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THE UAE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY FOR SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT

Abstract. The purpose of this article is to analyze the effectiveness of United Arab Emirates (UAE) public policy and government programs in developing scientific research and development (R&D). This focus is critically important as the UAE transitions from an oil-dependent to a knowledge-based economy, prioritizing human capital development. As a result of these strategic efforts, the UAE has emerged as one of the regional leaders in the Middle East in science and technology. The relevance of this study lies in examining modern models of state-led research development, with the UAE's experience serving as a potential model for commodity-based economies like Kazakhstan. Unlike previous studies, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of the UAE's scientific achievements. The methodology combines document analysis, a systematic literature review, and quantitative assessment of research outputs. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journals and official government reports. Our results demonstrate that robust government support for science significantly contributes to developing qualified specialists who are integrated into the modern labor market, thereby strengthening the national economy. Furthermore, the strategic introduction of advanced technologies into educational and research laboratories is facilitating the R&D necessary for the UAE to establish itself as a leading, self-sufficient knowledge powerhouse in the Persian Gulf region.

Key words: the UAE, science, higher education, knowledge economy.

Introduction

There is a strong connection between technological innovation and economic growth. Technological innovations create new markets, products, and services, which effectively support economic growth. Innovation can also come from research and development made possible by economic growth (My Thi Thi & Tran Phu Do, 2024).

In order to create innovative economies, many developed countries have coordinated their public policies and established higher education systems as a means of fostering the development of cutting-edge technologies and innovations (Sopybaeva, Kozhirova, 2025). Li, Xue, Wei, and colleagues found that, nations with fast economic growth strongly value higher education for both domestic advancement and international competitiveness. By catching up technologically, they are capable of competing with more developed countries in the knowledge economy (Li *et al*, 2024: 1-11). Consequently, the economy serves as the foundation for educational policy, determining the content, goals, and implementation tools of educational programs (Baishan, Nechaeva, Belgozha, 2025).

Science and research productivity have a significant impact on a country's economy as well as many aspects of people's lives. The level of scientific progress is a key indicator of a society's and a country's development. Those countries that pay close attention to scientific research, master the latest high-tech technologies, and provide financial support have competitive political economies among the top economic countries and show major positions in the global economy. For instance, the dynamic advancements made by the extraordinary economies of East Asia (Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong) are actually the result of significant investments in science, technology, and research (IMF, 2024: 1-31).

The UAE has wanted to change its oil-driven economy into a sustainable one based on information, innovation, technology, and research, as presented in the UAE's government development programme Vision 2021. Today, the country derives benefits from rising infrastructure in research due to its many academic institutions and foreign and national researchers (Vision 2021).

With the ambitious competing tendencies, the Arabian Gulf countries witnessed 'unprecedented' struggles with their oil-dependent export economy, and the decisions to diversify their national economy are concomitant with that concern. Gradually the UAE and, on a broader scale, the Arabian countries in the Gulf region accumulated the cumulative progressive economic concepts in the first decade of this century. The UAE undertook its Vision 2021 in 2010 with a significant focus on its education system and knowledge economy, which was later followed by Vision 2031 and the UAE Centennial Vision 2071.

Innovation, science, and technology are critical to the socio-economic development of the UAE. The UAE's authority plans to accomplish their objectives by using their resources and having an efficient government. It has started initiatives in a number of fields, including renewable energy, water, transportation, education, and health. Human development and economic diversity are top priorities as well. The objective of the UAE's strategy in science, technology, and innovation is to advance innovation based on science and technology in order to meet national goals and tackle global problems (UAE Government, 2015).

