

EMIRATE OF ABU DHABI

Shaikha Alzaabi

Abu Dhabi Education Council

Language and Literacy

Instruction in Abu Dhabi schools is conducted in Arabic and English, although Arabic is the official language of the Emirate and the most common mother tongue in public schools. Prior to 2007, the only English instruction that students received was in the subject of English language. In 2007, select government schools introduced English instruction for the subjects of mathematics, science, and English. Students at Ministry of Education schools receive instruction in Arabic, while private schools can choose the language of instruction based on their curricula. Private schools also may offer foreign languages including French, German, Japanese, and Persian.

The Abu Dhabi School Model (ADSM), previously known as the New School Model, was introduced in 2010 to all government schools from kindergarten to Grade 3. This model stipulates that instruction for mathematics, science, and English must be provided in English. Taking a student centered approach that aims to develop Arabic and English literacy, the ADSM considers the differences and similarities between the two languages in order to facilitate the development of students' literacy skills.¹ Additional grades have been added to the ADSM each year since 2011, with the model currently reaching Grade 9. Full implementation of the ADSM will occur in the 2019–2020 academic year.

Overview of the Education System

The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) manages education in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in addition to guiding, adopting, and implementing various educational development strategies and initiatives. The ADEC vision is to be recognized as a world class education system that supports all learners in reaching their full potential to compete in the global market.

Three main types of education are found in Abu Dhabi: public schools, private schools, and higher education. ADEC operates 251 public schools with an enrollment of 132,708 students and regulates 192 private schools with an enrollment of 243,590 students. Public schools have a population that is 79 percent Emirati nationals and 21 percent expatriate, while private schools have a population that is approximately 75 percent expatriate and 25 percent Emirati nationals.² Public and private schools offer kindergarten to Grade 12.

Public schools operate in a system with centrally developed policies, curricula, and common year end assessments. Performance standards in these schools are established by ADEC. Several private schools offer international curricula including the International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement courses, the General Certificate of Secondary Education, and Asian programs.

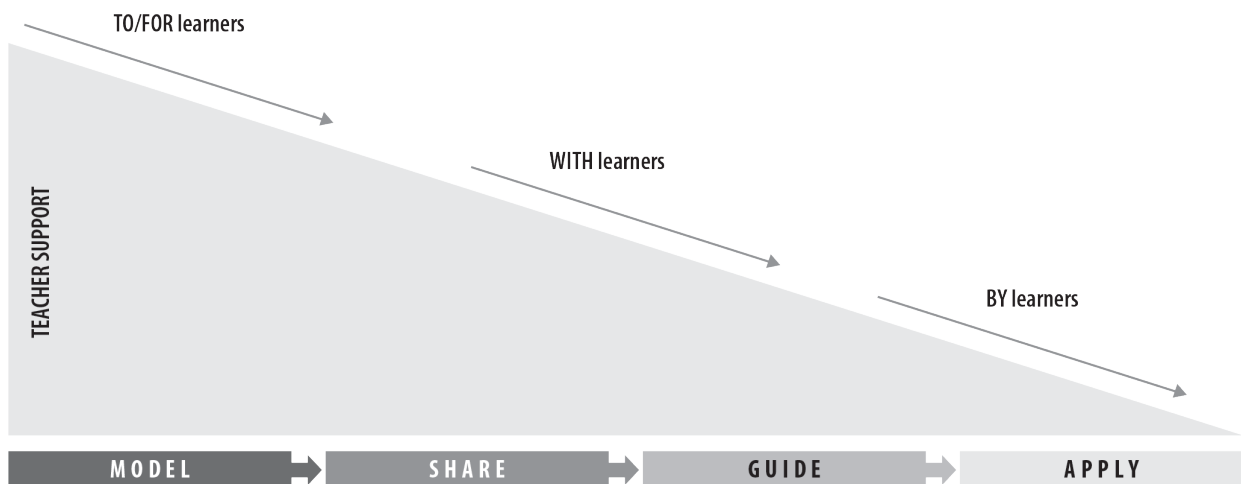
Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Summary of National Curriculum

The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, the pedagogical approach of the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), seeks to support the individual instructional needs of each student. While progressively moving them from a state of dependence to one of independent practice and skills application, this approach expects the teacher to make careful observations of individual students' learning and use professional judgment in order to plan learning opportunities.³ Three instructional strategies that exemplify the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model while addressing specific literacy skills—shared, guided, and independent reading—have been implemented in ADEC schools. Exhibit 1 illustrates the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model.

