UAE central/Federal government does not provide any funding for these private universities. It is noted that the United Arab

²http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/explore_zu/index.aspx

³<http://www.adu.ac.ae/en/article/about-adu-vision-and-beyond.html>

Emirates adopts a policy of allowing free market economy factors to determine the type and number of educational programs offered at private universities. This research divides UAE university institutions into two main categories, "federal" and "private" according to the classification of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The second category of private universities comprises different and complicated types of educational systems.

These private educational institutions include a number of foreign universities that have established branches in the UAE in collaboration with a local partner, possibly UAE governments or sectors such as the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), which collaborated in the establishment of the Sorbonne University branch in the capital city. The partnership may be done through local companies/partners seeking to establish academic programs in areas required by the labor market. However, the founding of these private educational institutions may sometimes involve activists or personnel or other stakeholders concerned with the establishment of public interest universities and colleges. Further, the private sector contributed to the establishment of some governmental educational institutions, including universities and colleges erected by individual Emirates or governors of Emirates and are often launched by decisions of members of the Emirate's ruling families.

The above-mentioned category of universities should be classified within the institutional system as significantly different from other universities particularly non-governmental educational institutions owned by individuals or companies from the private sector. It is certain that there are large funds and allocations for these public universities compared to those of private universities. These high-funded universities are more responsive to the social needs of the state than private commercial universities. Therefore, this paper examines the differences between the educational programs offered in the UAE through three different types of educational institutions

"federal", "government", private or "commercial". In this study, the analysis of the number of students enrolled in the various educational sectors depends on the published figures according to the chronicles of the Council of Academic Accreditation and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The gathered information does not include all the programs actually offered in the UAE or the programs that have not yet begun to attract students. The study also does not include students who study educational programs in some commercial sectors for which there are no declared data regarding the number of students enrolled.

The first point to be raised here includes a two-part question: Does the demographic profile of university students in the UAE fit the socio-economic model of higher education? What is the rate of students who study purely academic subjects compared to their counterparts enrolled unprofessional specializations?

The second point to be raised also includes a two-part question: Is there a similar demographic shape within the different educational sectors in the UAE? Are students studying more subjects and courses in the federal education sector compared to their counterparts in private universities, whether governmental or commercial?

The third question to be asked is as follows: Did the numbers of programs provided by accredited and non-accredited educational institutions, federal, governmental and commercial, reflect the demographics of students enrolled in these institutions?

Major Arguments, Discussions and Results

Tables 1 and 2 show the data and the overall ratios of students enrolled in the UAE in the 2010 academic year, which the researcher was able to obtain from the Council of Academic Accreditation (CAA) website.

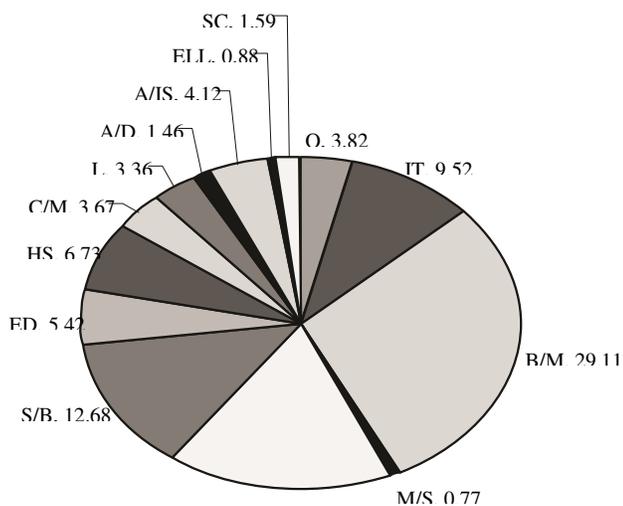


Fig 1: Shows the total number of UAE students listed per specialization (spring semester 2016) course materials.

Figure 1 above confirms the assumption that the educational programs offered are dominated by professional and practical specializations such as Engineering (ENG), business and management (B/M), and Information technology (IT). The two most common widely dominated topics are business/management (B/M) and engineering (ENG). In addition to computer science

and information technology, these programs absorb about 55% of the total number of students at universities. Pure scientific specializations such as mathematics and science (M/S) attract very few students. Table 1 below shows that education in the United Arab Emirates focuses on professional specializations and that a larger proportion of students are enrolled in areas with

