

## Chapter 14

# A Pilot Study on the Challenges of the UAE Ministry of Education's "Advanced Science Program": The Critical Gap Between Strategic Planning and Strategic Practice

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to provide an empirical study on the plan set by the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) named the "Strategic Plan 2017-2021." The chapter aims to investigate the challenges that are faced specifically by the advanced science program (ASP) provided by the MOE, which was created to select Emirati elite students (ES) from different levels of education and allow them to join a fast-tracked, gifted students program. The study focuses on the current gap between the MOE strategic plan and their actual strategic practice, then recommends possible effective practices that might be adopted in order to overcome the challenges faced in achieving its goal.*

### INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a confederation of seven emirates. These emirates include: Abu Dhabi (the capital of UAE), Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, and Umm Al Quwain. UAE is considered one of the pioneer Arab countries in adapting and using technology effectively in managing the education sector. The main objectives of the ministry of education's (MOE) current five-year strategic

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plan (2017-2021) are to ensure (a) inclusive quality education (from pre-school education to post-school education); (b) quality, efficiency and good governance of educational and institutional performance; and (c) capability of quality, efficient and transparent administrative services in the education sector.

They are to be implemented in accordance with the quality, efficiency and transparency standards (MOE, 2017-2021). There are 659 government schools (public schools) in UAE while there are 567 private schools in the country. There are 280,841 Emirati students in different levels of public education with a total of 22,235 educational staffs in the public sector while in the private sectors there are 42,345 (MOE, 2016-2017).

## **BACKGROUND**

The MOE introduced the Advanced Science Program (ASP) in 2016. This is an academically challenging program offered to outstanding students to study and attend in the elite stream. The ASP program's strategic planning aims at providing decision makers with accurate and essential information about the remarkable and talented students in the program, which aligns with MOE strategic vision and mission in a high quality academic environment.

The ASP strategically is a technology-based problem-solving program which enhances the process of selecting and enrollment of the outstanding Emirati students from both government and private schools. The information systems is integrated with other technology systems in MOE for future promising ASP program.

The ASP program, as part of the MOE strategic plan, was designed for parents who have needs for gifted and talented children that perform at remarkably higher levels of accomplishment than others of their experience, age or environment as well as those children who could develop their talents with proper educational experience and follow advanced program. The MOE strategic plan is integrated with information systems strategic plan because ASP is supported by information systems to computerize the students' enrollment process.

The computerization of the enrollment program is aimed at making the process efficient, transparent, and easier for the parents of the target students. The study used empirical analytical tools to understand the potential gap between the MOE strategic plan and strategic practice.

## **THE ASP CURRICULUM**

ASP was implemented in 2016 as part of MOE strategic plans to develop UAE's education system. The program seeks to build and encourage the outstanding Emirati students to register and follow this program in selected government schools.

1. The ASP Elite Stream is developed for academically outstanding students from Grade 6 to Grade 12.
2. The program curriculum focuses on mathematics and science and is supported by a number of exercises, together with laboratory experiments to enhance analytical and logical thinking skills as well as practical problem solving.

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