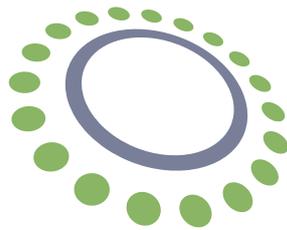




Creative Clusters in Dubai's Education sector: A Public-Private Partnership towards development.

Mona Mostafa El-Sholkamy





منتدى الإمارات للسياسات العامة
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Public-private based partnerships have been gaining momentum in many emerging economies, and the U.A.E. is no exception. Alongside the advancement of creative clusters, the benefits stemming from these partnerships are that the delivery of services can be provided in a more efficient manner, through channeling the private sector's networks and expertise. The Dubai Creative Clusters Authority (DCCA) was established as a government regulatory body, and recently mandated an unprecedented regulation that fortifies part-time student work contracts. The primary objective of this regulation is to enable businesses under its jurisdiction to access a pool of university students who present themselves as potential part-time employees, seeking to complement their fields of study and increase their employability after graduation. Aligned with the country's National Vision Agenda for 2021, this Public Private Partnership will foster the role of private sector companies, contribute to the provision of job opportunities to Emiratis, and potentially take part in the government's fiscal consolidation policies that aim to relief the financial burden on the latter. This study explores how such an initiative will narrow the knowledge-skills gap prevailing in the labor market, and could possibly provide sustainable employability for university graduates.

JEL: E24, J41, O15 and O38

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Introduction

Based on a Public Private Partnership (PPP) model, the Dubai Creative Clusters Authority (DCCA) is established to foster the development of Dubai's academic cluster and has launched an unprecedented regulation that will fortify a part-time student work policy across the emirate. The primary objective of this regulation is to enable private-sector businesses under its jurisdiction to access a pool of university students who present themselves as potential part-time employees, seeking to complement their fields of study and increase their employability index after graduation. The new regulation is expected to narrow the knowledge-skills gap generally prevailing across the Arab World, as identified by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2016, and allow partnering companies to attract and retain talented employees. The U.A.E., and particularly Dubai, are geared towards an innovation-driven economy, hoping to provide all opportunities necessary for its labor force to work in sectors such as technology, life sciences, energy, education and others. The current spread of education across generations and the expected future trajectory of jobs highlight certain challenges and particular strategies for the UAE. The UAE needs to adopt new educational and training strategies to qualify for the future competencies in current labor markets (Elsholkamy et al., 2017).

There is mounting evidence of a profound mismatch between job requirements and skills, as young people fail to acquire the talent needed to succeed in today's jobs, let alone tomorrow's. According to the World Economic Forum, nearly 40% of employers in the region in 2017 indicated that skills gaps were a major impediment to business growth and several countries in the region fell below the global average in the ease of finding skilled employees.

The gap exists across basic skills, starting from creative and independent thinking, all the way to functional skills and technical expertise; and all that is in between (ibid). The strong reliance on public sector employment in the UAE has also contributed to the intensity of the problem. In addition, the private sector and the education system remain in silos, missing out on the benefits that could be generated if they share the responsibility in producing appropriate skills for a dynamic labor market such as that of Dubai.

Having expanded its industries and educational capacities, turning into the number one educational hub for international branch campuses, Dubai is determined to 1) enhance the match between skills and jobs; 2) divert the interest of its nationals to employment opportunities in the private sector; and 3) spare the generous budget-allocations that are currently being expensed to finance public sector wages, at times when fiscal consolidation is a dire necessity. Achieving this will necessitate a strategy reform in skills policies, fiscal policies, and labor market regulations. It will also require a shift in actions and attitudes of the Emirate's government, businesses, and workers alike. While there is a wide range of measures that address job creation, this report explores how the private and public sectors alongside a number of specific strategies can work together to address the mismatch between jobs and labor skills.

The Dubai Creative Clusters Authority

The ratification of the DCCA decree and its collaboration with private sector enterprises and universities is an initiative that will support the regular inflow of domestically trained candidates in key industries, invigorating Dubai's position as a career nucleus. The new regulation has the potential to bring about many economic and societal benefits. What is key, however, is the creation of holistic partnerships and strong synergies between government, businesses and universities to maximize its success.

Prior to the establishment of the part-time work regulation, students in Dubai were unable to secure employment while studying, lacking vital workplace experience and skills needed to keep up with the fast-changing job market. By connecting the higher education and industry sectors, the student experience has been enriched through exposure to real-world experiences such as forming professional relationships at an early stage, ultimately increasing their chances of full-time employment after graduation. Most importantly, part-time work inculcates a sense of responsibility and self-reliance, by providing students with the opportunity to support themselves financially.

Students are not the only stakeholder group to benefit from this initiative. Businesses licensed by DCCA now have access to a valuable, enthusiastic and creative stream of cost-effective talent. This is especially important for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which account for approximately 90% of private sector employment in the UAE, allowing much needed flexibility to build capacity for short term projects (WEF, 2017). Utilizing a qualified and well-rounded workforce, businesses can now effectively match talent with skills and reduce recruiting unskilled workers from overseas.

