THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON THE UAE GOVERNMENTAL SCHOOL INSPECTION OUTCOME AND PERFORMANCE

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by

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# **Introduction**

The UAE education vision “Innovative education for a knowledge, pioneering, and global society” (Ministry of Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021, 2020; p. 1) inspires the mission, values, and Ministry of Education (MOE) Strategic Objectives that lead to the main 2021 targets illustrated in Table 1. This necessitates the role of MOE school inspection, which enhance outcomes among government schools and improve the quality of education (Ministry of Education, 2017).



Figure 1: MOE Key Targets for 2021

(Ministry of Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021, 2020; p. 1)

According to Ehren and Shackleton (2016), school inspection practices have attracted international interest among researchers since they are based on concepts that give different solutions. These ideas have allowed many countries to adopt frameworks that school leaders must implement to ensure quality and performance. This explains why school inspections are considered an accountability approach by governments to track investments in education systems (Miguel, 2015). However, the implementation problem remains in schools, which are not up to the same standards, leading to different outcomes and performance.

School inspections are a vehicle to address the obligation bestowed upon governments to establish a performance-based plan that includes education institutions at all levels, requiring them to implement a framework to guide their outcomes (Quintelier, Vanhoof & Maeyer, 2018). In the UAE’s education system, the inspection framework is tailored to aid teachers in their performance of their duties. It does so by highlighting key performance areas and it suggests suitable key performance indicators and explains how they are assessed. Quintelier (2017) established that educational accountability achieved through inspection is an indicator that should help countries improve the effectiveness of their performance through school inspection.

Badri et al*.* (2016) found that the Abu Dhabi Education Council inspection process expects schools to complete self-evaluation as a mechanism to build experience among teachers to conduct leadership during an inspection. The school inspection framework adopted in the UAE is a facilitator of attaining the desired school outcomes (Lesinger et al., 2017). This is meant to give parents and stakeholders a clearer understanding of the of educational goals in the country. In developed countries, establishing inspection helps them sustain the desired education system that focuses on improving low performing schools while aiding those in significantly disadvantaged positions (Dedering et al., 2017).

This study focuses on investigating the impact of school leadership practices on governmental school inspection outcomes and performance.

## **Background**

In 1970, education in the UAE was confined to urban areas. This meant that individuals seeking higher education had to travel abroad to complete their studies. However, this gap in the education system led to adopting an efficient education system to educate the country’s next generations (Kamal, 2018). The country has introduced new educational initiatives at different levels. International universities are creating programs that attract brilliant students across the globe to the UAE. The UAE’s education system is categorized into three divisions; public schools, private and higher educational institutions. The Arabic curriculum is followed in public schools, while 15 different curriculums are available in private schools. Schools following curriculums from the U.S, U.K, India, and MOE account for 90% of private schools’ population. There are other curriculums, including the International Baccalaureate (IB), German, Japanese, Canadian, and French (Kamal, 2018).

 The UAE has a compulsory education system for public primary and secondary schools for girls and boys. In these schools, the primary teaching medium is Arabic, with equal emphasis on the English language (Kamal, 2018). The UAE has gained a strategic transnational education position because of its regulatory framework that focuses on student mobility openly (Kamal, 2018). The education development trust reports that it took an approach based on training and recruiting additional bilingual inspectors to augment existing reserves (Kamal, 2018). Further, the establishment of other bureaus such as the Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB) of KHDA by Decision 38 illustrates the school inspection framework’s importance (Kamal, 2018). From an international perspective, the collaboration on school affiliation within the UAE has been significant in uplifting education levels due to professional leaders making their contribution.

School inspection is a combination of assessments, evaluations, and measurements that determine appropriate school systems that should be implemented to improve the quality and standard of education provided (Kemethofer, Gustafsson & Altrichter, 2017). The inspection of schools is derived from an authoritative style of management to assess teachers (Butler, 2019). School inspection is a capacity-based practice crucial to teachers' productivity and their education to foster performance (Bruneforth, Shewbridge & Rouw, 2019).

Due to the global demand for quality education, the common objective is to deliver an education system that meets citizens’ need to embrace market expectations and improve professionalism (Hall, 2018). Governments become accountable when there is a national education decline, while schools would have to adopt progressive frameworks and implement them to improve performance. This practice focuses on building commitment among teachers towards educating students and contributing to outstanding school performance (Azeem & Mataruna, 2019). Outcomes and school performances are measured according to different metrics in the UAE. These include students’ academic achievements, their personal and social development as well as innovation skills, the protection, care, guidance and support they are offered, and the leadership they experience(Azeem & Mataruna, 2019) .

These concerns illuminate the need for this study to investigate how school leadership practices can influence governmental school inspection outcomes and performance.

## **Significance of the study**

The study’s significance is that it will help determine how school leadership practices influence governmental school inspection outcomes and performance in the UAE. Leadership at all levels of learning must have supporting standards that schools should implement to improve their performance. According to Abdallah and Forawi (2017; p. 19), “Various studies have focused on investigating leadership styles and their impact on the success of educational institutions”. This study aims to extend that research by performing a mixed methods study, specifically in the UAE.

