

**Research Article****META-ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES****Alanood Alshamsi and \*Laila Mohebi**

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**Abstract**

This qualitative study analyzes a range of 34 research papers with different topics related to the early childhood education system in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) such as child education content, special education system, policies, language and literacy, learning, professional development and other topics. In view of various research papers in UAE education, the paper explores children's academic education programs and brings together different studies relating to the educational system in the country using a meta-analysis method. This research aimed to identify the current status of early childhood education in UAE. It also included the challenges that are faced by the early childhood education system in the country and the development measure that is applied. At the end, a list of recommendations is listed regarding the six topics covered in the paper.

**Keywords:** Early childhood education, UAE, Meta-analysis.

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**INTRODUCTION**

During the last two decades, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emphasized and developed the education sector. The UAE education system has faced an ambitious overhaul with flourishing improvements in education programs (AlSumaiti, 2012). A great amount of investment has been made in areas like administration, communications and delivery systems (AlSumaiti, 2012). Countrywide partnerships and joint projects have been established aiming at implementing best international practices aligned with national goals that support the development of educational programs. Below is a chronology of key events in early childhood education in the UAE.

**Research Questions**

This study seeks to find out answers to the following main research questions through a meta-analysis review of 34 UAE studies in childhood education:

1. What are the issues in early childhood education in the UAE evident in the decade of reform 2000 -2013?
2. What developmental work has occurred in early childhood education in the UAE during the last ten years?

These two main questions will help the researchers to understand the present situation, the challenges faced by the early childhood education sector and what development measures are in place to overcome those challenges.

**Scope and Research Objective**

Keeping in mind the importance of early childhood education in the life of children, it is essential to explore and analyze the present childhood education system. To understand the need for improvement it is vital to evaluate and analyze the present scenario. Relevant and applicable improvements can only be presented if the prevailing situation is understood properly.

Identification of issues will help in the crafting of recommendations that are according to the needs of the UAE system. So the main objective of this study is to analyze current research and to come up with recommendations that can help in meeting the current challenges faced by the early childhood education in the UAE. This can only be done by understanding and analyzing the current situation of early childhood education in the country.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study analyzed and evaluated 34 articles from different sources which were published between 2000 and 2013.

**Meta-analysis definition**

A meta-analysis approach was applied to evaluate and understand the considered questions. The history of meta-analysis can be traced back to 1952 when Hans J. Eysenck indicated that there were no positive effects of psychotherapy. This set off a raging debate that continued for almost 20 years with hundreds of studies, however, the debate was not resolved. In 1978 Glass statistically concluded the findings of 375 psychotherapy studies. This provided a foundation showing that psychotherapy does work and is effective. The method was later called a "meta-analysis" (Wilson, 1999). Fisher (1944 cited in Wilson, 1999) defined meta-analysis as "When a number of quite independent tests of significance have been made, it sometimes happens that although few or none can be claimed individually as significant, yet the aggregate gives an impression that the probabilities are on the whole lower than would often have been obtained by chance". In other words, the meta-analysis is concept of cumulative probability values. Meta-analysis provides an opportunity of analyzing the changes in a focused way to establish the direction and size of the effects across studies. This is essential for many studies and in this way meta-analysis is recommended for research where it is essential to measure size effect. It offers a discipline for drafting conclusions and summarizing the research findings. It provides a detailed study of all the research that is obscured in other approaches.

2000	Start initial survey of indoor air quality in kindergarten by Dubai Municipality for the purpose of providing permanent health monitoring in classrooms
2001	The establishment of The Kindergarten Development Center that provided training parameters on how to apply the new curriculum which takes 11 weeks based on two methods in practical and theoretical training.
2002-2006	Distribution of the new 16 units of kindergarten curriculum which are: Welcome Unit, Unit I, the Family Unit, the housing Unit, the unit of food and drink, the unit of Ramadan, the unit of the National Day, the unit of clothing, animals Unit, the book Unit, the transport Unit, the Hajj Unit, the desert Unit, the water Unit, the plants Unit, the unit of safety. Changing the curriculum in kindergarten cause another changes on the environment to suit the new curriculum, where traditional chairs, tables and blackboards changed to whiteboards and learning corners to meet the needs of children
2005	Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) established to oversee the development of education sectors in Abu Dhabi
2006	Inclusion for special need students in government schools Expatriate students may attend government schools for a fee
2007	1980 to 2007 the Ministry of Education (MOE) become responsible for Government kindergartens. Then this responsibility was transferred in Dubai to the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in 2007
2008	The start of inspections in school by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority for government and private schools Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) school inspections started for private schools
2009	Two government nurseries were built in two organizations in Dubai (Custom and DEWA) to serve 43 Children.
2010	Began to teach English in public kindergartens
2011	Transfer the inspection to the Ministry of Education (MOE) for the government school Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) announced that hundreds of female Emirati teachers replace expatriates in boys' primary schools.
2012	Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) announced the launching of "Irtiqa'a" program to assure the quality of education in public and private schools in Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

