# Pearson

# United Arab Emirates:

# What makes an effective teacher?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Katherine McKnight, PhD**
*Pearson*

**Jessica Yarbro,
Lacey Graybeal, &
John Graybeal,**
*George Mason University*

# Executive Summary

> "
> ## The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.
> "
>
> BARBER & MOURSHED, 2007

Decades of research make it clear: teachers make a difference in student learning. In fact, Stanford University economist Eric Hanushek (1992) has noted that the difference between a good and a bad teacher can be a full level of achievement in a single school year. Given the strength of these findings, nations around the world recognize that in order to improve educational outcomes and equity they must focus on effectiveness of teachers. A critical step toward achieving that goal is for individual countries to identify the competencies required for effectiveness and use them to inform teaching standards, pre-service teacher preparation, professional development programs and performance evaluations. To make an impact, those systems and processes will need to be based on a common understanding, within each country, of what it means to be an effective teacher.

**Oxfam's international study of teacher competences and standards concludes that in order to build that common understanding, it is "absolutely necessary that the question as to what is considered a quality educator is investigated among stakeholders" (Bourgonje & Tromp, 2011, p. 145).** Giving stakeholders a voice not only allows us to understand how they think and feel about a topic; it provides an opportunity to help frame important policy decisions that directly impact their lives. Pearson is therefore surveying learners, teachers, principals, education researchers, policymakers and parents in 23 countries regarding their perceptions of what it takes to be an effective teacher. Pearson is comparing the views expressed by these stakeholders with both current government teaching standards and research on effective teaching.

This report, the fourth in the series, summarizes the results of the survey conducted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where the government has been working to provide a high quality education to all children, yet still faces significant struggles in developing and training teachers to deliver high quality instruction. In the global report, 23 participating countries are compared not only across stakeholder groups, but by country as well.

## The Survey

To learn the top qualities education stakeholders in the UAE seek in their teachers, we administered surveys across the country (see **Figure A1** in the Appendix). The stakeholder groups include:

- Students ages 15-19
- Parents of K-12 students
- K-12 teachers
- K-12 administrators
- Education researchers and policymakers

Respondents were asked to list, in their own words, between three and fifteen qualities that they feel are <u>most important</u> in making an "effective" teacher and to indicate what type of teacher, by subject(s) and grade level(s), they were thinking about while creating their list. The survey did not define "effective" for respondents, other than that it meant "good," allowing respondents to define what an effective teacher meant for themselves. We developed a coding system to categorize responses based on prior research about competencies of effective teachers. This coding scheme was reviewed by teachers, principals, education policymakers and researchers and revised iteratively as additional responses were coded, resulting in a final list of 32 categories.

## The Most Important Qualities of Teachers in UAE

We found some consistency in how the groups of surveyed stakeholders responded when they were asked to list between 3 and 15 of what they believed to be the <u>most important</u> qualities or competencies of effective teachers. The most common response across the full sample was that effective teachers need to build trusting, compassionate *Relationships* with their students. It was the first most common response for each of the stakeholder groups except researchers and policymakers, for whom it was third. It was also the most common response for government schools (second for private schools); teachers of kindergarten, primary and secondary grade levels; and for males (second most common for females). Ultimately, the survey results reaffirm the notion that, at its foundation, **teaching is about trusting relationships between teachers and learners that foster learner success, as these communities define it.**

The second and third most common responses across all stakeholder groups were the teacher's *Subject Knowledge* and a *Patient, Caring*, and kind personality. Subject knowledge was expressed as deep and thorough understanding of the content and/or curriculum, in order to select which topics to teach and to address student misunderstandings. Patient, caring, and kind personality addresses positive personality characteristics, particularly associated with compassion and empathy.