Aligned with its National Vision Agenda for 2021, this Public-Private Based Partnership will foster the role of private sector companies, contribute to the growth of the “earn while you learn program”, and potentially take part in the government's fiscal consolidation policies that aim to relief the financial burden of the latter. On the other hand, the DCCA will play the role of the regulatory body that will ensure all stakeholders involved adhere to the ultimate objectives of this partnership, while protecting every entity's legal rights and entitlements. This research draws on an ongoing evaluation of one of the initial attempts for this initiative – the DCCA - where nine creative clusters are being utilized as instruments to stimulate local economic development and social inclusion.

The Evolvment of Creative Clusters and PPPs in the UAE

Creative clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (for example, universities, standards agencies, and trade associations) in particular fields that compete but also co-operate (Chapain, 2010). They are also 1) places that bring together communities of ‘creative people’ who share an interest in novelty but not necessarily in the same subject; 2) catalyzing places where people, relationships, ideas and talents can spark each other; 3) environments that offer diversity, stimuli and freedom of expression; and 4) open and ever-changing networks of inter-personal exchanges that nurture individuals’ uniqueness and identity (Pratt, 2004). An integrated set-up for creative clusters with such impacts, if embedded with a dynamic public private partnership in a particular field, could very much yield unprecedented accomplishments (Delgado et al., 2016).

Public private partnerships (PPPs) have been around for quite some time and are gaining momentum, particularly in the U.A.E. Public private partnerships are considered an essential tool for providing public services and infrastructure capital. A conventional definition of PPPs would describe it as “a long-term contract between a private party and a governmental entity providing a public asset or service, where the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility and the return on investment is linked to performance” (Patrinos, 2009). Education is positioned as a critical catalyst for any country’s economic, political, and social development

(Patrinos, 2009). It is an indispensable ingredient for society members’ engagement in markets and economic activities. These are but few of the reasons why governments around the world take over the responsibility for providing and financing education, at all levels. Some of the acknowledged ultimate objectives of PPPs in the field of education revolve around the arguments of increasing the accessibility of high quality education; efficiently utilizing otherwise-underemployed school infrastructure; and last but not least, improving the quality of education from a holistic perspective. But this responsibility is a large and complex one for any government to meet adequately, which is why it is important for governments to explore diverse ways of financing and providing educational services.

From the Emirati perspective, PPP initiatives take a unique form. According to the country's ministry of finance, Public Private Partnerships are considered an effective way to enhance sustainable development, and a major contributor in driving the economy of the country forward. This is done by expanding investments, providing jobs, and offering a variety of services by accountable stakeholders engaged in added value projects. For this mechanism to operate effectively, a robust public sector is needed to facilitate and coordinate the activities of all parties; alongside a competitive private sector characterized by its spirit of initiative.

Dubai's Department of Finance (DoF) understands the importance of PPPs in executing projects that deploy citizens and residents alike, and provide ample room to accommodate national, regional and foreign investments alike. Hence, the Dubai Government firmly believes that such integration and harmony of roles and responsibilities will contribute positively to the development of public sector programs and to opening channels for the private sector to expand its investments and activities. (MOF, 2016).

Facing increasing budgetary pressures resulting from plummeting oil prices, public sector entities are resorting to private finance to help pay for projects. In the case of higher education and the Dubai Creative Clusters Authority (DCCA), the government has drafted an unprecedented law that will allow university students to land part-time jobs, in the private sector, with legal contracts and paid compensation packages. The rationale behind such initiative is based on the notion that the Dubai government is seeking the provision of job opportunities by private companies, that it can no longer afford to offer for its national community. The main objectives revolve around a number of themes pertaining to government fiscal reforms, Emiratization of the private sector, bridging the gap between labor-market requirements and graduates' skills, and other positive spill-over effects.

The DCCA is a government regulatory body mandated to foster the economic development of Dubai's creative clusters and related knowledge industries. The authority launched a pioneering regulation that will enable over 4,500 businesses to offer part-time employment to 26,000 university students across the emirate's nine free zone creative clusters. Notably, the new regulation is expected to narrow the gap between labor market requirements and skills of fresh university graduates. It is also anticipated to tackle the concern of lack of availability of talent with the necessary qualifications as being a key barrier to recruiting in the UAE. It is evident that the ecosystem in the UAE is geared towards transitioning from what is currently a knowledge economy to an innovation-driven economy; making this regulation both relevant and crucial.

The objectives of the new regulation are perfectly aligned with the national vision of the country, set for 2021; which articulated the setting up of a competitive knowledge-based economy as one of its key performance indicators. The 12-point agenda includes growing the proportion of “knowledge workers” in the UAE’s workforce to 40%, from the 23% recorded in 2015. (MOF, 2016).

Dubai has also drafted its own stand-alone “Dubai Strategy for Innovation” agenda which focuses on cultivating and endorsing students in STEM systems (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), with the intention of nurturing a culture for innovation in the long run. According to the DCCA’s new regulation, the “earn-while-you-learn” perception will open doors for students to get employed in technology, science, and energy sectors. All of which are represented within the nine clusters regulated by the latter.

It is expected that this new regulation will create a substantial influx of locally trained graduates in these key industries, further accentuating Dubai’s position as being a hub for STEM careers in the region. It is also expected to raise employability standards among the emirate’s graduates, especially after the recent concerns about the widening gap between labor market requirements, and employability criteria among potential recruits.