**Table 1. Example of data collection table**

No table of figures entries found.	Topic	Title of Resource	Type of Resource	Aim of Resource	Methodology	Key research Questions	Key Findings	Key Recommendation
Coughlin, C., Mayers, G., & Wooldridge, D. G. (2009). History of public kindergarten in the united arab emirates: past, present, future. Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, Vol. 76, No. 1.	Professional Development	History of Public Kindergarten in the United Arab Emirates: Past, Present, Future	Journal Article	Aim is to discuss the history of the public kindergarten and how the rapid expansion though has produced teachers without university degree, which became a concern.	Questionnaire and interviewing	How is the enrolment and performance in public kindergarten?	Public kindergarten recorded high enrolment and performance in the past but are gradually losing it out to the private kindergarten	There is need to rebrand the public kindergarten as the ideal place of child development by the government and other stakeholders

It increases the scope of a study by offering a large number of studies (Wilson, 1999). With that, there are certain disadvantages of the study that includes the conceptual understanding of the researcher. This means that the analysis of the articles may vary from reader to reader. It solely depends on the reader what he/she may extract from the articles. The selection of articles holds particular importance in meta-analysis process and conclusions and the ultimate target if the meta-analysis is to avoid a negative and null finding (Cooper, Valentine & Hedges, 2010).

### Researcher Procedure

A literature of 34 articles was collected from different sources focusing on the two primary questions considered for the research. The researcher found 34 published articles relating to early childhood education in the UAE. The selected articles were analyzed and included only if their topic was considered to be important to the research topic and added value to the research. The selection was based on the authenticity of the source, reviews, topic of research and relevance to current research. The literature review for the study can be defined as the collection of previously published materials including articles, reports or papers related to early childhood education in UAE (Cooper, Valentine & Hedges, 2010). The analysis is represented through the use of a table format (see Table1)

### Findings

In UAE there is a growing awareness regarding education and due importance is given to different sections. The importance of the early years' education cannot be ignored as it forms the future foundation. The analyzed articles included in this meta-analysis are focused on many topics related to childhood education in the country as show in Figure1.

### The Research Aims

There are many hot topics for educators who are interested in children education in UAE. The following sections summarize key research questions under each category and provide an overview of the links between the papers in each category:

### Child Education Content

The studies that focused on child education content are:

Faour & Suwaigh (2010).

Bennett (2009).

National Qualifications Authority (NQA). (2013).

Gaad, Arif, & Scott (2006).

UNESCO. (2007).

Neugebauer (2008).

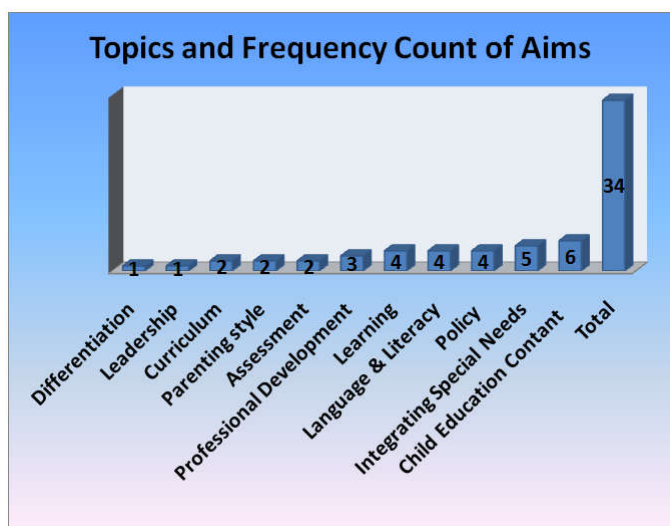


Figure 1. Topics and aims count

The questions raised in these studies include:

- What is the current status of policies, programs, and services provided for children in their early years in Arab countries?
- What are the challenges Arab countries face in early childhood Education?
- Does Dubai meet the quality standards of early childhood education or not?
- Is the system integrated as planned?
- What are the challenges facing early child hood programs worldwide?

Three of these studies noted positive aspects in the early childhood sector. UNESCO (2007) identified the aims of kindergarten education as follows: Developing the children's intuition and monitoring their moral, intellectual and physical growth in accordance with the principles of the Muslim religion. Helping the children to acquire the conceptual principals that match their age and their needs. Helping the children to acquire the proper behavioral moral rules that match their age by giving them a good example. Developing the national feeling by means of social and national activities related to the children's life and local community. Familiarizing the children with the school, introducing them progressively into the school's social life, and developing their reading and writing skills. Enriching the children's vocabulary by teaching them the right expressions and the easiest syntax according to their age and related to their life and direct social environment.

