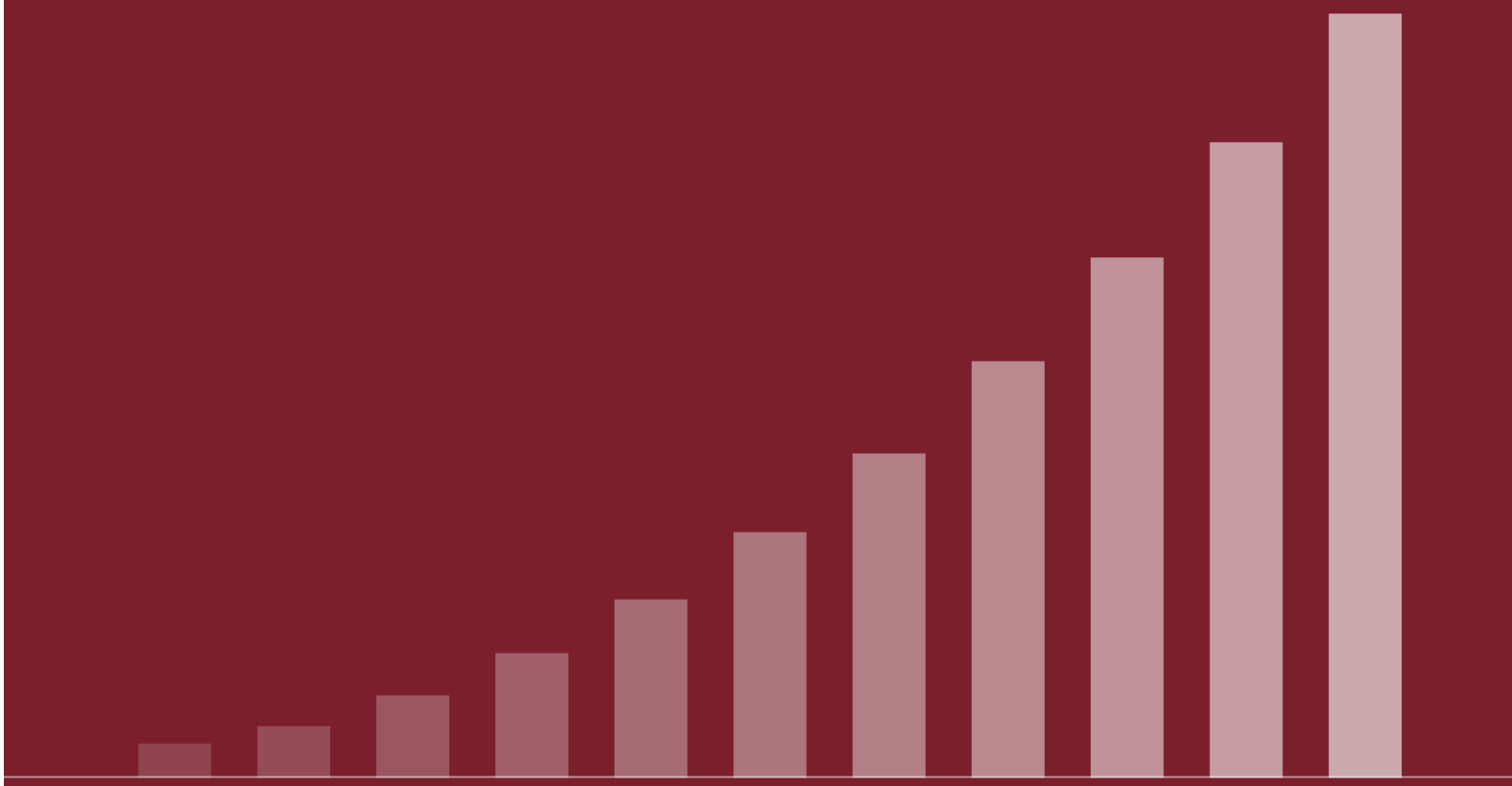
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RESEARCH PAPER · EPIC-PP-2026-053

Why Has the UAE Produced No Famous Philosophers, and Could It in Future?

A sourced study of philosophy and intellectual life in the UAE, with a forecast to 2071

EPIC Research Team

November 2026

Why Has the UAE Produced No Famous Philosophers, and Could It in Future?

Philosophy and Intellectual Life in the UAE: History, Causes and a Forecast to 2071

EPIC: Emirati Perspectives and Insight Centre
EPIC-PP-2026-053 · Society, Identity & Education · 23 November 2026 · Author: EPIC Research Team
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Abstract

EPIC found no Emirati philosopher in the academic, systematic sense in any period. The best-supported explanation is institutional. Formal schooling began around 1907, no university existed before the 1970s, and philosophy departments, doctorates and journals are still few. Since 2020 the UAE has moved fast: the Ministry of Education announced a school philosophy subject with teacher training, a BA in Philosophy and Ethics opened at MBZUH in 2022, and the Fujairah House of Philosophy has published a quarterly journal since January 2022.

The historical record shows a strong tradition of practical wisdom (majlis, Nabati poetry, seafaring knowledge) and a merchant-led cultural awakening, which together give raw material and a patronage model. EPIC's reasoned judgement, labelled as such in section 8, is that the first internationally recognised Emirati philosopher is more likely to appear in the 2040s than the 2030s, with AI and technology ethics, philosophy of coexistence and renewal of Arabic and Islamic thought as the likeliest fields.

Section 9 sets out recommendations for the Ministry, universities, publishers, prizes, families and independent researchers. Further evidence (section 19) shows that annual philosophy graduate numbers are small, in the low tens across the institutions EPIC could count, which lowers the forecast slightly; it also shows that Kalima's philosophy output has grown to 64 titles, 4.6 per cent of its list.

Keywords: UAE; philosophy; intellectual history; higher education; school curriculum; Kalima; Mohamed bin Zayed University for Humanities; Fujairah House of Philosophy; Nabati poetry; majlis; academic freedom; forecasting; Society, Identity & Education

Full text

Key findings

3
Institutions with a philosophy degree
MBZUH, NYU Abu Dhabi, Sorbonne Abu Dhabi

64 of 1,397
Kalima philosophy titles
Abu Dhabi Arabic Language Centre, September 2025

2020
Ministry announces school philosophy
Teacher programme 5 Jul to 24 Aug 2020

Oct 2021
Fujairah House of Philosophy founded
Journal from January 2022

1. **Documented**: no Emirati philosopher with a recognised body of philosophical work was verified. The closest Emirati writers are essayists such as Ali Abu Al-Reesh and academics in ethics.
2. **Documented**: the first semi-formal schools date from 1907 (Sharjah) and 1912 (Dubai), financed by merchants. Higher education followed decades later.
3. **Documented**: the Ministry announced in July 2020 that philosophy would join the curriculum in three levels from 2020 to 2021. EPIC found no textbooks, enrolment figures or evaluation.
4. **Documented**: on current institutions the UAE stands mid-table in the Gulf. Kuwait and Qatar have older or steadier academic bases; Oman and Bahrain have less visible philosophy provision.
5. **Documented**: independent indices rate the UAE low on academic freedom (V-Dem 0.195 in 2025; Freedom House 18 out of 100).
6. **Interpretation**: the pipeline from school to international recognition takes roughly 25 to 30 years, so the earliest products of the 2020 reform reach recognition in the mid-2040s, with earlier cases possible among people trained abroad.
7. **Interpretation**: every cause usually offered for the absence has a counter-argument, and the strongest cause is institutional age.
8. **Documented**: Sorbonne Abu Dhabi had 61 students in its philosophy and sociology double bachelor in 2024/25 and graduated 7 from it that year. UAE University offers no philosophy major.
9. **Documented**: Sufi teachers and communities are traceable in the territory from the 17th century (Ras Al Khaimah, Dubai), and Emirati official religious discourse centres on tolerance and coexistence (Document on Human Fraternity, 2019; Abrahamic Family House, 2023).
10. **Interpretation**: English-medium university teaching, a rentier-style career structure, and heavy reliance on expatriate scholars each shape who becomes a philosopher in the UAE. Women appear prominently among verified Emirati academics in ethics and philosophy.
11. **Gaps still open**: no Ministry textbook or uptake data, no MBZUH enrolment or graduate counts, no verified Emirati philosophy PhD with an international publication record, no named scholar of the territory before the 17th century.

How to read this paper

- **Documented**: a fact from a source listed at the end.
- **General background**: widely established history that EPIC states without a dedicated citation; it is flagged as such.
- Interpretation or forecast: EPIC's own reasoning, never proven by a source. Probabilities are judgements.
- **Unverified**: a flag for something EPIC could not confirm.
- No quotations are reproduced from poems or books, because EPIC could not verify wording against a reliable edition. Paraphrase is flagged as paraphrase.

- Several sources are newspapers or opinion columns, and the text says so where it matters.

1. Definitions and criteria

Four meanings of philosopher

- Academic philosopher: holds philosophical training, publishes systematic argument and engages peers in journals and conferences. This is the meaning used for the main question.
- Public intellectual: writes essays and commentary on ethics, politics or culture for a general audience. Emirati writers fit here more often.
- Practical sage: a person known for wisdom in judging disputes and guiding conduct. The majlis tradition and Nabati poetry belong here.
- Applied thinker: a scientist, jurist or navigator whose work carries conceptual or methodological reflection, as in Ahmad ibn Majid.

Interpretation: the question, why no Emirati philosophers, shifts depending on which meaning is chosen. On the practical-sage meaning the territory has a long record. On the academic meaning the record is thin and recent.

