

<b>Effective Date</b>	9 January 2024
<b>Compliance Starts From</b>	9 January 2024

## **Schools Policy on Cultural Considerations**

### **Introduction**

Over the past decades, the United Arab Emirates has witnessed rapid population growth, driven by a large influx of expatriates who have settled in the country and contributed to its economic and cultural diversity. In parallel, the proportion of non-Emirati educators and students in private schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi has increased, providing a clear picture of the global diversity of the private education sector. The UAE has embraced this cultural diversity by promoting the values of tolerance embodied in the National Tolerance Programme. At the same time, however, there has been a growing need to raise the awareness of all members of the school community about culturally and nationally acceptable topics and practices in the education sector.

### **Purpose**

- To establish a guiding framework for schools on how to handle cultural considerations in the UAE, to help them raise their awareness of appropriate topics and practices.
- To define the expected practices from schools to ensure compliance with the legislation in force in the UAE.
- To set specific requirements to ensure teaching and learning resources are aligned with the cultural concepts of the UAE.

### **Definitions**

<b>Cultural Considerations</b>	
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	Knowledge, awareness, and understanding of topics and practices that are appropriate within a culture.
<b>Culture</b>	The set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of a society or a social group, which encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs (UNESCO, 2001).
<b>Proselytism</b>	Biased teaching aimed at promoting beliefs, religions, or ideologies.
<b>Legislation</b>	The body of legal documents (laws, bylaws, instructions, policies, directives, standards, rules, etc.) that govern and regulate practices in a specific aspect of a jurisdiction.
<b>Malice</b>	An intentional tendency to disregard cultural considerations, resulting in a cultural offense.
<b>National Identity</b>	A system of social and moral values associated with the lifestyle of people in the past, present, and future (Ministry of Culture and Youth, as cited in the Official Portal of the UAE Government, n.d.).
<b>School Community</b>	Staff, students, parents/families, alumni, and other individuals who are responsible for one another and provide an environment for intellectual learning as well as a sound social environment where everyone is supported.
<b>Teaching and Learning Resources</b>	Any document, written or audiovisual material, e-learning/technological resource, event, individual, or other item that directly or indirectly supports and enhances teaching and learning.

# The Policy

## 1. Commitment to UAE Legislation

1.1 Schools must ensure that all members of their school community understand, respect, and comply with the requirements of the Department of Education and Knowledge's (ADEK) Cultural Considerations Policy (hereinafter referred to as "this Policy"), the Professional and Ethical Charter for Employees in Public Education Institutions (issued by the Ministry of Education, 2022), the Ministry of Education's Circular No. (1) of 2022 concerning the commitment of private schools to areas related to national identity in the school environment, the Ministry of Education's Circular No. (1) of 2023 concerning the promotion of a safe school environment, in addition to all other legislation in the UAE.

1.2 The School Principal is responsible for ensuring that the school's practices and the content of all teaching and learning resources are aligned with and considerate of cultural norms as outlined in the country's laws. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. "Respect for the Constitution, laws, and orders issued by public authorities in implementation thereof, observance of public order, and respect for public morals shall be a duty of all inhabitants of the Union" (Article 44, Constitution of the United Arab Emirates).
2. "Preserving Islamic and Arab principles and values, public morals, and the values, traditions, and systems of the State" (Clause 11, Article 11, Federal Decree-Law No. (18) of 2020 concerning Private Education and its amendments).
3. "Respecting national identity and sovereignty" (Clause 12, Article 11, Federal Decree-Law No. (18) of 2020 concerning Private Education and its amendments).
4. "Penalties shall be applied to anyone who manufactures, imports, exports, possesses, acquires, or transports with the intent of exploitation, distribution, or display to others any writings, drawings, pictures, films, symbols, or other items if they are contrary to public morals" (Article 416, Federal Decree-Law No. (31) of 2021 promulgating the Crimes and Penalties Law and its amendments).

## **2. Application of the Cultural Considerations Policy in Schools**

2.1 Requirements for Schools: The school must include the following elements to address cultural considerations:

1. Awareness Training and Refresher Courses: Schools must organize awareness programs regarding the cultural considerations of the UAE, to be provided to all new members of the school community, including staff, parents, and students. Refresher training should be provided annually after holidays to staff, parents, and students to maintain their awareness of the country's cultural considerations.
2. Resource Auditing: Schools must adopt processes and procedures for auditing, reviewing, and selecting teaching and learning resources in accordance with Section 2.3 Learning Resources and Educational Activities of this Policy.
3. Observance of the Country's Cultural Practices: The school must adhere to cultural practices such as the daily performance of the national anthem, celebration of official holidays and national occasions, and following the protocol for flags and official portraits according to the sequence of official portraits of Their Highnesses the Sheikhs and the Flag Usage Guide. This includes ensuring that the only flag raised in schools is the UAE flag and that the portraits are only of its leaders.
4. Monitoring School Communication Activities: Schools must regularly monitor all official and unofficial communication channels associated with the school (newsletters, social media, parent communication groups, etc.) to ensure compliance with this Policy.
5. Non-Compliance Response Mechanism: Schools must establish a specific mechanism and procedures for reporting, responding to, and handling any violation of this Policy.

