DUBAI
Knowledge المعرفة

PART ONE

Guide to the Policy on Arabic Language Provision in the Private Early Childhood Education Sector in Dubai

FOR CHILDREN AGED FOUR TO SIX YEARS

PHASE ONE

August **2025**

> **We believe that our vision and aspirations for a better future for the UAE begin in our schools, classrooms, and curricula, and that focusing on the Arabic language and developing its teaching methods and approaches is an integral part of this vision.**

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE

CONTENTS

Introduction

Research and experience show that learning a new language, especially through play, stories and immersive experiences, supports children's intellectual and emotional development.

These Guidelines are designed to help school leaders and teachers bring Arabic language and Emirati culture to life in early years classrooms through meaningful play and everyday interactions.

Learning the Arabic language enhances children's cognitive development, deepens their understanding of Emirati culture and prepares them for a world where being fluent in more than one language is increasingly essential.

Children in Dubai enter early childhood settings speaking a range of languages and dialects of Arabic. Research referenced in these Guidelines shows that both native and non-native speakers of Arabic learn Standard Arabic more effectively in an immersive environment. In such settings, Standard Arabic is seamlessly integrated into their daily experiences, combined with systematic teaching of phonological awareness, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills to achieve fluency in Standard Arabic.

Starting from September 2025, teachers of Arabic will collaborate and work alongside early years educators to integrate the teaching and learning of Standard Arabic using engaging and play-based activities. Through stories, rhymes, songs, and direct group interactions, children will be supported in developing their knowledge and skills in Standard Arabic naturally and enjoyably.

These Guidelines support leaders, teachers, and practitioners in schools and early childhood centres (referred to as settings in this document) in implementing the Arabic language requirements outlined in KHDA's Policy on Arabic Language Provision in Early Childhood Education, the Ministry of Education (MoE)'s Mandatory Subject Guide in Private Kindergartens, and any future related guidelines.

Section One outlines the key requirements and includes a checklist leaders may use to plan the implementation of the policy requirements in their settings.

Section Two explains the core principles for integrating Arabic into the early years' curriculum, as well as the fundamentals for teaching Arabic to children aged four to six, ensuring a shared understanding of the vision for teaching and learning of Standard Arabic.

Section Three provides practical strategies for teachers, including planning, organisation, and assessment.

Section Four defines the key learning expectations in Standard Arabic in the pre-primary phase (up to age six), guiding teachers in assessing children's progress from their starting points and in facilitating a smooth transition into formal schooling.

Section Five emphasises the key role of leaders in ensuring the requirements are implemented consistently within high-quality early years provision that nurtures Standard Arabic language learning through play and enjoyment.

Section Six outlines expectations for staff training and induction and includes research excerpts that settings could use to support professional development and reflective practice.

Section One

Statutory requirements for Arabic language provision in early childhood settings

Statutory requirements for Arabic language provision in early childhood settings

All private schools, early childhood centres (ECCs), and any future services licensed by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) must implement Arabic language provision in line with these guidelines starting September 2025.

Settings have three academic years to ensure that all existing and new staff meet the required qualifications.

Implementation timeline:

PHASE ONE

For children aged four to six.
Effective from September 2025
(or April 2026 for schools following an April to March academic calendar).

PHASE TWO

For children aged three to four.
Timeline to be confirmed.

PHASE THREE

For children from birth to three years.
Timeline to be confirmed .

The implementation of Phases 2 and 3 will depend on the evaluation of Phase 1 outcomes, which will be conducted two years after Phase 1 begins in September 2025.

All teachers delivering the Arabic language must be registered in the KHDA system. Their weekly teaching schedules must be clearly documented and made available to KHDA for review upon request.

Settings must also be prepared to provide KHDA with evidence of the curriculum being taught for Arabic language, ensuring alignment with these guidelines and the school's curriculum and any future curriculum requirements issued by the Ministry of Education. Information must include assessment data on children's progress and attainment in Arabic language.

Teachers, instructional requirements, training and qualifications

All settings serving children aged four to six must employ a sufficient number of appropriately qualified teachers of Arabic, based on their language model. Children must be exposed to Arabic for at least one-third of their weekly instructional time. This should include a variety of activities such as child-led, teacher-led, whole-group and small-group learning experiences. In line with KHDA's Policy on Arabic Language Provision in Early Childhood Education and MoE's Mandatory Subjects Guide in Private Kindergartens, children must receive a minimum of 200 to 300 minutes per week of structured, Arabic teacher-led activities.

In addition to the structured Arabic language time allocation, teachers of Arabic should have their schedules organised to ensure they are present in each classroom or section at different times throughout the day. This enables them to support the integration of Arabic language learning during various daily activities, such as meals, playtime, and teacher-led activities.

No teacher of Arabic should be responsible for more than 75 children within the defined age group in total across all the classes they are assigned to. Staff within the setting are required to plan with and work together with Arabic teachers to deliver a balanced mix of one-to-one, small group and whole group activities implemented consistently across the setting. Leaders must ensure that the same group of children interact the same Arabic teacher for different activities on different days of the week.

Teachers of Arabic must participate in regular professional development, completing a minimum of 20 hours of training annually. This training should focus on ways children acquire the Arabic language as well as guiding principles for early childhood education, including play- and inquiry-based learning.

Teachers of Arabic must be included in the setting's appraisal or performance review system. This process must ensure that there is observation and discussion of their performance including planning, teaching and assessment of children's progress and attainment. This is also an opportunity to review their professional development and training requirements as well as setting targets for improvement.

Qualifications and experience for teachers of Arabic for children aged four to six years

Settings must comply with KHDA's published requirements for teacher qualifications and experience when recruiting teachers in private schools and early childhood centres.

This compliance must be achieved within three academic years starting from September 2025.

Qualifications	A Bachelor's degree or higher (Level 6 QFEmirates) in one of the following: ○ Education or Early Childhood Education ○ Arabic or a related field (Journalism or Law -if Arabic was the medium of instruction, Sharia or Islamic Studies) ○ Any other discipline, provided the applicant also holds a Level 3 QFEmirates certification in Early Childhood Education
Experience	At least one year of recent experience as a teacher or leader in an early childhood setting *Or* For new teachers, at least six months of supervised teaching practice by an experienced early childhood teacher.

The following checklist supports leaders in planning and implementing the requirements for the teaching of Arabic language in their settings by September 2025.

Arabic language provision from September 2025	
Leaders and those responsible for governance ensure that the statutory requirements from these Guidelines are integrated into the setting's philosophy, policies and plans.	☐
Leaders ensure that a sufficient number of qualified teachers of Arabic are employed to meet the policy requirements.	☐
Leaders ensure that all the teachers of Arabic employed meet the required qualifications and experience within the designated three-year compliance period.	☐
Leaders ensure that all teachers of Arabic are registered in the KHDA system with complete details.	☐
Leaders ensure that all staff and parents are informed of the implementation of Phase 1, starting from **September 2025** or **April 2026** (for April to March schools).	☐
Leaders ensure that all staff are informed and trained to implement the requirements as detailed in these Guidelines.	☐
Leaders ensure that teachers of Arabic are included in the setting's appraisal or performance review system.	☐
Leaders ensure they review and publish the setting's policy on the teaching of Arabic in line with these Guidelines. The type of Arabic language provision offered has been clearly identified as one of the following: 1. Arabic language of instruction; or 2. Arabic-based bilingual model; or 3. English-based bilingual model; or 4. English-based multilingual model; or 5. Multilingual model This information has been submitted to KHDA through the setting's profile in the KHDA system.	☐
Leaders ensure that teachers of Arabic actively support children's learning of Arabic language for a minimum of one-third of the children's instructional time and that structured teacher-led activities are provided no less than 200 to 300 minutes a week.	☐
Leaders ensure that staff consistently plan and work collaboratively with teachers of Arabic to deliver a balanced mix of one-to-one, small group and whole group activities. Their weekly teaching schedules must be clearly documented and are available for KHDA to review upon request.	☐

Arabic language provision from September 2025

Leaders ensure that the same group of children interact with the teacher of Arabic across different activities on different days of the week. ☐

Leaders ensure the consistent use of active, play-based learning, as detailed in these Guidelines, with clear integration of UAE culture and values. ☐

Leaders ensure that there is continuous assessment of children's knowledge, skills and understanding of Arabic language. Assessment information is used effectively to inform planning and support each child's next steps. ☐

Leaders ensure that the key learning language expectations outlined in Section Four are used to evaluate children's Arabic language learning outcomes. ☐

Leaders ensure that all parents are regularly supported in ways that they can enhance their child's learning of Arabic language. ☐

Leaders ensure that parents receive regular feedback and reports on their child's progress and attainment in Arabic language. ☐

Leaders are prepared to provide KHDA with evidence of the Arabic curriculum being taught and how it aligns with these Guidelines and the school's curriculum.

This evidence should include a detailed assessment of children's progress and attainment in their learning of the Arabic language and how this data informs planning. ☐

Leaders ensure they have planned for children's transition, including using end-of-stage assessments to support progression to the next stage of learning. ☐

Leaders ensure that future planning includes the integration of Phases 2 and 3 into the school's provision ☐

Section Two

Principles and fundamentals of teaching the Arabic language

Principles and fundamentals of teaching the Arabic language

These guidelines are underpinned by a broad base of research demonstrating the consistent benefits of early additional language learning for all children. These benefits include increased cognitive development, improved educational outcomes, and long-term social and economic benefits.

There is no single profile of a child learning Arabic. Children enter early childhood settings with varied linguistic backgrounds. They may come from homes where:

- Arabic is the native language and main language used for communication.
- Standard Arabic is spoken.
- Arabic is the primary language, and the child is bilingual in other language(s).
- Arabic is not the primary language.
- Arabic is not the primary language, and the child is bilingual in other languages.

Because of this diversity, a one size fits all approach will not meet the needs of all learners. Each child's journey into Arabic language learning will vary depending on their existing knowledge, understanding and use of Arabic at the time they enter the setting.

Key principles for Arabic Language provision

Leaders create a positive ethos where learning Arabic and engaging with Emirati culture is a meaningful and enjoyable experience for all children in Dubai.

Provision takes into account and builds upon the home language and cultural background of each child as they develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of Arabic Language.

Arabic is taught through a dual language, integrated approach which enhances children's language development and all-round cognitive functioning.

Arabic language provision is from native/fluent Arabic speakers, who model accurate pronunciation and use Standard Arabic in meaningful contexts.

Teachers of Arabic language are part of the early childhood team and fully involved in all aspects including planning and assessment.

High-quality early childhood provision, with a play-based active approach to learning, supports the teaching of Arabic language.

Teachers of Arabic are well-qualified and experienced, with sufficient time allocated to work with each group of children. This ensures secure Arabic language development.

The focus is on developing oral language through play, storytelling, songs, and an emotionally and language- rich environment in the early stages of language learning.

Support is provided for children to develop the motor skills required for speech and writing before they are expected to engage in formal activities.

Sufficient time is given for children to embed their knowledge, skills and understanding before progressing to the next stage.

Specific planning for the learning of Arabic language needs to build upon continuous assessment, detailing where children are in their learning and where they need to go to next.

Key expected linguistic competencies is used to assess children's progress and attainment from their starting points and to support their transition to the next phase of learning.

Support is provided for parents so that they can engage actively with their children in their learning of Arabic language.

Key fundamentals for building foundational Arabic Language skills

Readiness for learning

Early childhood education is unique and requires a tailored approach. At the start of the academic year, learning should begin with a series of well-planned, engaging preparatory activities designed to foster children's readiness for learning.

These activities should include:

- Diverse, purposeful, and enjoyable experiences that help children integrate into the setting and interact positively with their peers. Examples include games, songs, music, drawing, physical activities, storytelling, and imaginative play.
- Introducing children to learning centres, facilities, daily routine, and activities.

During this initial phase, Arabic language exposure should occur naturally within these play-based and immersive contexts. Rather than direct language instruction, children should hear Arabic in meaningful situations and see it visually throughout the setting's environment. This approach allows children to become familiar with the sounds, letters and shapes of the Arabic language in an enjoyable way.

Approach to teaching Arabic in early childhood

Children may enter settings with little or no prior exposure to Standard Arabic, regardless of whether they come from Arabic-speaking or non-Arabic-speaking households. Therefore, teachers at this stage play a vital role in preparing children to acquire and begin learning Standard Arabic.

To achieve this, teaching strategies should focus on building proficiency in the four foundational language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Emphasis should be placed on the five components of early reading development: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and fluency. These components provide the essential, structured entry points for establishing a strong linguistic foundation and fostering overall language development. [1]

The following sections provide a detailed explanation of the four core language skills, including their key concepts and the sub-skills of each component.

1. Guidelines for teaching reading skills (The five components of reading)

Arabic language teaching in early childhood should begin with a focus on reading readiness, grounded in the five essential components of reading. For each of these five components, teachers must be familiar with their definitions, related skills, and developmental levels.

a.   Phonological awareness

Refers to the child's ability to recognise the sound structure of words, including individual sounds and syllables. It also includes the ability to identify and distinguish sounds and syllables within words, analyse and synthesise sounds to form words, and to manipulate word sounds by deleting, adding, or substituting. This component is particularly critical in Arabic language learning, as children often enter the settings with exposure to various dialects or foreign languages and typically lack familiarity with the phonetic system of Standard Arabic.