Exhibit 1: Grade 4 English and Arabic Curriculum

Gradual Release of Responsibility Model



The Abu Dhabi School Model curriculum is organized around a set of learning outcomes and has a dual focus on the Arabic and English languages. The English and Arabic curriculum is broken into four strands: Literacy Readiness Skills; Speaking and Listening; Reading; and Writing. The English Reading strand consists of three substrands: Reading Texts; Reading for Meaning; and Vocabulary/High Frequency Words. The Arabic Reading strand consists of four substrands: Comprehension/Self-Assessment/Reading Strategies; Vocabulary; Nonfiction Texts; and Fiction Texts.



The focus of the Grade 4 Arabic curriculum is to enable students to determine their reading goals, predict the content of texts, and use a variety of skills to analyze different texts. Students also are required to:⁴

- Summarize texts
- Use tables and graphics
- Answer direct and indirect questions
- Read both paper and electronic publications
- Self-check their understanding of the text
- Read independently
- Listen to their teachers
- Participate in diverse readings of the persuasive and technical texts knowledge
- Use catalogs and titles
- Ask questions about reading
- Outline the main idea and identify important details
- Distinguish between fact and opinion
- Compare story plots and features of a narrative
- Distinguish between different characteristics of literary genres; find the relationship between the general atmosphere of the story and the writer’s choice of vocabulary

In the Reading strand of the Grade 4 English curriculum, students are expected to:⁵

- Use context knowledge to understand familiar and unfamiliar texts
- Analyze how the structural features of explanatory texts support a specific purpose
- Evaluate the main idea of texts and support their answers with key details
- Analyze the use of figurative language, inferences, visuals, author’s purpose, and characterization in terms of the meaning they add
- Increase their English vocabulary to include homophones, synonyms, antonyms, and high frequency words

Teachers, Teacher Education, and Professional Development

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) stipulates that teachers must hold a bachelor’s degree in the specialty required with a minimum grade of “good” and a relevant teaching qualification.⁶ Teachers who are not Emirati nationals also must have at least two years of teaching experience.



Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

ADEC is committed to strengthening the professional development and excellence of school staff through the process of performance development, management, and professional growth and evaluation. Through the collaborative efforts of divisions within the preprimary to Grade 12 (P–12) sector, the school operations sector, and the Office of Planning and Strategic Affairs, the Performance Appraisal System was developed.⁷ This system aims to maintain and promote ethical professional standards in accordance with ADEC P–12 policy. ADEC seeks to ensure that high performance standards are maintained by providing teachers and educational leaders with a professional growth and evaluation tool that helps them evaluate school site employees against a clear set of professional standards that are designed to support professional growth and ethical behavior.⁸ This system operationalizes the professional standards for each position at the school site that form the basis of the school staffs' performance evaluation. With the goal of creating a developmental system that will help to improve performance, the appraisal system is built on the belief that student outcomes are improved with the professional growth and development of school site employees. The appraisal system applies to all school site employees identified on ADEC's organizational structure for schools. Each position on the chart has job specific standards that form the basis of their performance appraisal. Employees who have completed their probationary period are evaluated annually under the Performance Appraisal System.⁹

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

Instructional Materials

The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) provides a variety of electronic and print resources to support literacy instruction in both Arabic and English. A curriculum map outlining how the resources could be incorporated into the thematic planning approach to learning outcomes also is provided. Learning experiences are designed to ensure that students spend the majority of their time learning by:¹⁰

- Engaging in hands-on experience and opportunities with a variety of age appropriate literacy resources
- Engaging in active learning experiences
- Being immersed in a print rich environment
- Participating in a wide range of literacy activities (e.g., reading aloud; independent, guided, and shared reading and writing)
- Taking part in conversations and classroom discussions
- Participating in contextualized experiences

Use of Technology

ADEC provides schools with subscriptions to several websites that support the teaching and development of English literacy skills, including:



- Reading A-Z provides teachers with leveled readers, guided reading assessments, phonics support, and lesson plans.
- Raz-Kids provides students with access to leveled readers, reading quizzes, and online guided reading assessments. Teachers are able to use the online guided reading assessments to assign each student to a reading level that ensures students are reading suitable texts.
- BrainPOP Jr. is an online program that provides educational movies on a variety of topics. Each movie is accompanied by leveled quizzes, games, and activities that allow students to develop comprehension skills. All content is read aloud with mouse rollover, and movies are subtitled to reinforce the development of literacy skills.

Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

The Abu Dhabi Education Council has provided each school with a school psychologist to support students with social, learning, or adjustment difficulties. School psychologists provide targeted psychological services and promote healthy learning environments that focus on students' individual needs.¹¹ Only professionally qualified psychologists (i.e., holders of a minimum of a master's degree) promote the use of psychological assessment techniques, except when such use is conducted for training purposes with appropriate supervision.¹² IQ, social-emotional, and personality diagnostic testing is implemented and corrected by highly qualified trained professionals.

