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VIEWPOINT

Is it time to rethink K-12 inspections in the GCC? School leaders weigh in **PG 38**



SCHOOLS GRAPPLE WITH TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

Tolga Özdil, Regional SYS Commercial Director, Middle East, Turkey & Africa (META) at ASUS discusses how educators are adapting to the new era as AI and smart devices transform classrooms **PG 22**



K-12 MARKET OUTLOOK

Driven by national visions and population growth, the GCC education market is set to surpass US\$58 billion by 2030 **PG 05**

AI ADOPTION GATHERS PACE

With AI compulsory in public schools in the UAE and Saudi, GCC private schools move fast to keep up with the change **PG 24**

REIMAGINING SCHOOL INFRA

Driven by AI and well-being, schools are creating future-ready spaces with flexible design and multifunctional equipment **PG 34**

The completeness of SchoolBusNet modules

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AI, STEM and the shifts in GCC education

As schools across the GCC reopen their doors, our Back-to-School edition takes a closer look into the dynamic transformations shaping K-12 education in the region.

Ambitious national visions and population growth is driving K-12 market growth across the GCC, where countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia continue to attract education investment from across the globe.

The UAE and Saudi governments' decision to make AI compulsory in all public schools can be defined as a pivotal moment in educational advancement within the region, where policymakers have embraced the change and the transformation AI can bring about head-on.

This has also driven private schools in the region to rapidly move towards integrating AI into the curriculum.

The evolution of AI into every sphere of school operation is further influencing the way infrastructure is planned. New schools are being built with new design principles, driven by tech-enabled environments, inclusivity and innovative learning environments.

In this edition we also explore how a limited global pool of experienced educators coupled with other local challenges are adding to the GCC's teacher shortage, and how government initiatives and parental push continue to drive STEM adoption across the GCC.

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CONTENTS



AI EDUCATION

AI adoption gathers pace among private schools

With AI compulsory in public schools in the UAE and Saudi, private schools in the GCC move fast to keep up with the change

K-12 MARKET OUTLOOK

K-12 education boom across GCC

Driven by national visions and population growth, the education market is set to surpass US\$58 billion by 2030 in the region

RECRUITMENT TRENDS

Schools face growing teacher shortage

A limited global pool of experienced teachers and localisation targets are deepening teacher shortage in the GCC

STEM EDUCATION

STEM on the rise

Government initiatives and parental push continue to drive STEM adoption across the region, with suppliers seeing robust growth

PRODUCT SHOWCASE

Latest launches

From Arabic learning and cybersecurity platforms to AI-powered classroom solutions, explore the newest wave of products

INTERVIEW

Schools grapple with technology adoption

Tolga Özdil, Regional SYS Commercial Director, Middle East, Turkey & Africa (META) at ASUS discusses how educators are adapting to the new AI era



INFRASTRUCTURE TRENDS

Reimagining school infrastructure

Driven by AI and well-being, schools are creating future-ready spaces with flexible design and multifunctional equipment

VIEWPOINT

Is it time to rethink school inspections in the GCC?

As Dubai's KHDA pauses school inspections for 2025-26, the debate around their relevance has intensified. School leaders weigh in



The number of international schools in the GCC has grown by 8%, from 1,599 to 1,720, between 2020 and 2025

National visions, population growth drive K-12 education boom across GCC

The region's private K-12 sector is on a rapid upward trajectory, projected to exceed US\$58 billion by 2030 and requiring nearly 2,800 new schools by 2029. With demand surging in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, the GCC is becoming a focal point for education investment and expansion

By **Joseph George**

Technology integration and population growth are catapulting the K-12 education sector in the region, despite pressures of teacher shortages, rising tuition fees and high operational costs.

Governments and private schools are investing heavily in EdTech, AI-driven platforms, cloud-based learning systems and smart classrooms, fuelling opportunities for suppliers of innovative technology products and solutions.

The UAE has introduced AI education

from age four, while Saudi Arabia is embedding AI and coding into core curricula across all school levels.

"The K-12 education sector across the GCC region is undergoing a period of profound transformation, driven by ambitious national visions, rapid

population growth and evolving expectations from parents, governments and investors,” says Sami Yosef, Head of Global Research at ISC Research.

Soaring K-12 market

According to recent data from ISC Research, the private K-12 market is accelerating, with projections suggesting it could surpass US\$58 billion by 2030, requiring around 2,800 new schools across the GCC by 2029. Demand is particularly strong in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar.

There are 53 new schools expected to open in the GCC in the academic year 2025-26, with 31 in the UAE alone.

The number of international schools in the GCC too has grown by 8% (between Jan 2020-Jan 2025), from 1,599 to 1,720. This now represents 11% of the total number of international schools worldwide.

The UAE, according to Yosef, has experienced a 10% growth in the past five years, from 760 to 836 schools. “In Saudi Arabia this percentage is 3%, from 323 to 333 schools. In Qatar, it is 7%, rising from 206 to 221 schools,” adds Yosef.

Nilay Ozral, CEO at Bloom Education says the K-12 education sector in the GCC is undergoing an exciting transformation. “There’s a clear shift towards future-focused learning, driven by rapid modernisation, deeper technology integration and the need to prepare students for an increasingly complex global landscape.”



The UAE has experienced a 10% growth in the past five years, from 760 to 836 schools. In Saudi Arabia this percentage is 3%, from 323 to 333 schools. In Qatar, it is 7%, rising from 206 to 221 schools.

— Sami Yosef,
Head of Global Research, ISC Research

According to recent estimates by the World Bank, economic growth across the GCC is projected to increase in the medium-term to 3.2% in 2025 and 4.5% in 2026.

Sam Truman, Chief Operating Officer, Taaleem points out that the region, and particularly the UAE, continues to experience a steady influx of globally mobile, high-income families

seeking academically rigorous and values-led education.

“Parents today are looking for more than academic results, they’re seeking best-value schools that embed digital literacy, critical thinking and adaptability alongside traditional academic performance,” says Truman.

According to him, there is a strong growth in new admissions across the Taaleem portfolio, both from new arrivals to the UAE and, significantly, from transfers within the local school ecosystem. This momentum, he says, is reflected in record enrolment figures and high utilisation rates.

“Taaleem’s public-private partnership (PPP) schools, delivered in collaboration with the UAE government, have also seen sustained enrolment growth and continue to serve as a model for scalable, high-quality education accessible to a broader demographic. These schools exemplify our ability to align with national priorities and deliver impact at scale,” adds Truman.

Ozral also points out that the admissions landscape for 2025-26 is particularly competitive, with surging interest at key entry points including FS/Kindergarten. “For instance, Bloom World Academy has seen a significant surge in applications, with available places filling rapidly,” she adds.

Student enrolment numbers across the GCC has also grown from 1.6 million to 1.7 million in the past year, accounting for 23% of the total number of students attending international schools around the world.

The student population in the region is expected to grow to more than 15 million by the end of the decade, with private sector registering marginally higher growth compared to admissions to public K-12 schools.

“There is a continued demand for premium and super-premium schools, particularly in key hubs such as Dubai, driven by the influx of high-net-worth families,” he adds.

Emphasis on holistic learning

There is a regional shift towards holistic education that prioritises critical thinking, entrepreneurship, ethics and soft skills, alongside traditional academic performance. Schools are increasingly offering hybrid and flexible models.

There is a growing demand for globally recognised programmes both among expatriate and local families. The British curriculum remains the most preferred followed by American, IB and Indian (CBSE) curricula.



The student population in the GCC is expected to grow to more than 15 million by the end of the decade, with private sector registering marginally higher growth compared to admissions to public K-12 schools



Today's parents seek schools that go beyond academics to build future-ready skills

As Ozral points out, there is a growing interest in personalised, outcome-based education, along with key themes such as AI, entrepreneurship, sustainability and vocational learning pathways. “At the same time, there’s a stronger emphasis on developing critical ‘power skills’ such as communication, teamwork, adaptability and leadership — skills that will serve students well beyond the classroom,” she says.

Today there is a stronger alignment with global standards and regulatory benchmarks, particularly in the UAE, which continues to raise the bar on school quality and transparency, explains Truman.

According to him, there is greater integration of innovation and AI tools in teaching and learning, enhancing student engagement and personalisation.

Governments in the region are also spending heavily —up to 16.5% of their budgets— towards education, led by Saudi Arabia, which has allocated a massive 15% of its total budget, amounting to US\$51.2 billion, towards education.

The UAE has allocated a significant portion of its federal budget to education. The 2025 budget saw 15.3% amounting to Dh\$10.914 billion (US\$2.97 billion) earmarked for public and higher education.

Qatar has allocated QR19.4 billion (US\$5.33 billion) for education, which includes construction of new schools.

Kuwait too is undertaking a major overhaul of its education sector as part of the 2025-2027 Education Reform Plan.

Rising investor interest

Investment in the GCC’s K-12 education sector has also accelerated over the past 12-18 months, with capital flowing into both infrastructure and innovation. According to ISC Research major global investors have taken positions in education groups, including Brookfield’s significant



There’s a clear shift towards future-focused learning, driven by rapid modernisation, deeper technology integration and the need to prepare students for an increasingly complex global landscape.

— **Nilay Ozral**,
CEO, Bloom Education

investment in GEMS Education and Spring Education. “These moves aim to consolidate a fragmented market and scale delivery,” says Yosef.

According to him, funding is being channelled into AI-based learning platforms, STEM labs, VR/AR classroom solutions and digital infrastructure. School groups are launching their own innovation centres to differentiate offerings and attract students.

Bottlenecks prevail

Meanwhile, the major concerns the region faces —many of which have persisted from previous years— include teacher shortage, affordability and regulatory complexities.

One of the key concerns of the private education sector in the region is the shortage of quality teachers. “Despite impressive growth, the region faces several structural and operational challenges like teacher recruitment and training. There is a significant shortage of qualified, English-speaking teachers in the region,” says Yosef.

Affordability is another major challenge across the region, as rising tuition fees and high operational costs, particularly in real estate and staffing, are limiting middle-income families’ access to quality education

While reforms are ambitious, regulatory frameworks in some countries are still evolving. This often leads to uncertainty for operators and delays in implementing curriculum reforms or obtaining school licenses. ■



Parents today are looking for more than academic results, they’re seeking best-value schools that embed digital literacy, critical thinking and adaptability alongside traditional academic performance.

— **Sam Truman**,
Chief Operating Officer, Taaleem



Schools in the GCC see a 20% increase in teacher recruitment needs this academic year

Schools face growing teacher shortage

A limited global pool of experienced educators, localisation targets and the lack of availability of teachers who can meet local regulatory and licensure standards are all adding to the GCC's teacher shortage at a time when school numbers and student enrolments continue to rise

By **Ritika**

The GCC K-12 sector is experiencing a significant shortage of qualified, English-speaking teachers despite the region emerging as one of the most sought-after destinations for educators seeking overseas employment.

Recruiting qualified teachers continues to remain a pressing challenge for the GCC's K-12 private sector, even as school numbers and student enrolments continue to rise. While teacher salaries have marginally

increased, school managements are modifying certain benefits within compensation packages.

According to ISC Research, in some GCC countries, especially in Saudi Arabia, schools must navigate global teacher shortages while meeting localisation targets, striving to retain quality and diversity.

Policy changes in some GCC countries have mandated degrees in respective subjects for being eligible to teach. Though Saudi Arabia witnessed a 3% increase in

the number of private international schools and 2% growth in the number of private international school students in the past five years, the number of teachers registered a 3% decline during the same period.

As Sami Yosef, Head of Global Research at ISC Research, notes, the decline in staff numbers reflects the teacher recruitment challenges faced by international schools in Saudi Arabia, driven by Saudisation quotas and newly revised qualification requirements for both teachers and teaching assistants.



There is growing interest in STEAM-focused disciplines, digital technology and computing, and well-being-related roles such as school counsellors and pastoral leads. Demand is also increasing for early childhood specialists, especially those with a strong grounding in play-based and inquiry-driven learning models.

— **Sam Truman**,
Chief Operating Officer, Taaleem

“Strict subject-specific qualification requirements are now in force. Teachers must hold degrees directly related to the subject they teach, and teaching assistants are required to either hold a teaching qualification or a university degree. This is creating constraints in sourcing suitable candidates,” he says, adding that as of July 2025, updated data shows that teaching staff numbers in Saudi Arabia have remained unchanged over the past five years (0% growth). “By comparison, global teaching staff numbers have increased by 15% over the same period,” he adds.

Estimates from ISC research indicate that the GCC would require around 2,800 new schools by 2029, with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar registering strong growth.

There has been a 20% increase in job requests from GCC schools this academic year, compared to the previous year. “The market has been quite vibrant, particularly international schools in Saudi Arabia and the UAE,” says Diane Jacoutot, Managing Director, Edvectus.

Sam Truman, Chief Operating Officer of Taaleem, says the opening of

new schools and strengthening of existing schools have led to increased hiring this year.

“For the academic year 2025–26, we are hiring more than 400 new educators, spanning both teaching and leadership positions. This includes staffing for our newest openings, such as DBS Mira and Harrow Dubai, as well as strengthening existing schools across the group to meet growing enrolment demand,” he says.

David Coakley, Senior Vice President – HR, GEMS Education says formal recruitment planning at the school level typically begins during the summer months and continues through the academic year. “We anticipate hiring approximately 1,700 outstanding educators from around the world,” he says.

