

The Arabic-speaking World

The Arabic language

- Spoken by 360 million people across over 27 countries.
- Has at least 6 different dialect groups, with further subdivisions within them, amounting to over 30 varieties.
- A speaker of one variety can't necessarily understand all other varieties.
- Has a "prestige" or "high" variety called *Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)* which is only acquired through formal education, and taught as a subject in school. It is not any individual's native language.
- Has a Quranic version called *Classical Arabic* used only when reading and reciting Islamic texts.



The purpose of this map is to highlight dialectal groupings and should not be used for any other purpose.

Variety	Information	Speakers
Classical Arabic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language of the Quran Only used when reading/reciting Islamic texts Not spoken between native Arabic speakers Muslims whose native language is not Arabic who have studied the Quran may use Classical Arabic to communicate with native Arabic speakers 	Not a native language
Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A modernized version of Classical Arabic Used in TV broadcasts, newspapers, textbooks, and writing 	Not a native language

Variety	Region	Information	Speakers
Spoken Arabic	Levantine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spoken in Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria 	48 million
	Arabian/Peninsular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Also known as "Gulf Arabic" Spoken in Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen 	77 million
	Egyptian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spoken in Egypt 	77 million
	Mesopotamian/Iraqi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spoken in Iraq and Eastern Syria 	29 million
	Sudanese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spoken in Chad, Ethiopia, Sudan 	42 million
	Maghrebi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spoken in Northwest Africa such as Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia Strong French and Italian influence 	70 million

The regional spoken varieties in this table are in order of most to least similar to Modern Standard Arabic.

Schooling and Education

Countries across the Arabic-speaking world have diverse systems for schooling. Here are a few important considerations for school contexts in the US:

- **School Types:** These vary widely across countries. Public schools tend to be in poor condition and are attended by students of lower socio-economic classes. Private schools tend to be in better condition and follow international curricula. Religious schools are also a type of private school, and they may follow either national or international curriculums. There are also trade schools in some countries that some students choose to attend in order to gain vocational skills.
- **Schedules and Breaks:** Weekends come in different configurations depending on the country and school. Some schools are off Friday and Saturday, some Saturday and Sunday, and some Friday and Sunday. This is something that you should ask your student about, since attending school on Fridays may be unfamiliar. Students do not usually have the same schedule of classes every day. Some schools have one long break, while others have 2 shorter breaks, at times one being for lunch and one being for prayer.
- **Language of Instruction:** In most countries, the language of instruction is primarily Arabic, with notable exceptions in countries such as Bahrain, Jordan, and Lebanon, which have international schools that teach in English, French, or German.
 - Students learn to read and write in Modern Standard Arabic in school even though they speak other varieties of Arabic in the home.
 - *Coming Soon!* For more information on how early literacy skills in Arabic are taught, visit rislus.org.
- **National Curricula and Exams:** Countries tend to have national curricula that culminate in national exams. These national exams are the defining factor in a student’s educational career, and cause students a great amount of stress. Countries with International private schools tend to follow Western curricula. Students who study Western curricula do not take national exams.
- **Tracks and Specializations:** Some countries also have specific tracks that students can choose from starting in high school (grade 10). Tracks are typically separated into sciences (biology, chemistry, physics, math). Literature (English, Arabic, history, and religion, among others). Tracks differ across countries and may have gender restrictions.
- **Gender Segregation:** In many classrooms, girls and boys learn together. In some religious school contexts, girls and boys attend separate classes. In some countries, sports periods are separated by gender.

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Schooling and Education

School Type	Schedules	Language of Instruction	National Curricula & Exams	Tracks & Specializations	Gender Segregation	Other
Jordan						
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public schools Private schools German and American International schools Catholic schools UNRWA Refugee Camp schools 	<p>School year: September to June</p> <p>School day: (Public and UNRWA* schools): 6:00 - 11:00 or 12:00 - 5:00</p> <p>School day (Private schools): 8:00 - 2:00</p>	Arabic	<p>Both public and private schools offer national curriculum that culminate in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula.</p> <p>Low attendance in high school classes. Students study with private tutors, and prepare for national exams. School grades have little weight in college applications.</p>	2 tracks starting in 10th grade: sciences or literature.	Schools are gender segregated , with the exception of some private schools.	Great focus on grammar in English classes, not much on communication.
Lebanon						
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Secular private schools (majority) Public schools Islamic private schools Christian private schools 	<p>School year: mid-September to early June</p> <p>School day: 7:30 - 2:30</p> <p>2 recesses (20 minutes and 30 minutes)</p>	<p>English or French</p> <p>Arabic in history, geography, and civics classes.</p>	Both public and private schools offer a national curriculum that culminates in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula .	2 tracks starting in 10th grade: sciences or literature.	Some gender segregation.	Around 67% of students in Lebanon attend private schools since their fee structures vastly differ and in many cases are reasonable compared to private schools in other countries.
Palestine						
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public schools (majority) Christian private schools UNRWA* schools <p>Note: (most schools in Gaza are UNRWA schools)</p>	<p>School year runs late August to Mid-May</p> <p>School day: 8:00 - 1:00 or 8:00 - 2:30</p> <p>One recess at noon</p>	<p>Arabic</p> <p>English in some American and British private schools, which are a minority.</p>	Both public and private schools offer a national curriculum that culminates in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula .	2 or 3 tracks: sciences or literature , sometimes with a vocational track.	Majority of schools are gender segregated , with the exception of some American schools.	As of the publication of this document, due to the ongoing crisis, schools are not in session in Gaza.
Syria						
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Public schools (majority) Private schools 	<p>School year runs September to July</p> <p>School day: 7:30 - 12:30</p> <p>No recess</p>	Arabic	Both public and private schools offer a national curriculum that culminates in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula .	2 tracks starting in 10th grade: sciences or literature.	Some gender segregation.	The country is still recovering from the civil war, and many students fear leaving their houses and going to school.