2.2 Community Conduct: Members of the school community must ensure their behaviors are aligned with cultural considerations, including:

1. Respecting the values, customs, and community traditions of the UAE.
2. Not promoting (either directly or indirectly) inappropriate ideas with stereotypical perceptions, prejudices, and assumptions about the UAE and the region.

3. Not practicing, displaying, or encouraging, directly or indirectly, any behavior that does not consider cultural norms, such as the use of drugs, alcohol, and smoking, or engaging in violence, or promoting gender identity, sexual orientations, homosexuality, proselytism, etc.
4. Not using slogans, symbols, colors, or images associated with any movements or beliefs of extremist political, social, or religious groups that do not respect cultural considerations. This includes representing or personifying prominent figures in an offensive manner, offending religious beliefs, displaying images that include unjustified violence or sexual connotations, matters related to the LGBTQ+ movement, extremist ideas, etc.
5. Not holding any activities and/or using any content that leads to proselytism or the promotion of religious or political extremism, racism, bullying, or other forms of discrimination.
6. Refraining from holding any political marches, demonstrations, or protests within the school premises or during any school-related event off-campus.
7. Ensuring that the personal appearance of individuals respects cultural considerations, including but not limited to:
  - A. Covering visible tattoos on the body as well as any type of body piercing used for decoration for both males and females.
  - B. Adhering to appropriate attire according to the school uniform and dress code.
8. Ensuring that occasions, events, and celebrations organized by the school are appropriate for the culture and values of the Emirati society while ensuring compliance with this Policy.
9. Committing to act in accordance with the laws of the UAE.

2.3 Learning Resources and Educational Activities: Schools must form a committee to select and audit teaching and learning resources to ensure they respect cultural considerations. When reviewing and selecting teaching and learning materials, the school must consider the following points:

1. The appropriateness and suitability of teaching and learning resources for the target age group.
2. The appropriateness and suitability of materials (in terms of titles, content, and images) for the values and culture of the UAE and the

national identity. For example, books, content, and images that do not respect cultural considerations or that encourage negative habits or behaviors, such as the use of drugs, alcohol, smoking, violence, gambling, gender identity, sexual orientations, proselytism, etc., must be banned.

3. The appropriateness and suitability of materials with political topics according to the approved Social Studies curriculum in the UAE.
4. Schools must adopt a specific mechanism, including the necessary documentation system, to audit or verify the appropriateness of all resources. This mechanism should include obtaining final approval signatures from the librarian, the resource selection committee, and the school principal.

2.4 Topics Included in the Approved Curriculum: When dealing with topics that may be controversial, the school must consider the following points:

1. If the approved curriculum includes topics related to biological reproduction, human evolution, or sex education, the school must minimize the use of graphic illustrations and scientific images to what is necessary to achieve the relevant learning outcomes in an appropriate and culturally considerate manner.
  - A. Schools must inform parents in advance of the lesson, including the topics to be covered (and whether the topic will be included in any assessments), and allow parents to exempt their child from attending the lesson in question by providing a written waiver.
2. If the approved curriculum includes topics related to revolutions, wars, or other conflicts involving violence, schools must ensure that the required content is discussed and handled seriously, objectively, and neutrally. Since such content may contain offensive, violent, or indecent images or ideas, schools must minimize the use of graphic illustration and scientific images to what is necessary to achieve the relevant learning outcomes in an appropriate and culturally considerate manner.
3. If the approved curriculum includes any controversial topics that are part of activities or learning resources necessary for preparation for any important examinations, schools are permitted to present these topics after seeking approval from ADEK.

4. If controversial topics arise outside the approved curriculum due to pressing current events, schools must maintain political neutrality or adopt the official discourse of the state government, where appropriate, and as announced by ADEK.

### **3. Roles and Responsibilities**

3.1 Schools must ensure that the roles and responsibilities assigned to all parties are clarified. "Respect for the Constitution, laws, and orders issued by public authorities in implementation thereof, observance of public order, and respect for public morals shall be a duty of all inhabitants of the Union" (Article 44, Constitution of the United Arab Emirates).