Although the UAE school inspection framework emphasizes a visionary education system that is knowledge-based and drives innovation through research, it provides standards to ensure comprehensive performance to achieve quality education (Ministry of Education, 2017). It clearly defines the specific governance systems that should aid schools in implementing the framework. Insight from this study is expected to provide details about new leadership practices that should be developed to help school principals identify teaching skills and offer recommendations on implementing the inspection framework to improve performance.

## **Statement of the problem**

The UAE education inspection must help schools improve and deliver instructions to guide performance among students and teachers. However, implementing this framework is a problem for schools, which is meant to empower the learning environment through the provided standards. This thesis focuses on how schools implement three of six standards in the UAE inspection framework which are: Standard 3, teaching and assessment based on teaching for effective learning; Standard 5, how protection, care, guidance, and support of students has been implemented; and Standard 6, leadership, and management, which illustrates gaps in educational leadership due to differences in the direction, vision, and communication relationships with the rest of the sector. There is a significantly urgent need for the government schools leadership to improve their educational practices.

Cameron (2005) noted that wealth created by an oil boom allowed families to afford raising more children, a practice culturally valued in the Middle East. However, the educational infrastructure was ill-prepared to accommodate a significant boom in the middle- to high-income population. The UAE may have experienced an unprecedented economic boom but it was enabled by a globally-sourced labour force and, due to the limitations of the local education system, a substantial proportion of UAE citizens are excluded from this economy (Cameron, 2005). As such, schools’ failure to implement the inspection framework standards has hindered positive outcomes and performance among government schools.

## **Purpose of the study**

It is conceivable that schools in the UAE employ varying approaches to education, considering the education system is relatively young but requires rapid improvements. This study intends to examine school inspection reports to determine by how much schools deviate from each other in terms of performance and outcomes as determined by the school inspections framework and reports. While focusing on Standards 3, 5, and 6, this study intends to determine why school performances and outcomes vary and if any best practices that would significantly raise the standards and quality of all schools they are applied to can be established.

## **Research Questions**

**Standard 3**

RQ1: Are variations in teaching and assessment strategies significant in determining the outcomes and performances of schools as measured by the inspection system?

RQ2: How does assessment influence perceptions on school outcomes and performance during an inspection?

**Standard 5**

RQ3: Are there common practices in top-performing schools that are conspicuously lacking in poorly performing schools regarding protection, care, guidance and support for students? If so, are there significant financial implications that hinder poorly performing schools?

RQ4: How do school leadership practices impact guidance and support for schools to influence performance?

**Standard 6**

RQ5: How does effective leadership influence governmental school inspection outcomes and performance?

RQ7: Can self-evaluation and improvement planning impact school inspection outcomes and performance?

RQ8: Should self-evaluation be discarded in favor of a mandate for third-party audits and continuous performance monitoring?

## **Rationale**

The rationale of this study is to provide a critical evaluation of UAE’s inspection and how its influence can improve underperforming schools to achieve a better rating while also helping the outstanding ones maintain their quality and standards. In countries striving to obtain a quality education, aligning sustainable development goals is crucial for governments. The UAE subscribes to the notion of making education a backbone of its economic and social growth (UAE Economic And Social Development Economics Essay, 2018).

## **Research design**

The study will use a mixed-method approach. Data will consist of school inspection reports of 8 government schools. The study will also involve interviews with school principals about the three standards with a questionnaire to measure the implementation of these standards in the school. As a mixed approach study, information will be collected from primary sources that are the interview and school inspection reports.

## **Major concepts**

**School inspection***.* The concept involves collecting evaluation trends and state control protocols aimed at auditing performance in education systems (Lindgren 2015, p. 44).

**School leadership practices***.* These practices focus on setting directions, developing people, redesigning, organization, and managing instructional programs in a learning environment.

**Government schools***.* These education institutions were established by states to provide learning instructions to primary, secondary, and tertiary children with government funding.

**Quality education:** The meaning attached to quality education is that it is a developmental and pedagogical focused means of educating children to become productive individuals in society. Quality education ensures that individuals obtained the desired outcomes to benefit their communities and society towards prosperity.

## **Outline of the thesis**

 The study will investigate the impact of school leadership practices and policies on governmental school inspection outcomes and performance. In the introduction chapter, the background, purpose, and significance of the study are provided. Also included are the rationale, statement of the problem, and questions. Included in chapter 2 is a literature review that synthesizes and offers support to the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 explains the research methods, design, and instruments used in the study. The chapter also discusses the rationale, research questions, reliability, validity, and sample population used. Chapter four presents the study results about school inspection impact on outcome and performance. In chapter five, the paper discusses the findings, limitations, and implications of the study. Chapter six includes the recommendations and conclusion to the study.

# **Literature Review**

## **Overview**

Education is a top priority in UAE, with the government adding more strategies to ensure that students receive quality learning ("UAE School Inspection Framework", 2020). UAE focuses on education to improve welfare and secure the coming generation of students benefit from an enhanced education system (UAE Economic And Social Development Economics Essay, 2018) . The school inspection system aims at examining the quality and performance of the education system at the national and local levels in the UAE ("UAE School Inspection Framework", 2020). According to Miguel (2015), school inspection is part of the accountability approach by governments to track investments made in the education system. The UAE conducts school inspection because it targets becoming a leading quality education provider to grow its social and economic needs (Ministry of Education, 2017). Accountability is essential, and governments work on a performance-based plan with all the education stakeholders to ensure adequate school performance (Quintelier, Vanhoof, & De Maeyer 2018). The common objective is to deliver an education system that meets citizens’ need to embrace market expectations and improve professionalism (Jeffrey, 2018).

