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Private Education in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar: Implications and Challenges

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Abstract

Over the last three decades, continued expatriate population growth across the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar has contributed to the rise of a unique set of economic and social challenges. Among these are challenges relating to the provision of private education in the absence of a public option. In the face of rising demand for private schooling, a lack of affordable education options, the monopolistic behavior of private education providers, and varied government regulations have created a complex and unbalanced education sector. While researchers have studied the nature and implications of private education provision in the United Kingdom, United States, and other high-income states, no such research has been done in the UAE or Qatar. This research employs a mixed-methods comparative approach to understand the nature of the private education sectors in the UAE and Qatar, examine the ways in which private education providers navigate the regulatory schooling environments in the UAE and Qatar, and assess the impact on education stakeholders, in particular those at the lower ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. The study finds that there are considerable socioeconomic differences in terms of who has access to schooling and that a growing for-profit education market may be deepening segregation and inequities in both countries, leaving poorer families less able to access quality education. The promise of non-profit providers as a viable alternative is explored.

Acknowledgements

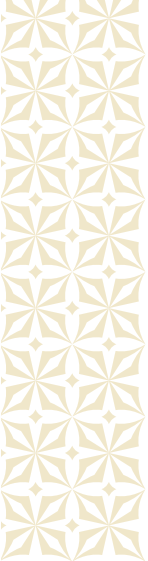
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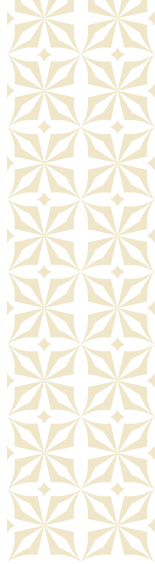
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Introduction

The expansion of public education in the Gulf region began with the discovery of oil in the 1950s. The accompanying rapid economic and social development that occurred across the region at the same time necessitated the employment of large numbers of expatriate workers. Many of these workers brought their families with them, and their children then needed access to schooling. To meet the needs of these expatriate families, private schools offering a variety of curricula were required. Thus, the private education sector began to expand and quickly outgrew the public education sector as, over time, the number of expatriates in many Gulf countries began to exceed the number of nationals.

Although the Gulf region has not engaged much in the privatization of the public education sector (with the exception of Qatar¹), the dominance of the private education market and of its for-profit providers raises questions about issues of access and equity, in particular for medium- and low-income families who have no access to public schools. This paper examines these issues and explores how they impact families, educators, and society in the UAE and Qatar.

A mixed-methods approach was utilized with three key measures: (1) interviews with government education agencies, (2) interviews with key private education providers, and (3) surveys and interviews with individual stakeholders, namely parents and teachers. The paper begins by examining the unique educational landscapes of the UAE and Qatar, in which private education has flourished. The second half of the paper details the research findings and examines how various private education providers (K-12) affect families and education professionals in the UAE and Qatar. We conclude with a discussion of how the dominance of the for-profit sector impacts private school access and equity, and how this may have far wider implications than governments suppose, potentially threatening not only education quality, but also the social fabric of both countries.

Private and Public Education Today

Global education today is a mix of private and public systems, with private schools and private operators of public schools becoming increasingly common. In Sweden, private school enrollments soared from less than one percent in 1994 to over 10% in 2008 (The Swedish Model, 2008). Along the same lines, the number of students in private schools in Australia increased from roughly 20% in 1970 to over 33% in 2012 (McCrindle Research, 2013). In the United States (US), while the number of students enrolled in traditional private schools dropped by 2% from 1999 to 2013 with the closure of many Catholic schools, there has been a steady increase in the number of private companies operating public schools through the growing charter school movement (Jennings, 2013). Charter schools in the US rose from less than 2% of public schools in 2000 to over 6% in 2013 (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2014).

In 2012, global education expenditure was over 4.4 trillion USD, and that number is estimated to grow by 7.4% by 2017 (IBIS Capital, 2013), making education a lucrative market that private

¹ In the early 2000s, Qatar underwent major education reforms led by RAND Cooperation. The reforms included contracting out public schools to private operators. This is described in more detail later in the paper.

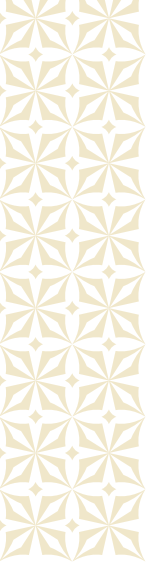
companies are eager to tap. Government, international, and educational establishments have influenced the popularity of private schooling, which may come in the form of community, faith-based, entrepreneurial, corporately-financed, or philanthropic schools (Lewin, 2014). On a global level, international organizations such as the World Bank, foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and universities like Harvard are increasingly advocating for the expansion of the private sector in education (Robertson & Verger, 2012).²

Many proponents of private education fail to distinguish between for-profit and non-profit provision, despite some fundamental differences. Non-profit schools generally have a legal identity and reinvest in the entity, whereas for-profit schools typically have investors or owners to whom the profits are passed back (Lewin, 2014). Since non-profits cannot distribute profits earned among owners and managers, they have less of an incentive to employ opportunistic practices than for-profits do (Brown, 1992; Hansmann, 1996). Some scholars have found that firms whose primary motive is increasing business returns “cannot be trusted to place the interest of children over profitability” (Elacqua, 2009, Abstract), and, as Bakan (2004) points out, public institutions are required to serve the public good while “corporations are legally required to always put their own interest above everyone else’s” (p. 118).

For-profit providers are seizing the opportunity to expand into both private and public education markets, arguing that they can scale quality education (GEMS Education, n.d.). Working in the public markets offers for-profit companies a steady stream of revenue from the government and the chance of a bailout if something goes wrong (Wilby, 2010). These partnerships are controversial as they mix education with business ventures, and little is known about the ways the industries “not only help rationalize, industrialise[,] and professionalise this way of governing, but ensure that policy reversals are increasingly difficult” (Greve, 2010 in Robertson & Verger, 2012, p. 18).

The charter school system in the US is an example of such a trend, wherein some public schools are managed by private, for-profit companies. Charter schools started to operate in the US in 1991 (NEA, 2014), and, by 2013, there were 6,000 charter schools educating 2.3 million children (Wiggin, 2013). Edison Schools Inc. was started in 1992 by Chris Whittle, and by 2002 it was the largest private manager of for-profit charter schools in the US, operating 150 schools across 23 states (McCloskey, 2009; Solomon, 2002). Edison Schools came under scrutiny in the early 2000s when researchers found that Edison School students did not have higher academic performance than students attending regular public schools. The company also faced public protests over Edison officials’ encouraging special education students to transfer to other schools (Saltman, n.d.). In 2002, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) discovered financial discrepancies, and the mounting controversy led Edison’s publically traded stock to fall from over 20 USD on the NASDAQ stock exchange to less than 0.14 USD (McCloskey, 2009; Henriques, 2003; Bakan, 2004). To recover money from its Philadelphia schools, the company began to sell student learning materials such as textbooks, school computers, and lab equipment and also considered using student labor to cut down on costs (Bakan, 2004). Many of the contracts for public schools under Edison’s management were revoked or not renewed, with states’ resuming control over some

² For more information about the policy networks of private and philanthropic organizations and their growing influence in education governance, see Ball, 2012.



of the schools (Henriques, 2003; Richburg, 2008). Edison Schools was sold in 2003 to a Florida investment firm as part of a deal that left Chris Whittle with an estimated 29 million USD payout over five years, even though the company had not made a profit since its creation (Caputo, 2003). With the decline in school management contracts, Edison began to shift its focus to education services, such as test preparation and tutoring, and the expansion of an online learning platform; it also rebranded itself as EdisonLearning (EdisonLearning, 2014; McCloskey, 2009). Despite this failure, EdisonLearning still markets itself as a pioneer of American charter schools, and in 2014 it was working with approximately 50 schools between the US (in 11 states) and the UK (EdisonLearning, 2014).

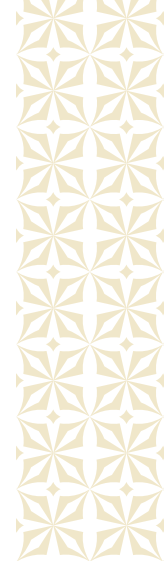
Sweden is another country in which private education is growing, largely due to government reforms passed in 1994 that allow anyone who “satisfies basic standards to open a new school and take in children at the state’s expense. . . . Nothing extra can be charged for, but making a profit is fine” (The Swedish Model, 2008, p.1). The law was originally passed with the public expectation that foreign language or religious schools would open; however, there was instead an influx of for-profit education management companies (The Swedish Model, 2008). A political adviser to the Minister of Schools in the Swedish government from 1991-1994, Anders Hultin, was branded an architect of the education reforms. In 1999, Anders Hultin became the cofounder of Kunskapsskolan, the largest international for-profit education provider in Sweden (Hultin, 2007; The Swedish Model, 2008; Curtis, 2009). Kunskapsskolan has been compared to IKEA due to its standardized, largely online curriculum in a no-frills setting (The Swedish Model, 2008). Kunskapsskolan operates 36 schools in Sweden, five in the UK (run under a non-profit trust), one in the US, and one in India (Kunskapsskolan, 2014). JB Education was another major for-profit, private school chain in Sweden until 2013 when it sold 19 schools and closed down eight others because its parent company, a private equity group, found the financial loss associated with the investment unacceptable (Smith, 2013).³

Legislation passed in 2010 in England allows the establishment of academies, which include “free schools,” that operate under private education policies similar to those in Sweden (“MPs pass flagship,” 2010). Ed Balls, the Shadow Education Secretary, has predicted that the movement towards free schools will “create an unfair and two-tier education system . . . with gross unfairness in funding, standards not rising but falling, fairness and social cohesion undermined” (“MPs pass flagship,” 2010, p. 1). Free schools can be set up by parents, teachers, charities, trusts, and religious and volunteer groups and receive funding from the central government (“Q&A: Academies,” 2012). Unlike in Sweden, these government-funded, privately run schools cannot be run by for-profit providers (Richardson, 2013). Yet providers such as Kunskapsskolan and Dubai-based Global Education Management Systems (GEMS), the largest international for-profit education provider in the world, with over 70 schools globally,⁴ have found loopholes and are able to run free schools by operating under not-for-profit trusts (GEMS Learning Trust, 2014; Kunskapsskolan, 2014).⁵

³ Anders Hultin had left Kunskapsskolan and was serving as Chief Executive of JB Education at the time of the of JB Education school closures (Orange, 2013).

