

# **Zayed University, United Arab Emirates: Adult Educators as Midwives of Emiratization**

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Keywords: emiratization, United Arab Emirates, employment, business communication

**Abstract:** The purpose of the study is to identify the business communications skills entry-level managers in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates need and to use this to inform program development in order to promote emiratization.

'Emiratization', the sustained employment of Emiratis across the private sector, is a national priority for the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The government-sponsored tertiary institutions, including Zayed University, were established to be agents of emiratization. The faculty of the College of Business Sciences at Zayed University is charged with imparting the knowledge, skills and attitudes learners need for successful and sustained employment. To create a business communications program that supports emiratization it is necessary to ascertain which skills graduates need to be successful. Data collected by the researcher will inform classroom practice, curriculum design and materials selection with the goal to improve the effectiveness of programs responsible for enabling emiratization.

## **Employment**

In 2007, the UAE, located on the Arab-Persian Gulf, was ranked the 35<sup>th</sup> most globalized market in the world, and the most globalized of the Arab countries (Roberts, 2008). It is a country where an estimated 81% of the population and more than 90% of the workforce is expatriate. Of the less than 10% of UAE nationals employed, 2% are in the private sector – although the private sector provides 52% of jobs in the country (Library of Congress, 2007). Additionally, it is estimated that nearly 60 percent of young nationals are unemployed (Dyer and Yousef, n.d.).

## **Higher education**

The education system is the primary agent of emiratization. Articles 17 and 20 of the UAE constitution, directly address the link between the education of UAE nationals and socio-economic progress. In order for emiratization to happen in a real way – not just on paper – UAE nationals need the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will enable them to succeed professionally. Demographic data show that in 2006, 51.1% of Emiratis were under the age of 20 years (Salama, 2006). The influx into the education system by this increase of students is a burden to an education system that had already been struggling to bring about emiratization. The critical role education will continue to play in emiratization and the economic success of the UAE is underscored by Benjamin (1999), "In the emerging global economy, the quality of a state's workforce (human capital) is the only asset that will count. The stakes are therefore very high" (p. 310) and by Mograby (1999) "Here, education is considered an investment in human capabilities where a return on investment is expected by individuals and society" (p. 285). The integration of the local population into private sector employment, in which education has an essential function, and diversification away from hydrocarbons are challenges the UAE is addressing as a matter of urgency.

## **Emiratization**

Several factors have been identified as inhibiting emiratization in the private sector: working hours, wage differentials, and job security (Benjamin, 1999; Pepper, 2007). However, employers' belief that UAE nationals are a burden may be the greatest obstacle

hindering their full integration into the private sector. In 2007, 72% of employers surveyed by the Middle East Economic Digest believed that most Emiratis do not have the skills to replace foreign professionals at the same level of competence and productivity as expatriate workers, or even to enter into basic employment. Employers also believe that 40% of Emiratis have an “unprofessional approach to work”.

To overcome these barriers, educators must stay informed of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed for sustained and successful integration of Emiratis across all areas of the private sector. This can only be accomplished through a continual dialogue between education providers and employers.

As adult educators, we are midwives of change, responsible to guide and facilitate, assist and support the UAE through the process of emiratization.

### **Research**

The purpose of the session is to discuss the researcher’s understanding to-date of the business communications skills needed by Zayed University College of Business Sciences’ graduates upon entry into the workplace in order to be successful entry-level managers in the oil and banking sectors in Abu Dhabi. In light of the scarcity of publicly available information on this topic, the researcher looks to anchor her work in related studies conducted in other countries. She also hopes to elicit suggestions and feedback on socially and culturally responsive methodological options for obtaining valid and reliable data in a host-culture environment.

### **Conclusions**

Pilot data indicate the business communications skills needed in Abu Dhabi do not differ significantly from those identified by researchers in the USA and Canada.

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