Raising the Quality of Arabic and Islamic Education in UAE Schools
A Qualitative Analysis of School Inspection Reports
Introduction
K-12 Education in the UAE

In a previous whitepaper about Outstanding Schools we started by pointing out the remarkable achievements of the education system of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since 1950 when there were only a few schools in the country, reserved for male students, through the 1960s and 1970s when a school building program was put in place to expand the education system.

In 2006-2007, approximately 650,000 students were enrolled at 1,256 public and private schools. About 60% of all students attend public schools. This percentage is changing in favor of the private schools in recent years and the counts are increasing.

We also wrote extensively about the quality assurance tools used by the departments of education in the Emirates to inspect the schools and to make sure they are matching national and international standards.

To regulate and monitor the progress and assure the quality of the UAE educational system, regulatory bodies were created. President H.H. Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan established the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), an independent Abu Dhabi-based corporate body, in 2005 to develop education throughout the UAE.

The Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB) of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) was established by Decision 38 of The Executive Council of the Government of Dubai in 2007.

The number of student seats in the private sector was recorded at over 269,700 in 2013, which is expected to increase to 315,500 in 2017, recording a CAGR of 5.5%, to reach a total of 360,000 seats by 2020, in accordance with the strategy set by KHDA.

Dubai Education Overview, Growth Potential in a Competitive Environment, Colliers International MENA, 2014
In 2015 the new UAE-wide inspection framework has been implemented for the first time. The A-C bands and Grades of previous inspections used in Abu Dhabi have been replaced by the ranking of the schools from Outstanding through to Very Poor.

Schools in Dubai are inspected yearly. However, as Abu Dhabi works on a 2 year inspection cycle, it won’t be until mid of 2017, that the reports using the new framework will be published for the private schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

These reports highlight the level of participation in this requirement and the extent of schools’ readiness to work towards the UAE Vision 2021 targets.

They explore how improvements in governance, leadership and self-evaluation have had a significant impact on the overall quality of education. The improvement in the quality of education experienced by students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is also highlighted in this report.

The UAE-wide 6 point scale rating will assure that results are comparable throughout the UAE. Inspectors will make judgements using a six-level scale. The six levels of quality on the scale are defined as follows:

Inspectors will make judgements using a six-level scale. The six levels of quality on the scale are defined as follows:

**Figure 1:** The six levels scale of quality rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outstanding</strong></td>
<td>Quality of performance <strong>substantially exceeds</strong> the expectation of the UAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Good</strong></td>
<td>Quality of performance <strong>exceeds</strong> the expectation of the UAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td>Quality of performance <strong>meets the expectation</strong> of the UAE (This is the expected level for every school in the UAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptable</strong></td>
<td>Quality of performance <strong>meets the minimum</strong> level of quality required in the UAE (This is the minimum level for every school in the UAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weak</strong></td>
<td>Quality of performance <strong>below</strong> the expectation of the UAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Weak</strong></td>
<td>Quality of performance <strong>substantially below</strong> the expectation of the UAE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School inspections are structured around six performance standards and conclude with an overall performance judgement. 

Performance standards:

1. Students’ achievement
2. Students’ personal and social development, and their innovation skills
3. Teaching and assessment
4. Curriculum
5. The protection, care, guidance and support of students
6. Leadership and management

The Private Schools and Quality Assurance (PSQA) Sector was established in 2010 to implement ADEC’s Strategic Plan and achieve rapid improvement in the school system in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The Sector’s key functions are to regulate, license, inspect and support private schools.

The purpose of inspections is to find out what a school is doing well and what might be improved. The reports are presented to school leaders, governors, owners and proprietors who are expected to take actions according to the recommendation.

Schools should recognize that inspections have provided a valuable contribution toward continuous improvement.

The public schools are government-funded and are free for citizens of the UAE; admission for expatriate students is based on merit and fees apply. The curriculum is created to match the UAE development’s goals and values.
The 2015 - 2016 Private Schools Inspection Results
In our previous white paper we analyzed the 2015 – 2016 Inspection reports for schools in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Al Ain in detail, especially for Outstanding rated schools.

The results are consistent throughout the UAE, only a few schools have been evaluated as being “Outstanding”. Most schools have been rated “Acceptable” and “Weak” in Abu Dhabi and “Good” and “Acceptable” in Dubai.

**Figure 2:** Dubai and Abu Dhabi Schools inspection reports 2015–2016 by rating

**Abu Dhabi Schools Inspections Results 2015-2016**

- Good: 36%
- Acceptable: 12%
- Outstanding: 36%
- Very Good: 10%
- Weak: 3%
- Very Weak: 3%

**Dubai Schools Inspections Results 2015-2016**

- Good: 38%
- Acceptable: 11%
- Outstanding: 9%
- Very Good: 5%
- Weak: 5%
When looking into detail during the qualitative analyses of the reports, we noticed that there is a gap between the ratings for the subjects Islamic education, Arabic as a first language and Arabic as an additional language where we see mostly Acceptable to Good ratings compared to other subjects like English, Mathematics and Science where the ratings are Very Good to Outstanding.

Improving of teaching of Arabic was frequently mentioned in the recommendations of the school inspectors. There were also several mentions of recommendations to improve Islamic Education.

Looking at the “Outstanding” rated schools, they seem to have been rated Outstanding despite a lower rating in these subjects. This puts them in a difficult situation, at risk to lose their outstanding rating if they only slightly decrease in any other performance standards.

For lower rated schools the impact is much more relevant, as it can be an important factor considered by inspectors in their rating and prevent them to achieve a higher level which then will assure them a series of benefits.

