



الجمعية الخليجية للتربية المقارنة
The Gulf Comparative Education Society

Conference Program

The 11th Biannual Gulf Comparative Education Society (GCES) Symposium

Pedagogy, Policy, and Praxis in the GCC

November 12-14, 2025

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الندوة الحادية عشر للجمعية الخليجية للتربية المقارنة
التربية والسياسة والممارسات التعليمية في دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي

THE 11TH BIENNIAL GCES SYMPOSIUM
Pedagogy, Policy, and Praxis in the GCC

Sponsored by

SHEIKH SAUD BIN SAQR AL QASIMI
FOUNDATION FOR POLICY RESEARCH



مؤسسة الشيخ سعود بن صقر القاسمي
لبحوث السياسة العامة

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United Arab Emirates University



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Welcome to the Gulf Comparative Education Society!

GCES President Note

أصحاب السعادة، الزملاء والزميلات الكرام، الضيوف الأفاضل من داخل دول مجلس التعاون وخارجها، السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،

باسم الجمعية الخليجية للتربية المقارنة، أقدم إليكم أطيب التحايا وأجمل عبارات الترحيب، وأرحب بكم جميعاً في رحاب الملتقى الحادي عشر للجمعية، المنعقد هذا العام تحت شعارٍ يجسّد رؤيتنا المشتركة "التربية، السياسات، والممارسات في دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي"، والذي نتشرف باستضافته مؤسسة الشيخ سعود بن صقر القاسمي لبحوث السياسة العامة في إمارة رأس الخيمة بدولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة الشقيقة، التي تحتضننا اليوم بكرمها المعهود، ورؤيتها المستنيرة.

أيها الحضور الكريم،

إنه ليومٌ مباركٌ نلتقي فيه تحت مظلة الفكر الخليجي الموحد، لنجدد العزم ونواصل المسيرة نحو تطوير التعليم في أوطاننا. إن اجتماعنا اليوم هو تعبيرٌ صادق عن وحدة التوجه، وسمو الغاية، وعمق الإيمان برسالة التربية، في زمنٍ تتسارع فيه التحولات، وتتشابك فيه السياسات التعليمية مع منظومات الاقتصاد والمعرفة والتقنية والمجتمع. فلنُحي هذا اللقاء بروح المسؤولية والرؤية، ولنفتح آفاق الحوار والإبداع، مستلهمين من إرثنا الخليجي ما يوجّه خطانا نحو مستقبلٍ تربويٍّ أكثر إشراقاً وتميزاً.

أيها الحضور الكريم،

تأسست الجمعية الخليجية للتربية المقارنة لتكون منبراً علمياً حراً، ومساحة تلتقي فيها العقول والخبرات والهموم التربوية، في إطار من التعاون الخليجي والعطاء الأكاديمي المشترك. ومنذ انطلاقتها قبل أكثر من عقدين، وهي تواصل أداء رسالتها في بناء مجتمع علمي خليجي يؤمن بقيمة البحث المقارن، ويجعل منه أداة للفهم والتحليل والتطوير. وقد استطاعت الجمعية، بفضل تضافر جهود أعضائها وشركائها، أن تُسهم في إثراء الفكر التربوي الخليجي والعربي، وأن تؤسس لحوار علمي رصين حول قضايا التعليم، يعبر الحدود الجغرافية والثقافية نحو آفاق أرحب من الفهم والمقارنة والتجديد.

ويأتي هذا الملتقى ليوصل تلك المسيرة المباركة، وليفتح أمامنا نوافذ جديدة للتأمل في التربية الخليجية بين النظرية والممارسة، وبين السياسات الوطنية والمقاصد العالمية. فنحن اليوم أمام تحديات لا تقل أهمية عن الفرص المتاحة: كيف يمكننا أن نطوّر نظامنا التعليمية لتكون أكثر استجابة للتحولات الرقمية، وأكثر وعياً بالهوية الثقافية، وأكثر قدرة على تحقيق العدالة والجودة والاستدامة في التعليم؟

لقد أضحي التعليم في منطقتنا، كما في العالم بأسره، ميداناً تتقاطع فيه التطلعات الوطنية مع الاتجاهات العالمية، وتتصارع فيه الخطابات حول الغاية من التربية ووظيفتها. ومن هنا تأتي أهمية هذا الملتقى الذي يجمع بين العقل الخليجي المتأمل والعقل الدولي المتفاعل، في حوارٍ علمي يوازن بين الأصالة والمعاصرة، ويجعل من المقارنة وسيلة للفهم لا للمفاضلة، وللتكامل لا للتقابل.

أيها الزملاء والزميلات،

إن البرنامج العلمي لهذا الملتقى بما يزر به من جلسات علمية، وورش تخصصية، ونقاشات مقارنة، يقم صورة ناصعة عن حيوية البحث التربوي في الخليج. من خلال ما يزيد على عشرين جلسة علمية وثلاث ورش تمهيدية، سيُسهم المشاركون من جامعات ومؤسسات

مرموقة في إثراء النقاش حول قضايا جوهرية، تشمل السياسات التعليمية، والقيادة والحوكمة، والتعليم العالي، والمواطنة العالمية، والتعليم من أجل التنمية المستدامة.

في هذا السياق يسرني أن أعبر عن ترحيب الجمعية بالمتحدثين الرئيسيين في هذا الملتقى، الذين يحملون إلى منصتنا الفكرية رؤى عميقة وخبرات ثرية من مدارس فكرية متنوعة، ويسهمون في توسيع آفاق النقاش حول مستقبل التعليم عالمياً وخليجياً على السواء. كما أرحب بجميع الباحثين والباحثات المشاركين بأوراقهم ودراساتهم، الذين يشكلون بجهودهم العلمية القلب النابض لهذا الملتقى وروحته المتجددة.

أيها الحضور الكريم،

لقد اختارت الجمعية لهذا الملتقى أن يكون موضوعه "التربية، السياسات، والممارسات" لأننا ندرك أن التعليم لا يُفهم إلا في ضوء تفاعل هذه العناصر الثلاثة. فالممارسة بلا سياسة عمياء، والسياسة بلا فهم تربوي عقيمة، والتربية من دون تطبيق واقعي تبقى مثالية معلقة في الفراغ. ومن هنا، فإننا في الجمعية الخليجية للتربية المقارنة نؤمن بأن الربط بين الفكر والسياسة والممارسة هو جوهر الإصلاح التربوي المنشود في منطقتنا، وأن البحث العلمي الرصين هو السبيل إلى ذلك.

ولا يسعني في هذا المقام إلا أن أعرب عن خالص الشكر والتقدير لمؤسسة القاسمي على شراكتها الفاعلة ودعمها السخي، وللرعاة الذي أتاح لهذا الملتقى أن يرى النور بهذه الصورة المشرفة. كما أتقدم بالشكر الجزيل لأعضاء اللجنتين التنظيمية والعلمية على ما بذلوه من جهد وتفانٍ في إعداد هذا البرنامج العلمي الثري، ولكل من أسهم بفكرة أو اقتراح أو مشاركة.

ختاماً، إن ما يجمعنا اليوم هو إيماننا المشترك بأن التعليم هو حجر الأساس في بناء الإنسان الخليجي القادر على التفاعل مع العالم بعقل منفتح وهوية راسخة، وأن التربية المقارنة ليست ترفاً أكاديمياً، بل وسيلة لفهم الذات في ضوء الآخر، وبناء مستقبلنا على ضوء التجربة الإنسانية الواسعة. فلنجعل من هذا الملتقى منبراً للحوار المسؤول، ومختبراً للأفكار الجديدة، ومجالاً للتعاون بين المؤسسات الخليجية والعالمية، حتى نسهم معاً في رسم ملامح تعليم أكثر عدلاً وابتكاراً وإنسانية.

مرحباً بكم جميعاً في ملتقى الجمعية الخليجية للتربية المقارنة 2025، وأتمنى لكم أياماً زاخرة بالمعرفة، ثمرة بالحوار، ملهمة بالعباء.

والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

Dr. Khalaf Al-Abri

GCES President (2023-2025)

Sultan Qaboos ,College of Education ,Associate Professor of Education Systems and Policies
University

Keynote and Featured Speakers



Keynote Speaker

Michele Schweisfurth

Michele Schweisfurth is Professor of Comparative and International Education at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, and was President 2023-24 of the British Association for International and Comparative Education. Her primary research interest is pedagogy, focusing on internationally travelling policies and notions of 'best practice'. Originally from Canada, she has worked as a teacher, teacher educator, or adult educator in six different countries, and conducted research and consultancy in many others. Past roles include editor of the journal *Comparative Education*, Chair of Trustees for the UK Forum for International Education and Training, Senior Research Fellow with the Education team at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and Director of the Centre for International Education and Research at the University of Birmingham.

Further details at: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/education/staff/micheleschweisfurth>.

Pedagogy in International Perspective: theory, evidence, and contemporary critical questions

The current context – post-COVID, mid-Sustainable Development Goals, and with the language of crisis perpetuating a sense of urgency – means that it is timely to re-examine pedagogy and situate it across different scales, from the global to the local. The global discourse of 'disaster didacticism' (Schweisfurth 2023) is generating universal prescriptions for classroom practice that promise to improve learning. However, pedagogy includes both the observable act of teaching and everything behind it, including philosophies, policies, and cultural and teacher beliefs (Alexander, 2001). This definition helps to explain why understandings of good teaching practice vary across cultures and scales, and why pedagogical patterns have tended to persist over long periods of time, even when policies prescribe change.

This presentation will address some foundational issues about the relationship between pedagogy and education's wider purpose. It will then present different ways of conceptualising practice, from the complexities of the 'pedagogical nexus' (Hufton & Elliott, 2010) to the apparently evidence-based 'best practice' prescriptions currently in vogue internationally. Finally, it will raise critical questions about the entrenched divisions and misunderstandings found in research and planning on pedagogy (Schweisfurth 2025).



Keynote Speaker

Jeremy Rapple

Jeremy Rapple is Professor and Director of the Comparative Education Research Center (CERC) at The University of Hong Kong. He previously spent 15+ years in Japan, much of it at Kyoto University, and for several years prior in Mainland China and Taiwan. His work seeks to create the basis for mutual learning in the field of Comparative Education, a field traditionally dominated by learning from the West (particularly Anglo-American approaches). To meet the sustainability challenge, he seeks a richer transdisciplinary discussion within Comparative Education, one that can combine philosophy, social science, and pedagogical practices, and think in radically new ways. The rise of East Asia, with its world leading academic performance and strong cultural commitment to education, provides new opportunities for this sort of engagement. As Director of CERC, he is working to create spaces for those inside and outside East Asia to dialogue, learn together, and reimagine research in comparative education – and thus warmly welcomes any scholars from the Gulf interested in engaging more deeply with East Asian education.

Let Them Eat Data: EdTech and the Emaciated Educational Imagination

Revisiting Bowers (2000) provocative critique of 'our age of high-tech euphoria', this talk explores what is lost in the enthusiasm for EdTech. Digital solutions in education wear a technology halo, promising to illuminate the path to a brighter future. But when EdTech illuminates, what other aspects of education are obscured?

The stark contrast between the current enthusiasm for digital solutions and long-standing apathy around 'school food' is illustrative. For most educational researchers, most definitely

across Anglo-American contexts but perhaps across much of the Gulf region as well, EdTech is a welcome panacea, while school food is an obscure topic. Even those who critique EdTech do so without seeing school food as a serious alternative. As consequence, the leading English-language journals of the field are filled with discussions – supportive and critical - around EdTech, entire conferences are dedicated to debating its impacts, and new positions are opened for EdTech specialists to fill. The contrast with school food is stark. Why the obscurity when obesity rates among school-age children, particularly in Anglo-American countries and the Gulf states, have exploded (WHO, 2025)?

In fact, both EdTech enthusiasm and alimentary apathy are different sides of the same phenomenon: long-standing Western/Modern cultural assumptions about what constitutes ‘good education’. Cognition, rationality, and symbolic mastery, all set atop a culturally specific Cartesian mind-body dualism. This narrow approach can be clearly traced back to long-standing philosophical and religious narratives of the Western world: that ‘universal knowledge’ obtained in Transcendence would result in “a body utterly subject to our spirit and one so kept alive by spirit that there will be no need of any other food” (St. Augustine). Symbolic Transcendence then, rather than Somatic Interdependence. The Emaciated Educational Imagination of today is a direct result of this attenuated cultural view of education.

To bolster this claim, the talk then works comparatively: turning to examine Japan’s long-standing tradition of Shokuiku (school food). Japan is interesting precisely because Symbolic Transcendence never took hold there, under a very different set of philosophical and religious narratives. Japan’s 2005 Basic Law on Shokuiku reinforced long-standing themes in Japanese education such as somatic interdependence, culture, and sustainability (see Rappleye, Komatsu, & Nishiyama, 2024). Over the past 20 years, Japanese education has hired thousands of new School Food educators, developed a wealth of high-quality school food pedagogical materials, and connected how children eat to the sustainability shift. South Korea and Taiwan have made similar moves. This has resulted in the highest rates of educational achievement, lowest rates of childhood obesity, and one of the lowest per capita Ecological Footprints per capita among all high-income countries. As educators in the Gulf contemplate their future, Japan and East Asia offer a different reference point and alternative views of education: one in which an emaciating EdTech is replaced - or at least rebalanced - with Somatic Interdependence, illuminating the path to a more sustainable future.

Pre-Conference Workshops

Workshop 1: Understanding the Educational Landscape: Leveraging PISA Data for Research and Policy

Background

This workshop introduces participants to the insights offered by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and equips participants with the tools to understand, interpret, and apply PISA data to enhance educational research, teaching, and policymaking.

Designed for educators, researchers, and policymakers, the session offers a practical and accessible introduction to the global educational landscape through the lens of PISA, with a focus on the UAE, the broader GCC region, and international comparisons.

Participants will examine key educational indicators, understand cross-country trends, and explore how to integrate international assessment data into their own work. Through a mix of presentations and interactive discussions, the workshop aims to help scholars and practitioners to use large-scale assessment data to inform local education systems.

Technical Summary

The workshop is divided into three thematic sessions:

Introduction to PISA

Participants will receive a high-level overview of PISA. The session will focus on recent findings, with a focus on how the UAE and GCC countries compare within international education benchmarks.

Understanding Key Indicators and Available Resources

This session explores some of the main indicators PISA provides (such as student achievement, socioeconomic background, and learning environments) and introduces participants to publicly available PISA datasets and tools. Emphasis will be placed on how to locate, interpret, and apply this information in research, policy, or classroom settings.

Working with PISA Items

Participants will examine selected publicly released PISA test items to better understand the competences measured by PISA. This hands-on exploration will offer practical insights into the design of large-scale assessments and the skills they aim to capture.

Workshop Format

The first two sessions will feature a 20-minute presentation followed by a 30-minute group discussion. The third session will be a 30-minute hands-on exploration of selected PISA assessment items. Participants are encouraged to bring current or prospective research ideas to consider how PISA data can inform and enrich their work.

Key Takeaways

- Understand what PISA measures and how it reflects educational performance globally and in the UAE/GCC context.
- Learn how to access, interpret, and apply key PISA indicators to support research, teaching, or policymaking.
- Explore publicly released PISA assessment items to understand the competences that PISA measures.

Target Audience

- University faculty in education and the social sciences
- PhD and graduate students in education, comparative studies, or policy
- Educators and school leaders interested in evidence-based approaches
- Education policymakers, advisors, or administrators seeking international benchmarking

Duration

This 2.5-hour session combines presentations and group discussions.



About the Moderator

Chi Sum

Chi Sum Tse is an advisor in the Office of the Director for Education and Skills at the OECD. He has worked on several projects across the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, including PISA, PISA for Schools, PISA-VET, and AI and the Future of Skills (benchmarking AI capabilities against human skills). In various capacities, his work has focused on helping educators and policymakers better understand their data and evidence, and translate it into

informed decisions. He has contributed to the development of PISA, drawing on his knowledge in assessment methodology. His current research interest lies in using AI in large-scale assessments, particularly for coding open-ended responses and providing formative feedback.

Before entering the education field, Chi Sum gained experience in international development with NGOs in Peru and Argentina. He later served on the board of France's CCFD - Terre Solidaire.

Chi Sum holds an MSc in Educational Assessment from the University of Oxford and an MA in International Development from Sciences Po Paris. He also pursued master-level courses on Mercosur at the University of Buenos Aires.

Workshop 2: The Use of LEGO® Serious Play and Gamification in Education for Sustainable Development

Background

How can playful methods like LEGO® Serious Play (LSP) and gamification transform learning for sustainable development?

This workshop introduces participants to experiential, design-based, and game-oriented approaches to teaching and learning. Drawing on real cases from higher education and policy engagement, the session will demonstrate how playful tools can unlock creativity, foster systems thinking, and encourage collaborative problem-solving around sustainability challenges. Participants will actively engage in exercises to experience firsthand how gamification and LSP can enhance critical reflection, empathy, and innovation in education for sustainable development.

Educators and policy professionals are increasingly seeking innovative pedagogical tools to prepare learners for complex sustainability challenges. LEGO® Serious Play and gamification provide structured yet creative approaches to learning by integrating metaphor-building, collaborative storytelling, and dynamic problem-solving.

Technical Summary

This workshop will:

- Introduce the theoretical foundations of gamification and its application to sustainability education.
- Explore how LEGO® Serious Play enables learners to construct, share, and reflect on metaphors of sustainable futures.

- Demonstrate case studies from higher education and policy labs where game-based methods fostered engagement, inclusion, and systems-level thinking.
- Guide participants in designing their own short activity that applies LSP or gamification principles to an education for sustainable development (ESD) context.

No prior experience with gamification or LSP is required.

Workshop Format

This highly interactive workshop combines short presentations, collaborative LEGO® Serious Play activities, and structured game-based exercises. Time will be dedicated to feedback and group reflection to ensure participants leave with practical ideas.

Key Takeaways

By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:

- Understand the value of gamification and LEGO® Serious Play in sustainability-focused education.
- Apply playful learning tools to foster creativity, collaboration, and systems thinking in ESD.
- Design small-scale activities adaptable to classrooms, workshops, or policy labs
- Reflect critically on how play can serve as a serious driver of equity, inclusion, and innovation in sustainability education.

Target Audience

- Faculty members and educators seeking to enrich their teaching practices with playful learning approaches.
- Graduate students and early-career researchers interested in experiential learning and sustainable development.
- Practitioners in policy, NGOs, and international organizations exploring innovative tools for capacity-building.

Duration

This 3-hour session balances conceptual input with immersive exercises, providing both experience and reflection.



About the Moderator

Evren Tok

Prof. Evren Tok is Associate Dean of Community Engagement and Associate Professor at College of Public Policy, Hamad Bin Khalifa University. Prof. Tok also acts as the regional coordinator for the Executive Master's Program (Development Policies and Practices) jointly offered by Graduate Institute of Geneva and Hamad Bin Khalifa University. He is the co-editor of *Policy Making in a Transformative State: The Case of Qatar*, published by Palgrave MacMillan, 2016 with Leslie Pal and Lolwah Al Khater. He is the director of a QNRF funded cluster (2021-2026) entitled "Education for Sustainable Development Qatar". He is the founder of the maker space entitled *Maker Majlis: Islam in a Global World*, which received Qatar Sustainability Award under Best University Initiative in 2020 and OIC Shaikh Hasina Award of Best Innovative Idea in 2022. Prof. Tok is also the recipient of Best Research Project Award in HBKU in 2022 and Service Excellence Award in 2024.

Workshop 3: Comparative Education Research: Approaches and Methods

Background

This workshop will utilise the English-language version of a book about approaches and methods in Comparative Education (see [weblink here](#)), and will launch the Arabic version of the book ([weblink to come](#)). Clarity in approaches and methods has always been important, but critics rightly point out that much scholarly work is loosely defined and inadequately bench-marked. Clearer understanding of alternative approaches, their implications, and of choices in units of analysis, will greatly improve the quality and impact of research.

Technical Summary

The workshop will be divided into two main parts:

Part One: Plenary Session

- It will focus on the field of comparative education, beginning with the early phases.
- It will then explore various milestones that are considered "the state of the art," and how these have led to the conceptualisation of "units of comparison."
- These reflections will serve as a bridge to the workshop's core focus: the units for comparative analysis.

Part Two: Group-Based Session

- Participants will be divided into groups.
- This part will encourage participants to think carefully about the units on which they focus during their research, on relationships with other units, and on implications for the conceptual and practical contributions of their work.
- Facilitators will provide guidance and support to the groups.
- The Workshop will then wrap up in plenary again.