 Education inspection has been confined to urban areas until 1970 when it was expanded to the local areas. All the students seeking higher education could not fit in the urban schools, and some travelled overseas to seek better education. However, this education system gap led to an efficient education system to educate the country’s next generations (Kamal, 2018).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The establishment of robust systems that support education accountability has become prominent in the government to improve school performance ("UAE School Inspection Framework", 2020), as captured by the following statement:

*To achieve the world-class education systems to which it aspires, the UAE must apply a high-quality evaluation system to measure reliably the quality of school performance and to support school improvements and students’ outcomes, through rigorous and regular school inspections. The UAE School Inspection Framework is based on comprehensive performance standards that define the essential aspects of a quality education. Each standard is broken down into specific indicators and elements, and detailed descriptors and illustrations guide inspection judgements and school improvement* (p. 7).

A conceptual framework that shows the relationship between UAE school framework inspection, leadership practices, and the outcomes is included in this section. The theories discussed include human relations theory, critical theory, and scientific management theory regarding education accountability and inspection.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The school inspection framework ("UAE School Inspection Framework", 2020), as the independent variable, indicates how principles and processes are applied when assessing different UAE schools. The framework sets out the statutory basis and features of UAE school inspection defined by school quality assurance indicators. The inspection also covers the evaluation of school leadership, assessing classroom practice, and inspecting teacher academic skills, among other aspects **(**Ehren & Visscher, 2006) . School leadership practices are the dependent variable that includes content, processes, and activities improved through the inspection process. Embracing new technologies, pedagogy, and shift in teaching practice help schools improve their performance **(**Ehren & Visscher, 2006). The outcomes include improved teacher classroom practice, student performance, classroom practice and student assessment skills **(**Ehren & Visscher, 2006). The relationship between the variables is shown in Figure 2.

 ***Independent Variable******Dependent Variable******Outcomes***

**INSPECTION**

* Evaluating leadership and management
* Assessing classroom practice
* Inspecting school discipline
* Evaluating teacher competence

**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES**

* Curriculum
* Pedagogy
* Classroom visits
* Study and discussion groups
* Coaching
* Collaborative research

**OUTCOMES**

* Improved teacher management
* Improved student performance
* Improved classroom practice
* Improved student assessment skills

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

(Ehren & Visscher, 2006)

**Human Relations Theory**

Mayo stated that meeting employees’ social needs helps in increasing their productivity (King, 2016). Incorporating employees in management activities, including decision making, contributes to high productivity. The employees also become creative when they are motivated by management through recognition and rewards (Felten & Lambert, 2020). King (2016) indicates that when leaders embrace human relation aspects at workplaces such as communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution, they promote employee productivity.

According to Felten and Lambert (2020), teachers play a significant role in education and require adequate support from the government and the institution's management. The involvement of teachers in decision-making regarding education matters improves confidence and collaboration towards academic improvement (AlKutich & Abukari, 2018). The inspection aims at identifying the areas that need improvement in school and possible solutions.

**Critical Theory**

According to McKie and Doan (2018), critical theory is a social model that focuses on changing society. The theory provides a divergent view of the traditional theory. The model applies a philosophical approach that focuses on identifying and challenging the idea of established knowledge in society (McKie & Doan, 2018). The foundation of critical theory is developed from the thoughts of Sigmund Feud and Karl Marx, that the primary goal of philosophy is to overcome social structures where people feel oppressed (How, 2017). Inspectors should not undermine and coerce the teachers to achieve the anticipated academic excellence but encourage them to reflect on their teaching and student performance (Quintelier, Vanhoof & De Maeyer, 2018). Application of critical theory in school inspection helps recognize teachers and other stakeholders that play a vital role in achieving improved academic performance.

**Scientific Management Theory**

Scientific management theory emphasizes organising work professionally to save time, resources, and capital (Taska, 2017). The scientific management theory indicates that there is only one way of doing things correctly. Principles include monitoring work performance to ensure employees are using the most efficient working methods. Ireh (2016) states that monitoring employee performance to achieve the anticipated work is also an essential scientific management principle. According to Kim (2018), the theory has been implemented in the USA, UK, and other countries to improve the education sector, and has been linked to school inspections in the US since the 1980s. The theories and literature review depicts the education inspection system needed in UAE.

## **Scope of the UAE Education System**

The education system in the UAE is divided into three categories that include public and private schools and higher educational institutions. Ridge, Kippels, and Farah (2017) examined curriculum development in the UAE and stated that the country emphasizes the youth by reforming its public education sector. The country is shifting the aim of education from memorisation to skill development that enables young people to thrive in the 21st century (Ashour, 2020). The formal education curriculum in UAE was introduced in 1953 after the Kuwait education mission opened a school in Sharjah and has undergone several changes over the years to accommodate diverse students in the country. Ridge, Kippels, and Farah (2017) indicated that between 1950 and 1970, a variety of curricula from different countries such as Egypt, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia was introduced into the country. Even after establishing MOE in UAE in 1972, as the central education authority to oversee education development in UAE, different curricula were still used. This makes it difficult to compare quality and performance across schools.

