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EXPLORING EDUCATION SUPPLY CHAIN
MANAGEMENT FOR EMIRATES COLLEGE
OF ADVANCED EDUCATION IN
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



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ALSHEHHI MARWAN ABDULLA EBRAHIM
ALMALEK

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2025



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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the educational supply chain management framework in the field of higher education in UAE by exploring the education-job mismatch, problems faced, and developing an educational supply chain management framework to reduce the mismatch. The method adopted in this study was qualitative research which was conducted through interview analysis. The sample size for this study included seven members of educational and non-educational sectors who provided data through administered interview protocol. Thematic analysis was considered in analyzing data on addressing the education-job mismatch. The analysis identified various factors that occur in higher education contributing to the education-job mismatch in the UAE including lack of understanding of education supply chain concept and poor curriculum. Some of the identified challenges contributing to the mismatch include poor communication, lack of collaboration and coordination, inadequate academic programs, students' unfamiliarity with the education supply chain, and a lack of innovation and invention. The developed educational supply chain management framework that facilitates the reduction of the mismatch include developing and implementing graduate employability programs, enhancing professional development, and developing and improving academic programs towards quality assurance. In conclusion, the UAE needs to improve the overall management of the education system, particularly by addressing education-job mismatches. In implication, the educational supply chain management framework developed provide guidance to stakeholders in UAE higher education effectively address the education-job mismatch, particularly by improving curriculum design, fostering collaboration among educational institutions and industry, and implementing targeted employability programs.





MENEROKA PENGURUSAN RANTAIAN BEKALAN PENDIDIKAN UNTUK KOLEJ EMIRIAH PENDIDIKAN LANJUTAN DI EMIRIAH ARAB BERSATU

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji rangka kerja pengurusan rantai bekalan pendidikan dalam bidang pendidikan tinggi di UAE dengan meneroka ketidakpadanan pendidikan-pekerjaan, masalah yang dihadapi, dan membangunkan rangka kerja pengurusan rantai bekalan pendidikan untuk mengurangkan ketidakpadanan. Kaedah yang diguna pakai dalam kajian ini adalah kajian kualitatif yang dijalankan melalui analisis temu bual. Saiz sampel untuk kajian ini termasuk orang ahli sektor pendidikan dan bukan pendidikan yang menyediakan data melalui protokol temu bual yang ditadbir. Analisis tematik telah dipertimbangkan dalam menganalisis data untuk menangani ketidakpadanan pendidikan-pekerjaan. Analisis mengenal pasti pelbagai faktor yang berlaku dalam pendidikan tinggi yang menyumbang kepada ketidakpadanan pendidikan-pekerjaan di UAE termasuk kekurangan pemahaman konsep rantai bekalan pendidikan dan kurikulum yang lemah. Beberapa cabaran yang dikenal pasti menyumbang kepada ketidakpadanan termasuk komunikasi yang lemah, kekurangan kerjasama dan penyelarasan, program akademik yang tidak mencukupi, ketidakbiasaan pelajar dengan rantai bekalan pendidikan, dan kekurangan inovasi dan ciptaan. Rangka kerja pengurusan rantai bekalan pendidikan yang dibangunkan yang memudahkan pengurangan ketidakpadanan termasuk membangun dan melaksanakan program kebolehpasaran siswazah, meningkatkan pembangunan profesional, dan membangunkan dan menambah baik program akademik ke arah jaminan kualiti. Kesimpulannya, UAE perlu menambah baik pengurusan keseluruhan sistem pendidikan, terutamanya dengan menangani ketidakpadanan pendidikan-pekerjaan. Implikasinya, rangka kerja pengurusan rantai bekalan pendidikan dibangunkan menyediakan panduan kepada pihak berkepentingan dalam pendidikan tinggi UAE dengan berkesan menangani ketidakpadanan pendidikan-pekerjaan, terutamanya dengan menambah baik reka bentuk kurikulum, memupuk kerjasama dalam kalangan institusi pendidikan dan industri, dan melaksanakan program kebolehpasaran yang disasarkan.





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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADEC	Abu Dhabi Education Council
ADSG	Abu Dhabi School of Government
CAA	Commission for Academic Accreditation
CHEDS	Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
MOE	Ministry of Education
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
SCM	Supply Chain Management
ToP	Theory of Performance
UAE	United Arab Emirates





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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



Education has remained a primary and fundamental aspect required to enhance the quality and welfare of human lives. This is because it offers an opportunity to acquire academic skills and knowledge essential in a job environment to grow one's life. As such, globally and locally, the educational system must develop competent approaches to acquire skills for contemporary work performance (Wilkins, 2019). Many countries worldwide have positioned their educational institutions to set dynamics that facilitate the evolvement of knowledge and its application outside learning places. As a result, the world has witnessed political, social, and economic improvements, especially in recent years attributable to educational development (Abdelhakim & Sabry, 2019). Society has realized high-speed globalization because of the enhanced human interaction influencing the rest of human life. Besides, through the continued supply of





education, all spheres of life have benefitted, including trade and the flow of currencies, improvement of family life, career development, and global political engagements (Almalek, 2022). The achievement of all these developments has been facilitated by the interconnection between education systems and labor market systems. As a result, governments globally have focused on strategic measures to align education and the job market properly.