Workshop Format

The 3-hour bilingual session (Arabic and English) will combine brief presentations, collaborative group discussions, and activities.

Key Takeaways

By the end of the workshop, participants will have thought more carefully about their fields and the variety, emphases, and implications of different units for comparison. This will help them situate their work within the field and strengthen their ongoing contributions.

Target Audience

The workshop is open to everyone, as we have much to learn from each other across generations, quantitative/qualitative/mixed approaches, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and more. The target audience includes but is not limited to:

- Graduate students and early-career researchers
- Experienced researchers in the field
- Faculty members, who should be made aware of ongoing developments in the field and their roles in critically reviewing its trajectory

Duration

The workshop will be for three hours, including a 15-minute break.

Contacts

Following registration, participants will be sent electronic copies of the English and Arabic

versions of the book to read in advance. They are also welcome to contact the Workshop organisers: Hanan_m_m@alexu.edu.eg and mbray@hku.hk.



About the Moderators

Mark Bray

Prof. Mark Bray holds the UNESCO Chair in Comparative Education at the University of Hong Kong. He is a past-President of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), the Comparative & International Education Society (CIES), and the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK). He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA). Professor Bray commenced his career as a secondary-school teacher in Kenya and Nigeria, before proceeding to postgraduate studies and then teaching at the Universities of Edinburgh, Papua New Guinea and London. In 1986 he moved to the University of Hong Kong where, among other roles, he co-founded the Comparative Education Research Centre. Between 2006 and 2010 he took leave to work in Paris as Director of UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). He has also undertaken assignments across continents for the Asian Development Bank, the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank. In the academic arena, Professor Bray is particularly known for contributions on two fronts. One concerns methodology in comparative study of education, and the other concerns the scale, nature and implications of the so-called shadow education system of private supplementary tutoring.



Hanan Mahmoud

Prof. Hanan Mahmoud works as an Assistant Professor of Comparative and International Education at the Faculty of Education, Alexandria University. She is a member of the Egyptian Society for Comparative Education and Educational Administration, and a certified trainer in entrepreneurship. Dr. Mahmoud began her academic career as a teaching assistant in the Department of Comparative Education in 2006 and progressed through various academic ranks to her current position. She teaches at both Alexandria University and Matruh University and has held several roles within faculty and university-level committees and administrative teams. She is the author of two academic books and has published numerous scholarly articles in the field of comparative and international education. Her research interests focus on comparative and international education, higher education, and education policy.

Highlighted Panels

Highlighted Panel 1: “Advancing Arabic Literacy: Examining the IQRA Program’s Conceptualization, Implementation, and Evaluation in Ras Al Khaimah and Beyond”

Helen Abadzi, Visiting Professor, University of Texas at Arlington

Steven Reissig, Executive Director, Ras Al Khaimah Department of Knowledge

Rui da Silva, Deputy Director, Al Qasimi Foundation

Gehad Al Najjar, Education and Community Development Assistant, Al Qasimi Foundation

Highlighted Panel 2: “Cultivating Flourishing: A Holistic Framework for Access, Belonging, and Community Resilience”

Institutional Spotlight: New York University Abu Dhabi (UAE)

Fatiah Touray, Esq. Assistant Vice Chancellor, Global Access and Engagement

Saman Hussain, Director, Global Access and Conflict Transformation

Hasan Johnson, Director, Global Engagement and Learning

Sarah AlZaabi, Associate Director, Global Access and Engagement

Highlighted Panel 3: “Disrupting Educational Norms: Aligning Global Policies and Local Practices for Sustainable Development in the GCC and Beyond”

Institutional Spotlight: Hamad bin Khalifa University, College of Public Policy (HBKU – CPP, Qatar)

Esmat Zaidan, Professor

Logan Cochrane, Associate Professor

Asma Al-Fadala, Assistant Professor

Tasneem Amatullah, Assistant Professor, Emirates College for Advanced Education

Bushra Faizi, Postdoctoral Researcher

Highlighted Panel 4: “Meet the Editors: Perspectives from Leading Academic Journals in the GCC and Beyond”

Michele Schweisfurth, Emeritus Editorial Board Member, Comparative Education; Member of Advisory Board, International Journal of Educational Development

Mark Bray, Member of Council of Reviewers, Comparative Education Review (CER); Member of Editorial Board, ECNU Review of Education (ROE)

Khalaf Al'Abri, Member of Editorial Board, Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies (JEPS)

Rui da Silva, Member of Editorial Board, Gulf Education and Social Policy Review (GESPR)

Highlighted Panel 5: “A Global Research Agenda for Building Inclusive Learning Environments”

Eman Gaad, British University in Dubai/Global Research Collaborative

Salyne El Samarany, Special Olympics Global Center for Inclusion in Education

Samir Dukmak, Al Ain University/Global Research Collaborative

Highlighted Panel 6: Enhancing Early Arabic Literacy Through Perceptual Learning and Oral Grammar Integration: A Case-Based Reflection from the UAE, Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco

Helen Abadzi (University of Texas at Arlington)

Fatma Abdelkhalek (Assiut University, Egypt)

Highlighted Panel 7: “Bridging Pedagogy and Andragogy: Empowering Educators Through Professional Development and Framework Innovation”

Institutional Spotlight: Sharjah Education Academy

Ted Purinton, Founding Dean

Fatima Bailey, Department Chair

Eric Hilgendorf, Assistant Professor

Huda Al Kalila, PD Programs Manager

Elaine Quraan, Director Learning Community Programs

Day 1: Presentation Abstracts

Panel 1: “Reimagining Arabic: Bilingual Beginnings, Teacher Agency, and AI-Enabled Reading”

A Roadmap to Bilingual Early Education in the GCC: Countering Linguistic Hegemony on the Path to a Knowledge Economy

Fatma Said, Zayed University

Amidst the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states’ shift towards a knowledge economy, educational reforms have increasingly positioned English as a medium of instruction (EMI), underpinned by its association with scientific advancement and global competitiveness (Said, 2024). While such policies align with the World Bank’s vision (2013) of economies driven by knowledge capital and technological proficiency, this paper highlights a critical oversight: the marginalisation of Arabic, the region’s mother tongue, within pedagogical and policy frameworks. Drawing on theories of linguistic hegemony (Phillipson, 1992; Coffi, 2017), the study critiques how EMI perpetuates power asymmetries, privileging English as a global lingua franca while relegating Arabic to secondary status, a dynamic mirrored in many multilingual contexts (Kamwangamalu, 2024; AlMahrooqi & Denham, 2022; Clarke, 2013; Guo & Beckett, 2008). As evidenced in GCC curricula, such hegemony risks diluting Arabic proficiency, threatening cultural identity, and undermining cognitive development by disconnecting students from their linguistic heritage (Mahboob & Elyas, 2017; Said, 2011). The exploratory paper contends that GCC nations must adopt innovative bilingual (Arabic-English) policies reconciling global participation with cultural sustainability (Said, 2024). Grounded in 15 years of sociolinguistic research and comparative analyses of linguistic equity frameworks (Major, 2018), data from interviews and surveys were analysed through thematic analysis and descriptive statistics. The study asserts that bilingual pedagogies enhance access to global knowledge and resist hegemonic hierarchies. Initiatives such as Dubai’s Policy on Arabic Language Provision in Early Childhood (KHDA, 2023) exemplify actionable reforms aligned with SDG4 and UNESCO’s mother tongue education goals (Sumartana et al., 2025; Dantas et al., 2024; Navarro et al., 2016). Aligning with the conference theme of Pedagogy, Policy, and Praxis, the paper advocates for pedagogies balancing language and critical thinking, policy reforms prioritising bilingualism (Coffi, 2017; Fraser & Ramsook, 2024), and praxis-oriented strategies addressing teacher training gaps. Ultimately, it reimagines reform by re-centring Arabic as a language of learning, bridging global aspirations with regional identity.

Reframing the Power Dynamics around Second Language Teaching Among Non-Arab Arabic Teachers in the GCC.

Juwaeriah Siddiqui, Rochester Institute of Technology

There is an underlying assumption that teacher language ideologies have a direct impact not only on teaching but also on shaping student ideologies (Vygotsky, 1986). A major part of the language ideology among language educators and learners stems from ideas such as “learn it like a native” (Cook, 1999), for languages such as French (Drewelow et al., 2007) and English (de Haan, 1998). However, this power dynamics, especially in dual language systems, leads to marginalization (Guzy & Kapaló, 2017) of teachers within the language education domain, both offline and online. Language educators from subcultures (within the Global South) are subject to two forms of marginalization practices, one through linguistic hegemony, which promotes English as the language of intellect, and a regional hegemony that defines who is qualified to teach a language (such as Arabic), based on their ability to establish native roots over educational qualifications. The study aims to research the perspectives of non-Arab TAFL (Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language) teachers and facilitators regarding their purposes of teaching Arabic within the Arab region. By applying Bakhtin’s theory of ideological becoming, this study examines authoritative neoliberal ideologies that dictate linguistic hegemony among non-Arab Arabic educators and their pertinent discourse regarding TAFL education. Implications regarding the marginalization of non-Arab Arabic educators’ own ideological becoming in the face of regional linguistic hegemony are discussed, and how that further underscores the symbolic, cultural, and social capital associated with teaching Arabic in the region.

Developing Spaced Fonts for Various Writing Systems: The Case of Arabic

Helen Abadzi, University of Texas at Arlington, Fatma Abdelkhalek, American University of Cairo

Research on critical print size and inter-letter spacing shows that reading speed—closely linked to comprehension— is maximized when size and spacing are optimized. Approximating this optimal speed is especially important for beginning readers and those with dyslexia. However, existing studies on print size and spacing are largely based on adult readers of Latin-based scripts, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of how font size and spacing affect reading in other writing systems, particularly Arabic. This presentation discusses the objective of developing spaced fonts tailored to the structural and perceptual features of Arabic script. It also outlines options for research to identify optimal

formula in various writing systems for early and struggling readers. To assess the effects of size and spacing on reading fluency and comprehension, we developed some large-spaced Arabic fonts. These were piloted with early-grade children and kids with reading difficulties across five Arab countries (UAE, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, and Egypt), using a combination of eye-tracking and reading-aloud tasks. Preliminary results indicate that large-spaced fonts—which accounts for the cursive nature of Arabic, the presence of diacritics, and visual similarity between letterforms—enhances reading performance in early-grade Arabic learners. These results highlight the need for script-specific guidelines in the design of instructional materials and dyslexia-friendly fonts. It also offers a research framework for identifying optimal reading formula for beginners across various writing systems.

The Impact of Employing AI Programs in Developing Reading Skills Among First-Cycle Students in UAE

Badreyya R. Alkhanbooli, Maryam K. Alshamsi, United Arab Emirates University

This study explores the effectiveness of artificial intelligence (AI)-based programs in enhancing reading skills among First-Cycle students in Al Ain City, United Arab Emirates. Adopting a descriptive-experimental approach, the research aimed to evaluate how AI-assisted reading tools can contribute to early literacy development. A randomly selected sample of twenty second-grade students participated in the study, with reading records serving as the primary assessment tool to measure progress. Two AI applications (Read Along and Microsoft Reading Coach) were integrated into classroom activities to support personalized and interactive reading experiences. Findings revealed a noticeable improvement in students' reading fluency, comprehension, and engagement levels after consistent use of these tools. The results highlight the value of incorporating AI-driven educational technologies into early language instruction, suggesting that such tools can provide effective, individualized support for young learners. The study concludes that leveraging AI in foundational reading education not only enhances literacy outcomes but also fosters motivation and confidence among students, offering valuable insights for educators and policymakers in the UAE and beyond. Detailed discussion of the results of this study will be shared with the conference audience.

Panel 2: “Policy Currents and Digital Disruptions: Governing AI and Shadow Education in a Globalizing Gulf” (Arabic Panel)

The Impact of Digital Leadership on Achieving Institutional Excellence in Public Schools in the Sultanate of Oman

Ruqaiya Mohammed Said Al Naqbi, Sultan Qaboos University

هدفت الدراسة الحالية لمعرفة دور القيادة الرقمية في تحقيق التميز المؤسسي بالمدارس الحكومية بسلطنة عمان من وجهة نظر المعلمين. وذلك من خلال الكشف عن مستوى ممارسة القيادة الرقمية والتميز المؤسسي، ومعرفة ما إذا كانت هناك علاقة بين القيادة الرقمية والتميز المؤسسي، والكشف عن تأثير هذه العلاقة. واستُخدم المنهج الوصفي المسحي، والاستبانة كأداة للدراسة. حيث تم استخدام معايير الجمعية الدولية للتقنية في التعليم لقيادة المدارس (ISTE) (لقياس القيادة الرقمية وبلغ معامل ثبات المقياس (0.924)، واستخدمت معايير النموذج الأوروبي للتميز 2020EFQM، لقياس التميز المؤسسي وبلغ معامل ثبات المقياس (0.944). واشتملت عينة الدراسة (425) معلما ومعلمة. وتم تحليل النتائج باستخدام المتوسطات الحسابية والانحرافات المعيارية وحساب معامل ارتباط بيرسون وتحليل الانحدار الخطي البسيط. وتوصلت الدراسة لعدة نتائج منها: أن مستوى ممارسة القيادة الرقمية بجميع أبعادها (القائد الممكن، التنمية المهنية المستمرة، مخطط ذو رؤية، مصمم الأنظمة، المساواة والمواطنة الرقمية) جاء بدرجة مرتفعة، وبلغ متوسطها الحسابي الكلي (3.86)، كما جاء مستوى تطبيق التميز المؤسسي بجميع أبعاده (الثقافة المؤسسية والقيادة، بناء قيمة مستدامة، الغاية والرؤية والاستراتيجية، اشراك المعنيين، قيادة الأداء والتحول) بدرجة مرتفعة؛ حيث بلغ متوسطه الحسابي (3.85). وأن العلاقة بين القيادة الرقمية والتميز المؤسسي علاقة ارتباطية ايجابية قوية بلغت (0.812). كما أنه يوجد تأثير دال إحصائيا للقيادة الرقمية في تحقيق التميز المؤسسي حيث بلغ مقدار معامل التحديد (0.695) 2R، ومعامل خط الانحدار بلغ (795 B) وهي قيمة دالة إحصائيا حيث بلغت قيمة "ت" 28.58. وتوصي الدراسة بأهمية الاستمرار في تطبيق القيادة الرقمية لما لها من تأثير إيجابي في تحقيق التميز المؤسسي. ودعم ذلك بتنفيذ برامج تدريبية متخصصة في القيادة الرقمية لمديري المدارس. واعتماد معايير تقييم أداء تعتمد على معايير القيادة الرقمية والتميز المؤسسي.

The Professional Teacher License in Gulf Countries

Mohammed Alsharija, Gulf Arab States Educational Research Centre

تعرف الرخصة المهنية للمعلم بأنها وثيقة رسمية تصدرها جهة معتمدة، تُجيز لحاملها ممارسة مهنة التعليم وفق معايير مهنية محددة وقابلة للقياس، تستهدف ضمان جودة الأداء المهني للمعلمين وتطويره المستمر. وتكمن أهمية هذه الرخصة في كونها أداة تنظيمية تسهم في تمهين التعليم، وتضع إطارا واضحا للكفايات المطلوبة من المعلمين، مما يسهم في تعزيز جودة العملية التعليمية ورفع مستوى مخرجاتها. كما توفر الرخصة المهنية آليات فعالة لتقييم أداء المعلم وتوجيه التنمية المهنية، بما يحقق الارتقاء بمكانة المعلم وتعزيز دوره المحوري في تحقيق الأهداف التربوية المرجوة.

وتعرض هذه الورقة نتائج دراسة أجراها المركز العربي للبحوث التربوية لدول الخليج، استهدفت إجراء تقييم شامل لأنظمة رخص المعلمين في دول الخليج في ضوء التوجهات والممارسات الدولية المتميزة. وقد تناولت الدراسة بداية المفهوم النظري لرخصة التعليم وأهميتها في تعزيز الجودة والكفاءة وتمهين الممارسة التعليمية، كما استعرضت بعض التجارب الدولية الرائدة في مجال الرخصة المهنية للمعلم شملت الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، والمملكة المتحدة، وأستراليا، وسنغافورة، واليابان، وسلطنة عمان. وبالاعتماد على المعايير المستخدمة لمنح الرخص المهنية للمعلمين في هذه الدول والآليات المستخدمة في تدريبهم وتقييمهم. وبالاعتماد على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، حللت الدراسة واقع تطبيق رخص المعلمين في دول الخليج، من خلال تحليل الوثائق الرسمية المتضمنة أهداف الرخصة ونظامها وبرامج التدريب والتطوير المهني وشروط التعيين في المهنة وشروط الترقى وغيرها. كما وظفت الاستبانة كأداة لجمع بيانات من عينة كبيرة من المعلمين والمختصين، وأجريت مقابلات معمقة مع مسؤولي التعليم في وزارات التربية والتعليم بدول الخليج.

وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة وجود تفاوت في مستوى تطبيق نظام الرخصة المهنية للمعلم بين دول الخليج، مع وجود تحديات مشتركة أبرزها ضعف آليات التقييم والمتابعة، وغياب المعايير الواضحة والموحدة بين هذه الدول، ونقص برامج التنمية المهنية الفعالة للمعلمين. وانتهت الدراسة إلى تقديم تصور عملي متكامل لتطوير منظومة رخص المعلمين في دول الخليج، يشتمل على إطار معياري واضح، ونظام تقييم محكم، وبرامج تدريب مهني مستمرة، مع مراعاة المرونة اللازمة لظروف كل دولة من دول الخليج.

The Impact of Authentic Leadership on the Quality of Work Life of Teachers in Public Schools in the Sultanate of Oman

Layla Alamria, Sultan Qaboos University

تظهر القيادة الاصيلية وجودة الحياة الوظيفية كمفاهيم حاسمة في مواجهة تحديات التكيف مع الانفجار المعرفي والتطور المتسارع في التكنولوجيا، وتسريع وتيرة تدريب وتطوير قدرات المعلمين، في ظل شعور بعض المعلمين بالإجهاد المهني وفقدان الدافعية، وزيادة معدلات التسرب من المهنة؛ والذي ثار قلقاً لدى صنّاع القرار في قطاع التعليم في كثير من دول العالم (اليونسكو، 2023)، لذا يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة تأثير القيادة الاصيلية بأبعادها الأربعة وفقاً لمقياس والومبوا وآخرين (2008، al . et Walumbwa): الوعي الذاتي، العلاقات بالشفافية والمعالجة المتوازنة والمنظور الأخلاقي الداخلي، على جودة الحياة الوظيفية للمعلمين بالمدارس الحكومية بسلطنة عمان وفقاً لمقياس فان لار وآخرين (2015، al et Laar Van .) (وأبعاده هي: الإدارة في مكان العمل، الارتباط بالوظيفية، الرفاهية العامة، التكامل بين الاسرة والعمل، وضغط العمل، وظروف العمل. كما تهدف الدراسة إلى الكشف عن تأثير متغيرات الجنس، والحلقة التعليمية، وسنوات الخبرة على تصورات عينة الدراسة حول جودة الحياة الوظيفية وممارسات القيادة الاصيلية. ومن هنا تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى الإجابة عن الأسئلة الآتية:

1. ما مستوى ممارسة مديري المدارس الحكومية بسلطنة عمان للقيادة الاصيلية؟
2. ما مستوى جودة الحياة الوظيفية في مدارس التعليم الحكومي،
3. ما تأثير ممارسة مديري المدارس للقيادة الاصيلية على جودة الحياة الوظيفية للمعلمين؟

وستستخدم الدراسة المنهج الوصفي، وسيتم جمع البيانات من استبانة سيتم توزيعها على عينة عشوائية من المعلمين والمعلمات بالمدارس الحكومية بسلطنة عمان خلال العام الدراسي /2024 2025م، ولمعالجة البيانات الاحصائية سوف يتم استخدام برنامج (spss) (من خلال الأساليب الإحصائية: معامل ارتباط بيرسون لحساب ارتباط العبارات والمحور الذي تنتمي له وللأداة ككل، واستخدام معامل الفا كرونباخ لقياس الثبات، والمتوسطات الحسابية والانحرافات المعيارية لكل محاور الأداة، وتحليل الانحدار الخطي البسيط للكشف عن تأثير ممارسة أبعاد القيادة الاصيلية على مستوى جودة الحياة الوظيفية للمعلمين، وفي ضوء النتائج المحصلة سيتضمن البحث جملة من التوصيات لتعزيز دور قيادات المدارس في تحسين جودة الحياة الوظيفية للمعلمين وضمان الاحتفاظ بهم وبقائهم في مهنة التدريس.