GEMS Education, he says, follows a proven strategy to attract and identify exceptional educators, while also exploring emerging markets to stay ahead of the curve in talent innovation. “We leverage AI and technology to ensure only the very best teachers make it through our very detailed and thorough recruitment process,” he adds.

While international schools continue to prefer teachers trained in their own curriculum and from its native countries, UK and US national teachers are in short supply and are only being afforded by high-fee schools. “However, most moderate fee-paying schools realise they may not be able to compete with higher paying schools given the limited supply of teachers coming from these countries, so they have become more flexible and more proactive earlier in the recruitment season,” says Jacoutot.

According to her, South African teachers are in higher demand, especially among budget schools.

“The demand has increased this year, compared to the past year, particularly for moderate fee-paying schools,” she says, adding that recruiting from South Africa can be complicated and time-consuming given the incredible diversity of applicants.

Meanwhile, a recent survey by Edvectus — sampling more than 500 teachers— revealed that Middle East was the most popular region for K-12 teachers, though the gap between the Middle East and the next most popular regions Europe and Southeast Asia is narrowing.

“This year 72% were somewhat or very likely to consider the Middle East-based schools in their job search,” says Jacoutot. The survey also indicated

that the two largest factors influencing their job search were financial benefit, and safety and security.

As Jacoutot points out, teachers this year were laser focussed on their finances, perhaps as a result of several years with very large cost of living increases at home. “About 85% of teachers surveyed listed these two factors as extremely important in their search. These factors were far more important to them than social opportunities, travel and even the career opportunities of the school.”

Nilay Ozral, CEO at Bloom Education says the attractiveness of UAE and the wider region to educators from around the world — whether they’re new expatriates or seasoned professionals who’ve chosen to make this region home — is also resulting in a diverse and highly qualified talent pool, which schools can draw from.

According to her, the group has recruited more than 200 academic staff across the network of schools for the 2025–26 academic year. “This recruitment drive has been shaped by continued enrolment growth, expansion of our specialist subject offerings and natural staff turnover. Our focus remains on attracting and retaining exceptional educators who



Strict subject-specific qualification requirements are now in force. Teachers must hold degrees directly related to the subject they teach, and teaching assistants are required to either hold a teaching qualification or a university degree. This is creating constraints in sourcing suitable candidates.

— **Sami Yosef**,
Head of Global Research, ISC Research

RECRUITMENT TRENDS



Future-ready education drives demand for teachers in AI and digital skills

share our commitment to high-quality, innovative education,” she says.

Salaries of private school teachers across the GCC have registered a marginal increase in 2025 compared to the past year. The cost of living continues to rise, especially in Dubai, which is the main centre of K-12

education in the region. According to Mercer’s 2024 Cost of Living City Ranking, Dubai rose to the 15th most expensive city globally for expatriates, up three places from 2023, while Abu Dhabi was ranked 43rd. The main driver was a significant increase in rental prices.

“We’ve noticed a smaller increase in salaries this year, in the vicinity of 5-7%,” says Jacoutot.

However, schools, she says are also moving away from offering free housing as part of the package. “We have also noticed more schools changing from packages that include free school-sourced housing to an ‘all in’ model where housing is lumped in with salary,” says Jacoutot, adding that teachers are often enticed by the top line figure, not realising the complications of getting their own housing. “So it may help with recruitment but will require more support upon arrival to get teachers settled.”

Meanwhile, the region is also experiencing a shortage of K-12 teachers. “There is particularly strong demand for teachers in STEM subjects, especially Physics, Computer Science and Design Technology,” says Coakley.

According to Truman, there is a



This year 72% were somewhat or very likely to consider the Middle East-based schools in their job search.

— **Diane Jacoutot**,
Managing Director, Edvectus



Emiratization initiatives are also shaping recruitment needs, driving greater demand for local teaching talent in subjects like Arabic, Islamic Studies and UAE Social Studies.

— **Nilay Ozral**,
CEO, Bloom Education

sustained demand in core academic subjects, including mathematics, science and English, particularly in upper primary and secondary phases. “In parallel, there is growing interest

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RECRUITMENT TRENDS

in STEAM-focused disciplines, digital technology and computing, and well-being-related roles such as school counsellors and pastoral leads. Demand is also increasing for early childhood specialists, especially those with a strong grounding in play-based and inquiry-driven learning models,” he says.

However, not all schools are able to easily find quality teaching staff they are looking for.

Jacoutot notes that this is especially true for schools wishing to recruit directly from the UK and US, where STEM graduates earn far more money by working in the industry. According to her, STEM teacher numbers have been dropping for more than a decade.

In yet another indicator of growth within the K-12 segment, the region saw an increase in demand for Early Years and Primary as well as core Secondary subject teachers. According to Jacoutot, this usually indicates the market is expanding. “In years where the international school market is contracting, we tend to see more demand for teachers offering dual subjects,” she says, adding that



 We anticipate hiring approximately 1,700 outstanding educators from around the world.

— **David Coakley**,
Senior Vice President - HR,
GEMS Education

there was also a surge in requests for art and music teachers this year.

“Schools are facing difficulty recruiting arts teachers because, with

the rising cost of university education in the US and UK and uncertain career prospects, there are fewer music and arts graduates. “In the UK for instance, there has been a 31% decline in Arts A levels taken since 2010, with a corresponding drop in the number of teachers.”

Ozral points out that demand remains strong for teaching talent in early childhood education and across core academic subjects such as English, Maths and the Sciences, including physics, chemistry and broader science disciplines. In addition, as digital transformation and future-readiness becomes increasingly central to education, there is a notable rise in demand for teachers with expertise in artificial intelligence, computing, business and digital literacy.

“Emiratization initiatives are also shaping recruitment needs, driving greater demand for local teaching talent in subjects like Arabic, Islamic Studies and UAE Social Studies. This ensures that our schools not only deliver a globally relevant curriculum but also reflect and support national priorities,” says Ozral.

Meanwhile, schools aim to prioritise teacher retention with various programmes and incentives, despite country-specific challenges faced within the region.

While globally the average retention rate for K-12 teachers continues to hover around 85-90% (10-15% turnover), the numbers drop in the GCC, mainly driven by the volatility of an expatriate workforce, rising living costs and competitive demand for qualified teachers.

“While the regional average staff attrition rate sits between 15-20% turnover, we’re proud to maintain a significantly lower rate – less than 5%. This strong retention is a testament to our ongoing investment in staff well-being, professional growth and internal talent development,” says Ozral.

According to Truman, attracting and retaining high-quality educators continues to be one of the sector’s most pressing challenges. “The global competition for top-tier teaching talent has intensified, particularly as international school groups expand their footprint in the GCC,” he adds.

With a limited global pool of experienced teachers, rising global demand for bilingual and multicultural educators and lack of availability of teachers who can align with local regulatory requirements and teaching licensure standards, the K-12 education sector in the GCC has its recruitment task clearly cut out. ■



Private school teacher salaries in the GCC have gone up marginally by 5-7% in 2025



There is a shift from theory to practical, skills-based learning, with schools integrating project-based experiments, robotics and coding into their curricula

STEM on the rise

Government initiatives and parental push continue to drive STEM adoption across the GCC, with suppliers seeing 25-30% growth year-on-year

By **Ritika**

The integration of AI literacy into school curricula is reshaping how STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) is taught, leading to a more experiential approach to learning even as various stakeholders are joining hands to equip teachers with the skills they need to train students in STEM.

The market for STEM education in K-12 has grown significantly in the GCC over the past three years, mainly driven by national efforts to diversify economies beyond oil, increasing demand for a future-ready workforce, and the integration of technology into education systems.

The integration of AI literacy into school curricula is reshaping how STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) is taught, leading to a more experiential

approach to learning even as various stakeholders are joining hands to equip teachers with the skills they need to train students in STEM.

The UAE has implemented several initiatives to strengthen STEM education across both K-12 and higher education sectors, driven by the need for a skilled workforce to power national programmes such as UAE Industry 4.0 and the Dubai Robotics and Automation (R&A) Program. While UAE Industry 4.0 (Fourth Industrial Revolution Programme) seeks to accelerate the integration of 4IR solutions and applications across the UAE's industrial sector and boost productivity by 30%, the R&A (Dubai Robotics and Automation) Programme aims to raise the robotics sector's contribution to Dubai's GDP to 9 per cent by 2032.

Recent research reports indicate that the UAE's K-12 STEM education market is estimated to grow at a



This phase [between Grade 3 and 5] represents a critical window in student development, as this is where curiosity meets capability. Younger students become more eager to experiment, whereas older students begin applying scientific principles and logic to complex, real-world problems.

— **Nilesh Korgaonkar**,
CEO, ATLAB

STEM EDUCATION

compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of anywhere between 7.5 to 15 percent growing from \$7.17 billion in 2025 to \$10.29 billion by 2030 reflecting broader regional trends.

Saudi Arabia has been particularly proactive, linking STEM adoption to its economic diversification agenda.

“Saudi Arabia is at the forefront with its Vision 2030, investing significantly in STEM-focused curricula, teacher training and educational infrastructure to support a knowledge-based economy,” says Nilesh Korgaonkar, CEO, ATLAB.

Similar to Saudi, both Qatar and Bahrain have launched their respective vision documents making STEM a national priority and aiming to achieve certain targets of implementing STEM within the education system by 2030.

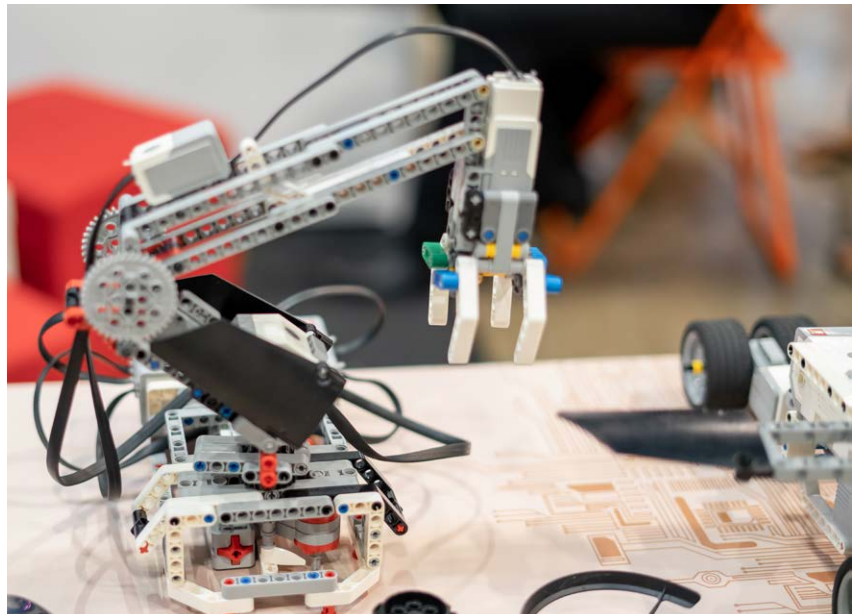
Qatar has been promoting STEM education through scholarships, research centres, and initiatives like the Qatar Science and Technology Park, which promotes collaboration between academia and industry.

Bahrain is focusing on digital literacy and vocational education to prepare students for future job markets. Kuwait supports STEM education through youth-focused strategies and partnerships with universities, seeking to enhance innovation and technical skills. Oman, under its Vision 2040, is enhancing STEM education to support economic diversification. This includes policy reforms, participation in international assessments, and efforts to close gender gaps in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Farida Dhambolawala, Founder & CEO, Innov8 Tech Education Services, says there has been a notable increase in both awareness and investment in STEM education across the GCC over the past years. “Schools, parents and policy makers increasingly recognise that STEM skills are essential in preparing students for the future workforce, particularly in fields like AI, robotics and renewable energy,” she says.

Senthil Kugan, CEO, EdNex & Maker and Coder, says STEM has moved from being an activity to a pathway of doing and creating. “While schools have integrated project-based experiments, robotics competitions and coding challenges into their curricula, students are actively building prototypes, programming humanoid robots and running hands-on experiments, reflecting a shift from theory to practical, skills-based learning,” says Kugan.

According to him, government initiatives in the region have



Primary students (K-5) are the biggest adopters of robotics programmes



Schools, parents and policy makers increasingly recognise that STEM skills are essential in preparing students for the future workforce, particularly in fields like AI, robotics and renewable energy.

— **Farida Dhambolawala,**
Founder & CEO, Innov8 Tech Education Services

accelerated this adoption. Riding this wave, EdTech companies and STEM solution providers in the region say they are seeing excellent growth in business over the past few years.

“We prioritise customisation when working with schools and universities. We collaborate closely with educators to understand their specific needs, allowing us to tailor our STEM and STEAM solutions to align with the institution’s curriculum and goals,”

says Korgaonkar, according to whom ATLAB recorded a 60% year-on-year growth in 2024, “marking our strongest performance to date.” This, he says, is a clear indication of the transformative shift happening in the region’s education landscape.