Figure 3: Outstanding rated schools – comparing Islamic and Arabic Education and the other subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>ADEC Overall Rating 2015/2016</th>
<th>Islamic Education</th>
<th>Arabic as First Language</th>
<th>Arabic as Additional Language</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al Bateen Secondary AlMushrif Private School</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Muna Primary School</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Good - Very Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very Good - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Community Private School</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Satisfactory - Improving</td>
<td>Satisfactory - Improving</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton College</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton College Al Ain (Bloom Gardens)</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Detailed Report Not Available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raha International Private School</td>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Good - Very Good</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Very Good</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Name</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>KHDA Overall 2015/2016 Rating</td>
<td>Islamic Education</td>
<td>Arabic as First Language</td>
<td>Arabic as Additional Language</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Science</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubai College</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Weak - Acceptable</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubai English Speaking Private College</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubai International Academy</td>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Good - Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEMS Dubai American Academy</td>
<td>US/IB</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEMS Jumeirah Primary School</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEMS Modern Academy</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEMS Royal Dubai School</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEMS Wellington International School</td>
<td>UK/IB</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumeirah College</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumeirah English Speaking School</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumeirah English Speaking (School (Br))</td>
<td>UK/IB</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings School Dubai</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lycee francais International Georges Pompidou Primary Oud Metha</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lycee francais International Georges Pompidou School (Dubai Branch)</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repton School FZ-LLC</td>
<td>UK/IB</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Indian High School</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Acceptable - Good</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Very Good - Outstanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The ratings are an average across the different stages, primary, secondary, etc and attainment and progress.
Importance of Islamic and Arabic Education
The Ministry of Education elaborated a strategy of 10 initiatives that the ministry is aiming to complete all by 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Outcomes</th>
<th>Ensure high quality curriculum is in place so that students are best prepared for the knowledge economy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student School Life</td>
<td>Ensure all students receive excellent teaching from all education staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Equality</td>
<td>Develop primary and secondary education across the UAE and minimize drop outs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure excellent learning environment and tools, to ensure that students' needs are met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Citizens</td>
<td>Install a harmonized assessment on federal level and ensure that students with special needs receive extra and individualized support to integrate them into the educational system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure an affordable, high quality standard of Public and Private education is accessible to all students' educational systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Effectiveness</td>
<td>Promote National Identity and develop the sense of belonging of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foster the society’s direct contribution to the school environment are met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure that all support services in Zones are conducted in a timely and efficient way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure that all support services in the Ministry are conducted in a timely and efficient way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Ministry of Education has developed textbooks and teaching material for Islamic and Arabic subjects that will focus on both national identity and community integration.

It is an important part of these strategies to develop curricula that align with higher education requirements and the requirements of the job market.

Included in these requirements is to improve language proficiency in Arabic and to foster appreciation for Islamic values, benefits, and practices in Islamic Education.

The knowledge of Islamic values, the development of awareness of spiritual and moral issues in life experiences is of utmost importance for all students, of any nationality living and learning in the UAE.
Curricula of teaching Islamic Education should aim to develop an understanding of religious traditions and to appreciate the cultural differences in the UAE today.

Students should be able to reflect on their own experiences and to develop a personal response to the fundamental questions of life; develop investigative and research skills and to enable them to make reasoned judgments about religious issues; have respect for other peoples’ views and to celebrate the diversity in society.

The Islamic studies courses at schools are offered in both English and Arabic.

The Islamic Studies courses are mainly covering five areas of study:

‘Aqeedah (Islamic Doctrine): Students learn about the six articles of faith. (To believe in Allah, to believe in his Angels, to believe in his Messengers, to believe in his Books, to believe in the Last Day, to believe in Divine Destiny). Students are introduced to their Islamic doctrine; a comprehensive knowledge about their Creator and things he has created mainly dealing with the unseen pillars of faith and is presented with a clear and authentic picture of how they are viewed in Islam. An introductory unit about comparative religions is taught when students reach Level 6.

Al Qur’an wa Oloomih (The Noble Qur’an and its Sciences): Students learn to recite the Qur’an along with the rules of Tajweed in depth as they move on to higher levels so that they can recite and understand the Qur’an independently. They also learn the meanings of a few important chapters/passages of the Qur’an to practice them in their daily lives.

Fiqh-ul-Ibaadaat Wal-Muamalaat (Worship and Dealings Jurisprudence): Students learn about the five pillars of Islam. They get the chance to practice Islam at school by offering Dhuhr Salaah at the school Prayer Room and undertake workshops on different pillars of Islam during different periods of the academic year.
Seerah Wa Taareekh (The Islamic History): Students learn stories of the prophets as well as other stories mentioned in the Quran. Students study in detail, the life of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) as well as the thirty years that followed his death, known as the Rightly Guided Caliphate. Students are then introduced to stories of the different companions of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), as well as other important figures throughout Islamic history. Specifically, students will learn about the four great Caliphs of Islam; Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali (RA).

Akhlaaq (Manners and Morals): Students learn about the Islamic code of morals, manners and ethics. For example, they are guided towards the right actions to be taken in the following cases; respect to parents, elders and teachers, kindness, cleanliness, eating habits and etiquettes, Islamic greetings, dressing code, manners in the mosque, good relations with people of other religions, forbidden food and drinks and many others. Students are also instructed about such actions to be avoided, such as backbiting, boasting, jealousy and miserliness.

Reading and studying stories are an important component of this part of Islamic studies. Dua’as (supplications) are also part of the curriculum, whereby students memorize daily Dua’as and recite them at the appropriate times.

Throughout their studies at schools in the UAE, students also follow an intensive Arabic programme of study set by the MOE (Ministry of Education) and in some cases also take up external exams for these subjects from the international exam boards.

Arabic is the language of the Qur’an and it is the aim of the MOE to ensure that every student is able to read, write and communicate in this language to the highest standards in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is a modernized form for classical Arabic. MSA is the universal language of the Arabic-speaking world that is understood, if not spoken, by most speakers of Arabic.

In some schools there are separate classes for native speakers of Arabic and for students who study Arabic as an additional language, depending on the students’ nationality. In these classes students will be enrolled based on the number of years they have studied Arabic and their level of Arabic, not based on their age and grade they are enrolled in for the other subjects.
Good and Very Good Ratings in Islamic Education
We are looking at schools that have achieved a rating of Good and Very Good for at least one stage and at least one aspect, attainment or progress for Islamic Education. These are schools with an overall “Outstanding” and “Very Good” rating.

The question we asked, what are inspectors looking for in students’ progress and attainment to give these schools high ratings. Here we are looking at a few schools as examples:

**Dubai English Speaking Private College rated “Good” in Islamic Education in the 2015/2016 inspection.**

In Islamic education, the majority of students demonstrated levels of knowledge, understanding and skills that were above national curriculum expectations. For example, students in Year 11 identified the scientific miracles in the Holy Qur’an and explained their effect on modern life and its practical applications. All assessments were internal and no external assessment or benchmarking was conducted. The tracking for students’ achievements over the previous three years showed improvement in their attainment. The majority of students made notable gains in knowledge, skills and understanding, when measured against the learning objectives in lessons. They made links to prior knowledge and used external resources such as references and websites to extend their understanding of the topics being learned. All groups of students made sufficient progress.

