Education Systems in Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates – A Comparative Analytical Study

النظام التعليمي في ماليزيا والإمارات العربية المتحدة، دراسة تحليلية مقارنة

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Abstract:

This study aimed to conduct a comparative analysis between the education systems of Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates, as two successful models of educational reform in two different geographical and cultural environments. The study used the comparative analytical descriptive methodology, relying on a systematic review of official documents, academic literature, and international reports. The findings revealed that both systems originated from traditional religious roots, then transformed into tools for building the modern state after independence/union. However, their priorities differed: Malaysia focused on addressing the effects of ethnic pluralism resulting from British colonialism through integration policies while preserving ethnic schools (Chinese and Tamil), whereas the United Arab Emirates moved towards rapid global openness supported by oil wealth, while maintaining identity through national curricula and encouraging international private education.

Both countries invested significantly in educational infrastructure, linked education to long-term national visions (Malaysia Vision 2020, UAE Vision 2021), and demonstrated a strong commitment to transforming education into an engine for knowledge-based economic development. Their efforts in adopting digital transformation and smart learning were also prominent, although UAE investments have been more intensive recently.

The study recommends the necessity of achieving a balance between preserving identity and openness to global curricula and managing cultural diversity, strengthening the relationship between curricula and the needs of the national economy. It also recommends adopting sustainable policies for teacher qualification, creating innovative funding mechanisms involving the private sector, and directing policies to reduce the gap between public and private education.

Keywords: Education system, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates.

الملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى إجراء مقارنة تحليلية بين نظامي التعليم في ماليزيا والإمارات العربية المتحدة، باعتبارهما نموذجين ناجحين للإصلاح التربوي في بيئتين جغرافيتين وثقافيتين مختلفتين. استخدمت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي المقارن، مع الاعتماد على المراجعة المنهجية للوثائق الرسمية والأدبيات الأكاديمية والتقارير الدولية. كشفت النتائج أن كلا النظامين انطلقا من جذور تقليدية دينية، ثم تحولا إلى أدوات لبناء الدولة الحديثة بعد الاستقلال/الاتحاد. ومع ذلك، اختلفت الأولويات: فركزت ماليزيا على معالجة آثار التعددية العرقية الناجم عن الاستعمار البريطاني من خلال سياسات دمج مع الحفاظ على المدارس العرقية (الصينية والتاميلية)، بينما اتجهت الإمارات نحو انفتاح عالمي سريع مدعوم بالثروة النفطية، مع الحفاظ على الهوية عبر المناهج الوطنية وتشجيع التعليم الخاص الدولي.

واستثمر كلا البلدين بشكل كبير في البنية التحتية التعليمية، وربطا التعليم برؤى وطنية طويلة الأجل (رؤية ماليزيا 2020، ورؤية الإمارات 2021)، وأظهرا التزاماً قوياً بتحويل التعليم إلى محرك للتنمية الاقتصادية القائمة على المعرفة، كما برزت جهودهما في تبني التحول الرقمي والتعلم الذكي، وإن كانت الاستثمارات الإماراتية أكثر كثافة حديثاً.

توصي الدراسة بضرورة تحقيق توازن بين الحفاظ على الهوية والانفتاح على المناهج العالمية، والاستفادة من خبرة ماليزيا في إدارة التعددية الثقافية، وتقوية العلاقة بين المناهج واحتياجات الاقتصاد الوطني، واعتماد سياسات مستدامة لتأهيل المعلمين، وخلق آليات تمويل مبتكرة تشمل القطاع الخاص، وتوجيه السياسات لتقليل الفجوة بين التعليم الحكومي والخاص.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النظام التعليمي، ماليزيا، الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

Introduction

Education is considered the cornerstone of building modern societies and a fundamental pillar for achieving economic and social progress. Both Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates have witnessed remarkable transformations in their developmental paths, with education being a central focus. In the UAE, the knowledge-based economy constitutes a fundamental pillar of the country's future vision, making investment in education and technology a national priority. Malaysia, on the other hand, has adopted comprehensive educational reforms since the 1990s, enabling it to achieve qualitative leaps in education quality and expand access to it. These two experiences represent modern models of employing education as a strategic tool for national advancement and enhancing global standing.

Studying and comparing educational systems between countries is an effective tool for understanding the policies and strategies that contribute to improving the quality of education. Through comparison, strengths and weaknesses in each system can be identified, and successful experiences can be leveraged to develop educational practices. Such studies also help in understanding the social, economic, and cultural contexts that influence the construction and orientations of the educational system. Hence, the comparison between the education systems in Malaysia and the UAE gains particular importance in light of the rapid changes witnessed by the education sector globally (Abyad, 1993).

Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates were selected as case studies due to their significance as successful models of educational reform in two different geographical and cultural environments. Malaysia represents a pioneering experience in Southeast Asia, while the UAE embodies an advanced model in the Arabian Gulf region. Both countries have undergone radical educational transformations in recent decades, investing in digital infrastructure and curriculum development according to global standards. Their noticeable progress in international indicators reflects the effectiveness of their ambitious educational policies, making them inspiring models for countries seeking to enhance the quality of education.

Statement of the problem

Despite the notable progress achieved by both Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates in the field of education, the study problem lies in the absence of comprehensive comparative studies that reveal the common factors and fundamental differences between the two educational systems. Although both countries have achieved advanced positions in international tests such as PISA and TIMSS (OECD, 2023; IEA, 2020), there is a shortage of research analyzing how educational policies are utilized to achieve these results amidst differing cultural and economic contexts. There is also a need to explore

educational systems that have achieved significant international and local accomplishments in a relatively short period.

The study problem is further clarified by the limited research examining the impact of recent educational reforms in Malaysia and the UAE on human development and economic indicators. Although both countries have launched ambitious strategies such as the "Education Vision 2025" in Malaysia and the "National Education Strategy 2030" in the UAE, there is a need for studies that assess the extent to which these policies have achieved their intended goals on the ground. Moreover, the disparity in economic resources and demographic composition between the two countries raises questions about the possibility of transferring some successful experiences from one country to the other, an aspect that previous studies have not sufficiently addressed**.**

Research questions: Based on the above, the study questions can be defined as follows:

1. What are the historical roots of the education system in Malaysia?

2. What factors influenced the formation of the educational system in Malaysia?

3. What are the general characteristics of the education system in Malaysia?

4. What are the historical roots of the education system in the UAE?

5. What factors influenced the formation of the educational system in the UAE?

6. What are the general characteristics of the education system in the UAE?

7. What are the similarities and differences between the education systems in Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates?

Significance of the study

- Clarifies the historical roots of the education systems in Malaysia and the UAE

- Identifies the social, economic, and political factors that shaped each system

- Highlights the main characteristics of both education systems in a concise comparative way

- Provides a comparative framework to help policymakers exchange experiences and adopt best practices

- Supports educational reform efforts in countries with similar Asian and Arab contexts

- Enriches the academic literature in comparative education through a focused comparison of the two countries

- Offers a foundation for developing educational cooperation projects between Malaysia and the UAE

Objectives of the study

- To trace the historical development of the education systems in Malaysia and the UAE.

- To identify the key factors that have shaped the formation of each education system.

- To describe the general characteristics and structure of the current education systems in both countries.