⁴ From 2009-2010 Anders Hultin worked as CEO of GEMS Education UK (Hultin, 2014).

⁵ The trusts can still legally subcontract out daily work to the commercial, for-profit branches of the company that charge management fees and sell supplies (“Educating children should,” 2010).



In contrast to the US, Sweden, and England, for-profit schools are not allowed to operate in Australia at the primary or secondary levels (see Table 1). Schools must be non-profit to receive public funding, and for-profit schools are illegal under Victorian law (Rome & Smith, 2012; Han, 2013). Even with these barriers, international for-profit education providers such as GEMS Education have attempted to enter the market but so far have been met by resistance and have not succeeded in opening any branches (Han, 2013).

For-profit education providers are changing the nature and purpose of education globally.⁶ While public and non-profit education provision aims to help children develop desirable qualities, which will contribute to society in the long-term, for-profit providers are profit-driven and often do not share such concerns about access and equity among stakeholders or the broader social good. Even though for-profit chains often claim that they serve everyone, “the temptation to turn away the difficult children from poorer backgrounds or those with special educational needs might be too great to resist. For they would almost certainly be less profitable [sic]” (“Educating children should,” 2010, p. 1).

Table 1: Comparative summary of private education in four countries

Country	For-profit schools allowed?	Large private education providers	Free public schooling available to all children?
United States	Yes	Catholic church, Gulen, Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), Edison Schools (formerly)	Yes ¹
Sweden	Yes	Kunskapsskolan, Internationella Engelska Skolan (IES), JB Education (formerly)	Yes ²
England	Yes	Church of England, Catholic church, United Learning Trust, GEMS	Yes ³
Australia	No	Catholic church, other religious groups	Available to all children but tuition may be required, depending on resident status ⁴

Sources: (State of Washington, 2014),¹ (“Kids of illegal,” 2012),² (UK Visa Bureau, 2014),³ (ACT Government, 2014)⁴

⁶ According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education is a human right (United Nations [UN], 2014). The purpose of education is broadly defined as preparing students to live productively and meaningfully, and, from an Education for All (EFA) standpoint, education is seen as acting to eradicate poverty, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat disease, encourage sustainability, and aid in global development (UN, 2014).



Private Education in the UAE and Qatar

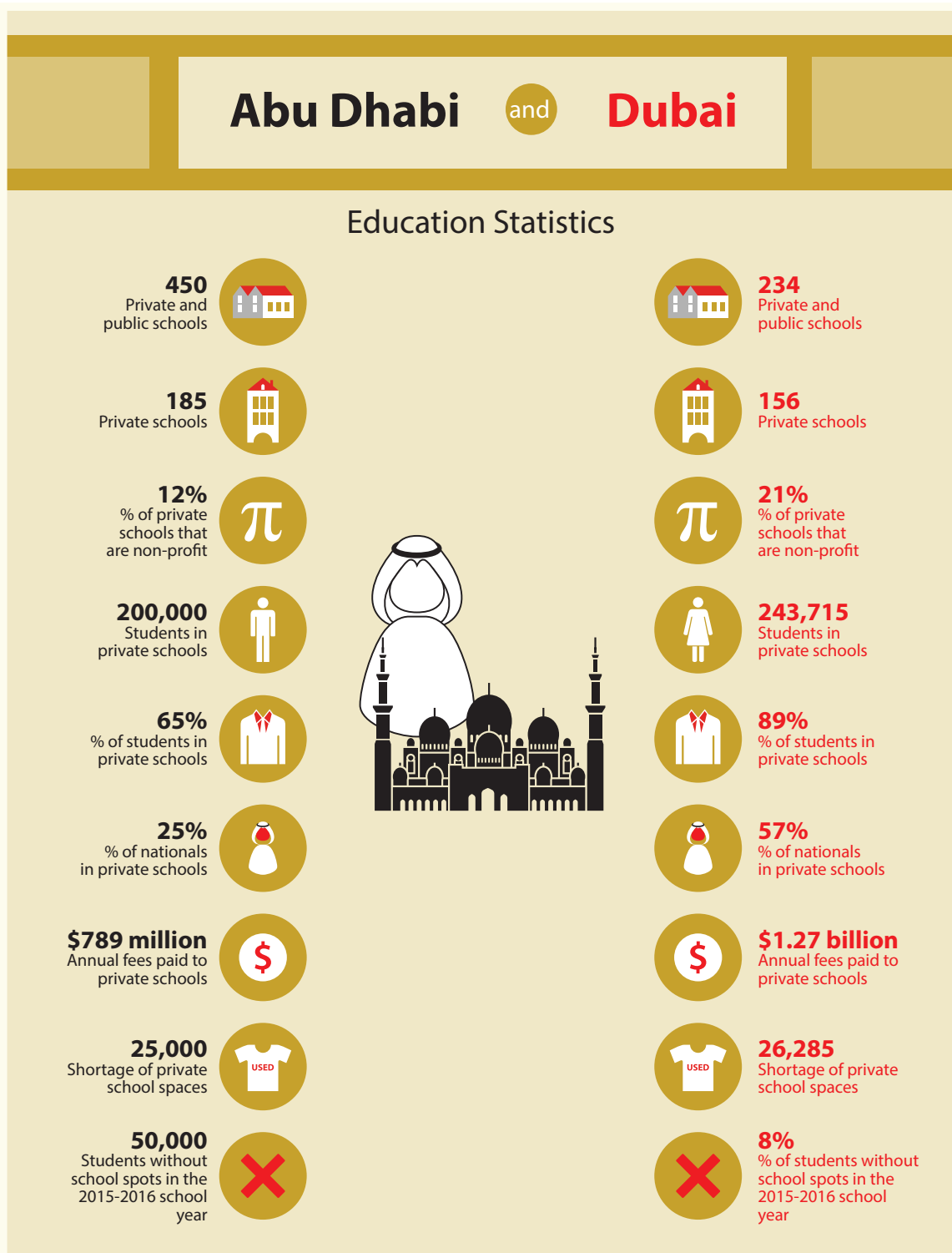
In the 1960s and 1970s, with the influx of oil money, Gulf countries began rapid development projects and became increasingly dependent on foreign labor. In 1975 only 9.7% of the Gulf population was foreign, but, by 2011, that figure had more than quadrupled to 43% (Fargues & Shah, 2011). While public education was expanding in the region for the locals, the private education sector was growing to meet the increasing demand from expatriate students who were not eligible to attend local public schools. Today, there are estimated to be 4,400 private schools (roughly 12% of all schools) in the GCC that collect 5.2 billion USD in tuition fees on an annual basis (“Education is a big business,” 2011).

When the UAE and Qatar are examined, it becomes clear how much the two nations are fueling the present-day growth in the private education sector in the Gulf region. In the UAE (Dubai and Abu Dhabi only), the private K-12 education sector is valued at 1.4 billion USD (27% of the GCC market), while Qatar’s private education sector is expected to triple from 430 million USD (7% of the GCC market) in 2010 to up to 1.5 billion USD in 2020 (Moujaes, et al., 2011). Survey results from HSBC’s Expat Explorer Survey (HSBC, 2012) revealed that common to all private education systems in the UAE and Qatar is the shared parental concern over the affordability of schooling. With schooling costs accounting for 30% and 35% of average household incomes in the UAE and Qatar respectively, it is crucial to understand the scope of private education in the two nations (HSBC, 2012).

In 2010, the UAE had a population of approximately eight million, with nationals composing only 11.5% of the population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Qatar had a population of around two million in 2011, with the number of nationals making up less than 15% of the population (Kinnimont, 2013). Between the UAE and Qatar, there were almost 800,000 students enrolled in private schools during the 2013-2014 academic year (see Figures 1 and 2). During that time, approximately 681,500 of those students were enrolled in private schools across the UAE. These students attended 185 private schools in Abu Dhabi, 158 private schools in Dubai, and 167 private schools in the five smaller, northern emirates (Ajman, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm Al Quwain) (Abu Dhabi Education Council [ADEC], 2014a; Knowledge and Human Development Authority [KHDA], 2014; Ministry of Education [MOE], United Arab Emirates [UAE], 2014). In Qatar, there were roughly 94,000 students enrolled at 166 private schools during the 2013-2014 academic year (Moujaes et al, 2011; Hukoomi Qatar e-Government).

