

An Assessment of the Effectiveness of Educational Waqf in Promoting Cultural Development in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of educational endowments in achieving cultural development in the United Arab Emirates, in light of the cognitive and developmental transformations witnessed by contemporary societies. The study is based on the premise that educational endowments are not merely a traditional tool for financing education, but rather a long-term strategic asset that can be utilized to achieve a sustainable cultural impact if managed according to modern institutional principles. The study adopted a descriptive-analytical approach by analyzing the theoretical concepts of educational endowments and cultural development, reviewing the historical and institutional development of educational endowments in the UAE, and analyzing their roles in supporting cultural identity, funding scientific research, sponsoring cultural programs and activities, and building human capital. The study also addressed indicators for measuring the effectiveness of educational endowments, whether quantitative, qualitative, or administrative, in order to assess their ability to transform financial resources into cultural outputs with added value. The results of the study showed that the effectiveness of educational endowments in achieving cultural development is more closely related to the efficiency of their management, the clarity of their objectives, and their alignment with national education and cultural strategies than to the size of the available endowment resources. The study also revealed administrative and organizational challenges that limit the maximization of the cultural impact of endowments, necessitating the development of management models, enhanced governance, and improved impact measurement mechanisms. The study concludes that educational endowments represent a promising developmental tool for supporting cultural development in the United Arab Emirates, provided they are activated within a strategic framework based on planning, evaluation, and sustainability.

Keywords: Educational Endowment, Development, Cultural Development, Sustainability, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Contemporary societies are witnessing rapid transformations in development paradigms, where economic growth alone is no longer considered a sufficient indicator of progress. Instead, deeper and more sustainable dimensions of development have gained prominence, foremost among them cultural development as a core component of human development, identity reinforcement, social cohesion, and long-term sustainability. This shift has generated increasing awareness of the strategic importance of investing in culture and education as two interdependent pillars of balanced development capable of integrating material advancement with value-based stability (Al-Khawlani & Al-Maliki, 2020).

Within this context, traditional financing and development instruments with deep historical roots, most notably educational waqf, are being revitalized as institutional mechanisms capable of reconciling historical authenticity with the requirements of contemporary governance and management. Educational waqf is not merely a charitable practice; rather, it represents a sustainable developmental model that has historically supported education and culture, contributed to the formation of intellectual elites, and ensured the continuity of learning beyond political and economic fluctuations. Historically, waqf played a central role in financing schools, libraries, study circles, and centers of knowledge production, thereby contributing significantly to the flourishing of Arab and Islamic civilization and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Abdulhadi, 2023).

However, despite the growing body of literature addressing waqf and development, prior studies have largely focused on normative, historical, or descriptive analyses, with limited empirical examination of the effectiveness of educational waqf in generating measurable cultural outcomes, particularly within the context of the United Arab Emirates. Moreover, existing research often lacks robust evaluation frameworks capable of linking governance practices, funding allocation mechanisms, and educational investments to tangible cultural impact. The cultural dimension of waqf performance thus remains weakly operationalized and insufficiently measured, leaving a significant analytical gap in understanding how educational waqf contributes to contemporary cultural development.

With the increasing complexity of economic environments and rising demands for transparency, accountability, and results-based governance, it has become insufficient to assess educational waqf solely in terms of its existence or financial volume. There is a growing need to reassess its performance in terms of effectiveness and efficiency in achieving clearly defined cultural and educational outcomes. The contemporary challenge lies not in the scarcity of waqf resources, but in how these resources are governed, strategically allocated, and aligned with measurable developmental objectives. Accordingly, educational waqf must transition from a traditional support model to a developmental investment model grounded in strategic planning, institutional governance, and value maximization (Al-Hadrami et al., 2021).

In the United Arab Emirates, educational waqf holds particular significance in light of the state's strategic orientation toward building a knowledge-based economy, enhancing cultural soft power, and consolidating national identity within an open global environment. The UAE has demonstrated increasing commitment to modernizing the waqf sector through legislative reform, institutional restructuring, and alignment with national development strategies and

sustainable development goals. This reflects an institutional recognition of educational waqf as a strategic developmental instrument supporting educational and cultural policy objectives (Al-Shammas, 2020).

Nevertheless, this orientation raises fundamental questions regarding the actual capacity of educational waqf to evolve beyond its traditional role as a funding mechanism and function as an effective developmental actor contributing to cultural production, knowledge dissemination, creativity, and human capital development. Achieving this transformation requires not only adequate financial resources, but also effective governance structures, strategic funding allocation, integration with national strategies, and the adoption of systematic evaluation tools capable of measuring cultural impact (Al-Hadrami et al., 2021).