- To compare and contrast the education systems of Malaysia and the UAE.

- To provide evidence-based insights and recommendations for policy and practice.

Terms of the Study

Educational System: The educational system in any society is a subsystem of the total social system. It consists of a set of subsystems, such as the teacher preparation system, administration system, financing system, examination and evaluation system, student system, facilities system, and policies and procedures system (Al-Khawaldeh & Al-Zyoudi, 2012, p 45).

The education systems in this study are the Malaysian and the UAE education systems.

Comparative Education: A branch of educational sciences that studies educational systems in different countries for the purpose of comparison and analysis, and understanding the similarities and differences between them in light of historical, social, economic, and political factors (Bray & Adamson, 2010, p 32)

Study Limitations

Topical Limitations: Studying the education system in both the UAE and Malaysia in terms of historical roots, factors influencing the education system, general characteristics of each educational system, organizational structure, and points of similarity and difference between the two systems.

Spatial Limitations: The current study is limited to the education system in the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia.

Study Methodology: The study used the comparative analytical descriptive method in order to describe the education system in the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia as a case study, and analyze their educational systems.

Theoretical framework and previous studies

The Concept of Comparative Education

Comparative education is a branch of pedagogy concerned with studying and analyzing different educational systems around the world. This field aims to understand the similarities and differences between these systems and attempt to derive general principles that can contribute to the development of education at the local and international levels. Marc Antoine Jullien, considered one of the pioneers of comparative education, believed that this field is based on collecting and analyzing information from different countries in precise comparative tables, allowing for the derivation of scientific results and knowledge that can be developed and applied (Morsi, 1998).

Researchers also indicate that comparative education is not limited to description alone but delves into studying the cultural, social, and political forces and factors that influence the shaping of educational policies and systems. Thus, comparative education helps decision-makers and researchers benefit from the experiences of other countries, avoid mistakes, and draw inspiration from solutions that suit the specificity and needs of each society (Morsi, 1998).

Objectives of Studying Comparative Education

Researchers seek to achieve a wide range of objectives through the study of comparative education, the nature of which varies according to the purpose of the study. These objectives, as outlined by (Al-Zaki & Al-Khaza'leh, 2013), can be clarified as follows:

1. Understanding the similarities and differences between different educational systems in terms of objectives, curricula, teaching methods, and assessment.

2. Analyzing factors affecting educational systems such as social, cultural, economic, and political factors.

3. Deriving lessons learned from the experiences of other countries and applying them in a manner appropriate to local conditions.

4. Developing and improving educational systems by benefiting from successful global experiences and practices.

5. Solving educational problems by analyzing their causes and proposing appropriate solutions.

6. Enhancing critical thinking and the ability to evaluate educational systems objectively.

7. Promoting international cooperation and the exchange of expertise between countries in the educational field.

Stages of Development of Comparative Education

(Al-Azzazi, 2010) mentions the stages of development of comparative education in the following points:

1. The Descriptive or Anticipatory Stage (until the end of the 18th century). This stage was characterized by describing systems of life and education in different countries through the travels of merchants, explorers, and travelers such as Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Battuta. In this stage, observations and impressions were the basis, with no clear scientific methodology or precise comparative analysis.

2. The Transfer or Borrowing Stage (from the beginning of the 19th century to the mid-20th century): Researchers began studying advanced educational systems and transferring or borrowing what was suitable to develop their own countries' systems. The credit for this goes to Marc Antoine Jullien, the founder of modern comparative education, who established the first scientific foundations for comparing educational systems through questionnaires and comparative tables.

3. The Stage of Cultural Forces and Factors (the first half of the 20th century):This stage was characterized by studying the factors influencing education, such as culture, environment, economy, and politics, not just transferring systems. Its pioneers were influenced by the analysis of various social and economic forces, such as Michael Sadler and Sir Cyril.

4. The Stage of Scientific Methodology and Analysis (mid-20th century to the present): Comparative education became an independent science relying on scientific methods and precise methodologies in analysis and deduction. The methodologies used included quantitative and qualitative analysis, and educational systems began to be studied and interpreted in light of their specific conditions, with a focus on the practical application of comparison results.

Factors Influencing the Education System

The education system forms one of the fundamental pillars for the progress and development of societies and is directly influenced by a set of factors that determine its success and effectiveness. Understanding these different factors is important for proper planning and formulating appropriate educational policies that meet the needs of society. and refer to these factors as follows:

Political Factor: The political factor is a major determinant of the nature of the educational system through its direct influence on educational policies and strategic objectives. That is, the prevailing ideologies determine educational content and the permissible boundaries for intellectual discourse. Political stability also plays a pivotal role in ensuring the effective implementation of educational plans, especially if the country suffers from occupation, colonialism, civil wars, and armed conflicts. As a result, educational systems vary according to the nature of governance; while democratic systems allow a wider space for intellectual pluralism, centralized systems tend to adopt more restrictive educational policies. (Al-Amiri, 2017)

Economic Factor: The economic situation represents the cornerstone in determining the quality of the educational system, as the investments is directly reflected in the potential of the educational infrastructure and facilities. Countries with strong economies provide an educational environment rich in technical resources and qualified cadres, while systems with limited budgets suffer from a lack of basic facilities and weak educational outcomes. This effect is evident in the disparity between the ability of countries to adopt educational innovations versus the struggle of others to maintain the minimum level of educational services. (Bakr, 2006)

Geographical Factor: The geographical location and climate determine the nature of the educational infrastructure, such as building design, school schedules, and holidays. For example, in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, the cold weather leads to delaying the start of the first stage until the age of seven. In Sudan, the summer vacation starts in April and ends in June due to the association of this period with high temperatures and lack of rainfall. In Brazil, the summer holiday starts in December and ends in February. The distribution of population between urban and rural areas also affects the ease of access to schools and their availability. The geographical environment requires modifying curricula and activities to suit the local reality. (Bakr, 2006)

Demographic Factor: The impact of demographic characteristics on shaping educational policies is evident through two main dimensions: cultural pluralism and population growth. The diverse population structure requires designing educational programs that respond to the specificities of each social component. These requirements are exacerbated in cases of migration and displacement, which create educational gaps between residents and newcomers. These demographic dynamics result in dual challenges: quantitative pressures resulting from rapid population growth that require expanding school capacity and qualifying educational cadres, and qualitative challenges that require developing inclusive curricula that respect cultural diversity and ensure educational equity.

Religious and Cultural Factor: Religion and cultural values play a role in determining the goals of education and the moral and behavioral content taught in schools. The presence of strong religious institutions influences the adoption of educational systems and laws and leads to differences in curricula according to religious affiliations. Cultural values influence the extent of society's acceptance of education and its goals. Historically, the teacher, who was a religious man, and reading the Quran and the Bible and spreading religious teachings, initially influenced educational systems. In the Middle Ages, the relationship between the state and the church in Christian civilization witnessed a long struggle for control over aspects of social life, especially education. (Bakr, 2006)

Social Factor: The social factor influences the educational system through society's view of education and the role of the family in motivating students and enhancing their academic achievement. Family and community support increase students' chances of continuing their education and improving learning outcomes. Social status also plays a crucial role in determining access to educational resources and continuing the educational journey. Educational systems express the culture and values of society, which is reflected in the educational goals and the nature of relationships within educational institutions and the behavioral standards followed. The influence of cultural diversity is evident in the differences in educational philosophies, such as the importance of respecting elders or focusing on individuality versus teamwork. (Al-Amiri, 2017)

Previous Studies

A study by **(Ashour and Kleimann, 2025)** compared the private higher education (HE) systems in Germany and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A 2025 study compared Germany's and the UAE's private higher education sectors, analyzing their historical and political contexts and state regulation. It explored the public-private dynamic, focusing on competition and regulation. Using a neo-institutional approach, it found that while global pressures shape both systems, their specific developments are moderated by distinct national histories and political contexts.