**GEMS Modern Academy rated “Good” in Islamic Education in the 2015/2016 inspection.**

Almost all students were very well disposed to learning and very positive in their attitudes. Their appreciation and understanding of Islamic values and of the culture and history of the UAE were very highly developed. They showed tolerance and understanding. They appreciated their own rich cultural heritage and those of other societies and cultures.

In Islamic education, in the absence of international measures, students’ attainment against curriculum and national standards were slightly above expectations. The majority of students could recite short Surahs of the Holy Qur’an using Tajweed rules with very few errors. They could relate Islamic concepts to their real life, such as the meaning of the Holy Qur’an and Hadeeth. The progress made by different groups of students during lessons and over time was good and matched their levels of attainment.
GEMS Royal Dubai School rated “Good” in Islamic Education in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In Islamic education, the majority of students attained levels that were above the UAE Ministry of Education (MOE) curriculum standards. They were able to make links to prior knowledge and had a secure grasp of the key principles of the Islamic faith. Students demonstrated detailed knowledge and understanding of the lives of prophets and could relate to the morals in the stories. Their skills in reciting the Holy Qur’an were improving and students were able to recite a number of short Surahs. All the assessments were internal and students’ attainment over the past three years was tracked. In relation to their starting points, the majority of students made better than expected progress. All groups of students, including those with SEND and lower attaining students, made good progress.

Jumeirah English Speaking School rated “Good” in Islamic Education in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In Islamic education, students’ attainment levels in national curriculum assessments were high due to effective progress. In Year 1, students could talk clearly and form good sentences about the love and support that should be among family members. Year 2 students enacted ‘Wudhoo’ ablution correctly, with the accompanying prayers. During lessons students were asked to recite verses from the Holy Qur’an, which they did accurately. They could build sentences related to their real lives in terms of Islamic values, such as honesty. They made good progress in lessons when they were given the opportunity to express themselves. Students achieved more when the subject was taught in English rather than Arabic. Different groups of students made similarly good progress.

Kings School Dubai rated “Good” in Islamic Education in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In Islamic education, the majority of students demonstrated knowledge and understanding of Islam that was above expectations. They had secure knowledge and understanding of Islamic concepts and the Holy Qur’an. Year 4 students knew the six letters of ‘Qualquila’ and the conditions where they could be used. However, their Tajweed skills were not as well developed. Year 6 students developed their understanding of the value of forgiveness. They had improved their skills of searching for references from the Holy Qur’an and Hadeeth. The majority of students made good progress in lessons because of their high levels of engagement and effective paired working. Groups of students made similarly secure progress from year to year.
Al Muna Primary School rated “Good” in Islamic Education in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In Islamic education, students make very good progress in developing knowledge, understanding and skills. They show a good awareness of Islamic values. A majority of students demonstrate competent memorization skills and can read and repeat short ‘surahs’ (verses) from the Holy Qur’an. They are able to confidently discuss and reflect on the impact Islam makes on their lives and behaviour. In social studies, students have a good understanding of the diversity of UAE society and developments within the UAE, for example when Year 3 students describe the range of social services. They show high levels of respect and understanding of UAE culture and values.

The Winchester School rated “Very Good” overall and “Very Good” in Islamic Education progress in the primary stage in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In Islamic education, most students had attainment levels that were above the expectations of the Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum. They displayed good knowledge of the main concepts of Islam such as the Pillars of Islam. Their recitation skills were very secure and they were able to refer to events by using simple verses from the Holy Qur’an and Hadeeth. In the majority of lessons, students made very good progress against the objectives, as for example in Year 2 when they could explain the value behind ablution before prayers. Progress over time was improving. Students with special SEND made good progress and the girls and boys made similar progress.

Summary
What are schools doing well in Islamic Education?

1. Recitation: Students are able to recite verses from the Holy Qur’an
2. Understanding: Students understand Islamic values, the heritage and the life in the UAE
3. Application: Students are able to relate Islamic concepts to their real life
Good and Very Good Ratings in Arabic as a first language and Arabic as an additional language
In the next step we are looking at schools that have achieved a Good and Very Good rating of Good and Very Good for at least one stage and at least one aspect, attainment or progress for Islamic and Arabic Education. These are few of the school with an overall “Outstanding” and “Very Good” rating.

The question we asked, what are these schools doing to achieve these high ratings. Here we are looking at a few schools as examples:

**Dubai College** rated “Good” in Arabic as an additional language in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In Arabic as an additional language, in the absence of external measures, attainment and progress were generally good. The majority of students demonstrated good listening and speaking skills. They could respond to simple questions about familiar topics such as describing people and places, or talking about hotels and leisure. They could formulate simple sentences to describe feelings and preferences, using a good range of vocabulary. Although the majority had developed adequate reading fluency and comprehension of appropriate texts, these gains were not sufficiently reflected in writing. Students still wrote at levels which were too basic and did not reflect the full range of vocabulary acquired throughout the years.

**GEMS Dubai American Academy** rated “Good” in Arabic as first and additional language in the 2015/2016 inspection for middle and high level.

Arabic as first language evaluation: Over the past three years, most of student attained levels that were in line with curriculum standards in Arabic as a first language. This level of attainment had been continued. For most students, listening skills were above the expected level. In lessons, the majority of the students made better than expected progress in relation to starting points. This was an improvement from last year. No significant differences were observed between the progress of boys and girls.

Arabic as additional language evaluation: The majority of students were performing above the curriculum standards of Arabic as an additional language. Students in Grade 9 could speak and read with an adequate level of fluency. They could construct independent narratives as part of a project that involved sharing information about a country that they had visited. Over time, the majority of students made better progress in relation to their starting points and curriculum standards and this was an improvement from the previous year.
GEMS Royal Dubai School rated “Good” in Arabic as an additional language in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In Arabic as an additional language, progress in lessons was good. For the majority of students, their attainment was above curriculum standards. According to internal examinations and recent work, a higher proportion of students in the lower year groups achieved above curriculum standards. Students had good listening skills, were able to respond to teachers’ use of standard Arabic and could interact with each other. They could express their ideas using a reasonable range of familiar sentences. Most students could read simple text but were less competent in answering questions about the topic. Their independent writing skills were variable. Students in the lower year groups were more confident and able to write using the Arabic script. Levels of attainment and rates of progress for different groups of students had recently improved against MOE expectations.