Employability is the combination of factors which enable individuals to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to progress during a particular career. It is a complex and multi-faceted notion. The intricacy of applying a straightforward definition has been recognized by various studies. Garrouste (2011) highlights the existence of two alternative perspectives in the employability debate. One focuses only on the individual’s characteristics and skills, referring to the individual potential to obtain a job. The other perspective takes into account also external factors (such as labor market institutions, socio-economic status, demographic variables) that influence a person’s probability of getting into a job, of moving between jobs or of improving his/her job. De Grip et al. (2004) call these factors ‘effectuation conditions’, i.e. the conditions under which workers can effectuate or carry through their employability. Any definition based only upon individual characteristics and skills would disregard the potential influence of the institutional settings that support personally or collectively the transition from school to work, and help the employed workers to stay in their job and the non-employed workers to find a job.

Based on the interest of this research, it is important to identify ways in which policies impact and can further enhance employability. Hence, a successful achievement of individuals at each stage of their working life would require the presence of the right combination of employability elements. Education and training– formal, non-formal and informal - are core

determinants of a person's human capital, both initially and, through lifelong learning. Good education and training should also stimulate motivation, build the skills important for the workplace and facilitate job search. Still, many employability factors lie beyond the scope of education and training policies. At the individual level, socio-economic determinants and personal attributes play an important role; while at the macro level, labor market regulations, structure of the economy and the overall economic situation constitute important employability conditions (Arjona et al., 2011). Hence, education's support for employability can be seen in three distinct phases:

The first phase could be referred to as the "preparation for employment" phase. Irrespective of the educational pathway chosen and the level of qualification attained, all young graduates should leave their initial education equipped with key competences and the necessary motivation and understanding of the labor market to allow them to progress in their future careers, all the while bearing in mind that preparation for employment is not the only purpose of formal education. The second phase, known as the "Transition from education to employment" refers to the end of the "preparation for employment" phase. During this phase, the contribution of education and training systems could, for instance, occur through career guidance and counseling; and through the development of qualification frameworks which are transparent, comparable and understandable to potential employers.

Finally comes the "stay in employment and progress in career" phase, which refers to the capacity of education and training systems to update and upgrade continuously the knowledge and skills of workers. It implies an openness and accessibility of education and training systems to all adult learners.

The problem of graduates' employability remains a continuing policy priority for higher education (HE) policymakers in many emerging and advanced economies. These concerns have been given renewed focus in the current climate of wider labor market uncertainty. Policymakers continue to emphasize the importance of 'employability skills' in order for graduates to be fully equipped in meeting the challenges of an increasingly flexible labor market. The UAE labor market regulators are no exception. The national labor market structure of the UAE, together with its employment mechanisms have their own distinct features that evolve in conjunction with wider structural transformations around the globe. Dominant discourses on graduates' employability have tended to center on the economic role of graduates and the capacity of HE to equip them for the labor market. Accordingly, there has been considerable government faith in the role of HE in meeting new economic imperatives. Graduates are perceived as potential key players in the drive towards enhancing value added products and services in an economy demanding stronger skill-sets and advanced technical knowledge. Yet, the position of graduates in the economy remains contested and open to a range of competing interpretations.

The future prosperity of the UAE will depend on its success in developing and enhancing its skill potential. The country’s vision for future economic development aims to eliminate, to a great extent, its reliance on foreign employees, and resort to a pool of talented and well educated Emirati natives. For these objectives to come true, they require effective and synchronized skills-policies that address issues like: the necessary skills essential for the rise of an emerging industrial economy; the preparation of students and graduates for the requirements of the labor market; and the efficient – most productive use – of available scarce resources and knowledge management.

Figure 1: The advancement of Creative Clusters in Dubai’s Education sector: A Public-Private Partnership towards educational and TVET development



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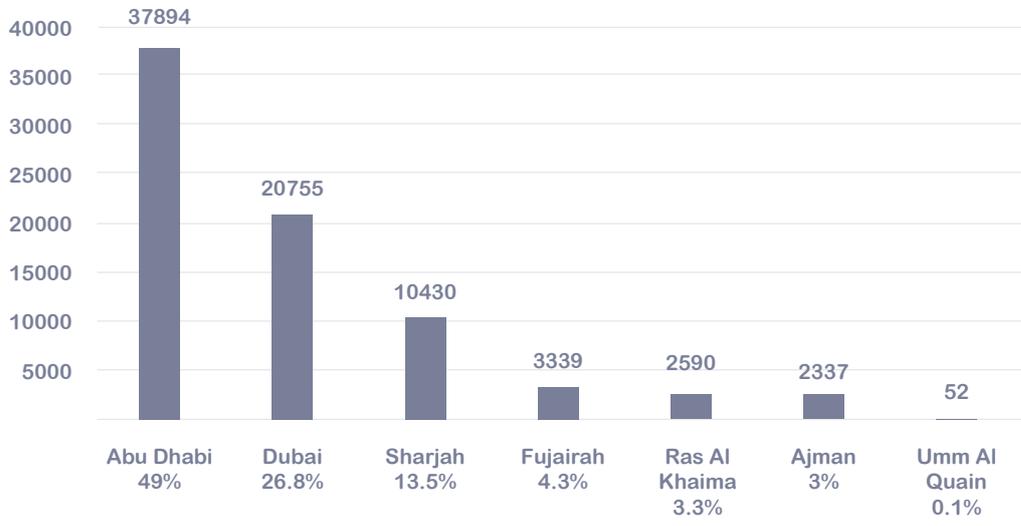
The global move towards mass higher education is resulting in a much wider body of graduates in arguably a crowded graduate labor market. This is further raising concerns around the distribution and equity of graduates’ economic opportunities, as well as the traditional role of HE credentials in facilitating access to desired forms of employment. There has been unprecedented prioritization in the UAE of enhancing the country’s Higher Education outputs, quality and overall market responsiveness. Such changes have coincided with what has typically been seen as a shift towards a more flexible, post-industrialized knowledge-driven economy that places increasing demands on the workforce and necessitates new forms of work-related skills.