The National Qualifications Authority (2013) noted that the UAE built educational capacity, encouraged technical knowledge and innovation in the curriculum, introduced international quality assurance frameworks to raise standards, and measured performance. In recent years, a coherent, more accountable system has begun to emerge for all levels of education provision across the country. Faour & Suwaigh (2010) found that the health sector has made notable progress as the rate of Infant Mortality (under 5) has gone down rapidly in most Arab countries. There has been an increase in the quantity of children being enrolled in early childhood services aged between 3-6 years. Progression is seen in some countries regarding the policies developed to cater the needs of young children and citizens. There is a strong need of policies to

provide the underprivileged with necessary requirements. However other studies raised some issues to be considered. Bennett (2009) commented that the government funds education but the education system does not achieve the necessary goals and there is a wasting of the funds. Though over 90% of children are enrolled in kindergartens before compulsory schooling, at minimal cost to the state, the small government investment does not ensure quality of services for all young children in Dubai. Seventy percent (70.3%) of Emirati children are enrolled in private kindergarten services where quality can be improved. Gaad, Arif & Scott (2006) found that there is poor alignment among what the system was developed for, how it was delivered, and what was evaluated. In order to align this system significant efforts are needed to ensure that extensive documentation in terms of teachers' guides; training sessions for teachers and supervisors, and relevant evaluation instruments must be designed with Systems thinking as the guide. Neugebauer (2008) noted that the major challenge to early childhood education in UAE is the inclusion of young children with special needs in mainstream kindergarten and primary education.

### Special Needs Program

The studies that focused on Integrating Special Needs are:

- Weber (2012).
- Dukmak (2010).
- Dhaoui (2008).
- Gaad & Khan (2007).
- Alghazo (2005).

The questions raised by these studies include:

- What are the key programs, policies, barriers and attitudes associated with the segregating or integrating disabled and handicapped students into mainstream classrooms?
- What type and frequency of interactions initiated by students and teachers in the fourth grades in regular classrooms and in special education classrooms in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)?
- What is on offer for primary students exhibiting social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (SEBD) in a Dubai-based private mainstream school?
- What could be recommended to support children with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (SEBD) to reach their full potential in private mainstream primary schools in Dubai?
- What are the primary classroom teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream classroom in the private sector in Dubai?
- Do mainstream primary classroom teachers in the private sector perceive themselves capable of delivering inclusive education?
- How do special education teacher's perceive their effective instruction practices in teaching students with disabilities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)?

Two of the studies discussed the level of development in GCC countries and the UAE. Weber (2012) found that in the last two decades efforts have been made in the GCC countries for developing educational facilities and establishing policies for securing the rights of children. All GCC states have adopted the policy to make education available for all; however, the

majority of teachers in the UAE prefer the traditional method of delivery of special needs education (segregation) over the model of inclusion since the teachers do not have training or experience with special needs student. Dhaoui (2008) showed that social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (SEBD) occupy considerable time and effort of the administrators and the teachers, but the lack of a clear and consistent system of identification and provision for students with SEBD makes it hard to meet their needs. Within a school community that hosts culturally diverse staff and student bodies, there is a misunderstanding and confusion on how to define, diagnose and deal with SEBD-related behaviors. Other studies focused on the curriculum, classroom interaction and teacher development issues in meeting the needs of children in special education. Dukmak (2010) points out that the level of achievements and disabilities of students decide their pattern of classroom interactions. High scoring students interacted more and similarly low scoring and special needs children interacted less. Gaad & Khan's (2007) data collected showed that special needs children lacked the skills required to master the full-time routine of a conventional classroom. Moreover, the load of work of a traditional classroom would be too high for such children making it extremely difficult for them to cope. The teachers in the study also believe that along with their help these children need help from special resources, special activities and additional help in order to strive in the educational field. Alghazo's (2005) study revealed that teachers generally were ineffective when it came to teaching disabled students. However female teachers were more efficient in handling such students rather than males. Teachers who taught in special education classrooms were better than teachers who teach in centers. Experienced and inservice trained teachers had a better performance than those who were inexperienced and not trained.

## Learning

The studies that focused on learning indicated in:

Khamis, Dukmak & Elhoweris (2008).  
Whitby (2011).  
Buldu & Shaban, (2010).  
Hasiba (2006).