Jumeirah English Speaking School rated “Good” in Arabic as an additional language in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In the absence of external benchmarks, attainment in Arabic as an additional language was judged above expectations because of students’ effective progress. The majority of students were acquiring good language skills. In lessons, they demonstrated well-developed listening skills. In upper primary, they could engage in short conversations confidently. Students’ notebooks reflected their good vocabulary and they could use basic grammar accurately in sentences. Although students could follow a pattern to write 4–5 lines of basic text, their independent writing skills were relatively weak. The reading skills of most students were good. Students in Years 4 and 5 made better progress than students in lower primary. The majority made good progress in developing their listening and speaking skills. Generally, boys and girls made similar progress.

Al Bateen Secondary Al Mushrif Private School rated “Good” in Arabic as an additional language in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In Arabic and Islamic education standards are above average and progress is satisfactory and improving. For example, Year 6 students have a secure knowledge of Arabic grammar and can recognise vowels within noun sentences. Students’ ability to read and write in Arabic is less well developed.

The school uses performance data very well to track the standard of students’ work and their progress. Emerging trends concerning individual students or groups, such as boys and girls, are accurately identified and acted upon. For example, the school is well aware of weaknesses in students’ writing in English and Arabic and is taking steps to close the gap.
Al Muna Primary School rated “Good” in Arabic as first language in the 2015/2016 inspection.

In the subjects taught in Arabic, students listen well and the majority demonstrate well-developed speaking, writing and reading skills, as for example when Year 2 students write sentences to match pictures and Year 5 confidently read stories. A minority of students does not consistently speak standard Arabic to express views or retell stories and this skill is not sufficiently reinforced by a few teachers. By Year 6, students have clear, legible handwriting.

Summary
What are schools doing well in Arabic Education?

1. Listening: Students are able to listen and understand Arabic text
2. Reading and writing: Students are able to read Arabic text and have a clear, legible handwriting.
3. Independent writing and speaking skills: Students are able to answer questions and construct independent narratives

Overall the progress was valued higher than the attainment. In the inspection reports we often find the comparison to previous inspections. Even if the overall achievement was lower than expected for students at a certain grade, the inspectors attributed the progress a high value, that shows they appreciate the schools effort to improve their teaching.

The Problem:
Among all taught subjects Islamic and Arabic education have the lowest ratings for all evaluated schools. Why are Arabic and Islamic Education the weakest subjects? And what needs to be done by the schools to improve their ratings?

The Solution:
Develop strategies, training, initiatives, extracurricular activities, teaching methodologies etc... to improve the teaching of Arabic language as first language and additional language and the students’ achievement and progress in Islamic Education.
Expert-Interviews

To learn more about the importance of Islamic and Arabic education in UAE schools, the gap between the ratings in these subjects compared with other subjects, the challenges that schools are facing and solutions that schools have applied to overcome these challenges, we have conducted interviews with 9 experts in these matters including inspectors, department heads and principals, all with many years of experience in the education sector in UAE.

We asked the following questions:

1. Why are Islamic and Arabic Education important for K12 students in the UAE?
2. Why are Islamic and Arabic Education the weakest subjects in inspection reports compared to other subjects when at the same time they are so critical to the national agenda?
3. What are the key challenges schools face in improving the quality of Islamic and Arabic Education in the UAE?
4. What are the key solutions being proposed to improve the subjects?

When you think about challenges in general you can categorize those in 2 groups. There are the external challenges which can be listed in a very long list and many educators tend to blame those factors because they are external and they are many.

We focus here in our system on the internal factors, so what can we do in the education field to do a good job. Focusing on external factors is not productive...The question is what can we do and there is a lot that can be done.

Dr. Mariam Al Hashemi
Importance of Islamic and Arabic Education – Experts’ Point of View
Islamic and Arabic education are critical for the UAE national agenda. The experts’ views and opinions are aligned with these plans of the government to improve the teaching and learning of these subjects. The reasons we heard in the interviews with the education experts can be summarized as follows:

- **Heritage, culture, values**: For local Emirati and Arabic students the learning of these subjects is important to learn about their heritage, culture, Islamic values. For other nationalities students it is also important to learn and understand the life in the UAE.

  > Language is not only a way of communication; it is way more than that. Arabic is heritage, it is identity, it is a way to communicate through generations: students communicating with their grandparents, for example; language is not just another kind of knowledge, it is personality. Islamic education is the source of the values we have and of course our religion.

  *Mrs. Hunada Kanbar*

- **Communication**: Arabic as a language is widely used in the Middle East, it is important to learn this language correct, to communicate, especially with the elder generation, grandparents who are not fluent in English. For Non-Arabic speakers living in the UAE it is also an advantage to understand the official language of the country they live in.

  > Our school, Emirates International School in Jumeirah, Dubai, has about half its population Arabic speakers, just short of 20% of them are Emirati students, therefore the focus on Arabic as a first language is significant, but also we have about 50% who are non-native speakers so we need to focus on Arabic B (Arabic as second language) students as well.

  *Mr. David Hicks*
- **Creativity:** Classical Arabic is the language used in books, it gives students the opportunity to read and to write, be creative in this language

- **Second language:** Especially for non-Arabic speaker it is important to learn a second language; this can open doors for them in the future, but also develops learning capacity from an early age which can benefit the students in other areas of studying.

- **Life quality:** The learning and understanding of Islamic Values and the application of Islamic principals in everyday life will lead to an improved life quality following principles of understanding, tolerance and forgiveness.

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I still think it’s important, for example if I were a British person going to live in France or in Germany or in Italy, it would be expected to learn a certain level of language in the host country. So if it is important for that reason for Expats. I also think it is very important that we maintain and sustain the mother tongue of our native Arab speakers, but with this come significant challenge.

*Mr. David Hicks*

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I have been here for 10 years and I started learning Arabic with my teachers, teaching me. I am trying to learn how to teach it so I am learning it myself. It is vital important to respect the country and culture that you are in, respect the land on which we stand. It’s really important for all the children to have an understanding of the culture and society in which they live.