In the wake of 2017, the UAE developed government campaigns and policies to regulate and ensure Emiratization in the private sector. Emiratization programs had started years earlier of course, but recently been regarded as a pressuring precedence that needs to be granted top priority. Hence, the ministry of human resources and Emiratization (MOHRE) stated these policies aim at improving the representation of UAE nationals in the private sector. The MOHRE issued amendments to the prevailing Emiratization framework that was ratified at the wake of 2017. The policies it contained aimed at improving the representation of UAE nationals in the private sector. Policies pertaining to entity classification, in terms of the number of UAE nationals that they employ, have also been revised, with companies now having more incentives to work towards improving their Emiratization records. This initiative coincides and perfectly aligns with the DCCA framework. Not only will it support the recruitment of Emiratis, it will also provide them with the opportunity to work while they are still students. An exercise which is already common practice among UAE natives.

It has also been a long-standing trend in the UAE where public sector resembles the stable, high-pay rewarding job for national new-market entrants and experience job seekers alike, resulting in an oversaturated public sector. This inclination is also to be reformed. The strong dependence on public sector employment has led to a bloated government body, that is no longer expanding at the same pace as graduate-inflows into the labor market are (The Economist, 2016). Furthermore, being an exceptionally lucrative sector in terms of compensation and pay, has only burdened the government budget at a time where plummeting oil revenues are not doing the country any favor. Hence, the two-fold-objective strategy of Emiratization will not only relieve the fiscal budget and allow for a re-allocation of now-scarce resources; but will also divert the attention of nationals to the private sector where more challenging and competence driven ecosystems dwell on the latent talents of graduates. Emiratization after all is a policy led by “positive discrimination” and aims at reducing the country’s over-reliance on expatriate labor. Through it, the UAE hopes to manifest the private sector as a vehicle of growth and development driven by local employees towards promoted efficiency and effectiveness.

According to the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), which is a government entity responsible for educational quality-assurance and regulation of private sector academic institutions in Dubai; there are 26,125 university students in the emirate, as per 1024-15, of which 67% of those are natives. Based on the KHDA statistics, there has been a 7.5% growth in student enrollment in Dubai, which is currently the biggest host of around 26 international branch university-campuses from 11 different countries (KHDA, 2016).