However, there have been continuous rapid changes and growth in the professional sphere leading to complexities and the need for diverse educational skills. Many students want to excel in their careers and improve life quality while expecting to remain relevant in the increasingly competitive global professions (Goher et al., 2020). Consequently, many countries and agencies have been forced to consider detailed development of the educational systems to meet the changing needs and rapid demand from students who want to suit the labor market. Over time, pressure has also mounted on institutions of higher learning to build the proper framework to provide competent education and reach the end target (Abdelhakim & Sabry, 2019).

While this could be described as a global issue, United Arab Emirates has not been left behind in facing this pressure, considering the extensive expectations from employers about graduates who want to join the job market. For instance, company leaders, managers, partners, and investors have set various professional qualifications, knowledge, and skills when hiring, which can be used as the baseline to maintain quality and competent education in universities in UAE and across the Gulf region (Abdelhakim & Sabry, 2019). The reports from the national statistics show that expatriates dominate the labor market in the UAE. This scenario is explained by the





existing population imbalance where 80% of the population in UAE are expatriates and the preference of nationals to opt more for state jobs/employers (Almalek, 2022). However, education-related reasons play a significant role in the extensive employment of the many expatriates in the UAE. For instance, modern education has caused a demand for trained and skilled labor from abroad.

Similarly, while essential development schemes require skills, immediate local skills provision proved enormously difficult. On this basis, it has become essential to provide and receive proper and relevant education and knowledge in UAE and Gulf at large (Wilkins, 2019). In response, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) needs to focus on developing and aligning education systems to facilitate meeting the labor market's needs and ensure that regional economic and political objectives are achieved (Almalek, 2022). As a country of concern, UAE has been at the frontline of adopting the needed and better educational supply chain framework triggered by the frequent changes in the job market causing demand. On this basis, the current paper explores the education supply chain management framework depicted in higher education in UAE (Soto et al., 2016). The paper seeks to answer various questions about how higher education prepares graduates for the labor market, whether this has been achieved in UAE and the potential underlying problems.

1.2 Background of the Study

The Gulf as a region is characterized by great opportunities and diversity where the level of development is high as new projects have been growing at an unprecedented





rate. These changes have constantly impacted the ways of life while pressuring decision-makers to ensure that necessary skills are available (Wilkins, 2019). The UAE is one of the countries in the Gulf and is considered the wealthiest of all the states. Since oil was discovered in UAE in the 1960s, the country has rapidly developed across multiple sectors, including higher education (Tezcan-Unal, 2019). The country has focused on investing in expansion and better higher education to show its commitment to building a knowledgeable society. Through the international expansion of the education system, UAE has attracted many foreign universities well-regarded to its free zones (Soto et al., 2016). The country has established new educational institutions through independent and cooperative efforts with other institutions at the international level.



The investment in higher education in UAE has been seen as the country's

commitment to global competition to be recognized as a society based on knowledge. The Ministry of Education (MOE) in UAE launched a national higher education strategy until 2030 in 2017 (Wilkins, 2019). The strategy prioritized higher education quality focusing on research as the country eyes becoming a knowledge economy. The focus of this 2030 plan is to develop students, engage other stakeholders, including the private sector, in developing curricula, and, most fundamentally, link academia and the labor market (Tezcan-Unal, 2019). Other areas of focus for the plan are increasing the competitiveness globally for its institutions of higher education through creating new and innovative academic programs and promoting and expanding research production (Bukamal & Mirza, 2017). This expansion plan aims to produce professionals and specialized graduates to compete in global sectors that are considered vital through research production, entrepreneurship engagement, and joining the labor market.





In November 2022, the UAE government launched UAE Centennial Plan 2017, which pay a special attention on developing excellent education and knowledge economy. Through this plan, the UAE government envisioned to be one of the leading global economic players by empowering new generations of inventors and scientist in UAE equipped with necessary education and technical skills. However, the UAE Centennial Plan 2017 also mentioned one critical point i.e., UAE needs to enhance the skills of Emeratis and improve their work culture by coordinating with developed countries. This situation indirectly implies that the skills possessed by Emerati today are no longer suitable to achieve this plan. Thus, realignment between education and job requirement becomes highly pertinent.

Besides, UAE is part of the six Gulf member states that formed the GCC and has been instrumental in promoting education supply management in the country and its peers. The council was created for multiple purposes, including cooperation with the private sector and joint venture development (Von Oppell & Aldridge, 2015). Like the rest of the Gulf nations, UAE shares regional culture. Its features exemplify education and economic sectors, including a quickly growing young labor force and over-dependending expatriate labor (Soto et al., 2016). Considering that UAE faces the same challenges as others, including labor force setbacks, the development of GCC marked a milestone in addressing these issues. The council significantly influenced the need for educational promotion within UAE and other states (Goher et al., 2020). By enhancing education's influence on scientific research and skills, the initiative helped strengthen the country's development. Besides, it has strengthened the ties between people from various platforms and fostered scientific progress and improvement in the technology sector that allows exploring natural resources (Almalek, 2022). The process has been





critical in prioritizing market needs for local labor, including workforce development, employment rates' alleviation, mismatch of skills, and job growth issues while considering the development of the economy based on available knowledge.