While many typically think of the Gulf as being inhabited by either well-paid bankers or poorly paid construction workers, the sheer scale of the expatriate workforce in the Gulf means there are expatriates of every nationality and wage level. Governments have enacted regulations on expatriate workers designed to limit their number of children. In the UAE, expatriate workers are only allowed to obtain visas for their families if they earn a minimum monthly salary of 4,000 AED (approximately 1,089 USD) (Kannan, 2014). However, in Qatar, workers are only permitted to bring their families with them if their monthly salary is at least 10,000 QAR (roughly 2,747 USD). This means that the lowest paid expatriate workers, namely construction workers, with families have had to leave their children in their home countries. Among expatriate families who are permitted to migrate to the two nations, there are large differences in salaries based on nationality (Tong, 2010).

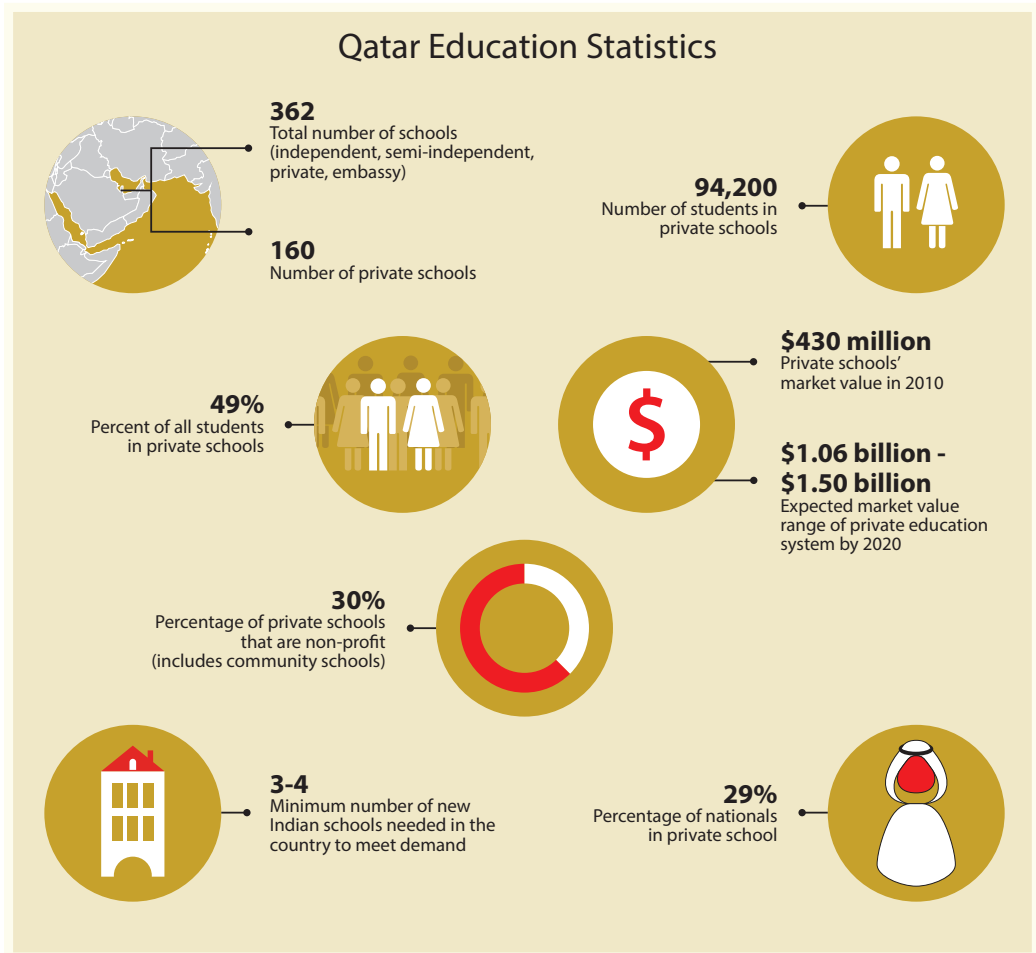
Figure 1. Abu Dhabi and Dubai education statistics



Data sources (Abu Dhabi): (ADEC, 2014b), (ADEC, 2014a), ("School fee cap," 2014), (Issa, 2013)

Data sources (Dubai): (Moujaes et al, 2011), (QEI, 2012), ("Minister stresses need," 2013), (Alpen Capital, 2012), (Bakshi, 2014), (Hukoomi Qatar e-Government, 2014)

Figure 2. Qatar education statistics



Sources: (Moujaes et al, 2011), (QEI, 2012), ("Minister stresses need," 2013), (Alpen Capital, 2012), (Bakshi, 2014), (Hukoomi Qatar e-Government, 2014)

In addition to receiving low salaries, parents in the UAE and Qatar frequently struggle to find school spaces for their children. In Abu Dhabi, there was an acute shortage of around 25,000 private school spaces during the 2013-2014 academic year, and, as shown in Figure 1, ADEC estimates that the shortage will double by the 2015-2016 school year (Issa, 2013). In Dubai during the 2012-2013 school year, private schools were filled at 90% capacity (KHDA, 2013). However, there were still long waiting lists at many schools in Dubai, particularly at the primary level, which left some parents unable to secure spots for their children (Ahmed, 2013; Dhal, 2013a). In Qatar, shortages of school spaces are also common, particularly in low-fee schools that follow Indian and Bangladeshi curriculums (Scott, 2014). According to Alpen Capital (2012), the number of private schools in Qatar will have to grow by a compound annual growth rate of 6% from 2011 to 2016 in order to keep up with the growing student population, which is expected to increase quickly with the arrival of skilled expatriate workers for the 2022 FIFA World Cup (see Figure 2).

The Study

It is clear that the private education sector in both the UAE and Qatar is expanding rapidly and shows no sign of slowing down. While schools are subject to inspections by authorities, and fee caps are typically enforced to ensure that tuition rates are not excessive, there is still very little authorities can do to raise the quality of or ensure the ethical treatment of teachers and families,⁷ especially for those in the more vulnerable communities. The remainder of this paper focuses in greater detail on the questions below to better understand the nature of the private education sector in the UAE and Qatar and how current practices may not only impact the most vulnerable education stakeholders, but also threaten the long-term social fabric of the nations:

1. In what ways are governments in the UAE and Qatar regulating and developing the private education sector?
2. How is access to education and quality of education received in the UAE and Qatar impacted by socioeconomic status?
3. Does the abundance of for-profit school operators threaten not only access to and equity of education, but also quality of education in the UAE and Qatar?
4. What are some long-term implications for these two countries?

To address these questions, the study employed a mixed-methods comparative approach to capture the different perspectives of stakeholders, including education providers, policymakers, government agencies, parents, and teachers.

Quantitative data was gathered from two surveys distributed to parents and teachers. A total of 190 responses were received from parents of private school children in the UAE and Qatar. Seventy-six teachers were also surveyed in order to gain insight into their perceptions of access and equity with respect to their schools, with a particular emphasis on schools' profit status. The findings section reports the primary results from the survey in the form of descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations using an SPSS statistical software package.

In addition to the surveys, the researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with five education regulation agencies, nine school principals, eight parents, and six teachers to fill in any information gaps that the surveys could not address regarding the four research questions. During all interviews, the researchers followed standard human subject protocols by guaranteeing the anonymity of interviewees, obtaining oral consent from the interviewees to participate, and informing the interviewees of their rights to withdraw or choose not to answer any of the questions during the interview.

⁷ In March 2014, a student at a for-profit secondary school wrote a lengthy suicide letter to his family on an exam before killing himself. The school reportedly refused to give a copy of the letter to the boy's family. A month after the death, the school was still billing the family for school fees and mailed the family a notification that the dead boy had been promoted to the next grade (Kumar, 2014).

Limitations

As a result of the lack of publicly available data, institutional barriers, sensitivities, and travel restrictions, there were some limitations to the study. The apparent sensitivity of the topic of the study for those in the UAE and Qatar meant that respondents were often unwilling to speak in detail, or to speak at all, about their experiences in the private education sector during the interviews. This resulted in a smaller sample size than originally targeted and perhaps curbed discussions of some of the issues. Two out of the five interviewees from education authorities mentioned that they could not comment or asked to go off the record on particular questions that were raised during their interviews. Interviews with principals from for-profit private schools were more difficult to secure than those with principals from non-profit schools. In Qatar, the researchers were turned away from most (at least three) scheduled principal interviews upon arrival and told they needed written approval from the Supreme Education Council (SEC), the primary regulatory body for education in Qatar. The only exceptions in Qatar were two non-profit schools. There was a general sense of fear of being interviewed among schools that were contacted in Qatar, and one school explicitly stated that the school board did not wish to participate in what its members considered to be an interview with “inflammatory” questions. After repeated cancellations of interviews in Qatar, the researchers finally received oral approval to meet with private school principals after the second and final visit to Qatar, but, unfortunately, this was too late for the purposes of the study.