*Mr. Asa Firth*
There is no doubt about the importance of Islamic and Arabic education among all the people we have spoken with and according to their opinion also among teachers and school managers across the UAE and other Arabic countries. However, as the schools only have a limited budget they can spend, they tend to prioritize other subjects which they might consider more relevant for the education and future development of their students. This brought us to our next question, why are Islamic and Arabic education consistently rated lower in inspection reports compared to the other subjects?

For non-Arabs who are here, in my experience I went to many schools, Filipino schools, Indian schools, I noticed there is so much willingness to learn Arabic because these people are willing to stay in this country, they are willing to find jobs in this country and by learning Arabic well they will be able to find good jobs in this country. They are already part of this country for a long time, some are living here for 20 years (the parents) and not speaking the language has become a barrier.

Mrs. Anwar Alsahri
Lower ratings of Islamic and Arabic Education - Experts’ Point of View
The answers to this question are already anticipating the next question about challenges. We asked our panel of experts why they think Islamic and Arabic education are consistently rated lower than other subjects. We have illustrated this in Figure 3, above, where it is obvious that there is a gap. The answers we found can be summarized as follows:

- **Importance**: There is no doubt about the importance of the subjects and schools are adhering to the national agenda, however compared to the other subjects Islamic and Arabic education is given a lower priority.

- **Investment**: As a logical consequence of giving these subjects a lower priority, schools are less inclined to spend a large part of their limited budget for the improvement of these subjects.

  

  Schools are aware of this gap that is why in the last years they are getting support from external consultants.

  *Mrs. Maysoon Dwairi*

- **Lack of internal monitoring**: There is no international benchmark available like for the other subjects, so it is difficult for schools to “self-asses” the level and progress of their students. This leads to the situation where they will receive a lower rating for these subjects and are only left with the option to improve in the time before the next inspection is due.

  

  The fact that these subjects are taught in a very traditional way, the focus is mainly on teachers speaking all the time, there are no active strategies, students are just expect to memorize. Learning Arabic grammar is not easy. Students have to memorize so much of Arabic grammar so when they speak they are not able to use it. This has blocked students from liking Arabic grammar.

  *Mrs. Anwar Alsahri*
Closely related to these reasons are the challenges that schools are facing when it comes to teaching Islamic and Arabic education. Many schools have identified these obstacles and have developed strategies to overcome them. We hope that this whitepaper will offer you some insights into the challenges and that you can benefit from the experience shared by our experts’ panel.

An uniform assessment…I mean what we are doing at the moment is developing an assessment which is based around the curriculum. We still have problems, because we have done that, we give it to our Arabic teachers…and they are still not accurate. I think sometimes they want to please us and to tell us this is where the children are, and then realistically, when we moderate, so at the moment we have done all our mid-year assessments for our Arabic students, we’ve got all our results, the head of department comes in and shows the results to our senior management, than we have a pupil progress meeting and we looked at them (the results) and they all looked really, really good. Actually they are not. When you look at one class to another class, they are not moderated. So now what we are doing, our senior management are going in with each Arabic class and moderate and see where the children are. So we have to moderate our assessments. We want to be as accurate as possible. The only way you can learn from anything is by being accurate and honest.

Mr. Asa Firth
Key Challenges and Solutions in Improving Islamic and Arabic Education in the UAE – Experts’ Point of View
We will now discuss the challenges and at the same time the solutions that our experts shared during the interviews. These challenges they faced at their schools or they heard about or seen at schools during inspections and solutions they found for their schools or they had seen at other schools.

We will be looking at the challenges and solutions on different levels, as we found that most of the experts we had spoken to identified these levels and offered separate solutions for each of these levels.

1. Leadership
2. Teachers
3. Students
4. Curriculum
5. Subjects
6. Society and the Parents

However, these levels are often intertwined and changes applied on one level can influence many others. It is important to understand their interactions and influence on the overall improvement of the Islamic and Arabic Education in UAE schools. Of course, they do not only apply to these subjects and can be identified for any other efforts to improve teaching, however some are more important for these subjects compared to others, we will illustrate why.

1. Leadership

Leadership is the last level that you would expect to have a big influence on students’ progress in Islamic and Arabic education, but all our experts agreed that Leadership is in fact the most important factor. Its implications are indirect but can have major consequences.

The way we used to teach Islamic is that Arabic teachers would teach a little bit of Islamic, so they would do a little bit of Arabic and then they would do Islamic.

What we decided to do 3 years ago was, we needed a specialist Islamic teacher, so we gave them a specialist space, a special room, a prayer rooms, so that they had value.... We gave them this special place, we have a Quran club, we have a Quran ceremony, they are having awards, and they are taking part in a competition at the end of the year.

Mr. Asa Firth
1.1 Understanding

Problem: If the leadership of a school is not convinced that Islamic and Arabic education are of utmost importance for the future of their students, than they will not cascade this idea down to the lower management levels and teachers and they will not allocate the needed time and budget to improve the teaching.

Solution: The leadership needs to be convinced of the importance of these subjects because only they can take decisions to make changes. This is usually done during the inspections when they read the feedback in the reports and the recommendations are to improve the quality of Islamic and Arabic teaching or in meetings with the teams, parents, management from other schools..etc..

I inspected this school (name confidential) myself and we were clear in explaining to the leadership team that they need to add more focus on Islamic and Arabic education, because they had a high percentage of local and Arab students. They were very keen to improve. The first thing they did was to assign the right people in the right positions, a head of the Arabic department and one of the Islamic department. They both were qualified; they both had the right subject knowledge plus knowledge of teaching strategies.

Once the school’s leadership had appointed these 2 people, they worked with them and they closed the gap: the Head (of the school) speaks English, so the communication was really good on the leadership level, but when it goes to the teachers, they don’t necessarily speak English well. So there was a gap in the communication between head and teachers. So what happened, within a year they improved unexpectedly, because they started working on skills, standards, planning together to understand how important Islamic and Arabic is for the students, made it a priority for the school, working with the parents and working all together.

Mrs. Hunada Kanbar
1.2 Attitude

Problem: It is usually not enough for the leadership to understand the importance of the Islamic and Arabic education. If they do not reflect this in their attitude they will not motivate the management, teachers and then students to follow their example.

Solution: Understanding the importance of these subjects is the first step, but in a next step the leadership has to reflect it in their attitude. The school personnel is following the schools leadership in beliefs and attitude. The change in attitude has to happen on the highest level, on the initiative of the leadership or at the advice of inspectors with the understanding that a lack of improvement and continued low focus on these subjects is putting the school at risk to lose their overall high rating.