---

[1] National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: Reports of the Subgroups. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.. Report of the national reading panel: teaching children to read: reports of the subgroups. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

At this stage, teaching should focus exclusively on phonics awareness, without using any written content of letters, syllables, or words. This ensures children focus on practising the sounds and phonetic syllables of the language. For example, if the teacher wants to teach children the sound of the letter (ع), the teacher might use pictures representing words that begin with that sound (ع), such as عَلم (flag), عِنب (grapes), or عُصفور (bird). The focus remains entirely on listening to and articulating the sound, without showing the written form of the letter or words.

This approach supports children's natural language development and prepares them for formal reading by developing their phonetic listening skills and awareness of the structure and rhythm of Arabic.

As children's initial learning depends on developing their readiness for the Arabic phonetic system, teachers must understand the components of the Arabic phonetic system and the types of syllables in Arabic.

Components of the phonetic unit in the Arabic Language

The phonetic system (phoneme) in the Arabic language consists of two main phonetic units:

Consonants	Vowels (short and long)
All Arabic letters when unvowelled (without short vowels or long vowel extensions).	The short vowels الفتحة (fatha), الضمّة (dammah), and الكسرة (kasrah) and the long vowels الألف, الواو, الياء.

Main types of syllables in the Arabic Language:

Arabic is phonologically structured into these main syllable types:

Short Open Syllable	Long Open Syllable	Long Closed Syllable
A syllable that begins with a consonant followed by a short vowel (fatha, dammah, or kasrah), such as (عَ/ لِ /مَ) for عَلِمَ.	Consists of a consonant followed by a long vowel, such as (عا) in the word عالم.	Begins with a consonant, followed by a short vowel, and ends with a silent consonant, such as (مِن, قَد).

The three aforementioned syllable types vary in complexity. Therefore, early childhood Arabic instruction should begin with words containing short open syllables such as (توت – تين - باسم) and long open syllables (سَمَك - عَسَل - جَمَل).

Words containing long closed syllables, such as (مَكْتَبَة – مُستشفى - مِلعَقَة), should be introduced later. This is because closed syllables consist of a vowelled sound followed by a silent consonant, such as (مل – مس - مك), which can pose difficulties for young learners, particularly those from non-Arabic speaking backgrounds.

b.　　Phonics

This component refers to the ability to recognise printed language symbols and accurately associate them with their corresponding sounds. At this stage, the teacher helps children transition from the previous phonological awareness level, where language is processed at an auditory-only level, to recognising and decoding written Arabic letters, syllables, and words. This transition is highly dependent on the child's readiness and their demonstrated proficiency in the phonetic aspects of Arabic.

Children aged four to six are typically exposed to Arabic sounds and vocabulary through auditory experiences such as songs, games, etc. However, it is not necessary to teach all 28 Arabic letters during the Foundation or KG1 stage. Teachers may focus on gradually introducing letters based on the children's developmental readiness and individual progress. In Foundation or KG1, teachers may introduce a subset of Arabic letters, with the remaining letters being taught in KG2 or Year 1. In some settings, children are able to learn all Arabic letters in KG1/FS2.

When introducing letters, it is important that teachers choose meaningful words. They must select words that represent tangible or familiar concepts that can be visually relatable, such as names of people, animals, places, and objects (e.g., شجرة - tree, طاولة - table, بيت - house, أحمد - Ahmed…). Using such words helps children form a mental image, making it easier to link the sound with the corresponding letter, syllable, or word they have learned. Conversely, it is essential to avoid abstract words that cannot be represented visually, such as (حرية - freedom, تضحية - sacrifice, انتماء - belonging, طاقة - energy, أمانة - trustworthiness).

Teachers must also follow a structured sequence for teaching Arabic letters to support early reading development.

Settings must adopt a proven methodology or select one based on educational research for sequencing Arabic letter instruction. This approach should align with the directives of the Ministry of Education and be appropriate to children's developmental stages, linguistic backgrounds, and learning needs.

### c.	Vocabulary

At this stage, both native and non-native Arabic-speaking children require deliberate support to develop their vocabulary in Standard Arabic. A well-developed vocabulary is essential for enabling children to understand, communicate, and use the language in a functional and easy way.

Children's vocabulary can be increased through various methods, provided there's a strong focus on repeating new vocabulary across diverse contexts and different activities to ensure mastery and retention.

Therefore, the vocabulary component is essential for helping children expand their Arabic vocabulary (their Arabic lexical repertoire). This, in turn, helps them with their reading fluency and comprehension of both written and spoken Arabic.

Below are some strategies that can be employed to enhance children's vocabulary:
- Word family strategy: This approach encourages children to generate orally as many words as possible from a common root (e.g., لعب - played, لاعب - player, ملعب - playground, لعبة - toy).
- Vocabulary web strategy: This strategy encourages children to generate orally as many words as possible to build a network of related terms based on thematic or contextual associations from a core word (e.g., روضة - kindergarten, معلم - teacher, أطفال - children, سبورة - whiteboard, ساحة - yard, أركان - corners, ملعب - playground).
- Synonyms strategy: This strategy focuses on helping children identify words with similar meanings (e.g., سلّم - stairs, درج - stairs).
- Antonyms strategy: This method teaches children to understand words with opposite meanings (e.g., سعيد - happy, حزين - sad).
- Context and derivation strategy: This strategy helps children understand words by analysing the context in which they occur or by relating them to other words from similar or familiar linguistic roots.

### d.	Reading Comprehension

In early childhood, reading comprehension begins with listening to and engaging with stories. At this stage, children develop foundational comprehension skills by interacting with stories that are closely connected to their learning themes and are appropriate for their developmental level.

Reading comprehension, at this stage is about building understanding through guided, meaningful interactions with stories. Most notably: linking the story to children's prior knowledge, predicting the story's topic from the picture and title, predicting story events, creating a timeline of events, identifying main character traits, recognizing key story elements, suggesting an ending for the story, suggesting a new title for the story, and retelling the story.

Fluency refers to a child's ability to read accurately, quickly, and with expressive intonation. In early childhood, the primary goal is to develop the foundational skills that support reading fluency. At this developmental stage, fluency is defined by a child's ability to read or recite high-frequency sight words related to familiar learning themes.

2. Guidelines for teaching writing skills

Writing is a crucial skill for solidifying children's reading development. In early childhood provision, mechanical writing serves as a tool to help children practise forming the letters and syllables, they are learning.

At this stage, writing is used to support phonetic reading. It helps children connect what they hear and read with what is written, strengthening both phonemic awareness and letter recognition.

Mechanical writing should be taught in conjunction with phonics. Each time children learn a new letter or syllable children at the phonetic level, they should also practise writing it, both in its isolated form and in its connected forms.

Mechanical writing at this stage does not rely on worksheets for formal handwriting, but rather on repeated written practice throughout the week, to help them build muscle memory and fine control skills. Activities to prepare for writing take several forms, including:

Writing in sand.	Forming letters and syllables with playdough.	Writing in the air.	Writing on paper.	Forming letters with body movements.

Children need to develop their writing skills through healthy motor development that supports their hand-eye coordination. This coordination is critical to help them hold a pen correctly. Therefore, it's essential to provide a learning environment rich in multi-sensory resources and materials that promote fine motor strength and coordination. Examples are soft balls, beads and stringing activities, writing in sand, and using playdough.

At this stage, it's important to develop children's readiness for writing by tracing various line types; curved, zigzag, winding, and straight lines. It is important to note that straight lines should be introduced last. Children find it easier to trace curved and zigzag lines first, as these are more aligned with the scribbling stage, where children begin their writing skills. Straight lines, on the other hand, require more advanced hand-eye coordination.

Furthermore, at this stage, it is recommended to introduce children to Nas'kh script, the most commonly used style in children's books and educational materials. It displays the clear and legible form of Arabic calligraphy.

Once children demonstrate readiness to begin mechanical writing using worksheets, it's crucial to introduce structured practice to ensure they are trained to copy letters and syllables from the bottom lines upwards on the worksheet. This approach helps keep their eyes focused on the ideal, correct model for writing Arabic letters or syllables, as shown in the example, rather than on their own writing, which may contain errors in formation.

ش	ذ	ب
ش ⬆	ذ	ب

3.   Guidelines for teaching listening skills

Listening is a foundational skill that plays a vital role in children's language development. Through intentional auditory exposure, children enhance their ability to accurately pronounce words and sounds, expand their vocabulary and sentence structures, in addition to using various linguistic styles such as interrogative, exclamatory, and others.

Several strategies should be considered when teaching listening skills to young children:

- Choose listening texts that align with the learning unit's theme.
- Use very short listening texts in Standard Arabic.
- Ensure the listening text is free of auditory distractions such as overpowering music.
- Verify that the listening text has no errors in pronunciation, language or grammar.
- Confirm that no implicit messages contradict the Emirati community's values, ethics, and culture.

When training children in listening skills, a behaviourist approach is recommended. This involves repeated exposure to the same listening text, setting a clear, focused objective for each listening session, and guided listening tasks that help children attend to specific features of the language and message.

Listening activities should be tailored to the language background of diverse groups of children (native Arabic speakers and non-native Arabic speakers). For non-native Arabic-speaking children, listening should be supported by concurrent visual and sensory aids, such as pictures and puppets. In contrast, native Arabic-speaking children can be exposed to the audio without visual aids.
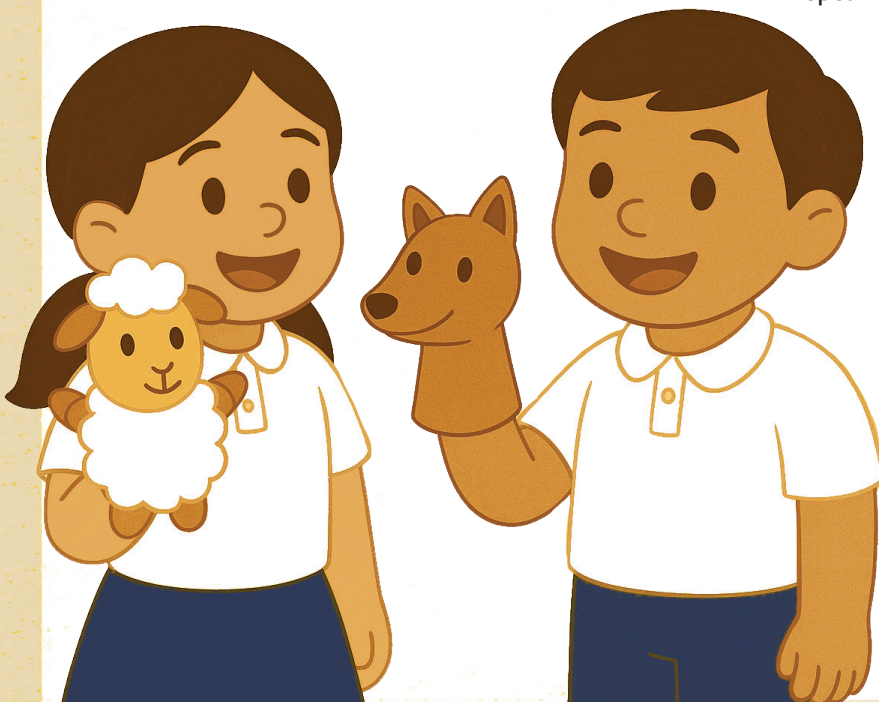
4. Guidelines for teaching speaking skills

When teaching conversation skills to young children, educators should consider the following:

- Choose conversation topics that align with the unit's theme and are relevant to the child's environment and interests.
- Use sight words and contextual connections to support children in conversation.
- Provide opportunities for children to practice conversation skills in authentic contexts that simulate real-life situations.
- Embed conversational practice in diverse activities such as working with peers, self-expression, show and tell about children's daily lives, hobbies, interests, games, or introducing themselves.
- Avoid focusing on errors during conversations to encourage children feel confident in using Arabic.
- Praise any attempt by the children to speak in Arabic, regardless of the vocabulary level or sentence accuracy.
- Provide opportunities for non-native Arabic-speaking children to mix Standard Arabic with their main language in early stages. Gently guide them in gradually replacing non-Arabic words with Arabic equivalents over time.
- For native Arabic-speaking children, expect a mix of Standard Arabic with their local dialect in their speech and conversations. Support them in gradually shifting toward using more Standard Arabic.