However, despite the efforts by UAE to prioritize higher education quality, the country has continued to face challenges when it comes to producing graduates with the capability of being actively involved in knowledge base building. Designing pre-entry courses entails preparing graduates to acquire skills for the English language required for various programs to pursue diplomas and degrees (Cabus & Somers, 2018). The eye of faculty-as-observer reveals an unprecedented demand for support to acquire English skills among students pursuing university education (Bukamal & Mirza, 2017). Similarly, there is a need to apply different teaching and learning methods that can accommodate the diverse needs of learners and ensure that they understand various subjects. Notably, most students entering university do not have essential skills that include teamwork, critical thinking, motivation to read, real-time desire for learning, independency, and conducting research.

As a result, leading figures from some of the top organizations and companies continue to express dissatisfaction with the higher education system in the country. Most of them have termed the issue of churning graduates without adequate skills and the spirit of entrepreneurship to take risks needed in cutting-edge employment in the private sector. Therefore, Truong et al. (2017) have argued that it is clear that the education system in UAE was not giving out what the economy requires. Research has shown that GCC faces challenges in its quest to achieve set objectives in UAE, just like other member countries. These challenges include increased unemployment and slower





job growth caused by an evident skill mismatch (Bukamal & Mirza, 2017). Graduates are left with few chances to improve themselves after graduation. Any improvements graduates advance is motivated by graduates themselves while struggling to land jobs and through the partial support of government and universities.

Though UAE has achieved significantly in its education field compared to the rest of the Gulf States, it needs more effort to achieve the desired outcomes. The country must continue investing in infrastructure and constantly update its policies to ensure that graduates are properly equipped before entering the work market (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). Consequently, the country had its draft policy document released through the Ministry of Education outlining the educational development strategy document. The paper outlines various plans to



One of the aspects introduced by this strategic plan is to facilitate the production of the latest information technology at all levels of education in UAE (Al-Ali, 2016). There is also a significant focus on the student's needs, primarily through self-learning promotion, continuous education programs, and technology. Besides, the decision by the government to spend on education for the public has shown the deliberate move by UAE to achieve the highest admission rates to higher education in the world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). The country offers a comprehensive education to students of both genders, males and females. Beyond that, thousands of students, males and females from the UAE undertake higher education courses abroad at the government's expense. The improvement of the educational environment for all UAE students has further grown following an extensive





private education sector (Wilkins, 2019). The country has embraced highly adequate resources at all levels as a constant strategy of modifying and updating education to ensure the development of quality programs (Al-Ali, 2016). UAE has also prioritized IT education, especially in the formative years, as a significant priority as some higher learning institutions sign partnership agreements to establish centers of excellence for e-learning.

Besides, the government of UAE launched an Emiratization policy in the 1990s to increase the number of UAE nationals participating in the labor force, especially the private sector. According to the UAE population statistics for 2022, more than 91% of the workforce comprises expatriates since they constitute approximately 89% of the entire population in the country (Abbas, 2022). Until today, there are only about 11% or close to 1.15 million UAE nationals. Even the few available prefer state jobs or employers rather than private sector employment explaining the current discrepancy in the percentage of the workforce between expatriates and nationals (Ashour, 2020). Therefore, through the Emiratization policy, UAE envisioned that nationals would be able to develop the skills and competencies necessary for absorption by employers (Wilkins, 2019). While this was a move to enhance the education system in the country, it facilitated the reduction of the high dependency on expatriates in the workforce. It lowered the burden of social security payments to unemployed nationals by the government.

However, while UAE may have employed several strategies to enhance its education system to match educational knowledge, skills, and labor, there is a lack of evidence of appropriate utilization of the established education supply chain





management (SCM) framework in higher education. Most steps and actions taken by the UAE government and other institutions have been reactionary and abrupt without regard to the entire education system, from the lower levels of basic education to higher education (Almalek, 2022). For instance, most measures taken to enhance skills and knowledge by the UAE government and other institutions have been seen at the tail end of learning when students want to transition to the labor market as they exit higher education (Ashour, 2020). This has left graduates with a limited chance of improving themselves as they join job hunting after graduation since they lack enough basic skills and knowledge (Wilkins, 2019). Therefore, there is a need to conduct detailed and appropriate research about the learners and their needs from starting to learn to higher education to facilitate their smooth transition to the job market. Achieving this requires that the established SCM is utilized in UAE to ensure that higher education meets all the requirements of basic knowledge and skills that graduates should have while entering the labor market.

Supply chain management (SCM) involves managing the entire process from initiating the production of commodities or services to the end, where consumers can access them. The components that involve SCM include planning, designing, controlling, executing, monitoring, and evaluating the entire process to turn raw resources into consumable services to maximize the welfare of stakeholders and society (Madgali & Taylor, 2015). In education, SCM entails adopting industry models for higher education specifically to ensure a constant supply of quality education to graduates to meet the job market requirements (Bukamal & Mirza, 2017). The education supply chain entails all stakeholders, including students, employers, schools, and university and college staff, collaborating to meet and satisfy all the needs.





Therefore, the concept of SCM focuses more on integrating all essential elements into the education structure to ensure learners become fully equipped for the job market.