The questions raised on the four studies include:

- What contribution do student and parents' socio-demographics, students' beliefs about learning, parental support of children's learning, peers' attitudes towards learning, teacher-student interaction and curriculum content to students' made for the motivation of students to learn?
- How do grade 3 teachers in kindergarten teach students with the help of visual arts and what major factors influence their teaching practices?
- Who is stigmatized among students at a private school culture in the UAE?
- What are the reasons that lie behind stigmas inside the classroom, and whether certain factors like gender play a role?
- What is the relationship between having a learning difficulty and being stigmatized?
- What are the effects of a stigma on the lives and education of such stigmatized students?

- What are recommendations that could help improve the educational services which are provided to the stigmatized students in the Emirati schools?

The findings of their studies referred to a number of factors that early childhood education needs to consider in planning for effective learning. Khamis, Dukmak & Elhoweris (2008) indicated there is a huge difference between girls' and boys' motivation to learn. Girls reported higher motivation to learn than boys. Moreover, gender also affected teacher students' interaction and boys have difficulty in building relations with their teachers. Buldu & Shaban (2010) state that visual art activities such as clay work and picture painting were considered less valuable when laid in comparison with other subjects. Also, the teachers notified that the arts periods were considered less important and were often taken by other subjects. The art activities should be considered as a way to develop children fine and motor skills and it also help the children to develop their cognitive and communication skills. Hasiba (2006) commented that the stigmatized students have learning problems in mastering the basic skills of academic subjects like Math, English or Arabic language which in turn affects their achievement level.

## Policy

The studies that focused on policy matters include:

Sowa & Dela Vega (2008)  
Karaman (2011)  
International Labour Organization (2012)  
Alkhaldi (2007)

The questions raised by the four studies include:

- How does one go about collaborating to change a system that has deep roots in a traditional format of memorization, repetition and classroom management based on physical punishment and fear?
- Is early childhood education a cost-effective strategy to help prevent or remedy delays in individual learning capacity and disadvantages created by poverty and unfavourable socio-economic conditions?
- Should investment in ECE viewed as a public good with higher rates of return than interventions directed at older children or not?
- What are the early childhood educational provision, policies, structures and human resources up to the age at which children begin primary education?
- What education policies should be developed by GCC states for all members to build their society and achieve their ambitions?

All four studies highlighted the important of a strong early childhood education system. The International Labour Organization (2012) found that ECE plays the role of a key investor for all countries. It requires greater policy, funding and organizational attention to give maximum access to education to young learners and their families, and that staff competencies and conditions are central to high quality ECE. In the UAE Sowa & DelaVega (2008) found that collaboration between the university sector and the Childhood Development Center (CDC) in Abu Dhabi is mutually beneficial. It will help in shifting the curriculum away from the traditional approach toward a child initiated inquiry driven curriculum. In Dubai

Karaman (2011) also noted that the education sector has seen a rapid growth in the past ten years. Overall, there is a high rate of enrollment of Emirati children in the kindergartens, with over 70% enrolled in the private sector, while only 5% of age-eligible Emirati children in Dubai are enrolled in nurseries. However, public provision of nurseries is scarcer, with only two nurseries catering to 43 Emirati children. In addition, Alkhalidi (2007) reminds us that the UAE education system should be based on Islam which the nation should adopt as faith, law, worship and legislation, considering a complete system for life. It also pledges to provide totally-free education.

### Language and literacy:

The studies that focused on language and literacy are:

Anati (2000).  
Hamidaddin (2008).  
Gallagher (2011).  
Sabbagh (2009).

The questions raised by these studies include:

- Whether storybook reading has positive impacts or not on children literacy development and reading interest?
- Which type of educational policies and curricula favour bilingual instruction?
- What kind of teaching practices and attitudes promote bilingual development?
- To what extent do the parents' attitudes towards bilingual education impact their children's academic outcomes?
- What macro-factors and contextual variables surrounding the recent introduction of compulsory bilingual schooling in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates to understand the socio-cultural, linguistic and pedagogical issues involved?
- How do ESL teachers in the U.A.E. teach oral presentations and non-verbal communication?
- To what extent is the implementation of focused oral presentations and nonverbal communication techniques possible in ESL classes in the UAE?