A Systematic Review of The Recent Global Trends in Utilizing Artificial Intelligence to Enhance Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Educational Process

Nasra Saleh Al Abri, Alsaeed Saad Alshamy, Khalaf Marhoon Al Abri, Sultan Qaboos University

شهدت السنوات الأخيرة مراجعة الاتجاهات البحثية العالمية الحديثة حول استخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي في التعليم المدرسي، من خلال تحليل 632 دراسة مستخلصة من قاعدة بيانات Scopus "للفترة 2020-2024" ولقد ركزت الدراسة على ثلاثة محاور رئيسية: تطبيقات الذكاء الاصطناعي في التعليم، واستخداماتها العملية في تعزيز كفاءة العملية التعليمية والفعالية الإدارية، وأبرز الفوائد والتحديات المرتبطة بتوظيف هذه التطبيقات. أظهرت نتائج المراجعة أن الدراسات أظهرت اهتمامًا متزايدًا بتوظيف الذكاء الاصطناعي في التعليم المدرسي. وركزت غالبية الدراسات على التطبيقات التي تُسهم في تعزيز كفاءة العملية التعليمية، مثل تقديم محتوى تعليمي مخصص، وتوفير تغذية راجعة فورية. كما تُسهم هذه التطبيقات في تعزيز الأداء الأكاديمي، وزيادة تفاعل الطلاب مع العملية التعليمية. في المقابل، تناولت الدراسات التي ركزت على تعزيز الفعالية الإدارية دور الذكاء الاصطناعي في أتمتة المهام الروتينية مثل مراقبة الحضور والجدولة، بالإضافة إلى تحليل البيانات لدعم عمليات صنع القرارات. وتُسهم هذه التطبيقات في تعزيز كفاءة العمليات الإدارية وتوفير الوقت اللازم للتركيز على الجوانب الاستراتيجية. ومع ذلك، كانت تمثيلاً مقارنة بالدراسات التي ركزت على كفاءة العملية التعليمية. إلى جانب ذلك، سلطت الدراسات الضوء على تحديات هذه الدراسات أقلّ متعددة، منها ارتفاع تكاليف التطبيقات، ضعف البنية التحتية الرقمية، وقلة الكوادر المدربة على استخدام هذه التطبيقات. بناءً على نتائج المراجعة المنهجية للدراسات، تُبرز الدراسة أهمية تطوير استراتيجيات شاملة ومرنة تحقق التكامل بين كفاءة العملية التعليمية والفعالية الإدارية، مع التركيز على تعزيز استدامة وجودة التعليم المدرسي. ويتطلب ذلك تحسين البنية التحتية الرقمية، وتعزيز برامج تدريب الكوادر التعليمية والإدارية، وتطوير سياسات تعليمية مبتكرة تضمن الاستخدام الآمن والمسؤول لتلك التطبيقات. وعليه، تقترح الدراسة إجراء بحوث مستقبلية تستكشف آليات متطورة تُسهم في تحقيق تجربة تعليمية وإدارية متكاملة ومستدامة، وتُلبي احتياجات جميع الأطراف وتوازن بين الابتكار التكنولوجي والبعد الإنساني في التعليم والإدارة.

Modeling the Impact of Teacher Leadership on Teachers' Commitment to Change towards e-Learning in Government Schools in the Sultanate of Oman

Muna Al-Alawi, Yasser Almahdi, Rashed Alfahdi, Raya Almuntheria (Sultan Qaboos University) (AR)

يشهد التعليم اليوم تحولات تقنية ومعرفية تتطلب وجود معلمين فاعلين قادرين على دعم تلك التحولات في العملية التعليمية للنهوض بالعمل التربوي، وباعتبار المعلم من المدخلات المهمة في المدرسة، والذي يلعب دوراً أساسياً وهاماً في تعلم الطلبة وتحسين العملية التعليمية بشكل عام، وذلك من خلال ما يقوم به من أدوار ومهام مناهة به سواء داخل الغرفة الصفية أو خارجها، ومن المهم في هذا الإطار أن يكون المعلم عنصراً فاعلاً لإحداث التغيير في العملية التعليمية سواءً من خلال المبادرة في تطوير ممارساته أو تحسين الثقافة التعليمية في مدرسته وبين زملائه، فقيادة المعلم للتغيير محور أساسي لتحقيق الإصلاح والتطوير التعليمي. لذا هدفت الدراسة إلى الكشف عن واقع قيادة المعلم، وكذلك واقع التزام المعلمين بالتغيير نحو التعليم الإلكتروني في المدارس الحكومية بسلطنة عُمان، ومن ثم استقصاء تأثير قيادة المعلم على التزام المعلمين بالتغيير نحو التعليم الإلكتروني في المدارس الحكومية.

ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة؛ استخدمت المنهج الوصفي بمنحى البحوث الكمية باستخدام أسلوب النمذجة بالمعادلة البنائية، لتطبيق مقياسي قيادة المعلم والتزام المعلم بالتعليم الإلكتروني، على عينة مكونة من (520) معلم ومعلمة، وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى أن مستوى قيادة المعلم جاء بشكل عام بدرجة كبيرة، كما كشفت الدراسة عن التزام المعلمين بالتغيير نحو التعليم الإلكتروني بدرجة مرتفعة، من جانب آخر كشفت الدراسة عن وجود تأثير إيجابي متوسط لقيادة المعلم في التزام المعلمين بالتغيير نحو التعليم الإلكتروني في المدارس الحكومية بسلطنة عُمان. وأوصت باستحداث إطار عمل واضح وموجه لمعلمي المدارس الحكومية؛

لتعزيز ممارساتهم للقيادة الموجهة لتعزيز التزام المعلمين بالتغيير نحو التعليم الإلكتروني.

Panel 3: “From Classrooms to Campuses: Motivation, Metacognition, and Interdisciplinary Pathways”

Analysing Students’ Motivation and Learning Strategies in General Foundation programs

Ahmed Al Jabri, Sohar University

This study investigates the relationship between student motivation and learning strategies among learners enrolled in General Foundation Programs (GFP) in Oman. Using a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 153 students through a validated questionnaire and complemented by semi-structured interviews with 12 participants. Quantitative analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between deep motivation and deep learning strategies, and a moderate correlation between surface motivation and surface strategy use. External pressures such as exam-focused environments sometimes prompt even highly motivated students to adopt surface strategies. Qualitative findings reinforced these dynamics, highlighting the influence of institutional context, family expectations, and future goals. The study provides actionable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to enhance student engagement, promote autonomy, and improve academic outcomes. It also offers practical recommendations for tailoring teaching approaches and program design in EFL contexts. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of motivational profiles and strategy use at the foundation level in higher education.

Impact of Interdisciplinary Education on Preparing Students for Future Careers

Laila Mohebi, Fatima AlMohsen, Zayed University

Contemporary job market requires graduates to have comprehensive interdisciplinary knowledge and skills to be able to apply different approaches to solving problems in the modern workplace. Interdisciplinary education is believed to have an impact in preparing graduates to view things from different perspectives and apply higher-order thinking and analytical skills in a current and futuristic work environment. The purpose of this study is to explore faculty perspectives on the impact of interdisciplinary education on preparing students for future careers. The study was conducted using a qualitative case study of a federal university in the United Arab Emirates. The paradigmatic position was interpretive. Thirteen faculty members who are currently teaching interdisciplinary courses were purposely selected to take part in semi-structured interviews. It was found that

interdisciplinary education provided various work-related graduate attributes and skills that prepared them for the evolving work environment. The study concludes that interdisciplinary education plays an indispensable role in getting graduates ready for work and is also influential in their selection of career choices.

Gaining Insight into Self-Regulation: Metacognitive Awareness and Risk-Taking in Adolescence and Young Adulthood

Yusra Alsaedi, Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge

Learning is strongly supported by self-regulation, which involves controlling our thoughts and actions to set and accomplish goals, and self-regulation changes extensively in adolescence and younger adulthood. Self-regulation encompasses at least two main aspects: understanding knowledge and one's own learning patterns - metacognition, along with the ability to evaluate risk (risk-taking). In addition, these functions interact with lifestyle factors such as sleep and social time, especially in adolescence and young adulthood. The United Arab Emirates Centennial 2071 plan holds education and societal cohesion as two of its pillars, and a better understanding of self-regulation and lifestyle factors in youth can contribute to this plan, as elements that support positive action can be identified. To address age-related changes and interactions in self-regulation, this study evaluates components of self-regulation along with lifestyle factors in adolescents and younger adults in Abu Dhabi. Adolescents and adults (N = 119) participated in this study. Questionnaires consisted of validated scales of a) metacognition and b) risk-taking to address self-regulation, along with c) scales of sleep habits, hobbies, and social time (e.g. physical activity, gaming, etc.) to address lifestyle factors. Results indicated associations between age and specific aspects of lifestyle, specific aspects of lifestyle and metacognition, along with risk-taking. Recommendations are made for educational practices that could best support adolescents and young adults in their social interactions and learning journeys.

Policy and Praxis in Shadow Education: Evolving Regulations for Private Supplementary Tutoring in the GCC Countries

Mark Bray, University of Hong Kong

A growing international literature focuses the shadow education system of private supplementary tutoring. It is called shadow education on the grounds that much content mimics that of schooling – as the curriculum changes in the schools, so it changes in the shadows. Shadow education has become a major phenomenon in all six GCC countries, especially in the senior-secondary grades prior to the watershed examinations that

determine university entry. However, government policies on the phenomenon vary widely. Regulations are in two major categories focusing on (a) teachers who wish to earn extra income from tutoring alongside their school duties, and (b) specialist companies for private tutoring. Regulations in some countries have strict controls while others are more relaxed and even facilitate private tutoring. Significant diversity may also be noted over time. The earliest policies in the region date from 1961 in Kuwait, while counterpart policies in other countries are much more recent. The paper will comment on the forces underlying changes, and thus present comparisons over time as well as place. The next question relates to praxis rather than policy, i.e. the extent to which the policies are actually implemented. Again the picture shows considerable diversity, with much depending not only on government capacity to implement the regulations but also on its commitment to do so. In practice much diversity exists even in countries with relatively tight policies.

Pedagogy as Epistemic Praxis: Reclaiming Student Voice in Higher Education

Michael Martinez, New York University Abu Dhabi

This paper examines how students' epistemological beliefs—about the nature, source, and legitimacy of knowledge—shape learning and belonging in higher education, especially for students from non-dominant traditions. Drawing on the framework of Critical Knowledge Praxis (CKP), the study synthesizes recent empirical literature on student epistemology to illuminate how institutional norms often privilege Western, secular, and individualist ways of knowing, creating epistemic dissonance for students from Indigenous, faith-based, or collectivist backgrounds. Rather than viewing epistemology as an abstract philosophical concern, the paper explores its role as a lived, institutional force embedded in curriculum, pedagogy, and policy. When students' epistemic orientations clash with dominant norms, the result can be marginalization, identity suppression, or even epistemic injustice. In response, students often engage in epistemic resistance—crafting hybrid frameworks, cultivating third spaces, and using narrative as a tool for reclaiming epistemic agency. These insights offer critical implications for Gulf higher education, where pedagogical reform often emphasizes outcomes and accountability, but may overlook deeper epistemic assumptions that structure learning environments. The paper argues that meaningful transformation requires more than inclusion-as-representation; it calls for epistemically plural institutions that affirm diverse knowledge systems, surface hidden curricula, and center students as legitimate knowers. By framing pedagogy as a site of epistemological justice, this research invites comparative reflection on how Gulf institutions can create more inclusive, contextually grounded, and epistemically reflexive learning environments.

Panel 4: “English in Motion: Translanguaging, Early Literacies, and Identity in Practice”

Decolonizing AI in L2 Education: Addressing Bias in Automated Feedback for Global Englishes among Arab Bilingual Learners – A Phenomenological Inquiry

Maha Alhabbash, Najah Al Mohammedi, United Arab Emirates University, Safa AlOthali, Ministry of Education

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in second language (L2) education, critical attention must be given to how these tools interpret and respond to diverse Englishes. This study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Arab bilingual learners when receiving AI-generated feedback that may challenge or conflict with their linguistic identity while using English as a second language in their writing. Specifically, the study investigates how bilinguals perceive and are affected by feedback that may favor standard English norms while marginalizing features typical of Global English, including those influenced by Arabic linguistic structures. Moreover, the study seeks to understand how Arab bilinguals make sense and respond to automated feedback that reflects standard language ideology. Fifteen bilingual Arab university students from the United Arab Emirates purposively participated in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using transcendental phenomenology. This approach aimed to uncover the essence of their experiences without any presuppositions, employing a cluster analysis method. Findings indicated that students often experience a conflict between their linguistic identity and the implicit norms imposed by AI systems. While some internalize the corrective suggestions, leading to reduced confidence and linguistic insecurity, others demonstrate resilience and a critical awareness of the sociolinguistic power structures embedded in the technology. This research contributes to the decolonizing agenda in language education by highlighting the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive AI feedback systems. Implications include promoting pedagogical strategies that empower learners to engage critically with AI tools and advocating for developers to recognize and support the legitimacy of Global Englishes, particularly those shaped by Arab bilingual contexts.

Monolingual Fallacy to Multilingual Reality: Translanguaging in a British Curriculum context

Maryam Aslam, Ranches Primary School

Translanguaging As an Inclusive Strategy for Supporting EAL Learners in International

Classrooms Maryam Aslam EAL Lead Teacher, Inclusion Department. ABSTRACT In Dubai's multilingual educational landscape, English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners often struggle to access the curriculum through traditional English-only instruction. These monolingual approaches, rooted in Phillipson's (1992) "monolingual fallacy," may hinder language development and academic engagement for early-stage learners (Cummins, 2001). This action research explores translanguaging as an inclusive pedagogical strategy that enables students to draw on their full linguistic repertoires to support understanding and learning. Guided by García's (2009) theory of translanguaging and drawing on Cummins' (2001) and García & Wei's (2014) work, the study examined a six-week intervention with two Year 2 EAL students in a British curriculum school. One student was at beginner level (Band A), and the other at intermediate level (Band C). The Gifted Linguist Programme (GLP) provided bilingual resources, scaffolded tasks, and dual-language instruction to support learning. Data was collected through student work samples, classroom observations, teacher reflections, and the EAL Star Assessment Framework. Results showed clear gains in vocabulary, written output, and learner confidence. Teachers reported improved student participation, better task comprehension, and enhanced peer interaction. Post-intervention feedback indicated that 89% of participating teachers found translanguaging "very effective" in supporting EAL learners. Despite challenges such as policy constraints and limited teacher training, the research demonstrates that translanguaging strengthens both academic language development and learner identity. This study adds to the growing evidence base advocating translanguaging as a powerful, research-informed tool in multilingual settings. It calls for broader integration of home languages into teaching to promote equity, engagement, and success for EAL students in international contexts.

Early Childhood Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of Storytelling in English Language Development Among ESL Learners in Public Kindergartens in the United Arab Emirates

Aamna Alharmi, Emirates College of Advanced Education

This study aimed to explore early childhood teachers' perceptions of the role of storytelling in developing English language skills among English as a second language (ESL) learners in the United Arab Emirates public kindergartens. Quantitative data were collected from thirty-five English teachers teaching in Ras Al-Khaimah, Ajman, and Dubai's public kindergarten, who responded to an online close-ended survey, and the data were analyzed into descriptive statistics. The study revealed that teachers' perceptions of storytelling are highly positive and acknowledge it as an effective teaching strategy for developing English language skills, specifically in listening and speaking skills and learning vocabulary. They also reported several benefits, including improvement in speaking fluency, and identified challenges, such

as time constraints. It is recommended to encourage using technology, such as digital storytelling tools, to overcome limitations and enhance children's engagement.

National Identity and Academic Excellence: Reimagining Language and Power in UAE Education through Translanguaging

Dzenita Mujic, American Gulf School Sharjah

In the United Arab Emirates, the promotion of English-medium instruction (EMI) has become central to preparing students for global competitiveness. However, this linguistic shift has also raised concerns about the marginalization of Arabic and heritage languages in schools, leading to identity erosion and uneven academic outcomes. This conceptual paper argues that translanguaging an approach that leverages students' full linguistic repertoires is essential for preserving national identity while advancing academic excellence. Drawing on regional policy documents such as UAE Vision 2031, the Moral Education Curriculum, and the UAE Education Strategic Plan, this paper examines how current educational practices often privilege English at the expense of culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy. It critiques the hegemonic language structures embedded in EMI and highlights the need to reposition Arabic and minority languages as cognitive and cultural assets rather than obstacles to learning. By synthesizing global research and aligning it with UAE's national goals, the paper proposes translanguaging as a transformative pedagogical tool that bridges linguistic equity and academic achievement. This approach not only affirms students' identities but also enhances comprehension, engagement, and inclusion particularly in multilingual classrooms. The presentation contributes to the GCES 2025 theme by addressing how power, language, and policy intersect in educational spaces. It calls for a shift in mindset from monolingual efficiency to multilingual empowerment offering actionable strategies for policymakers, educators, and curriculum leaders to support a more inclusive and nationally resonant educational future.

Cultural Etiquette and Legal Frameworks in UAE Education: Navigating Expression, Policy, and Practice

Fatihah Touray, New York University Abu Dhabi

This presentation examines how cultural etiquette and UAE legal frameworks shape freedom of speech and expression within educational institutions. As the UAE's academic landscape becomes increasingly international, educators must balance open discourse with respect for national laws and sociocultural norms. Drawing on examples from higher education and international schools, the session highlights how classroom dialogue,

research dissemination, and digital communication intersect with cultural expectations and regulatory boundaries. The framework is that understanding UAE legal and ethical contexts enhances, not restricts, academic practice, fostering environments grounded in mutual respect and legal awareness. Framed within broader Gulf debates on pedagogy and policy, this presentation offers practical strategies for developing culturally responsive, legally compliant educational practices aligned with the UAE's educational vision.

Panel 5: “Leading for Learning: Licensing, Distributed Practice, and Transformational Change”

Exploring the Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Teacher Professional Development in RAK Government Schools

Deema Alnaqbi, Emirates College of Advanced Education

Motivating followers through motivation and inspiration has been viewed as a significant component in teacher professional development and school improvement. Transformational leadership has been noted as one of the pinpoint causes. It has been linked with positive outcomes such as improving teacher cooperation and enhancing the overall school culture. This qualitative study investigates the contributions of transformational leadership to teacher professional development, focusing on RAK government schools. Nine senior leaders (six principals and three vice principals) agreed to be interviewed to explore their understanding of and approaches to transformational leadership and the challenges encountered. The results indicate that the participants viewed transformational leadership as a style of leadership that mainly focused on inspiration, motivation, and empowerment. Strategies used by leaders included collaboration, professional development, and celebrating achievement by providing recognition for effective teaching. Key challenges relate to unforeseen lack of resource materials for distribution, inadequate staff engagement, and faulty external interaction and communication systems. The study highlights that transformative leadership, by encouraging a positive learning environment, enhances teacher professional development, with an emphasis on continuous improvement. Adequate school leadership training and policy development aimed at lowering barriers to resources, time, and information overload designated for teacher development are essential for further research.

Principals' Perspectives on the Influence of Distributed Leadership on Teacher Collaboration in Sharjah in the UAE

Khawlah Aldhanhani, Ministry of Education

This thesis explores school leaders' perspectives on how distributed leadership influences teacher collaboration in public schools in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. This study challenges the national educational reform and school-based innovation by assessing leadership practices that transcend conventional hierarchical leadership models. The research bases its findings on qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with eight school leaders from UAE campuses to evaluate distributed leadership perceptions in this context. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: (1) shared ownership and collaborative decision-making, (2) empowerment and trust as foundations for effective teamwork, and (3) the impact of peer mentoring and recognition in sustaining professional growth. The research shows that teachers acting as school leaders show increased commitment to school improvement projects alongside better workplace spirits and cooperative practices. The approach faced several obstacles centered on resistance from teachers affiliated with cultural norms, uneven distribution of workloads, and a lack of appropriate role definitions. The study establishes five essential components for distributed leadership: shared decision-making, strategic delegation, professional autonomy, peer learning, and recognition. These cultural elements create collaboration that meets UAE national educational transformation goals, including the Vision 2031 agenda. The author discusses future implications for being an Emirati educational leader by advocating for distributed leadership integration into policy frameworks, training standards, and evaluation systems. The study helps fill the current research gap in distributed leadership in the UAE and offers specific suggestions for school leaders and policymaking institutions seeking educational reform. Integrated cultural elements with strategic distribution of leadership lead to sustainable educational improvement that prepares 21st-century schools to handle modern academic requirements.