Table 2. Parent respondent nationality distribution in the UAE and Qatar

Nationality	UAE	Qatar	Total	Total (%)
Expatriate Arab	20	19	39	22%
South Asian*	48	13	61	34%
East Asian*	3	11	14	7.9%
Western	34	12	46	26%
African	2	0	2	1.1%
Other	11	4	15	8.5%
Total*	118	59	177	100%

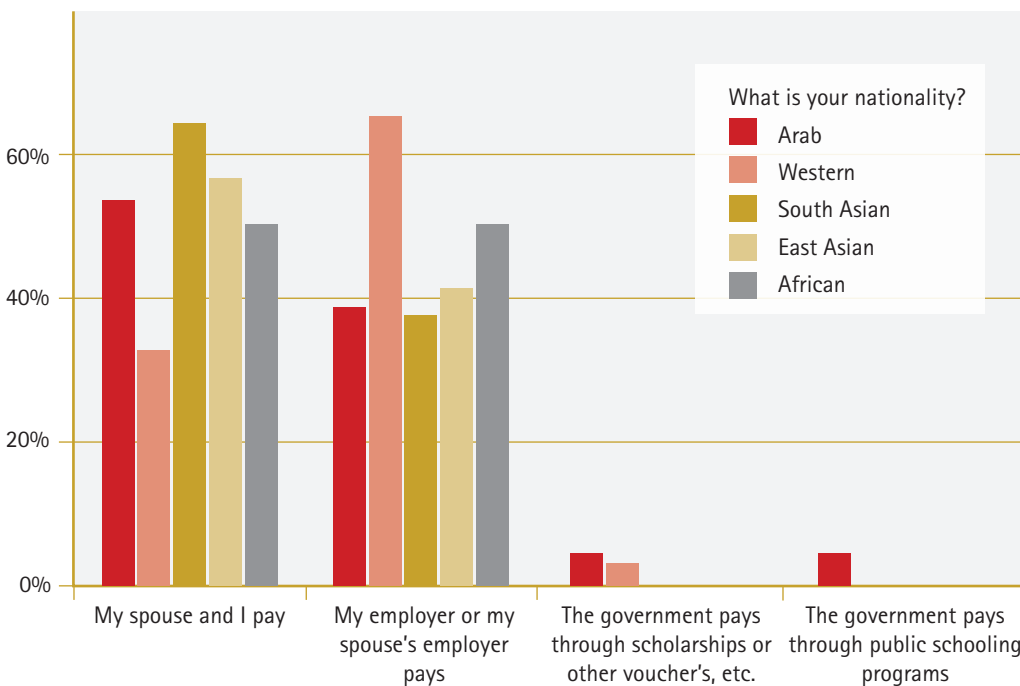
* Some respondents did not answer the questions on nationality and/or location of residence, and thus the number of responses is less than the total number of respondents.

Survey Findings

I. Parent survey

Demographic profile. The parent survey was distributed through online expatriate social networks, school visits, and the researchers’ personal networks and relied on convenience sampling to reach parents. It explored demographic characteristics, access to schooling, perceptions of private school regulation, and the impact of current government policies on expatriate families. One-hundred-ninety responses were received, and, of the total, 125 were based in five emirates across the UAE, namely Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Fujairah, and 63 were based in Qatar (the remaining two respondents failed to report their locations). The nationality breakdown of the respondents is shown in Table 2. Approximately 33.5% were male, and the remaining 66.5% were female. The majority were educated and had completed either a bachelor’s degree or master’s degree.

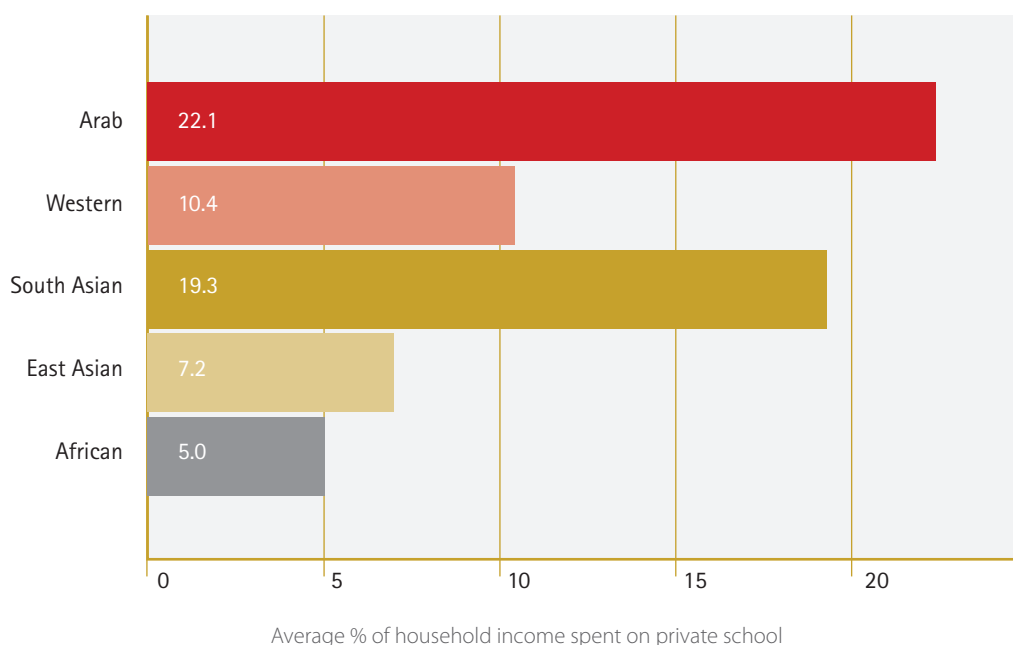
Figure 3. Source of private school funds by nationality



Socioeconomic differences in terms of access. The survey results indicate the existence of striking socioeconomic differences in terms of access to quality private education in the UAE and Qatar. To begin with, there are clear differences in the total annual household earnings of nationality groups in the UAE and Qatar. Arab and Asian expatriate families earn, on average, 150,000–200,000 AED/QAR (40,839–54,451 USD) annually, compared to Western expatriates, who earn a much higher 350,000–500,000 AED/QAR (95,290–136,129 USD). In addition to their higher salaries, Westerners

were more likely to receive educational subsidies from their employers. Figure 3 illustrates this difference in the UAE and Qatar, where 63.9% of Westerners reported that at least 75% of their children's educational costs were covered by their employers or their spouses' employers; only 37.8%, 36.7%, and 41.7% of Arabs, South Asians, and East Asians respectively reported receiving the same benefit.

Figure 4. Average percent of annual income spent on private school by nationality group



Impact of private education costs on families. The survey results also indicate that private school costs impact nationality groups differently. Arab and South Asian parents reported paying 15,000–20,000 AED/QAR (4,084–5,445 USD) on average annually per child on school fees, while East Asian parents paid 5,000–10,000 AED/QAR (1,361–2,722 USD). Westerners, on the other hand, pay around 25,000–50,000 AED/QAR (6,806–13,613 USD), approximately 30% more on average annually. Despite the higher tuition fees paid by Western parents, Arab and South Asian parents still reported having to spend a higher proportion of their total annual income on school fees, 22% and 19% respectively, as opposed to 10% as shown in Figure 4.

Value for money of education. Not only did parents report differences in access to private education across expatriate nationality groups, but the survey results also revealed differences in how satisfied parents were with non-profit versus for-profit schools. Parents whose children were enrolled at non-profit schools reported being happier with regard to the value-for-money of their child's education. More specifically, 50% of parents of children in non-profit schools compared to 30% of those with students in for-profit schools strongly agreed with the statement "the quality of education [in my child's school] is in line with school fees" as shown in Figure 5.

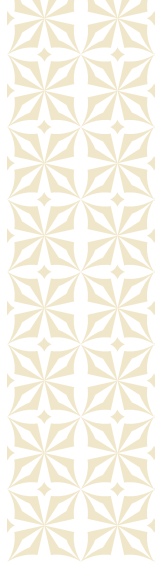
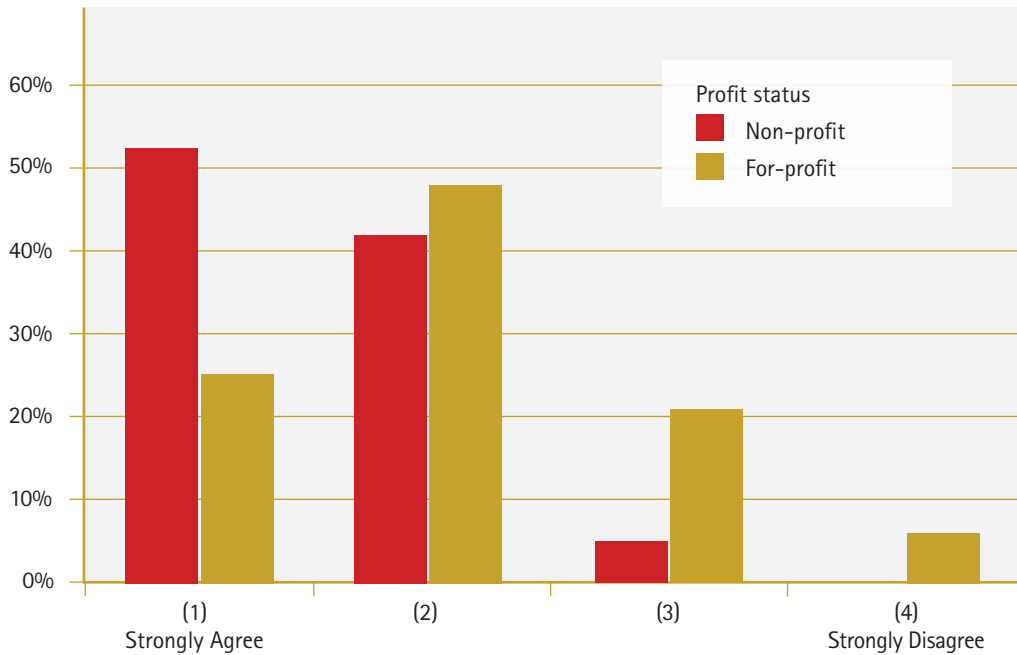


Figure 5. Quality of education and consistency with school fees



On a scale of 1-4, how much do you agree with the statement, "The quality of education is in line with school fees"?

