

Topic #3 – Education

One of the UAE's highest priorities has always been education. As President His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founder of the UAE, noted, "The greatest use that can be made of wealth is to invest it in creating generations of educated and trained people."

The UAE has focused on educating both men and women. In 1975, the rate of adult literacy was 54 percent among men and 31 percent among women. Today, literacy rates for both genders are nearly 90 percent.

K-12 Programs

The education system of the UAE is relatively new. In 1952, there were few formal schools in the country. In the 1960s and 1970s a school building program expanded the education system. Now, education at the primary and secondary level is universal. In 2006-2007, approximately 650,000 students were enrolled at 1,256 public and private schools. About 60 percent of all students attend public schools.

Education reform focuses on better preparation, greater accountability, higher standards and improved professionalism. In addition, rote instruction is being replaced with more interactive forms of learning, and English-language education is being integrated into other subjects, such as math and science. The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), the Dubai Education Council (DEC) and the UAE Ministry of Education are each tasked with education reform, while preserving local traditions, principles and the cultural identity of the UAE.

Higher Education

The UAE is home to a wide range of universities, both public and private. UAE citizens can attend government institutions free of charge, and the UAE has one of the highest application participation rates in the world. Ninety-five percent of all girls and 80 percent of boys enrolled in the final year of secondary school apply for admission to a higher education institution. UAE public universities include:

Global Partnerships

A number of international universities have campuses or programs in the UAE. Some are housed in special zones, including Dubai Knowledge Village and Academic City. These are multi-university complexes that attract students from the region who are unable to go abroad to study. More than 25 universities are located, or planning to be located, in these special Free Zones.

"Education in the UAE." Education in the UAE. United Arab Emirates Embassy. Web. 21 May 2015.

Children encouraged to innovate through new Abu Dhabi schools projects

By Anam Rizvi

3 March 2015

The National

A series of programmes to encourage innovation, from setting up clubs to science contests, have been announced by Abu Dhabi Education Council.

Children will be encouraged to be innovators and scientists, and to improve their knowledge of technology, said Adec.

The initiative is in line with the UAE's vision to become a knowledge-based economy by 2030.

"Three innovation centres will be established. Adec will also be joining hands with partners and companies at a national and global level, and children will be motivated to think 'outside the box'," said Dr Amal Al Qubaisi, Adec director general.

"An innovation barometer will be constructed that will measure the level of innovation practised at a school.

"The processes have been set in motion and programmes will come into effect immediately."

Innovation hubs will have laboratories to teach skills and give pupils opportunities to apply their knowledge in real situations.

Adec is partnering with the BT Young Scientist competition in Ireland to benefit from its experience in organising innovative contests. The Our Scientists contest will involve children from across Abu Dhabi emirate and will be linked to other international competitions. In the future, it will be held at a national or global level.

Adec said that children would also be taught computer coding and design, and innovation leaders would be appointed as a point of contact. Science ambassadors would also be appointed and innovation clubs established in schools.

Part of the plan is the Abu Dhabi Innovates campaign, which celebrates science and technology, and aims to showcase Emirati pupils' inventions all over the world.

The activities will be held after school hours, although they will later become part of the curriculum.

"Teachers are ambitious to participate and we have confidence in them.

"We will help them to develop their skills further," said Dr Al Qubaisi.

“The initiatives are being rolled out immediately but they are not mandatory.

“It is up to the schools to participate. We hope that the private schools are ready to participate.”

Workshops to increase parents’ knowledge of innovation will also be held.

A team has been working on the innovation project since last year.

UAE students to take on others in \$1 million Hult Prize competition

By Nadeem Hanif
23 February 2015
The National

DUBAI // Students will take on rivals from around the world in a US\$1 million competition to find ways of providing sustainable early education in poor countries.

Up to 25 young UAE entrepreneurs will join hundreds from across the Mena region and beyond in Dubai to take part in the finals for the Hult Prize Foundation.

The competition aims to give social entrepreneurs the chance to build and develop their ideas.

“Solving our region’s toughest challenges is as simple as providing Arab youth with an opportunity and a platform to have impact,” said Ahmad Ashkar, chief executive and founder of the foundation.

“We couldn’t be more pleased by the support we have received from Dubai and the UAE, and look forward to the many outstanding ideas the Hult Prize Dubai will produce.

“We have 30 previous finalists from this region who are still operational. The teams that make it that far receive so much support.

“The support from Bill Clinton is amazing. He personally backs each of the finalists.

“One previous success story from a team that competed at the Dubai finals is called SokoText, which uses a text message-based pre-ordering service to provide customers with purchasing power and help to alleviate food insecurity in deprived areas.”

Regional finalists will receive a one-year membership to the Clinton Global Initiative, as the former US president is supporting the challenge.

The prize, now in its third year, aims to connect young entrepreneurs with private and public organisations, as well as governments, to help bring their ideas to fruition.

About 200 young people in 58 teams from universities and colleges in the region were shortlisted after a record 200,000 first-round submissions.

They will take part in the regional final on March 14 at the International Business School in Dubai. Other regional finals are being held in Boston, San Francisco, London and Shanghai, with a sixth final online.

Winners will attend the Hult Prize Accelerator, a six-week programme of intensive entrepreneurial seminars hosted by Hult International Business School.

Those from each region then go to the world final in September, where they will pitch their ideas to an audience of business leaders and experts.

The winning team will be given \$1 million (Dh3.6m) to help them develop their initiative.

Mr Clinton set this year's challenge: to build start-ups to provide sustainable early education solutions for 10 million children in urban slums.