Distribution of UAE national students by location of study

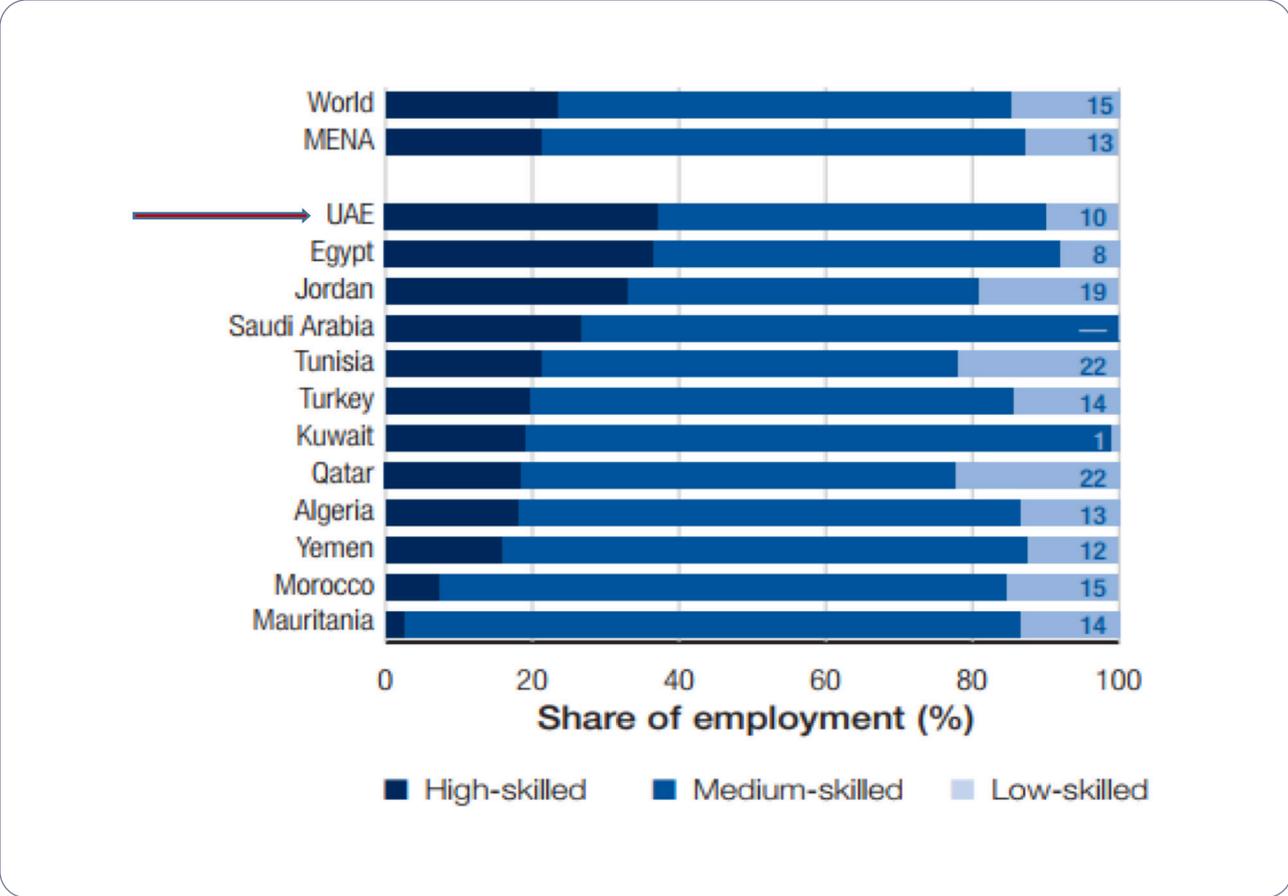


Compiled by the researcher based on data from the center for higher education data and statistics (CHEDS)

Perceptions of stakeholders involved.

A qualitative content-analysis research was conducted to explore how the emergence of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and academic clusters in Dubai could have a positive impact on the employability of UAE nationals and their entrance to the private sector labor market. The research problem in this context is the significant job-skills gap prevailing in the region in general, and in the UAE in specific; despite the dire need for human capital to occupy the rising high-skilled jobs (Elsholkamy et al., 2017). With almost 40% of jobs being classified as high-skilled, the UAE has recently embarked on a number of initiatives aiming to narrow the gap between job requirements and labor skills, while also harnessing human capital potential towards the private sector rather than its public counterpart (Elsholkamy et al., 2017).

MENA’s employment distribution, by skill level required.



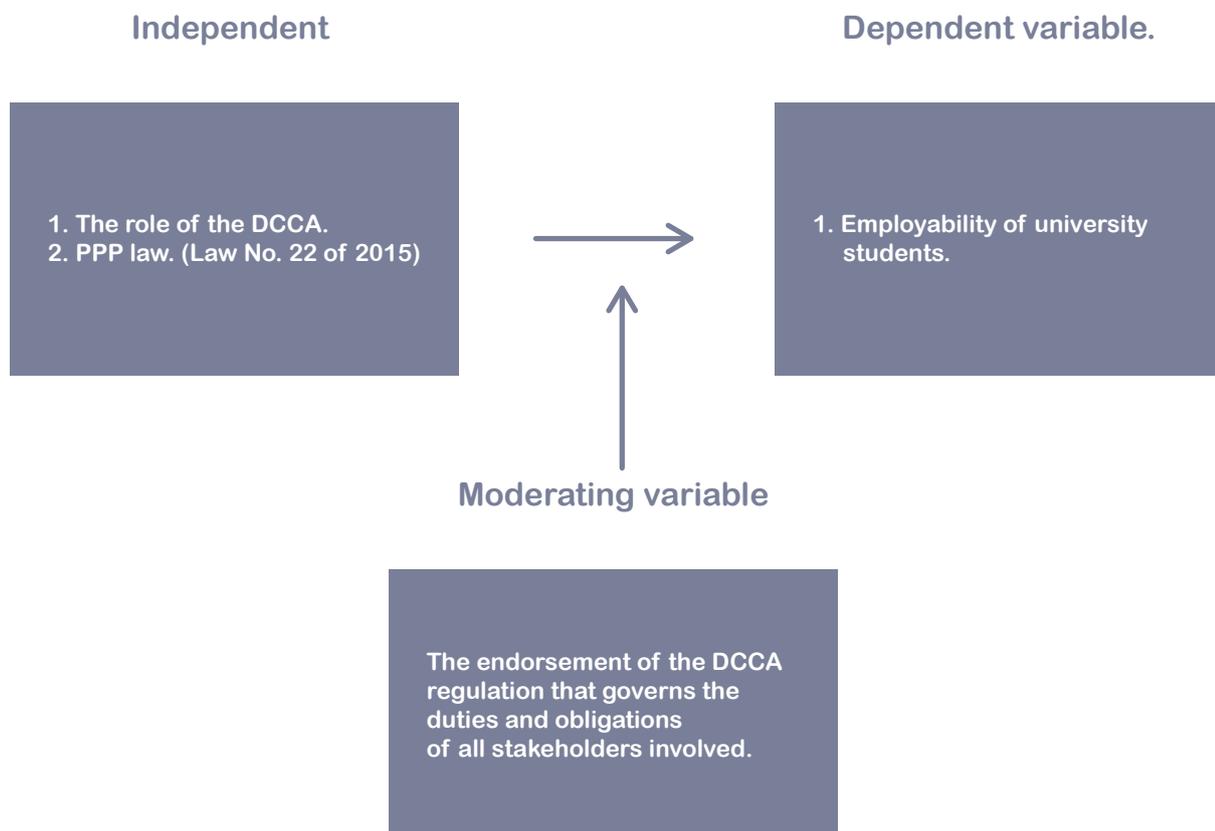
The research aims to answer the following research questions:

- a. How can the partnership between Government, Industry and Academia be improved to make this initiative a success?
- b. What impact will the activation of PPPs within Academic creative clusters have on the employability of nationals in private sector companies?
- c. How will the Dubai Creative Clusters Authority (DCCA) contribute to the enhancement of skills among university students in Dubai, UAE?