Albasha and David (2019) examined teacher’s perspectives on engaged teaching and noted that the curriculum department's role in MOE in the UAE involves reviewing and approving textbook manuscripts that are fundamental to the students and teachers. Unlike many other countries where the education system uses one curriculum, UAE uses different curriculums depending on the international universities having branches in the country (Abdallah, 2020). Overall school curriculum helps MOE set content and performance levels in each grade. MOE is also involved in the preparation and evaluation of assessment tests and examinations. According to Ashour (2020), the number of private and international academic institutions entering the UAE has increased due to the growth and globalization of education. The private institutions have contributed to western education qualifications and development in the country.

Although the UAE goals can be achieved through a proper education system, a quality and integrated curriculum that supports UAE values is needed (Abdallah, 2020). Simpson (2014) stated that American curriculum schools are popular in Dubai and are part of the private schooling that dominates the school sector. According to Albasha and David (2019), Dubai schools are regulated by the government through the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). Dubai schools are also inspected by the Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB), which provides parents with performance data and makes informed decisions.

## **Quality of Education in the UAE**

Nuzhat (2020) examined the globalization of education in the UAE and indicated that managing education quality in a multicultural population is problematic for education stakeholders. According to Soomro and Ahmad (2012), private and government universities focus on improving and maintaining higher education quality. Institutions accredited under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and KDHA are inspected to determine whether they meet the expected credentials. Nuzhat (2020) noted that universities under KDHA are branch campuses of international universities and their curricula and academic systems reflect their main campuses. Branches of different universities from America, Pakistan, India, and Britain are established in the country. Ashour (2017) stated that KDHA and MOE and Scientific Researcher have a vital role in authorization and assuring quality assurance to higher learning institutions in the country. University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB) under KDHA determines the education quality of the international branch universities in the country. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research also works under the commission for academic accreditation to evaluate higher learning institutions.

ElKaleh (2019) noted that the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) was established to ensure academic excellence in higher education institutions. CAA provides the attainment of quality education and educational standards and proper academic operations within the schools. According to Soomro and Ahmad (2012), CAA is the only agency that provides licenses to higher education institutions in the country. CAA also works with other agencies across the emirates, such as the Abu Dhabi Educational Council (ADEC), to monitor education quality. ADEC plays a significant role in raising the quality of education in Abu Dhabi from local to higher learning institutions (ElKaleh, 2019). The agency regulates all the education development activities in Abu Dhabi and ensures all the higher learning institutions in the Emirate adhere to the set education quality standards. The institutions of higher learning in UAE have three main functions; teaching, research, and community services (Ashour, 2017). The agencies such as the KDHA in Dubai and ADEC in Abu Dhabi monitor the institutions to ensure they efficiently achieve such functions. The new challenges in achieving quality education in higher learning institutions include rising demand for education, teacher education, privacy provisions, and academic profession (Soomro & Ahmad, 2012).

## **Impact of School Inspection in UAE**

 AlKutich and Abukari (2018) observed the benefit of school inspection on teaching and learning and suggested that the attainment of quality education requires constant school inspection from MOE and other relevant bodies. The leadership demonstrated by the school administration and teachers play an integral role in ensuring the inspection process is successful and the set academic goals are achieved (Barbour, 2019). The interaction between these players helps in the attainment of the educational goals.

School inspection needs internal and external inputs that make the process successful. The internal factors include the relationship established between inspectors and teachers, communication, and academic qualifications of the school inspectors (AlKutich & Abukari, 2018). The relationship between the inspectors and the teachers play a vital role in determining whether the inspection process is successful (El Saadi, 2017). Poor relationship undermines the whole process, and teachers ignore the inspectors' recommendations (Barbour, 2019). The willingness of the teachers and inspectors to engage in the process leads to improved teaching and learning (El Saadi, 2017). Al Samkari and David (2019) indicated that when the inspectors negatively affect the teachers or the learning institutions, it becomes challenging for them to conduct a fair inspection process. Sometimes the teachers view the inspectors as enemies who come to ruin their jobs, thus creating enmity between them (Jones & Tymms, 2014).

Sophisticated school reforms are needed in the education sector to ensure the students' education is relevant to them in the contemporary world (Al Samkari and David, 2019). The assessment of teaching and learning done in schools helps the education stakeholders determine the students’ education performance (Madden, 2019). Ayouby and Mahmoud (2016) indicated that the inspection process helps assure that the teachers' techniques in teaching the students are relevant in the contemporary world. The inspection process in UAE is focused on ensuring regulations, resources, and achievable strategic plans are followed to achieve quality learning and teaching in the country (Madden, 2019). The inspection process holds schools accountable for their work and plays an essential role in improving school performance (Alzuhair, 2018).

Tamim and Colburn (2019) demonstrated that school inspection has positive effects on the performance of underperforming schools and also ensuring accountability from the school administration. However, there are some negative impacts of school inspection. Through constant inspections, pressure mounts on the teachers and sometimes they are not able to perform their duties effectively. During inspections, the teachers may also act in the expected behaviour from their normal routine to please the inspectors (Jones and Tymms, 2014). This may give inspectors a different impression of the school from the real situation.