Since 1997, the UAE's national fiscal investment has significantly prioritised the knowledge-based economy (Ashour, 2020: 209–223). To achieve the maximum utility of its visions, it greeted a wide range of institutional approaches, including emphasising research environments in higher educational institutions across the country and funding opportunities, inviting international scholars and visiting professors, inter-institutional agreements and cooperations, and ensuring relentless access to competing technologies on campuses. The eminent universities in the UAE, such as New York University in Abu Dhabi, bolster the government's commitment to being central to a knowledge-based economic landscape (Areepattamannil, 2024). Dubai as a smart city has drawn wide scholarly attention, and it is argued by the scholars that the technology facilitated for the daily citizen life is eventually fostering the learning wave in the labs of the colleges (El Khatib et al, 2023: 1657-1672). The ecosystem-based infrastructures like Dubai Knowledge Park and Abu Dhabi's Masdar City are integrating the needs for academia with its service to the labour markets. Worthy of mention, the UAE was among the first to join the World Bank's human capital (HC) projects along with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and data is evidenced to have a stable correlation between HC and national economic flow (Aldulaimi et al, 2020: 1-6). Furthermore, the government's less engagement with the private sector to boost its knowledge economy is undermining the state effort (Ben Hassen, 2022). From 2012 to 2021, the knowledge and non-oil sector of the UAE gradually expanded, contributing to the state goal of economic diversification (Crupi. & Schiliro, 2023: 2286-2300). Still, the special education zones are only engendering the temporary skilled migrant workforce, which is critically scrutinised by Rottleb and Kleibert and suggested for in-depth policy analysis by including offshore educational institutions with the government's mainstream efforts and considering a comprehensive citizenship criterion (Rottleb & Kleibert, 2022: 930-948).

In literature and policymaking discourse, the UAE's visions are conventionally talked over, and subsequent improvisation decisions are raised to evaluate and reevaluate the government's initiatives as well as their ramifications. However, the resourcefulness of the government in scientific development is found to be an emerging topic to concentrate on with an objective approach to answer the grey areas in policymaking. Embracing technology by the students and the faculties is still conventional in UAE campuses, which calls for accelerating the pace to reap the optimal benefit (Ashour, 2020: 2513-2525). With Emiratisation having limited success in the education and labour market, in-depth concentration was needed to pay attention to the potentiality

of the government's scientific efforts (Sarker & Rahman, 2020: 173–186). These challenges are often intertwined with the implementing methods of the government's enterprises in developing higher educational overall productivity in generating the original insights as well as employing them in national interests, which comes later. For a nuanced understanding of the UAE's higher educational efforts, the study is to undertake a critical appraisal with an analytical approach.

In brief, with a view to finding the potential answers to these concerns, this study aims to analyse the government of the UAE's public policies on scientific research and the higher education system, and particular attention is paid to evaluating the UAE's research and achievements in science, which will dictate the attention of the policymakers, with their paying dedicated attention to the effectiveness of the UAE's public policies.

This study's main research question is: Can public policy in research and development in the UAE be considered as effective?

Methodology

The authors reviewed and analyzed a range of sources, including articles, monographs, and official reports, to address the research question and gather data regarding government research programs in the UAE. A substantial part of the relevant research literature was also carefully reviewed, and statistics and websites of international organizations were examined. The study was conducted by using such methods as literature review, document analysis and quantitative methods.

Results

Modern educational policy of the UAE. The UAE aimed to "modernize" their system of higher education. The country's demand for globally recognized university programs has increased over time. Universities in the UAE that have partnerships with international universities have grown quickly as a result (Della Giovampaola & Ugazio, 2024: 682-703). Partnerships with consultants from western countries played a significant role in reshaping higher education in the UAE (Jaleel & Saber, 2025).

UAE government boosted the research productivity by supporting research activities in private and public universities, centers, institutes and companies, by individuals or teams of scientists in UAE through the disbursement of research grants. One of such funds is the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Knowledge Foundation, which is aimed at advancing scientific knowledge in the region by funding research projects. It was established in 2007 and has a $10 billion endowment fund (Al Yami, Ajmal & Balasubramanian, 2022: 670-700).

