

Sharjah, UAE

Sharjah Private Education Authority

Introduction

Overview of Education System

Under the visionary leadership of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, the Ruler of Sharjah, the region has made remarkable strides in the field of education, particularly with the establishment of the Sharjah Private Education Authority (SPEA) in 2018. This initiative highlights the emirate's dedication to education excellence and innovation, focusing on a framework that aims to nurture young minds, support familial and community structures, and meet the community's needs.

The public education system in Sharjah is regulated by the Ministry of Education. The private education system in Sharjah is regulated by SPEA, which oversees 130 private schools. SPEA regulates these schools but also grants them the autonomy to adopt various international curricula. This structure facilitates a global education approach while ensuring quality and regional relevance through local oversight.

SPEA is responsible for setting policies, standards, and guidelines that align with both Sharjah's and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)'s vision for education. Its critical role ensures that private schools meet education and operational standards, thereby maintaining education excellence across Sharjah's private institutions. Additionally, SPEA is in charge of licensing private schools in Sharjah, issuing permits to educators, and ensuring school compliance in all aspects, including curriculum accreditation.

The private education system in Sharjah spans several levels:

- Preprimary education focuses on early childhood education, setting the stage for primary schooling.
- Primary education provides basic education that develops foundational skills across various subjects.
- Secondary education prepares students for further education or vocational paths through advanced studies.
- Training institutes offer courses that aim to train and teach students in a specific area of study.

Reflecting its multicultural community, Sharjah's private schools offer a wide array of curricula, including the British curriculum (International General Certificate of Secondary Education [IGCSE]/A-Levels), American curriculum, Indian Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), International Baccalaureate (IB), French curriculum, German curriculum, Australian curriculum, Pakistani

curriculum, Philippine curriculum, and various other international programs.^a Each curriculum is designed to meet diverse education needs and preferences, emphasizing different areas such as analytical skills, broad-based education, or critical thinking, depending on the program. Each curriculum should be accredited by its governing board and attested by an accredited university in its original country.

Schools typically select their curriculum based on education philosophy and community needs. Admissions and placement often depend on academic performance and entrance assessments. The choice of curriculum reflects different education philosophies, from the holistic approach of the IB to the structured focus of the British A-Levels.

To maintain high standards, SPEA requires that schools offering international curricula obtain accreditation from the curriculum's country of origin. This policy ensures adherence to global education standards. Additionally, SPEA conducts regular review visits to evaluate schools' compliance with education and operational standards, based on the UAE's inspection framework. These reviews focus on academic rigor and the holistic development of students.

Through its structured yet adaptable approach, Sharjah continues to develop its education landscape, making it a prime location for education investment and a leader in private education within the region. This system not only meets the diverse needs of its population but also aligns with global education trends, preparing students to thrive in a competitive global environment.

Use and Impact of TIMSS

The use and impact of TIMSS in Sharjah have been quite significant in shaping the education landscape of the emirate. Historically, participation in TIMSS has enabled the UAE, and by extension Sharjah, to assess and compare its students' proficiency in mathematics and science against international benchmarks. This participation has been a key component of the emirate's strategy to elevate education standards and achieve global competitiveness. The impact of TIMSS on educational practices and policies in the UAE and Sharjah include the following:

- TIMSS results have highlighted specific areas where Sharjah's private education system could improve, particularly in mathematics and science education. This has led to targeted reforms aimed at strengthening these subjects.
- One significant result of the UAE's performance in previous TIMSS cycles is the integration of adaptive digital content within classrooms in Sharjah.
- Insights from TIMSS have prompted new approaches in teacher training, emphasizing pedagogies that are effective in science and mathematics. This includes professional development programs focused on enhancing teachers' instruction strategies to improve student learning outcomes in these subjects.
- The data and insights provided by TIMSS have informed policy decisions and reforms within the education sector. These reforms are aimed at closing gaps identified by

^a The mathematics and science curricula used in primary and lower secondary grades may vary widely since the private education system includes several different curricula. As a result, this chapter does not provide specific details about each curricula.

TIMSS, enhancing curriculum design, and adopting international best practices to boost the quality of education.

- Regular participation in TIMSS allows Sharjah to benchmark its students against international standards, which is crucial for the emirate’s Educational Authority to understand its relative standing globally. This benchmarking is not only a measure of current performance but also a driver for continuous improvement.

Through these strategic uses of TIMSS data, Sharjah has been able to refine its education strategies continually, ensuring that the learning approaches not only meet local and regional education needs but also align with global standards. The ongoing commitment to using TIMSS as a tool for education enhancement demonstrates Sharjah’s dedication to developing a robust education system that can produce globally competitive graduates.

Teacher Professional Development Requirements and Programs

Professional Development Requirements

In Sharjah, the private education system places stringent requirements on mathematics and science teachers at both the fourth- and eighth-grade levels to ensure high standards of teaching. To qualify for these teaching positions, individuals must possess at least a bachelor’s degree in a relevant subject area along with a qualification in education. This academic foundation is crucial for providing teachers with the content knowledge and pedagogical skills necessary for effective teaching.

Ongoing Professional Development Programs

Beyond initial qualifications, SPEA mandates that all math and science teachers engage in ongoing professional development. Teachers are required to complete at least 100 hours of professional development annually. This requirement is designed to keep teachers updated on the latest educational practices and to continuously enhance their teaching skills.

Responding to identified gaps in the skills of math and science teachers, SPEA has implemented a robust professional development program. This initiative includes offering over 50 hours of targeted training each year, developed and delivered by experts from the Sharjah Education Academy. This training focuses on areas where teachers most need improvement, as identified through regular assessments and feedback mechanisms.