## **School Transformation and Performance**

Gustafsson et al. (2015) noted that school inspection is among quality assurance metrics in education used to achieve school transformation and improve student performance. Inspectors engage in different activities before compiling an assessment report of a particular school. Hopkins et al. (2016) suggest that it is through continuous school inspection that schools transform and improve their performance. Inspectors help the teachers identify the appropriate teaching methods and skills to improve student performance (Gustafsson et al., 2015). When the inspectors perform their duties professionally, the teachers and other school stakeholders accept their recommendations and focus on implementing them to benefit the students (Gustafsson et al., 2015).

## **Conclusion**

The study aims to investigate the impact of school leadership practices and policies on governmental school inspection outcomes and performance. The majority of authors in the reviewed studies expressed support for inspection to improve school performance in UAE and other countries (AlKutich and Abukari, 2018; Barbour, 2019; Ehren & Visscher, 2006; ElKaleh, 2019; Miguel, 2015; Quintelier, Vanhoof, & De Maeyer 2018; Tamim and Colburn, 2019 "UAE School Inspection Framework", 2020). However, there are some negative impacts of school inspection, such as teachers not performing due to pressure, or trying to please the inspector (Jones and Tymms, 2014). This results in a skewed view of teaching effectiveness.

The scope and quality of the UAE education system was discussed. Ridge, Kippels, and Farah (2017) noted that a curricula from different countries was introduced into UAE, making it difficult to compare quality and performance across schools. Nuzhat (2020) stated that managing education quality in a multicultural population is problematic for education stakeholders; however, institutions such as KDHA, MOE, Scientific Researcher, UQAIB, CAA, ADEC, and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research are involved in quality evaluations.

The impact of school inspection in the UAE is underpinned by the relationship between the inspectors and the teachers, which plays a vital role in determining whether the inspection process is successful (El Saadi, 2017). Poor relationships undermine the whole process, and teachers ignore the inspectors' recommendations (Barbour, 2019). Achieving school transformation and performance is achieved by the inspection process. Gustafsson et al. (2015) stated that school inspection is a key quality assurance metric in education and is utilized to realize school transformation and improve student performance. Inspectors assist teachers identify the appropriate teaching methods and skills to improve student performance (Gustafsson et al., 2015).

The theoretical frameworks utilized are human relations theory, critical theory, and scientific management theory. Human relations theory, applied to education, involves teachers (AlKutich & Abukari, 2018) and provides support for them (Felten and Lambert, 2020), such as improved communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution, which promotes employee productivity (King, 2016). Critical theory promotes inspections that are non-coercive and encouraging (Quintelier, Vanhoof & De Maeyer, 2018) and overcoming oppressive social structures (How, 2017). Scientific management theory principles include monitoring employee performance to achieve the anticipated work (Ireh, 2016).

# **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to determine by how much schools deviate from each other in terms of performance and outcomes as determined by the school inspection reports and to ascertain the impact of school leadership practices on governmental school inspection outcomes and student performance. This study will investigate why school performances and outcomes vary and if any best practices that would significantly raise the standards and quality of all schools they are applied to can be established.

The study will utilize a convergent parallel mixed-method approach. Data collection will involve primary data consisting of school inspection reports of eight government schools and interviews and closed-ended questionnaires with the eight school principals of these schools. The interviews will focus on Standards 3, 5, and 6. The quantitative data will be analyzed via graphical and visual analysis method while thematic analysis will be utilized for the qualitative data.

According to Molina-Azorin (2016), the central tenet of a mixed research approach is the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide an in-depth understanding of complex research problems. The mixed research approach permits triangulation of results from multiple perspectives thereby enriching the validity of inferences derived from the results (Chaumba, 2013, p. 311; Cresswell, 2013, p. 23). Moreover, a mixed research approach will be appropriate for the current study as it serves the purpose of complementarity and to expand the breadth and range of education research inquiry. By establishing a balance between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the researcher will be in a position to compare the two forms of data to achieve synergy and congruency in the findings.

However, conducting mixed research might be challenging because it will require more work, time, and financial resources. Moreover, the researcher will be required to develop more skill sets in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. However, these aspects should not be viewed as constraints, but rather as opportunities to develop further expertise (Mplina-Azorin, 2016).

Integrated research designs (mixed method studies) arose during the 1990s; its intention was that the limitations of qualitative and quantitative studies on their own could be canceled out by combining them (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). This study uses a convergent parallel mixed methods design (see Figure 3), which entails the simultaneous collection of qualitative and quantitative data that are then analysed separately and results compared; both sets of data are collected to answer the same research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). Usually, researchers draw from the same sample for their qualitative and quantitative data and may weigh the former to equal the latter in size or may accept that the two forms of assessment provide different information and need not be identically sized (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). In this study, both sets of data are drawn from the same source, i.e. the same eight schools.



Figure 3: Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods

(Creswell & Creswell, 2014; p. 272)

## **Pragmatic Research Philosophy**

A mixed research approach follows pragmatic research philosophy (Betzner, 2008, p. 13). Pragmatism emphasizes individual decision-making within an actual real-world situation. By applying a broader context of the inquiry, the pragmatic paradigm believes that there could be single or multiple realities open for scientific inquiry (Kolly, 2017, p. 457). The primary premise of pragmatism is that knowledge and reality are constructed upon social beliefs and habits. It implies that knowledge is based on human experience which is unique to every individual. Therefore, an inquiry is crucial to develop knowledge that could change, shape, or improve a reality or a social situation. This study aims to add to knowledge about why school performances and outcomes vary and if any best practices that would significantly raise the standards and quality of all schools they are applied to can be established.