Model adapted from Contreras - Romero, Linan-Thompson, Rodrigues, Gittler, Villers, Arias & Escalante (2008)

Methodology for teaching Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Writing Skills – the micro-lesson approach

This methodology is best implemented in small group settings, where teachers can closely observe, support and guide each child based on individual level of readiness and progress. The micro-lesson follows the instruction model "I do – We do – You do". The teacher first models the skill, then children practise it with teacher support in small groups, and finally, each child practises independently with ongoing teacher support and monitoring.
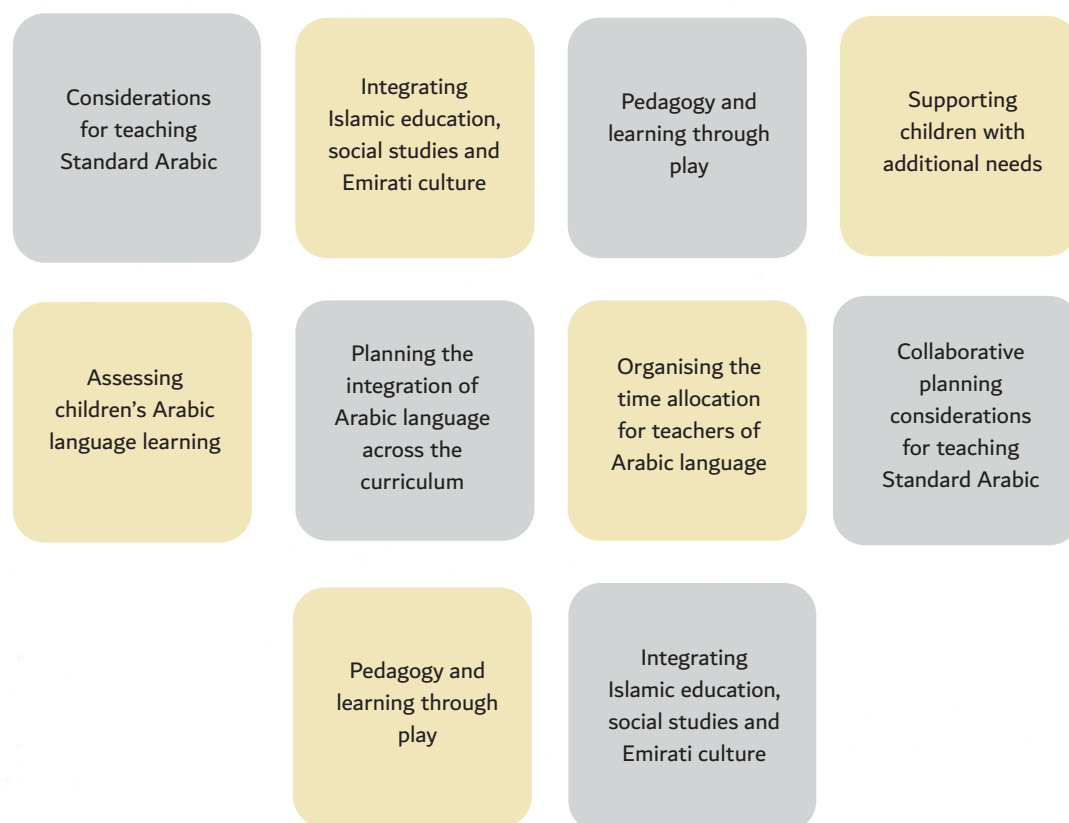
Section Three

Practical guidance on integrating Arabic language into early childhood settings

Practical guidance on integrating Arabic language into early childhood settings

Research referred to in Section Six of these Guidelines highlights that there are positive benefits for children's personal, social, emotional and intellectual outcomes when they learn more than one language, provided this is done well in a high-quality early childhood setting. It is also important to support parents so they can be involved in their child's language learning. When sending resources home, teachers should take into account whether children are learning Arabic as their main language or as an additional language.

This section provides practical guidance to support teachers in implementing the requirements for integrating the learning of Arabic language into early childhood settings with:

Considerations for teaching Standard Arabic	Integrating Islamic education, social studies and Emirati culture	Pedagogy and learning through play	Supporting children with additional needs
Assessing children's Arabic language learning	Planning the integration of Arabic language across the curriculum	Organising the time allocation for teachers of Arabic language	Collaborative planning considerations for teaching Standard Arabic
	Pedagogy and learning through play	Integrating Islamic education, social studies and Emirati culture	

Considerations for teaching Standard Arabic

Arabic has many unique sounds pronounced at the back of the throat that are not used in other languages. These sounds can be hard to learn later in life; that is why it is better to learn Arabic during early childhood. At this stage, children are more able to hear the differences in pronunciation, and their vocal cords are still flexible enough to reproduce the sounds.

When teaching Arabic language, it is essential to understand the term diglossia. This is where varieties of the same language are used in different circumstances. In Arabic, there is Standard Arabic, which is the formal written and spoken form. There is also a range of dialects of Arabic that have different words and pronunciations from Standard Arabic, with no consensus regarding orthographic representation.

Children who are native Arabic speakers enter the setting speaking a version of Arabic which is from their home and neighbourhood and is increasingly influenced by the media. Consequently, teachers need to understand that even if children are native speakers of Arabic, they are frequently bringing a colloquial version of Arabic that is not sufficient for speaking, reading and writing Arabic at a high level.

Teachers should respect and value the language that children bring from home, whilst consistently modelling Standard Arabic when speaking, reading and writing. Teachers should build upon the linguistic and dialectal diversity within their class, encouraging the children to use their home dialects or language variations before being introduced to the Standard Arabic equivalent, as illustrated by the following example:

Teachers should acknowledge all versions of Arabic used by children and discuss the importance of having a common form of Arabic words. After acknowledging a child's word or phrase, the teacher should then clearly say the equivalent word in Standard Arabic and encourage all children to repeat the word. Many repetitions within different contexts are usually needed for new vocabulary to be stored in long-term memory and to become part of the child's expressive language.

Verbal interactions that take place between children and teachers during a wide range of activities build a positive bridge between a child's home language and Standard Arabic. These interactions support children to gradually develop the vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical structures needed to be fully literate in Standard Arabic.

Islamic education, social studies and integrating Emirati culture into early childhood settings

The Islamic education and social studies curriculum, as provided by the Ministry of Education, supports a comprehensive understanding of Islamic principles for Muslim children and promotes shared values and cultural traditions for all children. These subjects also play a vital role in nurturing children's spiritual, moral and ethical development.

In alignment with the Ministry of Education's Mandatory Subject Guide in Private Kindergartens, the 90 minutes allocated for Islamic education is to be included within one-third of the total time designated for Arabic language instruction. Social studies should be integrated throughout the early years curriculum. Early childhood institutions must adhere to all current and future requirements issued by the Ministry of Education regarding Islamic education for Muslim children.

This aspect of the curriculum does not conflict with the requirement to integrate Arabic language into early childhood programmes. Instruction in Islamic education and social studies should be delivered using interactive, play-based teaching methods, in line with the principles outlined in these Guidelines.

UNESCO defines culture as:

The set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group that encompasses not only art and literature but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs.

Since the mid-1900s, large numbers of people have come to live and work in Dubai, adding to its rich cultural diversity. Integrating Emirati culture throughout early childhood settings enables all children to appreciate how Emirati culture is relevant to their lived experiences in Dubai today.

Learning and appreciating the Arabic language are central to understanding Emirati culture. Children deepen their understanding further through learning about all aspects of Emirati culture, which is part of the social studies outcomes, including the UAE rulers, its history, geography, animals, plants, art, music, literature, sports, cuisine, dress, religious and national celebrations.

The learning environment is greatly enriched when artefacts and displays enable children to practise and develop their use of Arabic within a context that celebrates Emirati culture. When planning, teachers should continually consider how the learning of Arabic language and Emirati culture can be integrated. This might involve inviting guest speakers or organising field trips to enhance their understanding and enrich their culture.

Pedagogy and learning through play

Play is essential for the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of children. Recognising its importance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that every child has the right to rest, leisure, play, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

Play-based experiences are opportunities for children to explore their environment, engage in meaningful learning, confront challenges and develop strategies to resolve them. These experiences lay the foundation for developing metacognition. By developing children's working memory, cognitive flexibility and inhibitory control, play provides opportunities for observers to understand children's learning and development, supporting more accurate assessments.

Children's language acquisition, including the learning of Arabic language, is enhanced by providing a rich, physical, emotional and social linguistic environment where children feel safe to express themselves freely. In collaboration, early childhood teachers, specialist teachers and teachers of Arabic can support children's learning of Arabic through:

Storytelling

Stories offer a linguistically rich and imaginative context where children can engage with language in meaningful ways. Daily storytelling with the use of puppets, props and artefacts, helps to expand vocabulary, develop sentence structure, support emotional expression and build a visual and sensory foundation that supports long-term word recall.

Art, Music and Songs

Songs are an enjoyable and effective method for reinforcing vocabulary, developing auditory rhythm, and encouraging active participation, all of which naturally support expressive language development. Music is often the first gateway to language acquisition, as rhythmically similar phrases are easier for young learners to memorise, store, and repeat.

Creative arts activities using a variety of materials provide many opportunities for children to develop their vocabulary and language through describing what they are doing and what they have made.

Drama and Role Play

Engaging children in role-playing real-life situations (e.g., going to the doctor, shopping, travelling) and enacting specific, pre-planned roles using props, costumes, and vocabulary prompts supports the development of contextual language and communication skills.

Print-Rich Environments

Reading areas that feature a diverse selection of attractive, age-appropriate and interesting books in a variety of languages, including Arabic, encourage children to explore language in engaging ways. Incorporating visual word cards, labels, posters, and interactive displays throughout the setting links language to daily routines.

Ideally, visual words should be paired with images or objects and written in large, clear fonts. This sensory association between sounds (letters, syllables, and words) and their meanings supports decoding and vocabulary recall.

تفاحة

قطار

شمس

كتاب

Purposeful Daily Communication

Every moment in the early childhood setting, from morning circle time to mealtime to transitions, is a linguistic opportunity. Teachers should engage purposefully with children through open dialogue, rich questioning, and contextual language use. Embedding Arabic language into everyday routines and varied contexts such as greetings, emotional expressions, and instructions encourages functional language acquisition. Consistent exposure allows children to express themselves confidently and meaningfully in Arabic.

Support for children with additional needs

Babies and young children worldwide typically follow similar developmental pathways, such as rolling, crawling, walking, and beginning to speak. These sequences support the development of gross and fine motor skills, sensory processing, speech, and language. These stages are often referred to as developmental milestones and form the essential building blocks for learning and future academic progress.

Children progress through these developmental milestones at different rates. Some may miss or delay certain milestones, such as crawling or early speech, which can impact subsequent learning and development. Others may reach milestones more slowly or inconsistently and may require additional support to meet their full potential.

It is important that any gaps or delays in development are identified as early as possible. This can be achieved through:

- the use of developmental assessment systems aligned with the early years curriculum;
- systematic observations carried out by teachers and support staff;
- screening tools administered by trained school staff or external specialists;
- analysis of progress across developmental domains (e.g. language, motor skills, social-emotional development);
- and collaboration with parents and carers who provide key insights into the child's behaviours at home.

In the early years, children with developmental delays may not yet meet criteria for a formal diagnosis. However, as they grow and formal assessments become more appropriate and viable, they may later be identified as having specific disability-related needs. Recognising and responding to emerging needs during these early stages is essential to ensuring inclusive access to learning.

Children's additional needs are often grouped into four broad categories:

1. Communication and Interaction

The foundations of communication include:

- attention and listening;
- play and interaction;
- understanding of spoken language;
- expressive language;
- and speech and articulation.

Children with needs in this area may struggle to express themselves, understand others, or follow social rules of communication. It is essential to assess how well a child is communicating in their home or primary language before identifying a possible need. Children presenting with characteristics associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are included in this category.

2. Cognition and Learning

These children may learn at a slower pace than their peers and may experience difficulties with:

- understanding and remembering new concepts;
- organising thoughts or tasks;
- sequencing and recall (e.g., remembering days of the week or counting patterns);
- early literacy and numeracy (e.g., recognising sounds, understanding number relationships).

This category includes children demonstrating traits associated with dyslexia, dyscalculia, or general developmental delay. In the early years, diagnostic clarity may still be evolving, so responsive,
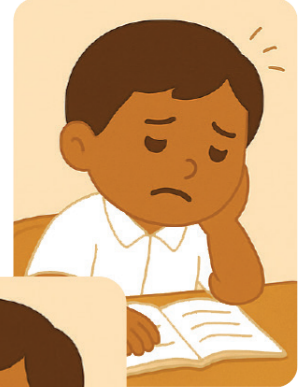
3. Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH)

Children may experience challenges in regulating their emotions and behaviours, which may affect their ability to form relationships and engage in learning. They may:

- show signs of anxiety or low mood;
- withdraw from social interaction;
- struggle to manage frustration;
- experience disrupted sleep, appetite, or routines;
- be impacted by trauma, transition, or separation from familiar caregivers.

Emotional and social wellbeing is closely linked to learning and development in early years, especially during major transitions such as entering a new setting or starting school.
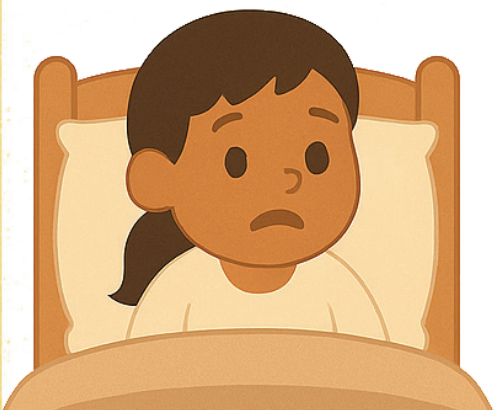
4. Physical and/or Sensory Needs

Children with physical and sensory needs may present with:

- difficulties in movement and coordination (e.g., balance, using cutlery, hand strength);
- hearing or vision impairments that may require aids or adaptations;
- or differences in sensory processing, such as sensitivity to sounds, textures, or movement.