This study is grounded in the assumption that the effectiveness of educational waqf should not be assessed by the size of endowed assets alone, but by its ability to generate added cultural value through the strategic allocation of resources to high-quality educational and cultural programs aligned with societal needs and future challenges. It further assumes that the absence of clear performance indicators, weak linkage between funding decisions and cultural outcomes, and limited impact measurement mechanisms constrain the actual developmental role of educational waqf, even in contexts characterized by sufficient financial and regulatory capacity (Al-Najjar, 2020).

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the effectiveness of educational waqf in achieving cultural development in the United Arab Emirates through a structured analytical framework that focuses on four key dimensions: governance and institutional management, funding allocation mechanisms, cultural impact measurement, and alignment with national educational and cultural strategies. By systematically analyzing these dimensions, the study aims to evaluate how educational waqf contributes to cultural development outcomes and to identify the institutional and strategic conditions necessary to enhance its performance. Ultimately, the study aims to propose an evidence-based evaluation framework that supports the transformation of educational waqf into a sustainable developmental instrument with a clear and measurable cultural mandate, contributing to the construction of a balanced knowledge-based society that integrates authenticity with modernization and responds to present and future development challenges (Al-Hammadi, 2023).

The Roles of Educational Waqf in Supporting Cultural Development

The roles of educational waqf in supporting cultural development constitute a core dimension that highlights the true value of this institution beyond its traditional charitable framework. Educational waqf does not merely provide financial resources for education; rather, it functions as a strategic instrument for cultural production, identity preservation, and long-term societal awareness-building. In light of rapid knowledge transformations and increasing cultural openness, directing educational waqf toward areas that ensure balance between modernization and cultural specificity has become increasingly important particularly in the United Arab Emirates, which has adopted a comprehensive development vision positioning culture and education as fundamental pillars of sustainable development. Within this framework, the key roles of educational waqf in supporting cultural development can be identified as follows:

Supporting Identity-Based Education

Educational waqf contributes to financing educational programs that promote the Arabic language, cultural studies, national history, and heritage, thereby ensuring the intergenerational transmission of cultural values. Through this role, education transcends its purely cognitive function to become a means of identity preservation and cultural belonging, particularly within culturally open societies such as the United Arab Emirates.

Funding Cultural and Humanities Research

Educational waqf provides a sustainable source of funding for research in the humanities and social sciences, thereby strengthening the production and advancement of cultural knowledge. This role is particularly significant given the relative scarcity of funding typically allocated to these fields compared to applied sciences, positioning waqf as a key mechanism for achieving balance within the knowledge system.

Supporting Cultural Programs and Activities Within Educational Institutions

Waqf contributes to financing cultural exhibitions, intellectual seminars, academic conferences, and cultural initiatives within universities and educational institutions. This support helps integrate culture into the educational environment rather than relegating it to a marginal activity, while also enhancing interaction between theoretical knowledge and cultural practice.

Preserving and Transmitting Cultural Heritage through Education

Educational waqf supports educational projects concerned with documenting tangible and intangible cultural heritage and incorporating it into curricula and academic activities. This role is essential for safeguarding national cultural memory from erosion and ensuring its sustainability amid rapid social transformations.

Building and Empowering Cultural Human Capital

Educational waqf plays a vital role in providing scholarships, supporting talented individuals, and funding capacity-building programs in cultural and intellectual fields. Investment in human capital represents the true return of waqf, as culturally and intellectually equipped individuals serve as the primary drivers of creativity and sustainable cultural development.

Indicators For Measuring The Effectiveness Of Educational Waqf In Achieving Cultural Development

Indicator Type	Indicator	Indicator Description	Relevance to Cultural Development
Quantitative Indicators	Volume of Funding Allocated to Educational and Cultural Programs	Measuring the financial resources allocated by the waqf to support education and cultural activities	Reflects the degree to which culture is prioritized within the waqf's strategic orientation
	Number of Supported Cultural Programs and Initiatives	Identifying the number of educational and cultural projects funded annually by the waqf	Indicates the breadth and scope of cultural impact
	Sustainability of Waqf Resources	The waqf's capacity to maintain continuous funding without interruption	Serves as an indicator of long-term cultural sustainability
Qualitative Indicators	Number of Beneficiaries	The number of students, researchers, or institutions benefiting from the waqf	Demonstrates the societal reach of cultural impact
	Quality of Educational and Cultural Outputs	Assessing the quality of programs and content supported by the waqf	Reflects the depth of cultural impact rather than its quantity
	Degree of Alignment with Cultural Identity	Measuring the extent to which programs focus on language, heritage, and national values	Represents a direct indicator of support for cultural identity
	Level of Cultural Creativity and Innovation	The extent to which the waqf encourages innovative and research-based cultural initiatives	Indicates cultural vitality and renewal
	Administrative Indicators	Efficiency of Waqf Management	The presence of clear governance structures, transparency, and strategic planning
Availability of Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms		The existence of periodic reports to assess cultural impact	Determines the seriousness of the waqf in achieving its objectives
Strategic Indicators		Alignment with National Strategies	The degree of consistency between waqf activities and national educational and cultural policies
	Partnerships with Educational and Cultural Institutions	The level of collaboration with universities and cultural centers	Enhances institutional and societal cultural impact