The study of (Mustafa, 2023) compared teacher professional development in Finland and Malaysia to identify lessons for Egypt. Using a comparative approach, it analyzed how cultural factors shape each country's programs. The study concluded that Egypt's programs require continuous reform. Key recommendations include revising teacher qualification requirements and establishing new, scientifically-grounded frameworks for professional development.

In addition, a study by (Mohammed et al., 2022), aimed to analyze Malaysia's educational system in both schools and colleges, identify the curricula in both basic and secondary stages and the history of educational reform in Malaysia, and clarify the 2020 educational reform plan. The researchers analyzed the factors that helped the development of public education, including cultural, social, political, and geographical factors. The researchers concluded that the reasons for the progress and success in the Malaysian educational system are due to strategic planning and the development of comprehensive plans aimed at advancing education and attention to scientific research and gifted students.

The study of (**Al-Zahrani et al., 2020**), on the other hand, titled "The Educational Ladder in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, and Finland: A Comparative Analytical Study," aimed to understand the reality of the educational ladder in the mentioned countries and the factors affecting it. The comparative method was used to compare the educational ladder, and found that the patterns of the secondary stage in Japan are multiple, Finland focuses heavily on the pre-primary stage and the vocational aspect after the intermediate stage, while the UAE has a unique educational ladder and has introduced new tracks in secondary education.

A study by (**Al-Ahmadi, 2018**) analyzed the education systems in Finland and the UAE in terms of the cultural factors influencing the formation of the educational system. Among the most prominent results were the similarity in the funding pattern by focusing on infrastructure, the general centralized pattern in both systems with the necessary flexibility to adapt according to social needs, and the interest of both systems in linking the educational system and its outcomes with the local and international labor market.

A study by (**Abdel Hadi, 2016**), titled "The Malaysian Development Model and the Extent of Arab Benefit," aimed to explore the Malaysian development model that can be applied in an Arab context. To achieve this, this study adopted the descriptive analytical method. The study concluded two main results. First: The Malaysian experience in its foundations was based on the development of human and natural resources, thus creating a development model that led to its progress. Second: It is possible to benefit from the Malaysian development model in the Arab world if the obstacles that limit comprehensive development are eliminated.

A study by (**Dahan & Jassim, 2016**), traced Malaysia's educational evolution since independence. The study outlined policies aimed at establishing Malaysia as a global education hub, noting how the nation navigated challenges like the 1997 economic crisis through strategic development plans.

A study by (**Ying and Chounan, 2015**) aimed to compare the lower secondary science education of Malaysia and Japan by studying the commonalities and the differences of the science curricula in each

country in terms of the two essential aspects: the aims and goals of the curriculum and the content and organization. Japanese students are found to have better basic in investigation, analysis and exploration ability compare to Malaysian students. The experiments designed for the lower secondary learners in Japan are highly recommendable for the Malaysian.

A study by **(Platcan, 2015)** compared the Malaysian Education System with Turkish Education System. The study found out that Malaysian and the Turkish educations systems aim to improve the quality of education and national unity. Both of the systems are centralist in structure. The Ministry of National Education administrates both Malaysian and Turkish national education systems. However, the Ministry of Higher Education carries out the Higher Education in Malaysia, while in in Turkey it is Higher Education Board. In general, there are many similarities between the systems in terms of school organizations. In both countries, the school steps consists of which elementary, middle, secondary and undergraduate

A study by (**AbuHassan**, **2014**), focused on character formation, focusing on literacy and numeracy, and the use of integrated learning classes as essential aspects of Malaysian education to form a quality generation capable of survival. This holistic approach ensures that every student is equipped with moral values, strong literacy and numeracy skills, in addition to a deep understanding of various disciplines. However, the implementation of these strategies faces diverse challenges, such as lack of resources, curriculum pressure, and lack of teacher training. To overcome these challenges, implementation recommendations such as vocational training, curriculum improvement, and community involvement were proposed.

Commentary on Previous Studies:

Previous studies indicated that the educational development tracks of Malaysia and the UAE have been shaped by differing contexts and strategic approaches. The Malaysian system is often presented as a case of long-term strategic planning and policy continuity. Studies such as (Mohammed et al., 2022),(Dahan & Jassim, 2016), Abdel Hadi, 2016) stated that Malaysia's educational achievements rest on a holistic vision integrating human and economic development. Also, (Mustafa, 2023) and (AbuHassan, 2014) stated that it was a clear emphasis placed on cultivating capable individuals through sustained teacher professional development and curricula designed to foster character formation and foundational competencies

On the other hand, the UAE emerges as a model of rapid, flexible transformation and massive investment, benefiting from its resources and wise leadership. Studies of (Al-Zahrani et al., 2020) and Al-Ahmadi, 2018) emphasized the uniqueness of the Emirati educational ladder and its rapid response

to future requirements, as it worked to create new educational pathways, especially at the secondary stage, and directly link the educational system to the local and international labor market.

Meanwhile, despite the differing historical and cultural contexts, the two systems meet in several key points as shown by the studies, most notably: a strong focus on strategic planning (Malaysia 2020, and the UAE with its future vision), massive investment in educational infrastructure and technology, and the pursuit of linking educational outcomes to the labor market.

Methodology of the Study

The study followed the comparative analytical study to describe, compare and analyze the education systems of Malaysia and the UAE. Data will be collected by a systematic review of existing documents like official documents, historical texts, academic literature and international reports. Data will be analyses by the technique of thematic and comparative analysis

Results of the study

1. What are the historical roots of the education system in Malaysia?

The roots of the education system in Malaysia extend to the pre-colonial era, where traditional Islamic schools, known as "Sekolah Pondok," were the common pattern for transmitting education and religious knowledge among the Malay population. With the arrival of British colonial rule in the 19th century, secular schools were introduced, especially in the Straits Settlements like Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, and educational institutions emerged that separated the main ethnic groups (Malays, Chinese, and Indians), each with its own educational institutions and distinctive languages of instruction. This variety has deepened the ethnic division in Malaysian society at the time (Al-Amiri, 2017).

After Malaysia's independence in 1957, education became a major focus of state-building policies and promoting national unity. The government adopted a comprehensive reform program based on an open Islamic philosophy while benefiting from other educational philosophies, seeking to integrate education to serve the nation and enhance coexistence among ethnicities. A unified national education system was implemented in the Malay language while preserving Chinese and Tamil schools, forming the multi-ethnic Malaysian identity. Subsequent educational policies focused on developing education as a means to achieve human and economic development and overcome the effects of ethnic divisions, making education a fundamental contributor to the country's modern renaissance (Dahan & Jassim, 2016).