This category includes children with conditions such as Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)/dyspraxia, or sensory integration needs.

Inclusive Arabic Language learning

An inclusive approach to the teaching of Arabic language ensures all children in Dubai are supported to become confident, capable, and culturally connected learners. Language learning should be accessible to every child, including those with developmental or specific learning needs. Children who are learning Arabic as an additional language may also have emerged or identified special educational needs. These needs should be carefully considered and take into account:

- which languages are spoken at home;
- the language most used or preferred by the child;
- whether the child has reached expected developmental milestones in their home language;
- the differing grammatical and phonological features of languages;
- the use of code-switching as a normal part of bilingual development;
- the possibility of a silent phase while acquiring a new language;
- and the emotional impact of life changes (e.g., starting school, moving, or family stressors).

Once a child's needs are identified, a personalised plan should be developed in collaboration with the parents and education staff. The plan should include:

- strategies to support the child's access to Arabic language learning;
- regular review points to monitor progress;
- and documentation of any necessary adaptations within the child's individual education plan or provision map.

It is important to emphasise, that having additional needs does not mean a child cannot learn an additional language. With thoughtful adaptations and support, almost all children can participate meaningfully in Arabic language learning.

Assessment

Assessment should primarily be conducted through observations of children's learning. The key learning expectations outlined in teachers in evaluating children's knowledge, skills and understanding in a structured and systematic way. This enables teachers to identify and fill any gaps in learning and support children on their journey toward mastery. To achieve mastery, a child should confidently achieve the learning objective several times in different contexts, apply the learning in new contexts and retain this learning over time.

These assessments help teachers plan for each child's next stage of learning and ensure their readiness for transition to the next class or phase. They also support meaningful conversations with parents about children's learning and progress, including ways parents can further support their child's development at home.

Planning the integration of Arabic language across the curriculum

Language learning does not occur in isolation. Activities supporting the development domains and across all areas of learning and parts of the school day provide 'teachable moments' with opportunities for linguistic enrichment and the learning of Arabic language. These moments include greetings, circle time, snack and mealtimes, story-time, using technology, show and tell, and home-time routines.

The following outlines examples of how Arabic language can be integrated across key early years curriculum learning areas.

Curriculum/Development Area	Early years Arabic language, and specialist teachers work collaboratively to:
Health, Safety, Personal, Social and Emotional Development	Create a secure and welcoming environment where children feel safe and confident to communicate in Arabic.
Physical Development	Develop balance, gross and fine motor skills, and hand-eye coordination necessary for reading and writing. Provide a range of equipment that enables children to climb, roll, crawl and move in different ways. Provide opportunities for children to manipulate a wide range of materials, cut, stick, draw large shapes in the air and on paper, to support the development of correct pencil grip and prepare for formal writing.
Executive Function • **working memory** • **cognitive flexibility** • **inhibition control / self-regulation**	Plan activities where children have opportunities to solve problems, make plans, learn to manage their emotions, reactions and respond appropriately to instructions. (e.g. following recipes, playing "Simon Says"...) all while using Arabic language contexts.
Communication, World Languages and Citizenship	Provide opportunities for children to appreciate diversity, distinguish Arabic from other languages and gain confidence in speaking and attempting to use standard Arabic.

Mathematical Development	Integrate Arabic vocabulary into practical activities involving matching, comparing, measuring, ordering, sorting, counting and using numbers and shapes in Arabic.
Scientific Development	Provide opportunities for children to learn Arabic vocabulary when finding out about living things (humans, animals, insects and plants), materials (rocks, soil, solids and liquids), forces, electricity, weather, earth and space using Arabic terms.
History, Geography and Environmental Development	Use Arabic language to help children develop a sense of place including the location of their home and their setting, and to be able to locate countries and physical features on a globe and a map. Introduce environmental vocabulary in Arabic, and explore topics related to caring for the earth and nature.
Digital Learning	Enable children to use interactive technologies to develop their understanding of Arabic language and Emirati culture. For example, digital storybooks, educational apps, and audio/video tools. Encourage children to record and listen to themselves using Arabic words and phrases.
Creativity, Art and Design	Use Arabic art forms and design elements to inspire children's creativity and encourage them to present and describe what they have created.
Early Intervention for additional needs including Arabic language learning	Establish individual learning plans with targeted interventions to support children's additional needs.
Extension for when children demonstrate ability and talent	Continually extend children's Arabic language use, thinking and learning by providing a wide range of challenges that can be tackled independently and collaboratively.

Organising the time allocation for teachers of Arabic language

Leaders of settings should ensure that a teacher of Arabic is present for one-third of the weekly instructional time allocated to each class, and that in their schedule it is clear that the Arabic teacher-led structured activities are no less than 200 to 300 minutes. During this time, the teacher should deliver a balanced mix of one-to-one, small group and whole group activities.

For young children, all activities and times of the day are learning opportunities and should be appropriately supported by staff. This means that teachers of Arabic language are allocated portions of the day where they can work with early childhood teachers to support children's Arabic language development across all curriculum areas and daily activities.

Below is an example of a weekly timetable for a teacher of Arabic language assigned to three classes. Leaders can adapt the schedule to reflect the context of their setting and the specific needs of their children.

Arabic Teacher	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Registration	Class One	Class Two	Class Three	Class One	Class Two
Session One	Class One	Class Two	Class Three	Class One	Class Two
Snack	Class Two	Class One	Class Two	Class Three	Class One
Session Two	Class Two	Class One	Class Two	Class Three	Class One
Lunch	Class Three	Class Three	Class One	Class Two	Class Three
Session Three	Class Three	Class Three	Class One	Class Two	Class Three
Snack	Class One	Class Two		Class Three	
Session Four	Class One	Class Two		Class Three	
Planning preparation and training					

Staff breaks are planned and agreed upon as a team to ensure appropriate supervision and care is in place at all times.

● Class One   ● Class Two   ● Class Three

Collaborative Planning

Although teaching in the early childhood phase should be flexible and follow the needs and interests of the children, it is not sufficient to just 'plan in the moment'. The integrated curriculum document should be used to plan a termly overview of provision for the year. Weekly plans should then be produced which together with assessment information are used to devise daily plans.

Termly, weekly and daily planning requires all members of the team to contribute to designing interesting and creative learning opportunities that integrate Arabic language development.

Planning should include time for the following:

○ Allocating teacher-led sessions daily and weekly, where the teacher of Arabic takes the lead in delivering focused language learning experiences for the whole group or small groups for no less than 200- 300 minutes a week.

○ Designing co-led sessions, where the classroom teacher takes the lead, and the teacher of Arabic provides language input alongside the teacher.

○ Facilitating child-initiated play, where the teacher of Arabic works alongside early years childhood teachers, supporting children's learning of Arabic. This includes creating opportunities for small group activities tailored to each child's stage of language development.

○ Incorporating Arabic into daily routines, such as registration, snack, lunch and home time. During these moments, the teacher of Arabic either leads or supports the use of Arabic, ensuring that the language is integrated naturally throughout the day.

The learning expectations in Section Four of these Guidelines support planning for the systematic learning of Arabic, so that children build the knowledge, skills and understanding they need for fluency in speaking, reading and writing. The pedagogy for these sessions should still be play-based with a focus on the use of language in context.

Grouping children:

○ Teacher-led groups for Arabic language learning should be differentiated based on language proficiency, with beginners and those who are more fluent speakers being grouped together. This enables children who are beginners to develop secure building blocks for communicating in Arabic and for those who are more fluent to extend their learning.

○ During child-initiated play, mixed-language groups work well as those children who are native Arabic speakers provide effective models for their peers. As with all areas of the curriculum, teachers should adapt their support and responses based on their deep knowledge of the children.

Section Four

Key learning expectations for Arabic
language for Children aged four up to six

كيف حالك

أنا بخير

بخير والحمد لله

Key learning expectations for Arabic language for children aged four up to six

Children aged four to six are expected to develop a set of linguistic competencies in Arabic, progressing at different rates depending on the child's linguistic background, whether they are native Arabic speakers or non-Arabic speakers. This section outlines a set of expected foundational linguistic competencies, based on systematic early literacy principles.

The table below outlines the developmental stages of phonological and orthographic awareness for children aged four to six. Children's progress is assessed across four levels of competencies:

1. Emerging
This is the level at which the child demonstrates basic or initial understanding of the competency.

2. Developing
This is the level at which the child has a partial grasp of the competency without being able to achieve it fully.

3. Proficient
This is the level at which the child consistently demonstrates the competency and meets age-appropriate expectations.

4. Mastering
This is the level at which the child confidently applies the competency and can apply it in contexts beyond the words they have learned.

Linking learning expectations to the Arabic curriculum

Settings will use the defined competencies and key learning expectations to guide the progression of Arabic language skills that children are expected to acquire during this developmental stage. All settings must ensure that these competencies are aligned with the Ministry of Education's curriculum standards and learning outcomes. This alignment will ensure that curriculum planning and design are integrated with the setting's adopted curriculum framework.

At the individual child level

Dubai's early years settings are diverse, reflecting a wide range of language models. Some settings use Arabic as the primary language of instruction, others follow a bilingual approach, and many use a multilingual model in which Arabic is taught alongside English or other languages. As a result, while all children are expected to embark on a two-year learning journey in Arabic, with the same set of expectations, they begin from different starting points. Many will also conclude this learning journey at varying levels of achievement. The crucial aspect is the ability to demonstrate each child's progress towards mastering Standard Arabic throughout their learning journey.

Age-specific attainment expectations for children aged four to six

Whilst recognising the differences between Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic-speaking children, system-wide general expectations have been set to support the development of age-appropriate Arabic reading skills. These expectations define the minimum proficiency levels that speaking and non-Arabic speaking children should achieve after one or two years of Arabic language instruction. All children should build strong foundations in Arabic language appropriate to their age and stage of development.

Age Group	Expected Level of Proficiency			
	Emerging	Developing	Proficient	Mastering
Native speaker 4-5 years with one year of learning		◯		
Non-native speaker 4-5 years with one year of learning	◯			
Native speaker 5-6 years with two years of learning			◯	
Non-native speaker 5-6 years with two years of learning		◯		
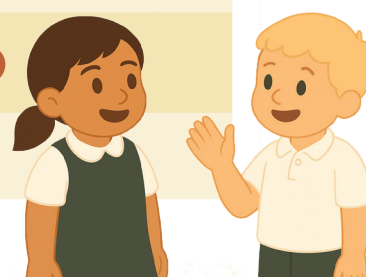
Expected linguistic competencies for children in the early childhood stage (four to six years old)

Competencies for phonological awareness: (auditory level)

- Identifying rhyming words (language rhythm).
- Recognising Arabic sounds according to their positions in the word (beginning, middle, and end), along with the three short vowels (فتحة، ضمة، كسرة) and long vowels (الألف، الواو، الياء).
- Analysing words that have two or three syllables phonetically, provided that the syllables are of the open syllables type and avoiding the use of words with closed syllables.
- Composing words phonetically from two to three syllables, provided that the syllables are of the open syllables type and avoiding the use of words with closed syllables.
- Manipulating sounds by deletion (for native Arabic-speaking children only).

Competencies for reading letter sounds: (printed level)

- Distinguishing Arabic letters from other symbols.
- Recognising the letter sounds and shapes, according to its different positions in the word (beginning, middle, and end).
- Analysing words orthographically (in writing) into two to three syllables, provided that the syllables are of the open syllables type and avoiding the use of words with closed syllables.
- Composing words orthographically (in writing) from two to three syllables, provided that the syllables are of the open syllables type, and avoiding the use of words with closed syllables.
- Distinguishing between Arabic letters with short vowels and long vowels.
- Readiness to read sight words from what they have learned, consisting of two to three syllables (concrete nouns, demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns, personal pronouns), some prepositions, and conjunctions.

Competencies for writing (early writing)

- Practising holding the pen correctly through activities that develop finger muscles.
- Practising tracing various types of lines (zigzag, curved, straight) to develop the child's visual-motor coordination.
- Isolating letters from words.
- Writing Arabic letters in both their isolated and connected forms.
- Writing diverse syllables by imitating the teacher's model, based on what they have learned.
- Writing their name accurately in Arabic.

Competencies for vocabulary

- Acquiring a linguistic vocabulary (lexicon) based on unit themes (core semantic fields): (e.g., Me, My Family, My School, My Home, Seasons and Weather, Types of Living Beings: Plants and Animals, Healthy Food, Sports and Hobbies, Dubai and the UAE). This includes forming a vocabulary web (e.g., communication phrases, days of the week, colours, numbers, shapes, sizes, time, feelings) through diverse strategies appropriate for their developmental stage.
- Ability to communicate using simple Arabic words and sentences, expressing self and emotions, asking for permission, giving thanks, apologising, and any other daily communication skills children require.
- Ability to retell a heard story or text using simple words that express their understanding.