All four studies highlight the positive elements of current language and literacy practices in UAE education settings. Anati (2000) for example stated that introducing storybook reading enhances the literacy of Arab kindergarteners. An increased quantity of formal Arabic language was noticed in the kids' speech. Kindergartners expressed a vast use of vocabulary and complex sentences when it came to picture story telling. Besides using words, the children's speech improved tremendously. The use of words became better and grammatical errors were less. The children easily pronounced the end of words and were able to differentiate between singular and plural words. The children were more motivated towards reading. Two of the studies focused on the issue of bilingualism. Hamidaddin (2008) comments that English is gaining powerful dominance and Arab countries educators have increased their demand for maintenance of Modern Standard Arabic MSA. Research has showed that successful bilingual training depends on elements such as language used to introduce literacy skill, subject and time allocation accorded to each language, type of coordination between the two languages of instruction, and several other factors. It was proposed that teachers from both schools would be

equivalently qualified if assessed by their certification, however, when the performance of teachers in Sharjah was evaluated, they were nether found to be highly educated but not familiar to with new methodologies of teaching. All the staff members in Dubai schools acted in a good fashion and cooperated during professional development. In addition Gallagher (2011) concludes that bilingual education is likely to negotiate linguistic, academic and socioeconomic benefits on future generations of Emirati school leavers. However, the acquisition of illiteracy is likely to be challenging because of the diglossic features of Arabic, as well as the linguistic distance between Arabic and English. Because of the ambiguity of international research findings with regard to the appropriate age to begin second language learning, as well as uncertainty about the merits of simultaneous versus sequential teaching of biliteracy, Gallagher (2011) suggested that research must be undertaken in Abu Dhabi schools into the effects of bilingual education under conditions of early Arabic/English immersion. Sabbagh (2009) found that most teachers are not at all hesitant to include oral presentations in their ESL teaching. The obtained results proved that non-verbal communication in the ESL classroom is highly useful. The teachers however shared their responses, shedding light on the many misconceptions that take place during their ESL classes when oral presentations are included.

### Professional Development

The studies that focused on Professional Development included:

Ibrahim (2013).  
Makhmasi, Zaki, Barada & Al-Hammadi (2012).  
Coughlin, Mayers & Wooldridge (2009).

The questions raised by these studies included:

- How is the role of the four-stage conceptual change approach effective for creativity development in teacher education in the Emirate of Dubai, UAE?
- What is the supervisory style preferred by student teachers?
- What is the supervisory style most used by cooperating teachers as perceived by student teachers? Why do student teachers think cooperating teachers use this style in particular?
- What is the supervisory style most used by university supervisors as perceived by student teachers? Why do student teachers think university supervisors use this style in particular?
- What supervisory styles are perceived to be most used by cooperating teachers and university supervisors, according to their own reports? Why do cooperating teachers and university supervisors use these particular styles?
- Why students do or do not appreciate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses?
- What are the factors that affect a teacher's effectiveness?
- How is the enrollment and performance in public kindergarten?

Coughlin, Mayers & Wooldridge (2009) found that public kindergartens recorded high enrollment and performance in the past but are gradually losing out to the private kindergarten. In the pre-service sector Ibrahim's (2013) study indicated that different supervisory approaches are needed, depending on the

level of development of the person being supervised. Student teachers preferred the cooperative approach used by mentor teachers rather than a directive approach used by their university faculty supervisor. For in-service teacher development Makhmasi *et al.* (2012) stated that proper measures should be taken to take into account the concerns of unsatisfied teachers belonging to this profession. Budgetary compensation is necessary along with improving resources, training and teaching material for the teachers.

### Other Topics

Other focused on assessment, curriculum, Differentiation, leadership and parenting style including:

1. Baker (2013).
2. Buldu (2010).
3. Pyle & DeLuca (2000).
4. Al-Momani, Ihmeideh & Momani (2008).
5. Dukmak (2009).
6. Ibrahim & AlTaneiji (2013).
7. AlSumaiti (2012).
8. Alsheikh, Parameswaran & Ethoweris (2010).

The questions raised by the studies indicated:

- To what degree does pedagogical documentation as a formative assessment method contribute to kindergarten children's learning?
- How do pedagogical documentation help parents of kindergarten children understand their children's learning experiences in kindergarten?
- How do teachers describe and demonstrate their curricular stance in relation to developmental and academic orientation to kindergarten education?
- What assessment strategies do kindergarten teachers integrate into their kindergarten programs?
- How do teachers' approaches to assessment align with their curricular stance?
- To what extent is the content of the kindergarten curriculum appropriate for the children in UAE, as perceived by kindergarten teachers?
- What are the teaching strategies used by kindergarten teachers?
- What are the assessment procedures used by kindergarten teachers?
- How should the teachers group the students in classrooms to boost interaction and hence the learning process?
- What are the leadership styles of principals in Dubai schools?
- What is the relationship between the principal's leadership style and school performance?
- What is the relationship between the principal's leadership style and effectiveness?
- Does the principal's leadership style differ according to the principal's gender, school level, and years of experience?
- Does the principal's effectiveness differ according to the principal's gender, school level, and years of experience?
- What role should parents play in the education of their children?