It is evident that after independence, Malaysia found itself facing significant challenges after long years of British colonialism that drained its resources and changed the features of its society. With the desire to build a strong and independent state, the Malaysian leadership realized from the first moment that education was the cornerstone for achieving comprehensive renaissance, making it a fundamental pillar of development, stemming from its firm belief that it was the only path to progress and prosperity.

2. What cultural factors influenced the formation of the education system in Malaysia?

Geographical Factors

Malaysia is located in the heart of Southeast Asia near the equator, between latitudes 1 and 7 degrees north and longitudes (100) and (119) degrees east, and is characterized by a strategic location on the sea route between India and China, surrounded by seas from several sides. The favorable environmental and climatic conditions, thanks to its location in the tropical rainforest region with a moderate climate and permanent greenery, have contributed to creating a stimulating educational environment that supports student productivity and improves their academic performance. (Dahan & Jassim, 2016).

Geography has significantly shaped Malaysia's education system, with particular impact in Sabah and Sarawak. In remote areas like Bario, the e-Bario project used solar power and internet to bring digital education to isolated communities. To address similar urban-rural divides in states like Kedah, Perlis, and Perak, Malaysia introduced Mobile Internet Units and Telecentres, expanding e-learning access across remote regions. (Wikipedia, 2025)

Social Factors

(Al-Amiri, 2017) explains how social factors influenced the Malaysian education system, where the pluralistic nature of Malaysian society imposed diversity in the primary education system, prompting the country to seek solutions that balance recognizing cultural diversity and the necessity of promoting national unity. Malaysia concluded that adopting an educational system based on the principle of "unity in diversity" during the primary stage is the optimal solution to avoid ethnic or sectarian conflicts. The issue of unifying the multi-ethnic Malaysian people was one of the most important priorities of the "Alliance" government after independence, where a committee was formed in 1956 to develop an educational policy aimed at promoting national identity. These efforts culminated in the issuance of the Education Act of 1957, which stipulated:

- The use of Malay and English as the main languages of instruction (temporarily) in primary schools, while allowing Chinese and Tamil languages in the private schools of those communities.

- Unifying the curricula for all schools while preserving some cultural specificities.

- Adopting the Malay language as the primary language of instruction at the secondary stage.

These policies contributed to building a strong educational system that helped Malaysia:

- Provide a skilled workforce that supported the transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy.

- Pave the way towards a knowledge-based economy reliant on technology and innovation.

- Achieve social harmony amidst great ethnic and religious diversity.

Political Factors

The role of political factors emerged fundamentally in shaping the Malaysian educational system, where educational policies were closely linked to national goals and prevailing political trends. (Fahmy, 1985) indicated that the political administration of the Malaysian government is one of the most important factors that contributed to the qualitative success of education in the state. The ruling system provided continuous and distinguished attention to the education sector, providing strong support for this vital sector, and established clear frameworks for the continuous development of the educational process. The most prominent manifestations of political influence on Malaysian education were:

- British Colonial Influence: The colonists established many schools to graduate individuals loyal to them and encouraged enrollment in these schools with the promise of holding senior positions in the state.

- Chinese Influence: With the increasing numbers of the Chinese community, they established private schools for their children that focused on spreading Chinese culture using the Chinese language as the primary language and included English in their curricula.

- Indian Community Influence: Indian immigrants established private schools to teach their children the educational basics, where these schools focused on teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, and these schools were under direct government supervision.

- British Return: The renewed British presence had a significant impact on the development of education, as many reform projects appeared in the Malaysian educational system.

These political factors collectively shaped the general framework through which the educational system in Malaysia developed, reflecting the depth of the relationship between politics and education in building the modern state.

Economic Factors

Since independence in 1957, Malaysia's economy has shifted from tin and rubber dependency toward industrialization and productivity, driving parallel advances in education. Targeting 2020 as a milestone for national development, Malaysia achieved strong economic progress and invested substantially in education—including free basic education—to support its transformation into a knowledge-based economy (Al-Amiri, 2017).

The economic factors played a pivotal role in developing Malaysian education, as the transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy required a developed educational system capable of preparing a skilled workforce, prompting the government to make education a fundamental pillar in its development plans, especially in the first and second five-year plans. In its quest to achieve the "Knowledge Society 2020" vision, Malaysia paid special attention to modernizing and developing the educational system to keep pace with the requirements of the era. There was a focus on qualifying highly skilled human cadres through integrated programs that included all levels of general and higher education and its various branches, making the educational system an effective tool in serving the national economy and driving comprehensive development.(Ayoub, 2012)

The Malaysian education system reflects the integrated influence of five key factors. Geographically, urban-rural divides spurred digital innovations like e-learning to ensure equitable access. Socially, ethnic diversity led to an education model promoting "unity in diversity," respecting cultural identities while fostering national unity. Politically, post-independence reforms transformed colonial legacies into a catalyst for a national, development-oriented system. Economically, the shift from a commodity-based to a knowledge-driven economy prioritized educational investment, aligning it with national visions such as Vision 2020.

3. What are the general characteristics of the education system in Malaysia?

Educational Objectives of the Malaysian Educational System.

The Malaysian Ministry of Education (2013-2025) defined the objectives of education in Malaysia in the following points:

1. Enhancing National Unity: Instilling values of belonging and unity among students from different ethnicities and religions to enhance social cohesion.

2. Improving Education Quality: Raising the level of students' academic achievement in basic subjects such as mathematics, science, languages, and developing curricula to keep pace with the requirements of the 21st century.

3. Equity in Educational Opportunities: Ensuring that all students, regardless of their social, economic, or geographical backgrounds, receive high-quality education.

4. Enhancing Leadership and Creative Skills: Encouraging innovation and critical thinking among students to prepare them for the competitive labor market.

5. Promoting Technical and Vocational Education (TVET): Developing technical and vocational education to meet the needs of the labor market and enhance the economy.

6. Promoting Moral and Spiritual Values: Instilling Islamic values (for Muslims) and common universal values for all students.

7. Adapting to Globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Introducing technology and digitization in education to graduate students capable of competing globally.

8. Improving the Efficiency of Teachers and School Administration: Developing teachers' capabilities and providing a stimulating educational environment.

It is clear that the objectives outlined by the Malaysian Ministry of Education reflect a comprehensive, forward-looking, and value-driven educational philosophy. They strategically balance the imperatives of national identity and social cohesion with the demands of global competitiveness and technological adaptation. Notably, the plan integrates moral development, equitable access, and economic pragmatism—particularly through TVET—into a unified vision for human capital development. This holistic framework underscores education's role not merely as an academic endeavor, but as the foundational pillar for sustainable national progress.

Educational Administration:

Educational administration in Malaysia has evolved since its independence until now, going through several stages accompanied by changes in organizational structures. (Al-Zaki & Al-Khaza'leh, 2013) summarize the levels of administration as follows:

- Federal (Central) Level: The Ministry of Education sets national policy, curriculum, and guidelines, led by a Minister, a Director-General (professional matters), and a Secretary-General (administrative affairs).

- State Level: An Education Department in each state, headed by a Director, implements national policy locally, manages school resources (staff, finances, facilities), and provides feedback to the Ministry.

- Local (District) Level: District Education Offices act as supervisory links between the state departments and schools, assisting in the implementation and oversight of programs at the school level.