Positivist researchers focus on objective knowledge through empirical evidence and hypothesis testing. Therefore, positivism supports quantitative methods and deductive reasoning. According to Pham (2018, p. 3), the first concern about employing positivism is that it relies deeply on experimental research thus making it difficult to use in social research where measurement of phenomena related to intentions, attitudes, and thoughts is impossible. The second limitation which makes the positivist paradigm unfit for the current study is the tendency to generalize results leading to the risk of neglecting the truth about reality that can be revealed by individuals' beliefs, understanding, and interpretation of the phenomena.

On the other hand, the constructivist paradigm, which is rooted in interpretivism, emphasizes subjectivity, qualitative methods, and inductive reasoning on the claim that knowledge is relative, and reality is too complex. By employing the relativist ontology, constructivists believe that a single situation can yield multiple interpretations rather than just one truth. Consequently, constructivists can gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, its uniqueness, and complexity by employing diversified views such as grounded theory, ethnography, case studies, and life history within the social context (Pham, 2018, p. 3). However, in the processes of dissecting the complexity of the phenomenon, a constructivist paradigm could suffer the limitation of inability to verify the validity and usefulness of the findings. The second weakness is the subjective nature of the paradigm whereby the outcomes of the study are significantly affected by the researcher's interpretation, personal belief, and cultural preferences leading to systematic bias (Pham, 2018, p. 3). The paradigm is also inappropriate for the current study since it focuses on understanding the phenomenon rather than solving the problems related to empowerment.

However, pragmatism asserts that the process of acquiring knowledge is a continuum rather than two opposing sides of objectivity and subjectivity (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019, p. 4). The pragmatic paradigm, therefore, embraces both quantitative and qualitative methods as well as deductive and inductive reasoning to offer flexible and more reflexive inquiry methods. Pragmatism entails detection of the socio-political problem and critically thinking about the most appropriate mechanisms and actions that solve it (Gross, 2018, p. 88). Therefore, encountering a situation and recognizing it as a problem by relating it to a range of experiences is the tenet of pragmatism. In the current study, the researcher will adopt a pragmatic research paradigm because it is the most appropriate approach to sufficiently address the impact of school leadership practices on governmental school inspection outcome and student performance. A pragmatic inquiry will offer a holistic framework and multiple views to dissect the current research problem (Pham, 2018, p. 5).

## **Site/Context**

The site of the research will be government schools in the UAE. Specifically, the research will focus on the local district to ensure that cost feasibility is upheld. This will ensure that the research process does not exceed the researcher’s budget. Since government schools in the UAE have leadership and authority structures in place, the process of seeking and granting of approval will be straightforward and smooth. Moreover, the researcher will seek preliminary approval from the Ethics Review Board to ensure that the site, context, and research process adheres to the set rules, guidelines, and limitations.

## **Sampling and Participant Selection**

“The population of interest in a research study refers to the target population that is studied” (Majid, 2018, p. 3). The research paper will entail the local district government schools and their accompanying reports as the target population. Particularly, the paper will focus on the school principals, as they are in a position to adequately address the policies and practices implemented in their schools, regarding leadership practice and school inspection. School inspection reports will also be targeted by the research, forming another niche of the research population.

“Sampling refers to the process of selection of individuals as a statistical representative of the population of interest” (Majid, 2018, p. 3). This ensures that the researcher does not attempt to include the entire population as participants, which might be unfeasible or unrealistic. “There are numerous sampling methods such as convenience, random, cluster and purposive sampling, with each possessing its own strengths and shortcomings” (Majid, 2018, p. 3). This paper will use the purposive- also referred to as judgement- sampling method in selection of participants. The method is a non-random technique that entails deliberate choosing of participants by the researcher based on pre-determined qualities (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016, p. 2). This will ensure that information-rich sources are incorporated in the research, with respect to willingness and availability. Moreover, the sampling method suits this study as it will help the data collection process focus on relevant data sources, as opposed to diversity concerns such as age and culture. For the government school principals, the criteria used in the sampling process will be location of the school, with preference for schools located in the local district and accessible to the researcher. The inclusion criteria of the school reports on the other hand will be determined by the participating schools, whereby only schools whose principal is participating will provide data on school inspection reports.

“An important aspect of consideration in the sampling process is the sample size to be used, as the sample size should be significant in terms of adequacy and representation” (Majid, 2018, p. 5). In this paper, the sample size used will be eight: eight principals will provide qualitative data (interviews), and eight school reports will provide the corresponding quantitative data. This sample size was chosen due to its feasible nature, in terms of time and expenses. The researcher will ensure that the number of participants does not dwindle, as loss in participants would compromise the overall effectiveness of the findings. The required documents, the school inspection reports, will be requested from the informed principals, to ensure accessibility of the documents.

## **Data collection tools**

“Data collection is an important phase of research that contributes to the understanding of theoretical underpinnings of a given phenomenon” (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016, p. 2). “Data sources can be broadly classified as primary and secondary, with primary data collected directly by the researcher while secondary data is existing data recorded by a third party” (Cheng & Phillips, 2014, p. 371). This paper will use both, with primary data collected from principals and secondary data from school inspection reports. Data collection methods can be broadly classified into qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, based on the nature of variables. Qualitative methods are useful for non-quantifiable variables/phenomena while quantitative methods are useful for quantifiable variables, and mixed methods for phenomena that does not adequately fit in either category (Dettori & Norvell, 2018, p. 311). This paper will adopt the mixed methods approach, to properly capture the impact of leadership practices, which does not fit solely into either qualitative or quantitative categories. The tools that will achieve this are interview questionnaires and school inspection reports.