Two of the studies identified broad issues facing teachers when implementing new curriculum requirements. Pyle and DeLuca (2000) analyzed the current accountability framework of public education and observed that kindergarten teachers are

facing a problem in balancing the traditional teaching and academic methods and the newly oriented curriculum constantly being devised with a change for the betterment of students. Al-Momani, Ihmeideh & Momani (2008) found that it is the belief of some teachers that the official curriculum is not appropriate as its main focus is academics rather than the social and mental building of the child. The developmentally appropriate practices proposed by these teachers are not considered. Their instructional and grading practices stress more on academic skills. Other studies commented on the link between early childhood education and parents. AlSumaiti (2012) for example found that parents solemnly believe that educating their child is entirely the school's responsibility. However it has been proved through research that parents can also play a key role in the academic building of their children. Sumaiti's findings build on those of Buldu (2010) that pedagogical documentation (teachers' planning and records) focuses on improvement of children's learning skills, makes the teachers aware of the learning procedures and provides parents with a much more enhanced understanding of their children's education. The link between home and school was also evident in Alsheikh *et al.*'s (2010) study where results suggested that family bonding and efforts were related positively to the child's school performance and self-autonomy was related to negative performance at school. Self-esteem was unrelated to any of the factors studied. The interaction of mothers with children was highly dependent on age and gender of the child.

Baker's (2013) study focused on creativity in early childhood curriculum. Results showed that participant conceptions of creativity were altered according to the aspects of creativity embedded in early childhood. Teachers and children engaged actively and cooperatively in creative self-development and adventurously explored the creative aspects of learning. New studies and notions were easily and warmly welcomed in creative learning.

Dukmak (2009) draws attention to the issue of gender where his study results indicate that high-achieving students in all groups interacted more than low-achieving ones and high-achieving girls' interacted more than high-achieving boys. Boys interacted in the same-ability classrooms more than they did in mixed-ability classrooms but girls showed opposite results. Students in the same-ability groups interacted more than those in the mixed-ability groups.

In a leadership study that included leaders from a range of school levels, Ibrahim & AlTaneiji (2013) found that principals in 34 government schools in Dubai are more transformational than transactional or avoidant in their leadership attitudes and behaviors. The study also found that the principal's leadership style is correlated with how teachers perceive him/her to be an effective leader. The study found that female principals are more effective and transformational in their approach than male principals. The study found that schools with female principals had better performance than schools with male principals.

### Data Collection Methodology

Researchers used different methodologies to conduct their research. The table below review the most commonly methodology used by the researchers of the articles and the weaknesses and strengths of each method.

**Table 2. Number of researchers using the same research method**

Observation	Interview	Questionnaire and survey	Document collection
10	18	16	16

**Table 3. Advantages and limitations of research methodology (Kumar, 1996)**

Method	Advantages	Limitation
Interview	Get in depth information Explain for the respondent to understand the question better Appropriate for sensitive and complex topics or state Can be used for a wider research population (children and illiterate people) Can be recorded and transcribed for later analysis	Time consuming and expensive The quality of the data depends on the interaction of interviewer and the interviewee and the experience and skill of the interviewer
Questionnaire & Survey	Quick method to collect data People can give more info People have time and think of their answers	Cannot be used for illiterate people Questions should be direct and clear People can misunderstand a question Answers can be untrue and biased
Document Collection	Detailed information collected by different people perspective. Data collection could be grouped a cording to the interest of the researchers and could be compared	Validity and reliability will be differing between normal researchers and government data. Personal ideas of the writer could affect the data and finding. Some documents are not easy to collect.

Researchers used these different methods to collect their data, to answer their research question or to check their hypotheses. Most of the data in the collection of the papers are collected by questionnaire, survey and interview. Using these three techniques in research has an advantage and limitation as Kumar (1996) mentions (see Table 3).

## DISCUSSION

The early education learning process is a concern for educators. There is a huge effort in building a flourishing childhood education sector from the UEA government. The comment by Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid in January 14, 2014 in Tweeter that the government will increase the budget for the childhood education indicate that education system stakeholders understand there is a relation between curriculum and motivation to learn (Khamis, Dukmak, & Elhoweris, 2008). Girls place a very high value on education, and are educationally and occupationally ambitious (Whitby, 2011). Therefore education stakeholders should make boys have the same ambitions as they make the other half of our UAE society. It might start by improving the home-school relationship through the cooperation between school and parents that can contribute to a large extent in solving student's difficulties as well as improving his/her behavioral problems (Hasiba, 2006). Also visual art activities such as drawings, paintings, print-making, clay work, construction, and handicrafts can increase students' involvements and interactions in the learning process (Buldu Shaban, 2010). It is a satisfying fact that notable progress has been in the health sector since the rate of infant mortality (under 5) has declined in most Arab countries (Faour & Suwaigh, 2010). With this an increase in the number of enrolled children in early childhood services was noticed. The enrolled children are aged between 3 to 6 years (Faour & Suwaigh, 2010). The major challenge to early childhood education in my country is the inclusion of young children with special needs in mainstream kindergarten and primary education (Neugebauer, 2008). The UAE builds educational capacity, encourage technical knowledge and innovation in the curriculum, introduce international quality assurance frameworks to raise standards, and measure performance. In recent years, a coherent, more accountable system has begun to emerge for all levels of education provision across the country (International Labour Organization, 2013). The aims of kindergarten education are as follows:

- Developing the children's intuition and monitoring their moral, intellectual and physical growth in accordance with the principles of the Muslim religion.
- Help the children to acquire the conceptual principles that match their age and their needs.
- Help the children to acquire the proper behavioral moral rules that match their age by giving them a good example.
- Developing the national feeling by means of social and national activities related to the children's life and local community.
- Familiarize the children with the school, introducing them progressively into the school's social life, and developing their reading and writing skills.
- Enriching the children's vocabulary by teaching them the right expressions and the easiest syntax according to their age and related to their life and direct social environment (UNESCO, 2007).

Therefore, Emirati mothers have expressed an interest in early childhood education services (Bennett, 2009). It is alarming that only 5.4% of nursery staff in Dubai speak Arabic, raising concerns about children whose first language is Arabic (Bennett, 2009). This is one of the biggest concerns for the parents and that is the reason why most of the parents are unwilling to send the children to the nurseries. In the UAE the trend of enrolling children in preschool is increasing. The parents prefer private kindergarten where they have more quality. The trend is more among the non-nationals and the percentage of Emirati children enrolled in the nursery is 5% only (Bennett, 2009). Improvement in teachers' quality in the child education sector is needed to ensure greater access and quality. It requires a detailed approach with right levels of funding and frameworks. Proper qualified and trained teachers are the blood stream of educational institute, especially for boys schools since the UAE faces a huge gap between boys and girls school quality services. In order to align the system, significant efforts are needed to ensure that extensive documentation in terms of teachers' guides, training sessions for teachers and supervisors, and relevant evaluation instruments must be designed with systems thinking as the guide (Gaad, Arif, & Scott, 2006). There has been an increase in the number of Emirati children being enrolled in kindergartens and nurseries with over 70% going to the private sector while 5% are placed in government nurseries (Karaman, 2011). Seventy percent of Emirati children are enrolled in private kindergarten services where quality can be improved.

There is a scarce provision of government nurseries in Dubai with only two nurseries catering to 43 Emirati children (Karaman, 2011). Though private nurseries are running successfully it is essential that government should take measures to provide economical and affordable education since most of the private nurseries take it as money making. Collaboration with the Childhood Development Centers is mutually beneficial. It will help in shifting the curriculum away from the traditional approach toward a child initiated inquiry driven curriculum (Sowa & DelaVega, 2008). There should be the division of a system to maintain quality and to collect data in order to assist areas like expenditure; staff qualification and professional development (International Labour Organization, 2012). However all the development and reforming should match our main policy which is coming from our Islamic religion which the nation should adopt as faith, law, worship and legislation, considering a complete system for life (Alkhalidi, 2007).

In the last two decades efforts have been made in the GCC countries for developing educational facilities and establishing policies for securing the rights of children (Weber, 2012). All GCC countries and the UAE have adopted the policies to make education available for all including special need students; however the majority of teachers in the UAE prefer the traditional method of delivery of special needs education (segregation) over the model of inclusion (Weber, 2012). Since the teachers have no training or experience with special need students it is impossible to use curriculum materials, tools or techniques to enhance all students achievements including the low scoring and the special need students (Dukmak, 2010). Curriculum, lack of special resources, and no special activities make most of Dubai private teachers favor traditional special education delivery models over full inclusion practices (Gaad & Khan, 2007). Teachers generally are ineffective when it came to teaching disabled students. However female teachers were more efficient in handling such students rather than males (Alghazo, 2005). The teachers and administrator have to help the students to get the sense of belongingness (Dhaoui, 2008). New laws and legislations should be developed for the children with special needs. Schools and training institutions in Dubai should provide the teachers with the following training:

- Informative workshops in teaching students with special needs (grading, testing, classroom management).
- Time management strategies.
- Resources, tools and materials to help the teachers achieve their desired learning goals.
- Reduced class sizes
- School administration should be involved in the students' achievements and behaviors development (Gaad & Khan, 2007).

