

Bright future for 'early years of education'

A report by GCC education sector says primary and secondary sectors will grow at 1.7 percent and 1.6 percent respectively

RITIKA SHARMA / EMIRATES BUSINESS

Fatima (imaginary name), mother of a 3 year old, is searching for a pre-school for her son. Though, being in Dubai, she has a lot of options, she is still not sure if she should go for the one that is famous for its art classes or the one that prepares children for British curriculum.

Well, rightfully, she wants the one which combines the best of study and play so that her son is 'completely' ready when he joins a primary school in coming years. Same is the story of all parents with kids this age, in UAE, as they are well aware and are putting in substantial amount of their time to select 'the best' out of scores of nurseries or preschools in their respective Emirates.

UAE has an attractive 83 percent pre-primary enrolment rate spread across 500 nursery schools across the Emirates. What fuels the growth of this segment is the growing number of expatriates and rising awareness which is ensuring that parents take their children's pre-school years seriously and choose a nursery of highest standards.

Reports state that overall student population is expected to increase at an average annual rate of 5.6 percent between



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of Dubai-based
Maple Bear

2013 and 2017 to reach about 0.7 million buoyed by the increasing popularity of international curriculum pre-schools in UAE.

Saurabh Narain, owner and manager of Dubai-based Maple Bear, the famous Canadian Curriculum a pre-school for children aged 18 months to 6 years, believes that the growth figures are encouraging for the owners of such nurseries and the industry on the whole.



A second generation entrepreneur, Narain told Emirates Business, "It's an area of great opportunity for pre-school and nursery education in the UAE and there are very exciting times ahead. At the moment, pre-school education in the country is quite fragmented and not well organised as primary and secondary education, however this seems to be changing. More preschools are starting to introduce a more curriculum based and professionally managed system, but there are still many improvements that need to be made in the industry."

Maple Bear with a global experience of more than 200 locations in 12 countries is aiming to bring the best of early childhood education to UAE, helping parents make informed choices

when it comes to their children's early education.

"Having successfully operated bilingual programs across the world benchmarking our Canadian experience, we offer the same in Arabic and English/French in the UAE. Our curriculum is academically strong and children are encouraged to read a lot of books in their early years, showing parents in the UAE that starting your child's education off on the right foot is vital to their future success," said Narain.

GCC education sector report published by Ardent Advisory and Accountant says the growth in the total number of students in the pre-primary and tertiary segments is expected to outpace the growth rate of primary and secondary segment. Report also



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Preparatory School

states that the pre-primary segment will see a growth rate of 11.2 percent, followed by tertiary segment at 4.8 percent, while primary and secondary sectors will grow at 1.7 percent and 1.6 percent respectively.

Graham Beale, Principal of The Arcadia Preparatory School, another Dubai-based pre-school believes this growth has facilitated the pre-school environ-



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Learning Centre

ment academically, as now there are a lot of curricula and pedagogical methodologies in UAE that one can choose from.

Beale told Emirates Business, "It is clear that pre-school and nursery provision is becoming increasingly important for parents seeking the best possible educational start for their children. Given such an imperative, the early years' sector has seen

growth that is set to continue. Along with this has come increasing diversity in the range of curricula and pedagogical approaches provided within schools from which parents are able to choose." Making the right selection is the key, said Beale.

"I believe that parents should look for three key elements in selecting the correct pre-school option for their child; the quality and qualifications of teachers, identifying a seamless 'match' in curriculum and approach for the type of school their child will move to in the future (British, American, etc.), and the quality of facilities, educational resources and nurturing ethos evident."

Apparent role of the UAE government is applauded across the country by both the parents and the nurseries owners.

Monica Valrani, CEO of Ladybird Nursery and Early Learning Centre told Emirates Business, "The government has encouraged establishments (of preschools) to offer a range of curriculums while keeping a focus on implementing a strong Arabic language and culture component, thereby making it attractive to all nationalities in the UAE. Through appropriate regulation, the UAE government is now ensuring that children residing in the UAE get the very best of an early years education."