Future Challenges of Educational Waqf in the Context of Digital Transformation

Digital transformation represents one of the most significant contemporary variables reshaping patterns of education, culture, and resource management in modern societies. This transformation poses future challenges for educational waqf that extend beyond traditional frameworks of administration and financing. In the United Arab Emirates, where the state has adopted ambitious strategies for digital transformation and the development of a knowledge-based economy, a critical question arises regarding the ability of educational waqf to adapt to these changes without compromising its cultural mission and institutional values (Al-Khawlani & Al-Maliki, 2020).

The first major challenge concerns the readiness of digital infrastructure for managing educational waqf. Some waqf institutions still rely on traditional administrative methods in documentation, monitoring, and decision-making. With the acceleration of digital transformation, there is an urgent need to adopt advanced digital systems that ensure administrative efficiency, rapid access to information, and enhanced transparency and accountability. The absence of such infrastructure weakens the capacity of waqf institutions to keep pace with the requirements of digital governance (Al-Shammari, 2022).

The second challenge relates to the digital gap in utilizing waqf resources. Supporting digital education and digital culture requires new investments in educational platforms, digital content, and interactive technologies. Educational waqf thus faces the challenge of balancing the allocation of resources toward these emerging fields while simultaneously maintaining support for traditional educational and cultural programs with a strong heritage-oriented character (Al-Hammadi, 2023).

A third challenge lies in safeguarding cultural identity within the digital environment, as digital spaces carry the risk of cultural dilution amid global knowledge flows. In this context, educational waqf is expected to contribute to the production of digital content that promotes national language and culture, rather than limiting its role to that of a traditional funding entity. This necessitates the development of a clear digital cultural vision (Al-Hammadi, 2023). Educational waqf institutions also face a challenge related to the development of human competencies capable of managing digital waqf operations. Traditional expertise is no longer sufficient to administer waqf assets in an environment driven by data, digital platforms, and advanced technologies. This situation calls for investment in building specialized human capacities that combine waqf knowledge with digital proficiency.

Accordingly, the future of educational waqf in the era of digital transformation depends on its ability to redefine its roles, modernize its management models, and transition from traditional waqf practices to a digital waqf framework capable of supporting education and culture within a rapidly evolving knowledge environment, without undermining its core value-based and developmental foundations (Al-Najjar, 2020).

The Transition from Traditional Waqf to Investment-Oriented Waqf

Educational waqf in the contemporary era is undergoing a qualitative transformation in its philosophy and operational tools. The traditional model based on preserving the principal asset and allocating limited returns has become insufficient to meet the demands of modern development, particularly in the fields of education and culture. In this context, the concept

of investment-oriented waqf has emerged as a more efficient and sustainable approach, focusing on maximizing the value of waqf assets and deploying them through well-planned investment strategies that ensure continuity of returns and amplification of developmental impact. This transformation is particularly relevant in the United Arab Emirates, which has adopted modern economic orientations centered on innovation and sustainability (Abdulhadi, 2023).

Traditional waqf management is primarily characterized by conservative asset administration, emphasizing capital preservation and directing returns toward predefined charitable purposes, often without diversification of income sources or development of management mechanisms. Despite its historically significant role in supporting education and culture, the limited returns and inflexibility of this model have reduced its capacity to respond to rapid economic and knowledge-based transformations. In contrast, investment-oriented waqf seeks to transform waqf assets into productive instruments through investment in diversified projects, such as real estate, financial portfolios, and sustainable-return educational initiatives (Al-Hammadi, 2023).

The shift toward investment-oriented waqf represents a strategic step aimed at enhancing the financial sustainability of educational waqf and reducing reliance on donations or unstable resources. This transition allows waqf institutions to adopt principles of economic efficiency without compromising their non-profit nature, as investment returns are redirected toward long-term educational and cultural objectives. The primary challenge lies in achieving a balance between maximizing financial returns and preserving the social and cultural mission of waqf (Al-Najjar, 2020).