Since education SCM is the basis for achieving quality education, it requires implementing and integrating well-aligned systems that allow learners to advance in all areas of societal development. Like many other countries in Gulf, UAE has rapidly and significantly witnessed economic growth over the past recent years with fewer economic downturns (Wilkins, 2019). A successful SCM would therefore require adopting new educational systems and policies that align with the local labor market needs. However, little to no evidence exists that the higher education system has utilized education SCM.



been ineffectiveness and inefficiencies witnessed in providing education services (Ashour, 2020). This has led to the country experiencing a knowledge and skills mismatch needed for performance in the job market. Researchers, including Mohammed (2017), have highlighted various reasons behind the ineffectiveness and inefficiencies witnessed in the education system in UAE. They include limited financial resources to enhance learning that would lead to adequate knowledge and skills acquisition. There is also a lack of information integration due to poor alignment between stakeholders within the education system in the UAE (Cabus & Somers, 2018). Other reasons that could explain this situation include a lack of interactivity, more focus on supply rather than demand in education, and a lack of dynamism when providing feedback that can enhance the decision process.





The challenges UAE faces inform the need to understand how the country is learning from successful economies to align its education with the labor market needs. This is necessary considering that the number of students enrolling in higher school levels has been increasing rapidly, and projections show that more will enroll in higher learning institutions (Cabus & Somers, 2018). This rapid growth requires the country to develop new educational systems and adopt different policies to enhance the system and ensure successful SCM. These measures need to be taken in addition to what the UAE government and institutions do to improve the education supply chain. For instance, UAE's Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) helps regulate education within the country (Ashour, 2020). This regulation ensures that the graduates released are competent and meet the current labor market needs. The work of the CAA also involves accrediting educational institutions through the analytical process of the academic programs they offer before being allowed to admit students to ensure they have the right capability to provide quality education (Goher et al., 2020). Considering that the education system of UAE extends from kindergarten through to the institutions of higher learning, understanding the framework of education SCM would be critical in this study.

Similarly, the country's higher learning comprises multiple institutions, including universities, colleges, technological schools, and technical institutes. Therefore, this study is critical in understanding the extent to which higher education has facilitated graduates for the labor market; explore any skill-job mismatch, associated problems, and solutions developed over the years. This is informed by the existing realities of the education system, considering the smaller percentage of nationals within the workforce (Bukamal & Mirza, 2017). While this could be





attributable to population imbalance as non-nationals dominate UAE, a significant portion is related to the disconnect between students' abilities and aspirations. Many graduates in the country prioritize higher wages while paying little or no attention to the preparation for how to venture into a competitive market (Wilkins, 2019). Therefore, this requires understanding about the critical role of education, the existing gap between skills, knowledge, and labor requirements, the underlying issues or problems leading to the mismatch, and potential solutions that will shape the higher education systems to match all required contexts, including institutional and economic. The next section will discuss in greater detail about education-job mismatch in UAE.

1.2.1 Education- Job Mismatch in UAE



The Arab World is described as a young country, with a third population below 15 years and another third between 15 and 29 years. The IFC's Regional initiative concerned with the Education for Employment program has indicated that more than 25% of youths in the Arab World have remained unemployed (El Ashmawi, 2015). The rate is considered the highest to be witnessed globally as it costs countries in the region, including the UAE, billions of dollars yearly.

In UAE, one of the Arab countries, unemployment increases following the increase in the education level. The education profile of the unemployed youths shows that a quarter had a university or tertiary education (Tuxford, 2017). In this region, education faces multiple challenges, with vocational and technical education in UAE facing the greatest challenge considering the large number of students and graduates it





serves compared to the academic stream. According to El Ashmawi (2015), numerous studies and reports highlighted the lack of relevant employability and technical skills among the workforce as a significant constraint towards improving competitiveness and economic development in UAE and other Arab countries (El Ashmawi, 2015). This has significantly come into play considering the demographic change unfolding, global competition increasing, and rapid technology change. As all these events occur, skill mismatch has come into the limelight in the UAE as policy makers debate the differences between the education offered and the skills and knowledge required in the job market.

Significant evidence supports the mismatch between education and the job market in the UAE. In their article, Tuxford (2017) highlighted that multiple surveys in the country show the challenge for many companies when it comes to the recruitment of graduates due to the lack of necessary soft skills. While graduates reported taking several months or years searching for a job, they associated the time taken to find jobs with the lack of experience demanded by the industry. In a survey conducted by The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), most graduates in UAE believe that the education they receive failed to prepare them for their targeted industry to a great extent (Tuxford, 2017). They also indicated that their colleges was unable to assist them in applying or identifying appropriate job opportunities.

In one of the most recent studies carried out in UAE by Goher et al. (2020), the researchers found that skills and educational mismatch is a prevented phenomenon in UAE in both public and private sectors. Specific fields such as engineering have become most affected, unlike business areas. This explains the dominance of





expatriates in technical work areas since it focuses on the need to invest highly in human capital if high productivity needs to be realized. The UAE Minister of State supported the findings of the survey for higher education and advanced skills, Dr. Ahmad Belhoul, in his speech during the UAE public policy forum. The minister agreed that at least 40% of Emirati graduates have skills that the job market does not need (Tuxford, 2017). It is on this basis that the UAE government has made graduate recruitment a priority with a focus on how to address the education-job skills mismatch. Therefore, overwhelming evidence has been gathered to show the prevalence of the skills gap in the UAE, especially in the past few years. Due to the apparent mismatch between education and the job market in UAE, there is a need to investigate the area further.