Comments and recommendations from parents. At the end of the survey, parents were given space to add any comments or recommendations with regard to private schooling in the UAE and Qatar. A number of topics arose including access and fees. One parent whose child currently attends an Indian for-profit school in the UAE remarked,

"[We] need more schools with Indian curriculum as it's a [big] community. Villa schools were closed prior to having any alter[native] arrangements made. New schools are charging [high fees], which [the] majority of families can't afford."

Parents also stressed that schools should be concerned more with education quality than with fees and that they should take less of a commercial interest. Western parents, however, reported fewer concerns about fees than their South Asian counterparts. Rather, Western parents were more affected by the lack of access to other educational options. One parent reported,

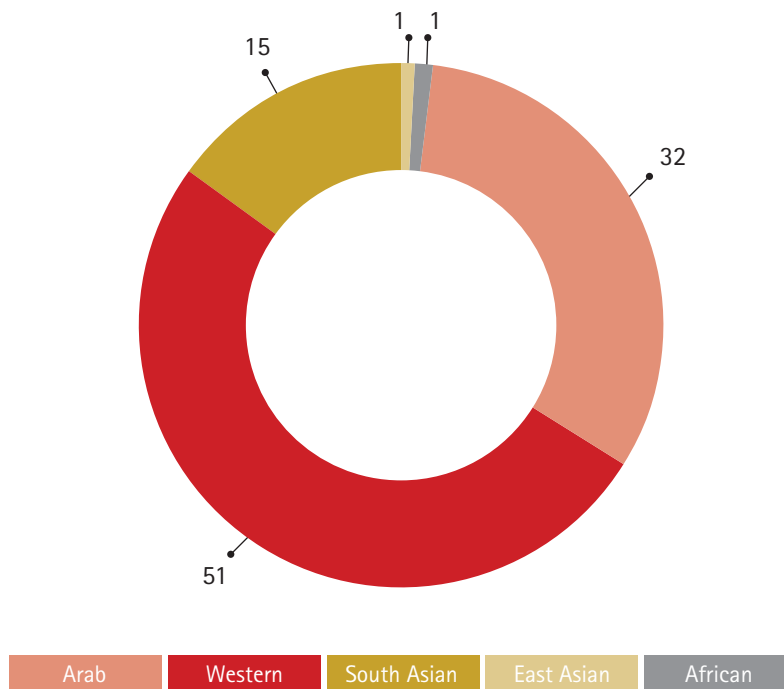
"I'd like there to be more viable options—possibly a proper Montessori or a smaller primary school with a more intimate and individualized feeling. A dual language school where my kids could learn Arabic and Arabic speaker[s] could learn English would be an attractive option for my family. We would happily spend more for a different experience (even though our tuition allowance doesn't even cover half of our education expenses)."

Approximately 75 of 86 respondents mentioned that they would like to see improvements in teacher quality and school facilities.

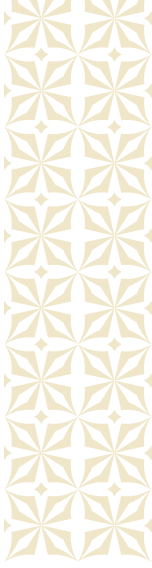
II. Teacher survey

Demographic and professional profile. Following the parent survey, the researchers distributed an online teacher survey through online teacher networks, expatriate social networks, school networks, posts on online education forums, and the researchers' personal networks and again relied on convenience sampling. A total of 76 completed responses were received from teachers teaching at private schools in the UAE and Qatar with 27.6% being male and 72.4% being female. Of the total number of respondents, 47 were based in the UAE (across Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Ajman), and 29 were based in Qatar. The nationality breakdown of these respondents is shown in Figure 6, with Western respondents making up the majority of the sample, followed by Arabs and South Asians respectively.

Figure 6. Teacher nationality distribution from parent surveys in the UAE and Qatar



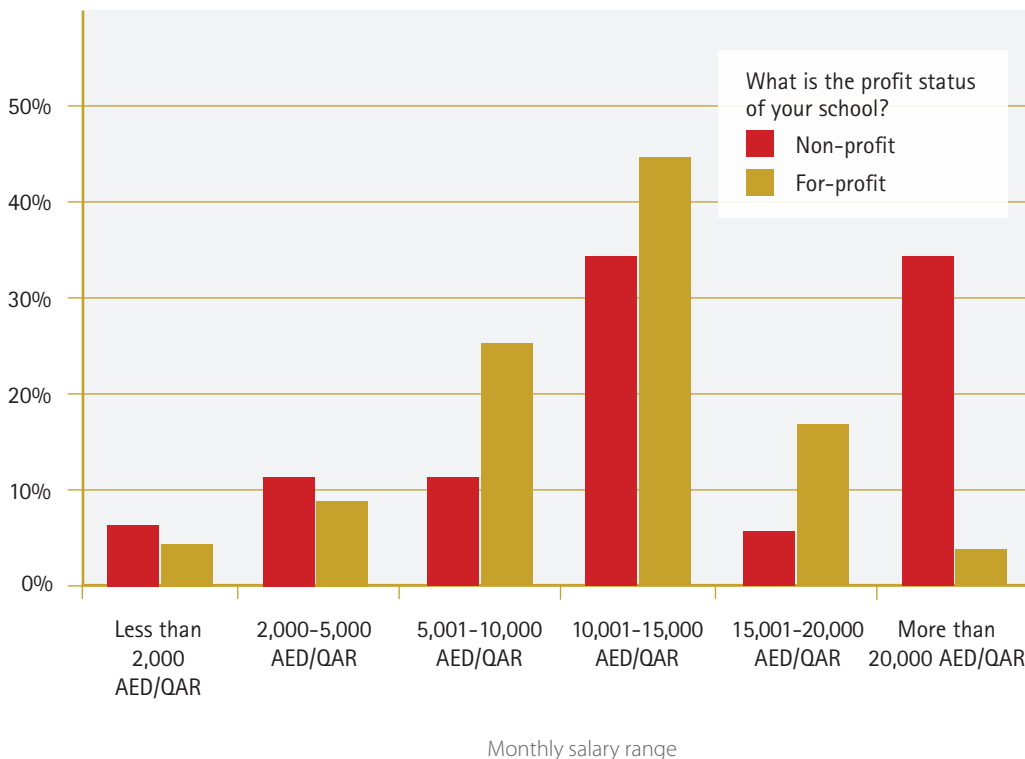
Approximately 94% of those teaching in non-profit schools reported holding an official teaching certification or license, as opposed to 85% in for-profit schools. Moreover, teachers in for-profit schools reported having an average of 13 years' teaching experience, with five years' in their current schools while those in for-profit schools had around 12 years' teaching experience, with four years' at their current schools.



Teacher workload, curriculum, and school profit status. While teachers came from schools offering a wide range of curricula, the majority, 56.5%, taught at British or British/International Baccalaureate (IB) schools with others coming from American, Indian, Ministry of Education, Egyptian, or Iranian curriculum schools. Thirteen of the 49 respondents who taught at British or British/IB curriculum schools were at non-profit schools, the highest proportion compared to schools of other curricula. In terms of workload, teachers from non-profit schools reported having to teach, on average, 105 students during the most recent term while those from for-profit schools reported teaching 303 students a term.

Teacher salary and benefits at for-profit and non-profit schools. The survey results show that teachers working at non-profit schools reported receiving higher monthly salaries than their for-profit counterparts, with average salary ranges of 10,000 - 15,000 AED/QAR (2,723–4,084 USD) as compared to the average salary range of teachers at for-profit establishments, which is 5,000–10,000 AED/QAR (1,361–2,723 USD). Over 30% of teachers at non-profit schools received monthly salaries above 20,000 AED/QAR (5,445 USD) while less than 5% of those in for-profit schools did, as illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Teacher salaries by profit status



In addition to higher salaries, teachers working at non-profit schools generally indicated receiving more work benefits than their for-profit counterparts. For instance, as shown in Table 3, while 78% of teachers working at non-profit schools reported receiving housing allowance or other accommodation benefits, 59% of those in for-profit schools received the same. Teachers at non-profit schools were also more likely to receive health insurance, annual flights, and education allowances than their for-profit counterparts. Nevertheless, 16% and 15% more teachers at for-profit schools reported receiving transportation allowance and maternity/paternity leave benefits respectively.

Table 3. Benefits attained by teachers at for-profit and non-profit schools

Profit status		Housing allowance/ accommodation	Transportation allowance	Health insurance	Annual flight	Funding of children's education	Maternity/ paternity leave (if applicable)
Non-profit	Mean	.78	.17	.83	.72	.33	.22
	N	18	18	18	18	18	18
	Standard Deviation	.428	.383	.383	.461	.485	.428
For-profit	Mean	.59	.33	.67	.56	.22	.37
	N	27	27	27	27	27	27
	Standard Deviation	.501	.480	.480	.506	.424	.492

Note: Means are reported from a range of 0 to 1, with 1 representing a "yes" response and 0 representing a "no" response to whether or not the teacher received the benefit in question.

Finally, given these salaries and benefits, 55.6% of teachers at non-profit schools and 51.9% of teachers at for-profit schools reported that their salaries adequately covered their living expenses. A similar percentage of teachers at non-profit and for-profit schools reported engaging in income-supplementing activities, mainly private tutoring, outside of their school work.

Figure 8. Students are receiving value-for-money education at this school.