- Executive (School) Level: The school principal, assisted by senior staff, is responsible for daily administration, curriculum implementation, and professional leadership, supported by a Parent-Teacher Association for community engagement.

The education system in Malaysia operates under a centrally governed yet administratively decentralized model. While the federal government sets national policies and curriculum standards, implementation is adapted at state, district, and school levels. This structure ensures uniformity but can create bureaucratic delays, limiting responsiveness at the school level. Principals must navigate central mandates alongside local needs, supported in part by formal Parent-Teacher Associations, which serve as a vital link between the centralized system and local communities.

Structure and Organization of the Education System in Malaysia

Education in Malaysia is free but not compulsory, and most schools in the country are government or government-supported schools. Formal education in Malaysia consists of four stages, starting from the primary stage lasting six years, the lower secondary stage lasting three years, followed by two years for the upper secondary stage and two years for the post-secondary stage (called the sixth form), meaning that the upper secondary stage consists of two stages (2+2), academic and specialized.

(Obeidat et al., 2022) describe the different stages of education in Malaysia:

Malaysia's education system is structured into distinct stages:

1-Preschool Education (ages 3–5): Offered through over 6,000 centers, most (77%) government-run, all fee-based.

2-Primary Education (6 years, ages 6–12): Divided into two three-year cycles, focusing on foundational literacy, thinking skills, and values. Instruction is offered in:

- National Schools (Malay medium)

- Chinese-medium schools

- Tamil-medium schools

- Malay is compulsory in all schools, with English as a second language.

3-Lower Secondary (3 years): Follows primary education. Students from Chinese/Tamil schools first complete a one-year transition class to gain proficiency in Malay, the medium of instruction in secondary schools.

4-Upper Secondary (2 years): Students are streamed based on performance into:

- Academic Track (Science/Arts), culminating in the Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE).

- Technical Track, also ending with the MCE.

- Vocational Track, leading to the Malaysian Certificate of Vocational Education.

Organization of the Academic Year

Schools in Malaysia operate according to a two-semester system. The academic year starts in the first week of December until the end of October of the following year. The number of school days in schools is 210 days per year (41 weeks). Schools usually start their day at 7:45 am, and many Malaysian schools, especially those located in rural areas, operate under a two-session system, morning and afternoon. Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2023)

Education Funding

The Malaysian government demonstrates a strong financial commitment to education, allocating approximately 18% of the national budget (about 6% of GDP) to the sector. Within this, the Ministry of Education directs around 82.5% of its expenditures to current operational costs—such as primary, secondary, technical, and vocational education, teacher training, and student support—ensuring system stability and broad access. The remaining 17.5% is dedicated to development expenses, covering educational planning, research, and higher education, which reflects a strategic focus on incremental, long-term enhancement within the established framework rather than pursuing radical systemic change (Ismail, 2014).

Curricula

Malaysia's curriculum framework balances cognitive, value-based, and skills education within a unified national system that respects cultural diversity and promotes national identity. The Malaysian National Curriculum, taught primarily in Malay (with Chinese or Tamil medium options), includes core subjects such as languages, mathematics, science, Islamic or Moral Education, history, arts, and physical

education. Since 2021, the UPSR exam has been replaced by the school-based assessment system (*Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah* — PBS) to allow more continuous and holistic evaluation. Additionally, private and international schools offer programs such as IGCSE, American, and Australian curricula, usually in English. The overarching philosophy emphasizes holistic student development—intellectual, moral, spiritual, and physical—while fostering critical thinking, innovation, 21st-century skills, and national values through active learning and collaborative approaches (Abu Hassan, 2014).

Malaysia's curricula are marked by a diversity-responsive and development-oriented design. Reflecting the nation's multiethnic fabric, education is delivered in Malay, Chinese, and Tamil, with all schools adhering to a common national framework and teaching Malay as a compulsory subject. There is a strong emphasis on strengthening science and mathematics through regular curricular updates to align with contemporary advancements. At the secondary level, students can pursue specialized pathways—academic, technical, or religious—allowing tailored education based on individual aptitudes and interests (Abu Hassan, 2024).

Teacher Qualification in Malaysia

Teacher preparation in Malaysia is an essential part of the Malaysian Education Plan (2013-2025), where the government pays great attention to training and developing educational cadres to ensure the quality of education. This is done through specialized institutions such as the National Institute of Teacher Education (IPGM) and public universities. The Malaysian Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Teacher Education (IPGM) clarify the most important stages and sources of training and professional development through the following stages:

Teacher Qualification Pathways

a. University Programs: Through which teachers are prepared through Bachelor's programs in Education that provide integrated educational programs including specializations: Sciences, Mathematics, Languages, Islamic Education, Special Education.

b. Teacher Training Institutes: These offer diplomas in teaching (Diploma in Teaching) for a period of 2.5 to 3 years, in which the following are taught: Educational Curricula, Educational Psychology, Teaching Methods, Educational Technology.

c. Postgraduate Programs: These provide Master's and PhD programs in Education to improve teachers' efficiency, available in universities such as UPSI and UM.

Teacher Selection and Training Standards

According to Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia. (2022), The teacher selection and training process goes through the following steps:

a. Meeting Admission Requirements for Teacher Preparation Programs: Before the admission process, the applicant undergoes a psychological and educational test (Psychometric Test & MEdSI) to assess educational tendencies. It also requires a good academic average (usually 3.0 and above in secondary school), as well as passing a personal interview.

b. Practical Training: Student teachers are required to train in schools for 12 to 16 weeks under the supervision of experienced teachers.

c. Professional Licensing: After graduation, teachers must register with the "Education Service Commission" and obtain a teaching license.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD): The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) provides annual training courses for teachers in: Digital Teaching and Smart Classroom Management, STEM, and Creative Education, through the Teacher Development Center and the (Excellent Teacher) program to stimulate professional excellence.

The Education System in the United Arab Emirates

4. What are the historical roots of the education system in the United Arab Emirates?

Before the establishment of the Union in 1971, education in the UAE was limited, confined to Kuttabs that taught the Quran and the principles of reading and writing. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the first formal schools appeared, such as Al-Ahmadiyya School in Dubai (1920) and Al-Qasimiyya School in Sharjah (1930), which were influenced by Arab curricula, especially the Egyptian one. With the discovery of oil in the 1950s, education expanded with the establishment of schools such as Al-Sa'ada in Abu Dhabi (1959) and Al-Nahda in Dubai (1959), and educational missions to Arab countries began. (Muheisen, 2014).

After the establishment of the state in 1971, education witnessed a major boom with the establishment of the Ministry of Education (1972), which set a unified educational policy and provided free education for both genders. The University of the UAE (1976) was also established to reduce dependence on external missions. With economic development, private education flourished, which today serves more than 70% of students, especially in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where international curricula are taught alongside the national curriculum. The government set strategic plans to keep pace with technology,

while preserving national identity, so that the number of schools today exceeds 1,200 between public and private schools. (Ghanem, 2019).

5. What cultural factors influenced the formation of the education system in the UAE?

Geographical Factors

According to the UAE Yearbook 2016, the United Arab Emirates covers an area of approximately 83,600 square kilometers in Southwest Asia, on the eastern Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by the Arabian Gulf to the north and northwest, shares maritime boundaries with Qatar, and has land borders with Saudi Arabia to the south and west and Oman to the southeast. The country consists of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Ras Al-Khaimah, and Fujairah. Deserts constitute about 74% of its territory, and it experiences a warm, sunny desert climate in winter and a hot, humid summer (National Media Council, 2016).