Explore the Impact of Transformational Leadership Practices on School and Student Readiness in Early Childhood Education Schools in Abu Dhabi

Hamsa Alobaidi, Emirates College of Advanced Education

Early childhood education (ECE) represents a critical foundation for children's cognitive, social, and academic development. Despite ongoing efforts to strengthen ECE provision, gaps remain in aligning early education stages and in developing students' readiness within the local context. This qualitative study investigates the role of transformational leadership practices in building school and student readiness, supporting smooth transitions, and strengthening stakeholder capacity in early childhood education schools in Abu Dhabi.

The study explores three research questions: (1) the transformational leadership practices

implemented by early childhood educational leaders to enhance school and student readiness, (2) the challenges leaders face when applying these practices, and (3) how collaboration with parents and educators can support transformational leadership in improving readiness outcomes. A phenomenological and exploratory qualitative research design was employed to capture participants' lived experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine school leaders, a focus group with five educators, and analysis of school documents. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis approach, involving systematic stages of familiarisation, coding, theme generation, review, and interpretation. This process enabled the development of a cohesive narrative that reflects participants' perspectives and experiences.

The findings highlight the importance of a shared, individualized school vision aligned with both school needs and the UAE national vision as a foundation for building readiness. While participants demonstrated key transformational leadership traits, many leaders lacked explicit awareness of this leadership style, indicating a need for targeted professional development. The study also identified a gap in curriculum alignment and collaboration between preschools, kindergartens, and primary schools, which hinders smooth student transitions. Strengthening curriculum coherence and cross-sector partnerships is therefore recommended. Overall, participants expressed strong awareness of the importance of school and student readiness and emphasized the need for professional development, stakeholder collaboration, and systemic support to enhance early childhood education practices in Abu Dhabi.

Navigating Global Education Governance in the UAE: Local Agency Amid Global Policy Currents

Asma Abdallah, Sharjah Education Academy, Rasha Abdallah, Ahmed Alkaabi, United Arab Emirates University

Over the past two decades, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has undergone rapid educational transformation shaped by global policy frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Education 2030, and international quality benchmarks. At the same time, national priorities particularly around Emiratization, innovation, and educational quality have given rise to a hybrid governance model that blends global aspirations with localized strategies. This paper critically examines the evolution of education governance in the UAE through three dimensions: 1. The influence of global education agendas on national policy reform; 2. The role of transnational actors and private sector stakeholders in policy implementation; 3. The dynamics of local agency, particularly how national vision

documents and federal-local coordination shape governance decisions. Using document analysis and policy mapping, the study interrogates how the UAE mediates between alignment with global governance trends and assertion of local sovereignty. It also explores the implications of this balancing act for equity, quality, and inclusion in the education system. The presentation offers insights into how a fast-modernizing, non-Western context like the UAE engages with the increasingly complex ecosystem of global education governance. It contributes to broader discussions about stakeholder coordination, policy transfer, and the localization of international education reform agendas.

Global Governance and Inclusive Excellence: Shaping Gifted and Special Education through Collaborative Teacher Development in the GCC

Ahmed Hamdan, United Arab Emirates University

This presentation explores the intersection of global governance, inclusive excellence, and teacher's development in shaping the future of gifted and special education within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) context. Drawing on evidence from the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) reports and the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2024, it examines how leadership, teacher's preparation, and collaborative professional learning can advance equitable and high-quality education for all Learners. The analysis highlights the importance of building educational systems that empower teachers and leaders to embrace diversity as a driver of excellence. Key focus areas include the integration of social and emotional learning (SEL), differentiated instruction, and technology-enabled innovation to meet diverse learners' needs. The presentation underscores how inclusive governance frameworks, guided by SDG 4 require investment in teacher's capacity, supportive school leadership, and data-driven policies to ensure safe, accessible, and effective learning environments. It further argues that inclusive and gifted education should not be treated as parallel agendas but as complementary pathways toward holistic excellence. Developing teachers as reflective practitioners, mentors, and collaborators, and equipping school leaders to foster shared leadership and inclusive school cultures, are central to this transformation. Ultimately, the presentation calls for a collective commitment to inclusive excellence, where equitable opportunity, professional growth, and student diversity become the foundation of sustainable educational innovation in the GCC.

Panel 6: "From Ethics to Inclusion: Data Dilemmas, Disabilities, and Parental Involvement"

Ethics in Educational Research: A Content Analysis of Consent Forms

Sarah Mead Jasperse, Emirates College of Advanced Education, Shaza Attia, Sanad Village

When conducting educational research with children, researchers generally are required to obtain parental consent and are encouraged to obtain child assent (agreement to participate). When working with very young children, these two processes (consent and assent) necessarily become intertwined, and ensuring that parents/guardians understand the assent process is critical. This study, which was conducted by a research team based in the United Arab Emirates, used applied thematic analysis to examine ethical practices related to research assent within parental consent forms for research involving young children (up to 8 years old). Focusing on 101 forms sourced from the Middle East/North Africa region, the study involved a core set of descriptive variables and a systematically developed codebook with 34 codes. The analysis explored key elements, such as the purpose and presentation of the study, procedures and activities, confidentiality measures, informed consent, assent-related information, and the language or tone used in the forms. We used factor analysis on the code distribution dataset to identify ethical content clusters within the forms. The use of intercoder reliability procedures provides support for a high degree of confidence in the findings. Our results indicate considerable variation in assent-seeking practices. We identified an emerging factor on assent-specific content, which suggested that only a selection of forms covered common assent standards and adequately differentiated between consent and assent. The forms analyzed often lacked information on how to express dissent and how to adapt assent-seeking practices to diverse cultural contexts. Nearly all assent forms required a written response to signify the child's assent (e.g., signature or printed name), while few assessed the child's competency to assent. In addition, the readability of parental consent and assent forms was often lower than expected. These practices reflect a common disconnect between the intended goal of child assent (aiding in the child's understanding of the study to achieve meaningful participation) and its operationalization in practice. By identifying current gaps in parental consent and child assent practices in the MENA region, we offer evidence-based insights to inform the development of regional frameworks and guidelines for child assent.

The Ethical and Power Implications of Using 'Big Data' and AI for Educational Surveillance and Student Profiling

Shahinaz Osman, United Arab Emirates University

This paper critically examines the confluence of global education metrics and emerging digital data governance in education, analyzing how these powerful regimes shape, and often deepen, social marginalization. The first part investigates the hegemonic influence of

international large-scale assessments (ILSAs), such as PISA and TIMSS. The second part of the paper connects this metric-driven governance to the rapid expansion of educational surveillance through big data and Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI-driven systems for learning management, assessment, and student profiling—while promising personalization—entail profound ethical and power implications. We explore how the massive, often opaque, collection of student data creates a "panoptic" educational environment, undermining student autonomy and agency. Crucially, the paper investigates how algorithmic bias embedded in these systems (e.g., in predictive scoring or behavior monitoring) risk exacerbating existing inequalities, disproportionately profiling and punishing students from historically marginalized groups. By synthesizing the macro-level impact of global metrics with the micro-level power dynamics of data surveillance, this research offers a critical framework for understanding the new mechanisms through which educational inequality is measured, managed, and reproduced in the digital age.

Beyond Moral Obligation: Reframing the Inclusion of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities as Strategic Investment in UAE Education

Marwa Hussien-Diaa, University of Birmingham Dubai

This paper explores the economic and social value of including individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) within the UAE education sector, challenging the notion that their inclusion is primarily a moral duty. While ethical imperatives have shaped many national policies, they have not always led to sustainable implementation. Instead, inclusive education is positioned as a strategic opportunity that contributes to national development through job creation, pedagogical innovation, and strengthened social cohesion. The UAE has advanced inclusive education through legislation and policy, yet individuals with intellectual disabilities—particularly those with complex needs—remain at the margins of mainstream schools. This exclusion limits not only their rights and dignity but also the sector's potential to evolve as a more adaptive, dynamic system. A structural tension persists: mainstream schools often lack the capacity to support ID learners meaningfully, while specialised settings, though better equipped, can restrict participation and long-term inclusion. As a result, families must choose between academic access and community belonging. Reframing inclusion as a structural and economic investment helps transcend this divide, creating integrated and functional support models. Drawing on insights from parents, educators, and policy documents, as well as international case studies, the paper illustrates how inclusive systems generate ripple effects—creating employment in education and EdTech and advancing adaptive pedagogies. Inclusion is framed not as a remedy for marginalization but as a driver of sector-wide resilience and innovation. This reorientation is informed by Islamic ethics,

which view human diversity as purposeful and necessary. The Qur'anic principles of ta'āwun (mutual cooperation) and takāmul (complementarity) frame individuals as interdependent members of society. Inclusive education thus enacts these principles in tangible ways. In conclusion, the paper calls for a culturally grounded, economically informed reframing of disability inclusion in UAE education policy as a strategic investment in resilience, equity, and national progress.

Engaging Arabic-Speaking Mothers and Fathers in an Inclusive Parent Education Program in Abu Dhabi

Khawla Barley, Michelle Kelly, Emirates College of Advanced Education

The current study evaluated a pilot parent training program for Arabic-speaking mothers and fathers of children of determination aged 2 to 7 years in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Fourteen parents participated in the six-session program, three of which included direct, supported engagement with their children through the established, inclusive Young Athletes Program (Special Olympics UAE, 2022). Grounded in the science of behavior analysis and informed by an action-oriented values identification approach (Byrne et al., 2021), the training was developed with input from local stakeholders. Delivered through in-person workshops led by bilingual facilitators, the training aimed to enhance parental confidence, competence, and capacity. The mixed-methods evaluation included both quantitative and qualitative measures to assess outcomes. Paired-samples t-tests assessed the impact of the training on parent well-being, sense of competence, and stress. Parent well-being significantly improved post-intervention ($M = 16.7$, $SD = 4.04$) compared to pre-intervention ($M = 21.1$, $SD = 4.27$), $t(15) = -2.90$, $p = .01$, with a moderate effect size ($d = 0.72$). Parenting sense of competence also increased significantly (post: $M = 64.4$, $SD = 9.09$; pre: $M = 60.0$, $SD = 11.24$), $t(15) = 2.12$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.67$. While parent stress decreased (post: $M = 11.31$, $SD = 2.87$; pre: $M = 12.31$, $SD = 2.52$), the change was not statistically significant, $t(15) = 1.67$, $p = .11$, with a small to moderate effect size ($d = 0.42$). Nearly all parents (99%) said they would recommend the training, and 97% agreed the goals were important for parents in the UAE. Additionally, 99% rated the training as “important” or “very important.” The presentation will conclude with a discussion of the potential implications for future research and the design of culturally relevant, evidence-based parent education programs in the UAE.

Panel 7: “Teaching in Context: Problem-Solving, Parent Partnerships, and Alternative Pathways”

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Students' Approaches to Solving Mathematical Word Problems in Public Primary Public Schools in Sharjah

Mashaal Almuaini, Ministry of Education

Word problem challenges significantly influence students' learning progress, confidence, and long-term opportunities. The ability to solve mathematical word problems is essential throughout life, yet many students struggle to do so effectively. This study explores teachers' perceptions of how students in Sharjah's public primary schools approach mathematical word problems, aiming to understand their difficulties and the instructional strategies employed to support them. A qualitative research design was adopted, with data collected through semi-structured interviews involving 10 qualified mathematics teachers, and the data were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that students' limited reading and reading comprehension skills were the most common barrier, which hindered their ability to interpret mathematical contexts. Teachers also highlighted difficulties in vocabulary, translating real-life scenarios into mathematical models, and sustaining problem-solving persistence. Within the GCC context, linguistic diversity and reliance on English or Modern Standard Arabic as mediums of instruction added further challenges. Teachers reported using scaffolding techniques, visual aids, guided practice, and culturally relevant examples to address these issues. The study underscores the urgent need for integrated approaches that strengthen both literacy and mathematical reasoning in the region. Insights from this research can inform best practices, enhance problem-solving instruction, and support education policies across the GCC.

Exploring Parent-Teacher Relationships among Primary Schools in the UAE: Parents' Perspective

Houda Haddad, Sarjah American International School Umm Al Quwain, Alexandria Proff, American University of Ras Al Khaimah

This study investigates Arab parents' perceptions of parent-teacher relationships in primary schools across the United Arab Emirates (UAE), highlighting the sociocultural, emotional, and communicative dynamics that influence these interactions. Parental engagement is widely recognized as a cornerstone of student success, yet in culturally diverse contexts like the UAE, parent-teacher partnerships face unique challenges. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, the study draws on in-depth interviews with 15 Arab parents from various socio-economic backgrounds, conducted in both Arabic and English to ensure accessibility and cultural relevance. Thematic analysis, facilitated by Atlas.ti software, revealed five central themes: communication strategies, barriers and challenges, emotional dynamics, impact on students' educational experiences, and the triadic relationship between parent, teacher, and child. Findings underscore the importance of clear, culturally sensitive

communication, and highlight how teacher behavior, trust, and empathy significantly shape parental perceptions and involvement. While many parents valued digital communication tools like ClassDojo, others emphasized the need for more personal engagement and inclusive school initiatives. Emotional dynamics, including appreciation, respect, and expectations, were closely linked to the perceived quality of relationships and students' well-being. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on school-family partnerships in multicultural contexts and emphasizes the need for teacher professional development focused on cultural competence, relational trust, and inclusive communication. It offers practical recommendations for schools and policymakers to foster stronger, more collaborative parent-teacher relationships that support student learning and holistic development.

Contextualizing Teacher Education: Al-Ra'y, Liberal Arts, and the Majlis Curriculum

Wisam Abdul-Jabbar, Hamad Bin Khalifa University

This presentation proposes the Majlis Curriculum as a culturally responsible framework for teacher training in the Arab Gulf region. It reimagines curriculum development by integrating Al-Ra'y, a classical Islamic concept of informed reasoning, into the dominant tripartite educational model of Tarbiya, Ta'lim, and Ta'dib. How can internationalization in teacher education be achieved without eroding local epistemologies? What cultural values and practices inherent to Gulf societies can serve pedagogical aims that provide a regionally grounded yet globally relevant educational framework? This presentation introduces culturally responsible pedagogy, which emphasizes the need for teachers to understand and internalize their cultural frameworks, a preamble to culturally responsive teaching. This pedagogy challenges reductive views of culture as a fixed set of rituals or values and instead positions culture as an active mode of deliberative pedagogy and civic engagement. The Majlis Curriculum negotiates with the internationalization of education by aligning Islamic traditions, rooted in Al-Ra'y, with critical thinking, interculturality, and liberal arts principles. Establishing a correlation between Al-Ra'y and liberal arts is meant to reconceptualize the internationalization of education within local settings. Pedagogically, the presentation argues for integrating a set of dialectics from within Arabic thought for teacher training programs. Therefore, the main aim is to identify cultural tools and concepts that support contextualizing teacher education programs guided by humanities-oriented curricula. The aim, therefore, is to discuss Arabian thought as a pedagogy for contextualizing the internationalization of teacher education programs in the Arab Gulf.

Principals' Perspectives on the Influence of Distributed Leadership on Teacher Collaboration

in Sharjah in the UAE

Khawlah Aldhanhani, Ministry of Education

This thesis explores school leaders' perspectives on how distributed leadership influences teacher collaboration in public schools in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. This study challenges the national educational reform and school-based innovation by assessing leadership practices that transcend conventional hierarchical leadership models. The research bases its findings on qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with eight school leaders from UAE campuses to evaluate distributed leadership perceptions in this context. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: (1) shared ownership and collaborative decision-making, (2) empowerment and trust as foundations for effective teamwork, and (3) the impact of peer mentoring and recognition in sustaining professional growth. The research shows that teachers acting as school leaders show increased commitment to school improvement projects alongside better workplace spirits and cooperative practices. The approach faced several obstacles centered on resistance from teachers affiliated with cultural norms, uneven distribution of workloads, and a lack of appropriate role definitions. The study establishes five essential components for distributed leadership: shared decision-making, strategic delegation, professional autonomy, peer learning, and recognition. These cultural elements create collaboration that meets UAE national educational transformation goals, including the Vision 2031 agenda. The author discusses future implications for being an Emirati educational leader by advocating for distributed leadership integration into policy frameworks, training standards, and evaluation systems. The study helps fill the current research gap in distributed leadership in the UAE and offers specific suggestions for school leaders and policymaking institutions seeking educational reform. Integrated cultural elements with strategic distribution of leadership lead to sustainable educational improvement that prepares 21st-century schools to handle modern academic requirements.

Panel 8: “Wellbeing at Work: Leadership, Mobility, and Care in UAE Schools”

Teacher Wellbeing Under Administrative Burden: A Qualitative Study of Stress and Resilience in Ras Al Khaimah Private Schools

Mohamed Abouria, Emirates National School – Ras Al Khaimah

This ethnographic case study delves into the impact of non-teaching responsibilities on the well-being of teachers in private schools in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE. Teachers are often engaged in a range of non-teaching duties, including administrative tasks, committee participation,

supervising extracurricular activities, and pursuing continuous professional development. These demands have raised significant concerns regarding their effects on teachers' emotional, psychological, and occupational well-being. Adopting a qualitative constructivist approach, this study gathers data through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. English subject teachers are selected purposefully through judgmental sampling to ensure that the data is both relevant and diverse. The analysis employs a three-stage coding process using ATLAS.ti software, comprising open, axial, and selective coding, which helps identify key themes and enhances the credibility and validity of the findings. The research reveals how these non-teaching responsibilities contribute to stress, burnout, and an imbalance between work and life, ultimately affecting teachers' well-being and job satisfaction. The findings shed light on the various ways these duties impact teachers' emotional and mental health, highlighting the necessity for institutional support to promote their well-being. This study also adds depth to existing research by focusing specifically on the context of teachers in Ras Al Khaimah, providing valuable recommendations for policymakers, school administrators, and educators on managing non-teaching responsibilities to enhance teacher well-being. Future research should explore additional strategies to alleviate the adverse effects of administrative tasks and foster teacher well-being in diverse educational environments.

The Pepper Mill Effect: Emotional Grinding and the International Migration of Black American Teachers from US Classrooms to the United Arab Emirates

Tiffany Lachelle Smith, University of Birmingham Dubai

Traditional studies on teacher turnover often focus on two categories. Attrition delineates teachers who leave the profession, and migration includes those who move between schools. This presentation takes an analytical turn from these studies by exploring a less-examined path, which is the international migration of American teachers from schools in the United States (US) to those in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By focusing on Black American teachers, a group disproportionately affected by attrition in the US, the teachers in this study share narratives of emotional exhaustion and systemic pressures that pushed them to the brink of burnout. Therefore, using a dual theoretical lens of intersectionality and emotional transnationalism, this presentation discusses a study that identifies three core themes conceptualized as emotional collisions which analyze various factors that influenced these teachers' decisions to remain in the education profession but to relocate abroad. Like

peppercorns in a mill, these educators describe being ground down by their experiences teaching in US classrooms while comparing those narratives to experiences teaching in schools throughout the UAE. This presentation concludes with recommendations for educational policymakers and school leaders to consider more inclusive retention policies that offer accountability and sustainable strategies to support the stock of international/expatriate teachers attracted to fill the private and public classrooms within the UAE. Rather than solely focusing on the vision of the UAE national educational policy, this conversation brings forth the reality faced by several teachers who choose to voluntarily leave their home countries to teach in schools throughout the country.

Exploring the Influence of Emotional Intelligence in Leadership on Teacher Satisfaction and Fostering a Positive Work Environment: School Leaders' Perspectives from the UAE's Northern Emirates

Hajar Alkaabi, Emirates College of Advanced Education

Emotional intelligence in leaders' practices, such as motivation, empathy, social-interaction skills, and self-regulation, is essential to have safe and positive work environments for teachers and to help them increase their job satisfaction. This qualitative study examines how leadership practices of emotional intelligence affect teachers' job satisfaction and create a positive environment in public schools in the Northern Emirates in the United Arab Emirates. Prior literature shows how important it is for leaders to understand and implement different emotional intelligence strategies to increase employees' job satisfaction and create a positive work environment. This study was conducted using a semi-structured interview, and nine leaders from public schools, including different school levels from kindergarten to primary schools, from the Northern Emirates in the United Arab Emirates, were interviewed. Thematic coding was used for the data analysis, which identified leaders' practices of emotional intelligence with the teachers and different strategies which were used to increase teachers' satisfaction and strategies which were used while having conflicts, and the challenges of implementing emotional intelligence while dealing with other teachers' mindsets and cultural backgrounds. Results indicate that leaders who use empathy, self-awareness, and effective social interactions help build trust between themselves and the teachers, improving their relationships. Also, emotional intelligence practices such as supportive feedback, flexible leaders, and appraisal of a good job increase teachers' motivation and passion to work. There are challenges, such as workload pressure of leaders and communication barriers, so leaders applied different strategies to reduce those challenges, such as team collaboration, active listening, and providing employees with professional development to reduce those challenges and to sustain emotionally supportive

environments. These findings highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in teachers' job satisfaction and creating a supportive work environment, and this can be integrated in professional development sessions to help all leaders understand emotional intelligence.