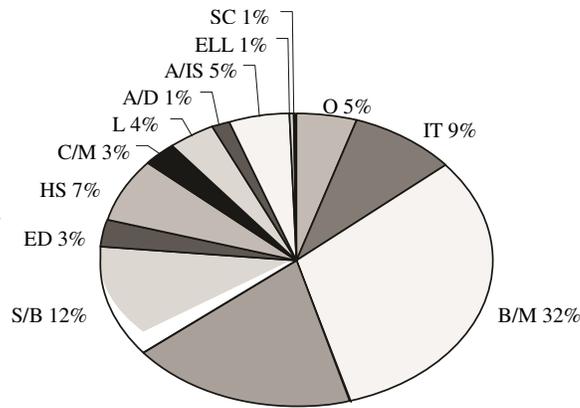
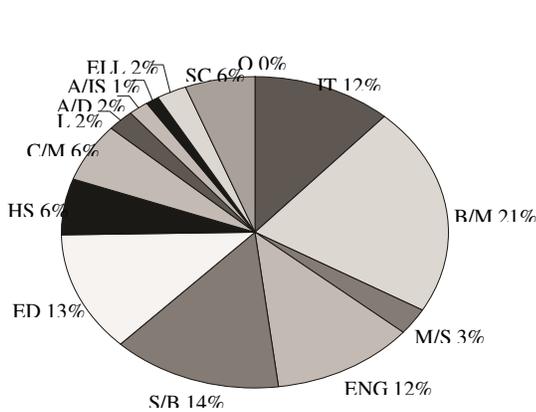
professional orientation such as business, management, computer science, information technology and engineering. Most topics focus on three areas: Management / Business, Computer Science / Information Technology and Engineering.

Table 1. Shows that education in the United Arab Emirates focuses on professional specializations

Spring	Fall	Specializations
30%	%29	Management/Business
12%	%10	Computer Studies/ Information Technology
16%	%17	Engineering
3%	%2	Art and Design
3%	%2	Math/Science

Table 1 illustrates the dominance of the three study disciplines mentioned above on the educational institutions in the UAE, reflecting the structure of the state economy. Therefore, these disciplines become commercially viable. Therefore, they become more attractive than others to most of the students from a perspective of career prospects and available jobs in the UAE.

In figure 2, 3 there is a comparison between the number of students enrolled in different specializations in the federal and private higher education sectors in the UAE. Figure 3 shows the rates of the total number of student enrolled in bachelor's degrees per specialization at UAE University, Zayed University and Higher Colleges of Technology (Fall 2017).



Source: Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

Fig 2 shows the rate of students enrolled in the bachelor's degrees (per specialization) in programs approved by the Council of Academic Accreditation (Fall 2017)

Fig 3 shows the rates of the total number of student enrolled in bachelor's degrees per specialization at UAE University, Zayed University and Higher Colleges of Technology (Fall 2017).

Data from the federal and private educational sectors show an increasing interest among students in management and business disciplines, but this interest is more strongly highlighted in the private educational sector. Similarly, it is noted that a higher rate of students are studying engineering at private universities than federal universities. On the other hand, it is noted that a higher rate of students are studying mathematics and science at federal universities while there are almost no students studying these disciplines in private universities. It is also noted that Federal

universities offer a greater number of specializations than private universities. On the other hand, it should be noted that the number of students studying Arabic language and Islamic studies is lower in federal universities than in private universities. This is due to the presence of two specialized universities specialized in these fields, namely Imam Malik College of Sharia and Law and the College of Islamic and Arabic Studies in Dubai.

Table 2: Summarizes the major differences between accredited universities in the federal and private educational sectors.

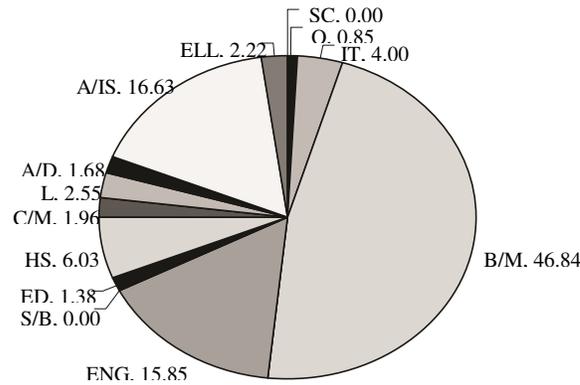
Accredited Private Universities	Federal Universities	Specializations
%32	%22	Business/Management
%9	%12	Information Technology/Computer Sciences
%19	%12	Engineering
%5	%1	Arabic/Islamic Studies
%1	%2	Art/Design
%1	%8	Math/Sciences

It has been noted that private universities are seeking to offer specialized fields of study required in the labor market and specializations with professional orientation while neglecting

the less economically important disciplines, even if they are of social importance. It was noted that the predominant characteristic of the pattern of students enrolled in commercial

universities is the tendency to study business and management disciplines. It has also been noted that about half of the students enrolled in commercial universities are studying programs in business and management. This supports the hypothesis that commercial universities offer study programs in the most

economically volatile areas to attract the largest number of students and generate huge profits. However, this conclusion does not apply to all disciplines because computer science (which is a common discipline) is more frequent in public universities than in commercial universities.

