Supporting libraries and developing their systems in the UAE under the Federal Law No. 18 of 2016

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Abstract

The National Reading Law is the Charter that places the cultural institutions in the UAE in the position of social responsibility to activate reading and make it a way of life in the UAE society to ensure the sustainability of knowledge and research in the United Arab Emirates.

The paper aims at shedding light on the literacy initiatives carried out by the Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development since the enactment of the National Reading Law in 2016. The researcher used the analytical descriptive approach to describe and analyze the literacy initiatives carried out by the Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development and the effectiveness of these initiatives and programs and measuring the impact on the society it serves Ministry Libraries.

The researcher also stands on the most important findings of the study and analysis to determine the impact and feasibility of implementing such initiatives and results.

The study concluded with some recommendations recommended by the researcher to ensure continuity of work on such initiatives.

Keywords
Libraries, reading programs, laws and legislations, United Arab Emirates

Foundations of the National Reading Law (No. 18 of 2016)

The law was issued by the late Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan to establish a legislative framework for reading in the UAE. Its primary mission is to support human capital development and build a knowledge society by fostering mental and cognitive abilities.

Core Objectives

- **Human Capital Investment:** Prioritizing the cognitive development of citizens to create an inspired model for the region.

- **Sustainability:** Ensuring that reading becomes a daily, ingrained habit across all segments of society.

- **Intellectual Support:** Promoting national intellectual production and fostering a culture of lifelong learning.

- **Institutional Integration:** Transforming reading into a comprehensive government project where every institution has a role in its implementation.

Guiding Principles

The law is built upon seven specific principles, including:

1. **Islamic and Cultural Values:** Reading is viewed as a core Islamic principle and a fundamental value of UAE society.

2. **Innovation and Economy:** It is seen as a driver for scientific achievement, intellectual creativity, and economic development.

3. **Human Rights:** The law reinforces the right to education, intellectual property, and cultural enjoyment.

4. **Tolerance:** Reading is identified as a primary gateway for promoting peace, coexistence, and understanding between cultures.

The UAE National Reading Strategy (2016–2026)

In conjunction with the law, the UAE launched a ten-year strategy to solidify the nation's position as a global capital for content and knowledge.

Strategic Components

- **National Reading Fund:** Established with a budget of 100 million AED to support reading initiatives.

- **National Reading Month:** March is designated annually to intensify community reading activities.

- **Knowledge Bag:** A legislative requirement for the government to intervene early by providing "knowledge bags" to newborns and children to encourage reading from birth.

- **National Catalog:** The creation of a unified database for all public and institutional libraries in the UAE.

Evolution and Management of Public Libraries

The study identifies three distinct historical phases in the development of UAE public libraries under the Ministry of Culture:

1. **Emergence and Foundation (1972–2000):** Initial establishment of public libraries across the seven emirates.

2. **Development and Restructuring (2001–2009):** Internal modernization and restructuring of existing facilities.

3. **Excellence and Innovation (2010–Present):** A focus on "Five-Star" service quality, strategic planning, and creative service delivery.

Library Distribution and Statistics

The Ministry of Culture currently oversees 10 primary libraries serving approximately 4.1 million people across various emirates.

Emirate	Number of Ministry Libraries	Notable Libraries
Abu Dhabi	3	Abu Dhabi Public Library, Madinat Zayed, Delma
Dubai	0*	*Libraries transitioned to local government*
Sharjah	0*	*Libraries transitioned to local government*
Ras Al Khaimah	1	Ras Al Khaimah Public Library
Fujairah	3	Fujairah Public Library, Dibba Al-Fujairah, Masafi
Umm Al Quwain	1	Umm Al Quwain Public Library
Ajman	2	Ajman Public Library, Masfout

Key Cultural and Digital Initiatives

To fulfill the mandates of Law No. 18, the Ministry of Culture has implemented several innovative projects designed to increase accessibility and engagement.

- **UAE National Catalog of Libraries:** A centralized platform to unify library indexes, facilitating easier access to information for researchers and the public.

- **Beach Libraries:** The first digital beach libraries in the Middle East, offering thousands of titles in Arabic and English, including academic journals and periodicals, accessible in daily leisure environments.

- **Digital Heritage Library:** A collaborative project with UNESCO to preserve UAE's oral and intangible heritage in a digital format.

- **Five-Star Service Standard:** An annual evaluation system to ensure libraries meet high institutional excellence standards and narrow the information gap in society.

- **National Cultural Encyclopedia:** A digital platform providing free access to information regarding UAE's heritage, history, and prominent figures.

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

The National Reading Law explicitly assigns duties to various sectors to ensure the success of the national strategy:

- **Ministry of Culture:** Responsible for the National Catalog, funding reading materials for individuals with disabilities, and promoting Arabic content in international forums.

- **Media Sector:** The National Media Council is mandated to develop an integrated media policy to encourage reading, requiring public TV, radio, and print media to dedicate specific slots for reading-related programming.

- **Education Sector:** The Ministry of Education must collaborate on professional development for librarians and publishers, offering specialized academic programs in publishing and library management.

- **Economic Sector:** Publishers and authors are supported through incentives, including exemptions from fees for International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN). Shopping malls are also encouraged to provide commercial spaces at competitive prices for public library projects.

Study Findings and Recommendations

The analysis of the law's implementation reveals significant progress and areas for continued focus.

Key Results

- The Ministry of Culture has executed approximately **700 cultural initiatives**, reaching an estimated **200,000 beneficiaries** across the state.

- Library operating hours were extended to **12 continuous hours** to better serve the public.

- There has been a measurable increase in library visitors and memberships following the law's enactment.

- The **Arab Reading Challenge** has been successfully implemented across all cultural centers.

Recommendations for Future Development

- **Targeted Programming:** Develop specific events and programs tailored to different age groups and demographics.

- **Parental Engagement:** Conduct awareness workshops to emphasize the importance of parents encouraging their children to read.

- **Brainstorming Sessions:** Implement regular sessions with library users to understand their evolving needs.

- **Financial and Professional Support:** Increase funding for reading initiatives and prioritize the recruitment and training of specialized professionals in library science.

- **Modern Design:** Redesign library spaces to align with the tastes and requirements of the youth and the emerging generation.