Educator Wellbeing and Practices in Early Childhood Settings

Claudine Habak, Joseph S Agbenyega, Ieda M. Santos, Emirates College of Advanced Education

Quality early childhood education relies on interactions with educators and experiences that promote children's holistic development, learning, and wellbeing. There has been much focus on curricula and approaches in early childhood education, and only recently has there been deeper appreciation of educator wellbeing. Consistent with the SDG's framework for holistic wellbeing, which recognizes that work quality and interactions arise not only from knowledge and skills, but also from elements of the whole person, such as educator wellbeing, social and emotional aptitudes, and approaches. This work addresses the elements that promote high quality interactions between early-childhood educators and the children entrusted in their care in Abu Dhabi. To evaluate early-childhood educator wellbeing and its interaction with practices and approaches, 425 early-childhood educators and caregivers in Abu Dhabi participated in an anonymous survey, which included scales of wellbeing, stressors, attitudes, practices and approaches. The study was carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki for work involving human participants and was approved by ECAE's Institutional Review Board. Results indicate a relationship between the wellbeing of early-childhood educators and other elements, including stressors, societal value, and practices and approaches. A better understanding of educators, holistically, allows us to identify fitting approaches to support their needs and wellbeing. Recommendations point not only to innovations in training and capacity building of educators, but also to their whole-person care and societal engagements. Acknowledgement. This work was supported by a research grant from Abu Dhabi's Early Childhood Authority.

Day 2: Presentation Abstracts

Panel 9: “Making Science Make Sense: Family Engagement, Lived Experience, and STEM Readiness”

Relevance, Purpose, and Trust: Enhancing Science Education Through Students' Lived Experiences in the UAE Context

Noor Al Haj Ibrahim, Magnus Oskarsson, Mid Sweden University

Building on previous research exploring factors affecting students' interest and attitudes toward science education (Al Haj Ibrahim, 2023), this study investigates ninth-grade students' perceptions of science through the interrelated constructs of relevance, purpose, and trust. Using a mixed-methods design grounded in the Expectancy-Value Theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2020), the study combines survey data based on The Relevance of Science Education - Second (ROSES) international project (Jidesj, Oskarsson, & Westman, 2020) and qualitative analysis of students' argumentative texts. Findings reveal that perceived relevance of how students see science connected to their lives and future goals emerges as the strongest predictor of interest, followed by trust in science's ability to solve real-world problems. Conducting this research in the UAE offers educators and policymakers a valuable opportunity to develop science education by aligning curricula with students' lived experiences, societal values, and aspirations. This study highlights the importance of designing science education that imparts knowledge and fosters personal meaning, societal purpose, and critical trust, ultimately promoting deeper engagement among students in the Gulf region.

Teacher Readiness for STEM Integration: A Study on Perceptions, Challenges, and Lesson Design Approaches

Ahmad Qablan, Hosam Badawy, Patil Maramdian, Hesham Badawy, Ahmed Alkaabi, United Arab Emirates University

Recent education reports have identified improving STEM education as a critical priority, highlighting its potential to increase the number of students pursuing advanced STEM degrees and careers, broaden the STEM-capable workforce, and enhance STEM literacy for all learners. Actively involving teachers in STEM curriculum design has shown promise for supporting teacher learning and professional development. Participation in teacher design teams focused on curriculum development has been associated with key benefits, including increased self-confidence and growth in pedagogical content knowledge (PCK).

This mixed-methods study utilized data from a validated STEM survey to explore teachers' understanding and perceptions of STEM, their confidence in designing and implementing STEM instruction, their attitudes and reflections, the challenges they encounter, and their views on collaboration and professional development. Additionally, the study analyzed 12 science learning modules created by elementary and middle school teachers using the STEM Integration Curriculum Assessment (STEM-ICA) instrument. While the survey data revealed generally positive attitudes and moderate confidence—particularly among mid-career teachers—the qualitative analysis of the learning modules exposed significant gaps in classroom implementation. In key areas such as engineering design, mathematical integration, collaborative learning, and formative assessment, the modules often fell short of established best practices for high-quality STEM instruction.

This discrepancy between teachers' conceptual support for STEM and their classroom practices suggests underlying limitations in pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum design skills, and institutional support. The findings underscore the need for strategic investment in teacher capacity building, curriculum design support, and sustained collaborative practice to bridge the gap between positive teacher perceptions and effective classroom implementation of STEM education.

Enhancing Specialized Translation Classes through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Metacognitive Learning Strategies

Nour el Houda Cherifi, University of Algiers

Specialized translation classes require more than linguistic competence; they demand extra-linguistic skills that significantly influence students' psychological readiness, classroom performance, and cognitive and motivational engagement. Extra-linguistic competence encompasses subject-matter knowledge and situational awareness, while metacognitive strategies involve the learner's awareness and regulation of their own learning processes. Though distinct, these elements interact closely with learners' psychological needs, fostering autonomy and motivation. This research, entitled "Enhancing Specialized Translation Classes through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Metacognitive Learning Strategies", explores the theoretical foundations of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and metacognitive strategies, aiming to propose a practical method for their integration into specialized translation instruction. The paper is structured into three sections. The first examines motivation theory and the impact of needs fulfillment or deprivation on learners' psychological readiness and academic performance. The second discusses metacognitive awareness, self-regulation, and their effects on learner engagement. The third proposes a

pedagogical framework for implementing Maslow's theory and metacognitive strategies in specialized translation classes. Findings suggest that instructors can enhance students' psychological safety, sense of belonging, and self-esteem by cultivating a dynamic, supportive learning environment. This environment encourages critical and creative thinking, classroom interaction, and the development of self-efficacy, self-actualization, and self-regulation key factors in specialized translation tasks. Furthermore, teaching metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and self-assessment, along with constructive feedback, equips learners with essential tools to tackle complex translation challenges autonomously.

Human-AI Collaboration in Multimodal Spaces: Tensions, Transformations, and Future Directions

Najah Al Mohammedi, Maha Alhabbash, United Arab Emirates University, Safa AlOthali, Ministry of Education

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly integrated into multimodal environments, understanding the dynamics of human-AI collaboration is critical for advancing both system design and user experience. This study explores the tensions, transformations, and future directions of human-AI interaction in multimodal spaces that incorporate text, voice, image, and gesture-based inputs. Through a comprehensive literature review and a survey administered randomly to all AI users, the research investigates four key dimensions: collaboration quality, interactional tensions, adaptive transformations, and expectations for future systems. Findings highlight the limitations of current dyadic interaction models and the need for multi-agent, context-aware, and explainable AI systems. Notably, challenges such as cognitive overload, trust calibration, and bias in multimodal processing emerged as significant barriers to effective collaboration. In response, the study highlights the importance of adaptive interfaces, dynamic explanation mechanisms, and ethical design principles in supporting equitable and resilient human-AI teams. This research contributes actionable insights for designing more trustworthy, flexible, and user-centered AI systems in complex collaborative environments.

Panel 10: “Numbers to Narratives: Reading PIRLS, TIMSS, and PISA for Regional Reform”

The Role of International Assessment Results in Defining Educational Policy Reform Requirements: A Comparative Study of Selected Arab Countries

Mohamed El-Sayed Mohamed, Education Development Fund

International large-scale assessments have become essential tools for evaluating the performance of education systems worldwide. These assessments provide quantitative and qualitative data that uncover structural and pedagogical gaps and support evidence-based decision-making in educational policy. This paper aims to analyze and compare the results of international assessments, specifically TIMSS and PIRLS, in selected Arab countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, to identify key policy reform requirements based on student performance outcomes. Using a comparative descriptive-analytical approach, the paper explores trends in student achievement in mathematics, science, and reading across the selected countries. It also draws on contextual questionnaire data to examine the influence of school, home, and system-level factors. The study highlights the similarities and differences in how these countries have responded to international assessment data and to what extent such results have been utilized to inform national educational policies, curriculum development, and teacher preparation. The paper concludes with a set of proposed actions and policy requirements aimed at enhancing the strategic use of international assessment results in educational reform across the Arab region, fostering greater equity and quality in basic education.

Comparison Despite Uniqueness: A Thematic Analysis of the PISA 2022 Results for the UAE

Emily Winchip, Zayed University

Connecting to the conference themes of critical analysis, international comparative assessment, and the vision for education in the United Arab Emirates, this paper seeks to understand the usefulness of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for improving education. The relative uniqueness of the UAE likely undermines any benefit for students, as comparison is the primary mechanism of reporting PISA results. The UAE participates in PISA as part of a larger national strategy that includes a focus on educational improvement and future economic development for the country. The results of PISA are presented primarily through comparison, often by comparing every participating country on the parts of the test and computed indices. The results are often presented, and countries that exemplify the patterns or do not fit the patterns are described further in the accompanying text. This research was conducted through critical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Themes were developed through coding each mention of the UAE in the four main results documents for PISA 2022 to understand how the UAE is portrayed and the contextual information provided about the country. This thematic analysis revealed that the mentions of the UAE could be categorized under three main themes. Theme one was the

uniqueness of UAE schools, with subthemes of school staffing, technology use, the prevalence of private schools, and student behavior at school. Theme two was the uniqueness of UAE students, with subthemes of the prevalence of immigrant students, family effects on students, student time out of school, and student “sleepers”. Theme three was the uniqueness of the results with performance gaps, specifically gaps related to gender, SES, comparisons of high performers to low performers, and the results for immigrant students. The themes of the uniqueness of schools, students, and results will be discussed, along with the use of comparison despite the uniqueness of the UAE and how focusing on PISA results may constrain UAE education policy.

Navigating Institutional Tensions in Kuwaiti Education: Local Values and Global Reform Pressures

Nour Alshammari, University of Pittsburgh

This paper investigates the institutional tensions Kuwaiti teachers navigate as they operate at the intersection of traditional social values and global reform agendas. Drawing on institutional theory, the analysis explores how multiple, interconnected systems sustain traditional logics such as compliance with centralized authority, communal decision-making, and socially embedded conceptions of professional identity, while also promoting international logics of standardization and economic competitiveness. These international logics, often embedded in reforms promoted by external actors such as the World Bank and OECD, emphasize assessment-driven accountability and technocratic governance models. Yet their integration into Kuwait's education system remains uneven and superficial, partly due to tensions with more locally valued logics and practices. Using qualitative analysis of policy documents, press coverage, and scholarly analyses of reform efforts in Kuwait, this study draws on the Modes of Reproduction (MoRe) framework to trace how particular norms, beliefs, frames, and identities at multiple levels contribute to the persistence or disruption of global and local reform logics. It illustrates how teachers are caught between top-down mandates rooted in global benchmarks and a deeply embedded institutional context that values stability, hierarchy, and local legitimacy. By foregrounding teachers' roles within these overlapping and sometimes conflicting institutional environments, the paper illustrates how certain reforms persist rhetorically despite limited implementation. It highlights the challenges of navigating and reconciling multi-level institutional logics and calls for more contextually attuned approaches to educational improvement in the Gulf.

Higher Education Policy Borrowing: A Comparative Case Study of The United Arab Emirates and Oman

Katariina Juusola, Ajman University, Ahmed AlSaadi, University College Londo, Maryam Al Aufi, University of Technology and Applied Sciences – Shinas

This research explores the modernisation of the higher education landscape and the role of policy borrowing in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman through a comparative case study and the analytical lens of the education policy cycle model developed by Phillips and Ochs (2003). This research demonstrates key policy events through snapshots of education policy reforms in both countries across three eras from the 1960s to the present decade. The UAE and Oman were chosen for comparative analysis due to their proximity as neighbouring countries, having relatively new education systems that the governments of the respective countries have attempted to modernise rapidly during the past decades to build knowledge economies. However, the reform and vision behind both countries' education policies have been different, as the UAE has extensively internationalised its education offering by importing higher education institutions and programmes. In comparison, Oman has relied less on transnational HE provision and foreign education models. This comparative historical case study employs qualitative methods, namely periodisation, and utilises different sources of data, e.g., previously published scientific articles and books, reports from non-governmental organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations, reports from the Ministry of Higher Education of both countries, reports from quality assurance and licensing bodies, university historical documents, and other publicly available records.

Panel 11: “Supporting Diverse Learners: Inclusion, Choice, and Classroom Strategy”

A Qualitative Mixed Method to Study Effective Scaffolding for Students with Autism: LSAs' Perspectives, Practice and Theory Gap

Murshidha Mohammed, University of Birmingham Dubai

Students with autism often receive individualised support in mainstream classrooms through Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), a practice common globally and well-established in the UAE. Although LSAs frequently take on instructional roles, they are rarely trained in scaffolding strategies, which aim to promote learner autonomy through guided, structured support. While literature on scaffolding theory is extensive, its application by LSAs for autistic students remains underexplored, especially in the UAE context. Current research emphasises learner autonomy can only be achieved through a structured hierarchy of scaffolding strategies and differentiates LSA roles into support, repair, and heuristic functions. The latter emphasises learner autonomy which is a desired yet elusive goal for students with autism due to specific challenges such as anxiety, sensory processing

differences, and executive dysfunction. This study investigated scaffolding practices from the perspective of six LSAs in a mainstream Dubai primary school. Data was gathered through naturalistic observation and individual interviews, then analysed using deductive thematic analysis. The findings were both manifold and significant. LSAs predominantly provided emotional and relational support, aligning with scaffolding literature insofar as heuristic strategies those that promote learner autonomy were underutilised. A key insight emerged: LSAs' limited repertoire of strategies often stemmed from assumptions about students' capabilities, shaped by their knowledge of autism. Additionally, some LSAs' perspectives reflected a strong reliance on behavioural frameworks such as Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), which emphasises fading support, but inadvertently allows the provision of answers undermining learner autonomy. A congruent finding was that the complex roles of support and repair warrant the same differentiated scaffolding strategies without which, LSAs continue to be indispensable to students with autism. These findings confirm the study's assertion that professional training that integrates scaffolding theory with autism-specific insights is necessary to move beyond a medical model and foster autonomy in learners through well-informed, contingent educational support.

Including Learners with Autism in the Mainstream Classroom in Muslim-Majority Countries: Teachers' Perceptions

Marijke Fox, University of Birmingham Dubai

This systematic review examines the attitudes and perceptions of mainstream education teachers in Muslim-majority countries regarding the inclusion of learners with autism in mainstream classrooms. Given that much of the existing literature on disability and inclusive education is grounded in Western, Judeo-Christian frameworks, this review sought to explore whether an alternative perspective—specifically an Islamic view of disability and inclusion—is reflected in teachers' perceptions and practices. The review aimed to identify key barriers and facilitators shaping teachers' perceptions and to determine whether Islamic values influence their views on autism inclusion. Themes drawn from literature addressing Islamic perspectives on disability were compared with themes identified in international research on teachers' perceptions of inclusion. The research question was refined using the PICO framework, and a systematic search was conducted following PRISMA (2009) guidelines. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure the selection of studies focused exclusively on mainstream teachers working in mainstream educational settings within Muslim-majority countries. Studies involving special education teachers, inclusion or nurture classes, school leadership, or other specialists were excluded. An initial database search yielded 125 articles. Following abstract and full-text screening, six studies employing

qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs were deemed suitable for inclusion. The selected studies were quality-assessed, and extracted data were coded and analysed. Findings indicate that teachers' perceptions of including learners with autism in mainstream classrooms were largely consistent with global trends. Teachers in five of the six studies expressed positive attitudes, affirming that learners with autism belong in mainstream settings and benefit academically and socially, alongside neurotypical peers. Identified barriers included limited knowledge and skills, insufficient training, lack of resources, inadequate support staff, and unsuitable learning environments. Facilitators included recognition of social benefits, beliefs in learners' rights to education, and access to training and specialist support. Notably, there was no clear evidence that teachers' perceptions were directly shaped by Islamic values, despite thematic overlaps such as social responsibility and inclusion emerging in both Islamic discourse and teacher perspectives.

Choosing the Right School: Exploring the Factors that Influence the Decision-Making Process of Families of Children with Disabilities in Dubai

Zara Awan, Prithvi (The Developing Child Centre)

Against the backdrop of Dubai's cultural diversity and free-market model of private education—now moving toward a more inclusive philosophy—this study explores how parents of children with complex disabilities from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds make school placement decisions. Using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, the research follows the school placement journeys of five families, weaving together their lived experiences to illuminate an underexplored narrative. Findings indicate that, as in many parts of the world, parents in Dubai experienced heightened stress when seeking schools for their children with special educational needs (SEN), voiced frustration over the lack of readily available impartial information, and valued settings where their children were treated with kindness and empathy. Unique to Dubai, parents called for greater regulatory oversight in the hiring of learning support assistants and for centralized, transparent information on inclusive educational services and their quality.

This study aims to explore the school placement decision-making experiences of parents with children who have complex disabilities, focusing on families from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Dubai. It examines these decisions within the context of Dubai's culturally diverse environment and evolving private education sector that increasingly embraces inclusive philosophies. Parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Dubai, like those worldwide, faced high stress and frustration due to limited impartial information when choosing schools. They prioritized environments where their children

were treated with kindness and empathy. Unique to Dubai, parents highlighted the need for stronger regulatory oversight in hiring learning support assistants and called for centralized, transparent information on inclusive education services and quality.

Enhancing Dyscalculia Support in UAE Secondary Schools: A Mixed-Method Study of Challenges, Curriculum and Teaching Strategies.

Crisild Mullaji, Middlesex University

Abstract Dyscalculia, a lesser-known learning difficulty compared to dyslexia, is under-researched and insufficiently supported, especially in secondary education. Students face complex mathematical concepts and high-stakes exams without the necessary specialised support. International research focuses on early identification in younger children, but secondary students' needs are often overlooked, leading to ineffective engagement with standard math instruction. In the UAE, despite efforts towards inclusive education, support for dyscalculic students remains limited. This dissertation examines the lack of structured support for dyscalculic students in secondary education. Using a mixed-method approach, it combines quantitative and qualitative analyses of mathematics teachers' experiences. Surveys of 50 secondary math teachers from various UAE curricula provided quantitative data, identifying patterns in challenges and instructional strategies. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses using SPSS evaluated the relationships between teacher training, resources, and teaching effectiveness. Qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with five educators complemented the quantitative data. Thematic analysis with NVivo identified themes such as time constraints, resource limitations, and inadequate instructional methods. Teachers expressed frustration with the lack of a modified curriculum for dyscalculia. Findings highlight the need for enhanced professional development, additional resources, and curriculum modifications tailored to dyscalculic students. Quantitative analyses showed strong correlations between teacher training and instructional effectiveness, underscoring the need for specialised support. Teachers emphasised the importance of a dyscalculia-specific curriculum to help students engage with mathematical content. The study proposes a framework to enhance the secondary math curriculum with multisensory learning approaches, interactive tools, and real-world applications. It also advocates for sustained professional development and collaboration to equip teachers with the skills to support dyscalculic students effectively. This research offers valuable insights into inclusive education in the UAE, informing educational policy and practice by identifying key challenges and proposing practical solutions to improve educational outcomes for dyscalculic students.