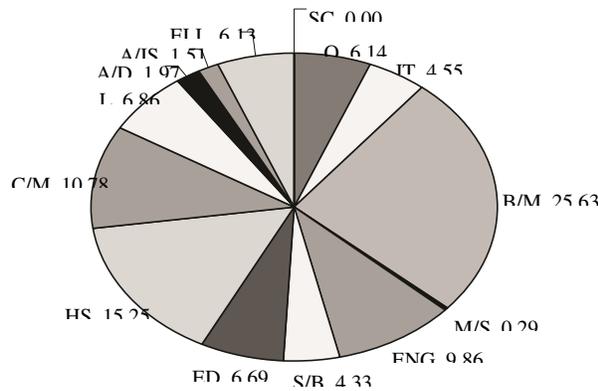


Source: Council of Academic Accreditation (CAA)

Fig 4: Shows the rate of students enrolled in commercial universities per specialization (Spring 2017)

It has been noted that socially oriented disciplines are more popular among students studying at federal universities compared with their peers studying in commercial universities. It was also noted that the specialization of health sciences (H/S) and education (ED) attracts a large proportion of students in public/federal universities but these disciplines are less frequent in commercial universities. On the other hand, the specialization of Arabic and Islamic studies (A/IS)-and other

disciplines related to culture and society- have received a low turnout of students in public universities but attracted a larger proportion of students enrolled in commercial universities due to the existence of two colleges specialized in these subjects as mentioned before. The most important issue in this context is the focus on the disciplines of management and business in the private and federal education sectors in line with the needs of the labor market.



Source: Council of Academic Accreditation (CAA)

Fig 5: Shows the percentage of students enrolled in governmental universities per specialization (Spring 2017)

Note: This analysis is based on figures published by the (CAA) and the available data are not sufficient and do not include all universities or programs offered to students in the business and private educational sectors.

Conclusion

The role of education during the twentieth-century aimed to develop individuals and prepare citizens with a high degree of culture. This humanitarian framework for education has focused on the importance of cultural understanding and the formation of knowledge through the study of established academic topics. The features of this educational model combine the view of the

German scientist von Humbold of intellectual development (which appeared in Germany in the 19th century) and the special preparation of university students derived from Oxford and Cambridge model. In the late 20th century, this model of higher education was discarded and replaced by a new model that emphasizes the importance of education as a lever for economic development and was called the socio-economic model.

Education across the world has undergone a major revolution over the past fifty years, moving from being limited to relatively small intellectual elites to a larger student population. This change coincided with a qualitative shift in university jobs.

In the 20th century, universities focused on developing students' personal intellectual skills and scientific/academic research capacities. In the 21st century, there is a shift in the attitudes toward university education, which became an essential trigger of economic development and prosperity. In the last century, educational policies were dominated by a humanitarian approach while ignoring the social and economic aspects of education. The rapid expansion of higher education that took place in the Europe and North-America during the mid-late twentieth century was based on a philosophy that considered higher education as a means of intellectual development for individuals. This educational philosophy was founded on the basis that societies need highly educated citizens. The spirit of this epoch was crystallized by intellectuals such as Raymond William and others who are looking for rich communities that offer great entertainment for citizens. These transformations coincided with the growth of global economy and the hegemony of "globalization" as a major social phenomenon. The new education policies became integral to the economic theories underlying globalization which depended on the existence of free-market structures. These global trends have had profound effects on education in general and higher education in particular across the world, including the United Arab Emirates. Currently, the free market system has had a stronger impact on the structure and policies of higher education within the UAE and the GCC countries more than anywhere else. Within this context, this study examined the higher education structure in the UAE in light of this vision and discusses the results of the application of current higher education policies in terms of the duration, types, and availability of academic programs in higher education institutions in the UAE. In the light of the above-mentioned argument, this research paper discussed the changes that have taken place in the UAE's higher education policies recently and it traces the objectives of higher education from its humanitarian orientation to its transformation into a social and economic model. These changes were accompanied by the emergence of educational policies, which advocated the co modification of the higher education sector in the UAE focusing on the socio-economic benefits of the state and the individual while marginalizing the personal, intellectual and cultural development of the citizen.

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