Majlis and oral tradition as practical philosophy

UNESCO's 2015 inscription describes the majlis as a place where the community resolves disputes and exchanges news, where judges and religious sheikhs clarify rights and responsibilities, and where young people learn the manners and ethics of their community, dialogue and listening skills, and respect for the opinion of others. Women have their own majlis, and some are academic or literary. The text says the majlis transmits oral heritage including Nabati poetry.

UNESCO also records that al-Taghrooda, the chanted Bedouin poetry inscribed in 2012, lets the poet comment on social issues, and that al-Razfa often features Nabati verse. Interpretation: these are living forms of public argument and moral instruction. No source claims they form a written philosophical system.

Criteria for internationally recognised

For the forecast EPIC uses this working definition, which is EPIC's own proposal: a UAE citizen with a philosophy doctorate, peer-reviewed publications in major international journals or presses, regular citation by other philosophers, and invitations to leading conferences or a named chair. Whether naturalised residents count is a definitional choice that EPIC flags without resolving.

2. Historical narrative, era by era

2.1 Prehistory and the Bronze Age

Umm an-Nar tombs (about 2600 to 2000 BC) were collective, with no sign of an elite and non-elite distinction in death (Potts, Palgrave 2009). UNESCO's description of the Al Ain sites refers to belief in a collective fate in the afterlife. Ras Al Khaimah's heritage department describes over 7,000 years of continuous human activity in the emirate.

Interpretation: the burial evidence suggests an egalitarian or collective worldview. No texts survive, so no philosophy can be reconstructed. The evidence supports a claim about belief and social structure only.

2.2 Iron Age and late pre-Islamic period

The Ed-Dur temple (1st century AD) carries an Aramaic inscription naming the sun god Shamash (Ghent study). Hellenistic coins and figurines show Greek artistic contact (Pavan 2023, Tell Abraq). The Sir Bani Yas church and monastery of the 7th to 8th centuries remained in use after the arrival of Islam, according to Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism.

Interpretation: trade connected the territory to Mesopotamia, South Asia and the Mediterranean world. EPIC found no evidence of Greek philosophical texts in the territory, so the contact evidence is artistic and commercial.

2.3 Early Islamic centuries

Islam arrived through envoys in AD 630. Dibba hosted a major battle of the Ridda wars, and Julfar served as a staging post in AD 637 (Ras Al Khaimah heritage). The same site notes that knowledge of the pre-Islamic period is scant and that written chronicles begin with the Islamic period.

Documented gap: EPIC found no named Ibadi, Sunni or Sufi scholar of the territory for the first Islamic centuries. General background: Oman to the east developed a strong Ibadi theological tradition, and Basra and Baghdad to the north were major centres of kalam and falsafa. Interpretation: the territory sat between these centres without producing a documented local school. The absence may reflect lost records as much as absence of activity.

2.4 The medieval Gulf and Julfar

Julfar was a major port, and Ahmad ibn Majid (about 1432 to about 1500) was born there into a seafaring family (Wikipedia citing AramcoWorld; Ras Al Khaimah heritage). Section 3.1 treats his work in detail. Tijani (2014) notes that documentary evidence for classical-period literature in the territory is thin.

2.5 Qawasim, British treaties and the Trucial period

Ras Al Khaimah's heritage history describes the rise of the Qawasim after the Omani-Persian wars of 1720 and the later British Political Residency, set up to safeguard British imperial interests. General background: a series of British treaties from 1820 onwards bound the coastal sheikhdoms, which became known as the Trucial States.

Sufi context: Sheikh Hassan al-Madani is recorded as moving with family and followers from Medina to Julfar around 1676 to 1677 CE, then to Lengeh, where he began teaching (Sultan Al Qasimi's 2020 publication on Rashid bin Matar Al Qasimi). Interpretation: this is the earliest documented teaching figure EPIC found with a clear intellectual-spiritual role connected to the territory, though his work was Sufi teaching and falls outside philosophy.

2.6 The pearl economy and the first schools (1900 to 1950)

Evidence	What it shows	Source
Al Taymiyya Al Mahmoudiya, Sharjah, 1907; Al Ahmadiya, Dubai, 1912	Schooling came from merchant patronage	Al Bayan; Dubai Culture
Bookshop opened in Sharjah in 1912 by Ali al-Mahmud; Sultan al-Owais funded schools and overseas scholarships	Private patronage built the first cultural infrastructure	Tijani 2014
Visits by Arab reformist intellectuals including Ameen Rihani and Rashid Rida	Contact with the Arab Nahda, according to Tijani	Tijani 2014

Evidence	What it shows	Source
Sharjah school library circulated Arab periodicals such as al-Muqtataf, al-Hilal and al-Fath	Access to modern Arab thought	Al Bayan 1999
1938 Dubai reform movement: merchants demanded a consultative majlis after the pearl crash	Merchant political agency, then suppression	Belfer Center; Peterson survey

Interpretation: the Nahda reached the coast through periodicals and visitors, and the audience was a literate merchant class. A school of philosophy needs sustained teaching posts, and none existed. The 1938 movement shows a public-minded merchant elite, which is the social type that funded philosophy in other societies (section 7).

2.7 Oil, federation and state-building (1950s to 1971)

Libraries and departments of culture appeared from the 1960s. General background: Abu Dhabi began exporting oil in 1962 and the federation formed in 1971. Heard-Bey (From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates, 1982) is the standard academic account of this transition.

Interpretation: the 1960s and early 1970s absorbed intellectual energy into building ministries, schools and infrastructure, which is a normal pattern of state formation and leaves little room for speculative disciplines.

2.8 Institutions after 1971

Tijani lists the Sharjah Department of Culture (1981), Sharjah Book Fair (1982), Emirates Writers' Union (1984) and Abu Dhabi book fair (1990). General background: UAE University opened in 1976 in Al Ain. Tijani also notes that Kuwait and Bahrain had a literary awakening earlier than the UAE.

Interpretation: the UAE built literary and book institutions before philosophical ones. The 2020s are the first decade in which philosophy has a school subject, a degree in a dedicated humanities university and a house with a journal.

3. Case studies

3.1 Ahmad ibn Majid of Julfar

Item	Documented	Source
Birth and origin	Born about 1432 in Julfar, present-day Ras Al Khaimah, into a seafaring family; navigating ships at seventeen; died about 1500	Wikipedia citing AramcoWorld (Lunde)
Output	Nearly forty works of poetry and prose; thirty-nine in verse according to Ras Al Khaimah heritage	Wikipedia; Ras Al Khaimah heritage
Major work	Kitab al-Fawa'id fi usul 'ilm al-bahr wa'l-qawa'id (Book of the Benefits of the Principles and Foundations of Seamanship); an encyclopaedia of navigation covering monsoons, lunar mansions, latitude and the qibla	Library of Congress; Ras Al Khaimah heritage
Reputation	Known as the Lion of the Sea; navigator, poet and scholar	The National, quoted in Wikipedia
Vasco da Gama	Long linked to da Gama; contemporary research finds it unlikely they met	The National via Wikipedia

What this implies (interpretation): Ibn Majid shows that a person from the territory could build an organised, written body of knowledge on a practical science, drawing on earlier navigational tradition and citing predecessors. His work is conceptual in the sense that it systematises method and teaches by

verse. It stands outside academic philosophy as defined in section 1. Its value for this study lies in the proof that the region produced written, systematic, poetic knowledge long before the modern state. EPIC did not read the text directly and gives no quotation from it.

Limits: the surviving evidence on his thought concerns navigation. Statements that he held a particular philosophical doctrine would need a specialist reading of the Fawa'id and his poems.

3.2 Ali Abu Al-Reesh: works and themes

Work	Year	Theme (from titles and catalogue entries)
Al-Gharbiyya, Taa'ir bi-Thamaniyat Ajniha: Ta'ammulat fi Falsafat al-Ramz wa-l-Makan (The West, a Bird with Eight Wings: Reflections on the Philosophy of Symbol and Place)	2015	Published by Humaleel, Abu Dhabi, 398 pages according to a secondary summary of catalogue entries; a literary treatment of the Western Region of Abu Dhabi (history, nature, culture), using symbol and place to reflect on identity and memory; reported winner of the best Emirati printed book about the UAE at Sharjah International Book Fair 2015 (single-source, unverified)
Ru'a Falsafiyya fi al-Hukm wa-l-Furusiyya: Muqarabat Falsafat Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum bil-Falsafat al-Kubra (Philosophical Visions on Governance and Chivalry)	2015 or 2016 (sources differ)	Compares Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid's thought with 'great philosophies'; topics listed in catalogues include governance, giving, optimism, women's empowerment and chivalry
Zayed, the Ethical Personality	2017	Ethical reading of Sheikh Zayed (Arabic Wikipedia list); content unread
Al-Hurriyya Kharij al-Hurriyya: Sihr al-Lahza... Raqsat al-Mawt (Freedom Outside Freedom)	2018	Freeing the mind from selfishness, rigidity and superiority, per publisher and bookshop descriptions
Limatha Ana? wa-Laysa Nahnu... As'ila fi al-Tasamuh (Why Me and Not Us? Questions on Tolerance)	2020	Issued by the Ministry of Tolerance; existential questions including the self, death, isolation and enslaved consciousness, per Al Bayan and Al Tibrah

Documented: Abu Al-Reesh was born in 1956 in Ras Al Khaimah, is a novelist and journalist, and won the Emirates award for the novel in 2008 (Arabic Wikipedia). The titles and catalogue descriptions above give five non-fiction books across 2015 to 2020. Interpretation: the themes move from place and memory (2015), through governance and character of leaders (2015 or 2016, 2017), to freedom and tolerance as existential questions (2018, 2020). That arc matches the national themes of tolerance and leadership, and the 2020 volume's publication by the Ministry of Tolerance shows official sponsorship. EPIC did not read the books and makes no claim about argument quality, originality or reception. They show what Emirati philosophical writing looks like today: essayistic, culturally oriented and often linked to national figures. A specialist reading would be the next step.