* UNRWA: United Nations Relief and Works Agency

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School Type	Schedules	Language of Instruction	National Curricula & Exams	Tracks & Specializations	Gender Segregation	Other
Bahrain						
1. Public schools 2. Private schools 3. British and American International schools	School year: Early September to early June School day: 8:00 - 2:50, with one day per week running from 8:00 - 1:30 2 recesses	Arabic in public schools, English in private schools.	Both public and private schools offer a national curriculum that culminates in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula .	3 tracks starting in 10th grade: sciences, literature, or art .	Schools are not gender segregated , but boys and girls sit at separate tables in the same classroom. Sports classes are gender segregated.	Many teachers are American, British, and South-African. Illiteracy rates are less than 2.4%.
Kuwait						
1. Public schools 2. Private schools 3. Evening schools	School year: Mid-September to Early June School day: 7:30 - 1:40 2 recesses, one for lunch and one for prayer	Arabic	Both public and private schools offer a national curriculum that culminates in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula .	2 tracks starting in 11th grade: sciences or literature. Possible Secondary tracks: religion and special education.	All public schools are gender segregated. Private schools are not gender segregated.	Education is seen as important; however, some teenage boys join the military if they're not doing well in school .
Saudi Arabia						
1. Public schools (majority) 2. Private schools 3. Islamic schools	School year: September to June School day: 7:00 - 1:00 2 recesses, one for lunch and one for prayer	Arabic	Both public and private schools offer a national curriculum that culminates in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula . High focus on religion classes. Most public schools have one period of religion every day	Tracks start in 10th grade and are gendered : Girls choose from literature, sciences, or teacher training . Boys choose from sciences, religion, Arabic, social sciences, or administrative studies .	Schools are gender segregated.	Students are generally happy and don't worry about war or political or economic issues.
Yemen						
1. Public schools (majority) 2. Private schools 3. Religious schools	School year: August to May School day: 8:00 - 2:45 40 minute lunch recess	Mainly Arabic , with some private schools offering English sections for science classes.	Both public and private schools offer a national curriculum that culminates in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula .	Various tracks starting in 11th grade: either liberal arts, or select courses such as mathematics, physics, biology, or chemistry .	Schools must segregate students by gender since 2015 legislation.	Conflict negatively affects the consistent implementation of the national curriculum and the overall functioning of the education system, including international schools.

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School Type	Schedules	Language of Instruction	National Curricula & Exams	Tracks & Specializations	Gender Segregation	Other
Iraq						
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public schools 2. Private schools 3. Vocational schools from grade 9 and up 	<p>School year: September to June</p> <p>School day: 8:00 - 1:00 or 1:00 - 5:00</p> <p>No recess</p>	Arabic	Both public and private schools offer a national curriculum that culminates in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula .	3 tracks starting in 10th grade: applied sciences, life sciences, or literature .	Schools are not gender segregated .	<p>In the last 30 years, it is increasingly common for a child in every household to have completed school.</p> <p>Teachers lecture in school, there are no discussions.</p>
Egypt						
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public schools 2. Private schools 3. International schools 	<p>School year: Late September to early June</p> <p>School day: 8:00 - 2:00</p> <p>One short recess</p>	Arabic, except in experimental language schools where the national curriculum is taught in English .	<p>Both public and private schools offer a national curriculum that culminates in national exams. Private schools also offer Western curricula.</p> <p>Some international schools offer hybrid options, blending different types of curricula.</p>	2 tracks starting in 10th grade: sciences or literature . Both tracks include Arabic and English classes.	There are separate schools for girls and boys beginning after 6th grade.	English and French have been taught in Egyptian schools since the 1860s. For about a hundred and fifty years, the status of English in Egyptian schools has changed from an optional subject to a compulsory one in all school types.