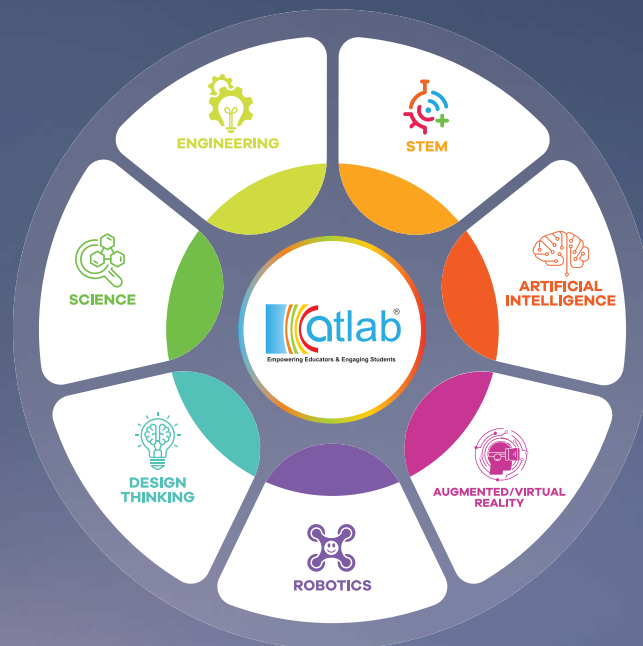
“This growth is not just about increased product demand but about a broader move toward experiential, AI-driven learning. We have positioned ourselves not just as a technology provider, but as a strategic partner for schools, universities, and training centres that are preparing students for a digital-first future,” he adds.

Ednex too has seen 25–30% growth year-on-year in its STEM-focused portfolio, says Kugan. “Schools today want environments where students can experiment, prototype and solve tangible problems. Examples include renewable energy labs, AI-based robotics, and coding competitions that measure real competencies in problem-solving, collaboration, and computational thinking,” he says.

“Innov8Tech has experienced an average of 25–30% growth year-on-year in STEM-related projects since 2021,” says Dhambolawala, adding that the growth has been driven by demand for hands-on, real-world problem-solving activities.

According to her, most schools request customised STEM programmes tailored to their curriculum, student ability levels and current focus areas. “Sourcing customised solutions is achievable through our network of suppliers and in-house R&D, though timelines can

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STEM EDUCATION

be longer when highly specialised equipment or software is required,” says Dhambolawala.

Kugan too indicates that schools are increasingly seeking an experiential approach to STEM. And students are solving real-world challenges in renewable energy, robotics and AI.

Schools, he argues, are integrating Project-Based Learning (PBL) and design thinking frameworks to ensure transferable skills. Teacher empowerment is also key, enabling educators to facilitate high-quality experiments while assessing competencies effectively. STEM education is no longer theoretical; it is shaping actionable expertise today.

The market, according to him, increasingly demands customisation. “Schools require labs and kits that align with their curriculum. The challenge is not sourcing products, but adapting them to be pedagogically relevant, age-appropriate and culturally contextual,” says Kugan.

Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have mandated AI across all public schools from kindergarten to Grade 12, starting academic year 2025–2026. There is a rush among private schools too towards AI adoption, teacher training and developing appropriate curriculum.

Priyanka Chandanani, Director & Managing Partner, Logix Engine,



Demand for hands-on, real-world problem-solving activities is driving the growth of STEM education

says when it comes to K-12, different schools start at different grades based on curriculum requirements.

According to her, primary school students (K-5) are the largest adopters for programmes like robotics and coding, followed by middle school. High school students look at more customised project-based learning, often self paced.

Kugan, however, emphasises on starting early. “Adoption starts as early as Grade 3 for exploratory learning but middle school (Grades 6–9) is where curiosity peaks through hands-on experimentation,” he says adding that in secondary school (Grades 10–12), students engage in structured projects such as designing drones, smart city prototypes, or AI solutions, often linked to competitions, university preparation and industry exposure.

According to Korgaonkar, STEM education is seeing the strongest growth in adoption between roughly Grade 3 and 8, spanning the upper primary to middle school years. “This phase represents a critical window in student development, as this is where curiosity meets capability. Younger students become more eager to experiment, whereas older students begin applying scientific principles and logic to complex, real-world problems,” he says.

Government policy initiatives and



The challenge is not sourcing products but adapting them to be pedagogically relevant, age-appropriate and culturally contextual.

— **Senthil Kugan,**
CEO, EdNex & Maker and Coder



Primary school students (K-5) are the largest adopters for programmes like robotics and coding, followed by middle school. High school students look at more customised project-based learning, often self paced.

— **Priyanka Chandanani,**
Director & Managing Partner, Logix Engine

investments made by schools in developing robotics labs, coding curricula, and project-based learning have proven to drive measurable engagement among students and yield positive inspection outcomes. With artificial intelligence (AI) becoming a mandatory subject across school curricula in the UAE there is a stronger national push to embed future-focused skills at every level of education. ■



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BravoBravo 2.0 reinvents Arabic learning for the next generation

BravoBravo 2.0 is setting new standards for Arabic language education across K-12. Officially launching its redesigned platform in the academic year 2025-26, BravoBravo builds on five years of proven success, with 97% of surveyed schools reporting measurable improvements in student outcomes.

Built for today's classrooms, BravoBravo 2.0 combines rich Arabic content with cutting-edge technology to serve native and non-native speakers alike. The platform covers all four core language skills—reading, writing, listening and speaking—with integrated assessments through an adaptive, gamified experience that keeps students motivated and progressing.

Its content library is one of the most comprehensive, with more than 1,000 leveled Arabic books aligned with Arab Thought Foundation standards, 150,000+ curriculum-based questions and 40,000+ audio files. Smart AI tools power placement tests, automated scoring and real-time



The library offers more than 1,000 Arabic books, 150,000 curriculum-based questions and 40,000 audio files

progress tracking, allowing educators to personalise instruction and manage assessments with ease.

BravoBravo 2.0 is built for inclusivity, offering differentiated

learning pathways, standardised rubrics and full alignment with national curricula. Teachers enjoy streamlined lesson planning, auto-graded exams and intuitive dashboards, while parents stay connected through linked accounts, offering full visibility into their child's progress.

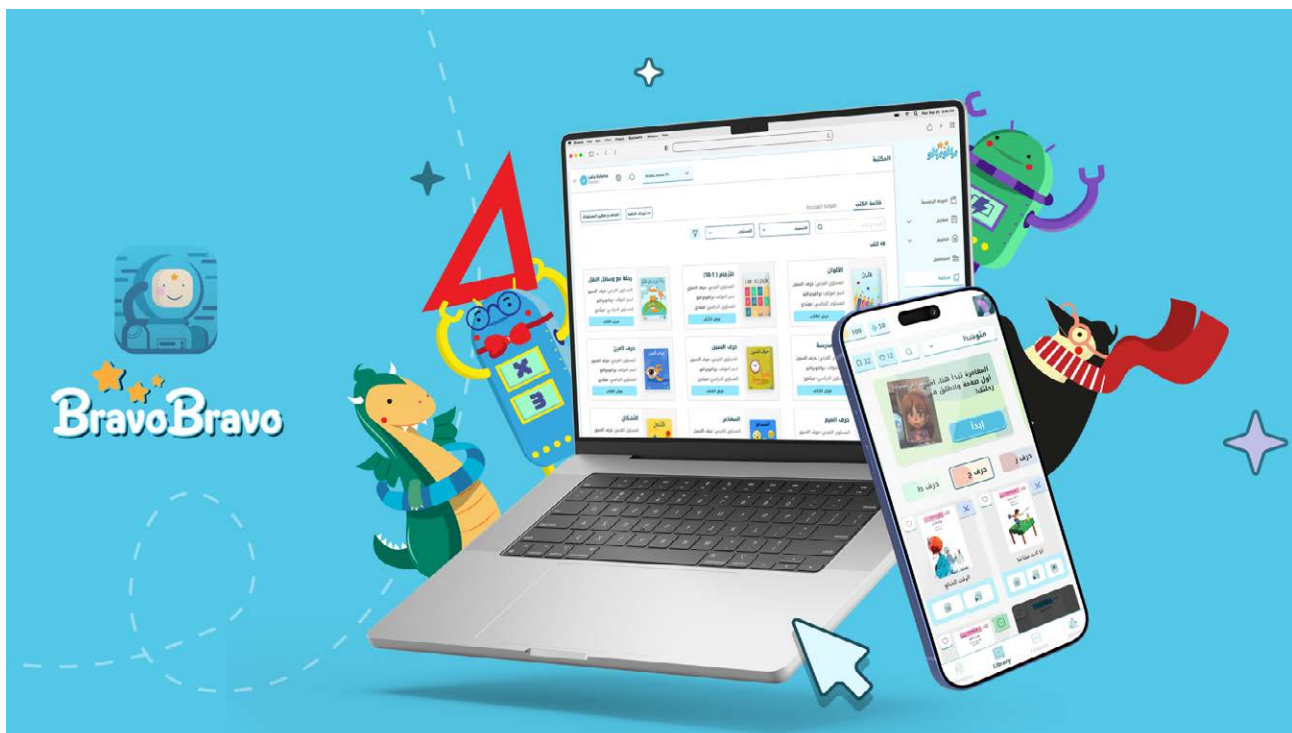
Trusted by 3,000+ teachers in 500+ schools across 13 countries and winner of the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award in 2024, BravoBravo is the only Arabic learning platform awarded 5 stars by the Educational App Store. With deep partnerships, including Asala, Nahdet Misr, Dar Al Manhal and Dar Al Maaref, the platform delivers authentic, culturally resonant content that brings Arabic to life.

BravoBravo 2.0 supports Arabic learning both in the classroom and at home, combining engagement with data-driven insights and adaptability to learners' needs.

For more information email info@bravobravoapp.com or visit www.bravobravoapp.com.



— Partner Content



BravoBravo 2.0 combines rich Arabic content with cutting-edge technology to support both native and non-native speakers



Interactive Range goes beyond digital safety, offering schools premium programmes, after-school initiatives and competitions that spark innovation

Interactive Range brings cybersecurity to every classroom

While the world races to bring AI into classrooms, another subject (just as vital) is being overlooked — cybersecurity. In an age where students spend more time online than ever, this gap poses a real danger.

Interactive Range is one of MENA region's first all-in-one cybersecurity education platforms designed specifically for K-12 and academia. With a rich library of interactive modules, immersive labs, hands-on challenges and expert-led lectures, it transforms cybersecurity from an abstract concept into a life skill every student can master.

With cyber threats escalating globally, Interactive Range provides a training ecosystem that goes beyond theory. Students gain hands-on experience through safe digital literacy exercises, immersive labs, competitive challenges and AI-driven personalisation, all within a secure, browser-based environment.

The platform is already in use by schools and universities across Central Asia and is now expanding into Saudi Arabia and the wider GCC region. Its presence at international events such as LEAP, GESS Riyadh and London Tech Week has brought Interactive Range recognition from global education experts.

Beyond strengthening digital safety, Interactive Range offers institutions premium programmes, after-school initiatives and sponsored competitions, creating opportunities to drive innovation.

By equipping classrooms with Interactive Range, schools can better prepare students for the demands of the digital age.

Schools can take the first step towards making cybersecurity an integral part of their curriculum by booking a demo with Interactive Range to explore the available programmes.

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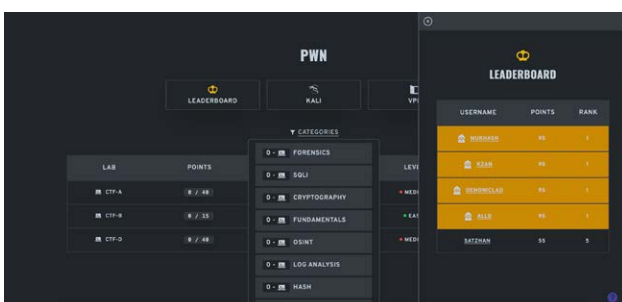
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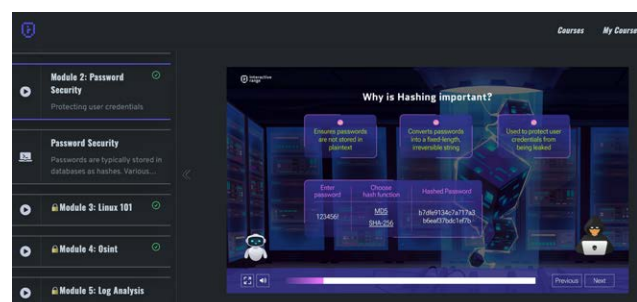
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Students build digital literacy through labs, challenges and AI-driven personalisation in a secure, browser-based environment



Interactive Range's CTF mode engages students and prepares them for international cybersecurity competitions

AI takes centre stage in BenQ's classroom solutions

As artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes the educational landscape, BenQ is leading the charge with smart, human-first solutions that support teachers, protect students and build healthier, more engaging classrooms.

For five consecutive years, BenQ has been recognised as the Number 1 Interactive Display brand in the Middle East, a testament to its commitment to empowering educators and transforming learning environments.

Empowering educators with AI

Teachers across the region are embracing AI tools to ease administrative burdens and improve learning outcomes. BenQ's suite of AI-powered software solutions is designed to integrate seamlessly with its smart boards, giving educators intuitive tools without compromising classroom control.

"Technology will never replace the classroom teacher," says Manish Bakshi, Managing Director of BenQ Middle East.