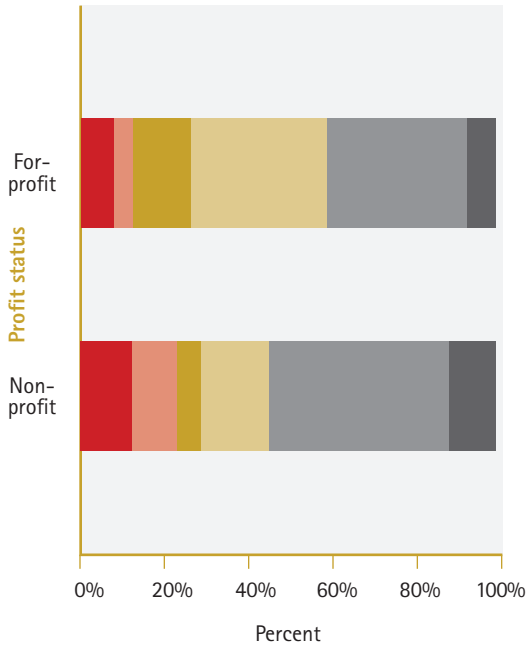


Figure 9. I wouldn't want to work in any other school.

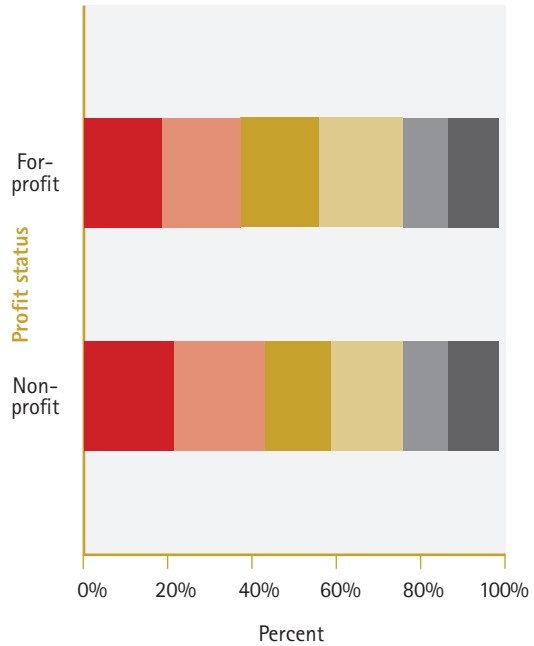


Figure 10. Teachers are involved in making important decisions in this school.

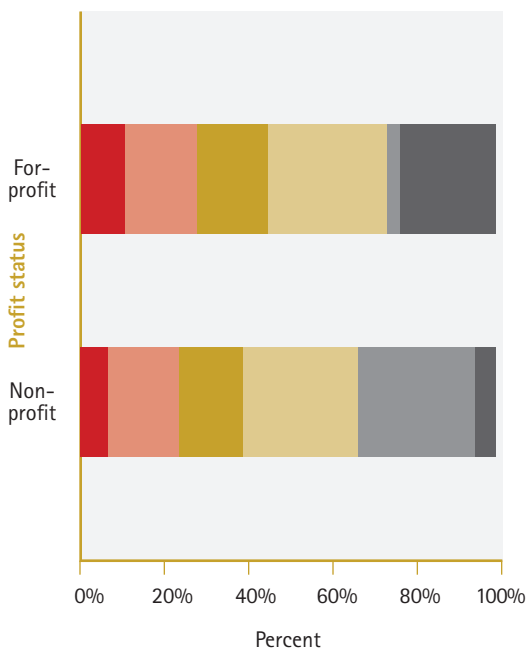
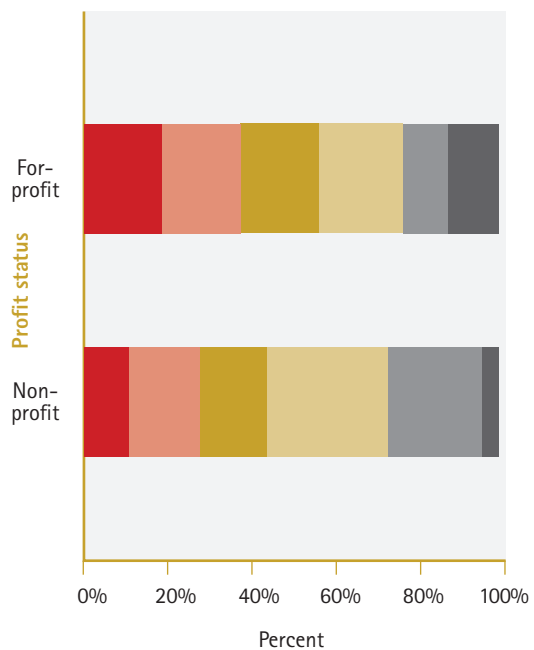
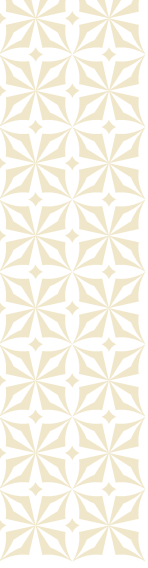


Figure 11. Teachers are appropriately compensated for their work in this school.



Strongly agree
 Agree
 Somewhat agree
 Somewhat disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree



Teacher perceptions on school quality at for-profit vs. non-profit schools. In the final section of the survey, teachers were asked about their perceptions of their current schools and how teaching there may or may not be living up to their expectations and needs. When asked to what extent teachers saw their schools as offering educational value-for-money to its students, a surprising 27.8% and 25.9% of teachers at non-profit and for-profit schools respectively responded that they either strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed with the statement. Similarly, 61.1% and 59.2% of teachers in non-profit and for-profit schools respectively indicated that they would be happy to move to another school by responding negatively to the statement, “I wouldn’t want to work in any other school.” However, a higher percentage of teachers at non-profit schools reported more autonomy when it came to school matters and satisfaction in terms of their salaries. Sixty-one percent either strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed that teachers were involved in making important decisions at school, compared to 51.9% of those in for-profit schools. Fifty-six percent felt appropriately compensated for their work at their current schools, compared to 50% of those in for-profit schools. Figures 8 through 11 illustrate the responses of teachers to these questions in the form of Likert scale diagrams.

Comments and recommendations from teachers. Like the parents, teachers surveyed were given a space to make open-ended comments and recommendations with respect to private schools in the UAE/Qatar. One of the strongest comments came from a frustrated teacher working at a for-profit school in Dubai and reads as follows,

“Teachers are treated as expendable servants at my school. Many of us are U.S. citizens with master’s degrees. We do not have adequate professional development, teaching resources, or time to plan and collaborate. The demands that are made on us by the administration cut into our classroom teaching time and time needed to plan, prepare, and interact with students. The administration and management company use fear and intimidation to control teachers and keep them quiet about the unethical practices that they employ. Parents are being sold a school that, in reality, does not exist. If teachers were treated as experts, with respect, and if they were trusted, the retention rate would improve dramatically. If the culture of fear and intimidation were removed, teacher performance would improve. To feel valued, [to be] respected, and to be rewarded with words and salary would provide teachers with a desire to stay at this school.”

Another comment from the same teacher read,

“The profits of private schools are going to pay investors their yields. Yes, investing in schools is big business in the GCC[,] as multiple studies and consulting groups have indicated. However, there is a tremendous problem when very few profits are going back into the school to support teachers, enhance facilities, provide professional development, hire additional staff, and expand much needed [sic] resources. Unfortunately, the majority of profits are going to investors and school owners.”

Teachers working at for-profit schools frequently commented about a lack of transparency in their schools and concerns about management. Comments and recommendations related to this include the following,

“[I recommend] a more transparent attitude between senior management and staff. Continuity between the three schools under the same management umbrella . . .”

"[I want] CLARITY. NO LIES."

"[There are] too many people in management, too much in-fighting [sic] . . ."

"Teachers should have a voice in making decisions at school. At least, school administrations should consult them when it comes to issues related to [the] teaching and learning process, student behaviors, and SIP implementation."

Only two teachers from non-profit schools had similar concerns, and their responses follow:

"In this school teachers are not supported or listened to. The school is run autocratically[,] and parents' wishes are paramount."

"There are concerns about the [growing number] of children versus the physical space [available]."

Other comments and recommendations made by both teachers at for-profit and non-profit schools in the UAE and Qatar were primarily about salaries, benefits, and respect. Teachers reported that they would like to receive higher salaries and pay for overtime work and that they want to feel recognized, respected, and acknowledged by other teachers and the administration for the hard work they put in. Interestingly, few teachers reported being satisfied with their schools, facilities, and relationships with students and parents, regardless of profit status.

Interview Findings

Alongside the data collected from the surveys, data was collected around and interviews were conducted with primary education agencies, private school principals, parents, and teachers⁸ in the UAE and Qatar. The primary themes that emerged from each of these are reported below after using NVivo text analysis software to code transcriptions and notes from the interviews.

I. Regulatory frameworks

The UAE follows a federal education system arrangement, which has resulted in three education management bodies' operating within the small nation (Nolan, 2012). The seven emirates in the nation have varying degrees of power, and the federal MOE licenses all schools except public and private schools in Abu Dhabi and private schools in Dubai (Nolan, 2012; Ahmed, 2012). The KHDA, established in 2006, oversees private education in the emirate of Dubai while ADEC, created in 2005, regulates public and private schools in Abu Dhabi. The education systems in Ajman, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm Al Quwain function under the federal MOE, which provides their respective "education zones" with an annual budget from which to work (Nolan, 2012). These various regulatory bodies have given rise to a complex education regulatory framework in the UAE, sometimes resulting in federal and emirate-level bodies' competing for both control and resources (Nolan, 2012). Table 4 highlights some of the regulatory differences among the northern emirates, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi.