3.3 Nabati wisdom poetry

Poet	Documented	Caution
Al Majidi bin Dhaher	Ras Al Khaimah heritage calls his collection valuable and says his life is known through oral narration; Faleh Hanzal's 1992 study examines his thought through his poetry; a poem attributed to his daughter is praised for its proverbs	Dates uncertain
Salem bin Ali Al Owais (1887 to 1958 or 1959)	Sultan Al Amimi says his educated colloquial poems tackled political and essential questions with philosophical and psychological dimensions; over a hundred unpublished Nabati poems	Philosophical label is one researcher's judgement
Mubarak Al Oqaili (1875 to 1955)	Tijani lists him among early Emirati poets; Arabic Wikipedia says he was born in Al-Ahsa, settled in Dubai in 1897 and hosted a literary salon	Origin differs between sources
Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid	Nabati poet; author of Flashes of Thought (2013)	Leadership reflection

Interpretation: Nabati poetry carries proverb, moral counsel and social comment, and so functions as vernacular practical philosophy. Scholarly treatment is thin: the evidence EPIC found consists of a few studies and newspaper articles. A systematic anthology with analysis of ethical themes (fate, generosity, justice, patience, sea and desert) would turn this resource into material for philosophical research. Those themes are EPIC's suggested categories. They come from general knowledge of the genre, and EPIC did not verify them against a corpus.

4. Why were there no philosophers? Causes with counter-arguments

4.1 Late formal schooling and higher education

- **Claim**: philosophy needs schools, teachers and universities, and the UAE acquired them late.
- **Evidence**: schools from 1907 and 1912; state in 1971; Heard-Bey and Tijani on late institutions.
- **Counter-argument**: Greek philosophy began before universities, and Ibn Majid produced systematic knowledge without them.
- **Verdict (EPIC's judgement)**: high weight. Early Greek thinkers worked in small circles, but modern academic philosophy requires institutions.

4.2 Small population and demographics

- **Claim**: a small citizen population gives a small talent pool.
- **Evidence**: Tijani (2014) reports citizens under 20 per cent of about 5.3 million.
- **Counter-argument**: Athens had a modest citizen body and produced Socrates, Plato and Aristotle; Vienna in the 1920s produced a circle of about three dozen thinkers. Scale matters less than concentration and patronage. Residents, including naturalised citizens, expand the pool if definitions allow.
- **Verdict**: medium.

4.3 Limited research institutions

- **Claim**: philosophy requires departments, doctorates and journals.
- **Evidence**: no philosophy master's found at UAE University; the first philosophy BA in the region at MBZUH in 2022; one journal since 2022.
- **Counter-argument**: institutions can be built quickly with funding, as the Kalima and House of Philosophy examples show.
- **Verdict**: high weight today, with fast change under way.

4.4 Distance from scholarly centres

- **Claim**: the territory lay far from Baghdad, Cairo and Damascus.
- **Evidence**: Baghdad's patronage model (Gutas); no evidence of local libraries in the Islamic centuries.
- **Counter-argument**: Julfar was a connected trade port, and Ibn Majid travelled widely. Distance matters less in an era of print and the internet.
- **Verdict**: medium for premodern times, low today.

4.5 Theological opposition to philosophy

- **Claim**: Islamic orthodoxy suppressed philosophy after al-Ghazali.
- Evidence against: Stanford's entry on al-Ghazali, Griffel and others reject the story that al-Ghazali ended Islamic philosophy; philosophy continued in later centuries.
- Counter-argument for some weight: suspicion of falsafa existed in some circles, and Alwali's 2012 paper asks why philosophy is not accepted in Arab culture.
- **Verdict**: low as a general cause, medium as a social attitude that school and university reform must address.

4.6 Policy swings on school philosophy

- **Claim**: philosophy has entered and left the curriculum.
- **Evidence**: the Abu Dhabi Arabic Language Centre's chair says it was in the curriculum from foundation; Faraj (via Asharq Al-Awsat) says it was dropped in the late 1990s; Barqawi says it was present then absent; the Ministry restored it in 2020.
- **Counter-argument**: sources disagree on dates, and EPIC could not obtain ministry records.
- **Verdict**: medium; the risk of another swing remains.

4.7 Orality and documentary heritage

- **Claim**: an oral culture leaves little written philosophy to build on.
- **Evidence**: UNESCO inscriptions of oral forms; Tijani on thin documentary evidence for classical literature.
- **Counter-argument**: oral cultures can produce sophisticated reasoning, and written manuscripts may exist uncatalogued. EPIC found no manuscript census.
- **Verdict**: unverified.

Overall (interpretation): institutional age and research capacity are the strongest causes. Demography and policy continuity have medium weight. Theology has low weight as a general cause. The absence of a philosopher has several overlapping causes, and none of the seven is sufficient alone.

5. The present: schools, universities, publishing and authors

5.1 The 2020 school philosophy subject

- 5 to 6 July 2020: the Ministry launched a remote summer programme to teach philosophy to Cycle 3 teachers of all specialisms, 5 July to 24 August 2020, two one-hour workshops weekly, with five axes including distinguishing philosophical thinking from scientific, religious and mythical thinking (Sharjah24).
- 26 July 2020: the Ministry said philosophy would join the subjects from 2020 to 2021 in three levels; the first unit of Level 3, Philosophical Thinking, had three learning outcomes: the birth of philosophy, the logic of philosophy and the value of philosophy (Al Ittihad).
- The syllabus covers existence (ontology, will, freedom and determinism), knowledge (epistemology and the sciences) and values (ethics, logic and aesthetics) (Al Ittihad via Argaam).
- 21 October 2020: Philosophy for Children programme with nine axes including the community of inquiry and Socratic dialogue; an introductory session was compulsory for Arabic, social studies and moral education teachers in Cycles 1 and 2 (Argaam citing Al Ittihad).

- **Gap**: EPIC found no philosophy textbook, enrolment figure, teacher number or evaluation. A search of published Grade 12 general-track book lists found mathematics and physics but no philosophy title, so absence of a public textbook is likely though not proven.
- Background on the 1990s: an Al Ittihad column (29 August 2022) quotes researcher Rita Faraj saying philosophy was dropped in secondary schools in the late 1990s by a Ministry decision, that the subjects Philosophical Thinking and Logical Thinking were removed from the literary section, and that some related topics, such as critical and creative thinking skills, stayed in Grade 12 literary psychology. The same column notes that Moral Education has been taught in schools since roughly a decade before 2022, and that Radwan al-Sayyid, who proposed names for MBZUH's philosophy department, sees moral education linking with religion and philosophy.
- Academic critique of the neighbouring Moral Education subject (Globalisation, Societies and Education, 2021) raises questions of authenticity and quality when a separate tested subject enters a crowded curriculum. Interpretation: philosophy faces the same risk.
- A UAE University paper (2021) finds no cohesive national framework for teacher professional development, while the Ministry's 2020 Teachers' Curriculum Forum targeted 23,000 teachers.

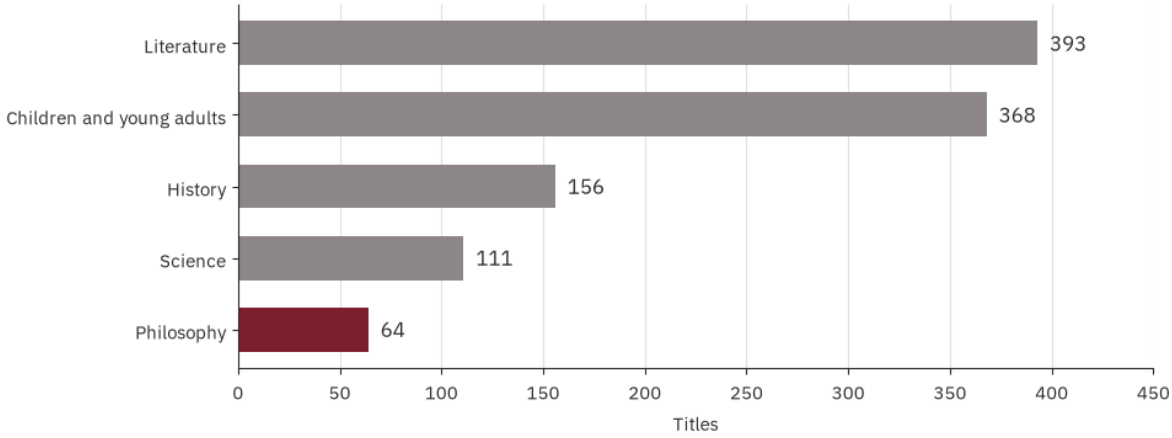
5.2 Universities and the House of Philosophy

- MBZUH: BA in Philosophy and Ethics, 120 credit hours, launched July 2022, with courses in Islamic philosophy, Islamic civilisation and AI (Gulf News). The National (2021) says MBZUH offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in humanities and philosophy.
- UAE University: the current undergraduate programme list for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences shows no philosophy degree, and The National's 2022 guide lists philosophy among subjects not taught as a major there. Professor Abduljaleel Alwali's ORCID record gives his post as Professor of Philosophy at UAEU since 15 August 2001 and refers to a Department of Philosophy. Correction to earlier versions of this study: EPIC no longer describes UAEU as a philosophy degree provider.
- NYU Abu Dhabi: philosophy major. In the Class of 2025 commencement programme EPIC counts six entries containing 'Philosophy', single or combined majors, from a two-column PDF extraction, so treat the figure as approximate; a separate secondary summary counted five. The class had 556 graduates overall according to the same summary.
- Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi: Double Bachelor in Philosophy and Sociology, taught in French, three years, 180 ECTS credits, awarding two Sorbonne Universite bachelor degrees (one in philosophy, one in sociology); the programme is listed in the fact book with the date 08/04/2019, which the extract does not label as launch or accreditation. Enrolment was 60 in 2023/24 and 61 in 2024/25; graduates in 2024/25 were 7 from the double bachelor (and 2 from the Master in Applied Sociological Research). The programme stresses epistemology, justice, freedom and equality, and the challenges of environmental change and AI.
- Fujairah House of Philosophy: founded in October 2021 under the patronage of Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad Al Sharqi; first conference November 2021 (From the Question to the Problem), second November 2022 (Philosophy and the Present); quarterly journal from January 2022; series on Arab philosophers, a youth series and the Fujairah Philosophical Circle. Dean Ahmed Barqawi calls it the first such house in the Gulf and the Arab world (Al Ittihad).
- **Interpretation**: the House builds Emirati infrastructure ahead of an Emirati school, with contributors drawn from the whole Arab world.