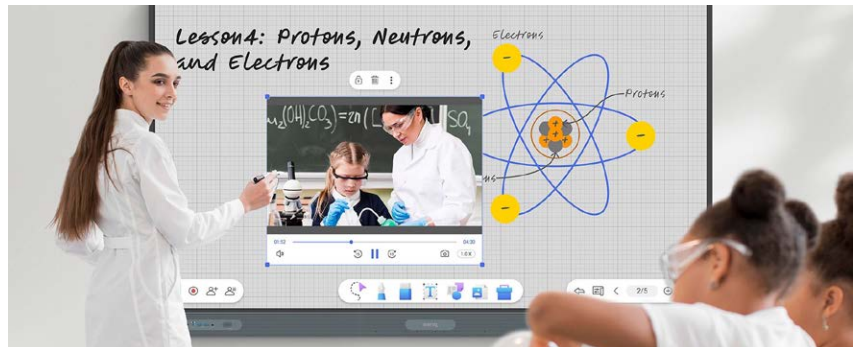
"Our products are designed to support teachers and streamline processes. Anything we can do to give back time to teachers—to help them deliver the curriculum more effectively—is an endorsement of the R&D behind our constantly improving panel technology."

Transforming teaching with AI

BenQ's AI tools align with key trends in Middle East education, including equity, engagement and instructional efficiency. These innovations amplify the impact of educators and enrich student experiences through practical, accessible technology.

BenQ boards are integrated with these five standout AI features:

- **EZ Math:** Converts complex handwritten math equations into editable digital content for cleaner, more organised teaching materials.
- **Text-to-Speech & Speech Translation:** Breaks down language barriers with instant multilingual communication, which is ideal for the region's diverse classrooms.
- **Optical Character Recognition (OCR):** Digitises textbooks and printed handouts, allowing teachers to use traditional materials in modern ways.
- **AI Lens:** Instantly identifies plants and insects to enrich science lessons and spark student curiosity.



BenQ's education technology is designed to empower teachers, safeguard students and provide lasting value



Manish Bakshi,
Managing Director, BenQ Middle East

- **AI Content Moderator (AI Guardian):** Filters shared images in real time.

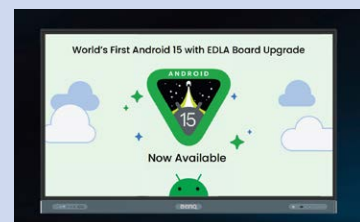
"If a student tries to send something inappropriate to the board, our AI Guardian feature will recognise and block it," explains Bakshi.

"This means teachers can use BenQ boards with full confidence," he adds.

For a healthier learning environment

BenQ's commitment to student well-being is reflected in its ClassroomCare® features, which ensure that classrooms remain safe, healthy and conducive to learning:

- **Air Quality Monitors:** Alert teachers when CO₂ levels rise, prompting ventilation adjustments. Data can be stored to identify long-term issues.
- **Eye Care Solutions:** Low blue-light, flicker-free and anti-glare screens reduce eye strain from extended screen use.



BenQ's Android 15 upgrade will be available for all RP04 customers

Android 15 and Beyond

BenQ recently unveiled the world's first Android 15 education display, further expanding its portfolio of AI-driven teaching tools and health-conscious technologies.

"By extending this upgrade to our existing RP04 customers, we're showing that innovation and after-sales care can go hand-in-hand," says Bakshi.

- **Germ-Resistant Screens & Accessories:** Interactive learning tools like pens and remotes are designed to minimise the spread of bacteria.

BenQ has expanded its focus from hardware to holistic solutions, aligning with its vision for the future. The company aims to create smarter, safer and more inclusive classrooms today.

Discover how BenQ's AI-powered tools can revolutionise your teaching experience. For more information, contact info.ae@BenQ.com or download your free [BenQ ebook](#).

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- Deliver lessons with **AI Tools**



- Encourage collaboration by allowing students to share their ideas on the BenQ Board with InstaShare 2



- Prepare lessons anytime, anywhere with AMS.
- Sign in and out completely with a touch



Scan here to read more about BenQ Boards

Schools grapple with technology adoption

As AI and smart devices transform classrooms, GCC schools must balance innovation with responsibility. Tolga Özdil, Regional SYS Commercial Director, Middle East, Turkey & Africa (META) at ASUS discusses how educators are adapting to this new era

With technology evolving at a rapid pace and transforming how it is used in classrooms, education is at a significant turning point. Schools are under pressure to integrate technology that enhances learning and equips students for a rapidly changing world, while at the same time grappling with questions around its responsible and ethical use. Challenges remain, ranging from equipping classrooms with the right tools to ensuring teachers have the confidence and skills to use them effectively.

Bridging this gap requires more than just innovation. It demands solutions that are practical, scalable and grounded in the realities of everyday teaching. As AI-powered devices and smarter learning platforms begin to reshape the education landscape, schools must carefully consider how to integrate them in ways that align with their educational goals.

In an exclusive interview with *Education Middle East*, Tolga Özdil, Regional SYS Commercial Director, Middle East, Turkey & Africa (META) at ASUS discusses the opportunities and hurdles schools must address when adopting new technologies, the growing role of teacher training and how AI is opening new possibilities for students across the GCC.

What are some of the latest technological trends we are seeing in the education sector?

We've seen the rise of digital education in the past few years, beginning with the pandemic. One of the most significant developments within this shift has been the emergence of AI-powered tools. These tools not only allow a more personalised learning experience but are also seen as a promoter of inclusivity for supporting students with diverse abilities in enhancing their digital skills.

What role should Artificial Intelligence (AI) play in education?

AI has become an essential tool for students to complete their work. I do have concerns about the impact of AI on learning skills, which is why



Tolga Özdil, Regional SYS Commercial Director, Middle East, Turkey & Africa (META) at ASUS

educators should see it as a tool that supports learning rather than replacing it. We should also consider the potential of AI being misused, which could affect learning altogether.

What are some of the biggest challenges schools face when adopting new technologies?

AI is a new technology that has evolved rapidly in the past two to three years. As it has now become a part of our daily routines, issues have been raised globally about inherent biases, data privacy concerns, model hallucinations and more.

While algorithms are improving and becoming more regulated, schools must exercise due diligence on the ethical use of AI before incorporating it into their infrastructure.

There is a human angle to it as well, as many teachers still face challenges in effectively utilising these new tools. Schools must invest strategically in training teachers to make sure that technology adoption is in line with the learning objectives.

What role does teacher training or technical support play in ensuring

the success of tech adoption in classrooms?

As mentioned earlier, teacher training is critical to the success of AI adoption in EdTech. Resistance to change in this space can delay effective use of technology and may hinder the desired outcomes. These trainings should go beyond basic usage to incorporate pedagogical integration, while encouraging a culture of continuous learning through workshops, sandboxing sessions and peer-to-peer learning.

What is ASUS's vision in designing technology that fits with classroom needs?

As a core market for the Middle East, ASUS's goal for the education sector is to provide students and educators with devices that can integrate seamlessly with their routines. We aim to provide a comprehensive range of reliable products that educators can count on to perform consistently without interruptions. We engineer our devices with meticulous detail and integrate advanced technologies to enrich the learning experience.

Take our CR and BR line of Windows and Chrome devices for example. They are purpose-built for education, combining military-grade durability with thoughtful design. Features such as dual world-facing cameras, reinforced rubberised covers and a modular structure for easy maintenance ensure that the devices withstand daily classroom use. The keyboards on our devices, for example, can be replaced in minutes using simple tools. These small things make a big difference in ensuring the devices are tailored to meet the demands of modern classrooms.

To simplify deployment, we also provide Google Education Upgrade licenses pre-installed, enabling zero-touch setup for IT managers.

Additionally, we have also formed strategic alliances with regional clients to help them set up their AI labs. These labs can be utilised for sandboxing sessions that will facilitate successful adoption of the newest AI tools.

Are AI-enabled laptops gaining attention in education? Where do ASUS laptops add value in this area?

AI devices are gaining attention across verticals due to new applications that are making users' lives easier. The education sector is no exception, as we see several useful AI-driven applications being adopted in school curricula. To fully utilise these AI applications, the hardware industry has taken the initiative to add AI-powered chips and technology to current-generation



ASUS ExpertBook CX54 Chromebook Plus is engineered to be tough enough to meet next-level, industry-leading US MIL-STD 810H standards



While algorithms are improving and becoming more regulated, schools must exercise due diligence on the ethical use of AI before incorporating them into their infrastructure.

— Tolga Özdil,
Regional SYS Commercial Director,
Middle East, Turkey & Africa (META) at ASUS

laptops and will continue to carry this forward. ASUS currently has a wide range of hardware portfolio across Intel, AMD and Google Chrome devices for education.

With manageability software and an AI assistant, our devices are built to make learning easier for students across any learning space. Our devices are also tested with the highest standards to make them durable in the hands of students. We also offer AI ExpertMeet, a solution that uses AI to cancel background noise, create summaries, on-the-go translation and add watermarks, which can help save time and use it to focus more on learning and growth.

What role do you see for sustainability and eco-friendly products in the education sector? How is ASUS addressing this?

Sustainability and eco-friendly practices are playing an increasingly vital role in the education sector. Students are encouraged to integrate green living and solve

real-life environmental challenges through projects. Other initiatives like green campus, digital transformation (paperless), etc., are also gaining in popularity.

ASUS has been leading the sustainability narrative for some time now and ensures that the materials used and supply chain are increasingly aiming for 100% renewable energy use. Recycled materials are used in our Education series devices such as the CR and BR laptops and flip-style tablets, using Chrome and Windows. Products such as Expertbook P5405 exceed ENERGY STAR standards by 43-56%, helping lower power consumption. ASUS also supports academic-industry partnerships to cultivate sustainability-focused technology talent.

Looking ahead, how do you see AI shaping the future of education?

AI is already shaping education rapidly, and the integration of AI in the UAE and other Middle Eastern curricula is a testimony to this. AI will continue to accelerate personalised learning with intelligent and tailored content creation to the students' needs.

By reducing admin tasks for teachers, AI will give more time for building meaningful human relationships and allow more time for self-development and mentorship sessions.

With text-to-speech (and vice versa), translation, transcription, etc., AI technologies are now being adapted across languages, and we are moving towards a more inclusive learning environment for students. Lastly, interacting with AI content from a young age will prepare today's students to be the AI professionals of tomorrow in terms of understanding and removing AI bias, addressing data privacy issues. ■

— Partner Content

AI adoption gathers pace among private schools

From 2025–26, Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be compulsory in all public schools in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Private schools across the GCC are moving quickly to keep pace with this shift



From 2025–26, AI becomes mandatory across all public schools in the UAE and Saudi Arabia

By **Joseph George**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the landscape of K-12 education, ushering in a new era of personalised learning, enhanced teaching methods and innovative classroom experiences.

Governments across the world are introducing new policy initiatives to guide and regulate the implementation of this rapidly evolving new technology. GCC is no different and has, in fact, gone a step ahead in adopting AI into the classrooms.

Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have mandated AI across all public schools from kindergarten to Grade 12, starting academic year 2025–26, reshaping how students learn, teachers instruct and educational systems operate.

The UAE has partnered with institutions such as the Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence and the Emirates College for Advanced Education, and along

with organisations such as Code.org has facilitated teacher training and curriculum development.

Schools and institutions across the region are now preparing for this shift, training educators, updating curricula and addressing ethical considerations.

Fadi Abdulkhalek, Vice President and General Manager for the Middle East and Africa at PowerSchool says the UAE and Saudi Arabia's decision to introduce AI curricula in public schools is a significant step towards preparing a future-ready generation. "While this rollout is currently focused on public institutions, we're already seeing strong signals that private schools will follow suit. Many leading private schools have begun integrating AI-powered tools and platforms to enhance personalised learning and operational efficiency," he says.

Most schools *Education Middle East* spoke to said that they are at various stages of AI implementation, and in the process of developing a dedicated AI curriculum.



Many leading private schools have begun integrating AI-powered tools and platforms to enhance personalised learning and operational efficiency.

— **Fadi Abdulkhalek**,
Vice President and General Manager for
the Middle East and Africa, PowerSchool



While AI is not a standalone subject, the newly published AI policy sets clear expectations for responsible, ethical and culturally aligned use by staff and students.

— **Jamie Efford**,
Elementary Principal,
Dubai Schools Al Khawaneej

AI readiness

“GEMS Education is not waiting but leading,” says Baz Nijjar, Vice President – Education Technology and Digital Innovation at GEMS Education.

GEMS Education recently launched a Global Education AI Hub in Dubai that supports research and co-development of AI solutions with industry and university partners, accessing more than 90 schools and 200,000 students. “The Hub enables real world pilots in personalised learning, tutoring systems, well-being, curriculum design and more,” says Nijjar.

GEMS Education has fully integrated AI into its flagship GEMS School of Research & Innovation, which opened in August 2025 in Dubai, which the group claims is the first institution built from inception around AI, XR/ Immersive technology, robotics and future design thinking as core elements of the curriculum, alongside being the first school to provide access to AI specialist devices for the teachers and students.

Omnia Mokhtar, Senior Specialist Teacher, One World International School (OWIS) Riyadh says AI education at the school began last academic year and is embedded within the STEAM-based learning framework. From Pre-KG to Grade 2, students are introduced to foundational concepts through robotics and coding. In Upper Elementary and Middle School, students engage in coding, robotics, microcontrollers and STEAM projects.

She says OWIS Riyadh, part of Singapore-headquartered Global Schools Group (GSG), is leading a pilot AI integration project for GSG across the MENA region, aiming to create a scalable and innovative framework for AI in schools.

