

# QATAR

Badriya Al-Mohannadi

*Evaluation Institute, Ministry of Education and Higher Education*

## Language and Literacy

Arabic is the official language and the language of instruction in Qatar. Farsi, Balochi, Pashto, and Urdu are among the many languages and dialects spoken by Qatar's large expatriate community. English is the most popular language spoken among Western expatriates, although bilingualism and language switching between Arabic and English are common among Qatari nationals and expatriates.

The importance of literacy in Qatar's society is evident in a variety of contexts. One tradition that promotes literacy is reading of the Quran by parents to their children at an early age and having them repeat verses. When children begin reading on their own, this activity becomes a daily practice that is monitored by parents or tutors at home.

## Overview of the Education System

As of 2016, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (formerly the Supreme Education Council) has overseen Qatari schools.

The State provides every Qatari child with free education from kindergarten through university, including textbooks, stationery, transportation, and sports kits and gear for all students. The state also offers financial incentives to Qatari students and organizes religious and cultural events and competitions.

In addition to a number of private schools, Qatar has schools for various Arab communities (e.g., Tunisian, Lebanese, Jordanian, Sudanese) as well as non-Arab communities (e.g., Indian, American, French, German). The State of Qatar supports the establishment of various types of private educational institutions and provides continuous legal and supervisory support.<sup>1,2</sup>

The education system in Qatar consists of three stages: primary (six years), preparatory (three years), and secondary (three years). Education is compulsory through the preparatory level.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is the main decision maker, and continues to implement its educational tasks and responsibilities through departments such as Educational Supervision, following up and monitoring curriculum and learning resources, and supervising government schools and teacher affairs, student affairs, and early years education.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is responsible for the development of educational plans, policies, strategies, and research. The Ministry also undertakes the training and development of all Ministry staff and employees, to provide an integrated system of educational services toward

achieving Qatar Vision 2030. This Vision focuses on the preparation of an advanced society, able to achieve sustainable development to provide prosperity for all its citizens by 2030.

## Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

### *Reading Policy*

Formal reading instruction is part of the Arabic language curriculum beginning at age 6 during the first grade of primary school and continuing throughout compulsory schooling (through the preparatory stage). Arabic is taught using an integrated curriculum to ensure the unity of the language and achieve balance across various language skills.

### *Summary of National Curriculum*

The curriculum standards Qatar has developed for all subject areas across all grade levels in both public and private schools represent a key pillar in the country’s educational reform.<sup>3</sup> These standards identify the educational objectives that students must acquire at each grade level. Additionally, standards are used to ensure that students in Qatar are receiving a high quality of education (similar to that of students living in developed countries), help public school graduates join prestigious universities and compete in the local and international labor markets, guide developers of teaching and learning materials, and inform the design of student examinations. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education manages the Arabic schools that offer the Qatari curriculum.

The Grade 4 Arabic curriculum comprises four strands—Listening and Responding, Speaking to Communicate and Interact, Reading Strategies and Responding, and Writing Strategies and Composing—in addition to Word Knowledge, which is taught by integration into those main strands. Within each strand, the curriculum standards are grouped into topics to which national tests devote different levels of emphasis. Exhibit 1 shows the distribution of emphasis given to topics in the Arabic curriculum for Grade 4.

**Exhibit 1: Arabic Curriculum Content and Assessment Weightings for Grade 4**

<b>Content</b>	<b>Assessment Weightings</b>
Listening and Responding	15%
Speaking to Communicate and Interact	20%
Reading Strategies and Responding	25%
Writing Strategies and Composing	25%
Word Knowledge (taught by integration into the above main strands)	15%

The Arabic curriculum is divided into three major domains: Words and Sentences, Listening and Speaking, and Reading and Writing. The Reading and Writing domain aims to develop students’ silent and oral reading abilities, allowing them to read freely and correctly and thus developing their minds and allowing them to fluently express their ideas. Qatar’s curriculum standards for reading and



writing performance for students in schools state that, by the end of Grade 4, students should be able to:

- Scan texts to identify key sections, paragraphs, and words
- Identify connective words that signal time and indicate sequence
- Read correctly, adding or deleting words, or changing the emphasis on letters of a word
- Read a variety of texts comprehensively and fluently, using the rules of Arabic phonetics, a clear voice when reading aloud, and a reasonable speed when reading silently
- Perform tasks that promote the acquisition of a broader vocabulary and linguistic understanding
- Recognize and understand the roles of theme, plot, setting, dialogue, direct and reported speech, rhyme, rhythm, assonance, emotive language, and similes in prose and poetry
- Identify instructions or procedures, typical language, and organizational features
- Read, understand, and discuss a variety of nonfiction texts
- Retell stories or relate information from reading
- Write continuous texts that link purpose to form, story openings, portraits of characters, short sequences of dialogue, and longer stories
- Locate, extract, evaluate, and synthesize information within a text
- Identify the main idea of hard copy and electronic texts

According to the curriculum standards for the Arabic language Reading strand, students at the end of Grade 4 should be able to:<sup>4</sup>

- Develop reading strategies:
  - Use various strategies to correct mistakes (e.g., intonation, spelling, grammar, context) during reading
  - Train to read aloud using punctuation (e.g., full stops, commas, question marks) to deliver the intended meaning of a text
  - Scan a text to identify key sections, paragraphs, vocabulary, and information
  - Read texts using a computer and the Internet
  - Use alphabetically ordered vocabulary located in dictionaries
  - Identify linking words and understand their purpose (i.e., to link sentences and show sequence)
- Develop reading comprehension strategies:
  - Identify the key topic in a text
  - Identify the plot and general atmosphere of texts, including poetry
  - Identify dialogue type, the imperative tense, questions, and exclamations

- Direct and indirect style
- Rhyme and the use of metaphorical language
- Nonfiction texts:
  - Identify and distinguish instructions or procedures in a text (e.g., directions)
  - Understand that a clear title may reveal the aim of instructional texts
  - Organize a text in its logical order and use linking words that show the sequence of actions
- Read and comprehend informational texts:
  - Expand upon knowledge gained in previous classes regarding the features of the informational text
  - Compare texts that provide similar information from different points of view
- Explain and interpret texts:
  - Read various texts regarding common topics
  - Use cause and effect and its vocabulary (e.g., “because,” “so,” “that is why”)
  - Read and understand key ideas and details in age appropriate texts

## Teachers, Teacher Education, and Professional Development

### *Teacher Education Specific to Reading*

Qatar has no specific requirements or preparation regarding the teaching of the reading curriculum as part of preservice education for teachers in schools. Language teachers must have a bachelor’s degree in Arabic language to teach reading to Grade 4 students.

### *Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers*

Teachers go through a series of training programs that aim to strengthen their abilities in teaching and delivering information. Also, teachers exchange classroom visits that usually are scheduled by the subject coordinator. The Training and Educational Development Center plays a major role in designing professional development workshops for teachers, allowing them to keep up with the latest teaching, school leadership, and management techniques. The center also advises school administrators on the design and content of their own professional development plans, approves the schools’ plans, and provides support as needed.

In 2007, the Training and Educational Development Center launched an online teachers’ network in an effort to improve the quality of teaching in schools and to promote professional development. The network provides a platform for all teachers in Qatar to exchange views and information on teaching issues, and encourages teachers to exchange ideas on curricula. New, aspiring, and experienced teachers can exchange learning resources and search for and apply for jobs online. Specialists in this field have held training workshops for teachers with the aim of improving students’ performance on PIRLS. Experts at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education supervise teachers and provide performance reports, used to pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses and identify ways to improve their teaching skills.



## Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

### *Instructional Materials*

Prior to 2005, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education published and distributed official schoolbooks to Qatari schools. Since 2005, independent schools also have used newspapers, magazines, tape recorders, and televisions in instruction.

In September 2011, the Supreme Education Council (which became the Ministry of Education and Higher Education) began providing independent schools with a list of instructional materials aligned with curriculum standards for all academic subjects and all stages, so each school could choose learning resources that best suited their students' needs. Private publishers from other Arab countries also produce a range of reading texts, workbooks, and other learning materials for instructional use and supplementary resources for teachers. Teachers provide guidance and support in how to use books effectively, such as teaching students how to use books to obtain information and increase their knowledge, or to deduce and analyze results. Teachers also use secondary sources including electronic resources to expand students' perceptions and enrich their knowledge.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education expects parents to provide further support for the development of student knowledge by:

- Becoming familiar with the learning resources for each subject, reviewing them with their children, and pointing out the advantages and benefits of their use, especially in the elementary and preparatory stages
- Encouraging their children to read their textbooks at home and to complete exercises and activities included in the book, even if they were not assigned by the teacher
- Reviewing the reading passages and the pages that have been assigned as homework
- Providing an environment that encourages reading at home by reviewing texts and reading them with their children

### *Use of Technology*

In addition to reading books in school, students have opportunities to read and view texts through modern means of communication. One of the major benefits of the educational reform in Qatar is the emphasis on schools' provision of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools. Televisions and computers are available in all schools, and the Internet is used as an aid for reading instruction. Many schools have been able to make technological advances because of a project coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education that aims to make ICT an integral part of education, by organizing events that promote its integration.<sup>5</sup> The success of this project can be attributed to Ministry support of the two councils, the dedication of schools and teachers, and students' motivation to participate in the events.

### *Role of Reading Specialists*

Qatari schools have no reading specialists.

### *Second Language Instruction*

Beginning in Grade 1, English is the first foreign language taught in all schools in Qatar. Many international schools use English as the language of instruction.

## **Students with Reading Difficulties**

### *Diagnostic Testing*

No diagnostic testing specifically identifies reading disabilities in Ministry of Education primary schools. Classroom teachers regularly assess students to diagnose reading difficulties. Because schools do not have a common reading disability screening test available, diagnostic screening varies. The Qatar Individual Needs Program is working to identify valid and reliable individual reading assessments designed to inform professionals and parents of students' potential reading difficulties, and has recently tested a screening inventory in some pilot schools. Students who are identified by these assessments as having reading difficulties are classified as "individual needs students."

### *Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties*

Depending on the severity of the problem, students identified with reading difficulties may receive support from a special educator or teacher. Schools specifically employ teachers to teach students with reading difficulties, because teachers with special education training are not likely to be trained as reading specialists. Special education teachers are expected to collaborate with general classroom teachers to best meet these students' needs. In schools that administer individualized diagnostic reading assessments, general classroom teachers collaborate with the school-based individual needs coordinator to implement the primary service delivery system, which identifies strategies for differentiated reading instruction. If this system does not meet students' needs, the level of service or intervention is increased, so the students receive more targeted attention, usually from an intervention specialist. In such cases, an individual education plan specifically describes the services or interventions to be provided.

## **Monitoring Student Progress in Reading**

The Evaluation Department is responsible for designing, implementing, and annually administering the Qatar Comprehensive Educational Assessment (QCEA) to students in independent schools in Qatar. The results of this assessment are published by the School Evaluation Office of the Evaluation Department in the form of a report card. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education posts these reports on its website for easy access by school staff, parents, students, and other interested parties.<sup>6</sup> Test results for individual students are not released publicly.



Another assessment is designed and implemented by schools, and the results of these assessments are sent to parents at the end of each semester as a report card with their children's oral and written examination scores in every subject. Teachers in Grades 1 and 2 primarily use verbal assessments, while the upper grades use verbal and written assessments along with homework grades. These reports are intended to keep parents up to date on their children's progress. Parents may choose to enroll their children in enrichment lessons if their performance levels do not meet expectations.

Following the dissemination of results, parents and class teachers receive student scores in relation to performance benchmark levels set by experts and teachers through a performance level-setting workshop. Student performance is categorized into three levels: Meets Standard, Approaches Standard, and Below Standard.<sup>7</sup>

## Special Reading Initiatives

In conjunction with Qatar's participation in PIRLS 2006, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education organized a contest among the primary grades for outstanding performance in Arabic language literacy. The main objective of the contest was to improve the performance of Grade 3 students on basic Arabic reading competencies. Following PIRLS 2011, the Evaluation Institute of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education launched book fairs, reading projects, and activities to encourage reading fluency. These initiatives were designed to highlight the importance of reading; improve students' reading aptitude; and encourage students to read, tell, and write stories. In December 2010, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing collaborated on the first Doha International Children's Book Festival, which introduced children to the book industry and allowed them to spend time discussing books with authors, reading, and painting.<sup>8</sup> The Qatari National Library, *Dar Al Kutub*, also organizes a number of events that support literacy (e.g., book fairs). Additional reading initiatives include:

- The program *My Library is the Heart of My School*—This program, adopted as part of the reading program by the Office of Her Excellency Shiekha Hind Bin Hamad Al-Thani, aims to foster the value of books and to promote the culture of reading by providing students with two special reading classes per month. The coordinators of the Learning Resources Center cooperate with Arabic teachers to select the stories for the program, conduct analyses of them, and organize appropriate activities for students based on them.
- The Internet Safety Project (*Hazeen*)—The IT department of Educational Inspection, in coordination with the Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ictQATAR), supports and monitors the implementation of *Hazeen*, or the Internet Safety Project, in all schools. This project uses multimedia consistent with the standards of the Arabic, English, and Values Framework for Grades 1 to 12.