Competencies for listening

- Identifying the general idea (main idea) of the heard text.
- Distinguishing words they have learned in the heard text.
- Recalling basic information from the heard text.
- Sequencing story events using pictures, based on their auditory comprehension.
- Expressing their understanding of the heard text through drawing.
- Expressing an opinion on the heard text using simple words (e.g., 'I like,' 'I don't like,' 'I liked it,' 'I didn't like it').

Competencies for speaking

- Expressing themselves, their family, favourite hobby, or any learned topic using concise, Standard Arabic phrases and short sentences.
- Using daily social communication phrases for greetings, thanks, permission, and apologies in Standard Arabic.
- Conducting a simple dialogue on a specific topic (question and answer).
- Describing images related to a learned topic using simple Arabic words or sentences.
- Describing a familiar person, place, or object.

Competencies for creative writing

- Ability to explore a story and identify its components.
- Ability to generate ideas for writing a personal illustrated story about an important person, place, or event in their life.
- Determining the chronological sequence of events in the illustrated story.
- Expressing the events of their story through drawing and with simple words and sentences from what they have learned.

Expected competencies in phonological awareness, reading letter sounds, and their performance indicators

Competency	Learning Performance Indicators			
Phonological and Orthographic (Readiness for reading)	**Emerging**	**Developing**	**Proficient**	**Mastering**
Language learning through rhythm (Distinguishing rhyming words)	The child can distinguish similar final sounds in rhyming words phonetically, without being able to pronounce the full words correctly.	The child can distinguish similar final sounds in rhyming words, can pronounce the words correctly and repeat a word after the teacher, but is not yet able to remember the word independently.	The child can distinguish similar final sounds within rhyming words from what they hear and can remember and pronounce these words correctly.	The child can produce rhyming words from their existing vocabulary.
Distinguishing letter sounds in different positions within a word (auditory)	The child distinguishes the letter sound at the beginning and end of a word, but pronounces it with an inaccurate articulation (with an accent similar to a corresponding sound in their primary language), without distinguishing in pronunciation between the letter sound with short and long vowels.	The child distinguishes the letter sound at the beginning and end of a word, and pronounces it with correct articulation, without distinguishing in pronunciation between the letter sound with short and long vowels.	The child distinguishes the letter sound at the beginning and end of a word with the three short vowels (الفتحة، الضمة، الكسرة) in words within the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned auditorily, and pronounces them correctly.	The child distinguishes the letter sound at the beginning and end of a word with short and long vowels and pronounces it correctly in any word that includes the sound they have learned, even if the word is outside the unit themes (semantic fields) they were taught.
Distinguishing letter shapes and sounds with short vowels (الفتحة، الضمة، الكسرة) visually	The child distinguishes the letter shape without accurately linking it to the short vowel sound it carries, in words within the semantic fields (unit themes) they have learned. They pronounce it with an inaccurate accent, influenced by a similar sound from their mother tongue.	The child distinguishes the letter shape without accurately linking it to the short vowel sound it carries, in words within the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned.	The child distinguishes the letter shape and its sound with the short vowels (الفتحة، الضمة، الكسرة) in words within the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned.	The child distinguishes the letter shape and its sound with the short vowels (الفتحة، الضمة، الكسرة) in words both within and outside the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned.
Distinguishing letter shapes and sounds with long vowels (visual reading)	The child begins to distinguish the letter shape without accurately linking it to its connected long vowel sound in words within the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned. They pronounce it with an inaccurate accent, influenced by a similar sound from their primary language.	The child distinguishes the letter shape without accurately linking it to its connected long vowel sound, in words within the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned.	The child distinguishes the letter shape and its sound with the connected long vowel in words within the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned.	The child distinguishes the letter shape and its sound with the connected long vowel in words both within and outside the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned.
Analysing words into their syllables (phonetically)	The child segments words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned, which consist of only two syllables and include the letter sound they have learned, without precisely distinguishing phonetically between short vowels and long vowels.	The child segments words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned, which consist of two to three syllables and include the letter sound they have learned, without precisely distinguishing phonetically between short vowels and long vowels.	The child segments words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned, which consist of two to three syllables and include the letter sound they have learned, accurately distinguishing between short and long vowel sounds in their phonetic segmentation.	The child segments words from both within and outside the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned, which consist of two to three syllables and include the letter sound they have learned, accurately distinguishing between short and long vowel sounds in their phonetic segmentation.
Analysing words into their syllables (visual reading)	The child segments words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned, which consist of only two syllables and include the letter sound they have learned, without distinguishing between short and long syllables, and pronounces the word with an accent influenced by the sounds in their mother tongue.	The child segments words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned, which consist of two to three syllables and include the letter sound they have learned, without accurately reading and writing all syllables precisely, distinguishing between short and long ones.	The child segments words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned, which consist of two to three syllables and include the letter sound they have learned in a word they have learned, accurately distinguishing between short and long vowel sounds in their phonetic segmentation.	The child segments words from both within and outside the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned, which consist of two to three syllables and include the letter sound they have learned in a word they have learned, accurately distinguishing between short and long vowel sounds in their phonetic segmentation.
Assembling syllables to form words (phonetically)	The child assembles words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned phonetically, which consist of only two syllables and include the letter sound they have learned, without distinguishing between short and long syllables, and pronounces the word's sounds with an accent influenced by the sounds in their mother tongue.	The child assembles two to three syllables to form words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned phonetically. These words include the letter sound they have learned. The child does so without precisely distinguishing between short and long syllables, and pronounces the full word with some phonetic errors.	The child assembles two to three syllables to form words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned phonetically. These words include the letter sound they have learned. They accurately distinguish between short and long vowel sounds in their phonetic construction, and pronounce the full word precisely.	The child assembles two to three syllables to form words from both within and outside the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned phonetically. These words include the letter sound they have learned. They accurately distinguish between short and long vowel sounds in their phonetic construction, and pronounce the full word precisely.
Assembling syllables to form words (Visual reading)	The child assembles words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned, both by reading and writing. These words consist of only two syllables and include the letter sound they have learned. They do so without distinguishing between short and long syllables, and pronounce the word's sounds with an accent influenced by the sounds in their mother tongue.	The child assembles two to three syllables to form words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned by reading and writing. These words include the letter sound they have learned. The child does so without precisely distinguishing between short and long syllables, and pronounces the full word with some phonetic errors.	The child assembles two to three syllables to form words from the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned by reading and writing. These words include the letter sound they have learned. They accurately distinguish between short and long vowel sounds in their phonetic construction, and pronounce the full word precisely.	The child assembles two to three syllables to form words from both within and outside the unit themes (semantic fields) they have learned by reading and writing. These words include the letter sound they have learned. They accurately distinguish between short and long vowel sounds in their phonetic construction, and pronounce the full word precisely.
Sound manipulation (Deleting the first sound)[2]	The child is unable to perform sound manipulation skills.	The child is unable to perform sound manipulation skills.	The child deletes the first sound from specific words they have learned, producing a new word, and pronounces it accurately. مع نطقها على نحو دقيق	The child deletes the first sound from any word, producing a new word, and pronounces it accurately.

[2] This competency only applies to children who are native Arabic speakers and have at least achieved developing level of proficiency.

Methodology and strategies for teaching phonological awareness and reading letter sounds

First: Teaching Methodology: Micro-Lesson Model (I Do, We Do, You Do)

In this model, the teacher first models the skill, demonstrating the correct pronunciation, then children apply the teacher's model in small groups, and finally, each child applies the skill individually with support and follow-up from the teacher.

Second: Teaching Strategies and Techniques

Using pictures of tangible objects to teach sight words, Arabic letters, and their syllables.	Utilising drama, puppet theatre, and video clips to teach correct pronunciation and the meanings (semantics) of stories and texts.	Using letter and syllable flashcards within words, with the target letter or syllable highlighted in a prominent colour.	Use finger and hand signals to train children on the differences between short and long vowel sounds in Arabic.
Using "traffic light" cards to regulate children's responses during learning.	Green card - I understand the task and can answer.	Yellow card - I understand the task but cannot answer and need help.	Red card - I did not hear the question or did not understand the task and need support and clarification.
Use finger and hand signals to train children on the differences between short and long vowel sounds in Arabic.	Using clapping or jumping while counting, to segment words into syllables or to blend syllables to form words.	Using a distinct color to highlight the letter or syllables to be taught.	Incorporating songs in Standard Arabic to develop phonological awareness skills.
Utilising word analysis and synthesis boxes.	Using small whiteboards to isolate letters and analyse and synthesize words.		

1 2 3

Writing competencies expectations and their performance indicators

Competency	Performance Indicators			
Readiness for writing	**Emerging**	**Developing**	**Proficient**	**Mastering**
Mastering pen-holding skills	The child can partially control their finger muscles but can't control holding the pen with three fingers only.	The child can control their finger muscles but holds the pen inappropriately.	The child can control their finger muscles and can hold the pen with ٣ fingers correctly.	The child can control their finger muscles and hold the pen correctly with ٣ fingers, demonstrating visual-motor coordination during writing.
Mastering writing in Arabic from right to left	The child mixes writing directions, from right to left in some places and from left to right in others.	The child can write from right to left, without the ability to control font size or adhere to writing on the line.	The child masters writing from right to left, adhering to writing on the line, but without the ability to control font size.	The child masters writing from right to left, demonstrating ability to adhere to font size and stay on the line.
Mastering tracing of zigzag curved and straight lines including their different sizes and forms.	The child can trace zigzag and curvy lines, with occasional deviation from the line, and without the ability to accurately trace straight lines.	The child can trace zigzag and curvy lines, without the ability to trace straight line accurately.	The child can trace zigzag, curved and straight lines.	
Mastering of Arabic writing skills	The child can write the Arabic letters learned only in their isolated form, without the ability to adhere to their dimensions relative to the line or their appropriate size.	The child masters writing the letters learned in both their connected and isolated forms as independent letters, adhering to their dimensions relative to the line, but without adhering to the size or their presence within words.	The child masters writing the letters learned in both their connected and isolated forms as independent letters, adhering to their dimensions relative to the line and their appropriate size, but without their presence within words.	The child masters writing the letters learned in both their connected and isolated forms, both as independent letters and within words.
Mastery of writing simple one- or two- syllable words from what has been learned.	The child can write Arabic syllables with long vowels (الألف، الواو، الياء) only when isolated, without being part of words, and without the ability to adhere to their dimensions relative to the line or their appropriate size.	The child can write the syllables learned with long vowels (الألف، الواو، الياء) adhering to their dimensions relative to the line, but without adhering to the size or presence within words.	The child masters writing syllables with long vowels (الألف، الواو، الياء) correctly in isolation (independently) without words, adhering to their dimensions relative to the line, but without the ability to adhere to the size.	The child masters writing syllables with long vowels (الألف، الواو، الياء) correctly both in isolation (independently) and within words, adhering to their dimensions relative to the line and their appropriate size.

Methodology and strategies for developing children's writing readiness

First: Teaching Methodology: Micro-Lesson Model (I Do, We Do, You Do).

In this model, the teacher first models the skill, then children apply the teacher's model within small groups, and finally, each child applies the skill individually with support and follow-up from the teacher.

Second: Teaching Strategies and Techniques

Introduce children to writing through the following progression: Writing in sand – forming letters with playdough – writing in the air – writing on small whiteboards – writing in children's daily notebooks.

Teach children to identify and separate both connected and isolated letters from words they have learned.

Use a bottom-up copying method to help children learn to write on the line and with the appropriate size.

Using "traffic light" cards to regulate children's responses during learning

Green card - I understand the task and can answer.

Yellow card - I understand the task but cannot answer and need help.

Red card - I did not hear the question or did not understand the task and need support and clarification.

Use boxes that match the number of syllables in a word to develop written analysis and sequencing skills.

Use visual arrow cues to guide children to learn the correct direction and size for writing letters or syllables relative to the writing line.