Abir Alaywan, Head of school of Bilingual French International School (ICE) in Dubai says age-appropriate AI and computing has been integrated across the school from as early as KG-2. “We’re also aligning our roadmap with the UAE and Saudi public-school moves to formalise AI curricula from 2025-26 so our learners can transition seamlessly between systems in the region,” she says.

David Lees, Principal, Citizens School Dubai says the school has taken significant steps to integrate AI into the curriculum and is currently in the process of developing a dedicated AI curriculum. “AI is a natural extension of our focus on digital literacy, which is one of our six core learning strands,” says Lees.

Batool AbuFarha, Digital innovation lead, Downe House Riyadh notes that the school has begun integrating AI into the curriculum across multiple key stages, with a progressive, age-appropriate model.

“We embed it across subjects through adaptive learning platforms, which use AI to tailor content to each student’s pace and understanding,” says AbuFarha..

Right age to begin

Those who argue in favour of early adoption at the kindergarten level vouch for age-appropriate measures and progressive curriculum structure aimed at fostering computational thinking and problem-solving skills.

Critics argue that basic literacy and numeracy should take precedence among young children who may lack the abstract thinking skills needed for AI concepts, even in simplified forms. Add to this additional screen time, with potential impact on attention spans and social development.

While there is no universal consensus on the right age to introduce AI into the classrooms, by making it mandatory UAE and Saudi Arabia have taken a bold step towards early adoption.

Kais Zribi, Coursera’s General Manager for the Middle East and Africa says familiarising children at an early age with the concepts of AI, by integrating age-appropriate tools in elementary classrooms, will provide foundational exposure to the subject.



We also referenced international frameworks [for the AI curriculum] like the California K-12 Computer Science Standards and UNESCO’s AI Competency Guidelines to ensure global relevance and best practices.

— **Omnia Mokhtar**,
Senior Specialist Teacher, One World
International School (OWIS) Riyadh

According to him, interactive and engaging AI tools can spark curiosity, stimulate deeper thinking and help develop critical skills such as creativity, collaboration, emotional intelligence and computational thinking in ways traditional resources often cannot.

“More complex topics such as data analysis and algorithmic thinking are best introduced around middle school, while direct, hands-on applications and a deeper dive into AI’s technical aspects are more suitable for high school students who possess the maturity to understand AI’s ethical implications and societal impacts,” says Zribi. He further adds that a balanced, phased introduction empowers young students to critically evaluate and question AI-generated content and apply AI responsibly, both in the classroom and beyond.

Andy Perryer, Head of Digital Learning, Cognita Middle East, says the view at Cognita is that AI education should begin early, ideally from the age of five, starting with foundational concepts.

However, according to him the irony is that many generative AI tools have an age restriction of 13 and above, creating a gap between when children first encounter these technologies and when they are formally permitted to use them.

AI EDUCATION

"This clearly places a responsibility on schools not only to educate students about AI but also to guide them in the safe, responsible and ethical use of AI, helping them to navigate this gap effectively," says Perryer.

As Daniel Franklin, Senior Education Consultant, EdRuption notes, the use of ChatGPT in classes shouldn't be encouraged under the age of 13, and between 13-18 years, parental consent should be sought for its use. "Some fundamental elements of AI (and GenAI) can easily be introduced from an early age; in much the same way principles of coding have been taught from age 5 upwards," says Franklin.

Nijjar says based on global best practice and UAE policy, AI concepts should begin as early as Foundation Stage 1 (around age 4) with age appropriate, play-based learning that builds into focused inquiry by primary years. "We are evolving our content based on where it fits best and has the most profound impact, especially on transferable skills, without the need for using tools and technology," he argues, adding that ethical AI use and digital literacy are introduced early and reinforced progressively.

Additionally, student leadership groups at various schools, he says, have focused on research-led discussions to explore intent, reflection on academic integrity, and guidance on appropriate AI use, and feeding back to the teacher research groups.



The irony is that many generative AI tools have an age restriction of 13 and above, creating a gap between when children first encounter these technologies and when they are formally permitted to use them.

— **Andy Perryer,**
Head of Digital Learning,
Cognita Middle East

Mokhtar too is of the view that students can start engaging with AI concepts effectively at the age of three. "We aim to provide a balanced approach, offering AI learning both through the formal curriculum and informal activities, such as after-school clubs, competitions and summative assessments. This balance promotes both creativity and deeper understanding," says Mokhtar.

According to her, in younger grades (Pre-KG-Grade 2), foundational skills are introduced through hands-on activities, with robotics and coding using block coding and screen-free kits. By the age of 12, students can use AI tools more independently and responsibly, applying them across different subjects.

Alaywan says at ICE it is believed that AI learning should begin in early primary, through playful, hands-on experiences such as robots, games and stories, which introduce core ideas such as sensing, rules, patterns and fairness.

"At ICE, coding starts as early as KG2, with explicit AI literacy (understanding predictions, training data and system behaviour) introduced in upper primary. These foundations are deepened in middle and secondary school through data projects and critical evaluation of AI outputs," she says, adding that this approach aligns with the UAE's vision to start AI learning from the age of four.

Dr. Terence McAdams, Innovation Governor, Citizens School Dubai., notes that AI should be introduced progressively, based on cognitive development and conceptual readiness rather than a fixed age. The focus, he argues, should be on helping learners understand how AI works, how it affects their world and how to use it with purpose and care.

According to him, in the early years, this begins with digital awareness, whereas in primary, learners explore coding, while beginning to think about algorithms, patterns and basic automation. By lower secondary, learners are working with Python, building 3D designs, and using generative AI tools in projects with real-world relevance. "This progression helps learners move from curiosity to capability, with space to question, experiment and reflect," he says, adding that AI should be introduced in stages, ensuring learners develop both skill and judgement as they grow.

Meanwhile, AbuFarha says that AI concepts can and should be introduced at Key Stage 2 (ages 8-11) through simple but meaningful activities. According to her, as pupils



More complex topics such as data analysis and algorithmic thinking are best introduced around middle school, while direct, hands-on applications and a deeper dive into AI's technical aspects are more suitable for high school students who possess the maturity to understand AI's ethical implications and societal impacts.

— **Kais Zribi,**
General Manager for the Middle East
and Africa, Coursera

progress to Key Stage 3 and beyond, they can move into more complex topics such as data analysis, machine learning, ethical considerations and cross-curricular projects using AI tools.

According to Abdulaziz Ahmed, Digital Design teacher at Swiss International Scientific School Dubai (SISD), the introduction of AI should begin from Grade 4 onwards (aged 9+). He argues that it is more beneficial for students at earlier stages, to focus on developing fundamental soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, creativity and resilience, rather than AI.

"These are lifelong competencies that provide a strong foundation for learning and personal growth," he says, adding that as students progress into upper primary, AI concepts can then be introduced gradually, year by year, in manageable portions. This continuum approach, he says, ensures that learners are not overwhelmed, especially given the demands of other academic subjects and the additional commitments many students have through extracurricular activities.

"By sequencing AI education in this way, schools can ensure that students are both well-prepared and



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well-supported in understanding and applying these emerging technologies,” says Ahmed.

SISD is introducing an AI unit in Grade 6 with a focus on ethical and responsible uses of AI as a tool to support student learning.

“Students are introduced to how machines process data and make decisions based on user input. To ensure engagement, the unit incorporates gamification, allowing students to see how AI connects to real-world applications, such as gaming,” says Ahmed.

Najeeb Jarrar, Regional Director, Marketing, Middle East and Africa, Google, says the discussion is less about age and more about the way AI should be introduced and how it's used in a learning environment depending on each audience.

Tech and tools

To support the integration of AI education, age-appropriate tools and technologies are introduced across different learning stages such as robotics kits and classroom robots tailored to younger learners; progressive coding pathways, starting with block-based coding in primary years and advancing to Python in middle and secondary school, and safe, classroom-managed generative AI tools for research, prototyping and language support, all used under clear, age-appropriate guidelines.

Schools also use microcontrollers and programmable robotics kits, VR headsets and 3D design platforms, robots to assist in real-time AI interaction and online AI tools for both students and teachers to create a more inclusive, personalised and engaging learning environment.



Should AI enter classrooms early, or should the focus remain on building core soft skills first? The debate continues



The use of ChatGPT in classes shouldn't be encouraged under the age of 13, and between 13-18 years, parental consent should be sought for its use.

— **Daniel Franklin**,
Senior Education Consultant, EdRuption

At Citizens School, students use tools such as ChatGPT, CapCut, 3D design software, Scratch and Python during Project-Based Learning (PBL), “empowering them to become not just consumers of technology but innovative creators,” says McAdams.

AbuFarha says students at Downe House Riyadh use a wide range of AI tools and platforms such as AI generators, image classifiers and chatbot builders to create hands-on, exploratory learning experience. “From hands-on machine learning activities such as training a model to help an ocean-cleaning robot differentiate between marine life and waste, to exploring application development using AI tools and logic-



Not all aspects of AI require new gadgets or devices due to the accessibility of the tools across multiple levels of hardware.

— **Baz Nijjar**,
Vice President - Education Technology
and Digital Innovation, GEMS Education

based systems to designing AI-driven applications to address real-world challenges, students are being trained to use AI to develop internal chatbot prototypes and automation tools that reflect their practical understanding of AI concepts,” she says.

According to her, students also make regular, practical use of AI in their everyday work. “For example, generating data visualisations in geography, using language-support tools in English as an Additional Language (EAL), creating AI-assisted compositions in music, or applying AI-powered analysis in science experiments are all learning outcomes of our AI integration,” she says, adding that these early steps, are just the beginning of a longer journey.

According to Nijjar, not all aspects of AI require new gadgets or devices due to the accessibility of the tools across multiple levels of hardware.

Meanwhile, schools are again grappling with budget allocations for AI-enabled IT equipment.

Franklin points out that many edtech platforms have essentially updated overnight to have the latest GenAI elements embedded into their products, which has often caught educators and students off guard.

“You can teach about AI without technology, again, much the same as you are able to teach coding concepts offline too. Helping students to understand how to interact with it online can be taught with much of the existing technology in place, for as

long as operating systems on devices will support it," says Franklin.

As Abdulkhalek notes, in many cases, AI tools can be integrated into existing classroom technology such as learning management systems, assessment platforms and student information systems. "This approach can make adoption more accessible and cost-effective," he says.

According to him, the approach should be to select AI solutions that complement existing processes, workflows or systems. Schools should assess their AI readiness and partner with providers who prioritise seamless integration and a comprehensive data model, minimising disruption while maximising impact.

"Equally important is safeguarding student data privacy. As AI becomes more embedded in learning environments, schools must demand transparency, strong protections and clear boundaries on how information is used, ensuring responsible implementation that safeguards student information while enhancing the learning experience," he adds.

Zribi also argues that while foundational AI concepts can be introduced using existing classroom technology, effective and widespread implementation often requires significant investment in digital infrastructure. Many schools, he points out, lack the necessary tools for equitable access and cannot, therefore, fully leverage AI's potential to transform learning and better prepare students for the future. This, according to him, demands robust teacher training. "Educators must be equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge through ongoing professional development. For AI integration to be successful, it must align with existing curricula and complement traditional methods to enhance and personalise learning," he adds.

Curriculum development

With very few countries having fully developed and endorsed effective AI curricula, serious efforts are on across the region, especially in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, where policymakers and educators are laying the groundwork for comprehensive frameworks that can be scaled, standardised and sustained over the long term.

UNESCO has launched AI Competency Framework for Students and the accompanying AI Competency Framework for Teachers designed to empower policymakers, educators and curriculum developers to equip students with the essential skills, knowledge and values needed for effective AI engagement.



Rather than chasing trends, we prioritise core competencies like design thinking, computational thinking, ethical reasoning and adaptability. This is so our curriculum and pedagogy remain flexible, relevant and rooted in purpose.

— David Lees,
Principal, Citizens School Dubai

The European Commission and OECD collaborated on the Empowering Learners for the Age of AI: An AI Literacy Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (AILit Framework), which provides a framework to shape learning materials, establish standards and develop responsible AI policies for primary and secondary schools.

The curriculum that is being implemented across public schools in the UAE is age-differentiated, using play-based methods for younger students and practical projects for older ones. It covers seven areas: foundational concepts, data and algorithms, software use, ethical awareness, real-world applications, innovation and community engagement.

In Saudi Arabia, the Digital Skills curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) covers AI concepts, machine learning, ethical AI and digital skills with project-based learning and real-world problem-solving.

Cognita has developed its own AI in Education Framework to identify precisely where AI can have the greatest impact on teaching and learning. According to Perryer, the group is actively exploring global best practices and recognised international frameworks in AI education, such as RAISE programme at MIT and the AI Competency Framework at UNESCO.

"Our digital learning leaders hail from all regions in which Cognita operates, giving us a robust global team with diverse areas of expertise," says Perryer. The UK-based Cognita Group operates more than 100 schools across 20 countries, while Cognita Middle East operates 14 schools across the GCC.

"While our focus remains on designing the curriculum carefully, we are also developing bespoke tools such as Cognita AI (powered by Flint) to support teachers and students in practical ways," he says, adding that the group is exploring potential partnerships to provide comprehensive AI literacy resources for students, teachers and parents.

Perryer says given the diversity of the group's global network, it is identifying and developing internal talent and investing specifically in curriculum and digital leaders to build sustainable leadership within the schools.

