Policy on Arabic Language Provision

in Early Childhood Education
(birth to six years)

Introduction

Arabic is an essential part of Dubai's cultural identity and heritage. Providing early Arabic language development opportunities for young children in Dubai will support **Arabic acquisition for all learners**, promoting it as a first language for Emiratis and native speakers and as an additional language for non-Arabic speakers. This greatly contributes to children's overall development as global citizens.

Introducing Arabic in a child's early language experience will enhance cognitive development and strengthen executive functioning, problem-solving, and cultural understanding – skills that are essential for their growth and future contributions to society.

Promoting the mother tongue, particularly for Emiratis, is a shared responsibility between parents, early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings, and the community. Through its E33 strategy and by implementing existing laws and policies, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) aims to strengthen Arabic language development in the early years.

The scope:

- This policy, in alignment with all relevant local and federal laws, **mandates the provision of Arabic language education** in all settings offering care and education services to children from birth to six years old in Dubai, including all private schools, early childhood centres, and any future services licenced by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA).

- As part of the E33 strategy and for compliance purposes, the policy outlines the gradual implementation of Arabic language provision in three phases: Phase 1 for children aged 4 to 6, Phase 2 for children aged 3 to 4, and Phase 3 for children from birth to 3.

- The implementation of Phases 2 and 3 will be contingent on the evaluation of Phase 1 outcomes, which will be assessed after two years (starting Sept 2025).

The aim:

- Foster positive attitudes toward learning Arabic, making it enjoyable and engaging for children.

- Establish a robust pre-primary Arabic programme that addresses the needs of parents, teachers, and leaders for effective language development and progression.

- Foster bilingualism to enhance cognitive and cultural development.

- Ensure equity in Arabic provision in line with KHDA's efforts to improve quality and consistency across the ECCE sector.

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Phase 1 requirements

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Targeted population:

- Phase 1 (effective September 2025 or April 2026 for April to March schools), will apply to all settings offering care and education services to children aged four to six years in Dubai, including private schools, early childhood centres, and any future services licenced by KHDA, and will be referred to as **"settings"** throughout this document.

The approach:

- Teaching should focus on oracy and foundational literacy skills in Arabic, using active, play-based learning that integrates UAE culture and values for all children.

- All ECCE settings serving Dubai's diverse population must clearly declare the language models they offer through their communication channels and Parents-School Contract or Parent-ECC Contract.

- The settings will clarify the type of Arabic language provision they offer by selecting one of the following models:

  1) Arabic as a language of instruction

  2) Arabic-based bilingual model

  3) English-based bilingual model

4) English-based multilingual model

5) Multilingual model

Curriculum requirements:

- KHDA will **issue curriculum design standards** that all settings must adhere to. These standards will ensure consistency across all settings and provide guiding principles for developing a shared understanding of early language development in a bi-or multi-lingual environment and its impact on culture and literacy. They will establish clear expectations for both native and non-native speakers and outline possible teaching strategies and practices tailored to various language models.

- Settings will adopt a holistic, play-based, and inquiry-driven approach to planning Arabic language provision.

- Each setting will adapt the planned Arabic curriculum and assessment strategies to align with its own curriculum philosophy, the demographics of the children, and parental preferences.

- A standardised end-of-phase assessment will be introduced, targeting a sample from each cohort to evaluate sector-wide output and progress, and to inform policies and decisions. The assessment will not be used for individual children's evaluations but will track overall sector improvements in Arabic language development to ensure timely interventions and policy changes.

Teachers, training and qualifications:

- All settings serving children aged four to six must recruit a sufficient number of appropriately qualified Arabic teachers, based on their language model, to ensure that a minimum of one-third of children's instructional time includes the presence of an Arabic teacher who will engage in daily activities, including student-led, whole-group, or small-group teacher-led activities.

- No individual Arabic teacher should be responsible for more than 75 registered children in total across all the classes they are assigned to.

- For settings that have teachers responsible for multiple sections or classrooms, instructional time should be distributed evenly across these groups. Teachers' schedules should be organised to ensure they are in each classroom at different times throughout the day, enabling integration of Arabic into various daily activities, such as meals, playtime, and structured formal learning.

- Arabic teachers must be passionate about working with children, possess excellent communication skills, and model modern standard Arabic, using the correct linguistic rules.

- Arabic teachers must participate in **regular professional development**, with a minimum of 20 hours of training annually, focusing on language acquisition as well as play- and inquiry-based learning.

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

General requirements:

- All staff (Arabic and non-Arabic speakers) are responsible for promoting the Arabic language by modelling a love for learning and integrating Arabic into daily routines, activities, and celebrations.

- Schools and ECCs must create print-rich environments with authentic and culturally relevant Arabic resources and materials to support early language acquisition.

- All settings should support **linguistically diverse children** through targeted programmes to ensure equitable access to learning resources and promote their full language development potential.

- Settings should provide parents with strategies to support Arabic learning at home, such as reading Arabic books and practicing conversational phrases.

- To ensure continuous improvement, schools and ECCs should conduct annual reviews of classroom environments, teaching practices, and curriculum alignment.

- All settings should regularly report to parents on their child's progress in language development as part of the setting's overall reporting policy. Adults in every setting are expected to support every child to acquire the language successfully.

- All settings must have appropriate appraisal systems in place for all teachers to ensure high-quality planning, delivery and achievement.

Compliance:

- Starting from September 2025 (or April 2026 for schools following an April start), settings will have **three academic years** to ensure that all existing and new **staff meet the required qualifications**.

- Settings must hire the required number of Arabic teachers in accordance with KHDA instructional time requirements, ensuring they do not exceed the maximum teacher-to-child ratio. All Arabic teachers must be registered in the KHDA system with complete details. The weekly schedule must clearly reflect their distribution and be available for KHDA review upon request.

- Settings must determine their language model based on curriculum requirements and student demographics, analysing the ratio of native to non-native Arabic speakers. This information must be submitted to KHDA through the setting's profile in the KHDA system.

- Settings must be prepared to provide KHDA with evidence of the Arabic curriculum being taught, ensuring alignment with KHDA guidelines and the school's curriculum. Additionally, they must demonstrate how students' progress in acquiring the required language skills is monitored.