Expected language competencies and their performance indicators

	Learning performance indicators			
Linguistic competency	**Emerging**	**Developing**	**Proficient**	**Mastering**
Vocabulary (linguistic lexicon)	The child only acquires the main vocabulary related to the unit›s themes (semantic fields) learned, such as (I, my family, my school), and is able to name some expressive pictures related to them without the ability to use them in sentences of his/her own creation.	The child acquires most of the vocabulary related to the unit›s themes (semantic fields) learned, such as (I, my family, my school), and is able to name expressive pictures related to them, but without the ability to use them in sentences of their own creation	The child acquires all the vocabulary related to the unit›s themes (semantic fields) learned, such as (I, my family, my school), and is able to use them in simple sentences, consisting of two to three words of their own creation.	The child acquires vocabulary linked to the unit›s themes (semantic fields), such as (I, my family, my school), and can both use these words in original sentences and comprehend their meanings within heard and read texts and stories.
	The child can express self, emotions, and any personal interests using simple Arabic words, without linking them together.	The child can express self, emotions, and any personal interests using Arabic words, linking them together with conjunctions and prepositions.	The child can express self, emotions, and any personal interests using short Arabic sentences, linking them together with conjunctions and prepositions.	The child can express self, emotions, and any personal interests using long Arabic sentences, linking them together with conjunctions and prepositions.
	The child uses some Arabic vocabulary in social interactions for greetings and apologies, such as «مرحبًا» (hello), «أهلاً» (welcome), «آسف» (sorry), «شكرًا» (thank you), «عفوًا» (you›re welcome).	The child uses some simple Arabic vocabulary and phrases for greetings and apologies, such as «مرحبًا» (hello), «أهلاً» (welcome), «آسف» (sorry), «صباح الخير» (good morning),» «مساء الخير» (good evening), «شكرًا» (thank you), «عفوًا» (you›re welcome), "السلام عليكم", (peace be upon you).	The child uses Arabic vocabulary and phrases for greetings, apologies and seeking permission, such as «مرحبًا» (hello), «أهلاً» (welcome), «آسف» (sorry), «صباح الخير» (good morning),»مساء الخير» (good evening), "اسمح لي", (excuse me/allow me), «أعتذر منك» (I apologize to you), «شكرًا» (thank you), «عفوًا» (you›re welcome).	The child uses Arabic vocabulary and phrases for greetings, and seeking permission, such as «مرحبًا» (hello), «أهلاً» (welcome), «آسف» (sorry), «السلام عليكم» (good morning),»مساء الخير» (good evening), «صباح الخير» (peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you), «ورحمة الله وبركاته» (excuse me/allow me), "أعتذر منك", (I apologize to you), «اسمح لي» (Thank God for your «أنا بخير، الحمد لله» (I am fine, praise be to God), «الحمد لله على السلامة» safe arrival), «شكرًا» (thank you), «عفوًا» (You're welcome).
Verbal communication (conversation)	The child demonstrates understanding of the speaker›s context through body language, but without the full ability to respond in Standard Arabic to express emotions or answer some questions, or to ask them, using aids such as pictures, tangible objects, words, situations, and prior experiences (prompts).	The child demonstrates understanding of the speaker›s context through body language, with the ability to respond using limited words in Standard Arabic to express emotions and answer some questions, or to ask them, using aids such as pictures, tangible objects, words, situations, and prior experiences (prompts).	The child can speak, converse, ask questions, answer, and express emotions, using short sentences about a learned topic, utilising the Standard Arabic words they have learned.	The child can speak, converse, ask questions, answer, and express emotions using short sentences about a learned topic, using Standard Arabic words which they have learned, along with words from their own linguistic repertoire.
	The child can introduce themself (name, age, father, mother) using limited words in Standard Arabic, without employing linking words, and without precise use of masculine and feminine forms.	The child can introduce themself (name, age, father, mother, peers) using limited words in Standard Arabic, employing some linking words such as conjunctions, prepositions and some demonstrative pronouns, but without accurate use of masculine and feminine forms.	The child can express themself (name, age, nursery/kindergarten, favourite hobbies) in Standard Arabic, using short, complete sentences (e.g., "My name is ....", "My nursery is....", "I am .... years old", "I like .... sport"), utilising appropriate linking words and distinguishing correctly between masculine and feminine forms, as well as using the appropriate pronoun.	The child can express themself (name, age, family, nursery/kindergarten, peers, country, favourite hobbies, interests) in Standard Arabic using complete sentences, utilising appropriate linking words, distinguishing correctly between masculine and feminine forms, and using the appropriate pronoun.
	The child can describe one to two pictures on a learned topic naming the main objects in the picture using Arabic vocabulary, without linking them together.	The child can describe two to three pictures on a learned topic by naming the main objects in the picture and some details, using some linking words.	The child can describe three to four pictures on a learned topic by naming the main objects in the picture and some details, using the linking words, phrases, and vocabulary he/she has learned.	The child can describe several pictures representing sequential events on a learned topic by naming the main objects in the picture and some details, using the linking words, phrases, and vocabulary he/she has learned.
Listening comprehension	The child can express through body language and limited words, an understanding of the general idea or overall theme of listened texts in Standard Arabic, including short stories, songs, and informational texts. They can answer questions that require linking images to the sight words learned within a unit's themes.	The child can express through body language and limited words, an understanding of the general idea or overall theme of listened texts in Standard Arabic, including short stories, songs, and informational texts. They can answer questions that require linking images to the sight words learned within a unit's themes.	The child can understand the main ideas in listened texts in Standard Arabic, including short stories, songs, and informational texts, and answer recall and comprehension-level questions about them.	The child can understand the main and subordinate (supporting) ideas in listened texts in Standard Arabic, including short stories, songs, and informational texts, and answer recall, comprehension, analysis, and application-level questions about them.
	The child can express listening comprehension orally or through drawing.	The child can express listening comprehension by linking what is heard to appropriate pictures.	The child can express listening comprehension with simple words.	The child can express listening comprehension with short, complete sentences.
	The child can express their opinion on what is heard using body language.	The child can express their opinion on what is heard using simple words.	The child can express an opinion on what is heard using simple phrases.	The child can express an opinion on what is heard using complete sentences.
	The child can arrange the events of a listened story using pictures.	The child can arrange the events of a listened story using pictures and some words.	The child can arrange the events of a listened story using pictures and some words and phrases from the story.	The child can arrange the events of a listened story using their linguistic repertoire of words and phrases.
Preparedness for utilising Arabic storybooks and informational texts	The child can browse stories and informational books in Arabic from right to left, with the ability to read and express the pictures using some Standard Arabic words learned, but without the ability to read the words of the story.	The child can browse stories and informational books in Arabic from right to left, and can read pictures and some sight words learned, but without the ability to read full sentences of the story.	The child can browse stories and informational books in Arabic that are developmentally appropriate in their themes, as well as in the size and number of words written per page, with the ability to read pictures and some words.	The child can browse stories and informational books in Arabic that are developmentally appropriate in their themes, as well as in the size and number of words written per page, with the ability to read some sentences.
Creative Writing Composing personal illustrated stories	The child can generate ideas for a story related to a personal situation (an event/person/important place in their life).	The child can generate ideas for a story related to a personal situation (an event/person/important place in their life), expressing them through drawings and simple Standard Arabic words of two to three syllables.	The child can generate ideas for a story related to a personal situation (an event/person/important place in their life), expressing them through drawings and simple Standard Arabic sentences of two to three words, with some spelling errors.	The child can generate ideas for a story related to a personal situation (an event/person/important place in their life), expressing them through drawings and simple Standard Arabic sentences of two to three words, without any spelling errors.

Methodology and strategies for teaching language competencies

First: Teaching Methodology: Micro-Lesson Model (I Do, We Do, You Do).

In this model, the teacher first models the skill, then children apply the teacher's model within small groups, and finally, each child applies the skill individually with support and follow-up from the teacher.

Second: Teaching Strategies and Techniques

Using pictures of tangible objects to teach sight words related to each learning topic, such as "I," "my family," "my school."	Using drama, puppet theatre, and video clips to bring to life stories, songs, and texts that children are learning.	Using word flashcards.	Using the "little teacher" strategy.

Using "traffic light" cards to regulate children's responses during learning:	Green card - I understand the task and can answer.	Yellow card - I understand the task but cannot answer and need help.	Red card - I did not hear the question or did not understand the task and need support and clarification.

Using vocabulary teaching strategies, including

Word families	Contextual cues and derivation	Vocabulary webs
Words with multiple meanings	Adding adjectives	Synonyms and antonyms

Using dialogues, discussions, debates, and question-and-answer sessions.	Encouraging descriptive speech through oral expression based on pictures.	Using listening prediction strategies for what is heard	Using simulation and role-playing strategies

Using the "mental film" strategy to visualise events in a story.	Using the retelling strategy.	Promoting story prediction, encouraging children to anticipate story events and outcomes.

Section Five

The role of leaders in driving effective Arabic language learning in early childhood settings

The role of leaders in driving effective Arabic language learning in early childhood settings

Leaders at all levels shape the values and priorities of a setting. Their knowledge, energy, enthusiasm and commitment ensure that high standards become the norm. A key responsibility of leadership is to ensure that the teaching and learning of Standard Arabic is effectively integrated into daily practice.

To achieve this, leaders must:

Ensure rigorous implementation of these Guidelines, embedding them within the setting's self-evaluation and quality assurance procedures.

Prioritise the development of children's speaking and listening skills in Standard Arabic during the early years, using a language acquisition model that aligns with the setting's approach, for example, adopting a bilingual or integrated approach with the input of native and fluent Arabic speakers. Ensure that all staff are well trained and have the knowledge, skills and understanding required to deliver high-quality teaching of Standard Arabic within early childhood education and care.

Promote collaborative planning and teamwork between class teachers, specialist teachers and teachers of Arabic language.

Foster a rich and varied learning environment where Arabic language and Emirati culture are a positive part of children's daily lived experiences.

Support teachers to tailor their teaching to each child's stage of language development.

Provide opportunities for children to learn Standard Arabic through child-initiated activities, where adults in the setting assume the role of a play partner, modelling, supporting and scaffolding children's learning of Standard Arabic.

Encourage teachers to be reflective practitioners, continually assessing children's learning of Standard Arabic, and supporting their next steps. Key learning expectations are used effectively to evaluate children's progress and as part of transition to the next stage.

Organise specific teacher-led, play-based activities where children are grouped according to their proficiency, enabling systematic and effective learning of Standard Arabic.

Build strong partnerships with parents and carers, enabling them to understand, support and engage in their children's learning of Standard Arabic.

Encourage adults in the setting learn Arabic alongside the children, modelling curiosity, persistence and a lifelong love for learning.

Section Six

Induction, Performance Review and Professional Development

Induction, Performance Review and Professional Development

It is important that **newly appointed staff** understand the vision for teaching Arabic language and are confident in implementing all of the requirements. A comprehensive induction process should be in place for all staff and must include:

- Reading and understanding the setting's policies, procedures and methodology for the integrated provision of Arabic language.
- Receiving a clear job description detailing responsibilities, including joint planning and assessment procedures, time allocation, meeting and training requirements, and designated line management.
- Attending a minimum of two introductory sessions to become familiar with colleagues, children, daily routines and organisation of the setting.
- Receiving mentorship support for a minimum of one term, with the possibility of extending to three terms, depending on the individual's level of experience.

All staff, including teachers of Arabic and teaching assistants, should take part in an annual performance review or appraisal process. This process should include at least two observations in the setting and discussion regarding the effectiveness of their performance in relation to children's learning outcomes. The review should also evaluate the effectiveness of any training undertaken, identify future training needs and set key targets for professional growth. These professional dialogues are an opportunity to appreciate staff for their contributions and to listen to ideas that they may have for future developments.

Settings should include teachers of Arabic language in staff meetings and in-house training. Records must show that teachers of Arabic have participated in regular professional development activities for a minimum of 20 hours of training annually.
Training should include:

- The policy guidelines for teaching Arabic in early years settings.
- Child development and how children learn language.
- The foundational principles for effective teaching of Arabic language in early years.
- Enabling parents to support their children's learning of Standard Arabic.

Teachers of Arabic language should also play an active role in supporting non-Arab early childhood staff in developing their knowledge and skills in relation to Arabic language. Everyone learning together deepens cultural understanding and the effective learning of Arabic language across the setting.

Questions to guide implementation

The following questions are intended to guide professional reflection, inform planning and support discussions within the setting's learning community. The accompanying responses are excerpts from research and may serve as a basis for further exploration and inquiry.

What is the importance of early language learning?

Although we continue to learn language throughout our lifetime, the development of language in children from birth to six years is remarkable. Knowing how babies and young children learn language informs our thinking with regard to children learning an additional language. Using pictures of tangible objects to teach sight words related to each learning topic, such as "I," "my family," "my school."
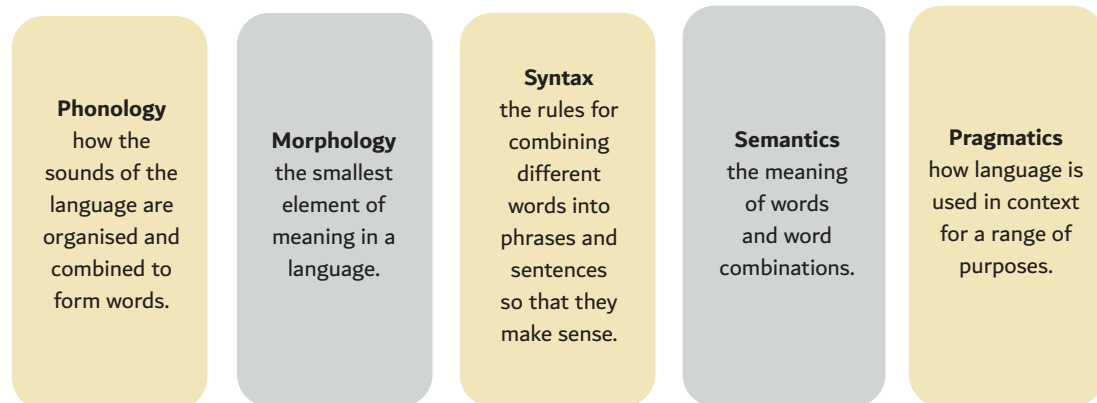
> One of the most powerful ways in which humans share emotions, experiences and thoughts is through oral language; from very early on infants show interest in faces and sounds and practice their own voices. Caregivers who are sensitive to the 'tunes and rhythms of a baby are able to join in with her expressions and vocalizations. These intimate conversations lay the foundations for developing language skills. They provide children with opportunities to extend their range of vocalizations, experiment with an extending range of words and learn about the rules' of conversation, which include turn taking, sensitive timing, responsiveness to others' behaviour and facial expressions, and an ability to listen and respond.
>
> (Mathers, Eisenstadt, Sylva, Soukakou and Ereky-Stevens, 2014, p10.)