Curriculum development at GEMS Education is ongoing, including external collaborations and internal utilisation of a vast network of teachers and students and other resources along with a focus on the GEMS Teach Like a GEM' playbook, says Nijjar.

"We are developing bespoke AI agents to assist lesson planning, differentiated instruction, assessment design and operational support. Our approach combines researching and incorporating global AI education frameworks, collaborations with leading edtech researchers and localised design within our curriculum team," he adds.

"Through the AI Hub, we invite AI experts, researchers and start-ups to co-design solutions that are both pedagogically sound and contextually relevant, apart from ensuring alignment with UAE pedagogy, multiple curricula environments and student well-being."

Citizens School is developing its AI curriculum in-house, guided by international frameworks, including the UNESCO AI Competency Framework and the UAE's National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031.

Curriculum design at the school is led by its academic team in consultation with external advisors. "One of our Board members, who advises the International Baccalaureate on AI and machine learning, has contributed to the shaping of this framework, helping ensure our model is aligned with global standards while responsive to our local context," says McAdams.

"Rather than introducing a generic or isolated programme, we are building

an integrated model that aligns with our Digital Literacy and Global Citizenship strands,” he adds.

Jamie Efford, Elementary Principal, Dubai Schools AI Khawaneej (DSK), says that while AI is not a standalone subject, the newly published AI policy sets clear expectations for responsible, ethical and culturally aligned use by staff and students. The Taaleem school is laying the foundations for a future AI curriculum.

Efford says DSK will develop the programme in-house drawing from respected global frameworks and the ISTE Standards for Educators, while collaborating with international thought leaders and local UAE industry partners. “Our aim is to ensure that when or if a formal AI curriculum is implemented, it will be meaningful, values-driven and seamlessly integrated into our bilingual learning model.”

Dr. Neil Hopkin, Director of Education, Fortes Education says students encounter age-appropriate AI concepts from as early as Year 2, beginning with unplugged activities and moving on to structured tool use by Year 5 and specialist applications from Year 7 onwards. “Our curriculum was developed by mapping outcomes to global frameworks such as UNESCO, ISTE and CSTA, consulting with university and industry partners, and tailoring content in-house to the UAE’s innovation agenda.”

Mokhtar says at OWIS Riyadh, the AI curriculum was developed in-house, led by its Innovation Lead



By introducing students to the ethical dimensions of AI such as fairness, transparency, privacy and accountability, we help them become thoughtful digital citizens who can make informed decisions in a world increasingly influenced by technology.

— **Abdulaziz Ahmed**,
Digital Design Teacher, Swiss International
Scientific School Dubai (SISD)

and in collaboration with academic leaders across the Global Schools Group network. “We also referenced international frameworks like the California K-12 Computer Science Standards and UNESCO’s AI Competency Guidelines to ensure global relevance and best practices,” she says.

AbuFarha says Downe House Riyadh’s AI curriculum was initially developed in-house by the ICT and Digital Innovation team, in collaboration with Downe House UK to align shared values and educational ambitions.

The school is also establishing a staff-led AI and Digital Ambassadors Committee, which will guide the implementation of 21st-century teaching strategies. “This initiative represents the first step in a larger plan to create a strong internal ecosystem of AI leadership and knowledge-sharing, while also remaining open to external partnerships and training opportunities,” says AbuFarha.

Ahmed notes that the curriculum at Swiss International School was created in-house and designed to be iterative even as global frameworks, best practices and research evolve. “We continuously refine it by drawing on global best practices, engaging with professional learning communities and monitoring research in both education and technology sectors,” he adds.

According to Alaywan, for schools looking to start integrating AI into their curriculum, it’s important to map global best practices to their own educational pathway, co-design with domain experts and publish an in-house progression that is iterated annually based on teacher feedback and student outcomes.

Alaywan also notes that ethics is essential and forms a core strand of AI education at ICE.

“Students are taught to question outputs, cite sources, respect data rights and understand the human impact of automated decisions. Topics such as privacy, bias, transparency, academic integrity and responsible creativity are embedded throughout the programme. This mirrors regional public-sector AI curriculum priorities, which explicitly highlight ethics, safety and fairness,” she adds.

Ethical awareness

While AI offers significant educational opportunities, it also introduces major ethical challenges relating to privacy, bias, fairness, academic integrity and misinformation.

While there’s near-universal agreement that AI education must include ethics, what’s being debated is the appropriate age to introduce complex ethical concepts.

According to Abufarha, “A vital part of educating students about AI is ensuring they understand its ethical use - from recognising potential bias in AI outputs to questioning the reliability and intent behind them.”

Students are taught how AI can be “shaped” or influenced, helping them approach it with a critical mindset rather than allowing it to do the thinking for them,” she says, adding that AI should never replace the development of their own reasoning, problem-solving and creativity.

Mokhtar too points out that in an effort to promote ethical AI usage, OWIS Riyadh has collaboratively developed an AI Use Policy, informed by Saudi Arabia’s national AI guidelines, to ensure responsible and safe engagement with AI tools for both students and staff.

“By embedding ethical considerations consistently throughout the curriculum from an early stage, we prepare students with not only technical skills, but also the critical thinking required to navigate these complexities responsibly,” says Perryer, adding that the aim is to ensure that students, teachers and parents understand that AI should complement and assist human learning rather than replace it,



Our aim is to develop young people who are informed, responsible and capable of thinking critically in a world increasingly influenced by intelligent systems.

— **Dr. Terence McAdams**,
Innovation Governor, Citizens School Dubai



Google has... been building AI tools that are purpose-built for learning, thereby empowering learners to ignite their curiosity, achieve deeper understanding, move towards active learning rather than simply providing an answer, and reach their goals.

— **Najeeb Jarrar**,
Regional Director, Marketing,
Middle East and Africa, Google

and that it should always be driven by a desire to do good for others.

According to McAdams, learners at Citizens School, Dubai engage with age-appropriate questions around data privacy, bias in algorithms, intellectual property and misinformation.

In practice, this means asking questions such as: Who benefits from this algorithm? What are the consequences of relying on AI to make decisions? How might generative tools shape our understanding of truth and originality?

"These are addressed through inquiry-led discussions, case studies and reflection tasks embedded in both our Digital Literacy strand and our wider project-based units," says McAdams.

According to McAdams, as learners advance, they not only use AI but also critique it, identifying limitations, analysing how systems are designed and reflecting on wider impact. "Our aim is to develop young people who are informed, responsible and capable of thinking critically in a world increasingly influenced by intelligent systems," he adds.

Ahmed points out that the ability to use AI responsibly is just as important as understanding how it works. "By introducing students to the ethical dimensions of AI such



A key part of AI education is helping students recognise bias, challenge reliability and think critically about intent

as fairness, transparency, privacy and accountability, we help them become thoughtful digital citizens who can make informed decisions in a world increasingly influenced by technology," he says.

According to him, embedding these discussions early ensures that learners view AI not simply as a technical skillset, but as a human-centred field where values, empathy and critical thinking play a critical role.

This approach reflects international recommendations, including those from UNESCO, which stress that ethical education in AI must be introduced early to prepare students for the social and cultural challenges of an AI-driven future.

Teacher training

The rapid introduction of AI into the K-12 curriculum has also led to a need

for enhancing teacher competencies, training teachers and ensuring educators are prepared for practical implementation.

GEMS Education says it has the largest K-12 and AI training programme in the region, with more than 10,000 teachers and students already trained and a target to expand and provide continuous training for all next year. "We have hundreds of teachers with AI certifications, including ethical use of AI, and the first school in the region with an AI certification (WSD) and many others to follow," says Nijjar.

In September 2025, GEMS is launching the Excellence Fellows in AI for its staff, which identifies and empowers faculty champions in regional schools to lead adoption, innovation and peer mentorship in AI tools, ethics and pedagogy.

AI EDUCATION

"We have also announced a first of its kind partnership with EON Reality to provide access to AI spatial technology to all schools, including evolving content repositories, which can be linked to multitude of subjects and can create immersive and interactive content within minutes," he adds.

Regarding teacher training, Nijjar notes that GEMS Education is pursuing a blended model of upskilling existing teachers through targeted AI professional development (in partnership with Microsoft and other providers) and bringing onboard specialist educators and industry practitioners and advisors.

To ensure effective delivery, ICE has put in place several key measures such as continuous teacher professional development through IB-aligned training and internal coaching cycles; model lessons and co-teaching collaborations between ICT specialists and class teachers to build confidence and consistency in practice; and strong governance oversight from a steering committee whose members regularly review the strategy, resourcing and guardrails to maintain quality and alignment with its vision.

"Teacher preparation should include targeted upskilling, peer coaching and selective external partnerships for advanced modules such as data science and ethics labs," says Alaywan.

"At Downe House Riyadh, we

believe the most effective way to keep pace with the fast evolution of AI is by empowering our staff to explore, experiment and share what works. We foster a culture of open conversation where teachers can trial tools, discuss their impact and act as digital ambassadors, championing approaches that enhance learning," says AbuFarha.

"By combining professional curiosity with strategic alignment, we can evolve our curriculum in ways that are both agile and impactful, while keeping our focus firmly on what benefits our students most," he adds.

Mokhtar says at OWIS Riyadh teachers are trained using various mechanisms such as in-house training sessions led by certified educators and innovation leads, external training through the National College of Education and specialised workshops, and peer-to-peer mentoring and collaborative planning across departments.

"We've also ensured that professional development extends to both academic and non-academic staff, fostering a whole-school culture of AI literacy and responsible use," says Mokhtar.

According to her, the relevance of AI curriculum can be maintained through a continuous review process that includes curriculum audits, collaborative benchmarking across branch campuses, partnerships with local vendors and industry experts, and teacher and student feedback.

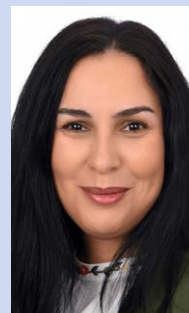
Lees also notes that to keep pace with rapid developments in AI, schools need to move beyond static curricula and adopt responsive, skills-based models that evolve with the technology. "At Citizens School rather than chasing trends, we prioritise core competencies like design thinking, computational thinking, ethical reasoning and adaptability. This is so our curriculum and pedagogy remain flexible, relevant and rooted in purpose."

According to Perryer historically, education has not embraced the latest technological trends without careful consideration and for good reason.

To keep pace effectively, schools, he says, should adopt a considered approach and regularly evaluate the impact of AI on student learning and experience.

"At Cognita, our AI framework and CognitaAI platform are designed specifically for this purpose, helping teachers and leaders integrate AI thoughtfully, in ways that align with clear educational goals and pedagogical integrity."

Google, meanwhile, says it has



At ICE, coding starts as early as KG2, with explicit AI literacy (understanding predictions, training data and system behaviour) introduced in upper primary. These foundations are deepened in middle and secondary school through data projects and critical evaluation of AI outputs.

— **Abir Alaywan**,
Head, Bilingual French International
School (ICE) - Dubai

been engaging schools globally to understand the changing needs and opportunities where tech can play a helpful role in the learning journey. "The way we do this is through a series of training sessions for both teachers and parents on the essential AI skills through 1:1 workshops as well as a dedicated online platform, with courses in both English and Arabic; and on internet safety through a dedicated online game, and a curriculum that can be applicable in classrooms," says Jarrar.

"We also have an in-house team of pedagogy experts and work closely with educational experts to ensure we're infusing sound learning science principles into our models, ultimately to help build tools that are purpose-built for learning," he says.

Google, he notes, has also been building AI tools that are purpose-built for learning, thereby empowering learners to ignite their curiosity, achieve deeper understanding, move towards active learning rather than simply providing an answer, and reach their goals. "Our approach is underpinned by proven pedagogical science, ensuring both innovation and effective learning outcomes," he adds. ■



Our curriculum was developed by mapping outcomes to global frameworks such as UNESCO, ISTE and CSTA, consulting with university and industry partners, and tailoring content in-house to the UAE's innovation agenda

— **Dr. Neil Hopkin**,
Director of Education, Fortes Education



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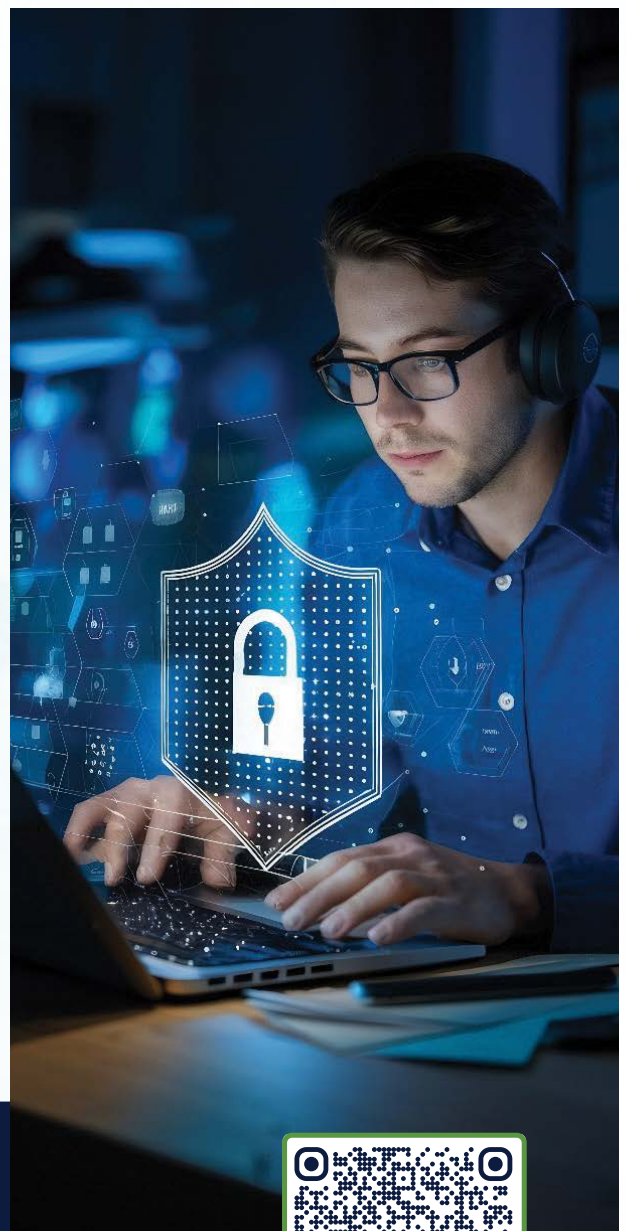
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Schools today recognise the importance of connecting furniture choices to overall architecture and design

Reimagining school infrastructure

As AI and well-being take centre stage in education, schools are moving beyond outdated layouts and rigid systems to create future-ready spaces—flexible in design, equipped with reliable connectivity and supported by multifunctional equipment—that enable holistic learning



It is important that every piece of furniture contributes to a wider story: one where schools become stages for ideas, collaboration and growth.