5.3 Publishing, translation and prizes

Indicator	Value	Source and note
Kalima titles in total	900 in 2016; 1,397 translated books from 23 languages by September 2025; 'more than 1,400' per the ALC chairman in October 2025	DCT Abu Dhabi; ALC press release of 28 September 2025; WAM 20 October 2025. WAM on 30 September 2025 gives 'more than 1,300' from 24 languages, so counts differ between releases
Kalima philosophy titles	64	ALC press release, September 2025 (earlier ALC page: 'more than 43')
Other Kalima categories	Literature 393; children and young adults 368; history 156; science 111	Same release; shares of 1,397 are 28.1, 26.3, 11.2 and 7.9 per cent (EPIC arithmetic)
Philosophy share	About 4.6 per cent (64 of 1,397)	EPIC arithmetic; earlier estimate of 3 per cent used a smaller reported count
Kalima translators	600+ in the database (older DCT page); 'over 800' (WAM 2025)	DCT; WAM
Sheikh Zayed Book Award	About ten philosophy winners, all in Arab Culture in Other Languages, among 136 winners to the 20th edition	Arabic Language Centre; no Emirati philosophy winner found
Translation grant	Since 2018, 50 titles into 12 languages	Arabic Language Centre
Philosophy journals in the UAE	1 found, quarterly since January 2022	Al Bayan; compare Qatar's Tabayyun since 2012

Figure 2. Kalima translated titles by category, September 2025 (total 1,397)



Philosophy: 64 titles, about 4.6 per cent of 1,397. Other categories as reported in the Arabic Language Centre release; shares are EPIC arithmetic. Source: Abu Dhabi Arabic Language Centre, September 2025.

Interpretation: translation is the UAE's strongest channel, and original philosophical production lags. Prize and translation structures reward imported thought and Arabic literature in translation to other languages, and they have not yet produced a local philosophical author.

5.4 Emirati scholars and writers: verified names

Name	Field and title	Verification
Ali Abu Al-Reesh	Novelist and essayist; philosophical essays (section 3.2)	Emirati per Arabic Wikipedia; Al Tibrah confirms a title

Name	Field and title	Verification
Dr Moza Ahmed Rashid Al Abbar	The Ethical Dimension of Islamic Political Thought in al-Farabi, al-Mawardi and Ibn Taymiyya, Alexandria University Press	Listed as Emirati on a books-library site; institution unconfirmed
Dr Ghadah Al Murshidi	Associate professor, UAE University; Professional Ethics in Education	Emirati per UAEU profile; applied ethics
Dr Fatima Al Mehdhar	Lecturer, Khalifa University; contemporary philosophy among interests	Emirati per university profile
Professor Abduljaleel Kadhim Alwali	Professor of Philosophy, UAEU, since August 2001; his ORCID biography lists Greek philosophy, ethical theory, intercultural and Islamic philosophy, nine peer-reviewed books and three textbooks	ORCID record; nationality not stated
Dr Mariam Al-Attar	Department of Arabic and Translation Studies, AUS; PhD in moral philosophy (work of Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar), University of Leeds, 2008; Master's thesis on 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, University of Jordan, 1996; teaches Islamic philosophy and ethics; researches women and gender in Islam	AUS profile; nationality not stated on the profile (a secondary summary called her Emirati; unverified)
Dr Maryam Al Hashmi	Emirati academic with a PhD in critical studies; profile centres on literature and criticism	Driven Magazine profile (2025); philosophy link unverified
Rashid Ahmad al-Jumayri (b. 1984)	Emirati author of a 2011 study of Sufism in the UAE, in the collective volume Sufism in the Gulf (Dubai)	Cited in Zilio Grandi's article; study of religion and heritage
Ahmad Rashid Thani (d. 2012)	Emirati heritage scholar, poet and playwright; edited an 18th-century Yemeni traveller's account of a visit to al-Sir (Ras Al Khaimah), Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, 2007	Cited in Zilio Grandi's article
Eltigani Abdelgadir Hamid	Islamic political thought, Zayed University	Nationality not stated
Dr Ahmed Barqawi	Dean of the House of Philosophy; journal editor	Nationality not stated

EPIC's search of UAE University's repository and Arabic databases surfaced no philosophy master's programme or philosophy theses at UAEU. Searches of Dar Al Mandumah, Google Scholar and ASJP were thin, so absence there is weak evidence. A full author census needs direct database access by name.

6. Country-by-country profiles

6.1 Saudi Arabia

- **Schools**: critical thinking introduced in revised study plans around 2022; a 2020 statement discussed folding philosophy into other subjects (Saudi MoE plans; Arab Weekly; Manshoor). Details differ by source.
- **Events**: a philosophy conference in Riyadh in December 2021, covered by the BBC.
- **Universities**: philosophy departments not verified in EPIC's sources.
- **Social context**: the Arab Weekly describes educational reform as progressing with resistance.
- **Freedom indicators**: V-Dem 0.066; Freedom House 9.
- **Interpretation**: Saudi Arabia has the largest population and the largest reform stakes. The UAE is ahead on dedicated institutions, and Saudi Arabia may overtake in scale.

6.2 Oman

- **Schools**: no standalone philosophy found in the Grade 12 curriculum pages EPIC checked.
- **Universities**: philosophy teaching at Sultan Qaboos University, listed in the College of Arts booklet; the college dates its activity from 1987.
- **Events**: a Cultural Club seminar on philosophy in Oman in 2024.
- **General background**: Oman has a long Ibadi theological tradition, which gives it a native intellectual heritage that the UAE lacks in documented form.
- **Freedom indicators**: V-Dem 0.215; Freedom House 24.

6.3 Qatar

- **Universities**: Doha Institute MA in philosophy; Qatar University minor in philosophy.
- **Journals**: Tabayyun, a Doha Institute journal, published since 2012.
- **Events**: annual Doha Institute conferences, including one on contemporary Arab thought in 2023 (The Peninsula).
- **Schools**: sources conflict.
- **Freedom indicators**: V-Dem 0.100; Freedom House 25.
- **Interpretation**: Qatar leads the Gulf in sustained postgraduate philosophy and journal publishing, despite low academic-freedom scores.

6.4 Kuwait

- **Universities**: department at Kuwait University since 1966 to 1967; master's since 1980 (department page).
- Publishing: the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters publishes the Alam al-Ma'rifa series, running since 1978.
- **General background**: Egyptian philosopher Fouad Zakariya taught at Kuwait University and edited Alam al-Ma'rifa; EPIC states this from general knowledge without a dedicated citation.
- **Schools**: Grade 12 literary track; Al-Araby Al-Jadeed reported in 2021 that logic was removed in 2016 and that the philosophy course faces a crisis.
- **Freedom indicators**: V-Dem 0.418; Freedom House 30.
- **Interpretation**: Kuwait has the longest Gulf academic philosophy record, and its school provision is shrinking.

6.5 Bahrain

- **Schools**: elective Philosophical Problems and Scientific Thinking.
- **Universities**: no philosophy department in the University of Bahrain's College of Arts handbook for 2024 to 2025.
- Institutions and events: none found.
- **Freedom indicators**: V-Dem 0.199; Freedom House 12.
- Tijani notes that Bahrain had an earlier literary awakening than the UAE.