- The Spelling Contest—Held for six consecutive years, this annual competition aims to enable students to use Arabic vocabulary correctly when writing, reading, and speaking. The competition is aligned with the national curriculum standards, with seven standards selected from the third grade and nine standards from the fourth grade.
- Literacy Numeracy (Maharati) Programme—This project aims to enhance literacy and numeracy skills, and to enable students to achieve the basic level of literacy and numeracy skills in the primary stage. Its subject areas include Arabic, mathematics, and science, and cover students in Grades 1 to 6.

## Use and Impact of PIRLS

The main contributions of PIRLS to education in Qatar have been its focus on an early start for reading instruction, early interventions for weak learners, and a continued focus on reading throughout the primary level. Analyzing student performance on PIRLS 2006 and PIRLS 2011 informed the Ministry of Education and Higher Education about the reading abilities of Qatari students in the fourth grade, as well as differences in performance among subgroups (e.g., boys and girls) and school types. The results have been reported to various officials, government committees, and universities. PIRLS findings also have been reported in the press and disseminated to schools, encouraging some schools to include the reading skills measured in PIRLS in their curricula. In some schools, talks and workshops have been provided to parents regarding how to create a positive home reading environment. Additionally, teachers can access reports on students' performance on the Qatar Comprehensive Educational Assessment (QCEA, the country's national assessment) and on international studies including PIRLS, TIMSS, and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Following PIRLS 2011, the International Studies Department of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education developed a plan to meet international standards in all schools in Qatar. The department has benefited from the recommendations that were presented following analysis of the PIRLS 2011 results. The aim of this plan is to improve upon the standards of the international study curriculum, and the performance of students enrolled in the International Studies Department. The plan focuses on defining, classifying, and comparing international standards with national standards or educational reality, students' levels, and the efficiency of the educational resources used in the field. The International Studies Department conducts training workshops for tests' subject coordinators, and then develops action remedy plans to be implemented in schools. A comprehensive media plan has been developed to implement the action plan; promote competition among students; and raise the awareness of students, parents, and teachers of the importance of participating in international tests.

Because PIRLS is conducted every five years, Qatar's participation in PIRLS 2006 and 2011 represents a baseline from which the country can track its progress in fourth grade reading performance over time. The comparison of the 2006, 2011, and 2016 PIRLS cycles will present Qatar with unbiased indicators that provide perspective on the status of the education system in Qatar as compared to international standards.





---

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2006). *Annual statistics report*. Doha: Author.
- <sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2010). *Schools and schooling in Qatar 2009– 2010: A statistical overview of aspects of schools and schooling in Qatar*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.qa/Statistical%20Report/2009-2010.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (n.d.). Qatar Arabic curriculum standards. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.qa/Ar/SECInstitutes/EducationInstitute/CS/Pages/default.aspx>
- <sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2005). Arabic language curriculum, fourth grade. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.qa/Ar/SECInstitutes/EducationInstitute/CS/Arabic/Schools/CS/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%81%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B9.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2007). QATAR borne with vocation to make technology part of learning. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.qa/En/Media/News/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsID=2351>
- <sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2016). Student assessment office. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.qa/En/SECInstitutes/EvaluationInstitute/SAO/Pages/default.aspx>
- <sup>7</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2012). Qatar comprehensive educational assessment (QCEA). Retrieved from [http://www.edu.gov.qa/En/SECInstitutes/EvaluationInstitute/SEO/Assessments\\_Tests/Pages/QCEA.aspx](http://www.edu.gov.qa/En/SECInstitutes/EvaluationInstitute/SEO/Assessments_Tests/Pages/QCEA.aspx)
- <sup>8</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education. (2010). Authors say children’s book festival bridges gap. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.qa/En/Media/News/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsID=3035>