⁸ Please note that qualitative results from the interviews with education agencies, parents, and teachers are excluded from this working paper. If you would like a complete version of the paper with these results, please contact the authors directly.

Table 4. Regulating private education in UAE

	Abu Dhabi	Dubai	Northen Emirates
Regulatory body	ADEC	KHDA	MOE
Number of private schools	185 ¹	156 ⁴	167 ⁹
Licensing requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational outcomes Health and safety Building requirements Site requirements² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of application by licensing committee Compliance with fees and license renewal rules as approved by the KHDA Educational, safety, building requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of accreditation by government agency Compliance with periodic inspections/ review Educational, safety, building requirements
Frequency of inspections	"Whenever the need arises" (p. 18) or every two years ²	1 time a year ⁵	1-2 times a year
Ranking system	Scale of 1-8, in which 1=Outstanding and 8=Poor ³	Four point scale: Outstanding Quality, Good Quality, Acceptable, and Unsatisfactory ⁵	Three point scale: Highly Effective, Effective, and Not Yet Effective ⁸
Fee determination	School proposes, ADEC reviews proposal and either accepts or rejects. Fee increases are capped at 20% and are reportedly not related to evaluation results. ⁴	During the time of writing, fee changes were positively linked to school ranking. As of June, 2014, fee increases were capped at 3.5% depending on ranking. ⁶	School proposes, MOE reviews proposal and either accepts or rejects. Fee increases cannot exceed 10% in 1 year, 15% in 2 years, and 30% in 3 years. ⁷
Other requirements	Financial capacity, Arabic language, Islamic studies (for Muslims), and civic studies subjects		

Sources: (ADEC, 2014a),¹ (ADEC, 2013b),² (ADEC, 2013a),³ (KHDA, 2014b),⁴ KHDA (2014a),⁵ (Pennington, 2014),⁶ (S. Al Jaber, personal communication, December 4, 2013),⁷ (Ahmed, 2012),⁸ (MOE, UAE, 2014)⁹

Education in Qatar is similarly complex and has undergone major reforms as part of a top-down, decentralization process led by the Qatari royal family (Nolan, 2012). In 2002, the Supreme Education Council (SEC) was established to oversee education in the nation, and, a year later, the RAND Cooperation was brought on to guide comprehensive education reforms. In 2004,

200 independent schools were established primarily to serve the national student body. The operation of these schools was contracted out to private operators, under the belief that they would improve accountability and efficiency within government schools (“Rand and Qatar Foundation,” 2013; Nolan, 2012). Public-private partnership schools with the MOE were also established, with these schools’ being labeled “semi-independent” schools. At the same time, there was a growing number of foreign private schools operating in Qatar targeting non-national students. The Private School Office (PSO) at the SEC regulates and monitors aspects of private school operations (Toumi, 2011). Table 5 displays more information about government regulation of private education in Qatar. However, events undertaken in 2013 and 2014 point to a rolling back of these reforms in a recentralization of schools under the MOE.

Table 5. Regulation of private education in Qatar

Regulatory body	Supreme Education Council (SEC)
Sub-regulatory body	Private School Office (PSO)
Number of private schools¹	164 ¹
Licensing requirements²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local or international accreditation • Promotion of national identity of Qatari students • Educational, safety, building requirements
Frequency of inspections	1–2 times a year; more if there is an issue of concern
Ranking system	No publically available formal ranking system
Fee determination³	School proposes, SEC reviews and either accepts or declines. Fee increases capped at 10% and are more likely to be attained by top schools.
Other requirements	Arabic language and Islamic studies to Muslims; Qatari history to all others

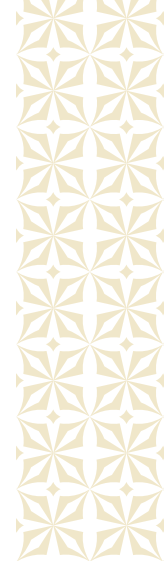
Sources: (Hukoomi Qatar e-Government),¹ (SEC, n.d.),² (Pathak & Mallick, 2013)³

II. Principal interviews

After studying the relevant government agencies and their regulation of private schools in the UAE and Qatar, the researchers conducted interviews with private school principals. In the UAE, principals from nine private schools were interviewed, while in Qatar, interviews were conducted with the principals of two private schools. Analysis of the transcriptions of these interviews revealed differences in the way non-profit and for-profit schools responded with regard to the following: curriculum and classes, extracurriculars, governance, future plans, quality, fees and costs, and perceived roles/purposes. These results are reported in Table 6.

Table 6. For-profit/non-profit themes and differences

Theme	For-Profit	Non-Profit	Both
Curriculum and classes	Less standardized curriculum—various national systems and ways of implementing requirements like Islamic education	Very standardized curriculum according to ministry regulations	
Extracurriculars	More involvement by PTA/ community; some academic opportunities for students to compete locally/ internationally	More extracurricular activities like sports offered	Provide some sorts of community events to engage students & families
Governance	Difficult to meet regulating bodies' demands on class size, fee increase limits, building standards; inspections often unannounced & source of stress, are inconsistent	Generally see regulating bodies' regulations as helpful & necessary & adhere to them	Admit that bureaucracy surrounding government regulations can be cumbersome
	Beholden to systems other than regulatory bodies, such as boards of governors	See themselves as independent, except in the case of community schools	
	Generally reported that while compliance can be difficult, government standards help schools grow; see improving government rankings as a top priority	Parents disapproved when school adhered to following new government standards particularly with respect to required Arabic language teaching	
Future plans	Future plans contingent on facilities or other resource granted by ministry; focus on solving endemic problems (survival)	Future plans focus on expanding/ improving facilities & improving administrative processes (expansion)	
Quality	Poor teacher training & difficulty finding qualified teachers; tend to employ teachers of same nationality as students/ curriculum	Greater number of more qualified teachers and teaching assistants	



Fees & costs	Higher incidence of parents' being unable to pay fees; more internal scholarship programs for students unable to pay fees; more frequent parental complaints about school fees even though they are lower	Higher proportion of fees paid by parents' companies	Meals not generally included in tuition (but provided at low-cost by for-profit school, by outside vendors at non-profit, or by parents)
	Greater need to raise fees, but abide by MOE limits on increases in doing so; charge a number of nominal fees for materials, transportation, etc.; use comparisons of quality with other similar schools to justify fee increases to parents	Tuition generally inclusive of school materials, extracurricular participation, transportation, etc.	
	Schools with lower fees more likely to offer low rates for kids of staff/faculty, siblings of current students	Less likely to offer scholarships, but some flexibility with regards to late payments	
Perceived role	Take pride in caring for children well; providing access to basic education reported to be a priority	See schools as filling role in society as a whole, contributing to best practices in education and raising standards overall	
	"evaluation," "study" mentioned more often	"building," "support," "community" mentioned more often	

In addition to the aforementioned themes, there were some additional observed differences between the ways principals at for-profit schools versus those at non-profit schools responded. For instance, principals at for-profit schools had shorter responses overall and focused on day-to-day operational challenges in their schools, whereas principals at non-profit schools expounded more on the ideological principles behind education at their schools. Non-profit school principals were also more openly critical of aspects of government education policy that hindered education quality such as overly frequent inspections and poor Arabic language curriculum (required for both native and non-native Arabic speakers).



Discussion

The UAE and Qatar provide a unique set of cases that offer us a glimpse of what a completely privatized education sector might look like. These two countries have long extolled the virtues of the free market and an open labor market wherein employers are free to pay people based on their nationalities rather than on education levels or experience. The private education sector in each country is likewise equally open and is a market in which teachers are paid according to nationality and in which schools are segregated in terms of socioeconomic status and geography. Founder and Managing Director of GEMS, Sunny Varkey, captures the prevailing view of private education providers in these two countries in an article published in *Gulf Business Magazine*, stating,

“Dubai is a place where, depending on your financial resources, you can choose a school model. If you want to choose a school that is \$10,000, you have it. If you want to send your children to a school that is \$3,000, you have it . . . so if you put your children in a school that you can’t afford then you can’t grumble. You understand what I’m saying? You must choose a school that you can afford.” (Buller, 2013, p.1)

In a nutshell, Varkey’s view indicates that parents in the UAE and Qatar should get the education levels they pay for. In the best scenario, poorer families will have to send their children to lower quality schools in which teachers are paid less, management is paid less, and there are fewer resources. Wealthy families will be able to send their children to schools with ample resources, in which teachers are paid competitive salaries and management is recruited from some of the best schools in the West. That, however, represents the best scenario since our research finds that with the large majority of school operators’ being for-profit, newer schools are no longer being opened in the lowest fee bracket, even though both countries continue to take in expatriate workers who will only be able to afford lower tuitions.

As inflation rises across the region, our research finds that poorer families are having to spend more and more on their children’s educations, often living on the breadline and taking out loans in order to keep them in school (Dhal, 2013b). Wealthier expatriate families are likely to have their employers meet the cost of their children’s educations and, in a bitter irony, spend far less, in terms of percentage, of their household incomes on education than do their less-well-paid counterparts. Varkey’s comment about parents’ having a choice rings quite hollow since, for less-well-off parents, there is no choice. With 25,000 children unable to find places in schools in Abu Dhabi, and similar shortages at the low-fee end in Dubai and Qatar, many families are choosing either to send their children back to their home countries to be educated in the public systems there or are deciding to home-school their children (Issa, 2013; KHDA, 2014a; Bakshi, 2014).