The strategic location of the UAE as a global trade and migration hub has fostered a highly open and diverse education system. Population diversity has led to a flexible, multinational educational landscape, featuring international curricula such as British, American, and Indian to serve both residents and citizens. Proximity to commercial centers like Dubai and Abu Dhabi has further stimulated private education investment and the development of high-quality institutions. For instance, Dubai alone hosts students from over 200 nationalities, supported by educational policies that accommodate cultural and religious diversity (MOE, 2022).

The UAE's desert environment and extreme climate have driven significant investment in climate-resilient educational infrastructure, including air-conditioned schools, sustainable energy systems, and e-learning solutions, particularly in remote or sparsely populated areas. To address uneven population distribution, initiatives like mobile smart schools and modern, safe student transportation have been implemented to ensure universal access to education (Alnaqbi and Alshannag, 2018).

Social Factors

The rapid social transformation in the UAE from a traditional tribal society to a modern and multicultural society has significantly influenced the orientations of the education system. With the increase in the number of citizen and resident populations, and the diversity of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it became necessary to develop an education system that reflects this diversity while maintaining national identity. (Razem, 2020)

The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA, 2023) indicates that the high standard of living and improved economic situation of citizens affected their expectations from the education system, as demands increased for providing high-quality and multiple-option education. This led to the expansion of private schools, which include more than 70% of students in some emirates such as Dubai, with families turning towards international curricula such as British and American. Additionally, changes in social roles – such as increased participation of women in the labor market – played a role in directing educational policies towards supporting girls' education and providing flexible educational environments that take into account family circumstances.

Economic Factors

The economic factor played an important role in transforming the Emirati education system from a limited traditional system to a developed system of global standard. The discovery of oil in the 1950s provided the necessary financial resources to build educational infrastructure and establish formal schools. (Ministry of Education, 1975). With the economic boom witnessed by the state, approximately 20% of the general budget was allocated to education in the 1970s and 1980s, which enabled sending student missions abroad and establishing the University of the UAE in 1976 (National Center for Statistics, 2020).

The transformation into a knowledge economy in the 21st century also contributed to restructuring curricula to focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), with directing large investments towards technical and vocational education. In addition, the growth of the private sector and the prosperity of businesses led to the spread of international schools with foreign curricula, with Dubai alone accounting for 40% of these schools in the region. (Knowledge and Human Development Authority in Dubai, 2022).

Political Factors

Political decisions and the strategic vision of the Emirati leadership formed the backbone of the development of the education system in the country. After the establishment of the Union in 1971, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan issued a decision to make education free and compulsory for all citizens, which contributed to raising the school enrollment rate from 28% to 98% within only two decades (Ministry of Education, 1995). The federal government also established the Ministry of Education in 1972 to unify curricula and educational policies across the seven emirates. In line with the state's political orientations, national education and Islamic education subjects were introduced in all schools to promote national identity. The UAE's foreign policy also played a role in establishing

educational partnerships with advanced countries such as Singapore and Finland to adopt best practices. (Alhebsi et al., 2015)

Modern political visions were based on transforming education into a tool for achieving sustainable development. Within the framework of the UAE Vision 2021, the government allocated 6% of the GDP to education. His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum launched the "Emirati School" initiative in 2017 to develop an integrated educational model that meets the requirements of the 21st century. (MOE, 2018).

It is noted that the education system in the United Arab Emirates was shaped through a dynamic interaction of the four main cultural forces and factors: geographical, social, economic, and political, which worked together to transform it from a limited traditional system into a modern and ambitious model with a global orientation.

Geographically, the strategic location of the UAE as a crossroads of global trade routes was not just a spatial fact, but also a decisive cultural factor. This location imposed a huge population diversity, which in turn formed a unique social fabric. As a result, a flexible and open educational system developed, combining the preservation of national identity through compulsory Islamic and national education subjects, and accommodating this diversity by allowing the establishment of international schools that offer global curricula (British, American, Indian) to satisfy the expectations of the diverse society and meet the needs of the labor market.

From a social perspective, the rapid transformation from a traditional tribal society to a modern, wealthy, and multicultural society was the main driver. The rise in the standard of living and the change in citizens' expectations led to a demand for high-quality education, which opened the door to a huge expansion in the private and international education sector. The increased participation of women in the labor market also led to supportive policies for girls' education and their empowerment.

Economically, the state's transformation from an oil-based economy to a knowledge economy was the driving force behind the priorities of the education system. The massive investment in education was no a strategic necessity. This economic transformation is what directed the curricula to focus on STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), and encouraged the establishment of major academic cities to make the UAE a regional center for education.

Politically, the influence of the cultural factor was embodied in the strong will and insightful vision of the political leadership, which made education a fundamental pillar for building the state since the establishment of the Union. Decisions such as compulsory and free education, unifying curricula under

the umbrella of the Ministry of Education, and launching strategic initiatives were not only technical decisions but also a reflection of a political and cultural vision aimed at building a unified national identity in light of diversity, and preparing generations capable of leading the march of sustainable development.

6. What are the general characteristics of the education system in the United Arab Emirates?

Educational Objectives of the Emirati Educational System

According to the vision of the Ministry of Education (2023), the UAE Ministry of Education seeks to achieve the following strategic objectives:

1. Ensuring equitable education, including pre-school education.

2. Achieving distinguished efficiency for leadership and educational bodies.

3. Ensuring quality, efficiency, and governance of educational and institutional performance.

4. Ensuring safe, supportive, and stimulating educational environments for learning.

5. Attracting and qualifying students to enroll in higher education institutions inside and outside the country in a manner that suits the needs of the labor market.

6. Enhancing scientific research and innovation capabilities according to competitive global standards.

7. Ensuring the provision of all administrative services according to quality, efficiency, and transparency standards.

8. Consolidating a culture of innovation in the institutional work environment.

It can be noted that these strategic objectives reflect the UAE's drive to build an inclusive, high-quality, and innovation-oriented education system that aligns with global competitiveness. They collectively emphasize equitable access, strong leadership, efficient governance, supportive learning environments, and preparing students for a dynamic labor market while fostering research and institutional innovation.

Structure and Organization of the Education System in the UAE

(Ghanem, 2019) mentions that the educational ladder in the UAE includes four educational stages: Kindergarten (4-5 years), Primary (5-12), Preparatory (12-15), and Secondary (15-18). In the primary stage: The Ministry of Education has tended since the beginning of the 1993 academic year to feminize the teaching profession in the lower grades of the primary stage. The preparatory stage was built to

serve two main purposes: First: Helping the student transition from primary school to secondary school. Second: Helping the student gradually transition from childhood to adolescence.

Basic Education Stage

The basic education stage in the UAE spans grades 1–8, divided into two cycles (grades 1–4 and 5–8). Enrollment in first grade requires a child to be six years old by the end of December of that academic year, and compulsory education continues until the age of fifteen, except in cases of special health conditions verified by a medical committee (Ministry of Education, 2025). This stage aims to develop balanced citizens with a conscious understanding of Islamic history, principles, rituals, and values—reflected in their character and behavior—while adhering to societal norms, traditions, and positive social values (Ministry of Education Vision 2015–2023).