Research Method

To address the research questions above, the study included in-depth interviews with a number of firms participating in the creative cluster – PPP model initiated in the emirate. The in-depth Interviews were carried out with prominent executive directors of these sample-firms, along with junior and senior university students who have enlisted themselves as eligible part-time employees based on their academic performance and university criteria of suitability. Furthermore, delegates and chief officials from the Dubai creative cluster authority were included in this in-depth survey, along with a number of university presidents participating in this project.

Figure 1: The conceptual model used as the primary framework in this study.



The independent variables in this model make up the legislative role to be executed by the DCCA as a government authority; and the PPP law that is to be made effective among parties involved: the student, private employer, and the university to which the student is affiliated to. These two variables under the government acting as chaperon, are expected to perform the following:

The DCCA: being a regulatory body, the authority ensures all stakeholders involved adhere to the ultimate objectives of the partnership formalized by both the university and the private sector employer. This effectively means endorsing the part-time work policy, ensuring all parties adhere to their rights and obligations. With respect to the employer, compensation commitment is explicitly drafted, and his right to a minimum number of working hours is received. As for the part-time student/employee, the DCCA protects his formal representation in the labor market, conditions medical coverage, and collaborates with the university to which the employee is affiliated to, making sure that no harm is inflicted on the academic level that the latter is expected to sustain. In this exercise, the DCCA behaves as an influential variable, an independent variable whose presence (or absence) will have direct impact on the outcome hoped for in this context.

The PPP law (Law no. 22 of 2015): aligned with the regulatory role played by the DCCA, the PPP law safeguards the wellbeing of part-time employees/students benefiting from this commandment, and at the same time, reaps the benefits of job creation that would have otherwise not been easily created. The PPP law in this scenario, ensures the accessibility of a pool of talented credentials, who deserve legal representation in the labor market, and are also entitled to early-employment experience, to be re-injected into the relevant industries upon graduation. After all, the ultimate benefit from such partnerships is the creation of part-time job opportunities in a more efficient and transparent manner, and also the contraction of prevailing knowledge-skills gaps that are jeopardizing the UAE labor market. PPPs take many shapes and forms. In this context, however, legalizing part-time work policies and creating a win-win university-industry partnership renders this particular PPP decree unique. In this application, the PPP law no.22 of 2015 manifests itself as a controlling and independent variable as it directly manipulates the sought outcomes from this decree. The effect this independent variable will bear on the creation of constructive competition among participating universities will be profound, as goodwill and enrollment rates will be at stake. Although the law does not explicitly condition the nationality of the contracted part-time employee/student, yet its main focus will be to encourage the early-exposure of employment experience among Emirati students in specific. In this context, the role this PPP law plays is confined – yet, not restricted to -the setting of clear, objective, and streamlined criteria that all participating parties must meet to reap the benefits poured by them, to them, and for them.

The dependent variables:

The execution of this industry-university partnership will bear its significant effect on the competence of participating universities. Not only will the competition spurred among the universities themselves over the best job-opportunities for their affiliated students impose developments and improvements to their teaching content and styles, but also the experience brought back with the working-students will certainly enrich the education process in a distinguished manner. Derived from the exploratory interviews conducted from a sample of university presidents, it was stated that part-time students are expected to share their practical work experiences with faculty members and staff, and may be the reason for the enlightenment of their fellow colleagues and peers due to their exposure to hands-on experience.

Employability of university students: Upon activating the PPP law and officially legalizing part-time work policies, will translate to a legal permission for the eligible students to delve into the real world of employment. The PPP law in this scenario is playing the role of a “skills-policy” aiming to develop the proficiencies-potential of a country. The dormant stock of skills residing within the part-time students who will enter the work-force will be efficiently allocated, according to the work interests of the candidates. This should ultimately contribute to the employability element of the latter, narrowing their knowledge-skills gap in the labor market. According to an IMF working paper published in 2004, the prevailing mismatch in skills supplied by national workers and those demanded by the private sector is profound. Despite the fact that Emirati nationals are eligible for free education across all levels, yet the modules offered often do not always reflect the practical requirements of the market. At a time when a rapidly growing number of fresh graduates are flooding the workforce, the government is no longer willing to act as an employer of first and last resort. Due to fiscal reform measures and other budget constraints pertaining to plummeting oil-sector revenues, the Emirati government is exploring new ways to activate the presence of its pool of talented graduates in its domestic labor market, and making the private sector its new successor in this national mission. The impact of the PPP law (in collaboration with the DCCA) on the employability of Dubai’s university graduates resembles the labor-market policy that will pave the way to improved accessibility and matchmaking between the right talent and the right job (IMF, 2004).