The Story of Digital Collaboration: Developing a Teacher Learning Community (TLC) Using a Technology Tool

Amber Noor Mustafa, Florida State University

This study examines how a large private school system in Pakistan, spanning over 200 branches across eight countries, established a digital Teacher Learning Community (TLC) using Google Classroom to enhance professional collaboration, instructional support, and resource sharing. Following an organizational realignment in 2019 that decentralized decision-making and eliminated hierarchical structures, the TLC addressed the urgent need for scalable, consistent support across more than 150 school heads, 600 middle managers, and over 6,000 teachers, all supported by just 12 curriculum specialists at the Head Office. Grounded in DuFour's Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework (2007) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003), the initiative created subject and grade-specific Google Classrooms. This study evaluated TLC's impact using surveys, interviews, and content analysis. Findings showed that these digital spaces enabled peer collaboration, timely feedback, shared problem-solving, and resource access while overcoming geographical and logistical barriers and promoting reflective practices by recognizing the importance of support networks for effective teaching and learning (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). This resulted in increased teacher satisfaction, stronger professional networks, improved curriculum implementation, and enhanced collaborative practice. Google Classroom proved both effective and cost-efficient, leveraging existing organizational IT infrastructure. Challenges included varied digital literacy, inconsistent engagement, and resistance to moving away from a traditionally top-down culture to a dialogic one. Still, the initiative created a dynamic platform for professional dialogue and collaboration. Later, it enabled a seamless transition to online learning during COVID-19 when Google Classrooms were created for students too, ensuring continued learning and minimizing dropouts. Hence, this research underscores the transformative potential of technology-integrated professional learning communities. It offers a scalable model for places like the Gulf region, where strong technology infrastructure, ample resources and a vision for digital expansion can support digital networks to enhance collaboration and instructional quality.

Panel 12: "Early Years, Local Roots: Forest Pedagogies, Readiness Frameworks, and Digital Play"

The Lived Experiences of Staff Involved in Adapting a Forest School Model to Fit with the Local Culture and Environment in one Private School in the United Arab Emirates

Elaine Wright

Originating in Scandinavia, Forest School (FS) has been adopted in various forms globally. The approach is currently used in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is not the typical physical environment for FS. This study investigated the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a FS model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain. This qualitative study followed a hermeneutic approach and drew upon concepts from sociocultural theory and place based education. Data was collected through two open-ended, semi structured interviews with staff from a case study school, using interview guides structured around central themes of the research. Documents which met the inclusion criteria and were related to FS or the culture and schooling system of the UAE were also analysed. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that the FS pedagogy offers a flexible approach and encourages contextualisation. This was somewhat reflected in the changes which were made to the FS project under study. The most significant adaptation was the change of name from Forest School to Desert Discovery. Several local resources were incorporated into the physical area; juxtaposed with resources which did not reflect the local context. Recommendations include staff training to make practitioners aware of the freedom to adapt FS to the local environment, as well as intercultural awareness training enabling staff members to identify aspects of local culture which can be incorporated into FS. Input from a member of the local community would also aid this process.

The CBF Model: A Daily Framework for Enhancing Social-Emotional and Cognitive Readiness in Early Childhood Education

Hamdah Jibar Alhashmi, Claudine Habak, Joseph Agbenyega, Emirates College of Advanced Education

The CBF Model: A Daily Framework for Enhancing Social-Emotional and Cognitive Readiness in Early Childhood Education Abstract Recent data indicate that stress-related behaviors among children under the age of seven are on the rise (American Psychological Association, 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Such stress often manifests as emotional outbursts, anxiety, and difficulties adjusting to social and academic routines, potentially disrupting healthy development and early learning. In response, this paper introduces the CONNECT, BREATHE, FLOURISH (CBF) framework, a concise, five-minute daily practice designed to fortify both emotional resilience and cognitive engagement in early childhood settings. Grounded in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), the CONNECT component dedicates three minutes to structured social bonding, enabling children to share simple experiences and practice empathy. By contrast, BREATHE, informed by Mindfulness

Theory, involves two minutes of guided breathing exercises that support self-regulation and bolster focused attention. Rather than serving as a separate technique, FLOURISH, inspired by Positive Psychology and Self-Determination Theory, encapsulates the cumulative benefits, such as improved classroom engagement, emotional stability, and a stronger sense of belonging, that emerge when children's relational and regulatory needs are met. The proposed framework requires minimal resources and can be seamlessly integrated into existing schedules, such as morning circle time, with only brief educator training necessary for implementation. This paper outlines practical recommendations for adapting CBF to diverse cultural contexts, discusses preliminary indicators of its effectiveness, and explores policy implications for broader adoption. By targeting key facets of wellbeing and attention, the CBF framework offers an accessible, evidence-based approach that supports children's holistic development and lays a foundation for enduring academic and social success.

Linking Teachers' Perceptions of Digital Tools to Classroom Integration: Evidence from UAE Early Childhood Education

Hala Sukkar, Khadija Alhashmi, Antje Von Suchodoletz, New York University Abu Dhabi

With the rapid rise in technology integration in Early Childhood Education (ECE), it is important to understand teachers' perceptions of digital tools in the classroom. This study applies the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to examine teachers' perceived usefulness (PU) and ease of use (PEU) of technology. The following questions are addressed: How do teachers perceive the ease of use and usefulness of digital tools, and which teacher characteristics relate to these perceptions? How do these perceptions relate to the time teachers dedicate to digital activities? Survey data were collected from 315 ECE teachers in the UAE. Participants (75% female) were, on average, 36.5 years old. PU and PEU were measured using items from previous research in the GCC (Al-Abdullatif et al., 2022). Teachers also reported total time with children and time spent on digital activities, from which a proportional score was calculated. On average, 58.7% of classroom time was spent on digital activities. Teachers generally perceived digital tools as useful (PU; $M=4.12$) and easy to use (PEU: $M=4.14$), on a 5-point scale. Perceptions of ease of use were moderately correlated with perceived usefulness ($r_s=.55$, $p<.001$). Neither years of teaching experience nor grade level taught were significantly related to PU or PEU. A regression analysis examined whether PU or PEU were related to the proportion of time teachers dedicated to digital activities, controlling for experience, which was negatively associated with digital time ($r_s=-.42$, $p<.001$). PU was positively related to digital time ($\hat{I}^2 = .29$, $p < .001$), whereas PEU was not ($\hat{I}^2 = .05$, $p = .43$). These findings suggest that teachers who view digital tools as useful are more likely to integrate them into classroom. Supporting teachers in

understanding the pedagogical value of digital tools may be more impactful than focusing solely on improving technical ease of use.

Beyond the Classroom: Expatriate Homeschooling Experiences in the UAE

Janaan Farhat, Al Qasimi Foundation

Homeschooling has become an increasingly prevalent form of alternative education around the world, including within the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (AlDhaheri, 2024; Nandkeolyar, 2021). However, it remains a significantly under-researched topic, with few studies examining the experiences, attitudes, or perspectives of homeschoolers. This qualitative study provides an in-depth analysis of the experiences of 15 homeschooling families in the UAE, focusing on identifying applicable education laws and policies, reasons for parents to pursue homeschooling, and challenges faced by such families at the micro-, meso-, and macro- levels. Based on our case study, the findings suggest that some parents in the UAE, similar to other contexts, choose to homeschool to customize their children's education to their needs, reinforce family and religious values, navigate learning disabilities, and avoid perceived negative features of mainstream education. Some of the key challenges that parents face while they homeschool include pressures on the family unit, especially mothers as the primary learning facilitators, social stigma, and obstacles to re-entry to mainstream education at the school level as well as in relation to higher education domestically. In light of such challenges, our recommendations include facilitating the recognition of homeschooling, albeit with quality assurance measures, in addition to challenging social stigma and conducting further research on homeschooling.

Panel 13: “Inclusive by Design: Gender Policy, AI Pedagogies, and Whole-School Supports”

How Do Teacher Education Policies Address Gender Equity? Examining Global Discourses and Local Allocations in the United Arab Emirates

Ramona Saraoru, Cambridge University Press and Assessment

An increased interest in gender equity followed the SDG 4 imperative of inclusive and equitable quality education for all. This interest is a result of significant international scholarly attention to gender and equity in the last 15 years, such as the gender gap in student achievement and career opportunities for females. This interest and attention have been reflected in the local context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where scholarship has examined important aspects of gender equity, such as the implications on girls' science

careers, gender-related desire to learn and the gender achievement gap. However, scholarly attention has paid insufficient attention to education policies, particularly understanding how teacher education policies address gender equity issues. In this presentation, I seek to redress this gap by examining the nature of teacher education policies and their intersection with gender policies in the UAE. I used Rizvi and Lingard's (2009) framing of policy issues (contextual, discourse, textual, implementation, and outcome) to explore how global education policies attempt to address gender equity. Then, I examined how the policies of particular international organisations aim to align gender equity discourses with national contexts. Subsequently, I analysed the gender policies in the UAE and explored the nature of the local education policies. Finally, I analysed Teacher Professional Standards for the UAE, through a gender equity lens using Rizvi and Lingard's policy issue framework. I paid particular attention to policy framings, exploring how they authoritatively allocate value to gender matters. By doing so, I endeavour to offer a nuanced and comprehensive elucidation of gender equity as it relates to teacher education policy in the UAE.

AI-based Teaching: Connecting Inclusion to Education

Mariyah Ambreen, European International University

In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), particularly in Saudi Arabia (KSA), students with language disorders or delays are frequently denied admission to schools that identify as inclusive. This exclusion has created a significant gap in the education sector, leaving families with limited alternatives such as homeschooling or unschooling. Contributing factors include limited awareness, insufficient training, and reluctance to adopt AI-based and assistive technologies within educational practice. This qualitative study explores the role and perceived importance of AI-based teaching and intervention tools for children with language disorders. It examines how special educators, therapists, and parents perceive the integration of AI-supported applications—such as Speech Blubs, SymboTalk, and Articulation Station—compared to traditional tabletop therapy approaches. Data were generated through in-depth interviews with parents, educators, and therapists, alongside student observations, and were thematically analysed through the lens of motor learning theory. Findings indicate that AI-based tools and AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) strategies significantly enhance expressive and receptive language development by enabling repetitive practice, timely feedback, and individualized goal setting. Participants emphasized that proper training in AAC and evidence-based strategies such as Dynamic Temporal and Tactile Cueing (DTTC) can substantially improve educational outcomes. The study highlights the need for inclusive environments supported by AI-assisted proprioceptive and sensory activities, advocating for equitable learning

opportunities for children with language impairments across educational settings.

Whole-School Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): A Framework for Authentic Inclusive Education

Farah El Zein, Emirates College for Advanced Education

Contextualized within international movements and policies, this research-informed discussion offers an analytical perspective on the evolution, challenges, and future scaping of inclusive education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This study employs a policy analysis and conceptual research approach, drawing on international frameworks, UAE policy documents, and research evidence to critically examine inclusive education reform and propose a contextually grounded whole-school multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) model. Following the global shift from right-based advocacy to school-based needs and practices, the UAE's inclusive education policy laid a solid foundation and evident readiness to reframe inclusive education reform from one that stems from the medical model to a whole-school framework built upon the human capability model. Schools in the UAE continue to experience blockers to effective inclusive education planning and implementation, most of which stem from challenges related to school structure, resources, stakeholder attitudes and teacher readiness. Internationally, there exists a rich body of research evidence of effective inclusive practices; however, replication of such practices, if feasible, does not guarantee a similar favourable impact on learning due to contextual variances. Alternatively, home-grown planning, implementation, and evaluation of inclusive education support programs carries greater promise. These programs can be implemented in forms such as 1) special education through consultation, 2) specialized support services, 3) co-teaching, and 4) research-informed pedagogical innovations. An 'all hands on deck' enactment of inclusive education built on the premise of human capabilities enables education policy makers and school practitioners to rethink inclusive education beyond sharing physical space, learning resources, and facilities. To avoid educational segregation under "inclusive roofs", a model based on MTSS is proposed as a proactive data-driven approach to promote sustainable, authentic, inclusive education. Based on ongoing progress monitoring data, instructional decisions are made within a systemic process that drives the transformation of a school's ecosystem to one that achieves 'School for All' beyond sharing physical space.

Teaching with GRACE: A Human-Centered Framework for Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Hasan Johnson, New York University Abu Dhabi

This session explores how the GRACE Framework supports inclusive and engaging teaching in Gulf classrooms. GRACE (Growth, Respect, Access, Collaboration, and Engagement) positions teaching as a form of leadership rooted in empathy and fairness. Drawing on examples from K-12 and higher education in the UAE, the session illustrates how GRACE integrates with Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018), Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), and national inclusion policies for Students of Determination.

Participants will engage in reflective discussions demonstrating how to build psychological safety, promote student voice, and link course design to cultural and institutional contexts. GRACE encourages educators to shift from compliance and control toward purpose, belonging, and shared growth. Attendees will leave with strategies and teaching practices that enhance motivation, cultural responsiveness, and fairness, helping transform classrooms into spaces of flourishing and engagement.

Panel 14: From Tradition to Profession: Licensing, Texts, and Leadership Across Contexts
[Arabic Panel]

Professional Associations for Comparative Education as an Aspect of the Institutionalization of the Field (A Comparative Study)

Hanan Abd Elraheamm Alexandria University

يُعد ميدان التربية المقارنة أحد الميادين التربوية متعددة التخصصات، والتي يعود تاريخها كميدان أكاديمي منذ أواخر القرن التاسع عشر. إن إضفاء الطابع المؤسسي على الميدان لا يقتصر على الاعتراف الرسمي به وموقعه داخل الهيكل الأكاديمي للقسم أو الكلية فحسب. بل يشمل أيضاً تشكيل الجمعيات العلمية وأشكال أخرى من الشبكات الأكاديمية مثل المجلات العلمية والمؤتمرات. وتعمل الجمعيات العلمية على جمع مجتمع العلماء والممارسين ذوي الاهتمامات والهويات المشتركة، ونشر المعرفة التخصصية بشكل أكبر؛ مما يحمي الميدان، ويضع له حدوداً فارقة تميزه عن غيره. وعلى عكس أقدم الدورات والبرامج الجامعية للتربية المقارنة والتي كانت في أوائل القرن العشرين، لم يتم تأسيس جمعية للتربية المقارنة إلا في عام 1956 في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية والتي عرفت باسم "جمعية التربية المقارنة CIS" واعتبرت بهذا أول جمعية للتربية المقارنة في العالم. وتُعرّف البنية المؤسسية للتربية المقارنة بأنها: "الشبكات المُخصصة التي تعمل على وجه التحديد في تعريف وإنشاء وإعادة تنظيم ونقل التربية المقارنة- باعتبارها ميدان من الميادين المعرفية - من بين الجهات الفاعلة والوكالات الاجتماعية المخصصة لإنتاج التربية المقارنة، والتي تشمل الشبكات العلمية، والجمعيات المهنية، والمراكز الجامعية والمجلات المتخصصة. ويهدف البحث إلى وصف وتحليل الاتجاهات في إضفاء الطابع المؤسسي على ميدان التربية المقارنة، ويتخذ الجمعيات المهنية كوحدة للتحليل المقارن. ويقتصر على "الجمعية الأمريكية للتربية المقارنة والدولية"، و"جمعية هونج كونج للتربية المقارنة" كحالات للدراسة المقارنة؛ لتبيان كيف يمكن الاستفادة من الدراسة التحليلية المقارنة لهما في تفعيل دور الجمعية الخليجية للتربية المقارنة في مؤسسة الميدان. ويستخدم البحث الراهن أبعاد المنهجية المقارنة والمدخل الجينالوجي.

Identifying the Key Comprehension Skills for Fluent Readers in the Primary Schools for the Arabic Language: in Reference to the PIRLS2021 Reading Framework

Ibrahim Alamoush, Sharjah Education Academy

يهدف البحث استكشاف مهارات الفهم القرائي الأساسية لدى طلاب الصفين الرابع والخامس في المدارس الإماراتية الناطقة لتحديد المهارات والمستويات المرجعية للفهم. وينطلق البحث من إشكالية تدني أداء PIRLS 2021 بالعربية، معتمداً على إطار مقارنة بالمعدلات العالمية، رغم تطبيق العديد من التدخلات التربوية والسياسات (KDHA) PIRLS الطلاب العرب في اختبارات الإصلاحية، ومنها مبادرات مؤسسة القاسمي وهيئة المعرفة والتنمية البشرية. ويطبق البحث اختباراً مزدوج المستوى لتحديد لقراءة PIRLS2021 مهارات الفهم الأساسية للقراء الطليق في الصفوف الابتدائية لمادة اللغة العربية؛ بالإشارة إلى إطار (والنمذجة المعادلات البنائية لتفسير العلاقة بين IRT النصوص. لقياس الفهم القرائي باستخدام تحليل نظرية الاستجابة للمفردة) صعوبة عناصر التقييم ومستوى فهم الطلاب. يشمل تصميم الدراسة اختباراً تمهيدياً لقياس الطلاقة القرائية الشفوية كشرط أساسي لضبط المتغيرات المؤثرة في الأداء، ثم تقديم نصوص قراءة موحدة ومجموعة من أسئلة متعددة الخيارات وأسئلة استدعاء حر لتقييم الفهم على مستويين. يركز البحث على العلاقة بين تعقيد النص (من حيث التراكيب اللغوية، والمفردات، والتماسك) ومستوى الأداء في التقييم، ويوضح كيف يمكن أن تؤثر الخلفية المعرفية للطلاب في تفسير هذه العلاقة. كما يقترح الباحثان تطوير إطار في اللغة Flesch-Kincaid و Lexile عربي معياري قابل للقياس لتصنيف مستويات الفهم القرائي، ومماثل لإطار في الإنجليزية، لتوجيه تصميم المناهج والتقييمات بطريقة كمية وموحدة تتمثل المساهمة الرئيسة للبحث في تقديم قاعدة بيانات كمية تساعد على تطوير أدوات تقييم معيارية للقراءة باللغة العربية، وتعزيز استخدام تقنيات الذكاء الاصطناعي في التعليم المخصص، مما يفتح المجال لتجارب تعلم أكثر عدلاً وكفاءة في العالم العربي، خصوصاً للمتعلمين من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة.

Global Governance of Education: Its Roles in Shaping Policies and Guiding Decisions: An Analysis of the Omani Experience

Mubarak Aljabri, Oman Academic Accreditation Authority

Since the beginning of the 21st century, global governance of education has undergone profound transformations that have significantly influenced national education policymaking. International organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the OECD have played increasingly influential roles in generating global reference frameworks that define overarching educational standards and directions, reshaping the very notion of sovereignty in the educational field. This influence is evident in many countries' adoption of standards centered on quality, accountability, equity, and engagement with comparative assessment tools and data systems that link performance with global indicators. This paper explores the rise of global education governance systems by analyzing cross-border policies and their role in driving educational reform through three main channels: first, international assessment standards such as PISA and TIMSS; second, conditional funding mechanisms that tie aid to the adoption of specific policy orientations; and third, global development discourses—particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4,

which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education as a central reference in international reports and strategies. Within this context, the paper examines Oman's experience in establishing its School Performance Evaluation System, set to be officially implemented in the 2025/2026 academic year. This national mechanism for school governance integrates learning outcomes, the quality of the learning environment, teaching effectiveness, and leadership capacity. While based on international models, the framework has been adapted to Oman's cultural and social context, drawing on local studies to strike a balance between global aspirations and educational autonomy. The paper provides an analytical reading of this initiative, highlighting how national policy engages with global standards critically, seeking not just compliance but strategic redefinition.

Panel 15: “Margins and Mirrors: Exclusion, Expression, and Wellbeing in Gulf Education”

Out of Sight or Out of Mind? A Case Study of Out of School Children in the UAE

Janaan Farhat, Alyazyah Almarzooqi, Al Qasimi Foundation

Over the past decade, global school enrollment has increased by 110 million children following the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on education in 2015 (UNESCO, 2024). Despite this progress, the total population of out-of-school children has decreased by only 1%, and UNESCO's 2025 SDG 4 scorecard estimates 285 million children remain unenrolled worldwide, leaving countries off-track to meet the 2030 target (UNESCO, 2025). At the regional level, data on out-of-school children in the Gulf states remain limited. Non-national children face particular challenges, as public schooling is free for nationals while non-nationals must rely on private education (Ridge et al., 2016). In the United Arab Emirates, 1% of children remain out-of-school, with Ras Al Khaimah recording 2,267 children aged 6–16 not enrolled in 2023, 75% of whom are non-nationals (Ras Al Khaimah Statistics Center, 2023).

This ongoing study investigates the factors affecting non-national children who remain unenrolled in Ras Al Khaimah. Grounded in theories of distributive and social justice in education, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach using UNESCO's Five Dimensions of Exclusion (5DE) framework (UNICEF, 2015). Data collection includes over 50 semi-structured interviews with parents from Arab, South Asian, and African communities, complemented by document analysis of statistics and policy documents. Preliminary findings indicate affordability, accessibility, and cultural factors as primary barriers, including tuition costs, bureaucratic hurdles such as expired residency permits, lack of

documentation, and subtle gendered preferences in school enrollment. The study aims to inform targeted interventions and policy recommendations to support marginalized families, enhance access to education for non-national children, and uphold global principles of educational inclusivity in the UAE.

