
[Taking stock of education quality in the Gulf States](#)

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Cross-national studies

A publication from the UNESCO Office in Doha presents an in-depth analysis of current trends and challenges for education systems across the Gulf region.

Until 2015, the [Education for All \(EFA\) framework](#) led by UNESCO sought to coordinate the international efforts so that committed countries could reach the six goals established to meet the learning needs of all children, youth, and adults. [Though only a third of countries achieved all of the measurable EFA goals by 2015](#), the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have kept quality education as a crucial component of the global agenda, focusing on continuing the progress made by governments on providing not only access, but also high quality learning to all.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, have all made extensive investments in education with great progress towards the Education for All (EFA) goals. Most Gulf countries have instituted universal education, attained gender parity, and offer preschool and lower secondary education to practically all citizens and residents. They have also made strides in the elimination of adult illiteracy. However, their performance is at par with other Arab countries, all of which score very low in international comparative examinations. Educational quality continues to be a challenge.

The education systems in the Gulf States have unique characteristics. While many students study in English, Arabic instruction is challenging. It is linguistically distant from the vernaculars. The script also presents visual challenges. Due to Islamic and cultural values, schools segregate boys from girls at various stages of education, and mainly rely on foreign teachers, especially for boys.

Systematic reviews on learning and learning outcomes in the Gulf region are scant. The [UNESCO Office in Doha](#) recently coordinated a two-year research study, including a systematic analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, which took stock of progress made towards the EFA Goals in the region. The study, [Momentum for Education 2030: Improving the Quality of Learning Outcomes and Enhancing the Performance of Education Systems in the Gulf Cooperation Council States \(GCC\)](#), presents an overview of the advances made, and the remaining challenges, on providing access to quality education and improving learning outcomes in the six Gulf States. The report also provides policy recommendations for future progress across and within countries.

Understanding educational challenges in the GCC region

- Although GCC States have committed significant resources to their educational systems, learning outcomes remain low compared with other countries at similar income levels. Dependency on government as the main source of funding with limited alternatives remains an issue in countries such as Oman.
- There is a need to provide access to quality education to a growing expatriate population in countries such as Saudi Arabia, where approximately one third of the population are expatriates residing in the country.
- Gender parity is a critical issue: although girls tend to outperform boys on international assessments, in some countries they are less likely to go on the next highest level or are under-represented in the national workforce.
- The review also points to significant differences in teachers' knowledge and expertise (in Literacy in Arabic, Mathematics and Science subjects). There are also significant differences regarding the role of teachers in affecting learning, teacher effectiveness, and teacher expectations.

Recommendations for moving forward

A few general recommendations are applicable to all countries including increasing the professionalization of teachers, linking pupil and teacher performance, creating enabling school environments, increasing parental involvement in schools or providing incentives for nationals to work in the education sector. A detailed list of policy recommendations for moving forward is also provided for each country.

In addition to differences between countries, there are marked differences on school performance even within countries. What works in improving learning outcomes in one district may not necessarily be effective on other districts. The report concludes that policies should therefore be based on conditions in each district or county.

The study, [Momentum for Education 2030: Improving the Quality of Learning Outcomes and Enhancing the Performance of Education Systems in the Gulf Cooperation Council States \(GCC\)](#) was conducted by the [UNESCO Office in Doha](#) in collaboration with experts from the [Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) Report](#), [PISA \(OECD\)](#), and [TIMSS \(IEA\)](#). The study was funded by the [Qatar National Research Fund](#).

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