Newborns are equipped to grasp the sound patterns of all languages. This ability begins to diminish after the age of six months as the dominant language sounds filter out others that are not used. "The young child's vocal cords begin to mature which makes it difficult to accurately produce new sounds." (Yang, 2006). That is why learning an additional language during early childhood is more effective and provides the building blocks for later learning.

Early speech and language development are crucial for children's overall cognitive, social, and emotional growth. The brain is particularly receptive to language input in the early years. Neuroplasticity during this time allows language skills to be acquired rapidly. However, delays or deprivation can have lasting effects on a child's ability to develop these skills

Through listening and speaking the child unconsciously develops the following core elements of language:

Phonology
how the sounds of the language are organised and combined to form words.

Morphology
the smallest element of meaning in a language.

Syntax
the rules for combining different words into phrases and sentences so that they make sense.

Semantics
the meaning of words and word combinations.

Pragmatics
how language is used in context for a range of purposes.

Why is it important to use Standard Arabic with children in early years settings?

Research emphasises the developmental importance of exposing children to Modern Standard Arabic from an early age. Saiegh-Haddad and Henkin-Roifarb (2014) highlight a key difference with regard to Arabic language learning as a result of diglossia where varieties of the same language are used under different conditions. Many native Arabic-speaking children encounter challenges when transitioning from colloquial to standard forms of the language. Colloquial Arabic is used by native speakers in a range of social situations. However, Standard Arabic is used for formal oral interactions such as delivering a lecture and critically for writing.

In a study by Schiff and Saiegh-Haddad (2018), Arabic-speaking children's abilities in phonological awareness, morphological awareness and reading (both voweled and unvoweled words) were compared across spoken and standard language varieties from childhood to adolescence. They found **that those children who had not developed their understanding and use of Standard Arabic had gaps in morphological awareness and in reading including fluency and accuracy.**

These key differences in colloquial Arabic and classical standard Arabic mean that native Arabic speakers may not have the pronunciation, grammar and literary skills required to be fully literate in Arabic language.

What are best practices for dual language provision?

The research of Socorro et al (2022) emphasises that linguistic and cultural diversity is an asset, not a deficit, for young children. Extensive research by Oglu (2024) with regard to the effectiveness of different methodologies for introducing a second language in early childhood education provide illuminating insights into best practices in pedagogy for dual language provision including:

- interactive play-based learning approaches increased student engagement by 35%, with a notable improvement in language comprehension and usage
- 40% improvement in verbal fluency among young learners exposed to interactive methods compared to those taught using traditional approaches.
- use of digital tools, including language learning apps, were found to enhance vocabulary retention by 25%, demonstrating their value as supplementary resources
- a direct method, emphasising full language immersion without translation, resulted in a 45% increase in overall language proficiency among children aged 4-6 years.
- classroom observations revealed that children exposed to a combination of the direct method and play-based learning showed a 50% faster acquisition rate of basic conversational skills compared to those taught by traditional methods alone.
- surveys indicated that 80% of educators found interactive methodologies more effective in maintaining student interest and participation in language learning activities
- interviews with language experts highlighted the importance of cultural context in language teaching, with children showing a 30% better understanding of cultural nuances when taught through culturally relevant content.
- traditional teaching methods were more effective in teaching complex grammatical   structures.

Socorro et al (2022) provides a helpful guide regarding the features of a high-quality bilingual setting in early childhood including:

- adopting a comprehensive approach to early literacy that is grounded in research and theory in second language acquisition and biliteracy
- implementing an active, positive engagement with texts in both the home language and the language of instruction
- providing a language-rich and print-rich environment
- ensuring rich oral language and wide vocabulary development in both languages
- providing opportunities for phonological awareness in and across both languages
- building cross-language connections and metalinguistic awareness
- ensuring early childhood pre-literacy practices are developmentally appropriate and focused on the precursors to literacy, not on explicit and discrete "reading skills"

- following a curriculum and implementing literacy instruction that is culturally and linguistically responsive and developmentally appropriate
- utilising instructional materials that reflect the languages and cultures of the classroom community in authentic ways to develop learners' languages, biliteracy skills, and conceptual understanding
- ensuring plentiful access to and daily engagement with books and print in both languages
- differentiation of instruction based on children's language proficiency levels
- valuing families' diverse home literacy practices that families wish to preserve and use with their children, including oral literacies, as culturally and linguistically bound assets to be tapped and integrated into settings instruction.
- ensuring that assessments are validated and normed for dual language learners.

How can we assess children's language development?

According to National Health Service (NHS, 2022), England, the following elements should be taken into consideration when assessing young children's language development:

- child's development over time/milestones
- vision and hearing
- language(s) spoken at home
- language the child speaks most
- attention and listening
- play and interaction
- understanding of language
- use of language
- speech sounds

If the assessment raises concerns regarding a child's language development, more detailed assessments should be conducted. Strategies are put in place as part of an individual plan which includes the tracking of progress and further action taken if necessary.

How may auditory processing affect language development?

Many children have never been in the position where they listen to one sound at a time and are unable to filter out background noise. Even with normal hearing, a child's ability to listen well and process what they hear may be disorganised affecting:

attention and concentration	understanding spoken language	social communication	noticing letter sounds for reading and spelling	confidence and self-esteem

Tomatis (2004) developed a measurement, known as the 'Tomatis curve' to show the optimum levels of auditory processing needed for learning. Some children may be assessed as having hearing within normal range yet not be able to process the full range of sounds in line with the Tomatis curve. This means that that the child may particularly struggle with processing the beginnings and endings of words and following instructions.

It is important to ensure that young children can process the full range of sound effectively by reducing background noise and engaging with them through talk, music and song.

Does technology impact language development?

Technology has revolutionised the world and the way that we communicate. However, Sigman (2017) presents research potentially linking screen use to delays in oral language development. In a study of 894 children aged 6 months to 2 years from 2011 to 2015, researchers found that for every additional 30 minutes of handheld screen time reported by parents, there was 49% increased risk of expressive speech delay in the child.

Digital devices, including the use of educational applications particularly to support additional language learning can be effective. However, screen time should be carefully monitored and balanced with rich, real-world language experiences. Recent advice from leading health authorities including the World Health Organisation (WHO), Oxford Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and the American Academy of Paediatrics recommend the following guidelines for screen time for young children:

- children younger than 18 months should avoid screen time, except for video calls
- children ages 18 to 24 months should only be introduced to high-quality digital content and avoid solo use
- children ages 2 to 5 should have no more than one hour of screen time per day, focusing on educational and interactive content
- children ages 2 to 6, limit non-educational screen time to about 1 hour on weekdays and 3 hours during the weekend days.

What are the features of high-quality early childhood provision?

High-quality early childhood education provides the essential foundation for children's holistic development and is critical to the effective integration of Arabic language. The following provides a range of evidence which supports early childhood leaders in evaluating the quality of their early childhood settings.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project headed by Professor Kathy Sylva (2010) presents reliable research evidence, including the Perry Pre-school project later known as the High/scope research that strongly links quality pre-school experiences to positive outcomes for children in school and in later life.

This research was followed up with the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Harms et al. 2015) which provides a useful tool for evaluating the quality of early childhood settings against a range of criteria including:

- use of indoor space /room arrangement for play and learning
- appropriateness of furnishing for play and learning
- child-related display
- space for gross motor play/ appropriateness of gross motor equipment
- health and safety practices
- encouraging children to use language/helping children expand vocabulary
- staff use of books with children
- encouraging children's use of books
- becoming familiar with print
- fine motor skill development opportunities
- access to art materials and creativity
- music and movement
- dramatic/role play
- nature/science
- mathematical materials and activities/understanding numbers
- promoting diversity and inclusion
- appropriate use of technology
- quality of staff-child interactions
- quality of peer interactions
- quality of positive behaviour management
- transitions
- quality of free play opportunities
- quality of group activities

Recent research particularly by Socorro et al (2022) and Oglu (2024) highlights the importance of children learning about their country of residence, its roots, laws and values and for them to become fluent in at least two languages.

Why should early childhood teachers know more about cognition, metacognition and executive functions?

Cognition is the mental process of knowing, understanding and learning. Metacogniton is the process used to understand our own thinking and learning. Self-regulation is the ability to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses, manage our emotions and behaviour and motivate ourselves so that goals can be achieved.

The Education Endowment Foundation (2021) highlights research by the Sutton Trust which found consistently that metacognition and self-regulation applies to children as young as three with high impact for low cost. Researchers emphasised that these processes should be woven into teaching activities and the many ongoing interactions that occur. Effective strategies included:

- activating and building upon children's prior knowledge; providing a range of activities to re-enforce the learning, using keywords, images and concrete materials so that children can form mental images, revisiting and re-enforcing learning so that it is secure
- having expectations that challenge the learner but do not overwhelm them
- supporting children in developing independence particularly by modelling the required learning, purposeful dialogue with what Professor Robin Alexander describes as learning talk (narrating, questioning and discussing) and teaching talk (instruction, exposition and dialogue); guided practice where the teacher gradually withdraws support as the child becomes more confident
- positive feedback that supports children in reflecting on their learning – what they have mastered and what they need to do to improve.

According to Morris in Early Childhood Education Redefined (Preedy et al 2019), executive functions are a set of skills that enable us to carry out (execute) tasks in a purposeful way and should be part of quality early childhood provision. They are generally broken into three main categories:

- Working memory - the ability to hold several things in mind working with them simultaneously
- Inhibition - resisting impulses and distractions
- Cognitive flexibility - adapting to new rules or priorities

Executive functions are used continuously to navigate life. There is a spurt in executive function development in the early years, particularly between the ages of three to six years, which highlights the importance of incorporating the development of executive functions into early childhood provision.

How can parents support children's development?

Professor John Hattie, Auckland University New Zealand added to the body of research in relation to the importance of parental engagement with their children. Hattie (2008) conducted a 15-year analysis of 50,000 studies involving 83 million students to see what worked in education. He found a combination of parental encouragement and high parental expectations were the critical elements in parenting support. The effect of 'Parent Engagement' over a student's school career amounted to adding the equivalent of an extra two to three years to the student's education.

The parents and carers as play partners research conducted by Preedy and Sanderson (2016) explored the quality of parent-child interactions during play and their impact on attachment and language development. Children's play in homes in the United Arab Emirates was examined to explore how children in this region play and whether the quality of this play supports the development of the necessary attachment with the parents and careers.

Observations and filming of parents particularly highlighted:
- many of the interactions consisted of closed questions such as, "How many bricks are in your tower?"
- play was frequently individual although parents were present
- concentration and spoken language were limited - no sustained play took place.

Following a short training session, parents set up a play partners session with their children for ten minutes each day. They followed their children's interests and engaged in the play as a partner.

The analysis of the video footage after the intervention had been introduced was very different from the earlier filming with children's body and spoken language indicating high levels of engagement and involvement. Through play, children were able to deepen their attachments whilst also extending their vocabulary, syntax (correct sentence structure) and use of language.

أحبك

I love you

Reflections

Research underpinning these Guidelines highlights the benefits of early additional language learning for all children, including enhanced cognitive development, as well as stronger social and emotional benefits. Integrating the learning of Arabic language into the early childhood curriculum requires leaders to ensure that their early childhood provision is of the highest quality. Essential to any quality assurance process are regular observations of practice, discussion about the learning outcomes for children and reflection on how to improve.

Having ensured that the setting for early childhood provision is of high quality, leaders must also ensure that the provision for the teaching of Arabic language is of high quality. The following key quality elements have been identified in the literature review:

- Language learning and positive cultural understanding should be seamlessly integrated into interactive learning environments. Children should learn through play, with a strong focus on developing oral language skills.
- Children's home languages should be valued and supported.
- Joint planning with early years staff who model the language is essential. Educators should ensure its seamless integration into daily routines.
- Parents should be engaged as partners in the learning process and supported in understanding the benefits of dual language acquisition and how they can contribute at home.
- Resources used to support learning should be culturally authentic, developmentally appropriate, and provide daily access to books and print in both Arabic and the child's home language.
- Assessments should be suitable for young children and normed for dual language learners.

Recent research has highlighted the importance of dual and multilingual learning in our modern world. It is time to embrace recent research into dual language learning and integrate best practice into high-quality early childhood provision. We owe it to our children to ensure that they are well-prepared for a world in which communicating effectively in more than one language brings many benefits.

الإمارات العربية المتحدة

Appendix

Key Terms (in alphabetical order)

The following key terms are used throughout the Guidelines to support a consistent understanding and approach to the teaching and learning of Arabic in early childhood settings.