Empowering Gulf Classrooms with AI Storytelling: Teachers' Voices on Integrating Climate Literacy into Education

Ghadah Al Murshidi, United Arab Emirates University

The growing urgency of climate education has prompted Gulf educators to explore pedagogical models that merge sustainability, innovation, and cultural relevance. This study investigates how teachers in the United Arab Emirates perceive the use of AI-enhanced digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool for integrating climate change education into formal curricula. Drawing on survey data from 206 teachers across kindergarten to secondary levels, the research examines three interrelated dimensions of digital storytelling—scientific accuracy, emotional engagement, and gamified interaction—that collectively shape students' climate literacy. Findings reveal that teachers, especially at the foundational and secondary levels, recognize the potential of AI-driven narratives to enhance conceptual understanding, foster empathy toward environmental challenges, and sustain learner motivation through interactive design. However, concerns persist regarding teachers' readiness, ethical considerations, and alignment with national curriculum standards. By situating these findings within the GCC's broader educational reform agenda, the study highlights how climate-focused digital storytelling reflects evolving educational governance and technological integration in the region. The research offers evidence-based insights for policymakers and curriculum designers seeking to cultivate sustainability competencies, socio-emotional learning, and critical thinking in line with the UAE Net Zero 2050 strategy and the Gulf states' visions for educational innovation. It thus contributes to the discourse on reimagining pedagogy through technology-mediated, values-driven approaches in contemporary Gulf education.

From Pedagogy to Policy: Navigating Social Media's Role in Educational Support and Its Impact on Young Adult Mental Health in the UAE

Seemal Ali, Ajman American Private School

This study examines how social media impacts the educational outcomes and mental well-being of young adults (aged 18-24) in the UAE. Using a mixed-methods approach, the

research explores social media's dual role as both a source of educational support and emotional challenges. Quantitative findings, drawn from surveys involving 322 participants, highlight the significant role of informational support in enhancing mental well-being and academic engagement. Factor analysis identified six dimensions of online support, with notable gender differences in perceived benefits. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale and the Online Social Support Scale provided robust measures for this analysis. Qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews reveal that while social media fosters peer support and collaborative learning, it also contributes to distractions, anxiety, and unrealistic expectations. Participants emphasized the need for new tools and skills to balance productivity and mental health. This study not only highlights the importance of social media as a resource but also sheds light on its limitations, offering a clear connection between pedagogical challenges and the need for institutional policy. The findings are expected to inform educators' pedagogy and shape institutional policy in the UAE, paving the way for strategies to maximize social media's positive influence while mitigating its adverse effects in a practical practice.

Panel 16: “Universities Unbound: Pedagogy, Participation, and Professional Roles in the Age of AI”

First Year Learning Community Alternative Higher Education Pedagogy

Yara Azouqa, Abu Dhabi University

The First Year Learning Community is a flexible teaching and learning pedagogy in Higher Education. It can be adopted in different forms ranging from Living Learning Communities to Linked Courses Model. These forms and their variations can be seen in community colleges and universities alike, though mostly prevalent in North America, they have great potential for learners in Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates and the bigger Gulf region. This research highlights the pedagogy and potential of a First Year Learning Community in its Linked Courses Model by engaging with the relevant literature around First Year Learning Communities and social constructivist teaching pedagogies. In doing so, this study envisions First Year Learning Community as an alternative educational model in first year experience in Higher Education. This study explores how the First Year Learning Community program in Abu Dhabi University influenced learners' first year university experience and beyond. The research uses Barbara Rogoff's three planes of analysis to examine the participants' narratives within the framework of a single site, exploratory case study. Data was collected from 13 students and took place over two years which enabled capturing the lived experiences of students from their first to fourth year of study. The

findings highlight the need for Higher Education Institutions to reflect on teaching practices and reduce the dominance of the transmission mode of teaching by infusing social constructivist teaching pedagogies. Adopting the First Year Linked Courses model can be a transformative learning experience in Higher Education in the Gulf region.

Student Engagement in Digital Media Education in the U.A.E.

Gume Osorio, Higher Colleges of Technology

Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2020), this study explores how meeting students' basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) shapes motivation and learning in digital media education. SDT posits that fulfilling these needs fosters intrinsic motivation, leading to greater academic engagement and improved learning outcomes. A quantitative approach was used to measure motivation using the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI), the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction (BPNS) scale, and the Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ). Results show that students are primarily driven by enjoyment and the perceived value of coursework, indicating strong internalised motivation. Most feel autonomous and competent, suggesting a supportive learning environment. Students report high effort levels, further exploration is needed to distinguish between intrinsic engagement and workload-related pressure. Relatedness to peers scored lower, suggesting students may feel isolated in the learning environment or perceive a lack of opportunities for social connection. These findings highlight the need for strategies that can further strengthen student motivation and engagement in digital media education, such as fostering collaborative learning experiences, while maintaining autonomy-supportive practices and competence-driven feedback. This paper also offers a detailed discussion of teaching implications based on these results. Building on this foundation, future research could explore additional strategies to support motivation and engagement, particularly in relation to peer connection and workload management.

Reimagining Faculty Roles in the Age of AI: Insights from UAE Higher Education

Salma Waly, Sharjah Education Academy

Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to reshape the landscape of education, offering tools and possibilities that are transforming how knowledge is created, shared, and assessed. While significant attention has been given to AI integration in K-12 education, the impact of AI on higher education, particularly from the perspective of faculty, remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by presenting findings from a qualitative inquiry involving 10

university professors across various disciplines in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The aim is to examine how faculty members are navigating the integration of AI into their academic practices and professional identities. The study explores how AI is being used to support teaching, streamline research processes, and enhance student engagement. Professors described using AI for content generation, formative assessment, feedback automation, data-driven curriculum design, and literature synthesis. In doing so, many found their roles shifting, from traditional knowledge transmitters to facilitators, curators, and data-informed decision-makers. At the same time, faculty expressed concerns about ethical implications, academic integrity, and the need for institutional policies that guide AI use responsibly. By centering the voices of educators, this paper provides practical insights into the opportunities and challenges AI presents in university contexts. The findings emphasize the importance of targeted professional development, interdisciplinary dialogue, and a reimagining of faculty support systems to ensure that AI is not only adopted but meaningfully embedded into higher education. For academic leaders, policymakers, and researchers, this study offers strategic considerations on how to foster innovation while maintaining pedagogical integrity. It also contributes to the growing conversation about preparing educators to teach, research, and lead in an era shaped by technological transformation.

Beyond the Curriculum: Exploring the Transformative Impact of Social and Emotional Development on Teacher Growth

Maram Al Aqra, Sharjah Education Academy

Social and emotional Learning (SEL) has become an increasingly important component of teacher professional development, aiming to prepare teachers to assist their students' emotional well-being. However, limited research has explored SEL as a foundation for teachers' personal identity, self-growth, and emotional well-being. This autoethnographic reflection draws on my personal and professional experiences designing and delivering a course on social and emotional learning and development for in-service teachers in the UAE. The course focused on essential SEL components such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making, emphasizing self-reflection and personal development. The course created a safe and supportive environment that encouraged teachers to explore their emotional strengths and challenges. Assignments were developed to assess content understanding and provide a healing and growth-oriented experience that fostered deep self-connection and critical self-awareness. As I facilitated this process, I also experienced a profound shift in my own perspective as both an educator and a learner. Reflecting on this experience, I found that while professionally accountable for

supporting kids through emotional challenges, many in-service teachers frequently lacked core SEL qualities. Self-awareness, in particular, emerged as a transforming element, allowing for deeper emotional insight and more authentic classroom interactions. This narrative highlights the obstacles, tensions, and transformative moments experienced throughout the course, emphasizing the importance of incorporating social and emotional learning into teacher education. Despite its transformative potential, SEL receives little attention in many teacher education programs. This perspective proposes that SEL be a fundamental and intentional part of all teacher education curricula as a core component of professional and personal growth.

Panel 17: “From Wellbeing to AI: Creativity, Belonging, and Pedagogy in Higher Education”

Boundless Community of Practice: A Developing Disability Arts Movement

Sarah Benson, University of Birmingham

Individual organizations in Jordan have been working to increase participation of individuals with disabilities in the arts as a tool for creating visibility, amplifying marginalized voices, and disrupting normative narratives. While these isolated efforts had limited impact, a cohesive community of practice emerged that led to the first Amman Arts and Disability Summit. This movement brings together youth, artists, and gallery owners using social learning models and communities of practice to create a more inclusive arts community. The movement is positioned to create lasting change for disabled artists and audiences as spaces and people work to dismantle barriers in Jordan. Leaders view the arts as a means of transforming how disability is perceived and understood within Jordanian society. This presentation shares the collective efforts of Jordan's disability arts movement by tracking value creation from the developing community of practice. The research provides value-creation stories from initiatives emerging from a university-based project that evolved into a community-developed and led initiative. Using Wenger's Communities of Practice framework and Value-Creation Framework as theoretical guides, the study examines how an arts and disability community developed in Amman. The longitudinal and iterative data collection approach gathered both personal and collective narratives to understand complex learning within the community of practice. The presentation will be shared as impact stories, developed from individual stories, interviews, and reflections with amalgamated emergent themes. These stories represent the ripples created by Jordan's arts practitioners committed to inclusive spaces and projects, offering evidence of how collective energy can drive community-based change.

Children's Emotional Intensity and Wellbeing in School Contexts Through Art-Based Methodologies

Maria Luisa Menano, Zayed University, Ieda M. Santos, Claudine Habak, Tasneem Amatullah, Sumaya Saqr, Emirates College of Advanced Education

Art-based methodologies are useful communication tools for school children to express their emotions through creative expression, which is particularly important with the UAE's recent focus on wellbeing. Children benefit from using these methodologies for emotional exploration, which helps them understand their feelings while communicating their challenges. The concept of emotional intensity is a valuable approach to help teachers and researchers understand the varying levels of emotional experience in children, and how it relates to children's wellbeing. School children's emotions have been explored consistently but emotional intensity is less frequently addressed and can be useful in supporting children and their teachers in better understanding the impact of children's emotions on learning. In addition, art-based methods to assess children's emotions rely on different methods such as pictures, drawings, and surveys, which can be less informative for emotional intensity. Here, we share the results of a study conducted with a partner school in the UAE to address children's wellbeing in school. The study investigated children's emotional intensity using an innovative approach to record children's feelings according to intensity, using shape and form techniques that stand out from traditional drawing-based research methods. Patterns of children's emotional intensity are presented with a novel visualization approach for educators and researchers to better understand children's needs in schools. The method can be implemented easily and rapidly in classroom and school settings, its resulting patterns and their implications for practice are discussed relative to the international body of work and the region.

From the Inside Out: Cultivating Mental Well-Being, Resilience, and Tolerance in Higher Education

Saman Hussain, New York University Abu Dhabi

As universities worldwide and in the region face a rise in mental health concerns among students, there is an urgent need to reimagine well-being in higher education. This presentation explores an “inside-out” approach to well-being, one that begins with values-driven living, self-knowledge and meaning.

Drawing on insights from faith traditions and contemporary mental health research, the

session highlights how reconnecting students with meaning, purpose, and character can nurture resilience, emotional balance, and tolerance for ambiguity. By cultivating inner awareness and coherence, learners become better equipped to navigate uncertainty, difference, and the pressures of modern academic life.

This approach also offers a counterpoint to the reactive and polarized dynamics often seen in “cancel culture,” encouraging empathy, reflection, and humility in dialogue. Participants will be invited to consider how higher education institutions can foster environments that support both psychological flourishing and moral-spiritual growth, enabling students, and the community as a whole, to thrive as whole human beings, not just achievers.

Student Engagement in Digital Media Education in the U.A.E.

Gume Osorio, Higher Colleges of Technology

This study explores the motivation of Applied Media students at HCT Abu Dhabi using Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a framework. By understanding the intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing student engagement, the research aims to provide insights into how students experience their coursework and what drives their participation. Additionally, this study seeks to suggest teaching strategies that can enhance motivation and student engagement in digital media courses.

Panel 18: “Reforming from Above and Below: Governance, Gifted Education, and Policy Borrowing” (Arabic Panel)

Governance of Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman in Light of the Experiences of Countries: A Comparative Study

Ali Said Al Matari, A'Sharqiyah University, Safa Cherkaoui, Mohammed V University

تشكل حوكمة التعليم العالي ركيزة أساسية لتحقيق التميز الأكاديمي والمسؤولية الاجتماعية، حيث تعتمد فلسفتها على توازن دقيق بين المبادئ النظرية والتطبيق العملي. فمن خلال تفعيل مبادئ المساءلة والمشاركة والشفافية، تصبح الجامعات قادرة على تعزيز الثقة الداخلية والخارجية، وضمان كفاءة استخدام الموارد، وتحسين جودة المخرجات التعليمية. كما أن الالتزام بمبدأ الواقعية يضمن عدم انفصال التشريعات عن الممارسة الفعلية، بينما يعزز مبدأ حفظ الحقوق بيئة جامعية عادلة تدعم الإبداع والاستقرار. منهجياً، تعتمد الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي المقارن، حيث يتم أولاً وصف وتحليل نظام الحوكمة في التعليم العالي بسلطنة عمان من حيث التشريعات، والبنى المؤسسية، وآليات صنع القرار، ثم مقارنته بنماذج مختارة من دول رائدة في هذا المجال (المملكة المتحدة، والولايات المتحدة الأمريكية)، وبعض دول الخليج (المملكة العربية السعودية، والإمارات العربية المتحدة)، وذلك بهدف رصد أوجه التشابه والاختلاف واستخلاص الدروس المستفادة.

وتُطبق هذه المنهجية من خلال ثلاث مراحل مترابطة:

1. التحليل الوصفي لواقع الحوكمة في سلطنة عمان اعتماداً على مراجعة الأدبيات والدراسات الوطنية والتشريعات الرسمية ذات الصلة.
 2. التحليل المقارن لتجارب الدول المختارة من خلال تحليل سياساتها ووثائقها الرسمية ومؤشرات الأداء ذات العلاقة.
 3. التحليل الاستنتاجي لاستخلاص النتائج والتوصيات المناسبة لتطوير حوكمة التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان.
- وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الإجابة عن السؤال الرئيس التالي: كيف يمكن تحسين حوكمة التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان بناء على تجارب الدول الأخرى؟
- ويتفرع منه الاسئلة الفرعية التالية:
1. ما مفهوم حوكمة التعليم العالي، وكيف يمكن تطبيقه في سلطنة عمان مقارنة بالدول الأخرى؟
 2. ما الهيكلية المؤسسية وآليات اتخاذ القرار في حوكمة التعليم العالي في (سلطنة عمان والدول الأخرى)، وكيف يمكن لسلطنة عمان الاستفادة منها؟
 3. ما التحديات الرئيسية التي تواجه حوكمة التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان، وكيف تم التعامل معها بناء على تجارب الدول الأخرى؟
 4. كيف تؤثر حوكمة التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان على جودة التعليم والبحث العلمي مقارنة بتجارب الدول الأخرى؟
 5. ما هي الدروس المستفادة من تجارب الدول الأخرى لتحسين حوكمة التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان؟
 6. ما أفضل الممارسات التي يمكن تكييفها مع سلطنة عمان بناء على التحليل المقارن؟

The Impact of the Principal's Educational Leadership Practices on the Reaching Effectiveness of Private School Teachers in Muscat Governorate

Mona Eldally, Waheed Hamaad, Alsaheed Alshami, Ehab Amara, Sultan Qaboos University

The current study aimed to reveal the impact of the principal's instructional leadership practices on teaching effectiveness among private school teachers in Muscat Governorate. It also aimed to reveal statistically significant differences in the sample members' perceptions of these two variables according to gender and years of experience of the school principal. The descriptive approach was used in its quantitative form to answer the study questions. To measure the level of instructional leadership practices, the school principal's instructional leadership scale developed by Hallinger and Wang (2015) was used. The teaching effectiveness scale developed by Liu and Hallinger (2016) was also used. The study sample consisted of (150) male and female teachers from private schools in Muscat Governorate, with 89 females (56%) and 70 males (44%). Arithmetic means, standard deviations, and multiple regression analysis were calculated to answer the study questions. The results revealed high levels of teaching effectiveness among teachers. They also revealed

a high level of educational leadership practices among school principals across three dimensions: setting school goals, supervising curriculum delivery, and promoting a positive school learning environment. The results also revealed no statistically significant differences attributable to gender, nor were there statistically significant differences in educational leadership attributable to the school principal's years of experience. The results indicated the ability of educational leadership to predict teaching effectiveness among the study sample, as educational leadership explained 20% of teachers' teaching effectiveness. In light of the study results, several recommendations were proposed regarding enhancing educational leadership practices in schools by developing school principals' skills in the three main areas of educational leadership.

Achieving Sustainability in E-Learning: A Technological Approach in a Dynamic Educational Context

Heba Nuseibah, Sharjah Education Academy, Mohammad Abu Baker, Ministry of Education and Higher Education – Palestine

This study aims to explore the efforts of an educational directorate in a developing region within a low-resource context to promote sustainable e-learning practices that may contribute to improving the educational process. The study employs a descriptive methodology to analyze the key challenges and obstacles that may affect the success and long-term viability of e-learning initiatives in this setting. A purposive sample of seventeen participants directly involved in implementing e-learning comprising officials from the educational directorate and school principals was selected. Primary data were collected through interviews and direct observations. This study differs from previous research by focusing on a specific educational directorate within a sensitive geographic context and by examining the extent to which sustainability in e-learning implementation has been achieved at the institutional level. Rather than relying on traditional survey methods, this study adopts qualitative tools, interviews, and observations to gain in-depth insights into the implementation and follow-up of e-learning programs across different educational levels. Initial findings indicate a relative readiness among the directorate and some schools to adapt to future changes, particularly in light of ongoing and evolving epidemiological challenges. There are also clear indicators of progress toward achieving the long-term sustainability of e-learning within this educational environment. The study concludes with practical recommendations aimed at enhancing the resilience of the educational system in the face of future crises. It also contributes to global discussions on education policy and governance by offering a localized example of efforts to address power imbalances and improve educational sustainability in developing contexts, while emphasizing the importance of including

marginalized populations and confronting the lingering impacts of systemic influences in international education and development.

Panel 19: Leaders Who Learn: Curriculum Continuity, Authentic Practice, and Emotional Intelligence

Leadership Practices and Pedagogical Continuity in KG Curriculum Reforms in Abu Dhabi

Asma Awadh, Tasneem Amatullah, Emirates College of Advanced Education

This study investigates how school leaders maneuver curriculum reform implementation in Abu Dhabi's kindergarten schools, where curricular changes have been recurring to achieve national visions and a quality education system. Utilizing a qualitative methodology through semi-structured interviews with eight educational leaders, including superintendents, principals, vice principals, and heads of faculty, the study explores how school leaders support teacher engagement for successful integration of curriculum reforms in their schools. Findings revealed that emotionally intelligent leadership was central to building trust and school culture. Leaders employed distributed, transformational, and instructional leadership strategies to foster collaboration, tailor professional development, and maintain alignment with evolving policy demands. Leaders supported curriculum alignment by integrating elements of the previous curriculum to fill content gaps. Effective professional development emerged as an essential tool for reform implementation, consisting of peer coaching, feedback, and workshops. Leaders implemented gradual change, delegation, and internal capacity-building to overcome staff shortages and teacher resistance. Additionally, leaders form academic committees to promote shared decision-making and vision-setting. These findings offer insights into leadership training, curriculum policy design, and school improvement planning within early childhood contexts aligned with the UAE's national education reforms. This study aligns strongly with the "Pedagogical frameworks, teachers' qualifications, and professional development" conference theme, exploring leaders' roles in supporting teacher professional development to integrate new curricular reforms successfully. It also overlaps with the theme "Nationalization policies, educational visions, and Gulf policies" directly sharing practical insights into how school leadership can contribute to realizing national education visions within the Gulf context.

Homeschooling, what is the most suitable format for the Gulf Arab countries?