1. Teachers must "respect national identity and sovereignty" (Clause 12, Article 11, Federal Decree-Law No. (18) of 2020 concerning Private Education and its amendments), and accordingly, they must:
  - A. Develop lesson plans using approved resources in accordance with the school's auditing process.
  - B. Conduct additional auditing to ensure that the resources used and content provided to students are culturally appropriate.
  - C. Prepare and audit all digital resources before starting lessons to ensure they are free of any content that does not respect cultural considerations. This includes, but is not limited to: images, texts, colors, and terminology that reference any topics covered by this Policy.
  - D. Refrain from any practices that promote proselytism when discussing cultural or political matters in the classroom.
  - E. Immediately inform the school principal and middle/senior leadership of any content in the resources found to potentially violate this Policy.
  - F. Ensure compliance with this Policy, including observing data confidentiality requirements when publishing school information through public channels such as social media.
2. The responsibilities of Senior Leaders include:
  - A. Reviewing and approving lesson plans and resources prepared by teachers.
  - B. Ensuring that all selected and/or prepared resources and materials are age-appropriate and culturally considerate, and that they are approved under the school's auditing process.

- C. Supervising the use of resources and materials during lessons to ensure compliance with this Policy.
  - D. Continuously monitoring the approved content of digital resources to ensure it aligns with the regulations, policies, guidelines, and circulars issued by ADEK.
  - E. Immediately informing the Principal of any content found in resources that violates this Policy.
3. The responsibilities of Librarians include:
- A. Reviewing, auditing, and approving all requested resources for use, ensuring they align with relevant requirements and are appropriate in terms of age and culture.
  - B. Submitting a list of acceptable and unacceptable resources to the resource selection committee for review and approval.
  - C. Monitoring digital and non-digital resources and textbooks and their usage to ensure they align with the regulations, policies, guidelines, and circulars issued by ADEK.
  - D. Immediately informing the Principal of any content in resources that potentially violates this Policy and ceasing the use of that resource.
4. The responsibilities of School Principals include:
- A. Forming a resource selection committee responsible for reviewing, auditing, and approving all resources.
  - B. Implementing and documenting the school-wide process for selecting teaching and learning resources as per Section 2.1.2 of this Policy.
  - C. Providing full documentation of the evaluation process to ADEK upon request and as described in Section 2.3.4 of this Policy.
  - D. Informing all staff of the procedures and processes applied at the school level.
  - E. Ensuring all resources and materials selected and/or prepared in the school are culturally appropriate for the target age groups.
  - F. Ensuring the provision of awareness training programs on cultural considerations, in addition to related refresher courses.
  - G. Informing ADEK of any content found in educational resources that violates the provisions of this Policy and immediately discontinuing the use of that resource.



H. Ensuring that relevant staff communicate with parents and inform them that their child's school:

1. Trusts in their cooperation in supervising children's internet use at home and limiting their exposure to any inappropriate content.
2. Looks forward to their cooperation in reporting any content in the school's resources that does not align with this Policy to the school and ADEK via the department's hotline 8002335, in addition to exercising caution when posting school information on public sites such as social media channels.

## **4. Compliance**

4.1 This Policy is effective as of 9 January 2024, and schools must be fully compliant by this date.

1. ADEK will strictly and actively monitor schools' compliance with this Policy, and will investigate any reports of potential violations, to decide if the reported case constitutes non-compliance with the policy if malice is proven.
2. Penalties for non-compliance may include the points mentioned below, subject to the approval of the Chairman of ADEK:
  - A. Revocation of the appointment letter for the person(s) proven to have committed the violation with malicious intent.
  - B. Sending a warning to the school and its investors.
  - C. Imposing a fine on the school ranging from AED 50,000 to AED 350,000.
3. Continued non-compliance with this Policy will result in legal accountability in addition to the fines prescribed under ADEK's policies, regulations, and requirements, as well as any other fines imposed under Federal Decree-Law No. (31) of 2021 promulgating the Crimes and Penalties Law and its amendments or other relevant laws. ADEK reserves the right to intervene if any violation of duties by the school is proven.

## References

- The Constitution of the United Arab Emirates. <https://uaecabinet.ae/ar/the-constitution>
- Federal Decree-Law No. (18) of 2020 concerning Private Education and its amendments.
- Federal Decree-Law No. (31) of 2021 promulgating the Crimes and Penalties Law and its amendments.
- Ministry of Education (2022). Professional and Ethical Charter for Employees in Public Education Institutions.
- Ministry of Tolerance (n.d.). National Tolerance Programme. <http://tolerance.gov.ae/en/uae-national-program-of-tolerance.aspx>
- The Official Portal of the UAE Government (n.d.). Preserving the Emirati National Identity. <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/social-affairs/preserving-the-emirati-national-identity>
- UNESCO (2001). UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

## Publication

2024 (September) ADEK Policy for Cultural Considerations in Schools - Version 1.1

Department of Education and Knowledge, Abu Dhabi

This policy applies to private schools and educational partnership schools in Abu Dhabi. However, if any circular was issued before the publication of this policy or is subsequently issued specifically for educational partnership schools, it shall supersede this policy.

## Previous Versions:

2024 (January) ADEK Policy for Cultural Considerations in Schools - Version 1.0