Secondary Education

The secondary education stage includes grades nine to twelve. The tracks of secondary education that a student joins according to his abilities and inclinations are as follows:

1. General Secondary Education Track: Based on a general cultural foundation and academic culture.

2. Advanced Secondary Education Track: Based on a general cultural foundation and specialized scientific foundation.

3. EliteTrack: This is an extended track from the basic education stage. Students join it from the seventh grade (or the end of the first cycle) and it is based on an advanced scientific foundation.

This stage aims to develop a citizen who is proficient in Arabic for effective communication and cultural enrichment, appreciates its structure and arts, and masters at least one foreign language. The student learns to adapt to the UAE's environmental, demographic, social, and cultural contexts, investing in and preserving these dimensions responsibly. Grounded in national heritage and Islamic civilization, the learner also engages consciously with global culture, positively contributing to and developing the societal environment (Ministry of Education Vision 2015–2023).

Vocational and Technical Education

Students enroll in vocational and technical education programs after completing the requirements for success in the eighth grade of basic education for a period of four years in specializations: Business Administration, Fashion Design, Information Technology, Tourism and Travel, Applied World,

Logistics/Supply Chain Management, Health and Social Care, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering. (Ministry of Education Vision 2015-2023)

Curricula

The Ministry provides curricula for all subjects and grade levels either by authoring them or adapting international series. All curricula are based on the objectives of the educational system and the specific objectives of the school stages, as well as the national learning standards that define the societal expectations for the characteristics of the Emirati student specified in the unified national framework for curriculum and assessment standards. The Ministry also provides an integrated system for evaluating student performance that ensures monitoring the levels of achievement of national learning standards within the framework of the Emirati School model. The academic year consists of 180 days distributed over 3 semesters, in which teachers start work one week before the students. (General Framework for Education Policies, 2018)

Student Assessment

The assessment system in the UAE education system takes multiple forms according to (General Framework for Education Policies, 2018):

- Continuous Student Assessment: These are the strategies and tools that the teacher carries out continuously and periodically to verify the learning outcomes of the students.

- School Tests: These are the formative tests prepared by the teacher to periodically assess student performance.

- Centralized Exams: These are the final exams conducted by the Ministry for school students at the end of the semesters.

- Standardized Tests (EMSAT): These are tests applied to grades: 1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 – with the aim of verifying their possession of the knowledge and skills necessary for a smooth transition between educational stages and different educational institutions (early childhood institutions, general education, and higher education).

- International Tests: Which are applied to students for the purpose of verifying their possession of international competitive skills.

Teacher Recruitment and Qualification

To become a teacher in the UAE, applicants must hold a relevant university degree and pass required tests, interviews, and a probation period. All teachers must obtain a professional license based on national standards, aligned with their qualifications and experience. A standard teaching load is set at 24 periods per week across all schools and specializations. Annual performance evaluation follows five criteria: meeting teaching load, improving student results, completing training hours, performing volunteer hours, and submitting applicable innovative proposals. Teachers are also required to complete 100 training hours annually (General Framework for Education Policies, 2018).

Education Funding in the UAE

Education in the UAE is funded mainly through the state's general budget, as the federal government allocated 6.2% of the GDP to education in 2022 according to the report of the UAE Ministry of Finance, with free education provided to all citizens in public schools. The private sector also contributes significantly to education funding through private schools, which constitute about 60% of the total schools in the country, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics (2023). In addition, government initiatives such as the "Knowledge Fund" in Dubai and the "Scientific Research Support Program" in Abu Dhabi support innovation and educational excellence. The UAE attracts foreign direct investment in the education sector amounting to 2.3 billion dirhams annually. (Report of the Dubai Economic Department, 2022).

8. What are the similarities and differences between the education systems in Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates?

Similarities and differences between the two educational systems in Malaysia and the UAE in terms of historical roots:

Similarities:

- Traditional and Religious Beginnings: Both countries relied in their beginnings on the Kuttab system/religious schools (Quranic schools in the UAE and "Sekolah Pondok" in Malaysia) to teach religious and linguistic basics. Education before the modern era was limited and served few segments of society.

- Education as a Tool for National Unity and Development: After independence/establishment (Malaysia 1957, UAE 1971), both countries made education a priority to build national identity and promote development. They adopted unified educational policies (Malay language in

Malaysia, Arabic in the UAE) while being open to pluralism (ethnic schools in Malaysia, international schools in the UAE).

Differences:

- Colonial Influence: Malaysia was subjected to long British colonialism, which created ethnic divisions through separate schools for Malays, Chinese, and Indians. The UAE did not undergo direct colonialism in education, but was influenced by Arab missions (especially Egyptian) and later British in administrative aspects.

- Development After Independence: Malaysia began its educational reforms gradually after independence (1957) with a focus on integrating ethnicities through a unified language. The UAE witnessed a rapid educational boom after the union (1971) due to oil revenues, with comprehensive infrastructure built in a few decades.

- Modern Educational Model: Malaysia maintained a difficult balance between ethnic schools (Chinese/Tamil) and unified national schools. The UAE moved towards a model open to the world through international schools, while maintaining identity through the national curriculum.

Thus, the basic similarity shows that both systems started from traditional religious roots, then transformed into tools for building the modern state after independence/establishment. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that Malaysia focused on addressing the legacy of ethnic colonialism, while the UAE moved towards rapid globalization while maintaining identity.

Similarities and differences between the two educational systems of Malaysia and the UAE in terms of the influence of geographical, social, economic, and political forces and factors:

Similarities:

- Influence of Population Diversity: Ethnic diversity in Malaysia (Malays, Chinese, Indians) led to a diverse educational system (national/ethnic/religious schools). Similarly, to some extent in the UAE, great population diversity (200 nationalities) supported the emergence of international schools with diverse curricula (British, American, Indian).

- Economic Transformation and Its Impact on Education: Malaysia transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial economy and then to a knowledge economy, with large budgets allocated to education. The UAE transitioned from an oil-dependent economy to a knowledge economy, with huge investments in technical education (STEM) and smart schools.

- Geographical Challenges and Innovative Solutions: Malaysia faced difficulties in rural and remote areas (such as the e-Bario project for e-learning). The UAE overcame desert challenges through mobile smart schools and distance education.

- Role of Political Leadership: Both countries relied on clear political visions (Malaysia Vision 2020, UAE Vision 2021) to make education a focus of development.

Differences:

- Historical and Colonial Factors: Malaysia was influenced by British colonialism, which left ethnic divisions in education. The UAE was not subjected to direct colonialism, but benefited from external expertise (such as Egyptian and British curricula).

- Language Policies: Malaysia focused on unifying the Malay language while allowing ethnic languages (Chinese/Tamil). The UAE strengthened Arabic as a national language with wide openness to English in international schools.

The basic similarity appears in that both systems were influenced by population diversity and economic transformation, and adopted ambitious educational policies to keep pace with the age. The fundamental difference is embodied in Malaysia's focus on addressing the legacy of ethnic colonialism, while the UAE moved towards rapid global openness while maintaining national Islamic identity.