When the responses of all stakeholder groups are combined, the other seven categories in the Top 10 qualities or competencies mentioned, were in descending order:

- Pedagogical skills and methods *(Teaching Skills)*
- *Professionalism*
- The ability to engage and motivate learners to learn *(Engaging)*
- The ability to make content and ideas clear for learners *(Makes Ideas Clear)*
- Knowledge and understanding of learners *(Know Learners)*
- *Dedication* to teaching
- Emphasis on developing students' *Non-Cognitive Skills*

## Most Important Qualities of Teachers in UAE

| 1 | Ability to Develop Trusting, Productive Relationships |
|---|---|
| 2 | Subject Matter Knowledge |
| 3 | Patient, Caring, Kind Personality |
| 4 | Teaching Skills/Pedagogical Practices |
| 5 | Professionalism |
| 6 | Engaging Students in Learning |
| 7 | Ability to Make Ideas and Content Clear |
| 8 | Knowledge of Learners |
| 9 | Dedication to Teaching |
| 10 | Emphasis on Developing Students' Non-Cognitive Skills |

Five of the Top 10 most frequent responses for each group of stakeholders were shared by all groups: *Relationships; Teaching Skills; Subject Knowledge; Makes Ideas Clear;* and *Engaging*. Teachers, parents, and students valued similar qualities; researchers, policymakers and principals valued similar qualities; and there were several notable differences in the reported qualities the groups didn't share.

Additionally, public and private schools, and males and females shared the same Top 10 most valued qualities. And regardless of the grade level of the teacher they were thinking of, stakeholders shared nine of their Top 10 qualities. For both comparisons (by type of school and grade levels), the categories varied slightly in frequency and order.

The categories of qualities mentioned most often across the entire sample reflect how strongly education stakeholders in the UAE value not only the knowledge and skills a teacher possesses, but also dispositions of care (relatedness, responsiveness) and character (responsibility, trustworthiness) in their teachers. There is research that supports the link between these dispositions, teaching effectiveness, and learner outcomes. There were also several instances where research emphasizes specific competencies that were mentioned, but not frequently, by education stakeholders (principals, teachers, and researchers, and policymakers), e.g., ability to plan effective lessons and learning tasks (*Planning*); provision of a rigorous, *Challenging* curriculum for all learners; use of *Assessment* to monitor learning (reported infrequently by teachers); regular communication with *Families*; having a continuous improvement mindset (*Always Learning*); and working collaboratively with colleagues to improve teaching practice (*Collaboration*).

> 66
> The categories of qualities mentioned most often across the entire sample reflect how strongly education stakeholders in the UAE value not only the knowledge and skills a teacher possesses, but also dispositions of care and character in their teachers.
> 99

### Using These Results to Improve Teaching Practice in the UAE

We recommend that the results of this survey be used to inform and guide the definition of what it means to be an effective teacher in the teaching and learning culture of the UAE. The results of this survey can inform national as well as local discussions about teacher preparation, hiring, training, and evaluation in the UAE, particularly in areas of need, as documented by research.

Given the stakeholders' emphasis on the importance of teacher-student relationships, teacher training programs could place greater emphasis on dispositions that stakeholders believe are essential for effectiveness—e.g., patience, care, and relatedness. The programs could assess these qualities in candidates, counsel candidates on career fit and provide training to improve teaching dispositions in future teachers. Given the challenges in recruiting, developing and retaining teachers who are not only qualified but passionate and dedicated to their work in the UAE, adding quality programs for developing the key dispositions that support and enhance student learning seems to be an important step in improving the teaching workforce in this country. As other researchers have noted, **focusing on improving the social relationship that is at the heart of student learning should lead to improvements in a wide range of student outcomes in schools.**

Likewise, training programs may want to emphasize the knowledge and skills that were mentioned less frequently but have been shown to be critical to effective teaching and student learning, such as:

• regular assessment of learner progress
• delivery of a challenging, rigorous curriculum for all students
• regular communication with families about student progress
• collaboration with colleagues

While this research identifies many different qualities and competencies of effective teachers, we caution against using the results to generate a checklist approach under the misguided belief that there is a single winning pattern of competencies to be an effective teacher. Finally, it cannot be overstated that to be effective teachers, the work conditions and environment, first and foremost, must be well managed; school context and community culture have a profound influence on the way different teacher roles and competencies are understood, prioritized, and practiced.