

# Arabic language programme 'bilArabi' aims to ease learning process

BY JAMIL KHAN

**DUBAI:** Around 100 educational professionals representing different institutes attended the launch of 'bilArabi', a dedicated Arabic learning programme designed to help students aged 4-13 to learn and reconnect with the language in a fun and engaging way.

The new initiative 'bilArabi' with its interactive approach plays a significant role in enriching children's learning experience and development launched by Pearson Middle East also aligned with the UK and US curriculum. It will be rolled out across schools in the UAE and KSA (first phase), and has the potential of further expanding across the higher education sector and to working professionals. The programme uses a question-answer based approach with engaging characters and stories that makes the learning student-centred.

During the launch which was attended by various educational professionals, it was pointed out that as young students struggle with literacy in the Arabic language, schools in the UAE are being urged to dedicate more time to teach Arabic reading and language comprehension skills. A 2017 survey carried out by the UAE government showed that only 68 per cent of students in the UAE had high skills in Arabic, according to national tests. In fact, the UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda has set as a target that UAE students have a strong knowledge of the Arabic language.

The current teaching methodology in schools is mostly traditional, often using a rote approach. Students – and especially those for whom Arabic is a second or even third language – struggle with this way of learning and will benefit immensely from a more engaging approach. An estimated 83.5 per cent of the UAE population is that of expats.

Fabio d'Emilio, Service Delivery and Publishing Director at Pearson Middle East commented, "The UAE has set a goal to rank in the top 20 countries in Programme for International Student Assessment and the top 15 nations in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study by 2021. In line with this strategy, we are proud to introduce this programme to students to reignite a

love of the Arabic language and to reduce its overall decline in the learning of the language. The programme is engaging and interactive and is aimed at gently challenging young learners, while teaching them important language skills that, as the research shows, will aid them during their school years and adulthood."

Dr Hanada Taha, series author and endowed Chair Professor of Arabic Language at Zayed University and former acting Dean of Bahrain Teachers College said, "bilArabi is a rich curriculum that offers more than just language learning, with a content that aims to develop a passion for Arabic history and culture and may result in a brighter future for the language as well. The course also includes 21st-century skills such as collaboration, creativity and critical thinking to prepare students for high-stakes exams and the workplace," she added. "We are proud to roll out the bilArabi programme in partnership with Pearson, underlining our ongoing commitment to improve the methodologies used for teaching the Arabic language. bilArabi has already proven to be extremely invaluable in our strategic plan in developing the

pedagogical practice of our teachers and in ensuring our children have a love for the language. The programme plays a significant role in contributing to the future of Arabic teaching, which is aligned with research, creativity and innovative teaching strategies. We look forward to further monitoring the impact of bilArabi on its progress and attainment over time," commented Ashleigh Thompson, Deputy Headteacher at Kings' School Nad Al Sheba in Dubai.

According to speakers, learners can access their student eBook through the bilArabi digital platform and can also take part in online practice activities such as quizzes to test their Arabic language knowledge and understanding, extending learning beyond the classroom. The inclusion of 'parent engagement' sections in the Student's Book actively involves parents in their child's Arabic language learning development from the outset of the course. bilArabi offers a blended-learning approach that suits both traditional and more technologically advanced schools.

It is also mentioned that a successful pilot was carried out in selected schools.