Educational policy makers should be aware that choosing a dominant language for schools is a crucial decision that shapes the entire school's environment, personality of the child and the entire community (Hamidaddin, 2008). More importantly, an increased quantity of formal Arabic language should be developed in all private and government schools (Anati, 2000). Teachers should make special efforts to gain literacy in both languages and most teachers are not at all hesitant to enroll in professional development workshops to share their experiences and to develop their skills (Sabbagh, 2009). Bilingual education is likely to negotiate linguistic, academic and

socioeconomic benefits on future generations of Emirati school graduates (Gallagher, 2011).

Innovation is part of the reforming system in the education sector that demands a lot of perfection and creativity. The Ministry of Education, Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), and Abu Dhabi Education Council set up a school inspection groups to insure quality (Baker, 2013). Moreover much research has been on the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of teachers within the old traditional system and the new interaction forms of education (Ibrahim, 2013). In this regards teachers and school administrators are involved in a range of professional development to enhance their performance and to familiarize them with the new curriculums and tools (Makhmasi, Zaki, Barada & Al-Hammadi, 2012). The professional development for all people working in the education system makes the learning move from unavailable curriculum to curriculum based on educational theories and discipline techniques (Coughlin, C., Mayers, G., & Wooldridge, 2009).

It is observed that teachers are facing problems in balancing the teaching and the academic methods in assessment with the new curriculum (Pyle & DeLuca, 2000). The pedagogical documentation focuses on improvement of children's learning skills, makes the teachers aware of the learning procedures and provides parents with a much more enhanced understanding of their children's education (Buldu, 2010). Ibrahim and AlTaneiji (2013) found that school leaders indirectly influence student achievement and school environment. In the UAE most parents are interested in results rather than the learning of their children (Sumaiti, 2012). They cannot understand that students differ in knowledge, skills, developmental stage, and learning rate (Dukmak, 2009). It is noticed that the children are really overburdened with the exceeding expectations by the parents and some time schools. On the other hand, the interaction of parents with children was highly dependent on age and gender of the child (Alsheikh, Parameswaran, & Ethoweris, 2010). The situation is more crucial with kindergarten students since the communication between school and parents will shape their future learning process (Al-Momani, Ihmeideh & Momani, 2008).

## Recommendations

After detailed analysis and evaluation the researcher presents the following recommendations.

### Special needs program

- Teachers should be provided with proper training for teaching of toddlers with special teaching needs.
- Teachers should be trained to create an interactive and cordial environment with special needs students.
- Special needs assistance (shadow teacher) should be available in schools.

### Language and literacy

- Curriculum should focus to develop multiple language vocabulary among the children. It is necessary in a multicultural society such as UAE without ignoring the Arabic language and Islamic culture.
- The curriculum should be a perfect mix of reading, writing and speaking activities.



## Professional development

- Opportunity should be provided to the male teachers to craft the future of the nation with consideration of salary level that links to other male dominated occupations.
- Teacher training program should be applied throughout the year.
- The most innovative and latest teaching techniques should be introduced to maximize the efficiency of the early education system.
- Share documentation of teachers' guides, training sessions for teachers and supervisors, and relevant evaluation instruments

## Other topics

- Parents training programs should be introduced to educate the parents about the importance of the early education for their child and their interaction with the schools.
- Parents should be educated that knowledge building, learning and skill development is more essential than scoring well on the GPA scale.

## Conclusion

Children are the future of the nation. They shape and craft the today and tomorrow of the country. Their development is of critical importance. Research proves that the most fertile period in terms of learning for any child is between the ages of one to six. During this time the child learns language, develops acquaintances and understands surroundings. If this time is utilized properly the child can develop certain habits that can be an asset for him or her for life like learning, exploring, etc. The education sector in the UAE has evolved and developed impressively during the last decade. Early childhood education is no exception as well. The dedicated effort is made in developing this section of the education sector. This research emphasizes the current situation of the early childhood education and the challenges faced by it. It is concluded during the research that the trend of sending toddlers to the nurseries is increasing but the non-nationals are enrolled more as compared to the UAE nationals. The reason is that most nurseries do not have Arabic speaking teacher and that is a major concern for the parents. Because that public owned nurseries are few in number private kindergartens and nurseries are preferred by the parents. The curriculum needs to be customized according to the needs and requirements of the country. It should be aligned with the social standards and ever changing global requirements of today. It should be made interactive, assist learning and information; it should focus on developing knowledge rather than scoring grades. The teachers should be trained properly and training should be applied as a continuous process. The training should include class environment, child management, and improve teaching skills, etc. The teachers teaching children with special needs should be trained accordingly. Parents should be educated and offered workshops to make the school-home more effective.

The children hold the future of the nation. To make early childhood education effective national level strategy should be developed with customized curriculum. The standard of the number of public nurseries should be increased to ensure a radiant present and bright future.

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