The objectives for improving the higher education system and science are outlined in the following national economic programs and strategic documents:

- UAE Vision 2021, which was announced in 2010, is designed to make the UAE one of the world's best countries. Six national priorities of the UAE Vision 2021 focus on the key sectors of government action in the following years (Vision 2021).

- The UAE Centennial Plan 2071 aims at preparing the future generations of the UAE by giving them the skills and knowledge to make the UAE, the most advanced country in the world by 2071 (UAE Centennial Plan 2071).

- The National Strategy for Advanced Innovation aims to establish the UAE as a global leader in innovation by encouraging experimentation and taking well-considered risks to achieve the UAE Centenary Goals 2071. The focus areas include exploration, future skills, quality of health, living and life, green power, transport and harnessing technology to serve humankind (The UAE's National Strategy for Advanced Innovation).

- The National Advanced Sciences Agenda 2031 seeks to further the goals of Vision 2021 and the Centennial Plan 2071 through eight scientific priorities to address future challenges (The National Advanced Sciences Agenda 2031).

- The UAE Strategy for the Future places importance on strategic planning, worldwide cooperation, and creating specific research laboratories for future challenges. The strategy has three main pillars: an entirely novel governmental operational model, developing national capacity through education and training, and focusing on technology, sustainability, healthcare, and education to set strategic priorities for the future (The UAE Strategy for the Future).

The UAE's achievements in science and research. A significant public and private investment has resulted in a tremendous expansion of the higher education sector, which now includes a diverse range of programs offered by a large number of public and private colleges and universities (Karabchuk, Shomotova & Chmel, 2022: 759-785). Shomotova and Karabchuk (Shomotova & Karabchuk, 2022: 159-185) argued that the recorded boom in higher education is not only owing to UAE's fast rising population, but also due to better higher education opportunities. For example, between 2001 and 2005, the number of graduates went up by 102%, while the number of people aged 20 to 24 increased by 94% in the UAE. This increase in higher education possibilities is being driven by the UAE's rapid economic expansion and the private sector's rising investments in higher education institutions throughout the Gulf region. Since colleges and universities are obliged to compete by enhancing their academic programs and the employability of their graduates, the growing number of higher education providers should have a beneficial influence on higher education quality.

According to the report done by the United Nations Development Programme in 2022 on the Human Development Index, the UAE has the highest rank among Arab countries and is 23d in the world (UN Development Programme).

United Nations Development Programme also indicates that UAE was ranked first in the Arab world in the knowledge economy index and 26th among 141 countries worldwide in 2024. The country's emphasis on innovation and education is demonstrated by its ranking 25th out of 59 nations with very high human development. In addition, the UAE made significant achievements in technological and digital progress, positioning itself as a leading knowledge economy (GNI, 2024).

There are several universities in the United Arab Emirates that are listed among the top universities in the world, according to the QS World University Rankings 2026. Khalifa University of Science and Technology (Khalifa University), which is ranked 177 globally, is the top university in the United Arab Emirates and one of the top 200 universities worldwide in 2026. Prominent universities in the UAE, such as the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) (229), the American University of Sharjah (272) and University of Sharjah (328) come shortly after it (QS World University Rankings 2026).

According to another prestigious global ranking of universities, Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025, Khalifa University ranks 201-250, followed by the UAEU 251-300 and the University of Sharjah 301-350 (World University Rankings 2025). Three highly ranked higher education institutions in the UAE are noted in Table 1.

Table 1 – a list of top universities in the UAE according to international rankings

University names	QS World University Rankings	Times Higher Education
Khalifa University	177	201–250
UAEU	229	251–300
University of Sharjah	328	301–350

Khalifa University of Science and Technology is a research-intensive university that was founded in 2017 by merging three top universities in the country: Khalifa University of Science, Technology and Research, Masdar Institute of Science and Technology, and The Petroleum Institute. It is located in Abu Dhabi and consists of three colleges, three research institutes, 18 research centers, and 36 departments that cover a wide range of scientific, technological, and medical disciplines. According to the University's Vision, it aims to be the progress engine of Abu

Dhabi and the UAE's knowledge economy, as well as the world leader among research universities in the 21st century (Khalifa University).