Rashid Al-Fahdi, Sultan Qaboos University

Homeschooling is one of the educational patterns that emerged in the mid-20th century,

aiming to provide education to children aged 6 to 17 years. Students receive their education at home without attending public, private, or religious schools, although they may partially enroll in public or private schools for no more than 25 hours a week. The teacher can be one of the parents, both parents, relatives, siblings, or possibly private tutors. The sources of education vary and include books, museums, trips, libraries, clubs, the internet, competitions, and more. There are multiple forms of homeschooling, including unit-based homeschooling, selective homeschooling, non-school homeschooling, parallel education, flexible education, open education, and electronic education. This illustrates the overlap of several models with homeschooling, which may be attributed to the undefined concept of this educational style. Additionally, modern technology with its various concepts has permeated all systems and models of modern education. In the Gulf Arab countries, there are some practices for this type of education. In Saudi Arabia, a complete enrollment system (home education) has been approved, which is considered a more flexible means than the traditional education system known in conventional classrooms. In Oman, the School Education Law was issued which stipulated in Article 46 the allowance of home study or distance learning for students whose circumstances require them not to attend regular classes. This paper will attempt to answer the following questions by examining previous studies and policies adopted in the Gulf Arab countries: 1. What is the concept of home education? Can it be isolated from other non-school educational patterns? 2. Are there organized policies for home education in the Gulf Arab countries? 3. What are the actual applications of home education in the Gulf Arab countries? 4. What is the most suitable format for implementation in the Gulf Arab countries?

Exploring Principals' Perspectives on the Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Professional Development for Primary School Teachers in Sharjah East, UAE

Aisha Aldhouri, Ministry of Education

This study explores how transformational leadership is perceived and implemented by school principals and vice principals to enhance professional development for primary school teachers in Sharjah East, United Arab Emirates. While the UAE continues to implement large-scale educational reforms aligned with UAE Vision 2030, persistent challenges such as teacher resistance to innovation, administrative workload, and a lack of structured professional development opportunities continue to hinder progress in many public schools. The aim was investigated by conducting a qualitative phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of 8 school leaders from government primary schools. Information was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method. The following three key themes were developed based on the findings: (1) empowering and motivating teachers through shared vision and

collaboration, (2) overcoming resistance to educational change, and (3) building sustainable professional development aligned with long-term school goals. Participants described using strategies such as distributed leadership, peer mentorship, individualized support, and professional learning communities (PLCs) to enhance teacher engagement and instructional capacity. Despite institutional and cultural constraints, the study found that principals who adopted flexible and context-sensitive transformational leadership practices were more successful in cultivating motivated and confident teaching environments. The findings of this study contribute to the literature of transformational leadership in Arabic-speaking educational contexts and have a practical impact on school leaders, policy makers, and teacher preparation programs alike. Finally, especially within the UAE context, transformational leadership is still a relevant model for sustainably and effectively invigorating teacher development and school improvement in an operationally aligned partnership with its national educational agenda.

Exploring Educational Leaders' Perspectives on Emotional Intelligence Skills in Early Childhood Education in Abu Dhabi

Shaikha Alameri, Michelle Kelly, Emirates College of Advanced Education

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is widely recognized as a critical issue in leading and leadership. The study aims to provide evidence of the role of EI from the early childhood school leaders' perspective in Abu Dhabi that they consider essential to use in their leadership practices. The study also seeks to contribute to developing effective leadership practices by providing recommendations for leadership training programs and policy making. Prior literature has highlighted a surprising lack of published studies that investigate the emotional intelligence of school leaders in early childhood context. The study taken by Blaik Hourani (2021) is a notable one which emphasizes that there are certain qualities that school leaders need to put in practice to have a healthy learning environment that help to thrive academically. This is a qualitative exploratory approach was used data collected through semi-structured interview sessions involving 10 purposely selected early childhood school leaders in Abu Dhabi, analyzed through thematic analysis to identify EI skills leader utilized in their leadership practices. Each interview lasted for 40 min. One finding that this study revealed that early childhood school leaders emphasized that self-awareness and self-regulation are paramount for effective leadership in respect to emotional intelligence. Leaders should have interpersonal skills to be influential and be able to create a collaborative environment and resolve conflicts. Another finding showed that school leaders used to follow certain strategies to navigate and overcome challenges. Last finding leaders highlighted the need to enhance EI skills through targeted professional development, ongoing support initiatives,

and integration within the policy framework. This study helped to build a clearer insight of the importance of how emotional intelligence skills can critically impact the quality of building effective school leadership not only in primary and secondary school but most importantly in early childhood context.

Day 3: Presentation Abstracts

Panel 20: “EdTech with Intent: Authentic Assessment, Sustainable E-Learning, and AI for Teaching”

EdTech and the Future of Learning in the Gulf: Disrupting Traditional Pedagogies in a Post-COVID Era

Kamal Tasiu, Istanbul University

The swift proliferation of educational technology in the Gulf, catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, has fundamentally altered the frameworks of teaching and learning. This paper explores the transformative impact of AI-driven learning platforms, digital classrooms, and virtual assessments on the educational landscape, while highlighting disparities in digital equity, educator readiness, and policy implementation. It evaluates the adoption of educational technology across Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain, illustrating the region's distinct challenges and advancements in EdTech. Governments have integrated technology to improve access to learning; however, disparities persist due to inconsistent infrastructure, limited digital literacy, and socio-economic inequalities. Using policy analysis, this study examines governmental documents, institutional reports, and case studies to assess the effectiveness of these strategies in achieving equitable educational outcomes. Although AI-powered tools have enhanced individualized learning experiences, their algorithmic dependence raises concerns regarding bias, equity, and data privacy. AI's reliance on historical data may perpetuate existing inequalities, underscoring the need for ethical frameworks within Gulf education systems. The transition to online and hybrid models has also increased teacher workloads and widened achievement gaps among students lacking digital access. Findings indicate that while AI-based platforms support personalized learning, unequal technological access continues to exacerbate disparities. The study recommends a balanced approach—leveraging digital tools while preserving the inclusivity and adaptability of traditional pedagogies. Policymakers must address digital literacy, equitable access, and the ethical use of AI to ensure technology enhances rather than hinders educational opportunity. Strengthening professional development for educators and implementing robust policies to bridge the digital divide are critical steps forward. Ultimately, the research underscores the need for Gulf States to align educational technology adoption with broader educational goals, ensuring that digital innovation advances equity and resilience in the post-pandemic era.

Family Engagement, Student Engagement, and Science Achievement: A Comparative Study of UAE and Singapore

Othman Abu Khurma, Emirates College for Advanced Education

The present study examines the impact of Family Engagement (FE) on Science Achievement (SA), moderated by country and mediated through Student Engagement (StEng), among students from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Singapore (SGP). The respective items on FE and StEng were analyzed using structural equation modeling partial least squares (SEM-PLS) with the PISA 2022 database. Participants included 259 students (n = 196 UAE; n = 63 SGP), all of whom answered all relevant questions. The outcomes showed a significant effect of FE on StEng (path coefficient: 0.25) and a significant impact of StEng on SA (path coefficient: 0.23), highlighting the mediating effect of StEng. While country was not found to be a moderating factor for FE and StEng (-0.06, p = 0.80), country-specific analysis revealed that SGP had a stronger effect of FE on StEng and SA (path coefficient: 0.18) than UAE (0.04). SA was confirmed with substantial (0.93–0.95) and acceptable (> 0.5) loadings for StEng and FE, respectively. Nevertheless, the relatively poor R-square values for both StEng (0.07) and SA (0.10) indicate limited explanatory power. These trends reflect nuanced relationships across cultural contexts between FE, StEng, and SA, with implications for tailoring family engagement efforts that leverage cultural differences to maximize academic benefits. This study contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics of science achievement and the variables influencing it across cultures, offering practical recommendations for policymakers and educators seeking to improve students' outcomes in science.

Teachers' Perspectives on Authentic Assessment: Implications for Student Engagement and Learning in UAE Private Schools

Nasreen Banu, Diyar Private Academy

As the United Arab Emirates (UAE) continues implementing education reforms aligned with its national agenda and Vision 2071, the shift toward competency-based, student-centered learning necessitates rethinking traditional assessment practices. Authentic assessments that evaluate students through real-world, meaningful tasks are increasingly recognized for their potential to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and engagement. Yet, limited research exists on how teachers in UAE schools perceive and implement these assessments, especially in relation to student learning outcomes and institutional support. This study adopts a convergent mixed methods design to explore UAE teachers' perspectives on authentic assessments. Quantitative data from 332 teacher surveys were integrated with qualitative insights from 15 semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that teachers widely regard authentic assessments as effective in enhancing student motivation, engagement, and deep learning. However, challenges such as time constraints, inconsistent rubrics, limited

training, and lack of administrative support hinder successful implementation. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the study highlights both the pedagogical value and systemic limitations of authentic assessments within the UAE context. It offers practical recommendations for schools and policymakers, including the need for structured professional development, clearer assessment policies, and leadership support to enable meaningful integration. The study contributes to ongoing national conversations around assessment reform by emphasizing teacher agency and the importance of context-specific implementation strategies. Ultimately, this research underscores that while authentic assessments align well with the UAE's educational priorities, their impact depends on institutional readiness and sustained policy support. This study provides actionable insights for improving assessment practices in UAE schools by bridging classroom realities and reform agendas. Keywords: Authentic Assessment, UAE Education, Student Engagement, Teacher Perspectives, Assessment Reform, Policy Support

School Leaders' Role in Integrating AI Tools to Enhance Teachers' Performance

Fatima Al Ketbi, Ministry of Education

Leadership is key in guiding the adoption of AI in schools. Transformational leadership has been found to foster collaboration, innovation, and experimentation in the educational context (Davis, 2024). However, the role of school leaders in integrating AI tools, particularly ChatGPT, to enhance teachers' performance in the classroom has not yet received sufficient attention, particularly in the UAE. This study investigates the vital role of school leaders in offering strategic support for integrating AI technologies to enhance teaching and learning activities within their schools. It examines how leadership strategies can improve teachers' performance and address challenges in implementing AI technology. This study utilizes a qualitative, phenomenological approach with purposive sampling to select six school leaders and eight teachers from two schools in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and focus group discussions to gain insight into real-life practices and leadership approaches. Findings indicate that transformational and participatory leadership have fostered a school environment conducive to digital innovation. Leaders who actively model AI use and provide ongoing professional development help reduce barriers and increase teacher engagement. Variations in AI tools adoption among teachers were linked to the level of leadership support and access to training. The study concludes that school leaders are vital in enabling AI's successful and ethical integration in classrooms. It recommends developing AI-focused leadership frameworks, institutional training programs, and clear policy guidelines to support sustainable AI adoption and enhance teacher performance.

Panel 21: “Business (Re)Educated: Recruitment, Retention, and Workforce Pathways”

Narrative Intelligence in Leadership: Rethinking Business Education Through Literary Thinking in the UAE

Réka Balog, American University of Sharjah

As UAE institutions expand business education – particularly by making Innovation and Entrepreneurial Mindset classes mandatory, curricula are increasingly designed to align with national goals for economic transformation. However, this expansion often emphasizes tools, strategy, and market-driven models, while overlooking many of the qualities most essential to effective leadership: vision, ethical reasoning, empathy, and the capacity to communicate meaningfully. These attributes are rarely developed through technical instruction alone. This presentation proposes a new direction for business pedagogy: integrating literary thinking and narrative imagination into leadership and innovation education. Drawing on my dual teaching role at the American University of Sharjah, in the Business department and teaching business and English at Middlesex University Dubai, the session reflects on how storytelling, metaphor, and reflective reading can inform leadership development and entrepreneurial mindset. The argument is not that business students should study literature as a separate subject, but that literary modes of thinking can enhance how they learn to lead, persuade, and envision change. The presentation explores early-stage findings and classroom reflections, along with plans for future research including qualitative interviews with UAE-based entrepreneurs and educators. It also invites dialogue on bridging disciplines and challenging traditional divides in university structures – particularly those that separate “soft” from “practical” knowledge. In line with the GCES 2025 theme of pedagogy, policy, and praxis, this session contributes to ongoing conversations about how higher education in the Gulf can move beyond content delivery toward transformative learning. It proposes that cultivating “narrative intelligence” may be one of the most powerful, yet overlooked tools in preparing students to become visionary, ethical, and human-centered leaders.

Recruiting International Students: Prospects and Challenges for the UAE

Hayfa Jafar, American University of Iraq

Recent statistics from UNESCO reveal a significant rise in the number of foreign students pursuing education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), reaching 237,034 in 2023, more than

double the figure from a decade ago (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024). In Dubai, international student enrolment rose by 25 percent in 2023, with foreign students comprising one-third of the private university population (KHDA, 2024). The inbound mobility ratio stands at 70 percent, including UAE residents, surpassing traditional international education destinations such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. Despite this rapid growth, scholarly inquiry into the underlying drivers remains limited. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining institutional and governmental policies shaping international student recruitment in the UAE. This research investigates institutional-level strategies and how immigration policies are leveraged to attract international students. It addresses key questions: What is the UAE's policy environment regarding recruitment? What rationales guide institutional and governmental efforts? What pull factors and strategies are employed by universities? Adopting a qualitative approach, this study includes semi-structured interviews with university administrators and marketing personnel at five public and private universities (including American-style universities and International Branch Campuses). Relevant policies, strategies, and promotional materials were critically analyzed. Preliminary findings indicate that universities adopt talent-oriented recruitment, agent networks in targeted regions, and market alignment strategies. Pull factors include education quality, rankings, scholarships, and safety. A key rationale is to sustain international identity and position institutions, and the UAE more broadly, as a global hub for higher education.

Reimagining Nurse Recruitment through Digital Pedagogy: A Design-Based Study on Professional Identity MOOCs

Moortooza Puttaroo, Aston University

Global shortages in the nursing workforce have prompted renewed focus on recruitment strategies that move beyond conventional, institution-bound pathways. This study offers a timely and innovative response through the design and evaluation of a Professional Nursing Identity (PNI) Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), created to engage and attract prospective student nurses. Grounded in an Educational Design-Based Research (EDBR) framework, the project was delivered in four iterative stages: stakeholder engagement, pilot testing, refinement, and full-scale implementation. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study assessed the MOOC's impact through pre- and post-surveys, online quizzes, discussion board analysis, and participant interviews. Findings revealed that the MOOC significantly enhanced learners' understanding of nursing as a profession, fostered critical self-reflection, and positively influenced participants' career decision-making. Evaluation using RE-AIM and the Kirkpatrick Model demonstrated strong reach, learner engagement,

and practical relevance” with implications for recruitment and professional development across diverse contexts. This research contributes to comparative education discourse by offering an alternative, open-access digital pathway to professional formation, one that is scalable and adaptable across global contexts, including the Gulf region. It challenges traditional paradigms of teacher qualification and professional identity development by placing learner agency, narrative exploration, and reflective practice at the heart of recruitment. Moreover, it signals how EdTech and MOOCs can support nationalisation policies and workforce planning in the GCC, particularly in contexts where health systems rely heavily on expatriate labour. By disrupting normative educational models, this study provides evidence for rethinking pedagogy and policy in the service of health workforce sustainability” a priority shared across the Gulf and beyond.

Teaching Higher-Order Thinking Skills in the Age of AI: Perspectives from Graduate Educators in the Arab Region

David Palfreyman, United Arab Emirates University

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence into education has prompted urgent questions about how we develop students' higher-order thinking skills. While AI can efficiently handle lower-order cognitive tasks like information recall and basic comprehension, its impact on developing students' analytical, evaluative, and creative capacities remains uncertain—and potentially concerning. This presentation reports findings from a survey of graduate program educators. The survey explores educators' current practices in developing thinking skills, their use of structured pedagogical frameworks, and their experiences with how AI availability has affected both their teaching and their students' learning approaches. Key findings reveal educators' most pressing challenges in fostering critical and creative thinking, their perceptions of AI as either threat or opportunity, and their identification of professional contexts where graduates must exercise independent thinking without AI assistance. The data illuminates the crucial role of oracy—structured verbal communication—in developing robust thinking skills that transcend technological dependence. Drawing on frameworks including Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, oracy pedagogy, and concepts of "co-intelligence," this presentation offers insights into how educators across diverse Arab contexts are navigating the tension between leveraging AI's affordances and preserving the distinctively human cognitive capabilities that graduate education aims to develop.

Panel 22: “International by Design: Branding, Bilingual Frameworks, and Sustainability in Schools”

Between Image and Identity: Experiences of Branding in British Schools in the UAE

Rachel Deyis, University of Aberdeen

This paper discusses the branding strategies of British secondary schools in the United Arab Emirates, offering novel insights into how British education is consumed and adapted in transnational contexts, with implications for inclusivity practices in international schooling. Over the last decade, the rapid growth of the private education sector in the UAE has given rise to an elite, international school market catering to both middle and upper class expatriate populations. British schools are amongst the most prominent in this landscape, with high levels of competition producing greater emphasis on schools' brand identities as they compete to attract the top clientele. While existing scholarship on secondary education in the region has explored the internationalization of the sector and its impact on national and migrant identities in the Gulf, the role of branding in shaping British international schools in the UAE and its impact on transnational and often largely South-Asian and Arab student bodies, has yet to be addressed. The paper closes this research gap by studying the branding strategies of one such school, with the aim of critically examining how branding narratives interact with regional racialized and classed discourses of elite cosmopolitanism, and how students and teachers negotiate these discourses through everyday practices. Situated at the intersection of education anthropology and Gulf migration studies, the paper builds upon scholarship about international schools as "branded spaces" that reproduce social hierarchies and spatialized exclusions. Understood as a lived and often contested process within everyday school life, the paper argues that branding materially shapes school spaces, pedagogy and policy in ways which often privilege whiteness. Through participatory and visual ethnographic approaches, the paper foregrounds student perspectives to reveal how branding is variously co-opted, resisted and re-interpreted by students, exposing crucial conflicts between institutional aspirations and students needs within an increasingly corporatized educational landscape.

Sustainability in International Education in the UAE

Tilde Rosmer, Zayed University

Most studies that assess questions pertaining to climate change and a Green Shift in the Middle East and North-African region have focused on technical and economic possibilities of or limitations to renewable energy initiatives (Arouri et al. 2012; Nader 2009; Sgouridis et al. 2013), as well as on policy, economic development, and international branding (Alhoweish & Orujov 2016; Gelil 2016; Luomi 2012). Few studies, however, have evaluated

sustainability in the educational context in the MENA region. Directives from the UAE Ministry of Education encourage the incorporation of environmental education in school curricula at all stages. The present study investigates how sustainability is incorporated in different curricula and teaching in the UAE, focusing on five different schools in Dubai (Nord Anglia International School (British curriculum); Dubai International Academy (IB curriculum); Australian International School DXB (Australian curriculum); Sabari Indian School Dubai (Indian curriculum); The International School of Choueifat (Lebanese Curriculum). The UAE is unique due to the plethora of international schools in one place, a consequence of the population being made up of around 85 percent foreign resident migrant workers. This case thus provides a great opportunity to compare the teaching of climate change and sustainability in one context. The study will assess the curricular requirements for each school, in which classes these relevant issues are taught and how they are addressed in the textbooks. Additionally, contextualization will be analyzed; all learning experiences are more effective when the theory is (somehow) relevant to the pupils' reality and everyday life (Adger et al. 2009; Wilhite 2014; Hanson-Easey et al. 2015). This is especially significant when assessing how to teach environmental and sustainable adaptation. Thus, this study asks how, and if so how, the local reality is included when teaching these issues (such as with case studies, field trips and engagement with NGOs)?

Investigating Chinese Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of the National Chinese Language Framework in UAE Public Schools

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This study examines the effectiveness of the National Chinese Language Framework (NCLF) implementation in UAE public schools. Recognizing the increasing importance of Chinese language education in the UAE, this research explores how teachers perceive the curriculum, their professional development experiences, and the challenges they face during implementation. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 100 Chinese language teachers across multiple emirates. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze trends in teacher familiarity with the NCLF, the availability of resources, instructional strategies, and perceived student outcomes. The findings reveal that while teachers generally support the goals of the NCLF, many feel underprepared and express concerns about insufficient training and resource limitations. These results align with previous research emphasizing the critical role of teacher agency in curriculum reform. Recommendations include expanding teacher training programs, providing culturally responsive resources, and ongoing institutional support. This study contributes to broader discussions on curriculum effectiveness in multilingual, multicultural educational contexts.

ROSES, which students choose science

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The Relevance of Science Education - Second (ROSES) is an international comparative research project gathering empirical evidence on factors of importance for learning science and technology from a student's point of view. (Jidesjö, Oskarsson, & Westman, 2020). ROSES uses a common questionnaire for students containing categories such as S&T content in and outside school, future job, environmental challenges, social media, and informal S&T experiences (Oskarsson, Al Haj Ibrahim, Westman, & Jidesjö, 2023; Westman, Jidesjö, & Oskarsson, 2025). We will present comparisons between students' opinions and willingness to engage in science from a wide range of countries. We will further present results from Sweden, showing which students choose Science for upper secondary School. Students choosing to continue their science studies have good experience of their science classes and, even more importantly, experience of informal science from home with visits to museums, science centers, and similar activities.