6.6 Egypt and Iraq as historic centres

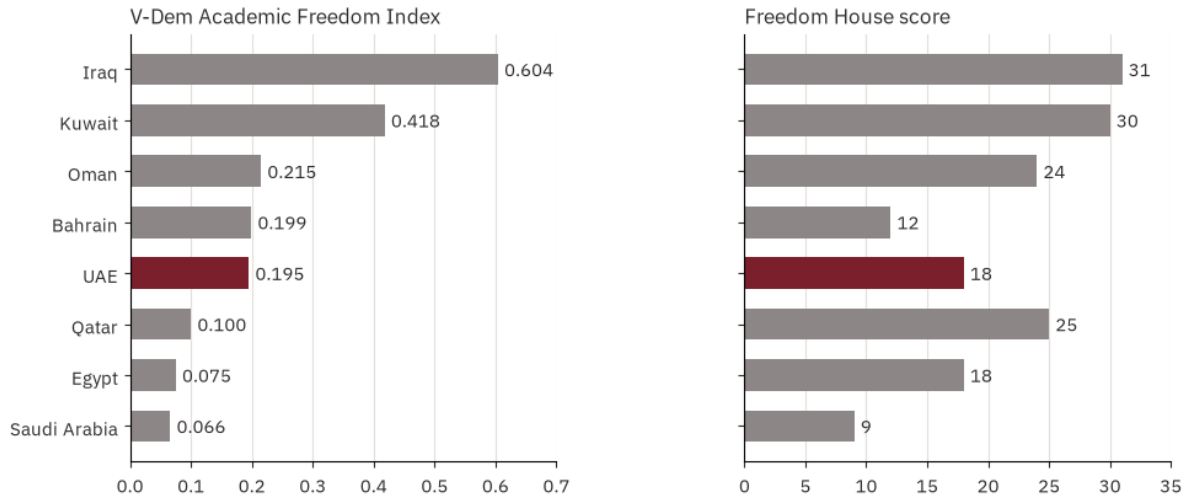
- Egypt: Cairo University's Faculty of Arts dates to 1925 (faculty brochure). General background: Egyptian philosophers such as Abdel Rahman Badawi and Zaki Naguib Mahmoud trained generations.
- Iraq: University of Baghdad's philosophy department dates from 1949 (department page); Baghdad was the centre of the medieval translation movement (section 7.1).
- **Freedom indicators**: Egypt V-Dem 0.075, Freedom House 18; Iraq V-Dem 0.604, Freedom House 31.
- **Interpretation**: both have deep academic traditions, and both score low on current stability or freedom. A long tradition does not guarantee current output.

6.7 The UAE against its neighbours

Country	Schools	Universities and outlets
UAE	Moral Education 2017; philosophy announced 2020	MBZUH 2022, NYUAD, Sorbonne Abu Dhabi; no UAEU major; House of Philosophy and journal 2021 to 2022
Saudi Arabia	Critical thinking c. 2022	Riyadh conference 2021
Oman	None found	SQU; Cultural Club seminar
Qatar	Sources conflict	Doha Institute MA; Tabayyun since 2012
Kuwait	Literary track; logic removed 2016	Department 1966 to 1967; Alam al-Ma'rifa
Bahrain	Elective	None found
Egypt	Not verified	Cairo 1925
Iraq	Not verified	Baghdad 1949

Country	V-Dem AFI 2025	Freedom House 2025
UAE	0.195	18
Saudi Arabia	0.066	9
Qatar	0.100	25
Kuwait	0.418	30
Oman	0.215	24
Bahrain	0.199	12
Egypt	0.075	18
Iraq	0.604	31

Figure 3. Academic freedom and freedom indicators, UAE and neighbours, 2025



Sources: V-Dem Academic Freedom Index 2025 (0 to 1); Freedom House 2025 (0 to 100). UAE values: V-Dem 0.195, Freedom House 18.

Interpretation: the UAE trails Egypt, Iraq and Kuwait in academic age and trails Qatar in sustained research publishing. It leads Oman and Bahrain in current institutional range, and it and Kuwait are the two Gulf states where EPIC found a dedicated school philosophy subject. Freedom House describes the UAE as a federation led in practice by Abu Dhabi, where civil liberties are subject to significant restrictions. Indices do not map neatly onto output: Qatar combines low scores with a leading journal, and Kuwait has the highest Gulf score alongside shrinking school provision.

7. Philosophical revolutions: four case studies and what they imply

These summaries draw on the sources listed (Gutas, Stanford, Isis, Routledge Encyclopedia, PBS, Darnton). For Athens and Enlightenment Europe EPIC read summaries only and did not consult full monographs.

7.1 Abbasid Baghdad and the translation movement

- Conditions: imperial wealth, caliphal and elite patronage, paper and libraries, and practical demand for astronomy, medicine and administration (Gutas; Stanford; Isis). General background: the House of Wisdom flourished under al-Ma'mun (reigned 813 to 833), with scholars such as al-Kindi and Hunayn ibn Ishaq.
- Mechanism: patrons paid translators and scholars at scale, which created a community that then produced original work.
- Implication for the UAE: the patronage model fits Kalima, the Sheikh Zayed Book Award translation grant and MBZUH. Interpretation: the Baghdad lesson is that translation leads to originality only when a community of scholars is employed for decades and when the state wants the knowledge for practical ends, which AI and technology policy could provide.

7.2 The Vienna Circle

- Conditions: a university chair (Moritz Schlick, 1922), a discussion circle from the mid-1920s of about three dozen thinkers, a 1929 manifesto, a popularising society, the journal Erkenntnis, and an encyclopaedia project (Routledge Encyclopedia; Stanford). General background: the Circle dispersed after 1936 and the Anschluss of 1938.
- Mechanism: a small interdisciplinary group, with scientists and mathematicians alongside philosophers, sharing a programme and publishing outlets.
- Implication for the UAE: a small group in one field with a journal and a shared programme can change a discipline. Interpretation: a UAE circle in philosophy of AI or ethics of technology, linking MBZUH philosophers with AI researchers at the same institutions, matches this model. The Circle's fragility after political upheaval is also a lesson on continuity.

7.3 Athens

- Conditions: democratic public debate, imperial wealth and leisure, public spaces, paid teachers (the Sophists), and then permanent schools: Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum (PBS; Oxford Handbook of Plato). General background: the Academy was founded around 387 BC and Socrates was executed in 399 BC.
- Mechanism: open argument on public questions, with institutions that outlasted individuals.
- Implication for the UAE: Athens shows that philosophy can flourish in a small city with wealth and public argument, and also that open argument can provoke a backlash. Interpretation: the majlis tradition resembles the public conversation space, and its link to university teaching has yet to be built.

7.4 Enlightenment Europe

- Conditions: cheap print, coffeehouses, salons, scientific societies and correspondence networks that formed a public sphere (Darnton). General background: the Encyclopedie appeared from 1751 to 1772.
- Mechanism: networks of readers and writers spread ideas across borders and made them a force for reform.
- Implication for the UAE: Interpretation: publishing hubs such as Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, book fairs and digital media supply the network infrastructure. The missing element is a critical readership that argues in public about concepts, which depends on freedom of inquiry.

7.5 Synthesis: what the UAE has and lacks

Condition	UAE evidence	Verdict
Patronage and funding	Kalima, House of Philosophy, MBZUH, Sheikh Zayed Book Award	Strong
Translation	43+ philosophy titles	Strong in volume, small in share
Research community	Scattered academics, no school found	Weak
Journals	One quarterly since 2022	Early stage
Link to living science	AI charter and national strategy	Promising
Open debate	Low external index scores	Uncertain

UAE Charter for the Development and Use of AI: aims include ethical and responsible AI, privacy and data security, balance between technological advance and social values, and transparency and accountability, with priorities including human-machine ties, safety and algorithmic bias. The National

Strategy for AI 2031 and Dubai's AI Ethics Guidelines are published. Interpretation: charters are policy documents, and a philosophical school would need critical scholarship on them in journals open to challenge.

Candidate fields for a UAE contribution (interpretation): philosophy of AI and technology; ethics of coexistence and tolerance; renewal of Arabic and Islamic philosophy through the translation corpus; maritime and trade ethics drawing on the region's history.

8. Forecast: the UAE and philosophy to 2071

> **READ THIS FIRST**
>
> This section is forecasting and interpretation. Every probability is EPIC's reasoned judgement built on the evidence above. None is data and none comes from a model. Scenarios are tools for thinking about what to watch.

8.1 Method and anchor facts

- **Pipeline logic (interpretation)**: a pupil in Grade 10 in 2020 to 2021 finishes school about 2023, a BA about 2027, a PhD about 2032 to 2033, and needs a further 10 to 15 years to reach international recognition, so about 2043 to 2048. Earlier recognition is possible only for people already trained abroad.
- **Anchor facts**: MBZUH BA 2022; House of Philosophy 2021 and journal 2022; no UAEU philosophy master's found; Qatar's Tabayyun a decade older; low V-Dem score (0.195); citizens under 20 per cent of the population (Tijani 2014).
- Scenario likelihoods to 2050 (judgement): base about 55 per cent; optimistic about 20 per cent; pessimistic about 25 per cent.

8.2 Year-by-year milestones, 2026 to 2035

Year	Base expectation (judgement)	Signal to watch
2026	First MBZUH BA cohort graduates, assuming a 2022 intake and a four-year degree	Graduate numbers published
2027	First Emirati students begin philosophy PhDs abroad or at MBZUH	Count of funded doctoral students
2028	House of Philosophy continues; first school cohort data released or still missing	Ministry report on school philosophy
2029	A master's or doctoral route in philosophy opens or expands locally	Programme accreditation announcements
2030	Journal indexing attempted; AI ethics centres publish under UAE affiliation	Indexing in an international database
2031	UAE AI Strategy 2031 target year; assessment of its ethics component	Independent evaluation of AI ethics
2032	First Emirati philosophy PhDs complete and take posts	Posts in UAE universities
2033	First peer-reviewed articles from this cohort appear in international journals	Emirati-affiliated publications
2034	Research groups form around AI ethics or coexistence	Named research centres

Year	Base expectation (judgement)	Signal to watch
2035	First translations of Emirati-authored philosophy into other languages; a UAE-hosted international conference with Emirati-led panels	Conference programmes

These milestones follow pipeline arithmetic and are EPIC's expectations. They are not announced plans. A delay of two to three years at any step shifts the later dates accordingly.