Unfortunately, the UAE has not achieved the role of higher education following the identified challenges among graduates in the labor market. Employability is a serious issue within the UAE, as the respondents lament the impact of the current educational programs and systems that do not prepare learners to compete in the labor market. The results confirm previous studies reporting the prevalence of skill gaps across the UAE (Ashour, 2020). Most of the respondents in the current research were senior people, including administrators and human resources. The participants confirm some fears among graduates seeking jobs who argue that their CVs are inadequate for the advertised and interviewed jobs. Some of the graduates in the UAE are working in positions that do not match their skills, while others get underpaid because their qualifications are higher than the requirements of the post (Goher et al., 2020). The results are consistent with other surveys reporting a high unemployment rate among UAE graduates. According to the World Bank (2022a), the unemployment rate among UAE graduates has been on the rise since 2016. However, the data contradicts





expectations from the UAE government's commitment to ensure that Emiratis get employment (McClusky, 2017). The government has not been selective on skills but employs Emiratis on educational qualifications without considering productivity.

Further results on the employability theme indicate that graduates in the UAE suffer from horizontal educational job incongruity where their skills do not align with those employers want (Goher et al., 2020). The students are receiving educational programs with low demand in the market following saturation to the extent that employers are not taking any more new recruitments. Past surveys in the UAE agree with the current one showing that around 69.9% of the graduates are not using the skills gained in the university or college (Goher et al., 2020).



Moreover, the UAE is experiencing an oversupply of skills following the

government shift in its policies and strategies to regulate employment. The UAE government is concentrating on productivity to support the weakening economy (World Bank, n.d b). As a result, most of the graduates who targeted public employment are seeking private ones. The problem is the increased number of graduates scabbing for few slots in the private sector (Litke, 2019). Hussein (2022) observes that the government cannot absorb the planned graduates, and private businesses are going for expatriates whom they believe to be highly skilled. The high number of graduates without employees confirms the existence of a horizontal qualification incongruity.

Additionally, the study reveals the prevalence of vertical qualification-job mismatch in the UAE, where graduates have lower skills to perform in the labor market effectively (Goher et al., 2020). In the UAE, some individuals who have gone through





higher education programs qualify with certificates but cannot handle jobs related to their training (Goher et al., 2020). The noted problem is a qualification in theoretical knowledge instead of soft and technical skills. Institutions of higher learning lack practicum courses and well-developed programs to equip students for the job market. The findings agree with existing literature that the UAE has confirmed vertical education-job mismatch (Bridi & Al Hosani, 2022).

Arabian Gazette (2016) notes the fear among graduates that they cannot deliver in allocated job positions despite completing their training in the area. They have the skills and knowledge for the given jobs but are inadequate to assure employers of outstanding productivity. Current outcomes also agree with the UAE situation, where most graduates who expected government jobs must focus on the private sector. Studies demonstrate that some Emiratis aimed at graduating without minding skills because of the promised positions in the Government (Shaer et al., 2019). High chances are that such people leave universities and colleges without proper preparations to handle jobs related to their training.

As a result of the education-job mismatch in the UAE, the country has been experiencing ever-increasing pressure to upskill and reskill graduates. Investigations have revealed that most university graduates in UAE lack STEM, language skills, and problem-solving skills required in the job market (Al Jassmi, 2021). The initiative to reskill graduates has seen the country shift the frameworks for learning and development towards lifelong education to equip students better to thrive in the workforce. UAE has unveiled significant changes in education systems through funding





the agencies responsible, including the Ministry of Education and the Federal Authority for Quality of Education, to prepare graduates for the future job industry (Jerath, 2021).

1.3 Problem Statement

Data shows that with the education-job mismatch, UAE will spend as much as \$50 billion to bridge the gap by 2030. Currently, the country spends about \$4.3 billion annually, which is equivalent to 0.6% of its GDP, to support the upskilling and reskilling programs (Jerath, 2021). These funds go into reskilling programs that break mindset, learning, and technology barriers, offer entrepreneurial boosts, and applied skills, and leverage technology to ensure scalable skilling.



Programs such as the ‘Investment Foundation’ launched by the Abu Dhabi School of Government (ADSG) have been critical in equipping graduates with skills and knowledge in the financial sector on investment practices, ethics, and finance (Jerath, 2021). Most universities in UAE have received funding facilitating them to diversify computer science degree offerings to reskill graduates and fill in the IT skills gap. For instance, American University in Dubai is among the leading institution in the employability of graduates and has received a boost to develop a master’s degree in AI to ensure consistency with the national strategy for artificial intelligence of UAE (Tatiana, 2019). Therefore, the major areas of focus in reskilling have been in information technology and the financial sector to fill the technological and financial skills gap.





The monetary commitment made by the UAE government proven the seriousness of education-job mismatch in UAE. According to Abudaga (2020), large companies face the problem of getting competent graduate workers who have the right skills from various institutions of higher learning to work for them. Litke (2019) discussed a study that Gaad and others conducted in the UAE, which surprisingly revealed that not even one of the surveyed teachers was aware of the national educational goals. Despite that, Litke (2019) revealed that only 2 out of the 27 teachers who participated in this survey agreed to have information on the goals of the subject they teach. Apparently, there is a lack of alignment among different educational system components and activities, such as the development of curriculum, delivery, feedback, and evaluation. The researchers of this study recommended the need for an approach to think differently to align activities and streamline them.



Though secondary education design prepares students to enter higher learning institutions, most of them never make it to higher education. The Global Monitoring Report by UNESCO shows that the trends emanate from the lower level, where many graduates at the primary level fail to proceed to secondary education (Abdelhakim & Sabry, 2019). The research report prepared by UNESCO at higher colleges in UAE reveals that many students have received poor preparation for universities and colleges and lack essential skills that could triumph them through and help them compete in the job market. The research revealed a lack of connection or link between the education system's products and the needs of the labor market (Bukamal & Mirza, 2017).