1.3 Actions

Problem: Understanding and a changed attitude can only generate limited improvements. Without clear actions being taken and implemented on several levels the desired improvement cannot be achieved. The leadership of a school, principal, and heads of departments are the decision makers for actions, especially involving budget spending.

Solution: The leadership has to develop a plan and set priorities, maybe in strategy meetings with the team or with the help of external consultants. A reallocation of budget makes sense when departments that are already performing outstanding do not need further funding and that budget can be allocated to low performing departments. It is also a decision of the leadership to use assessments of the teachers, training the teachers, and constantly monitor to document the process and improvement.

If the leadership thinks that Islamic and Arabic are priorities, they will do something to improve it.

Mrs. Hunada Kanbar
2.0 Teachers

2.1. Subject Knowledge

**Problem:** Quality of teaching usually refers to the subject knowledge of the teachers. Most teachers have a good knowledge about the subject they are teaching. However, there are cases where the leadership or heads of departments cannot assess the teachers’ level of knowledge because of their lack of subject knowledge or missing language skills. This is frequently the case in English language curriculum schools like UK or USA, India curriculum.

**Solution:** If the level of knowledge of the teachers cannot be assessed internally by head of departments or the schools leadership, it is recommended to use external assessors or the inspectors’ feedback when visiting the school and then take immediate actions if necessary. It is also recommended to constantly monitor and train the teachers on subject knowledge within and between the departments, as well as through external assessors or in collaboration with other schools.

2.2. Teaching skills

**Problem:** Arabic and Islamic teachers usually don’t have training in pedagogic methodologies. They have the knowledge, but are not able to transfer it to the students in an efficient and appealing way to get students involved in the lessons and motivate them to learn.

**Solution:** Train the teacher. Schools can initiate internal and external training by encouraging their teachers to take part in workshops and lecturers or by employing external trainers, specialized in pedagogic methodologies.

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[a few years ago] The schools were waking up to the call of inspections, they were not clear of what was expected, what to do, how to do it, so we didn’t see many examples (of connecting Islamic teaching to real life). It is still about memorizing.

*Mrs. Anwar Alsahri*
Most of these teachers (for Islamic and Arabic) are coming to us with little if any pedagogical training. They are subject specialists, but not educational subject specialists….So at first what they did as a department, spend time to develop capacities in a meaningful way so the professional development model was consistent with the research on effective PD.

There were not just fancy workshops in Dubai or “let’s take everyone out of class and send them to some 8 hours session in other school”. It was situated coaching, peer visits, not just the public coordinator is facilitating workshops, but they would rotate so every week one teacher would stand up in front of her colleagues and they would be sharing good practice from within their class and that’s why we see the consistency in our department. …You see that the Arabic Islamic department has a common theme of engagement, of the strategies they are going to be using…the leadership capacities have been developed in school even if they didn’t come to the school with this knowledge.

Mr. Moneer Moukaddem

(as a teacher)...if you come from a different background, from the States or from Canada...etc... when you go to universities to study, you are taking the minor of Physics or Chemistry or whatever subject you want to teach. We don’t have that for Arabic. Maybe I will have the best Arabic teacher, who has all the knowledge, but then transferring this knowledge to the students, that is a challenge; they (the Arabic teachers) don’t know about teaching methodologies or teaching techniques, they don’t know about planning. I am sure teachers have the knowledge, but delivering the knowledge that is the biggest challenge.

When you ask students which subject you like better, Arabic or English, most of them will say “English”. Why? “Because English is more fun.” It is not because English is more fun. Teachers are more fun. They make it more appealing to the students to like it better.

Ms. Dina Khuffash
2.3. Monitoring

Problem: Schools are investing time and resources in sending teachers to training courses or workshops, but then never follow–up to check the results. External partners who are offering these courses also do not follow–up, unless it is part of their scope of work at additional costs. The problem is that resources are wasted and the newly learned skills will soon be forgotten.

Solution: There has to be a constant follow–up to monitor the results of these training and development measures on the teacher’s level, if they are applying the new learned skills, as well as on the student’s level, if the new methodologies are contributing to an improvement of attainment and progress in these subjects. Monitoring schedules for teachers can be planned with the help of the leadership, department heads or directly other departments.

We have our own quality assurance cycle, internal cycle, what we call the quality cycle, where teachers get observed, they get told what their areas of improvement are, they do peer observations and they give them a list of people they should be observing and learning from and then they have professional development....that’s on the teacher front and then on the students front we have our regular internal assessment for learning, sessions where everything is recorded. We have collaborative learning, we have problem solving and then even for Arabic and Islamic we have challenge based learning, project based learning and then of course we have summative, that would be at the end of the year.

Mrs. Nargish Khambatta

Training the head of departments, they transfer the training to the teachers and the progress is measured on the students.

Mrs. Hunada Kanbar

For English we have proficiency exams like TOFL, IELTS. There is no exam for Arabic. We should have something like that, when they (the students) complete the course.

Mrs. Anwar Alsahri
2.4. Motivation

Problem: Teachers for the Islamic and Arabic subjects are often lacking the motivation to develop initiatives due to a long time of “doing things the same way” and missing out on the success feelings when their students achieve high marks. Often the leadership fails to recognize the importance of the motivation of the teachers on the learning achievements of the students.

Solution: It is the leadership’s responsibility to keep the teachers motivated by praising their work when praise is deserved, giving constructive feedback when required and appropriate financial compensation.

In schools where, let’s say the context doesn’t work very much for them, where the school culture isn’t Arabic and Islamic, the parents are far away from this subject, students couldn’t care less, at least compared to English and Math and Science. I would say than to look back at the importance of the individual teacher and the power that the individual teacher can have if he or she is liked by the students. So that’s the challenge for education leaders…spend time investing in people. This is going as far back as to the hiring process. Use critical networks, ones you found one you can ask them to find another and try to hold on to that person. They are out there, I have seen them come and go and I have seen other schools take them from us. Because it is really about that “magic” that is happening between the students and the teacher in the classroom and the education leadership should spend time thinking about, bring back the teacher and spend time investing in that person.

Mr. Moneer Moukaddem
3.0 Students

In my opinion, students are not the problem. They are students and they are the same all over the world.