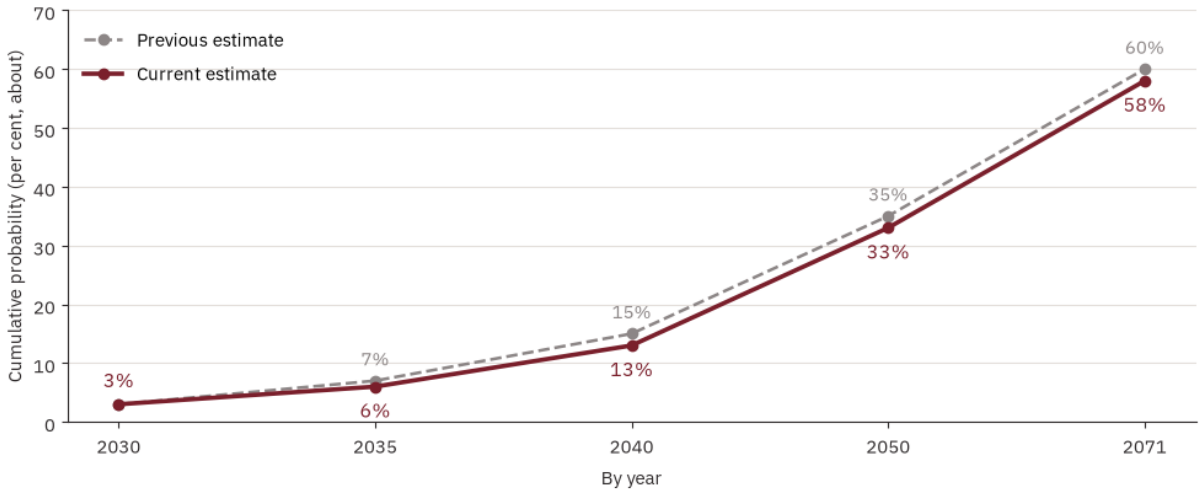
8.3 Decade-level scenarios after 2035

Horizon	Base	Optimistic	Pessimistic
2040	First generation of Emirati PhDs publishing; two or three research groups; a recognised regional journal	Emirati-led school in technology ethics with international citations	A few individuals with little community; philosophy used for official messaging
2050	At least one Emirati philosopher recognised in the Arab world and visible internationally	A cluster of Emirati thinkers with an international following	Philosophy remains imported; recognised work by foreign residents
2060	Established department tradition with second-generation scholars	Emirati philosophy exported through translation and chairs abroad	Stagnation as interest shifts to applied sciences
2071	Accepted, funded discipline with Emirati scholars of regional standing and a few of global standing	Recognised centre for philosophy of technology and coexistence	Little change in output

8.4 Probability of the first internationally recognised Emirati philosopher (EPIC's judgement)

By	Cumulative probability	Main driver
2030	About 3 per cent (unchanged)	Pipeline timing; no verified candidate now
2035	About 6 per cent (previously 7)	Early PhD cohort and people trained abroad; small graduate numbers
2040	About 13 per cent (previously 15)	First post-2020 cohort at mid-career start
2050	About 33 per cent (previously 35)	Mature local doctorates and research groups
2071	About 58 per cent (previously 60)	Institutional permanence over two generations

Figure 1. EPIC judgement: probability of a first recognised Emirati philosopher



These are EPIC judgements. Current estimates against the previous estimates (section 8.4). Source: EPIC judgement built on the evidence in sections 1 to 7.

The ceiling stays under 100 per cent because policy reversals, a small citizen population, and limited academic freedom could prevent a critical tradition from forming.

8.5 Drivers

- Funding and patronage: Kalima, prizes, MBZUH and the House of Philosophy (section 5).
- National AI and technology ethics policy (section 7.5).
- Doctoral scholarships and returns to local posts.
- School philosophy teaching and its measurement.
- A growing translated corpus that Emirati researchers can build on.

8.6 Wildcards

- AI: generative AI could change how philosophy is taught, written and translated, and could create demand for philosophical expertise in AI governance. It could also reduce demand for humanities degrees.
- Demographics: growth in the resident population and naturalisation policy would change who counts as Emirati and enlarge the talent pool.
- Policy shifts: a change of educational priorities could remove school philosophy again, as the disputed 1990s episode suggests.
- Regional events: conflict or economic shocks could redirect funding.
- A single exceptional individual: a gifted Emirati scholar could emerge early. EPIC assigns this a small probability within the 2035 figure.
- Academic mobility: a move of global scholars to Gulf institutions could create a research community faster than local training.

8.7 Risks

- Ceremonial philosophy: events and prizes without research posts.
- Narrow scope: philosophy limited to approved themes such as tolerance, which limits critical inquiry.
- Measurement failure: no published data on school uptake or graduates.
- Talent loss: graduates leaving for careers in law, business or technology.
- Dependence on foreign staff, which leaves no local school if funding shifts.

8.8 What would have to happen

1. A talented citizen enters philosophy, which needs school philosophy to be visible and respected (watch: published uptake).
2. Funded routes to PhDs at leading universities or a local doctorate, with a guaranteed research post on return.
3. Peer-reviewed publication internationally, helped by an indexed local journal.
4. A research community of colleagues in one field.
5. Space for critical argument, including about local policy.
6. A timescale of 20 years or more from the 2020 reform, so 2040 to 2050 is the central window.

8.9 Indicators dashboard

Indicator	Baseline	Milestone proposed for 2030
School philosophy enrolment and teacher counts	None found	Annual public report
Emirati students in philosophy doctorates	Not found	At least a dozen funded
Philosophy degree programmes	BA at MBZUH; UAEU department; NYUAD major	One master's and one doctoral route
Refereed philosophy journals	1 quarterly	1 with international board and indexing
Philosophy share of Kalima titles	About 3 per cent	6 per cent or more
Emirati-authored philosophy output per year	Not measured	Establish a count, then grow
V-Dem Academic Freedom Index	0.195	Rising trend

9. Policy recommendations per actor (interpretation)

These are EPIC's recommendations, grounded in the evidence above. They are not official positions.

9.1 Ministry of Education

- Publish enrolment, teacher numbers, textbook titles and assessment design for the 2020 philosophy subject, since none could be found.
- Protect timetable space and avoid the disputed 1990s pattern of removal.
- Tie teacher development to a national framework, since the UAEU paper finds none.
- Commission an independent evaluation after five years.

9.2 Universities

- Open master's and doctoral philosophy routes, and publish graduate counts.
- Create joint programmes between philosophy and AI or computer science, following the Vienna Circle model.
- Fund named chairs and early-career posts for Emirati doctoral graduates.
- Run Arabic-language theses and English-language publication support together.

9.3 Publishers and Kalima

- Raise the philosophy share of translated titles and commission original Arabic works.
- Publish an annual philosophy bibliography with Emirati authors counted.
- Edit and publish anthologies of Nabati wisdom poetry with scholarly commentary.

9.4 Prizes and foundations

- Add or sharpen a prize category for original philosophical writing in Arabic by residents and citizens.
- Fund first-book grants and doctoral scholarships.
- Support the House of Philosophy journal's move to an international indexed standard.

9.5 Families and schools

- Treat the majlis as a training ground for reasoned disagreement, which UNESCO's description already credits with listening and respect for opinion.
- Encourage children to read translated philosophy and to join school philosophy clubs where they exist.
- Value philosophy degrees as preparation for law, policy, AI governance and teaching.

9.6 Individuals, including independent researchers

- Build the missing census: a public spreadsheet of Emirati authors in philosophy, ethics and thought, with titles, dates and verification status, using Dar Al Mandumah, Google Scholar and UAE university repositories by name.
- Catalogue Nabati wisdom poetry themes with sources, working with researchers such as Sultan Al Amimi's published studies as a starting point.
- Read Ahmad ibn Majid's Fawa'id in a scholarly translation or edition and write a short note on method and conceptual content.
- Request school philosophy data from the Ministry through public channels and publish the response.
- Register an ORCID profile, publish short essays or working papers, and submit to the House of Philosophy journal or a regional journal.
- Join or form a reading group connecting philosophy with AI ethics, the Vienna Circle model on a small scale.

10. Religion and philosophy: kalam, Sufism, fiqh and official religious discourse

10.1 Official frame

- 4 February 2019: Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar signed the Document on Human Fraternity in Abu Dhabi. It states that the signatories adopt 'a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard' (Vatican text). It also mentions reflection on scientific and technical progress and the digital era.
- The Abrahamic Family House was inspired by the Document. Sheikh Saif bin Zayed and Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, inaugurated it on 16 February 2023, and it opened to visitors on 1 March 2023. It holds a mosque (named for Ahmed El-Tayeb), a church (named for Pope Francis) and a synagogue (named for Moses Ben Maimon), with a shared forum for dialogue (Abu Dhabi Media Office; Gulf News).
- Zilio Grandi (2023) lists Emirati-backed institutions in this field: the Mantle Prize (2004), Tabah Foundation (2005), Hedayah (2012), the Muslim Council of Elders (2014) and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies (2014, chaired by Abdullah bin Bayyah). She also notes that 4 February is now observed as the International Day of Human Fraternity.
- The government portal lists the General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments and the UAE Fatwa Council (created 2018, according to a secondary summary of the portal and a US State Department report) among the religious affairs entities.