UAEU is also one of the top national universities in the UAE. Moreover, it is considered as the first and the oldest university in the country, which was founded in 1976 by Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. Aiming to become an elite institution with a focus on research, UAEU currently admits about 14,968 Emirati and foreign students. The UAEU has nine colleges that provide a comprehensive range of accredited, high-quality graduate and undergraduate programs. The UAEU has created research centers of strategic importance for the country and the region as a whole, in addition to its academic courses. These centers are involved in research and development across a wide range of critical areas, such as cancer treatment and water resources (UAEU).

American University of Sharjah (AUS) was founded in 1997. AUS offer 32 majors and 46 minors at the undergraduate level, 17 master's degree programs and five PhD programs. Approximately 5,233 undergraduates, 412 graduate students, and 119 postgraduate students are enrolled in the university's four colleges in the year 2023. The university employs 339 full-time faculty members from 49 countries (AUS).

Table 2 below shows data from the World Bank Group, which is one of the world's largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries. It publishes statistics on the most important aspects of economic activity, research and development in the world. The author selected the countries the world's most advanced countries in the field of scientific research to compare with the UAE (The World Bank).

Table 2 - research and development expenditure (% of GDP), 2015–2020

Countries	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Israel	4,2	4,5	4,6	4,7	5,1	5,3
Korea	3,98	3,99	4,3	4,5	4,6	4,8
USA	2,8	2,8	2,9	3	3,1	3,4
Japan	3,2	3,1	3,1	3,2	3,2	3,3
Germany	2,9	2,9	3	3,1	3,2	3,1
China	2	2,1	2,1	2,1	2,2	2,4
UAE	0,86	0,9	-	1,2	1,3	1,5
Russian Federation	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,9	1	1,1
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-	-	-	0,5
Arab World	-	-	-	-	-	0,72

The government has built infrastructure for scientific progress, and invested significantly to promote research and development in the country. It has already increased its expenditure on research and development from 0.8 to 1.5% of GDP between 2015 and 2021. According to the data presented in the table, it can be concluded that the allocated funds are significantly higher than in other Arab countries, but lower than in some developed countries.

Another important indicator is the number of scientific researchers in a country. Human resources play one of the key roles in the creation of a new product or piece of knowledge (The World Bank). Data on the number of researchers is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - Researchers in R&D (per million people), 2015–2020

Countries	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Korea	7013,5	7086	7497,6	7980,4	8407,7	8713,6
USA	4269,9	4251,2	4411,7	4748,8	4821,2	-
UK	4320	4358	4435	4554	4684	-
Japan	5173,0	5209,4	5304,1	5331,1	5374,6	5454,7
Germany	4743,8	4861,7	5076,5	5217,3	5396,5	5393,1
China	1150,8	1196,7	1224,8	1307,1	1471,2	1584,9

UAE	1980,5	2383,1	-	2378,9	2382,1	2442,5
Russian Federation	3098,1	2952,2	2821,5	2784,3	2746,7	2721,7

Based on the above data, it can be clearly seen that the number of researchers in the UAE is growing steadily, as well as in other countries that are actively expanding the field of research.