While our findings invite discussion about the inequities inherent in the Gulf in terms of immigration, labor markets, and human rights, we believe that more than this, the cases of the UAE and Qatar offer a powerful cautionary tale for Western countries about what education looks like when it is dominated by the for-profit private sector. The trend towards private companies’ operating public schools continues across Europe and North America, with for-profit education management companies chipping away at the public education sector. This trend persists

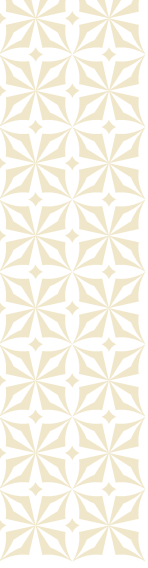
despite study after study's finding no differences in student achievement among equally matched privately and publically operated schools (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006; Peterson & Llaudet, 2006). The cases of the UAE and Qatar provide us with a reason to reflect on the notion of education as a right and as a public good, and, in short, on the purpose of education in society.

In the UAE and Qatar, the purpose of private education is very much related to developing the talent of the individual. Private schools market themselves to families in terms of how they can help children who attend their schools excel, typically in terms of university acceptance and job acquisition. For the vast majority of students in the UAE and Qatar, education is not about building the nation, or about educating responsible citizens, but is primarily focused on creating private returns. Yet expatriate children and their families spend several years living and working in the Gulf. They are in the malls, they are driving on the streets, and they are interacting with Emiratis and Qataris every day. Nevertheless, these students are being educated as if they were not part of the country in which they live and are excluded from public and sometimes even private education. The schools they attend are often not interested in fostering any linkage or loyalty to the countries in which they operate, and even required subjects such as Arabic are poorly staffed, with the result that most non-Arab expatriate children will speak no Arabic when they graduate school. With profit's driving the majority of schools in both countries, private operators seem not overly concerned with the social good; they are not interested, except to tick inspection boxes, in promoting values and beliefs consistent with local society. While crime rates have not soared in these two countries, due largely to strictly enforced laws, there are still issues related to the environment and health that can affect the population at large. When expatriates represent more than half of a country's population, one cannot contend that how they are educated will not affect society as a whole.

When governments abdicate responsibility for education to for-profit companies, social and economic inequality will soar, as is evidenced in this research. The question for many, especially the wealthy, is, "Why should we care?" In this sense, the US provides the most cautionary tale with its increasing crime rates, swelling prison populations, poor healthcare, and shortened life expectancies (Kenworthy & Smeeding, 2013). Few could argue that a nation would ever aspire to these characteristics, yet educational trends originating in the US are sweeping Europe and Australia for reasons that we do not have time to explore here.

In the UAE and Qatar, non-profit schools offer a glimmer of hope. These schools were originally established by foreign missions to cater to the educational needs of their citizens living abroad in these countries. Our school mapping shows that they are largely clustered in older areas of cities such as Dubai. Local and expatriate philanthropists, recognizing the needs of society's poorer members, have also established some non-profit schools. Parents and teachers alike spoke of the difference between for- and non-profit schools, and principals in non-profit schools talked about the philosophy of education versus operational issues, which were the primary concern of for-profit principals.

Non-profit schools offer something closer to what public education was originally conceived as. When profits are returned to a school and when the existence of the school is based on a belief in the transformative power of education, all stakeholders are happier, schools and students thrive, and schools become more connected to their local communities because they are grounded in a philosophy of learning and learning communities (Biggs, 2014). These non-profit schools offer a high-quality alternative to public education, but, sadly, too few of them exist in the UAE



and Qatar, and the ones that do often charge high fees and have long waiting lists. However, with government incentives, we believe that more non-profit schools would open, perhaps more started by nationals seeking to offer alternatives and to give back to society.

It would be unrealistic to propose that the governments of the UAE and Qatar open public schools for all expatriate families. However, education is the one social sector that is best not directed by market forces, as it has large positive externalities associated with it, including increased civic engagement, lower crime rates, improved health conditions, and economic growth (Hall, 2006). School inspections in both countries have certainly helped with quality assurance of private schools, but the lack of resources to help schools at the lower end of the market improve means that poorer schools remain poor, and inspections merely report these conditions; they do not ameliorate them.

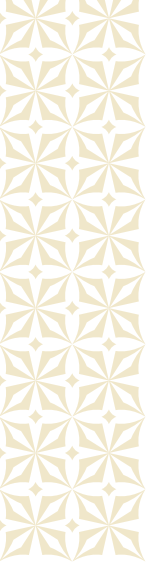
Understandably, governments might hesitate to invest resources into a poorly performing for-profit school, but perhaps governments would be willing to help support struggling non-profit schools and establish new ones as a way of investing in the future of their respective nations. While all expatriates in the UAE and Qatar are considered guest workers and will eventually have to leave those nations, the long time periods that many expatriates spend in both countries points to a need for a more holistic vision of the population and its development—one in which a respect for the values and culture of the UAE and Qatar is developed among all residents and in which education serves to unite people groups rather than separating or possibly alienating them from one another.

Conclusion

This study of private education in the absence of a public option in the UAE and Qatar has attempted to examine what happens with regard to access and equity when private education is the only option available to the majority of these nations' residents. Consistent with other literature on privatization (Ball, 2007; Atasay & Delavan, 2012; Robertson & Verger, 2012; Srivastava, 2010), we find that inequality, in particular among socioeconomic groups, persists and that families and educators alike feel the negative impact of this. The dominance of for-profit providers has meant that financial returns, rather than a belief in the importance of education for both the person and society, motivate the private education sector. Non-profit schools offer a viable alternative for more equitable and culturally connected schools that would benefit stakeholders at the individual and societal levels. However, there are too few non-profit options available for families in the UAE and Qatar, especially those at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. Consequently, both governments have the opportunity to provide incentives to non-profit operators in order to promote the establishment of more non-profit schools. More research is required in this area, particularly on the promise of non-profit schools and on the ways in which the lack of lower-fee private schools may threaten the ability of employers, both public and private, to attract foreign talent needed for the continued development of both nations.

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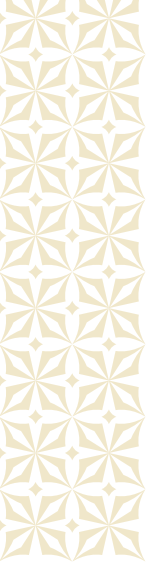
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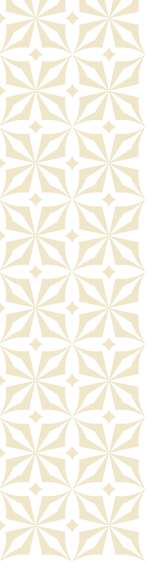
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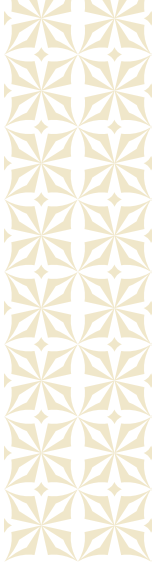
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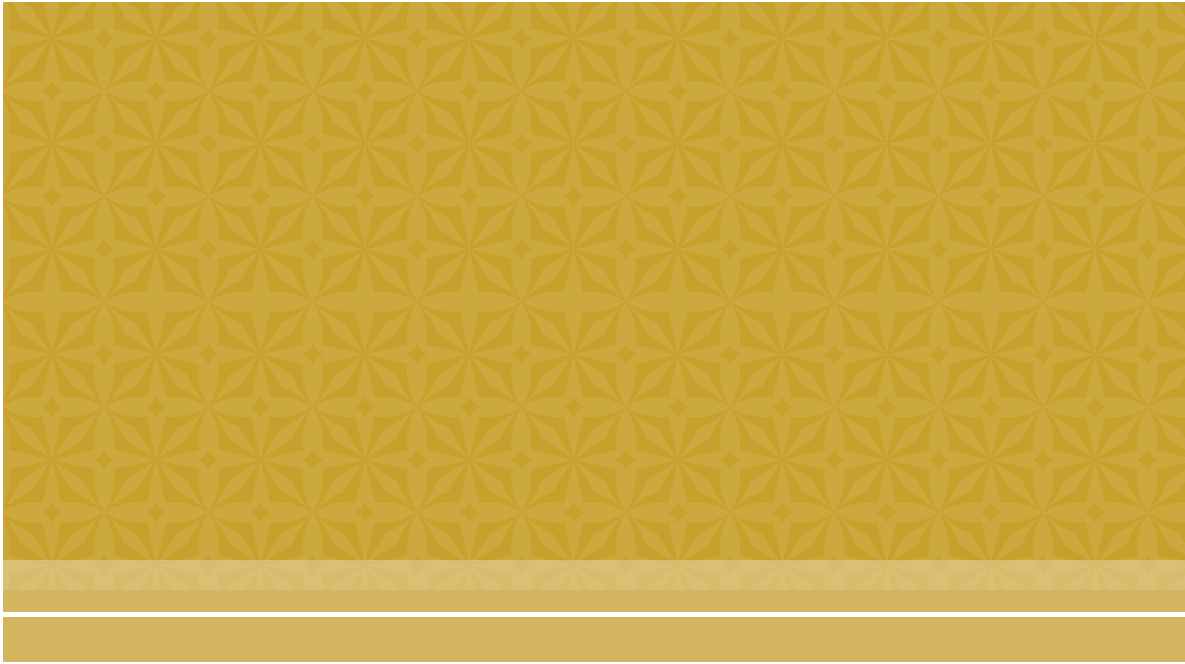
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