10.2 Sufism and fiqh in the territory

Period	Documented	Source
17th to 18th centuries	Hasan al-Madani, a Sufi of Iraqi or Medinan origin, revered in Ras Al Khaimah; his tomb dome was rebuilt by Rashid bin Matar Al Qasimi after damage in 1782. Dates differ: Zilio Grandi gives 1693; Sheikh Sultan Al Qasimi's publication gives arrival around 1676 to 1677	Zilio Grandi 2023; Al Qasimi 2020
18th century	An Alawi-Haddadi community in al-Sir (Ras Al Khaimah); a Yemeni traveller, Alawi al-Haddad, visited the tomb of a relative there and met followers; his account was edited by Ahmad Rashid Thani (2007)	Zilio Grandi 2023, citing al-Jumayri 2011
Nabati poetry	Majidi bin Dhaher, who lived between the 17th and 19th centuries, compares palm trees swaying in the wind to Sufis of the Badriyya and Rifa'iyya orders	Zilio Grandi 2023, citing al-Muhayri 2019
1799 or 1800	A Saudi military expedition and siege of Ras Al Khaimah forced the Qawasim to ban Sufi practices, including veneration of deceased masters	Zilio Grandi 2023
Late 19th century	Muhammad Umar al-Afghani (d. 1918), Qadiri, served as imam in Abu Dhabi and lived in Dubai under the Al Maktoum, with some Hanbali opposition in Dubai and Sharjah; Abdullah al-Murid (Rifa'i) arrived in Dubai from Oman in 1880; his son Abd al-Rahim al-Murid (d. 2007) continued the mawlid and nazm tradition	Zilio Grandi 2023
Legal school	Al-Jumayri notes the Maliki orientation of Dubai's rulers and its openness to the spiritual dimension of Islam	Zilio Grandi 2023
Written record	Zilio Grandi describes an almost total absence of written sources on Sufism in the UAE, and records that Lorimer's Gazetteer (1908 to 1915) declared the absence of Sufi aggregations in the region	Zilio Grandi 2023

This closes part of the gap on scholars connected to the territory. The names are Sufi teachers and community leaders from the 17th to the 20th century, and several were immigrants or travellers. EPIC found no named kalam theologian, jurist-philosopher or Ibadi scholar of the territory before the 17th century. General background: the Ibadi tradition centred on Oman's interior, and EPIC did not trace individual scholars of the coast.

10.3 Interpretation and counter-views

- **Interpretation**: religious thought in the UAE is institutionally strong and ethics-oriented. The official emphasis on tolerance, dialogue and coexistence supplies a ready theme for philosophy of coexistence and comparative ethics.
- **General background**: classical Islamic philosophy grew from engagement with kalam and Greek thought. A modern equivalent would link philosophy with theology and ethics, and MBZUH's degree in philosophy and ethics, with Islamic philosophy courses, follows that pattern.
- Counter-view documented: critics quoted by Zilio Grandi describe the Emirati model as a political choice in the regional contest with Salafism and political Islam, and a Saudi doctoral thesis she cites argues the UAE imported Sufism through migrant scholars. Supporters present it as balanced or enlightened Islam. EPIC reports both without ruling.
- **Interpretation**: philosophy that serves a state-promoted theme can stay descriptive. Philosophical independence would show in journals that examine the theme critically.

11. Language: Arabic and English in higher education

- Solloway (2018) reports that English is the de facto medium of instruction at the three federally sponsored institutions and, citing Sperrazza (2012), that over 60 per cent of students in the country receive higher education in English, although Arabic is the sole de jure official language.

- In his survey of 43 foundation-programme students at a federal institution, 81.39 per cent favoured being able to choose Arabic or English as the main language of tuition. The sample is small and from one institution.
- A 2020 article in Language Policy asks about proficiency, choices and the future of Arabic in UAE higher education (title and abstract only reviewed).
- Sorbonne Abu Dhabi teaches the philosophy and sociology double bachelor in French (programme leaflet). NYU Abu Dhabi teaches in English. MBZUH's philosophy degree language is not confirmed in EPIC's sources.
- Kalima translates into Arabic (1,397 books by September 2025). In October 2025 the ALC launched 'From Kalima to the World' to translate selected Arabic literature and thought into major world languages (WAM).

Interpretation: a UAE philosopher may work in three languages. Arabic carries the audience, the translation corpus and the heritage texts. English carries the international journals, and French carries one degree route. A recognised Emirati philosopher would probably publish in English for peers and in Arabic for the local public. The Arabic philosophical vocabulary depends on translation, which is why Kalima's philosophy list matters. A risk is that students taught in English meet Arabic philosophical terms late. A counter-argument is that Arabic-English bilingualism can be an advantage in comparative and Islamic philosophy.

12. Women and philosophy in the UAE

- Majlis: UNESCO notes women have their own majlis, some academic or literary.
- Verified Emirati names in section 5.4: Dr Ghadah Al Murshidi (ethics in education, UAEU), Dr Fatima Al Mehdhar (contemporary philosophy, Khalifa University) and Dr Moza Al Abbar (Islamic political ethics). Three of the four verified-Emirati names in that table are women. The sample is tiny and the finding is indicative.
- Dr Mariam Al-Attar (AUS) holds a PhD in moral philosophy (Leeds, 2008) and researches women and gender in Islam; her nationality is unverified.
- Student base: Sorbonne Abu Dhabi reports 68 per cent female students in Fall 2025 (1,232 of 1,814 in the annual report extract), with 1,169 Emirati students overall. This is institution-wide data, with no philosophy split.
- Abu Al-Reesh's governance book lists women's empowerment among the themes it examines in Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid's thought (catalogue descriptions).

Interpretation: if female enrolment in humanities stays high, the first recognised Emirati philosopher may well be a woman. Whether women reach senior research posts depends on the same funding and posting issues in section 13. EPIC found no UAE-specific study of women in philosophy.

13. Economy and incentives

- Rentier-state theory (Beblawi and Luciani): a state financed by external rents decouples reward from effort and skills. Summaries of the literature on the UAE and the Gulf apply this to graduate choices, with secure public posts preferred over demanding technical study or private careers (e-IR article; Wiley article on the state and the knowledge economy in the Gulf; both reviewed via abstracts).

- Emiratisation policy has struggled to move citizens into private-sector work, which is seen as insecure and dominated by expatriates (Emerald article; Harvard Growth Lab paper on UAE labour-market dynamics, 2022; abstracts reviewed).
- Career paths for philosophy graduates named by Sorbonne Abu Dhabi: public administration, international organisations, diplomacy, strategy, psychology, education, media, communication, consulting, human resources and research. An alumna who graduated in 2025 reports joining KPMG Lower Gulf as a Digital Transformation Consultant (programme leaflet testimonial).
- The Ministry of Education and universities are the main likely employers of philosophy teachers; EPIC found no employer census.

Interpretation: the UAE's move towards a knowledge economy creates demand for AI governance, ethics, policy and communication roles, which are plausible careers for philosophy graduates. A research career in philosophy needs funded posts, and incentives favouring secure public roles could draw talented citizens to administration rather than scholarship. Counter-argument: the same secure funding can support long research projects that private markets would not. The outcome depends on whether universities create tenure-track posts for Emirati scholars.

14. Media, publishing, book fairs and reading

Indicator	Value	Source
Arab Reading Challenge, ninth edition (2025)	32.231 million students, 132,112 schools, 50 countries, 161,004 supervisors; 14.2 per cent up on 28.2 million in the eighth edition	UAE Media Office, 7 April 2025
Arab Reading Challenge, cumulative	More than 163 million students over nine editions; first edition 3.6 million; AED 99 million in prizes; pupils from grades 1 to 12 read and summarise 50 books a year	MBRGI annual report 2025; Gulf News; Media Office
Sharjah International Book Fair 2025	2,350 publishers and exhibitors from 118 countries (1,224 Arab, 1,126 international); 1,400,730 visitors from 206 countries	Publishing Perspectives; Khaleej Times
Global Knowledge Index 2024	UAE 26th globally, first among the 11 Arab countries assessed, score 60.9	MBRF
Arab Reading Index (earlier edition)	UAE adults reported reading about 51 hours and 24 books a year, leading the GCC	The National; PR Newswire release; year not confirmed

Interpretation: the UAE runs the largest reading and book-fair infrastructure in the Arab world. None of these indicators splits philosophy from other genres, so they show reading volume without showing readers of philosophy. The Arab Reading Challenge targets school-age reading, and its stated aims include critical thinking (MBRGI). Abu Dhabi International Book Fair is directed by the same person who is executive director of the Arabic Language Centre (Saeed Hamdan Al Tunaiji, WAM 2025), which links the fair with Kalima and the Sheikh Zayed Book Award. Newspapers such as Al Ittihad and Al Bayan carry culture pages and have reported on the House of Philosophy, as the sources show. A philosophy readership indicator, such as sales or loans of philosophy titles, would be a useful new statistic.

15. AI and the philosophy of technology

- 2017: the UAE appointed the world's first Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence (UAE government portal).
- National Strategy for AI 2031: eight objectives, including AI talent, research, governance and regulation, and a reputation as an AI destination (strategy document).

- January 2019: Smart Dubai launched guidelines on the ethical use of AI, requiring AI to be fair, transparent, accountable and understandable (Digital Dubai).
- MBZUAI: founded in 2019 as a graduate research university for AI; 365 enrolled graduate students in 2025 per its catalogue and commencement programme, as summarised by search; it also welcomed an inaugural undergraduate cohort (university news).
- Sorbonne Abu Dhabi: a Bachelor in Mathematics, Specialisation in Data Science for AI, had 104 students in 2024/25 (fact book), and its philosophy programme gives special focus to environmental change and the development of AI and new technologies (leaflet).
- MBZUH's philosophy degree includes an AI component (Gulf News, section 5.2).
- The Document on Human Fraternity lists the digital era and mass media among the matters its authors reflected on.
- Stargate UAE: OpenAI announced a 1-gigawatt compute cluster in Abu Dhabi (OpenAI page; capacity timing reported as 200 MW in 2026).