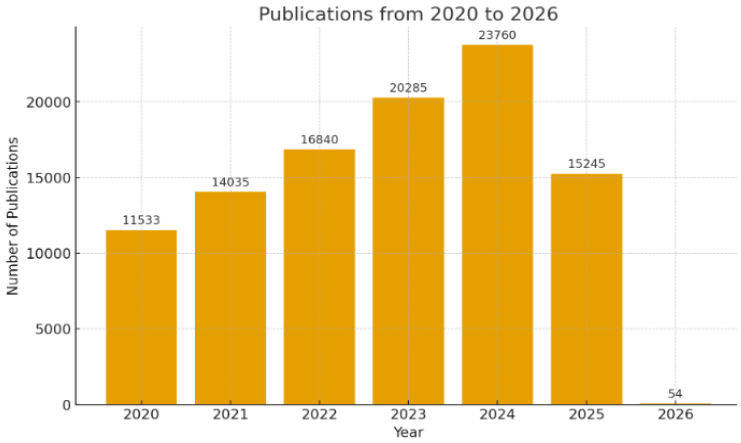

Figure 1 – Research performance from 2020 to 2026. (Source: https://www.scival.com/overview/publications/summary?uri=Country/784, accessed 04.09.2025)

Figure 1 demonstrates the development of research output in UAE. There are 101,752 documents in total published over the period 2020–2026. In 2020, the number of scientific research publications were 11533 which increased by around 106% to 23,760 in 2024.

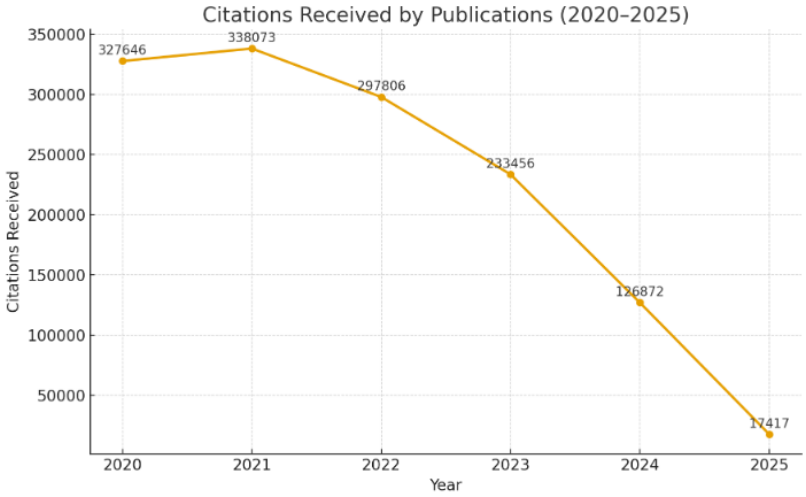

Figure 2 – citations of articles between 2020 and 2025. (Source: https://www.scival.com/overview/citations?uri=Country/784 , accessed 04.09.2025)

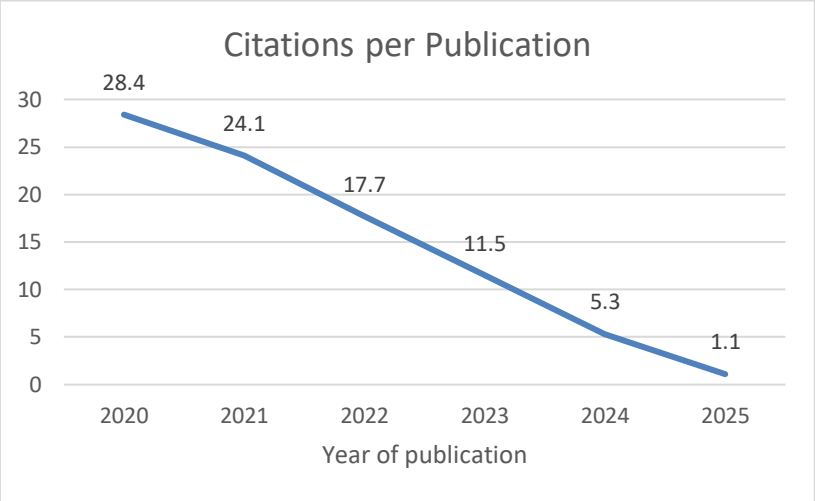

Figure 3 – citations per publication of articles between 2020 and 2025. (Source: https://www.scival.com/overview/citations?uri=Country/784, accessed 04.09.2025)

According to Scopus data given in Figures 2 and 3, there was a fluctuation in the citation over the last five-year period with an overall number of 772,425 citations. Similarly, the citations per publication also decreased from 20,9 in 2018 to 5,7 in 2022.