The commitment to reduce the number of expatriates in the UAE via state-led labor market policies is called Emiratization. Under the theme of the current PPP law, the emirate of Dubai is encouraging its university students to take part in the DCCA initiative that will allow them to attain part-time job contracts as early as their sophomore years. Prior to this mandate, there was no legal manner by which these students could have entered the labor market, except unofficially and unregistered, or at the expense of the degree-completion. The early exposure this directive will provide to both Emirati and non-Emirati students, for that matter, will enlighten them to the intricacies of the private sector. It is expected to also change the stereotype held towards the latter, and begin embedding the perception that this sector holds the potential for both growth and self-actualization in the work-field. From the macroeconomic and fiscal policy perspective, this automatically translates to a financial relief that has been for long borne by government institutions to provide guaranteed job vacancies to UAE nationals. Now, and after new budgeting approaches and fiscal consolidation measures adopted by the ministry of

finance, the provision of such vacancies will be the shared-responsibility of the private sector. With the DCCA moderating the impact of the PPP Law as an independent variable on Emiratis' employability, the generations of graduates to come will change the perception held towards the public sector as the employer of first and last resort. Being driven by a knowledge-based economy that requires the dynamics and mobility of such environment, it will be the private sector's duty to integrate knowledge and practical expertise, supplied by private sector universities and private businesses, respectively.

PPPs have been gaining momentum due to their ability to reallocate resources and relief fiscal constraints on pressured government budgets. In this model, the ratification of the PPP law, in its unique application, alongside the DCCA legal role, aim to provide the appropriate jobs for a high skills based growing market for reasons of efficiency and competitiveness, meanwhile aiming to reduce the budgetary expenses that have for long been burdening the public sector wage slot. The interesting phenomenon in this partnership model is that the process of matching recruitment opportunities to part-time students will not involve any financial burden on the government. Hence, the fiscal relief anticipated in the long run, should resemble a potential benefit worth striving for.

Enrollment of international students in Branch-Campuses: A branch campus is an entity that is owned by a foreign academic institution operating under its official name, and provides an entire academic program with a graduation degree awarded by the foreign academic institution. A branch campus must match the supportive environment and range of facilities offered to students based in the home country, along with an equivalent level of quality education. Over the last few years, UAE has strived to position itself as a leading international hub for higher education. There are 26 international branch university campuses across the emirate, which is the highest concentration in the world. International campuses serve as economic drivers for growth and catalysts for research. Fostering research and innovation is often part of the strategy of branch campuses. Such profile helps give birth to the next generation of local scientists, and establish the educational talent needed to support domestic institutions. From an economic development perspective, hosting branch campuses, especially those with reputable names attracts students and faculty alike, who may not otherwise have been interested to relocate to Dubai. They ultimately contribute to human capital development and have a significant role in nurturing the economy with the necessary capital investment inflows needed to sustain economic growth. Branch campuses are an integral part in education and skills development. They not only provide access to those who seek the service, but they also bring certified quality programs that are internationally recognized. With the legal enforcement of their role in fostering a competitive labor market and participating in narrowing the current knowledge-skills gap, both the new PPP Law, and the DCCA initiative will pave the way for Dubai to reap all the benefits possible from the impact this directive will deliver.

4. The Findings

The region's public sector has traditionally been a preferred source of employment for the UAE's new labor market entrants and experienced job seekers alike, resulting in an oversaturated public sector (Elsholkamy, 2017). Public sector jobs in the UAE make up 80% of the total labor market demographics, and the highest governmental wage bill (as percentage of GDP) in the world, standing at 9.8% (WEF, 2017). Hence, with the active role expected from the PPP under study and the responsibility anticipated from the DCCA, this picture is likely to change. In its current form, public sector employment creates disincentives for young nationals to join the private sector, let alone complete their higher education. A considerable number of Emiratis exit the education arena upon earning their secondary education, and may either choose to terminate their pursuit of university degrees all together, or resort to a very slow pace of completing it, at non-accredited universities. In both scenarios, the ultimate concern tends to be the enrollment at stable pay-roll headcounts, rather than the accumulation of innovative and state-of-the-art skills and attributes.

Derived from the exploratory interviews conducted with some of the international branch university presidents, there are social impacts to be anticipated from this project. First, the early exposure of parttime students to recruitment opportunities is expected to raise their level of responsibility and academic maturity across several aspects. One of the manifestations of such projections is expressed when students, upon graduation, eventually return to their hiring company, but with a change of interest in their specialization. Interestingly, due to the early work-exposure attained, they arrive at the realization of their real passion and the field they prefer to work in. Another demonstration of the positive impact this policy has had on graduates-to-be, is the selectivity the latter eventually develop. Students tend to become more selective when choosing their academic subjects, particularly with respect to electives. They eventually become more academically responsible in terms of choosing their subjects on the basis of sought-for intellectual value-added, rather than higher grade point averages. Students have been found to become more careful when choosing their academic modules, selecting them based on their contribution to their skills, knowledge and abilities to be used in the work-field upon graduation.

It was noted that the number of bachelor degree students who expressed interest in pursuing post-graduate studies and certifications has risen. Firstly, because of the flexibility that this regulation provides and the ability students receive to pursue both a career and academic path. And, secondly because of the early exposure; and thereby awareness; these part time students earn during their part time work experience. The acknowledgement of the importance of investing in one's self in the form of earning higher educational degrees was noticeably higher among those who experienced the best of both worlds: being a student and an employee at the same time.