## **Questionnaire**

Questionnaire refers to a defined list of queries that are completed by the respondent in response to the question (Roopa & Rani, 2012, p. 273). Questionnaire will be used to gather data on the measure of implementation in standards three, five and six in the government schools. The questions administered will be close ended in nature, that will utilize scaled questions. This will help provide data on the level of implementation of inspection and the integration with leadership. The researcher will pay attention to aspects such as visual appeal, graphics, and proper font-sizing to ensure response rate among the respondents (Pont, 2015, p. 169). See Appendix A for the questionnaire.

## **Interview**

The study will use qualitative data collected through the interview method, which is a common and useful method for educational research (Creswell, 2009, p. 168). The interview method entails interaction in the form of conversation between interviewer and interviewee as the researcher and respondent respectively (Alsheqeenti, 2014, p. 40). The method is useful in providing insight on human behavior and beliefs, which are important aspects of leadership and practices. The interview used will be in form of a semi-structured interview, to provide control and flexibility to the researcher (Stuckey, 2013, p. 57). This will allow the researcher to prepare properly and adequately for the interview, while leaving room for improvisation as dictated by the flow of conversation. See Appendix B for the interview questions.

## **School inspection reports**

School inspection reports will be used to provide data which will supplement the data collected via questionnaire and interview methods. The reports used will be from the same eight schools whose principles will be interviewed. This will ensure that the data used will be relevant to the schools addressed by the paper.

## **Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness**

Reliability and validity refer to the replicability of research in an accurate manner (Bolarinwa, 2015, p. 196). The accuracy of this paper will be enforced by triangulation, thick description and member checking via multiple data sources, participant confirmation of collected data and proper description of respondents in the final report. The bias of the researcher and respondents will also be curbed and addressed to secure trustworthiness of the research.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis will provide insight into the collected data by systematic organizing and reviewing the collected data (Bengtsson, 2015, p. 11). The qualitative data will be analyzed via thematic analysis, which will be implemented in five main stages: transcribing, decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization and compilation (Bengtsson, 2015, p. 11).

The quantitative data will be analyzed via graphical and visual analysis method. This will entail use of tables to generate graphs and pie charts. These will then be used to calculate interpolation, integrals and correlation between leadership practices and inspection outcomes. This method of analysis will be useful as it facilitates viewing data as individual units as opposed to summaries (Gast & Spriggs, 2014, p. 202).

Figure 4: Data Analysis Process

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics in research plays a fundamental aspect in outlining the code of conduct and principles to guide the research process. According to Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), ethics in research denotes the rules and behavioral expectations observed by the researcher concerning their engagement with the participants and the study subjects. By adhering to good conduct principles, the research affirms its intention to uphold the research's integrity and commit to the community of study's rules

***Ethical Expectation***

Conducting research requires the researcher to seek ethical approval that demonstrates their commitment to accountability in the data and the use of their study findings. There is an expectation from the institution that the researcher is affiliated, and the users of the findings that ethical conduct was upheld during the study. I will seek permission to research the Ministry of Education of UAE. Having sought ethical clearance, the researcher will seek permission from the public schools' principals to research their school.

***Informed Consent***

Undertaking the research requires setting up researcher-participant relationships upon which the research process will run unhindered by strictures such as power-imbalance. Fleming and Zegwaard (2018) state that the concept of being informed requires the researcher to explain to the participants the nature of data sought, how the data will be used, and the outcome that such research will yield. Therefore, I will explain to the participants who I am as the researcher, what the research intends to achieve, and the consequences for participating in the study. On the other hand, consent for the study implies the participants' agreements to aspects of the research, including the freedom to withdraw from the study, information concerning ownership of data, the procedure of expressing complaints, and assurance of confidentiality.

Moreover, the consent for participation will capture participants' access to collected data and the options to inquire more information on the research process. I will ensure the participants sign the consent forms, demonstrating their sound ability to provide the data sought in the research. See Appendix C for the consent form.

***Risk of harm, anonymity, and confidentiality***

The researcher has the moral obligation to provide all the necessary information to evaluate any possible risks or harm posed (Rose, Iguchi and Panicker, 2018). Further, the researcher is expected to note any possible chances of stress or emotional distress that participants may show. The assurance that the study’s findings would not pose a threat or have the participants victimized should be strongly expressed. Anonymity denotes resort to measures such as pseudonyms used to hide the participants’ identity rather than their self-identifying names that may exacerbate risks, while confidentiality involves scenarios where a participant’s identity is known but kept secret. The confidentiality of the participants would be attained by anonymizing their identity. Upholding the participants’ privacy would demonstrate trust and respect, and concern for the participants’ safety against any harm associated with the revelation of their identity (Rose, Iguchi and Panicker, 2018). Still, confidentiality will also pertain to data handling so that it is protected from the unintended audience. The data collection through interviews will be conducted in private, and the data collection and reporting done using pseudonyms in the place of self-identifying names. All data will be stored on a secure computer that is password protected and hard copied will be kept on secure premises, under lock and key.