Consequently, students, especially graduates, lack guidance and adequate support from the government and institutions such as universities and colleges to make





beneficial decisions and choices. According to Warner and Burton (2017), there is a clear mismatch between the products of universities and colleges and the needs within the market. Subsequently, Waham and Lestari (2019) observe that the coming generation lacked the required skills, motivation, and a sense of purpose and direction. Alongside this, Abudaga (2020) found 'foreign is better' is a common phrase strongly perceived by employers, especially in UAE, and they disregard the long-term investment in the national people.

Available literature has well-captured the failure exhibited by higher education to design and implement new systems to enhance the outcomes. Similarly, evidence from the literature presented in this section shows that the issue of education-job mismatch has gained increased attention from various stakeholders, including employers (Madgali & Taylor, 2015). This has attracted many scholars who have investigated the mismatch between the skills and knowledge offered to graduates and the job market needs. According to Abelha et al. (2020), the discussion around this issue has been presented in multiple articles, including those published in WoS and Scopus databases ranging from 2009 to 2019. However, the current study has identified various existing gaps for investigation and recommending solutions about the education SCM in higher education in UAE.

Firstly, scholars who have published reports on the mismatch have recommended various strategies that governments, educational institutions, and other regulatory bodies could conduct to reduce the gap. The recommendations have been reflected in research conducted in many countries worldwide. For instance, Li (2020) discussed a strategic plan for the Malaysian government that needed to be implemented





to reduce the issue of education-job mismatch. However, this has not been achieved in UAE despite the country still facing the problem related to education-job mismatch in its system.

Secondly, while many scholars have focused on the general issues around education-job mismatch, available studies have left important aspects unattended. For instance, little information is available on how much higher education plays a role in preparing graduates for the labor market (Abdelhakim & Sabry, 2019). The background information of this study revealed that the education system in UAE extends from kindergarten through to institutions of higher learning. At the higher learning level, various learning institutions comprise universities, colleges, technological schools, and technical institutes (Goher et al., 2020). Therefore, while the education system has multiple components and is defined by various elements, including varying levels and different forms of higher institutions, it is fundamental that higher education is singly and exclusively interrogated in terms of how it contributes to the preparation of graduates for the labor market. However, even with this picture in the eye, little or no focus has been given to this subject.

In contrast, discussions around the existing mismatch have placed a blaming finger on higher learning institutions (Wilkins, 2019). Considering that the main focus of this paper is the education supply chain, the question remains whether higher education makes a complete circle of the supply chain of the competent and skillful people required to perform the job. A review of the definition of the SCM concept reveals a whole process that starts from production to the end usage involving planning to execution, monitoring, and evaluation (Goher et al., 2020). Consequently, in the





context of the education field, SCM involves a whole learning chain encompassing all stakeholders regardless of the levels and learning, considering that they all contribute to preparing students for their careers in the job market.

Thirdly, as the studies about the education-job market mismatch continue to gain momentum and fill various databases, actual variation figures have not been presented. If anything, most of these studies have focused on the workforce representation between UAE nationals and non-nationals. For instance, the report from the labor division reveals that 91% of the workforce comprises expatriates, and most (98%) occupy private sector work. Most studies have focused on these statistics as the basis to conclude that most nationals lack enough educational skills and knowledge to work within the job market. However, the scenario where much of the UAE workforce is represented by expatriates is attributed to other reasons. For instance, the UAE population statistics for 2022 reveal that expatriates constitute approximately 89% of the entire population in the UAE. However, only about 11% or close to 1.15 million UAE nationals are in this country. From these figures, it is only logical to argue that the more the population, the more their representation in the UAE workforce; hence nationals are less represented in the workforce compared to the expatriates. Therefore, the argument that the limited representation of expatriates in the workforce is attributable to their lack of adequate and required educational knowledge and skills does not hold and has not been proved.

Similarly, statistics show that most expatriates (98%) work in the private sector because they have more preference for this area of service provision. This is not the case for the nationals since most prefer working for state employers/jobs. Considering





their few representations in the private sector, this may have an overall size of UAE nationals in the general workforce. Again, this dispels the argument that the low number of nationals represented in the workforce is due to a lack of education skills, knowledge, and preparation for the labor market (Cabus & Somers, 2018). Therefore, the existing studies about education-job mismatch have failed to provide empirical evidence to show the existence of such a mismatch. Instead, what exists is the perception that is associated with other reasons that could be refuted by empirically conducted research. Consequently, this gap warrants the researcher in this study to focus on establishing the actual mismatch between higher education and the labor market.

Fourthly, while previous studies have focused on discussing the mismatch between education and labor market needs, little or no interest has been diverted to examining the potential problems or challenges contributing to educational ineffectiveness and inefficiency. This means that no study has investigated the challenges the UAE education system faces to the extent of failing to meet the job market's needs. A few studies have conducted research in this area and identified various issues. For instance, Abdelhakim and Sabry (2019) identified a lack of integration for information, lack of interactivity, isolation of business process, lack of dynamism when providing feedback that facilitates decision-making, and more focus on supply than the need or demand for graduates from higher education. However, since this area has not received wide interrogation, building consensus around these issues/challenges identified as contributors to education-job mismatch has been difficult (Wilkins, 2019). This lack of consensus amounts to the gap in the research about the entire issue of education supply chain management at the higher education level to meet the requirements in the labor market field in the UAE that warrants current





investigations. Based on these existing research gaps, this study focuses on interrogating the supply change management for education in the higher education system in UAE.