"The Hult Prize is a wonderful example of the creative cooperation needed to build a world with shared opportunity, shared responsibility and shared prosperity," he said. "Each year I look forward to seeing the many outstanding ideas the competition produces."

This year's Mena regional winner will be decided by a panel of 12 judges who are innovators and leaders in their fields.

They include: Tariq Al Gurg, chief executive of Dubai Cares; Shaima Al Zarooni, chief executive of International Humanitarian City; Rahgu Malhotra, Mena president of MasterCard; and Mahmood Al Bastaki, chief executive of Dubai Trade.

Schools to focus on 21st century skills

By Roberta Pennington
22 February 2015
The National

DUBAI // A new curriculum with greater emphasis on teaching technology and 21st-century skills will be rolled out to the country's public schools in the 2018-2019 academic year.

The Ministry of Education undersecretary Marwan Al Sawaleh revealed the Government's plans to rework the curriculum for all public school children from kindergarten to Grade 12 on the sidelines of the Microsoft in Education Global Forum, which began on Sunday.

"We are rewriting all our curriculums – everything's 21st century, innovation," said Mr Al Sawaleh. "By 2018-2019, almost all of our curriculum will be changed – the curriculum, textbooks, digital books – everything. The innovation and entrepreneurship, this will be part of those changes."

Mr Al Sawaleh said the ministry was also following through on its strategy to introduce computers and tablets in all schools.

He said there were also plans in the works to launch innovation labs, although he did not offer details of how these would operate. Teachers and principals will be offered special training and a professional development programme focused on teaching innovation, he said.

The undersecretary's comments were made shortly after he spoke to about 500 corporate and education leaders at the two-day forum, which focuses on promoting technology in schools to foster employment skills among today's youth.

"Mr Al Sawaleh said the ministry had ambitious plans, based on "comprehensive and integrated development" of the education process that would allow "our schools to be the best incubators for creativity to all our talents and innovators".

"The ministry is keen to keep up with the pace of sustainable development, and community knowledge-based economy, which has become characteristic of our government, as we realise the importance of technology in the student's life and his future."

The ministry is already behind the Mohammed bin Rashid Smart Learning Programme, which aims to "shape a new learning environment and culture" in government schools in Dubai and the Northern Emirates by equipping every student with a tablet computer and installing Smart Boards and high-speed broadband in every classroom by 2019.

The Smart Learning Programme was heralded at the forum as one of the successes of technology in education.

Other examples shown in a video presentation included two classrooms of geography students who played a guessing game through Skype to try to find out the location of each other's classrooms.

“Since technology arrived 20 years ago in classrooms around the world, it has done one thing for sure, you can question a lot of things, but one of the things is that it excited students, it excited students to pursue a learning journey and expand their reality,” said Anthony Salcito, Microsoft’s vice-president, Worldwide Education.

He emphasised the need to raise awareness of the need for holistic change in education, “to really shift the dialogue and discussion around technology’s role as a catalyst for broad transformation” as opposed to a mere simple access to digital content and “a learning environment of the past”.

Alan Marshall, senior vice president for quality assurance and standards at Gems Education, the country’s largest school operator, said pupils needed more than academic qualifications to land a good job or get into a good university.

“Universities and employers are looking for those 21st-century skills that demonstrate rounded individuals,” he said.

Sky is no longer the limit for young Emirati women

By Emmanuel Samoglou
17 February 2015
The National

ABU DHABI // The number of Emirati women enrolling in a university course to prepare them for a career in aviation is steadily on the rise.

About 30 per cent of the 94 first-year students in Abu Dhabi University's aviation bachelor of science degree are women, most of them Emirati. Of the 350 students in all four years of the course, about 20 per cent are women.

In aviation courses elsewhere in the world, women make up between 8 to 12 per cent.

Shaimaa Aly started at the university in an architecture course before switching to aviation.

Ms Aly believes there are two reasons for the high percentage of women on the course.

"The first is that everyone is following their dreams," she said.

"And the second is, personally, I want to break the stereotype that females can't fly and they can't do a manly job. We want to prove that wrong, if I can say so."

The course, which gives graduates a degree but not a pilot's licence, was introduced to serve the needs of Etihad Airways.

Etihad wanted to give its cadet pilots an education to complement their technical training and allow Emirati trainees to stay in the country while studying.

Eventually, the programme was opened up to other nationalities and for those wanting to fly aircraft or pursue careers in ground operations.

Courses cover a range of subjects including physiology, navigation, air-traffic management and flight lessons.

The programme has been given special permission to be the only major at the university with coeducational classes, although there is separation for some activities such as presentations.

Tayyaba Habib said the university had made a career in aviation possible for her.

"These are new ways that weren't always available," Ms Habib said. "Now my family realises 'she has the potential, she has the means, we don't have to send her abroad'.

“With the initiative of Abu Dhabi University, we now have the opportunity of getting into the field more easily. I think that we are finally thinking outside the box.”

Laurie Earl, the course director, said the female students were helping to dispel stereotypes.

“The girls have got the highest marks,” Ms Earl said. “They’re doing excellently, perhaps because they have to prove themselves. The guys come into this with little effort. The girls have to fight to get here.”

Owais Aamir, an academic adviser for the course who achieved the highest marks in the programme’s first graduating class, said female pilots were just as capable as men, if not more so.

“Men can be a little overconfident sometimes. Women have attention to detail,” Mr Aamir said.

The young women are optimistic about the future as they break through the glass ceiling and prepare to gain real-world experience through internships as part of the programme.

“We have a long way to go. This is just the beginning,” said Ms Aly.