

'Boring' Arabic lessons in line for a digital makeover

► Old-fashioned teaching methods have until now been driving many children away from learning Arabic, experts say

ANAM RIZVI

Private schools will roll out a new Arabic digital teaching programme to help pupils use aspects of the language in everyday life.

Using mobile apps, pupils will be taught common words in a range of topics, including food, sports and exercise.

Global education company Pearson will launch its BilArabi programme in UK and US curriculum schools for pupils from years 1 to 3 in September.

Head teachers said the change in teaching methods would revive interest in learning the language and that too often mandatory Arabic classes in schools focus on boring texts and a "50-year-old" teaching methodology.

"If you modernise the way Arabic is taught, you inject energy into it," said Dr Hanada Taha Thomure, senior author at BilArabi and an education expert.

"Arabic teachers are not well trained or prepared and they don't have enough resources to help pupils learn and enjoy the learning process.

"In private schools, pupil's exposure to Arabic is limited and they don't get immersed in the language. This programme will help because it will modernise the teaching of Arabic," she said.

BilArabi combines textbooks, mobile applications and a digital platform to teach Arabic to native speakers and new learners.

The programme introduces pupils to characters that are meant to reflect those found in the UAE classroom, where there are children of various nationalities and some with special needs.

Pupils will use Arabic to talk about issues such as how to live a healthy life, how to engage in sports, the importance of helping others, how to be responsible and helping your parents.

Schools can choose whether

they adopt the programme for use during school hours or as an extra-curricular activity.

A 2016 Unesco study found that while children globally are able to read full-page stories by the end of Year 1, pupils in Gulf countries are able to read only single sentences in Arabic.

And by Year 4, global standards show children can read 800 to 1,000 words, but Gulf pupils are able to read Arabic texts of between only 200 and 300 words.

UAE Arabic teachers say they lack the proper resources to teach the language and schools say they have trouble finding teachers who can engage children in the subject.

"You might find qualified teachers, but they are not qualified to teach the most updated lessons. They teach in a boring way and this drives pupils away from Arabic," said Rufaidah Al



Children say they don't like Arabic classes in general because of the traditional methods used

ASHLEIGH THOMPSON

Kings' School Nad Al Sheba

Hajji, head of Arabic and Islamic studies at Beam, a school developer that has five schools in the UAE.

"Even if you train the teacher, they have to create their own tools to make the class interesting, because the technology in Arabic is limited.

"BilArabi will be an interesting educational resource."

Ashleigh Thompson is deputy head teacher at Kings' School Nad Al Sheba, where BilArabi has been piloted.

"BilArabi is interactive and reaches out to different groups of children because they can relate to the content. There are examples they can relate to their own lives," Ms Thompson said.

"Because most people speak English, pupils do not see the value in learning Arabic.

"Children say they don't like Arabic classes in general because of the traditional methods used."



Pupils will learn Arabic from new digital platform BilArabi, which helps apply the language to daily life. Subhash Sharma for The National