*Mrs. Hunada Kanbar*

**Problem:** The misunderstanding that it is the students’ responsibility to “absorb” the taught information and learn to repeat it at a pace and level given to them by the teachers.

**Solution:** Create and reinforce the understanding that it is the teachers’ responsibility to teach in an interesting and engaging way, to get students involved and motivated and to individually adjust the teaching strategies to meet the individual needs of each student, as they recognize that students have to be seen as individuals and all have different needs. Recommendation is to “train the teacher” on individual learning needs and involvement and engagement techniques, to see teaching as a dialogue that engages students in insightful discussions and reflection.

We also heard about an initiative

If you ask the students, you will find that they give Arabic learning less importance….they see this as an obstacle to enter a good university. In many universities the teaching language is English, so they will not use Arabic anymore.

In my opinion this is the problem, which students don’t see what the parents or the governments see in the importance of learning Arabic.

*Mrs. Maysoon Dwairi*
4. Curriculum

**Problem:** The Arabic curriculum has not been recently updated; teaching of Islamic studies is also following strict guidelines in terms of the content. It is difficult for teachers to keep students motivated and engage them to independently research and learn.

**Solution:** Initiatives developed in workshops or team meetings, initiated by teachers or leadership to create more modern and engaging Arabic and Islamic classes. We heard examples for Arabic teachers are encouraging students to read books and to write poems, even to develop Arabic mobile applications instead of using only English apps. For the teaching of Islamic studies we heard from teachers who had the most success by relating the teachings of the Holy Qur’an to real life experience. This can be by relating stories or research assignments. For example, one school that assigned their students the task to research divorce rates in the UAE, they researched the real court data and then conducted an analyses of the causes for the high divorce rate and developed solutions based on the Holy Qur’an to possible reduce the divorce rate by applying Islamic teachings and principles to this real life situation to better understand what marriage means, to create awareness for this topic.

5.0 The Teachers

5.1. Subject Knowledge

**The problem:** The Arabic language is more difficult than other languages, especially for non-Arabic speakers as well for Arabic speakers who are not practicing the classic Arabic or speaking a different dialect at home.

**Solution:** Encourage students to take part in initiatives and extracurricular activities, like for example reading or writing, taking part in competitions on school level up to national reading competitions, like for example the Arab Reading Challenge launched by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid in 2015 and completed in 2016.
5.2 Time

Problem: Islamic and Arabic education is taught for a small amount of time at school, about 3 hours per week for each subject. This is not enough to learn a language, especially for non-Arabic speakers. The Arabic language is more difficult than other languages, especially for non-Arabic speakers as well for Arabic speakers who are not practicing the classic Arabic or speaking a different dialect at home.

Solution: The school can assign tasks, “home work” that the students can complete outside school timings, possibly together with the family. We have heard of examples where an assignment was given that students should order only in Arabic at their next outing to a restaurant with the parents. Another example are reading clubs or recitation clubs where students will speak Arabic in addition to the few hours in class.

We tend to do are a couple of things, one is the experiential learning, so we send them out to the police station, to the metro, like a field trip. Then we give them an assignment to actually videograph, photograph it and then we put all of that on a collective platform for children to view. And they go to a restaurant, so we involve the families. As holiday from the principal they will get a note saying “this weekend please take your child to an Arabic restaurant, as a family please order food in Arabic.”

Mr. David Hicks

For the difference between the dialect and classical, we see that as a challenge because the students don’t usually speak the language of the Quran in day to day, but that is what they are expected to be able to do in the Arabic lessons. It is like me being tested in my ability to speak in Shakespearean English or former Queens English. We do not have that requirement in English. The requirement is to be able to communicate effectively, to use different media and so forth. But in Arabic it is much stricter, it has to be modern standard Arabic or classical Arabic and there for students who are not frequently using this language find it difficult. You know it’s the formal language of a television news reader which most children are not familiar with, I think that again is a big disadvantage.

Mrs. Nargish Khambatta
6. The Society and the Parents

Problem: The support of the society – other schools, neighborhood, student clubs...etc...and the help of the parents is of utmost importance for the success of teaching of these 2 subjects Islamic and Arabic education. Parents can have a positive impact, but also a negative impact when they do not agree with new pedagogic methodologies and refer to classic teaching, the way they learned in school by repeating the words of the teachers.

When I came here 10 years ago, the Arabic teaching and the style of teaching was not fun, children didn’t enjoy it, it was a very teacher lead style of teaching. Children weren’t enjoying it so parents weren’t on board ‘my child doesn’t like Arabic, can’t speak Arabic, it is too difficult’, so the whole community, the children weren’t enjoying it, the parents weren’t enjoying it and the teaching wasn’t good enough for children to make as much progress as they should. Now over the 10 years the philosophy has been to teach in a different way. So we had to start with our lower ends and wrote down. Our solutions had been to start Arabic earlier, so we started in Foundation 1. We have a teaching assistant who gets a little bit of Arabic done in Foundation 1, we also then introduce it in Foundation Stage 2. At the end of Stage 3 they get lessons in Arabic and it is all done through play and experience, they are writing letters, it does not follow the teacher lead teaching. Then when we get to Year one, we’ve looked at the phonics. We have a phonics program where our teaching who are English are in the Arabic lessons, they are supporting the Arabic teachers to teach the phonic sounds of the Arabic letters. And what we found is that the teaching are now learning how to read and write Arabic through teaching phonics. So we are getting the buy-in from the children, the buy in from the teaching, the teachers and then ultimately when children are enjoying their Arabic and coming home sharing it with their parents, the parents see a value in it and then the parents are on board. So now we have this generation that are coming through the school that are enjoying it.

Solution: To involve the parents and other entities like friends, relatives, neighborhood, partner schools...etc... in initiatives to educate them about changes, decisions, teaching methodologies and to ask for their support.
Knowing the importance of the subjects (Islamic and Arabic) will help the students and the parents to encourage the students to learn. What we are doing at the moment in UAE, we are trying to help the whole education system to make students to seek the knowledge, and not wait to receive it.... We encourage students to create something, not just be the “receiver”.

*Mrs. Hunada Kanbar*

From our perspective I think we have very forward thinking parents who embrace all the new methods, because it is not only for Islamic education, it is for Arabic, it is History and Geography and Science and Math, for everything we are using the new way of learning...we have very supportive parents who encourage our students for learning.