— **Namitha Girijan,**
Director of Furniture Design, Kidzink



By **Amitha R**

School infrastructure is undergoing rapid changes amidst greater technology adoption and increase in focus on teacher and student well-being. From smart classrooms to smart gadgets, smart furniture to smart labs and smart transportation, institutions are reimagining the way innovative learning environments are created to prepare the next generation for a dynamic world. The evolution of artificial intelligence into every sphere of school operation is further influencing the way infrastructure is planned.

While most of the legacy schools with infrastructure over a decade old try to navigate challenges such as outdated layouts, inefficient systems and limited adaptability, newer schools and those being designed are placing the latest technology and teaching methods at the centre of their design principle and creating more open spaces, where

learning is not limited within the four walls of the classrooms.

Furniture redefined

Schools today recognise the importance of connecting furniture choices to overall architecture and design. It is important for the design team to ensure that furniture, interiors and spatial design work together seamlessly.

“Underlying all these trends is intentionality, designing with purpose, culture and a sense of place,” says Namitha Girijan, Director of Furniture Design at Kidzink. According to her, there is a clear shift toward holistic design services.

“It is important that every piece of furniture contributes to a wider story: one where schools become stages for ideas, collaboration and growth. Importantly, these are not spaces just for students but for entire communities, places where learning, engagement and connection extend far beyond the classroom and last for

generations to come,” she says, adding that their own designs are guided by a culture of innovation and continuous research and development. “Our work is informed by in-house neuro-architecture specialists and insights gathered directly from students and educators,” she adds.

Cathy Di Savino, Marketing Manager, Intermetal LLC points out that recent trends in school furniture design are focused on creating adaptable, inclusive and sustainable learning environments that directly enhance student engagement.

“Classrooms are increasingly using flexible, reconfigurable layouts—supported by modular desks, mobile tables and lightweight stacking chairs—to transition seamlessly between lectures, group work and independent study, maximising instructional time and collaboration,” says Di Savino.

According to her, ergonomic features such as age-appropriate seating, shaped backs, and height-adjustable desks improve comfort and focus, while durable construction with heavy-duty frames, impact-resistant edges and high-quality laminates ensures longevity under daily wear.

Schools, he says, are also embracing breakout areas, such as corridors and alternative zones, to provide varied environments that stimulate creativity. “Sustainability plays a growing role, with a strong emphasis on low-impact materials, responsible sourcing and compliance with environmental

standards. Together, these trends are transforming classrooms into versatile, comfortable and eco-conscious spaces that actively support teaching and learning,” says Di Savino.

“Furniture is no longer just about filling a classroom; it’s about enabling learning. Today’s classrooms are no longer static; they are designed to be adaptable, inspiring, and aligned with modern educational needs,” says Lara Fayad, Managing Partner, Raymond Education.

Furniture designs, he says, should focus on being flexible, where modular, mobile furniture allows schools to reconfigure classrooms in minutes, supporting group work, independent study and project-based learning. “This adaptability gives teachers freedom and helps students stay more engaged,” says Fayad.

Focussing on comfort and ergonomics to create adjustable seating, he says, will make students feel comfortable, making them participate more actively and stay focused longer.

“It is all about creating dynamic, student-centred environments that are not only safe and durable but also inspiring places where children want to learn,” says Fayad.

Proactive fire safety

Many schools are moving towards IoT-based monitoring, where system health and fire alarm events can be tracked in real time, ensuring reliability and faster response in case of faults or emergencies.

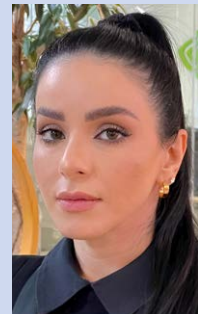
“Schools are adopting intelligent fire alarm systems that integrate with voice evacuation, emergency lighting and building management systems. This ensures faster detection, clearer communication and more efficient evacuation,” says Adnan Naveed, Customer Service Manager, Naffco.

There is also increased focus on sprinkler systems, clean agent suppression (for IT/server rooms) and quick-response extinguishers suited to different risk areas within schools.

“Infrastructure is being designed with children’s needs in mind, including low-mounted manual call points, clear escape signage and age-appropriate evacuation drills,” says Naveed.

According to him, Dubai Civil Defence mandates regular inspection, testing and maintenance of all fire protection systems, driving schools to adopt proactive safety management rather than reactive responses.

Schools are also investing in wider fire safety infrastructure across their



We’re seeing a strong shift towards technology-rich school labs designed to support multiple disciplines from engineering and computer science to design and digital arts.

— Chantelle Tavid,
Head of Marketing - MENA/CIS, NVIDIA

campuses. This includes protecting electrical switchgear, UPS rooms and server cabinets, where the risk of electrical fire is significant.

In Dubai, we are observing a strong emphasis on modernising school fire safety infrastructure in line with the emirate’s stringent Civil Defence regulations and international best practices,” says Naveed.

In an effort to enhance the safety features of school transportation, the UAE government mandated installing advanced fire extinguishing systems on all school buses. As per the guidelines of the Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology (MoIAT), starting April 15, all school buses in the UAE had to be equipped with the new certified system starting.

According to reports, there are about 17,000 school transportation vehicles in the UAE. “This helps protect children travelling on vehicles on their daily school journeys. While school bus fleet operators have 12 months to comply (as of April 2025), it’s very heartening to see that most school bus operators are taking the initiative to use the summer break to upgrade their systems,” says Mike Egan, Sales Director – Middle East and APAC, Reacton.

Apart from stringent compliance and audit mechanisms, there is also a growing focus on student-centric safety practices, and smart and integrated systems. “Many school operations are moving towards asset-



Infrastructure is being designed with children’s needs in mind, including low-mounted manual call points, clear escape signage and age-appropriate evacuation drills.

— Adnan Naveed,
Customer Service Manager, Naffco

specific fire suppression, using direct detection systems that activate right at the source of heat, rather than relying solely on traditional 'room flooding' approaches," says Egan, adding that the company is working with stakeholders to implement these solutions in line with local standards and international approvals.

Innovation labs

One of the major departments being disrupted is the school laboratory. Laboratories have become digitally connected, AI-enabled innovation centres. They are designed in such a way that they can support digital and physical research in schools. Devices that come with dedicated Neural Processing Units (NPUs) help make functions such as summarisation and translation easier thanks to machine learning algorithms.

"We're seeing a strong shift towards technology-rich school labs designed to support multiple disciplines from engineering and computer science to design and digital arts," says Chantelle Tavid, Head of Marketing MENA/CIS at NVIDIA

According to her, advanced computing now sits at the core of these environments. AI-powered research, complex simulations, CAD modeling and real-time 3D rendering demand performance beyond what traditional setups can offer.

Flexible design, reliable connectivity and multifunctional equipment are given significance in infrastructure to facilitate collaborative projects and hybrid classrooms. With features such as speech-to-text incorporated into lab design to guarantee inclusion



for all students, accessibility is a major motivator.

"In recent years, we've seen a clear shift in school laboratory infrastructure towards flexibility, safety and integration with digital learning. Schools are increasingly requesting modular lab furniture that can be reconfigured for both practical experiments and theory-based learning, which is particularly helpful

in space-constrained environments," says Harvey, General Manager, Classic Educational Supplies Trading LLC

Mohit Bector, Commercial Head - UAE & GCC, ASUS Business says AI labs will enable students to explore new technology and lead to pathbreaking innovations. "We anticipate more 'sandbox' AI laboratories for the upcoming school year, where kids can safely test new technologies without risking data privacy. Durability and scalability will be guaranteed by centralised IT administration in conjunction with student-ready devices," says Bector.

The main goal, he argues, is to create a multidisciplinary, AI-ready environment that will give students the tools they need to succeed in a knowledge-first, digitally fluent future.

According to Harvey, another growing trend is the emphasis on safety and sustainability. "Schools are now looking for chemical-resistant surfaces, improved ventilation systems and clearly marked, accessible safety equipment. There's also rising demand for eco-friendly materials and energy-efficient fittings, which is aligning with broader school sustainability goals," he says.

Technology, he argues, is playing a bigger role than ever, with interactive whiteboards, data logging equipment and virtual simulations becoming standard in many labs. "This is driving the need for integrated power and data points within lab benches and furniture," he adds.

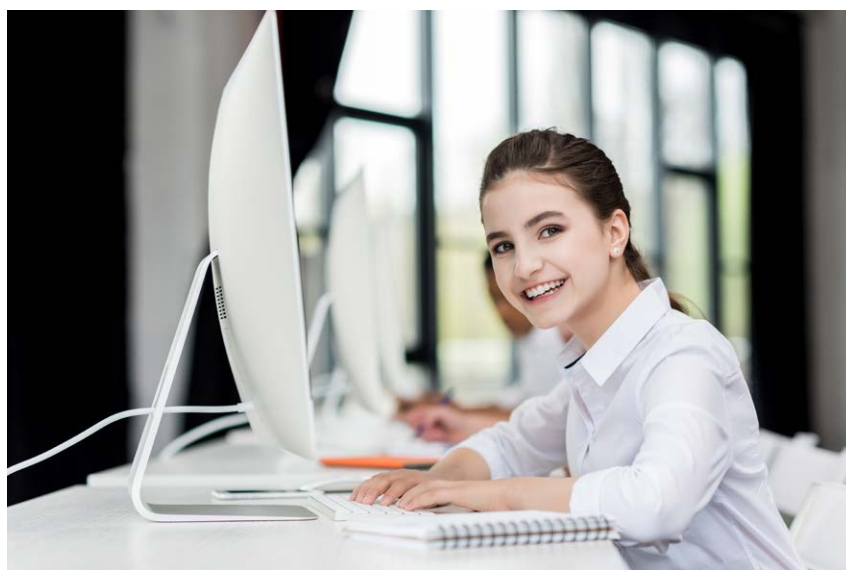
Ahmad Al-Okosh, Co-Founder, CEO, Penta says, "Schools today are seeking future-proof laboratories that are flexible, safe, technology-ready, sustainable and student-focused. We see a clear shift towards multi-purpose labs, integrated digital learning and ergonomic designs that enhance both safety and student engagement."

Modern IT infrastructure

Technology adoption in schools and educational institutions has led to increased dependence on devices and gadgets.

High-speed Wi-Fi, cloud platforms and interactive classrooms are enabling hybrid, collaborative learning experiences.

Starting from security solutions, attendance management and fleet management to curriculum, advanced tech solutions are being deployed. "Operational systems are going digital—smart canteen food management ensures efficiency and transparency in nutrition, while student tracking solutions and library management



Technology-rich school labs are emerging to support multiple disciplines from engineering and computer science to design and digital arts

system using RFID, biometrics and IoT strengthen safety and streamline attendance,” says Punarvasu Jain, Founder, Brio Technologies.

“One of the biggest trends in school IT infrastructure is the move towards fully digitally connected campuses. Schools are no longer looking at technology as a support tool but as the backbone of teaching, learning and daily operations,” says Jain.

According to him, these advancements are influencing teaching and learning by making classrooms more interactive, giving teachers real-time data on student engagement, and providing parents with greater visibility into their child’s education. “Schools are evolving into intelligent ecosystems where IT directly supports better outcomes,” he adds.

Many schools are fast upgrading their legacy systems, even as they transition to cloud-based solutions and increased AI adoption.

“Schools are increasingly moving from traditional on-premise systems to cloud-based platforms such as Google Workspace for Education and Microsoft 365. This shift enables greater flexibility, scalability and access to learning resources from anywhere, promoting a more collaborative and remote-friendly learning environment,” says Austin Antony, CMD, EEST Computer Systems Services LLC.

According to him, IT systems are increasingly being used to collect and analyse data on student performance, attendance and engagement. “This allows educators to make informed instructional decisions and offer targeted support,” says Antony.