***Conflict of Interest***

Any affiliation that the researcher may have with the issue or participants of the study can impact the research direction (Kivunja and Kiyuni, 2017). A researcher should figure out any relationships that may skew the data, undermining the objectivity sought. In carrying out the research, I will determine situations likely to undermine the data’s integrity through hierarchical relationships or associations that may influence the study’s findings.

## **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

The investigation on the impact of school leadership practices would only be limited to eight public schools. Similarly, the study will only focus on three of the six standards of the school inspection framework in the UAE. Consequently, the three standards’ focus would be restricted to the leadership practices’ impacts on the schools’ performance and outcome variations. Still, the study will not be restricted to any particular Emirati in the UAE.

However, considering the impact of that environment in shaping people’s social and economic life, the public schools’ assessment will not incorporate roles that environment plays at the leadership level and the learners’ readiness. The study will not cover the role that learners contribute to the inspection framework. Further, leadership practices in private schools and higher learning institutions will not be captured; the results cover only data from eight public schools. The principals will only be drawn from eight public schools, signaling that the views presented may not capture leadership practice’s overall effect on the performance and outcome variations.

Considering that leadership practice may operate differently depending on the participants’ socio-economic backgrounds and the schools from where reports are obtained, the data may fail to capture leadership practice’s complete impact. The differences in inspection approaches in each of the Emirati, which can likely influence the performance and outcome, will not be addressed. Issues that stem the implementation pace will not feature as it is not captured in the three of the six standards. Lastly, the input of other stakeholders in the leadership practices and their motivation on the performance will not be captured in the research. Further, the focus on the three standards is limited to the Arabic curriculum covered in public schools; the comparative study to other private schools’ curricula will not form part of this study.

**[7747 words]**

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# **Appendix A: Questionnaire**

**Code for Questions:**

**1= not at all; 2= somewhat; 3= a lot; 4= significant(ly)**

Firstly, I would like to look at a couple of questions that I want you to relate to **Standard 3.**

Q1: Are there significant variations in teaching and assessment strategies between schools?

Q2: Do inspections influence school outcomes and performance?

Secondly, I would like to look at a couple of questions that I want you to relate to **Standard 5.**

Q3: Do top schools have common practices regarding protection, care, guidance, and support for students that are conspicuously lacking in poorly performing schools?

Q4: Are there significant financial implications that hinder poorly performing schools?

Q5: Do school leadership practices impact guidance and support for schools to influence performance?

Thirdly, I would like to look at a couple of questions that I want you to relate to **Standard 6.**

Q6: Does effective leadership influence governmental school inspection outcomes and performance?

Q7: Can self-evaluation and improvement planning impact school inspection outcomes and performance?

RQ8: Should self-evaluation be discarded in favor of a mandate for third-party audits and continuous performance monitoring?

# **Appendix B: Interview Questions**

**Research Questions**

Firstly, I would like to look at a couple of questions that I want you to relate to **Standard 3.**

Q1: What differences are there between teaching and assessment strategies in different public schools?

Q2: What is the effect of inspections on school outcomes and performance?

Secondly, I would like to look at a couple of questions that I want you to relate to **Standard 5.**

Q3: What common practices are there in top-performing schools that are conspicuously lacking in poorly performing schools regarding protection, care, guidance, and support for students?

Q4: In what ways do financial implications hinder poorly performing schools?

Q5: How do school leadership practices impact guidance and support for schools to influence performance?

Thirdly, I would like to look at a couple of questions that I want you to relate to **Standard 6.**

Q6: How does effective leadership influence governmental school inspection outcomes and performance?

Q7: How does self-evaluation and improvement planning impact school inspection outcomes and performance?

Q8: What would be the advantages/disadvantages of discarding self-evaluation in favor of a mandate for third-party audits and continuous performance monitoring?

# **Appendix C: Consent Form**

**CONSENT FORM**

**Research Study:** The Impact of School Leadership Practices on the UAE Governmental School Inspection Outcome And Performance

**Institution:** University, State

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This study aims to find out the impact of school leadership practices on governmental school inspection outcomes and student performance. This document will help you decide if you want to participate in this research by providing you with information about the study and what you are asked to do. This requires completing the questionnaire and an interview to obtain the most insight from your experience.

 Some reasons you might want to participate in this research are to contribute to a research area about which very little research has been done, to provide your insights, and to assist researchers to identify further avenues of research. Some reasons you might not want to participate in this research are that it will take up some of your valuable time**.**

This study asks you to complete a short questionnaire and participate in an interview. Copies of your school’s inspection report will also be required. You have been asked to participate in this research because you are a principal in a UAE school in the area of research.

The choice to participate or not is yours; participation is entirely voluntary. You can decline to complete the questionnaire and interview or withdraw at any time.

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality by keeping all hard copies on secure, locked premises, and password and malware protecting all electronic data.

There are some potential risks to this study. These include feeling uncomfortable about answering some of the questions. Every precaution has been taken to reduce the risk, but there is still minimal risk, which means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

This research may benefit you directly by suggesting improvements for getting the most out of school inspections in the research areas described**.**  Society more broadly may also benefit by potential improvements to education in the UAE.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact supervisor, by phone at number or by email at email address.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

PRINTED NAME: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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