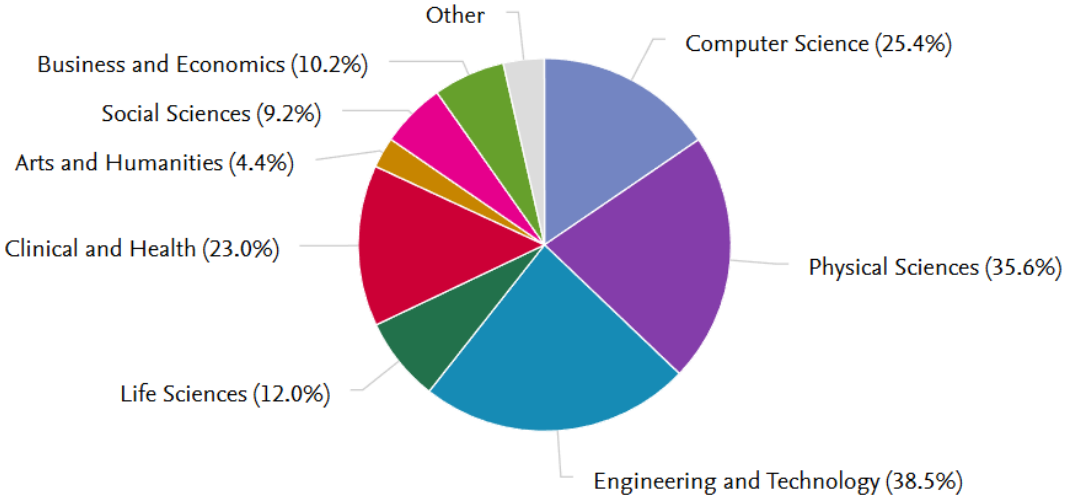

Figure 4 – the most popular subject area of all publications between 2020 to 2025. (Source: https://www.scival.com/overview/discipline?uri=Country/784, accessed 04.09.2025)

As shown in Figure 4, over the last 6 years “Engineering & Technology” was the most prevalent subject area at about 38,5% of all publications. While publications in the “Physical Sciences” (35,6%), “Computer Sciences” (25,4%) and “Clinical and Health” (23%) had almost similar contribution, “Arts & Humanities” was the least prevalent subject of the UAE’s research output.

Conclusion

The current study was to notably embody the UAE’s efforts to advance the knowledge economy by facilitating educational environments in institutions as well as integrating the cutting-edge technology into higher education. By embodying a wide range of data on the distinctive features of scientific development in the UAE, we concluded that the country has recently increased its efforts due to particular support from the government. This is evidenced by the majority of

national economic programmes aimed at fostering science and innovation, as well as significant state funding. The government patronage, which is perceptible as funding, infrastructure building, or specifying the universities as research-based or skilled labour suppliers, will on the one hand promptly contribute to creating a skilled, specialised faculty, and on the other hand, integrating those learners into the labour market will enrich the overall national economic experience. Embracing new technologies in the workforce, especially in the educational labs, will advance the research findings necessary to make the UAE a self-reliant giant in the Gulf region. The efforts are, to summarise, somewhere visible as hitherto progressing, as having named the UAE universities on the top university rankings competing with the Arabian countries. Besides, the research environment in the campuses with the numbers of the students struggling in materialising the best usages of the new technologies are steadily getting in the flow, which will allow policymakers to exploit the technological arena efficaciously.