*Mrs. Nargish Khambatta*
Understand
Explain the importance of the subjects, by inspectors during inspections or in experience exchange with other schools, or internal meetings.

Attitude
Leadership has to be aware, or be made aware that they have to live this attitude to show the importance of the subject, so others will follow their example.

Actions
Leadership can decide about implementing changes, allocating budget, organising events... etc...

Subject Knowledge
Assess the teacher’s subject knowledge if needed by external assessors etc.

Pedagogic Skills
Train the teacher! Workshops and lecturers for teachers to learn how to teach, how to transfer knowledge efficiently to make lessons more appealing for students.

Monitoring
Following up to monitor the results of training with the teachers and also with students to measure their progress.

Motivation
Leadership to motivate teachers to thrive to achieve and exceed their targets through praise, constructive feedback, appropriate remuneration.

Real-Life
Encourage students to be creative, relate teaching to real-life experience.

Curriculum
Teachers have to adjust to students’ individual needs when teaching and utilize techniques to involve and engage the students, encourage critical thinking and innovation.

Society/Parent
Misunderstanding of new Teaching Methodologies
Involve and educate the parents about new teaching methodologies, exchange experience with other schools to keep constantly updated about potential solutions and success stories that can be applied.

Student
Difficult
Encourage students to be proactive by participating in interesting initiatives with attractive rewards.

Time
Assign tasks that require practicing Arabic outside the school and class hours.
Summary – the ideal school that will achieve high ratings in Arabic and Islamic education
1. Leadership is aware of the importance of these subjects for students learning and living in the UAE. The leadership will encourage and support initiatives and will allocate budget to support the teaching. The leadership will initiate training for the teachers and constant monitoring of the teachers and students achievements. The leadership will encourage and motivate by praising and incentivizing good work.

2. Teachers are motivated and enthusiastic to share their knowledge with the students. Especially the Islamic Education teachers see their teaching as a mission, not just to transfer knowledge, but to encourage students to become better people. The teachers are combining traditional teaching with modern methodologies and materials and constantly keeping the students engaged, taking in account their individual needs and being able to foster critical thinking and innovation.

3. Students are curious, engaged, motivated. They are thriving to accumulate new knowledge, actively seeking information and developing critical thinking. The students are taking part in extracurricular activities, they are respectful and polite and applying the teachings of the Holy Quran and Islamic principles to their daily life.

4. Based on the traditional curriculum the school develops a new version, incorporating the newest trends in teaching methodologies to make the classes more interesting and more engaging and assure the participation of the students as seekers of new information, not just receivers.

5. The difficulty of the subjects will be overcome by making classes more interesting and more engaging and encouraging students to relate the lessons to real life situations where they can apply what they have learned in school.

6. The support of the parents and the society, such as other schools, neighborhood...etc.. is of utmost importance and the school and leadership has understood this and is organizing meetings and initiatives to involve and educate parents about new methodologies and extracurricular activities and to exchange information with other schools to mutually benefit from each other’s experience.
Our Panel of Experts:
We thank them for their time and participation and for sharing their valuable insights with us.
Ms. Dina Khuffash
Former ADEC Irtiqaa Lead School Inspector for Arabic and Islamic Education “Carrying on inspections and evaluations of private and public schools in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain (ADEC) / UAE on a freelance basis”

Mrs. Hunada Kanbar
Former KHDA School Inspector for Arabic and Islamic, experienced coach in the education sector, designing and delivering programs that help educators to move from telling to coaching in order to build better futures and touch more lives. Currently working with Pearson Education. Hunada worked in 5 countries: KSA, UAE, Canada, USA and UK

Mrs. Anwar Alsahri
Former ADEC School Inspector for Arabic and Islamic with a sound background in Arabic and English teaching and 10 years of experience in education, certified trainer in educational leadership by the British Council. Mrs. Answar worked as a trainer for a women empowerment organization, later from 2008 as a schools inspector in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and Western Region and a training specialist for schools improvement. Currently working as a teaching and learning specialist at the College of Emirates Technology where she is trainer for faculty instructors.

Mrs. Maysoon Dwairi
Former Arabic Lead at GEMS Education, living in the UAE for 30 years. Teaching Arabic and English, later working in leadership and later as an education consultant, supporting teachers in pedagogic development.

Mr. Asa Firth
Principal of Jumeirah English Speaking School, 10 years of experience in the UAE

Dr. Mariam Al Hashemi
Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Arabic and Islamic Emirates National School. Dr. Mariam has more than 10 years of experience in the UAE.

Mr. David Hicks
School Principal of Emirates International School in Jumeirah, Dubai, for almost 7 years. Prior to that in the lead management of 2 different schools in Dubai. 12 years in Dubai, well accustomed to the needs and challenges of working in the region. Background, from the UK, member of senior management for 9 years before transferring oversees.

Mr. Moneer Moukaddem
Principal at Ittihad National Private School in Abu Dhabi Provides leadership and support for teaching and learning, supervise student edification and discipline, pedagogy development and technology integration, parental engagement, extracurricular activities, emergency procedures, and facility operations. 5 years in the UAE.

Mrs. Nargish Khambatta
Principal of GEMS Modern Academy, Dubai, UAE with 26 years in education. Started her career as a professional, consultant for a startup school, conducting workshops for teachers and senior management.
About Us

The Knowledge Group (KG) has been created to be the united face of a new and growing collection of knowledge orientated institutes and entities. These organisations are dedicated to offering wide-ranging training and development solutions across the UAE and the region.

We look to provide a single point of call for all of the specific training and development needs of businesses, schools, universities, government institutions and individuals.

We provide a wide selection of innovative courses designed to develop the potential of people – and, by extension – the organisations they work for now and in the future.

On a broader level, through a combination of research, learning & development excellence, responsive course structuring and key sector focus, KG makes sure that organisations throughout the region are competitive, sustainable and equipped with highly qualified and enlightened people to lead them.

Dubai Education Overview, Growth Potential in a Competitive Environment, Colliers International MENA, 2014
United Arab Emirates - School Inspection Framework 2015-2016

For Brighton College, Al Ain the report is not published yet at the time of writing this White Paper and for the American Community School, Abu Dhabi the latest published report is from 2013. For these 2 schools it is to be seen when the reports will be published if the teaching of the Arabic language also needs to be improved. It is expected to be so.

The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning, The Wallace Foundation, 2013