These ongoing professional development programs are tailored specifically for practicing teachers and aim to address both subject-specific content and innovative teaching methodologies. The programs are designed to ensure that teachers not only refresh their knowledge but also incorporate modern educational technologies and methodologies into their classrooms. By doing so, SPEA aims to elevate the quality of math and science education in Sharjah, preparing students to meet the challenges of the modern world effectively.

Through these systematic and structured training programs, Sharjah is committed to maintaining a high standard of education and supporting its teachers in their professional growth, ultimately benefiting the entire education ecosystem within the emirate.

Monitoring Student Progress in Mathematics and Science

SPEA enforces rigorous standards to monitor student progress in key subjects, including mathematics and science, ensuring schools adhere to high education benchmarks. This systematic oversight is crucial for maintaining quality and consistency across the diverse curricula offered in Sharjah's schools through the ITQAN program (the review process applied by SPEA, based on the UAE's inspection framework, to support school improvement), which evaluates student outcomes. The ITQAN program involves regular review visits to schools to evaluate their performance across the following six main standards of the UAE's inspection framework:

1. students' achievement
2. students' personal and social development, as well as their innovation skills
3. teaching and assessment
4. curriculum
5. the protection, care, guidance, and support of students
6. leadership and management

Each school receives comprehensive feedback and a report that serves as a guideline for improvement. During the review visits conducted by SPEA, based on the UAE inspection framework, the team reviews students' performance in science and assigns a rating. They also compare students' performance in TIMSS with the curriculum assessments. If a school is rated as acceptable in key subjects, including language, math, and science, the review team will provide recommendations and return the following year to check the results. Additionally, an advisor will follow up with schools to ensure that the recommendations are implemented through a structured plan.

SPEA mandates that all schools must follow the accreditation standards set by education bodies in their countries of origin. This international standardization ensures that educational practices are aligned with global benchmarks, thereby maintaining a consistently high quality of education.

Schools are required to submit comprehensive documentation to SPEA, which includes accreditation letters and detailed student grade reports. This documentation helps SPEA monitor the schools' compliance with prescribed academic standards and the students' academic progress, particularly in mathematics and science.

Each school must provide SPEA with a formal accreditation letter. This letter serves as proof that the school adheres to its accrediting body's standards, ensuring that the school's educational programs are legitimate and of high quality. International accreditation of the

organization responsible for the curriculum and approval by a recognized university are requirements.

SPEA has established a robust system to evaluate and monitor schools' compliance with education frameworks, focusing on mathematics and science. This evaluation process is critical for ensuring that schools meet both local and international education standards.

Ensuring a balanced curriculum, SPEA requires schools to provide a comprehensive education schedule that gives adequate attention to both mathematics and science. This balanced approach is essential for fostering a well-rounded education, enhancing students' knowledge, and developing skills in these critical subjects.

Special Initiatives in Mathematics and Science Education

SPEA has implemented a distinctive initiative aimed at enhancing the learning experience for Grade 4 and Grade 8 students in mathematics and science. This initiative revolves around the deployment of an AI-powered platform that supports bilingual instruction in both English and Arabic. The primary goal of this platform is to enrich students' understanding of core concepts through engaging in extracurricular activities. Key features of the initiative include the following:

- The platform utilizes artificial intelligence to tailor the learning experience according to the individual needs of each student. This personalized approach helps in addressing the diverse learning styles and capabilities of students, ensuring that each student can engage with the material at his or her own pace and level of understanding.
- One of the critical aspects of this initiative is its focus on applying mathematical and scientific concepts to real-life situations. This practical application is designed to make learning more relatable and interesting for students, thereby enhancing their engagement and retention of the material.
- By providing support in both English and Arabic, the platform ensures that students can learn in the language they are most comfortable with. This bilingual approach is particularly beneficial in a multicultural and diverse education landscape like Sharjah, as it accommodates a wider range of students and backgrounds.
- The platform also includes a variety of extracurricular activities that reinforce academic content while making learning fun. These activities are crafted to stimulate curiosity and encourage students to explore and experiment with concepts they have learned in class.

This initiative by SPEA represents a significant step toward integrating technology in education and customizing learning experiences to meet the needs of all students. It highlights SPEA's commitment to adopting innovative solutions to improve educational outcomes and to prepare students effectively for the demands of the future.

In addition, SPEA is taking significant steps to foster a culture of creativity and innovation among students. A key element of this initiative is the encouragement of student engagement in both national and international conferences. This opportunity is particularly geared toward

gifted and talented students, providing them with platforms to showcase their skills and interact with peers and experts in various fields. Key features of SPEA's initiative include the following:

- SPEA actively supports the participation of students in relevant conferences. This exposure allows students to gain insights into the academic community, enhance their learning experiences, and apply their knowledge in broader contexts.
- Schools under SPEA's jurisdiction are monitored for their ability to nurture and develop student creativity and innovation. This monitoring helps ensure that schools provide environments that encourage students to think critically and creatively.
- SPEA organizes an annual summit that invites students from all Sharjah schools to present their projects. This summit serves as a vibrant forum for students to display their work, receive feedback, and engage with a community of like-minded peers and educators. It highlights SPEA's commitment to integrating practical, project-based learning approaches within the education system.

These initiatives by SPEA not only enhance the educational experiences of students in Sharjah but also aim to equip them with the skills necessary to thrive in a global environment. By fostering an atmosphere that values creativity and innovation, SPEA is preparing students to become future leaders and problem-solvers.

Suggested Reading

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