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БАӘ-НІҢ ҒЫЛЫМДЫ ДАМЫТУ БОЙЫНША МЕМЛЕКЕТТІК САЯСАТЫ

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақаланың мақсаты Біріккен Араб Әмірліктерінің (БАӘ) академиялық зерттеулерді дамыту жөніндегі мемлекеттік бағдарламаларын және олардың ғылымдағы жетістіктерін, сондай-ақ БАӘ мемлекеттік саясатының ғылыми зерттеулер мен әзірлемелердегі тиімділігін талдау болып табылады. БАӘ экономикасын әртараптандыруда, мұнайға тәуелді экономикадан білімге негізделген экономикаға және адами капиталды дамытуға көшуде. Нәтижесінде БАӘ соңғы онжылдықтарда аймақтағы ғылыми технологиялар мен зерттеулерді дамытуда көшбасшылардың біріне айналды. Бұл зерттеудің өзектілігі мемлекеттің ғылыми-зерттеу институттарымен және университеттермен өзара әрекеттесуінің заманауи үлгілерін зерттеудің маңыздылығында. БАӘ-нің ғылыми зерттеулерді дамыту тәжірибесі Қазақстан сияқты шикізатқа негізделген экономикасы бар елдерге үлгі бола алады. Біздің нәтижелеріміз ғылым мен зерттеулерді мемлекеттік қолдау заманауи еңбек нарығына кірігуге қабілетті білікті мамандар мен ғылыми зерттеушілерді дамытуға, сол арқылы елдің жалпы экономикалық жағдайын байытуға айтарлықтай ықпал ететінін көрсетеді. Жаңа технологияларды жұмыс күшіне енгізу БАӘ-ді Парсы шығанағы аймағындағы тәуелсіз алпауытқа айналдыру үшін қажетті зерттеулерді дамытуға ықпал етеді. Осы тақырып бойынша басқа зерттеулерден айырмашылығы, бұл зерттеу БАӘ-дегі ғылыми жетістіктерді жан-жақты талдауға бағытталған. Бұл зерттеуде авторлар құжаттарды талдау, әдебиеттерге шолу және сандық әдістерді пайдаланды. Бұл зерттеуге арналған деректер рецензияланған журналдардан, олардың веб-сайттарында бар ресми есептер мен ресми есептерден жиналды.

Кілт сөздер: БАӘ, ғылым, жоғары білім, білім экономикасы.

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ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ ПОЛИТИКА ОАЭ В РАЗВИТИИ НАУКИ

Аннотация. Целью данной статьи является анализ государственных программ Объединенных Арабских Эмиратов (ОАЭ) по развитию академических исследований и их достижения в науке, а также анализ эффективности государственной политики ОАЭ в области научных исследований и разработок. ОАЭ проводят диверсификацию своей экономики переходя от экономики, которая зависит от нефти к развитию «экономики знаний» и человеческого капитала. Благодаря этому ОАЭ стала одним из лидеров по развитию научных технологии и исследовании в регионе за последние десятилетия. Актуальность данного исследования обусловлена важностью изучения современных моделей взаимодействия государства с исследовательскими институтами и университетами. Опыт ОАЭ в развитии научных исследовании может стать примером для стран с сырьевой экономики как Казахстан. Наши результаты показывают, что государственная поддержка науке и исследованию значительно способствует формированию квалифицированных специалистов и научных исследователей которые смогут интегрироваться в современный рынок труда и таким образом обогащают общую экономическую ситуацию в стране. Внедрение новых технологий в рабочую силу, особенно в учебных лабораториях, будет способствовать развитию исследований, необходимых для превращения ОАЭ в независимого гиганта в регионе Персидского залива. В отличии от других работ посвященных этой теме, данное исследование уделяет особое внимание комплексному анализу научных достижений в ОАЭ. В этом исследовании авторы использовали анализ документов, обзор литературы и количественные методы. Данные для этого исследования были собраны из рецензируемых научных журналов, доступных официальных отчетов на их веб-сайтах и официальных отчетов.

Ключевые слова: ОАЭ, наука, высшее образование, экономика знаний.

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