Why this may be the likeliest niche (interpretation): the UAE has policy demand, funded AI institutions, and philosophy teaching that already mentions AI. A philosopher inside such an ecosystem can work on fairness, accountability, human-machine relations, Arabic-language AI and Islamic ethics of technology. General background: MBZUAI and partners released Jais, an Arabic-focused large language model, in 2023; EPIC did not verify details here. Counter-arguments: ethics statements can become reputation management; global competition in AI ethics is intense; and the field needs scholars who can criticise the national strategy independently. The Vienna Circle lesson (section 7.2) is that a small interdisciplinary group with shared outlets can matter more than size.

16. Diaspora and expatriate thinkers in the UAE

Person	Role in the UAE	Source
Radwan al-Sayyid	Lebanese academic trained in Tubingen and Al-Azhar, described as head of MBZUH; a proponent of linking enlightened intellectuals with traditional institutions; asked to propose names for MBZUH's philosophy department	Zilio Grandi 2023; Al Ittihad 2022
Abdullah bin Bayyah	Mauritanian scholar chairing the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, Abu Dhabi, since 2014	Zilio Grandi 2023
Ali al-Jifri	Yemeni scholar, founder and director of Tabah Foundation, Abu Dhabi (2005)	Zilio Grandi 2023
Abduljaleel Alwali	Professor of Philosophy, UAEU, since 2001; nationality not stated	ORCID
Ahmed Barqawi	Dean of the House of Philosophy, Fujairah; nationality not stated	Al Ittihad 2022
French faculty at Sorbonne Abu Dhabi	The department says its faculty are professors and lecturers from France	Sorbonne Abu Dhabi
Earlier immigrants named by a Saudi critic	Vehbi Gavoci (Albanian, in Dubai from 1986), Mahmud Ahmad al-Zayn (Aleppo) and Omani Muhammad al-Khazraji, cited as migrants who taught or published on religion	Zilio Grandi 2023, citing al-Badah 2015

Documented context: Tijani (2014) reports citizens as under 20 per cent of the population; Sorbonne Abu Dhabi reports 1,169 Emirati students among 1,814 in Fall 2025. Interpretation: most philosophy teaching and religious-thought leadership in the UAE comes from outside, which brings expertise and carries dependence. Two readings are possible. A broad one counts any philosopher whose work is produced in UAE institutions as part of UAE philosophy, as with Athens and Baghdad, which drew scholars from elsewhere. A narrow one counts only citizens. EPIC suggests tracking both, which section 20 and the recommendations support.

17. The philosophy of the founding: Sheikh Zayed's sayings and governance thought

Only verifiable sources are used. A 2005 Gulf News compilation, Shaikh Zayed in quotes, gives these English renderings, whose translation provenance is not stated:

- On wealth and people: 'Wealth is not money. Wealth lies in men.' He adds that this convinced the leadership to direct resources to building the individual and using wealth in the service of the nation.
- On education: 'The real asset of any advanced nation is its people, especially the educated ones, and the prosperity and success of the people are measured by the standard of their education.'
- On work: 'Man is mortal, but his work is not. Therefore, work is greater than wealth.'
- On consultation: 'I am not imposing change on anyone. That is tyranny. All of us have our opinions, and these opinions can change. Sometimes we put all opinions together, and then extract from them a single point of view. This is our democracy.'
- The Arabic Language Centre's chairman says Sheikh Zayed's poetic experience has a philosophical dimension and genuine wisdom (earlier cited ALC statement).
- Abu Al-Reesh's Zayed, the Ethical Personality (2017) offers an ethical reading (title and year from the Arabic Wikipedia list; content unread).
- The majlis (section 1) is described by UNESCO as a space of dialogue and respect for opinion, which fits the consultation quotation.

Interpretation: these sayings express practical principles: human capital as the real wealth, education as the measure of progress, work as legacy and consultation as a method of decision. A philosophy of the founding could be reconstructed from the full Arabic corpus of speeches and interviews, and compared with Islamic political ethics and with modern theories of development. EPIC did not find such a study. The quotations alone do not constitute a philosophical system, and attributing one to them would need scholarship EPIC could not verify.

18. Comparative quantitative table: UAE and neighbours

Only sourced figures appear. 'Unknown' means EPIC found no reliable number.

Country	Degrees and numbers	Journals and series	Translation and schools
UAE	MBZUH BA (120 credits, 2022), NYUAD major (about 6 listed in Class of 2025), Sorbonne AD double bachelor (61 students, 7 graduates in 2024/25); UAEU none; MBZUH numbers unknown	House of Philosophy quarterly, from January 2022	Kalima 64 philosophy titles of 1,397 (4.6 per cent); school philosophy announced 2020, uptake unknown
Saudi Arabia	Unknown	Unknown	Critical thinking in revised plans around 2022 per sources; philosophy status unclear; Riyadh conference 2021
Qatar	Doha Institute MA; QU minor; numbers unknown	Tabayyun, since 2012	Unknown; school sources conflict
Kuwait	KU department since 1966 to 1967; master's since 1980; numbers unknown	Alam al-Ma'rifa series since 1978 (philosophy count unknown)	Grade 12 literary track; logic removed 2016
Oman	SQU teaches philosophy; numbers unknown	Unknown	No standalone school philosophy found

Country	Degrees and numbers	Journals and series	Translation and schools
Bahrain	None found at University of Bahrain	None found	Elective Philosophical Problems and Scientific Thinking
Egypt	Cairo Faculty of Arts, 1925; numbers unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Iraq	University of Baghdad department, 1949; numbers unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Interpretation: the UAE has the only published philosophy-translation count in this table, so a like-for-like comparison of publishing is impossible. Counting philosophy graduates, journals and translated titles for each country is a feasible research project (section 20).

19. Forecast update: what changed and why

> **FORECASTING AND INTERPRETATION**
>
> The revised probabilities in section 8.4 are EPIC's reasoned judgement, labelled as such. They are not data.

- Evidence lowering the forecast: documented annual graduates are small. Sorbonne Abu Dhabi graduated 7 in 2024/25 and NYU Abu Dhabi had about 6 philosophy entries in 2025, which is roughly a dozen across two institutions, with MBZUH unknown and the Emirati share unknown. UAE University has no philosophy major, which removes the largest national university as a pipeline.
- Evidence holding the forecast: Kalima's philosophy output reached 64 titles and a 4.6 per cent share, above EPIC's earlier 3 per cent estimate; Sorbonne's programme has run since at least 2019 and enrols about 60 students a year; the AI institutional base is strong and philosophy courses already mention AI.
- Net change: a reduction of one to two percentage points at each horizon from 2035 onwards, with 2030 unchanged at about 3 per cent. The central window stays in the 2040s.
- Further wildcards: religious-discourse policy (section 10), language of instruction (section 11), and career incentives (section 13). Each could move the timing by several years.
- What would raise the forecast most: published MBZUH graduate and doctoral counts, an Emirati philosophy PhD cohort, and an indexed Arabic or bilingual journal.

20. Ledger of gaps: closed, partial and open

Gap	Status	Figures and sources
Ministry of Education curriculum details	Partial	Three levels from 2020 to 2021; fields of existence, knowledge, values; Level 3 unit Philosophical Thinking with three outcomes; teacher programme 5 July to 24 August 2020 (Sharjah24; Al Ittihad). The 1990s removal described by Rita Faraj (Al Ittihad 2022)
Ministry textbooks	Open	No philosophy title found in Grade 12 general-track book lists; no official page found
School uptake	Open	No enrolment, teacher count or evaluation found
Sorbonne Abu Dhabi enrolment and graduates	Closed	60 (2023/24), 61 (2024/25); 7 graduates from the double bachelor in 2024/25 (fact books)

Gap	Status	Figures and sources
NYU Abu Dhabi philosophy graduates	Partial	About six philosophy entries in Class of 2025 programme (EPIC extraction); five according to a secondary summary
UAE University	Closed	No philosophy major in the catalogue or in The National's 2022 guide; Professor Alwali in post since 2001
MBZUH enrolment and graduates	Open	BA launched July 2022; only whole-university graduate counts found
Ali Abu Al-Reesh's works and themes	Partial	Five non-fiction titles 2015 to 2020 with themes from catalogues; books not read
Kalima philosophy total	Closed	64 of 1,397 (ALC, 28 September 2025); chairman says more than 1,400 (WAM, 20 October 2025)
Islamic-era scholars connected to the territory	Partial	Sufi teachers from the 17th century to 2007 (Zilio Grandi); nothing named before the 17th century
Emirati writers and academics in philosophy or ethics	Partial	Section 5.4 table; none with an international philosophy record verified
Emirati philosophy PhDs	Open	None verified; Al-Attar's PhD (Leeds, 2008) is documented, her nationality is not
Philosophy readership data	Open	No indicator found that isolates philosophy

Conclusion

The documented record explains the absence of Emirati philosophers mainly through late institutions, with demography, research capacity and policy swings as supporting causes. The counter-arguments show that none of these is decisive alone, which is why change can come within a generation. The present has real foundations: a school decision, a degree, a house of philosophy, translation funding and AI governance. The forecast is judgement: the first recognised Emirati philosopher most plausibly appears in the 2040s, and the best chance of a distinctive contribution lies in applied ethics and technology. The outcome depends on whether the pipeline is funded and its output is measured and open to criticism.

Gaps and next research steps

- The ledger in section 20 shows which gaps are closed. Remaining priorities follow.
- Obtain Ministry of Education records on the school philosophy subject, including textbooks and uptake.
- Run name-based searches in Arabic and English databases to build an author census.
- Obtain graduate counts for UAE philosophy programmes.
- Find primary evidence for medieval scholars of the territory, if any survive.
- Read Abu Al-Reesh's books and Ibn Majid's Fawa'id directly for case-study analysis.
- Confirm the Kalima total from the publisher itself.

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