Similarities and differences between the education systems in Malaysia and the UAE in terms of some characteristics of the educational system?

Similarities:

- Educational Objectives: Both aim to deliver quality education, instill national values, nurture leadership and creativity, and ensure equitable access for all students, irrespective of social or economic background.

- Administrative Structure: Each system operates under a centralized model, where overarching policies are set at the national level, with regional or local bodies overseeing implementation in schools.

- Stages of Education: The two countries structure education into comparable stages—preschool, primary, and secondary—aligning in age ranges and duration, with a shared emphasis on preparing students for the workforce through technical and vocational pathways.

- Diversified Learning Tracks: Both offer secondary students multiple educational pathways, including academic, technical, and vocational streams, tailored to varied student interests and aptitudes.

- Teacher Development: There is a strong focus on teacher preparation through university programs and specialized training institutes, complemented by ongoing professional development and annual performance evaluations.

- Funding Approach: Education is primarily funded by the state, with substantial private sector involvement, particularly in the UAE. Public schooling is provided free of charge in both countries.

Differences

- Detailed Educational Objectives: Malaysia emphasizes national unity, technical and vocational training, Islamic and universal values, and adaptation to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The UAE prioritizes equitable education, leadership development, institutional performance, scientific research, and fostering a culture of innovation.

- Educational Administration: Malaysia follows a tiered centralized model (federal, state, district, school) supported by parent-teacher associations. The UAE focuses on institutional efficiency, governance, and transparent administrative services to promote safe and stimulating learning environments.

- Organization of the Educational System: Malaysia's national curriculum is complemented by private and international schools (e.g., British/American curricula), aimed at holistic student development, critical thinking, and innovation. However, The UAE adopts a multi-sourced curriculum aligned with national standards, emphasizes bilingual proficiency (Arabic and foreign languages), and uses diverse, continuous assessment methods.

- Assessment: Malaysia employs an integrated school-based assessment system (PBS), replacing the centralized UPSR exam. On the other hand, the UAE utilizes multiple assessment formats, including continuous, school-based, and national standardized tests, as well as participation in international assessments.

Study Results and discussion

The comparative analytical study of the education systems in Malaysia and the UAE concluded the following results:

1. Both systems originated from traditional religious education (Kuttabs in the UAE, and Islamic schools "Sekolah Pondok" in Malaysia) before evolving into modern educational systems. This finding goes with (Ashour & Kleimann, 2025), and (Al-Ahmadi, 2018) which emphasized the role of historical and cultural foundations in shaping the UAE's current system.

2. British colonialism in Malaysia created ethnic divisions in education, while the discovery of oil in the UAE was the pivotal factor in the development of education and the improvement of its infrastructure. This result agrees with (Mohammed et., al. 2022), (Abdel Hadi, 2016) and (Dahan & Jassim, 2016) which provided historical evidence that British policies created ethnic-based educational disparities.

3. After independence/union, governments in both countries played an active role in formulating national education policy, but Malaysia focused on ethnic pluralism, while the UAE focused on national identity. This result goes with (Mohammed et al. ,2022), (Abdel Hadi ,2016), (Ashour & Kleimann ,2025), and (Al-Zahrani et., al. ,2020) which confirmed that government intervention was a key driver in shaping the direction of education after independence/union, but with country-specific priorities reflecting either ethnic diversity (Malaysia) or national cohesion (UAE).

4. Malaysia sought to unify education in the Malay language while maintaining ethnic schools, while the UAE adopted Arabic while allowing curriculum diversity in private education. This result was supported by (Mohammed et., al. ,2022), (Abdel Hadi ,2016), and (Al-Zahrani et., al. 2020), which confirmed that both countries balanced national language policies with accommodation of diversity—ethnic schools in Malaysia and private curricula in the UAE.

5. Malaysia faced a challenge in managing education within a multi-ethnic and multicultural society, while the UAE was more homogeneous in its social fabric, which facilitated the unification of the educational vision. This finding agreed with (Mohammed et, al., 2020), and (Al Ahmadi ,2018) which confirmed that social composition influenced the ease of implementing national education policies, with Malaysia needing to balance ethnic pluralism, and the UAE benefiting from relative social cohesion.

6. Malaysia developed vocational and academic teacher qualification programs based on a national philosophy, while the UAE developed advanced national programs in cooperation with international universities to enhance educational quality. It goes with the study of (Mustafa ,2023) which confirmed that both countries have structured teacher development programs, but

Malaysia emphasizes national philosophy and vocational-academic integration, while the UAE emphasizes international collaboration and quality enhancement.

7. The UAE excelled in diversifying global educational curricula, with private education serving more than 70% of students, while education in Malaysia is more focused on the national system. This finding agrees with (Ashour and Kleimann ,2025) which confirmed that UAE's reliance on private education and global curricula enables international competitiveness, whereas Malaysia prioritizes national cohesion and centrally guided education, limiting international curriculum adoption.

8. Both countries allocate a considerable percentage of their public budgets to education, but the UAE employed its funding in education technologies and internationalization, while Malaysia focused on basic infrastructure and national integration. (Al Zahrani et.,al ,2020), and (Platcan ,2015) have supported this result making it clear that budget allocation reflects national priorities: Malaysia emphasizes infrastructure and cohesion, whereas the UAE prioritizes modernization, technology, and global engagement.

9. Malaysia linked education to long-term economic development plans (Vision 2020 then 2030), as did the UAE in its "sustainable development" vision, making education a tool for economic and human development. This result goes with (Abdel Hadi ,2016), and who confirmed that education in both countries is strategically tied to national visions, with Malaysia emphasizing Vision 2020/2030 and the UAE emphasizing sustainable development, making education a tool for economic growth and human capital development.

10. Both systems adopt digital transformation and smart learning, but the UAE invested intensively in it in recent years, enhancing its regional leadership in e-learning and smart schools. This is supported by the studies of (Ashour & Kleimann ,2025), and (Al-Zahrani et., al. (2020) which indicated that while both countries embrace technology in education, the UAE's recent investments and strategic focus have given it regional leadership in smart schools and e-learning, whereas Malaysia's adoption has been slower and less intensive.

Recommendations

Based on the study results, the researcher presents some recommendations, which are as follows:

1. The need to achieve a balance between preserving cultural and linguistic identity and opening up to global curricula and programs, as Malaysia did in its multilingual schools.

2. Reviewing Malaysia's experience in managing cultural and ethnic pluralism through education, and apply its elements in multi-cultural countries to strengthen national unity without erasing specificities.

3. Strengthening the relationship between educational curricula and the needs of the national economy as in Malaysia's experience, by focusing on skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training.

4. The necessity of adopting sustainable policies for teacher qualification before and during service, benefiting from the Malaysian and Emirati experiences in supporting continuous and technical professional development programs.

5. Create innovative funding mechanisms alongside government support, such as partnership with the private sector, especially in higher education and scientific research, as is the case in the UAE.

6. The necessity of directing educational policies towards reducing the gap between public and private education, especially in countries where private education is predominant, as in the UAE.

7. Encouraging applied educational research to develop educational policies based on evidence, with a focus on developing artificial intelligence and digital learning programs as in future Emirati visions.

8. Benefit from Malaysia's experiences in improving educational opportunities in remote areas through strategies of mobile schools or smart distance education.

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