The Special Educational Needs (SEN) teacher, learning support team, and classroom teacher provide students displaying low reading performance levels with checklists and simple assessments to determine their needs. Students who require more academic testing are referred to various centers or hospitals for specific diagnostic testing.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Various teaching strategies help students who struggle with reading to succeed at their level. Students with reading difficulties should be able to receive some instruction in a small group setting. The student can be pulled out from class to receive small group instruction and/or a learning support person can push into the classroom to provide group and one-on-one support. Strategies that can be used in the classroom and in small groups include:

- Reading with a partner to share responsibility for active reading
- Working in cooperative groups for focused and specific purposes related to inferential comprehension
- Providing opportunities for students to work with peers
- Working with a combination of text and audiotape or videotape
- Using computer programs and other technology resources to support word analysis and comprehension



- Providing opportunities for rereading and choral reading
- Using readers' theater to create interest and build skills in reading
- Activating prior knowledge and making predictions through prereading

Visually impaired students who have some sight receive large print books and instructional materials. Magnifiers for their laptops and papers also help them to see more clearly and participate in instruction.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Teachers assess students' skills and achievement in Arabic and English reading using classroom tasks and assignments designed by teachers. Curriculum documents along with explanatory notes define different levels of achievements in each outcome. The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) also provides continuous assessment templates for teachers that specify some or all of the assessment techniques to be used. Students' performance on these assessments is recorded using the electronic Student Assessment Record (StAR).¹³

While academic progress is supported by curriculum and pedagogy, the National Assessment Program provides an important platform to accrue data and subsequently measure system level improvement of the students within. The National Assessment Program includes two salient metrics: Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) and the External Measurement of Student Achievement (EMSA). PIPS is an externally developed annual assessment administered to students from kindergarten to Grade 2, measuring performance in mathematics, English reading, Arabic reading, and phonological awareness. EMSA also is an externally developed annual assessment, administered to students in Grades 3 to 11 in all ADEC public schools in Arabic and English language (reading and writing) and mathematics, and in Grades 3 to 9 in science. A representative sample of private schools also is included in the study to assess the Arabic language performance of students in Grades 5, 7, 9, and 11. Achievement is described using raw scores, standardized scores, and proficiency level descriptors. Various data reports are subsequently generated to inform policy decision making at the system level and teaching and learning at the practitioner level.¹⁴

Special Reading Initiatives

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) government is supportive of reading in schools and has introduced several initiatives to promote reading in the UAE. One such example is the Arabic Reading Challenge, in which all students in Grades 1 through 12 are tasked with reading frequently and writing summaries of all reading material.

The importance of and thus emphasis on reading is clearly incorporated within the Abu Dhabi Education Council logo, in which the Arabic word for "read" is located at its center. The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) has initiated several projects to promote reading among students and their parents. The Abu Dhabi Reads initiative, an awareness campaign directly linked with the kindergarten

and Cycle 1 (Grades 1 to 5) curricula, was organized by ADEC in collaboration with various government entities and community institutions including the Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority, the Municipality of Abu Dhabi City, the UAE Writers Union, the General Authority of Islamic Affairs & Endowment, Sheikh Mohammad Bin Khalid Al Nahyan Association for Future Generations, and the Abu Dhabi Media Company. Commencing in 2013 with the purpose of promoting Arabic and English reading among students and across the wider community, this project was awarded the best local initiative to promote reading in Abu Dhabi in 2016. The initiative includes many society activities such as book fairs, reading sessions, competitions, and free book distribution at various media events and activities. The goals of the campaign are to:¹⁵

- Assess Cycle 1 students' reading and writing skills
- Address students' individual needs in reading and writing
- Allocate specific time daily for reading and writing activities
- Introduce and improve teaching of reading and writing
- Train teachers to diagnose and respond to students' reading problems
- Engage talented students in reading enrichment programs
- Discover the talents of creative students
- Identify suitable print and nonprint learning resources to support students' learning
- Establish links between ADEC and local institutions
- Encourage the participation of university students and preservice teachers
- Apply modern and effective teaching strategies
- Apply action research to improve students' reading and writing abilities

Use and Impact of PIRLS

The Abu Dhabi Emirate first participated in PIRLS in 2011 as a benchmarking participant, and PIRLS was the first international reading performance benchmark for Abu Dhabi. The 2011 cycle provided valuable baseline data from which to make comparisons after the initiation of potential project improvements.

PIRLS 2016 will generate student performance data from which Abu Dhabi will be able to quantify improvement over the last five years. Results may indicate the potential impact of change within the system and on the teaching and learning of reading in addition to areas of strength and weakness within the current curriculum. ADEC also will use PIRLS data to validate and draw relationships with the National Assessment Program (namely, the External Measurement of Student Achievement).



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