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore the education supply chain in UAE.

1. To explore the factors in higher education that contribute to the education-job mismatch in the UAE.
2. To explore potential challenges within the education supply chain in higher learning institutions (universities and colleges) that impact mismatches between educational outcomes and labour market demands
3. To explore the educational supply chain management framework in the UAE

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the factors in higher education that contribute to the education-job mismatch in the UAE
2. What potential challenges within the education supply chain in higher learning institutions (universities and colleges) that impact mismatches between educational outcomes and labour market demands?
3. How is the educational supply chain management framework in the UAE?





1.6 Research Scope and Limitations

This research addressed education supply chain management and its elaboration, with the emphasis on higher education in the UAE. Hence, it turned its eyes upwards into the higher learning environments and downwards into the early education institutions to grasp a complete comprehension of the role of educational journey on the graduates' job readiness. However, this explorative extension introduces specific limitations to the study's scope and conclusions: However, this explorative extension introduces specific limitations to the study's scope and conclusions:

Extension to Lower Educational Institutions: The decision to focus on educational risks at kindergarten level through the secondary school sector to universities, was informed by the collective desire to have a big picture of how the entire education systems can influence the entry of graduates into the labor market. Nevertheless, such generalization could have shifted the focus from the primary research of higher education's direct impact, introducing aspect that could have complicate isolation of unique contribution and academy's functional faults in process of enabling students to get a good job. Placing second and third schools categorization, which at the same time, increases the inability to provide precision in terms of market entry difficulties arising from higher education practices and policies.

Limited Scope Regarding Education-Job Mismatch: Despite showing the role of education in the contradiction to job mismatch, the study may neglect the fundamental attributes informing this contradiction that develop in initial educational stages. Winding up that college misfit mainly with higher education could throw away





another likely reasons, which results of educational experiences from all levels. This approach actually happens to overlook the intricacies of the misfit that is an outcome of the diversity of factors that lead to the skills mismatch, thereby narrowing the research lens for the deep-seated causes of the graduate employment challenge.

Exclusion of Broader Socioeconomic Factors: The research process is in fact very meticulous not only in addressing the role of education in unemployment and poor performance but also concedes that it has not sufficiently investigated other considerable factors that are beyond education like economic, political, and social dynamics. While such focuses lenses can help isolating and emphasizing the role of education in labor market performances, they make the research fail to capture the multi-dimensional of issue at hand, which other socioeconomic factors, not education, also may have a big bearing on labor market performance.

Challenges in Literature and Methodological Approach: This research has severe limitations in that its reference material does not comprise in-depth literature that exactly targets management of supply chain completely to education, especially when this focus is on higher education. This scarcity in literatures that specifically address the relationship between higher education and other supply chain inefficiencies is a barrier to drawing evident conclusions. Lastly, the small sample size of the qualitative approach and the methods' possible applicability to statistical generalization of the research results is its inherent drawback. Utilization of a single methodological line is, in a way, advantageous for depth of the study but may reduce the variety of gathered data that, in its turn, negatively affects reliability and applicability of studies in different environments.





As part of the research, there's a need to identify these issues so that the study will be able to give an honest outlook of the methodology, scope of research and the boundaries by which the findings can be interpreted. In doing so, the study will have also laid the groundwork for future studies which may use a more complete range of educational levels to support the framework or examine other socioeconomic factors that affect the education supply chain management framework's impact in the UAE. Furthermore, it will also be possible to broaden the range of materials as well as draw on other theories and methods to refine the understanding of the education supply chain management framework'

1.7 Significance of the Study



This study unfolds on the development of an interrelationship between the education sector and the labor market in the UAE providing an overview of the critical function performed by higher education in relation to labor market dynamics. As this research applies the education-job mismatch viewed through the glasses of supply chain management to fill a substantial hole identified in the existing literature on the subject, it contributes to the field by furthering the research. This study takes a system-level approach and provides a critical account of the barriers faced by recent graduates when they enter the labour market in the UAE, thus raising awareness of the overarching problems that have not been regarded seriously in the context of the UAE so far.

Overall, this research adds new detail about academic knowledge in the following areas. It brings an innovative view to a multiple-dimension topic of





curriculum relevance and job market readiness by implementing a supply chain model in which universities can play a more prominent role in training graduates as demanded on labor-market. Through interaction with all the players in the arena- the educationists, the government, and employers, the study discovers the varied skills and abilities that are sought after by all the stakeholders, and then, it relates them to the current adjustments in the labor market. This engagement provides shades of meanings, though, on the the extent of coincidence, or not, between educational outcomes and labor market needs, in UAE, a region whose development model in constantly changing.

In addition to this, the research here is designed to close the existing gap in the application of supply chain principles in the education sector by considering education as a product. Therefore, this new strategy is fundamental for the clear demonstration of how the student transition is based on the higher education institutions and its effective action which are crucial links of the chain. The second component of this paper is the emphasis on nationals UAE focusing on the factors that stand as barriers to their integration in the labor market, especially in the private sector. This gives the paper a competitive advantage because its findings are contemporized. Through the exploration of foreign educational systems that the study is interested in, it comes up with promising solutions addressing the research concern of the factors that act upon the UAE nationals in social and economic dimensions and result in joblessness or unemployment.