It was also discovered that the main reason private sector companies chose to participate in this public private partnership policy was actually to raise their level of competitiveness in Dubai's dynamic labor market. Attracting, retaining and ultimately recruiting potential talent prior to their graduation allows participating companies to polarize and unlock the hidden potential of part-time recruits to the maximum. According to in-depth interviews conducted with leading SME founders and co-founders alike, adopting employee candidates at such early age creates deep rooted sense of loyalty, commitment, and belonging to the corporation at which the part time students work. This eventually lowers rates of labor-turnover and provides the stability necessary to establish the building blocks of competitiveness.

Another interesting finding derived from this descriptive-predictive, yet exploratory analytical research was the desire of all parties involved, particularly private sector employers and the DCCA officials, to narrow the job-skills gap currently jeopardizing the Arab labor market in general. The prevailing and disturbing mismatch between education and labor market requirements has left the labor market inflicted with long term unemployment particularly among the 15 to 29-year old generation, that makes up almost 30% of the MENA labor market as a whole (WEF, 2017).

It is worth noting that the consequences triggered by the currently popular Fourth Industrial Revolution presents both a challenge and a unique opportunity for the country's workforce (WEF, 2017). The popular revolution will have its toll on numerous socio-economic and demographic factors affecting the country, resulting in the creation of new occupations, new skill-requirements across jobs, new approaches to work management and administration, and last but not least, new tools to enrich workers' capabilities. According to the World Bank reports on job analysis, relative to 2015, 21% of core skills needed across jobs will be entirely different by 2020 in the GCC region.

The inspiration of this policy was not really about re-inventing the wheel. It was rather an exercise of benchmarking with normal well-known international models, and merely following pursuit.

This is what the advancement of creative clusters in Dubai's education sector is ultimately aiming to achieve: A Public-Private Partnership that will transport the emirate towards development. The main findings of this exploratory study remain under further investigation. However, and despite the novelty of the directive, it is very much anticipated that all stakeholders involved will reap the benefits and enjoy the positive spill overs.

5. Summary and conclusions

Based on a Public Private Partnership (PPP), the Dubai Creative Clusters Authority (DCCA) was established to foster the economic development of Dubai's creative clusters and has launched an unprecedented regulation that will fortify a part-time student work policy across the emirate. An Industry-University Partnership forum was held under the theme of higher education to discuss the impact – or policy implications – of the October 2016 decree that officially allows university students to enroll at Dubai universities on a part-time basis, while being eligible for part-time employment opportunities. The DCCA's aim is to endorse the part-time work policy, to raise the employability of Dubai students and attract more international students; especially that there are reputable international branch universities participating in this industry-university partnership. The ultimate objective of this partnership is to encourage the recruitment of the right “talent” at the right place.

Conventionally, this has always been how countries like USA, Canada, and other European nations attracted international students to travel for study, and at the same time work on a part time basis. In other words, earning their own money and financing their education; what has come to be referred to as the “earn while you learn” initiative. With this regulation rectified, not only will the emirate of Dubai utilize the wide range of international university branch campuses to an influx of international students - who will bring along with them foreign currency and contribute to the fiscal consolidation strategies the country is adopting in general; but it will also attract local Emiratis and enrich their knowledge, skills, and abilities as initially planned.

This PPP and the advancement of a regulation that will fortify the presence of creative clusters should not be seen as a policy that will encourage the employment of “cheap-labor” as some of the interviewees speculated. But, rather should be regarded as an initiative aiming at avoiding the waste of valuable resources; that is human capital. One of the challenging exercises stakeholders need to take into consideration on the margins of this PPP is the shared responsibility that is to be borne to maintain the necessary balance between students' academic performance, scholarship eligibility, and part-time work commitment. The participating universities are to set a collection of requirements, or rather prerequisites that make a student eligible – or not – for pursuing part-time job contracts. Furthermore, being of a temporary nature, universities have the lawful right to step in and intervene with the necessary actions in case a student struggles while balancing between academic and work duties. Alongside universities' supervisory role, the DCCA has an “employee affairs department” that ensures the protection of part-time employees' rights with respect to pay disputes and working hours. Hence, this unique PPP has transcended beyond international

standards as it takes employees' welfare a step further and functions as a regulatory body in the sense that it protects students' rights and entitlements.

Finally, with the rise of the 4th Industrial revolution where automation, digitization, artificial intelligence and robotics are becoming appealing words; business models and labor markets have no alternative but to adjust to the winds of change and exploit every possible opportunity. Being of an innovation-driven nature, the emirate has already taken massive strides to position itself and its labor force as one of the most competitive in the region. If harnessed well, all these efforts could help Dubai, and the UAE in general, broaden its production and manufacturing base by expanding its pool of talent; reducing its dependence on oil and gas exports and vulnerability to price fluctuations; and enable the country integrate its local labor market into global supply chains. Hence, with a few recommendations related to 1) expanding access to accredited higher education; 2) ensuring the "future readiness" of curricula; 3) investing in career and professional development pathways of teachers; 4) providing early exposure to the workplace and career guidance; 5) investing in digital fluency and technological skills; 6) providing robust technical and vocational education and training; 7) creating a culture of lifelong learning; and 8) maintaining the supervisory role of credible regulatory bodies, Dubai is assured to be stepping in to the right path towards development (WEF, 2017).

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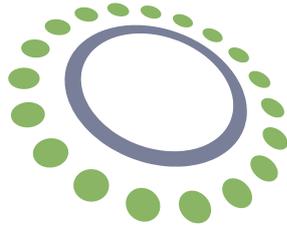
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