

Symposium Proposal

Symposium Title: Research–Policy–Practice Partnerships and Sustainable Educational System Transformation in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Keywords: research–policy–practice partnerships; learning ecosystems; educational system transformation; knowledge mobilization; Sharjah

Discussants: Professor Pauline Taylor-Guy, Chancellor Sharjah Education Academy, Khawla Al Hosani, Vice Chancellor, Sharjah Education Academy

This symposium examines how research–policy–practice partnerships (R3Ps) can support sustainable educational transformation within a place-based learning ecosystem (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Economist Impact, 2022). Focusing on the emirate of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, it explores how research policy practice partnerships (R3Ps) can generate shared knowledge, strengthen coherence across policy and practice, and build capacity for continuous improvement. The proposal addresses research gaps in how education systems can connect local innovation with wider policy coherence in contexts pursuing long-term, evidence-informed reform (Masters, 2023). It also addresses current debates on co-creating knowledge, strengthening cultures of evidence use, and mobilizing research through collaboration among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers (Farrell et al., 2021).

The symposium advances understanding of the conditions, mechanisms, and outcomes through which R3P approaches contribute to educational transformation at system level. Although such approaches are recognized as promising vehicles for knowledge mobilization, stakeholder alignment, and locally relevant problem solving, there remains limited empirical understanding of how they operate across whole systems and sustain impact over time (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Farrell et al., 2021). By focusing on Sharjah, the symposium offers an analytically rich examination of a jurisdiction intentionally designing and implementing a learning ecosystem that connects early childhood, school, higher education, and research institutions within a coherent reform architecture.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) education system combines federal oversight of education with emirate-level governance and regulation of the private sector. Within this landscape, Sharjah offers a distinctive educational model of reform characterized by sustained leadership commitment and institutional alignment. The Sharjah Private Education Authority (SPEA) established in 2018, regulates private schools and early childhood provision, the Sharjah Education Academy (SEA) conducts educator preparation, scientific research and continuous professional learning and, since 2023 operates the Sharjah Government Nursery system, and the Sharjah Council for Higher Education and Scientific

Research (SCHESR), established in May 2025, coordinates and advances the higher education and research landscape. Together, these institutions create enabling conditions for a learning ecosystem in which policy, practice, and research are connected rather than treated as separate domains (Economist Impact, 2022; Masters, 2023).

This symposium, comprising three interrelated papers examines the conceptual foundations, system-level effects, and responsiveness of R3P approaches in Sharjah and contributes to identified gaps in research relating to learning ecosystem scholarship and R3P literature which emphasizes the importance of trust, shared purpose, contextual responsiveness, and long-term collaboration (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Farrell et al., 2021; Hadar & Baharav, 2025). The first paper develops the conceptual model underpinning the Sharjah Education Model as a learning ecosystem. The second analyzes partnership impacts across policy development, teacher capability, and student learning. The third presents a case study of how partnership infrastructure has enabled coordinated educational responsiveness during regional disruption in the recent Middle Eastern conflict. Together, the papers show how R3Ps can function as system-building mechanisms that strengthen resilience, coherence, and improvement over time (Economist Impact, 2022; Farrell et al., 2021; McGeown & Sjölund, 2026).

Paper 1: Framing the Learning Ecosystem in the Emirate of Sharjah

Presenting Authors: Pauline Taylor-Guy, Suleiman Hamdan

This paper presents the conceptual foundations of the Sharjah Education Model, positioning the emirate's reform architecture as a learning ecosystem supported by research-policy-practice partnerships. It explains how cross-sector coordination, shared goals, and locally responsive design can support sustainable system transformation (Economist Impact, 2022; Hadar & Baharav, 2025; Masters, 2023). It specifically draws on the *Learning Ecosystems Framework* (Economist Impact, 2022), pillar 5 *Governance and Coordination* which reflects the quality and effectiveness of governance arrangements to resource and respond to change and challenge and enable growth, stability and stakeholder collaboration across towards common goals. It makes reference to the five dimensions of effectiveness for assessing research-practice partnerships developed by Henrick et al. (2017) and "Eastern" philosophical traditions, particularly those of the Arab world recognizing that effective R3P approaches (Coburn et al., 2015) are necessarily deeply culturally grounded and localized.

Paper 2: Strategic Impacts of Research–Policy–Practice Partnerships in Sharjah

Presenting Authors: Hunada Kanbar, Ziad Shatat

This paper examines the partnership between the Sharjah Private Education Authority and the Sharjah Education Academy to analyze how R3Ps shape educational policy, strengthen teacher capability, and contribute to improved learner outcomes through evidence-informed improvement work (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Farrell et al., 2021; McGeown & Sjölund, 2026).

Paper 3: Partnership, Resilience, and Crisis Response in the Sharjah Learning Ecosystem

Presenting Authors: Khawla AlHosani, Elain Al Quraan

This paper presents a case study of how R3P infrastructure and approaches supported a coordinated response to educational disruption in a context of regional crisis. It highlights how trust, institutional relationships, and shared responsibility enabled rapid support for schools, educators, children, and communities (Economist Impact, 2022; McGeown & Sjölund, 2026).

The symposium contributes an original international case of system-level partnership work in which research, policy, and practice are intentionally integrated to support educational transformation. It offers conceptual, empirical, and practice-relevant insights into how R3Ps operate within a learning ecosystem, generate strategic value across institutions, and enable resilience in times of disruption (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Economist Impact, 2022; Farrell et al., 2021). More broadly, it contributes to comparative and international knowledge about how education systems can move beyond isolated innovation toward coordinated, evidence-informed, and contextually grounded improvement (Farrell et al., 2021; Hadar & Baharav, 2025; Masters, 2023; McGeown & Sjölund, 2026).

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