Articulation

The physical production of speech sounds through the coordinated movement of the mouth, tongue, and vocal cords. It determines how clearly and accurately words are pronounced in both standard and colloquial varieties of Arabic.

Bilingual

Bilingual refers to an individual who is capable of using two languages with equal fluency. However, proficiency between the two languages may vary across speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Child-led activities

Child-led activities are activites initiated and chosen by children based on their interests. Teachers create learning opportunities in both indoor and outdoor environments, supporting children›s language development and learning during play. This is achieved by knowing when to participate in children›s play and when to step back, thereby encouraging independent exploration and thinking among children.

Code-Switching

Code-Switching refers to children naturally moving between two languages, using words and phrases from both their primary language and the additional language they are learning.

Communication

Communication is the process of conveying a message through verbal and non-verbal forms, including spoken and written language, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, and body language.

Consonants

Arabic consonants are the ٢٨ letters that represent speech sounds. When not followed by a short or long vowel, they are considered unvowelized or silent.

Contextual support/concrete/hands on

Tools and strategies that help bridge the gap enabling children to understand and remember the language used and the meaning. Examples include using real objects, visuals, stories, role play and games.

Delay/Disorder

Children who develop along expected lines but at a slower rate are described as having a delay, those who show atypical development are described as having a disorder.

Diglossia

Where varieties of the same language are used under different conditions; in relation to Arabic language there is Standard Arabic which has a standardised written form. In addition, there are a range of dialects of Arabic used in conversations. Colloquial forms vary regionally and do not follow a standardised written form.

Executive Function

A set of mental processes (executive functioning skills) that support the setting and implementation of goals. They are used to solve problems, make plans and manage emotions.

Individual plan/provision map

An individual plan for children with additional needs, detailing their specific learning needs, how they will be met and when the plan will be reviewed.

Long Closed Syllable

A syllable structure that starts with a consonant, followed by a short vowel, and ends in another consonant. Examples include: مِن (min) ،قَد (qad).

Long Open Syllable

A syllable that begins with a consonant followed by a long vowel. For example, the syllable عا /'aa/ as in عالم ('**ā**lam – «world»).

Morpheme

The smallest unit of meaning in a language.

Morphology

The study of the structure of words, their composition, and how they are formed from smaller meaningful units called morphemes.

Neuroplasticity

The brain's capacity to grow and adapt over time by creating new neural connections and pathways in response to our learning and experiences.

Orthographic

The conventional spelling of a language.

Pedagogy

The method and practice of teaching. It includes:

- understanding children and their needs
- teaching methods
- teaching theories
- feedback and assessment.

Phonics:

The ability to recognise the relationship between letters (written symbols) and their corresponding sounds. It enables learners to decode written words by sounding them out.

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and understand the sound structure of spoken words, including awareness of individual sounds (phonemes) and syllables. It includes the capacity to segment words into sound units, blend sounds to form words, and manipulate sounds by deleting, adding, or substituting them.

Phonological Manipulation

A specific skill under phonological awareness involving the ability to add, delete, or substitute sounds within words to form new ones. This helps in developing decoding and spelling abilities.

Physiological Training

Activities that develop motor skills and visual-motor coordination needed for writing and reading. It includes exercises to improve hand control, eye-hand coordination, and posture.

Phonology

How the sounds of the language are organised and combined to form words.

Rhyming Words

Words that have the same ending sounds or rhythm. In Arabic, examples include: فداء – نداء, قطة – بطة, جرس – فرس.

Scaffolding

Ways in which teachers help children to use language in speech and writing beyond what they could achieve on their own. Examples are modelling the language, providing visual clues, using key word cards.

Semantics

The meaning of words and word combinations.

Short Open Syllable

A syllable that begins with a consonant followed by a short vowel (fatha, dammah, or kasrah). For example: عَ ('a), لِ (li), مَ (ma) as in عَلِمَ ('alima – "he knew").

Standard Arabic

The formal, standardised version of Arabic used in education, literature, media, and official communication. It is recognised by Arabic language academies and distinct from dialects or colloquial speech. The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) uses the term "Standard Arabic" to refer to the standardised, unified language.

Syntax

The conventional arrangement of words and phrases in a sentence to convey meaning correctly. In Arabic, this includes word order, agreement, and case endings.

Vowels (Short and Long)

In Arabic, short vowels include الفتحة (fatha), الضمة (dammah), and الكسرة (kasrah). Long vowels include الألف(ālif – /ā/), الواو (wāw – /ū/), and الياء (yā' – /ī/).
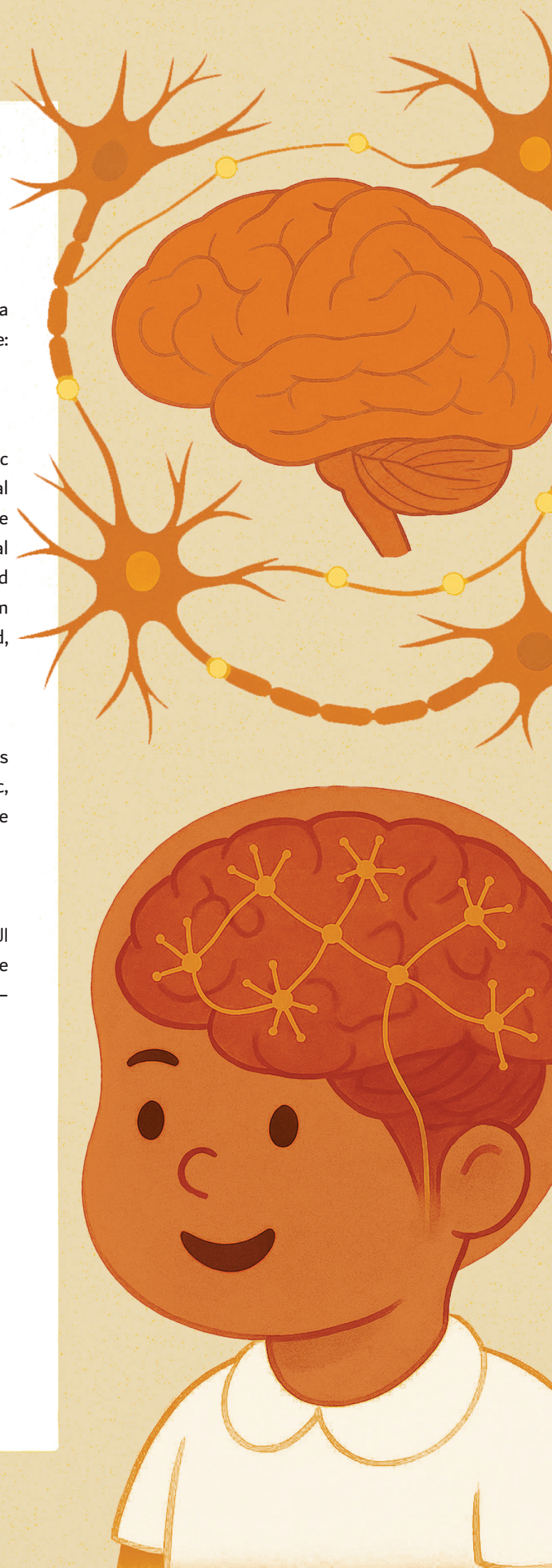
References

- Ambridge, B., Lieven. E. (2013). *Child Language Acquisition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*

- Ball, C. (1994). *Start Right: The Importance of Early Learning. London: RSA.*

- Brooks, J., and Kempe, V. (2012). *Language Development. West Sussex: Blackwell.*

- Bruce, T. (1991). *Time to play in Early Childhood Education. London: Hodder & Stoughton.*

- Bruce, T. (2004). *Developing learning in early childhood. London: Paul Chapman.*

- Buckley, B. (2003). *Children's Communication Skills From birth to five years. Oxon. Routledge*

- Callahan, R., & Gándara, P. (2014). *The bilingual advantage: Language, literacy and the US labor market. Multilingual Matters.*

- CFER. (2011). *Using the CFER: Principles of Good Practice. University of Cambridge*

- Clark, M. M. (2014). *Learning to be Literate: insights from research for policy and practice. Birmingham: Glendale Education.*

- Dickinson, D. K., & Tabors, P. O. (Eds.). (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school. Brookes.*

- Education Endowment Foundation. (2021). *Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning Guidance Report. London: Percipio*

- Erickson-DenHartigh, E. (2024). *Measuring International School Early Year Teachers' Actual and Perceived Knowledge of Strategies to Support Oral Language Development in Early Years. Bethel University. Spark*

- Government of Ireland. 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030

- Harms, T.,Clifford., R., Cryer.,D. (2015). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Third Edition. New York and London: Teachers College Press*

- Haddad.S.,Henkin-Roitfarb.R. (2014). *The structure of Arabic language and orthography. Handbook of Arabic literacy: Insights and perspectives. Netherlands. Springer*

- Hargreaves,V. (2019). *How to support Māori children with culturally responsive teaching. The education hub* https://the educationhub.org.nz/category/ece-resources/

- Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning, A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement. London: Routledge*

- Hasanzadeh, T. (2024). *Bilingual Education Models: Comparative Analysis of Efficacy and Outcomes.* ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net ›

- King.J. (2018). *Languages. Māori: Revitalization of an Endangered Language. Oxford Handbooks Online*

- Lucas, B. and Claxton, G. (2009). *Wider skills for learning; what are they, how can they be cultivated, and how could they be measured. Winchester: Centre for Real-World Learning.*

- Lucas, B. (2010). *The impact of parent engagement on learner success. Winchester: Centre for Real-World Learning.*

- Mathers, S., Roberts, F., & Sylva, K. (2013). *Quality in Early Childhood Education. In G. Pugh & B. Duffy (Eds.), Contemporary Issues in the Early Years. California. SAGE Publications Limited.*

- Mathers, S., Eisenstadt, N., Sylva, K., Soukakou, E., and Ereky-Stevens, K. (2014). *Sound Foundations. A Review of the Research Evidence on Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care for Children Under Three. The Sutton Trust, University of Oxford, United Kingdom.*

- Mathers, S., Malmberg, L.E., Lindorff, A.M. & Gardiner, J. (2022) *Early educators' knowledge of early language pedagogy: How can it be measured and does it matter for child language outcomes? Oxford: University of Oxford.*

- McMIllan .B., Saffran .J. (2016). *Learning in Complex Environments: The Effects of Background Speech on Early Word Learning. Child Development.*

- Nassea. (2015). *EAL Assessment Framework. Bury: nassea*

- NHS England. (2022). *Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit. Bedfordshire and Luton. NHS*

- Oglu, H.(2024). *The Magic of Languages: Introducing a Second Language in Early Childhood Education.* ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net ›

- Preedy. P. (2019) *Supporting the Early Language Development of Young Children Through Play. ISA Journal*

- Preedy, P., Sanderson, K., Ball, C., (2019). *Early Childhood Education Redefined. Oxford: Routledge*

- Puchner, L.D.(2003). *Children Teaching for Learning: What happens when children teach others in the classroom? Chicago: Hoenny Centre for Research and Development in Teaching.*

- Sanderson.K., and Preedy. P. (2016). *Supporting Parents of Preschool Children to develop Strategies for Schema-Based Play Activities to Enhance Attachment and*

Well-being: A Preliminary Study in the United Arab Emirates. Fire Volume 3, Issue 2.

- **Saiegh-Haddad.E. (2003).** *Linguistic distance and initial reading acquisition: The case of Arabic diglossia. Applied Psycholinguistics 24 (3), 431-451: Cambridge University Pres*

- **Shiver, E. (2001).** *Brain development and mastery of language in the early childhood years.* http://www.idra.org/resource-center/brain-development-and-mastery-of-language-in-the-early-childhood-years/

- **Siemund. P., and Li., L. (2020).** *'Singa-pore', in: Henning Klöter and Mårten Söderblom Saarela (eds.) Language Diversity in the Sinophone World. London: Routledge.*

- **Sigman, A. (2017).** *Screen Dependency Disorders: a new challenge for child neurology. JICNA. ISSN 2410-6410.* Available at: http://jicna.org/index.php/journal/article/view/67.

- **Sylva, L., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B. (2006).** *Assessing quality in the early years. Early childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-E). London: Trentham Books Ltd.*

- **Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., (2010).** *Early Childhood Matters Evidence from the Effective Pre-School and Primary Education project Oxon: Routledge.*

- **Sylva, K., Chan, L., Sammons, P., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2011).** *Emergent Literacy Environments: Home and Preschool Influences on Children's Literacy Development. In Handbook of Early Literacy Research. Guilford Press.*

- **Sylva, K., & Pugh, G. (2020).** *Transforming the early years in England. In The Routledge Reader in Early Childhood Education. Taylor & Francis.*

- **The Education Hub. (2019).** *How to support Māori children with culturally responsive teaching.* https://theeducationhub.org.nz/category/ece-resources/

- **The Bell Foundation. (2024).** *EAL and SEND: A Framework for Integrated Provision in Schools. Cambridge. Nasen.*

- **Tomatis, A. (2004).** *The ear and the voice. USA: Scarecrow Press.*

- **Vygotsky, L. S. (1978).** *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.*