Technologies like AI, AR/VR and interactive digital content are starting to play a role in enhancing engagement and experiential learning. These tools support immersive learning experiences, especially in STEM, history and language subjects.

This has also resulted in rampant cyberattacks. From 2023 to 2024, the education sector experienced a 35% increase in cyberattacks.

A recent report indicates that the education sector continued to remain the most targeted industry worldwide, averaging 4,356 attacks per organisation each week, which it terms is a 41% year-over-year increase.

In July 2025, Check Point said it observed 18,391 new domains related to schools, universities and students, with one in every 57 found to be malicious or suspicious.



Classrooms are increasingly using flexible, reconfigurable layouts, supported by modular desks, mobile tables and lightweight stacking chairs

The UAE has taken the lead in educating both students as well as educators about the dangers of cyberthreats.

The Ministry has introduced mandatory cybersecurity lessons starting this academic year for students from Grade 1 to 12.

“As digital usage increases, there is a growing emphasis on protecting student data and educating students about digital citizenship. IT infrastructure now often includes advanced security protocols, content filtering and monitoring systems,” says Antony.

Sporting facilities

Schools are prioritising sustainability, community access and wellness-driven design, aligning infrastructure with broader educational goals, says Carina A. Gallacher, Group Director – Landscape Architecture & Design, Gebal Co LLC.

“With a deep involvement in the evolution of school sports infrastructure, it’s clear that the landscape is shifting towards multifunctional, tech-integrated facilities that support both elite performance and broad student participation,” says Gallacher.

According to her, these trends are shaping strategic planning, where schools are no longer just building for sport but for holistic development, future-proofing campuses and enhancing student experience year-round.



Schools are increasingly moving from traditional on-premise systems to cloud-based platforms, enabling greater flexibility, scalability and access to learning resources from anywhere.

— **Austin Antony**,
CMD, EEST Computer Systems Services LLC

Saif Al Refaee, Key Account Manager – Educational, KOMPAN MEA says a growing trend in school sports infrastructure is the shift to nature-inspired play areas, replacing bright colours with natural elements. This supports sensory-rich, holistic play and encourages planning for calmer, eco-friendly environments. ■



Across the GCC, schools are reflecting on the role of inspections in shaping the future of education

Is it time to rethink school inspections in the GCC?

As Dubai's KHDA pauses school inspections for 2025-26, the debate around their relevance has intensified. School leaders across the region weigh in

By **Amitha R**

Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) recently announced a pause on school inspections for the academic year 2025-26. Framing it as part of an "evolving approach to support quality education," the regulator said the break will give schools space to reflect, consolidate best practices and explore new ways of driving student learning. Dubai's private schools have gone two consecutive years without formal inspections, following a similar pause in 2024-25.

The move has prompted schools across the GCC to question whether inspections are still vital for quality assurance, or if it is time to rethink their role in modern education.

School inspections have long been central to the UAE's education landscape. Introduced by the KHDA in 2009, Dubai's inspections have been widely credited with raising standards, improving international

benchmarking scores and providing parents with a reliable measure of quality. In Abu Dhabi, the Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) continues to conduct regular reviews, while the Ministry of Education runs its own inspection framework for foreign schools.

Elsewhere in the GCC too, inspection frameworks remain key quality assurance tools. In Saudi Arabia, Education and Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC) is responsible for the evaluation process, while schools also use international frameworks such as British Schools Overseas (BSO) or global accreditations to ensure they align with national ambitions while maintaining global standards. In Oman and Qatar, schools undergo external reviews, either through national regulators or respected international accreditors.

School leaders across the GCC are divided not on the value of inspections themselves, but on how they should evolve. Many leaders

acknowledge that external reviews provide accountability, credibility and reassurance to parents, while also safeguarding students and staff. Others welcome KHDA's decision as a chance to reduce the annual pressure cycle, allowing schools time to embed meaningful change without the looming deadline of inspection visits.

For some, the pause is a forward-thinking move that allows educators to innovate, take measured risks and focus on teacher growth and well-being. Others emphasise that in fast-growing markets, independent inspections remain non-negotiable to maintain international standards and protect students. However, leaders argue for a balanced, differentiated approach — one that maintains rigour but adapts to the needs and maturity of each school.

With regulators such as KHDA rethinking their approach, the question of what the school inspection of the future should look like has never been more relevant.



Maryssa O'Connor
EVP - Quality Assurance, GEMS
Premium Schools

A transparent and robust inspection framework can provide a rigorous approach that ensures accountability, drives improvement and supports national priorities such as innovation, inclusion and well-being. Across international contexts, inspections also serve to benchmark quality, inform parents and build trust in the education system.

In the UAE, inspection outcomes are closely linked to a school's reputation and market positioning. Parents often use inspection ratings as a key determinant of value, making fairness, accuracy and transparency essential. Globally, there is increasing recognition that inspections should not only identify compliance but also enable cultures of continuous improvement.

For these reasons, a balanced approach is crucial. High-performing schools, particularly those consistently rated outstanding or demonstrating excellence, require greater professional autonomy and reduced inspection frequency. In contrast, schools facing challenges benefit from more frequent, targeted reviews that offer both evaluation and developmental support. This differentiated model acknowledges each school's context and capacity, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach.

Alongside external inspection, GEMS Education focuses on internal quality assurance mechanisms, which provide equally robust accountability and developmental frameworks, creating a culture of continuous reflection and shared responsibility for improvement. Unification between internal and external methodology on evaluating standards leads to schools receiving valuable feedback and evaluation, advice and guidance for continuous improvement and a clear path to excellent standards for all children.



Oliver Bromley-Hall
Head Master, Brighton College Al Ain

The work of any inspectorate is incredibly important and very useful to schools and their stakeholders. Outcomes quite rightly act as markers by which parents gauge the quality of education being delivered, while also holding owners, governors and leaders accountable against clear targets and guiding future strategy. I commend the UAE's regulatory bodies, including ADEK, KHDA and the Ministry of Education, for their pragmatic and adaptive approach to evolving school needs, while remaining responsive to trends in educational research. For example, KHDA's decision to pause inspections in Dubai is a sensible step, as it gives schools the opportunity and time to make meaningful progress against improvement targets. Schools are highly complex organisations, so in order to effect real, lasting change for the benefit of children, school leaders and their teams need sufficient time to embed any developments they introduce.



Brett Girven
Principal, Dubai British School
Emirates Hills

It's both natural and commendable for any government or regulatory body

to seek assurance that children are receiving a high-quality education, whether here in the UAE or anywhere in the world. Few would disagree that the introduction of clear standards and accountability has played a significant role in elevating educational outcomes in the UAE.

As education evolves, so too must the frameworks that support it. The KHDA's decision to pause and reflect on its inspection process is a forward-thinking move—one that opens the door to meaningful progress. This pause offers schools a valuable window to consolidate and deepen the excellent practices they've been cultivating. It encourages thoughtful innovation and allows educators to take well-considered risks that a more rigid system might otherwise constrain.

Importantly, this moment also enables schools to invest more intentionally in the professional growth and well-being of their staff, without the immediate pressure of inspection. And while our focus on delivering exceptional learning experiences for students remains steadfast, this renewed space for reflection and growth will help us do so with even greater purpose and impact.



Jeremy Newton
Director of Schools, British
International School Riyadh (BISR)

At British International School Riyadh (BISR), we are committed to delivering the best of British education in Saudi Arabia. In this context, third-party school inspections using the BSO [British Schools Overseas] framework remain highly relevant. They serve as a vital quality assurance mechanism, offering reassurance to both our local and expatriate communities that we meet rigorous international standards and that we benchmark ourselves against British school expectations.

We complement these inspections with respected global accreditations,

VIEWPOINT

to ensure alignment with international best practices.

In a country where education is central to Vision 2030, school inspections play an important role in supporting national ambitions. They provide a robust framework for reflection, accountability and ongoing improvement.

While we understand the concerns that inspections can sometimes generate pressure or feel less relevant in certain contexts, at BISR they are welcomed. They offer both validation of excellence and a roadmap for continued growth.

Regardless of how inspection models evolve, one element must remain non-negotiable: there must always be an independent process in place to ensure that children are safe in education. In a rapidly expanding international school market, this external safeguard is not just helpful; it's essential.



Richard Snape
Principal, Cheltenham Muscat

At Cheltenham Muscat we place great value on the support we receive from our partner school, Cheltenham College, in the UK. As part of our ongoing quality assurance calendar they provide a critical but supportive external perspective on the quality of our provision and, importantly, the effectiveness with which we are reflecting the heritage, culture and ethos that makes Cheltenham College unique within our setting in Oman.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate framework and a team led by experienced ISI inspectors gives confidence in our ability to benchmark the exceptional education our team is providing here in Muscat against UK standards and offers validation to our parents that the experience their children are receiving is in line with the best of British independent schooling.

An annual review of this type, carried out within our partnership, allows staff to take external verification visits for BSO of COBIS accreditation in their stride, knowing the standard at which they are working, allowing them to communicate this confidently.



Rashmi Nandkeolyar
Principal and Director, Delhi Private School Dubai

School Inspections are a rigorous audit of a school's progress in every aspect of its functioning. Since the KHDA introduced inspections in 2009, schools in Dubai have rapidly improved in their functioning. In Dubai, school data for TIMSS has improved 92 points approximately, and PISA 40 points approximately. And improvement in IBT scores is not the whole story: every school has improved incrementally in almost all areas. Most schools move up their inspection indicators every year and the result is that students' experience in schools improves holistically.

Inspections ensure detailed feedback, giving direction to schools to initiate new programmes, policies and processes as well as finding solutions for gap mitigation. Schools also become aware of researched pedagogical trends or industry requirements and work towards creating a future forward environment.

On the other hand, yearly inspections do not give school leaders enough time to adequately prepare and embed change, as is required. A few interim years of quiet reflection, learning and processing is necessary to ensure meaningful change. School inspections can then be regarded not as stressful events, but rather to improve and benefit the entire school community, especially students.

To summarise, inspections are an excellent way to bring about improvement, but they must be

conducted in a phased manner, as is customary in most countries. In the meantime, schools should continue to evaluate themselves through other benchmarks such as international benchmarking tests, board results and other recognised audits.



Kate Jackson
Principal, King's College Doha

I see inspections as an essential part of a continuous improvement journey. Rooted in Simon Sinek's Infinite Game philosophy, I believe education must constantly evolve, adapting to emerging technologies, global priorities such as climate change, AI and the needs of future generations. At King's, we embrace this through our 5Cs values, Caring, Creative, Confident, Committed and Curious, which are underpinned by a robust and reflective system of internal quality assurance.

When conducted with integrity, personalisation and purpose, external inspections offer valuable opportunities to pause, reflect and refine. They support accountability across all levels of the organisation, ensuring that leadership teams remain focused, strategic and responsive. Inspections hold school leaders to account in a way that fosters professional growth and encourages transparency, rigour and self-awareness.

They also play a vital role in safeguarding, health and safety, and academic standards, areas that must never be left to chance.

All students deserve access to a consistently high standard of education, and inspections provide a quality benchmark to ensure this happens. At their best, inspections are not about judgment but about learning, growth and collective responsibility for delivering excellence in education, today and in future. ■

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منصة كتبي للقراءة التفاعلية

هي منصة قراءة متدرجة بثلاث لغات: العربية، والإنكليزية، والفرنسية تهدف إلى تطوير مهارات اللغة الأربعة، المحادثة والقراءة والكتابة والاستماع، ويستخدمها حاليًا ما يزيد على ٦٥٠ ألف طالب في أكثر من ٢٠ دولة حول العالم.

أداة تقييم القراءة الجهرية (KAT)

تمكّن هذه الأداة المعلمين من قياس مهارة القراءة لدى المتعلمين اعتمادًا على الدقة والطلاقة والفهم، ثم متابعة تطوّرهم في القراءة، كما تتيح فرصة ضبط التغيرات القرائية لوضع خطط علاجية لها.

كما توفر أداة تقييم القراءة سجلًا تحليليًا لمستوى الأداء والفهم الذي يحتاج إليه المعلم لينطلق منه مع المتعلم، وتقييمًا تشخيصيًا لتحديد المستوى بناءً على معايير أكاديمية. تمنح الأداة أيضًا إمكانية عكس نتائج التقييم على مستوى الطالب في منصة كتي.



منصة الطالب

توفّر كتيبي رحلةً قرائيّةً ممتعةً ومفيدةً للطلاب، تمكنه من تطوير مهاراته اللغوية بواسطة نشاطات القراءة والاستماع، وقياس الاستيعاب القرائي عبر أسئلة الفهم بعد كل قصة. كما تسعى إلى تحفيز الإبداع والقدرة على الابتكار لدى الطلبة باستخدام أداة إعادة كتابة القصة وأداة الحوار.

منصة المعلم

تمكّن المنصة المعلم من متابعة أداء الطالب وتطوره القرائي عبر واجهةٍ تعرض تقارير مفصلةً تشمل جميع النشاطات التي أنجزها الطلبة.

كما تقدم للمعلم إمكانية إنشاء الواجبات وإرسالها إلى الطلبة، وتقديم التغذية الراجعة لهم، ومكافأتهم بإصدار شهادات رقمية أو مطبوعة.

إضافة إلى تصميم عدد لا متناهٍ من أوراق العمل المتخصصة باستخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي.

