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## A triple helix approach to supporting Emitterisation, promoting research by moving from didactic to dialectic learning in the UAE

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### Abstract

In the UAE, higher education is increasingly recognized as important in both up skilling staff and assisting the Emitterisation process. However, at an institutional level, the research conducted in the UAE university sector remains low, both in terms of output and impact, in comparison to other institutions in the region, and in Asia generally. This paper aims to establish university based research within the triple helix model explained by Dzisah and Etzkowitz (2008), and proposes recommendations for introducing a more dialectic teaching and learning philosophy, while suggesting a framework for research assessment capable of providing intelligence for policy making.

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### 1. Introduction

Within the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the role of Universities in the knowledge economy and the structures of institutions of higher education are a source of increasing debate. In the current economic climate, higher education is increasingly recognized as important in both up skilling staff and preparing the UAE as a whole for future demand growth. Investment in research and innovation is vital to tackling the economic challenges facing the Emirates. Commercially driven knowledge exchange and knowledge transfer alliances between higher education and industry, demonstrate an increased level of acceptance by the business world of the ability of university staff to understand and

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solve complex commercial and scientific issues (Rowland-Jones 2012). The importance of the role that universities play in developing and sustaining knowledge-based economies is widely acknowledged in both developed and developing countries (Guermat and Saad 2015).

Essentially, the strategic objectives of these research interactions can support the UAE's goals for learning, innovation and business, by exploiting expertise and knowledge, and innovative activities on a global platform within specialist sector areas. The UAE Vision 2021: states that "Innovation, research, science and technology will form the pillars of a knowledge-based, highly productive and competitive economy, driven by entrepreneurs in a business friendly environment where public and private sectors form effective partnerships." The convergence of three seemingly discretely separate entities within the UAE: academic research, industry and the public sector can bring government education and industry into cooperative relationships.

This tripartite concept of collaboration is increasingly recognised as an important component of an innovation ecosystem. Universities should be seen as key partners in driving forward research development and delivery. The UAE National Innovation Strategy (NIS, 2015) identifies the UAE commitment to supporting a 'first-rate' education system as a foundation for innovation, and a knowledge-based economy. The launch of the NIS, and the establishment of the Mohammed Bin Rashid Centre for Government Innovation, at the Prime Minister's Office in the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, Dubai, has defined 2015 as the UAE's year of innovation. Both entities are tasked with the requirement to establish the basis for a virtuous circle of sustainable social and economic growth. However, the complexity of the context, perception, and understanding of innovation within the UAE is not surprising, especially given the ethnocentric influences of the primarily ex-patriot population. It also makes it difficult to establish structured government support mechanisms for research and innovation.

This paper seeks to establish a novel context for university based research within the triple helix model, and proposes recommendations for introducing a more dialectic teaching and learning philosophy within the UAE higher education landscape, as a sustainable interaction to shape the path of any research agenda development in the UAE.

## 2. Emiratization

Hafez (2009) identifies that within the UAE the predominantly expatriate labour force forms approximately 90% of the total workforce population. The national strategy of 'Emiratization' (Abdelkarim, 2001) is intended to reduce the UAE's dependency on the expatriate labour force by enabling Nationals to take up jobs currently performed by expatriates. The work by Rees *et al.* (2007:33) identifies that a reliance on a workforce based almost exclusively on expatriates creates serious long-term political, social and economic consequences. However, in discussing the level of engagement by Emirate nationals within the Emiratization process, Wilkins (2001) paper as cited in Al-Ali (2008) considers '*low standards of experience/training/skills*' as a key barrier to Emiratization. This provides a dilemma for UAE Higher Education institutions. Increasingly within the UAE, the conceptual understanding of the role of the University within society generally, and the knowledge economy specifically, requires new epistemological methods and philosophies of teaching and learning to be utilised by the University sector, in order to provide the link between the learning organisation and the locus of Emiratization.

The support of the Emiratization process requires an expansion of traditional thinking of University scope and engagement, to provide an opportunity to further develop existing teaching and learning philosophies, to the extent where there emerges a new paradigm that recognises and accredits graduate competencies and skills. Taylor and Krothi (2009) establish andragogy as learner-focused education, whereas pedagogy is referred to as teacher-focused education. The propositional use of andragogy within the learning concept is not widely practiced in the UAE. However, Pedler *et al.* (2005) questions the currency of existing academic awards, suggesting that there is a requirement for a more critical edge to business and management education in general, (citing in part -McLaughlin & Thorpe, 1993; Vince & Martin, 1993; Wilmott, 1994, 1997; Rigg & Trehan, 2004). Additionally, Heyler (2011) cites Gibbons *et al.* (1994), to support the view that learning occurs during work activity, thereby establishing the nexus between the epistemology of the learning process, and the andragogical development of the workforce.

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