Within the Emirati context, significant opportunities exist for activating the investment-oriented waqf model due to a supportive legislative environment, the availability of financial expertise, and the growing culture of responsible investment. However, this transformation requires clear governance frameworks, well-defined investment policies, and specialized management capable of risk assessment and ensuring transparency. It also necessitates the retraining of waqf personnel and the development of robust monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that investment returns are effectively directed toward achieving tangible educational and cultural impact (Al-Hammadi, 2023).

Thus, the transition from traditional waqf to investment-oriented waqf does not represent a superficial change in management style, but rather reflects a fundamental shift in vision from a logic of expenditure to a logic of sustainable developmental investment thereby strengthening the role of educational waqf as a strategic instrument for long-term cultural and educational development (Abdulhadi, 2023).

The Relationship between Educational Waqf and Cultural Development in the United Arab Emirates

The relationship between educational waqf and cultural development is based on a cumulative causal logic within a long-term developmental framework. Educational waqf constitutes one of the most important financing and investment tools that nourish the educational system, while education itself represents the fundamental infrastructure for producing, transmitting, renewing, and sustaining culture within society. From this

perspective, cultural development should not be viewed as an automatic outcome of the existence of educational waqf, but rather as a developmental result contingent upon the effectiveness of waqf in directing its resources and transforming them into genuine cognitive and value-based impact, as demonstrated in the experience of the United Arab Emirates (Al-Otaibi, 2021).

Educational waqf influences cultural development through multiple roles, beginning with funding educational programs that promote national identity, language, thought, and heritage, and extending to supporting scientific research and cultural and creative activities. The more educational waqf focuses on quality-oriented education rather than quantitative expansion, and prioritizes deep knowledge over conventional spending, the greater its capacity to produce sustainable cultural awareness capable of engaging with global transformations without compromising cultural specificity. In this context, educational waqf functions as an indirect yet highly impactful developmental entry point for cultural development, owing to its temporal sustainability and relative independence from financial fluctuations (Bint Razzaq & Al-Saifi, 2024).

However, this impact remains conditional upon the existence of a clear cultural vision governing the direction of educational waqf. The absence of clearly defined cultural objectives, or reliance on generalized educational roles, reduces the function of waqf to a limited educational expenditure tool with minimal cultural effect. Furthermore, weak evaluation and monitoring mechanisms hinder the ability to assess the actual outcomes of funded programs, rendering cultural development a theoretical goal rather than an achievable practical outcome. This underscores the conditional nature of the relationship between educational waqf and cultural development, whereby the availability of resources alone is insufficient without efficient management capable of linking funding to outcomes (Al-Hadrami et al., 2021).

This integrative relationship can be summarized in a clear equation: educational waqf provides resources, education transforms them into knowledge, and knowledge produces culture, while sound governance represents the decisive link that ensures the transition of resources from funding to impact. Any disruption within this chain weakens the relationship as a whole, regardless of the scale of waqf assets (Al-Najjar, 2020).

In the Emirati model, this relationship is strengthened when educational waqf is integrated within national education and culture strategies and managed according to principles of governance, efficiency, and impact-based financing. This approach has contributed to redefining educational waqf as a developmental partner rather than merely a financial supporter, capable of contributing to human development, safeguarding national identity, and enhancing the cultural strength of society (Al-Shammari, 2022).

Accordingly, the relationship between educational waqf and cultural development represents an advanced model of sustainable development grounded in investment in human capital and knowledge. Within this model, waqf transforms from a traditional institution into a strategic lever that balances cultural authenticity with contemporary demands and contributes to building a cohesive and culturally aware society over the long term (Abdulhadi, 2023).

Conclusion

This study concludes that educational waqf possesses significant strategic potential as a developmental instrument for advancing cultural development in the United Arab Emirates, provided it is governed through modern institutional frameworks that emphasize efficiency, accountability, and impact-oriented resource allocation. The findings demonstrate that the value of educational waqf lies not in the scale of its assets, but in its ability to convert resources into measurable educational and cultural outcomes that support cultural production, reinforce national identity, and enhance human capital.

The analysis further shows that the contribution of educational waqf to cultural development is integrative yet conditional, depending on the clarity of cultural objectives, alignment with national education and cultural strategies, and the availability of robust evaluation mechanisms. Persistent challenges, particularly weak cultural impact measurement, traditional funding practices, and limited institutional coordination, continue to constrain its effectiveness.

As a practical implication, the study recommends the adoption of a standardized national evaluation framework for educational waqf institutions in the UAE, linking governance quality and funding allocation to clearly defined cultural performance indicators. Such a framework would enable evidence-based decision making, enhance accountability, and support the transformation of educational waqf from a traditional funding mechanism into a strategic driver of sustainable cultural development.

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