Moreover, the theoretical foundations of this study lead to the practical outcomes, the concerned bodies acquire operative grounds to tackle the education-job disconnect. That can be understood as a teamwork way for educational facilities, regulatory bodies and business community to keep on revising the policies and curricula





in order to bring in maximum efficiency in the students' employment preparation. Besides, that, they also represent a very useful tool as they allow students to be guided through the specifics of demand and supply in different sectors and thus to better understand how their preparations and undertakings for jobs in both public and private sector are developed.

In summary, this paper fills the gap of the missing literature through delineating the intricate linkage between tertiary education and the industrial workforce in a UAE setting. As such, this paper not only bridges the knowledge gap but also sets the stage for systemic change. It focuses on connectivity and collaborative enterprise, in order to enhance skills and capabilities in students and make them ready for various markets. Via its all-encompassing facts and actionable suggestions, this paper takes up the flag of giving a detailed suggestion on how to deal with the difficulties of educating the students and meeting the requirements of the labor market in the UAE and further.

1.8 Definitions of Key Terms

Supply chain is defined as a range of processes appearing in a sequence involved starting from providing services leading to service consumption (Almalek, 2022). In this study, supply chain is defined as the process through which higher learning institutions including universities and colleges facilitate the transition of graduates into the job market to ensure that there is flow and bridge any gap due to lack of employees.





Supply chain management is defined as the management of the interface relationships among key stakeholders and enterprise functions that occur to maximize the creation of value that drive the needs of customers for satisfaction and facilitate efficient logistics (Walters and Lancaster, 2020). Thus, in this study, supply chain management is defined as the management of relationship between higher education institutions and employers including public and private institutions as the primary supply chain members to maximize the values of graduates in terms of their knowledge and skills to satisfy employers' current job requirements.

Educational supply chain management describes the process of managing activities and processes used to form and deliver educational services targeting students as the primary population and facilitate their achievement of effective and efficient education (Tuxford, 2017). In this study, educational supply chain management refers to the concept where the industrial models that depict job market are adopted into higher education with specific reference to ensuring a constant supply of quality education to graduates to meet the job market requirements while focusing on how to integrate all essential elements into the education structure to ensure learners become fully equipped for the job market.

High education refers to the final step students attend when undergoing formal education and involves a progressive stage from secondary education after primary (Bukamal & Mirza, 2017). In this study, higher education entails the education offered in universities and colleges before graduates leave for job market.





Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or parties having interests in an organization and are affected by the organization including its outcome (Marić, 2018). In this study, stakeholders include employers of graduates, careers masters in universities, and the ministry of education concerned with higher learning.

Education-Job mismatch- The concept explains the gap between education preparedness and the ability to perform in the labor market which occurs when the qualifications required for performing a specific job do not correspond with the needs of the labor market (Wilkins, 2019). In this study, education-job mismatch refers to the inability of the graduates from universities to fit in the job market and perform the duties as expected of them from employers.



Educational Supply Chain Framework is defined in reference to the essential

elements of educational supply chain management that enable the maximization of graduates' values in terms of their knowledge and skills to satisfy employers' current job requirements (Wilkins, 2019). In this study, Educational Supply Chain Framework refers to the training to graduates, educational programs, equipping graduates with technological skills, and up skilling and reskilling.

Education stakeholders are people and institutions that directly and indirectly affect the whole or small part of the education system and impact learners' skill development (Marić, 2018). In this study, education stakeholders include graduates, employers of graduates, university leadership including those in career department, and the ministry of education.





1.9 Structure of the Study

The study is structured into five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and analysis, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations. The introduction is the first chapter that puts the study into perspective. This chapter defines the shape of the study to help the reader understand the focus of the researcher in the paper. The chapter comprises background information, a problem statement, objectives, research questions, a theoretical framework, the significance of the study, and the definition of terms. The second chapter, the literature review, discusses the previous studies on the subject matter. This chapter compares and contrasts what others have said about education and subsequent performance in the labor market. While identifying various arguments, the chapter also indicates any existing gap for review. The third chapter of the methodology examines the processes, activities, and approaches employed by the researcher to collect relevant data to answer the research questions. This chapter identifies the philosophy of the study, design, sample, procedures followed, instruments used, and analytical methods applied. The fourth chapter, data analysis of the findings, is the actual presentation of the collected data, analyzed and interpreted. The discussion, conclusion, and recommendations are found in the last chapter five, which compares the outcomes obtained with the literature and summarizes the points, principles, and concepts presented in the study before making suggestions for improvements.





1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the perspectives of education supply chain management in higher education in the UAE. The chapter illustrates education as a critical aspect of human life that facilitates improving one's life. Education allows one to learn and equip themselves with relevant knowledge and skills to perform specific tasks. Students who undergo learning at higher educational levels gain skills to enter the labor market and achieve the goals of the organizations or employers. However, inadequate preparation leads to the inability to perform, creating a mismatch between education and job. As the need for effectiveness and efficiency in education increases, education supply chain management becomes essential in facilitating the proper preparation of graduates to fit into the labor market. The focus on these issues leads to multiple questions on what roles higher education has in preparing graduates for the market, any potential mismatch, and the challenges leading to the mismatch.

