Khalifa International Award
for the Early Learning

His Highness Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan

United Arab Emirates Vice President,
Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence,
Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the
Khalifa Award for Education

The launch of the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning marks an important step toward building an educational ecosystem that aligns with the vision of the UAE's wise leadership and the national agenda for education and human development. It supports the efforts of professionals working in the field of early childhood development while highlighting the pioneering role of the United Arab Emirates in empowering and nurturing young children through a comprehensive framework of legislation, policies, and initiatives that ensure integrated early care and education in accordance with international best practices.

The United Arab Emirates has achieved remarkable progress in the field of early childhood development. This journey began under the leadership of the Founding Father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, and continues under the guidance of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates. This vital sector has also benefited greatly from the unwavering support of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, Chairwoman of the General Women's Union, President of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood, Supreme Chairwoman of the Family Development Foundation, and "Mother of the Nation," whose efforts over several decades have contributed significantly to advancing the wellbeing and development of children through an integrated, future-focused approach.

In the United Arab Emirates, we firmly believe that investing in early learning is a wise investment in the future. It lays the foundation for future generations by providing them with a strong educational and developmental environment that enables them to contribute to national achievements and support sustainable development.

Through the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning, we seek to shine a spotlight on outstanding research, innovative programs, and evidence-based practices in early education and child development. We also aim to promote supportive environments that foster children's healthy growth and wellbeing across educational, health, social, and cultural domains, preparing them to become the leaders of tomorrow.

We are proud of the unique model that the United Arab Emirates has developed in the field of early learning and early childhood development. It is from this foundation that the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning was launched globally in 2021, serving as a valuable contribution to the efforts of leading academic, research, and professional institutions dedicated to advancing early learning worldwide.

Award Committee

Prof. W. Steven Barnett

BOG Distinguished professor and director, NIEER, Rutgers university

Prof. Iram Siraj

Professor Emerita,
University of Oxford

Dr. Meera Alkaabi

Acting President of the National Academy for Childhood Development (NACD)

Prof. Nirmala Rao

Professor Emeritus,
The University of Hong Kong

Dr. Jana Fleming

Director and Senior Advisor, Early Childhood Development, Salama Bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation

Screening Committee

Dr. Philip Quirke

Education Consultant,
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Dr. Rachel Takriti

Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, UAEU

Dr. Bochra Kaddoura

ECCE Advisor, Sharjah Private Education Authority

Dr. Sarah Rogers

Educational consultant ,
QuEST Direct Dubai

The Committees of the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning are independent experts who rigorously sort, screen, and evaluate nominations to select each year's laureates, upholding the highest standards of fairness and transparency.

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Introduction

The **Khalifa Award for Education** was founded in 2007 in the United Arab Emirates under the directives of the late Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan; God rest his soul. The Award seeks to advance Emirati and Arab educational outcomes and the quality of education at all levels by rewarding outstanding innovators in numerous academic and learning domains.

The **Khalifa International Award for Early Learning (KIAEL)** is a field of the Khalifa Award for Education. As an International Education Award, the KIAEL is intended to enhance the early childhood educational sector within the UAE, throughout the Arab world at large, and globally by honouring the distinguished efforts of researchers and educators whose contributions inform best practices and policies for early childhood education in all contexts. The field of Early Learning is organized into **two** main categories:

1. **Best Research and Studies**
2. **Best Programs, Curricula, and Teaching Methodologies and Practices**

The Khalifa Award for Education adopts the UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) definition of Early childhood, which includes ages from birth to eight. Any functional programs and practical research relevant to early childhood education are eligible to apply for the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning.

The Objectives of the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning

Promote social, physical, mental, intellectual, creative, psychological, cognitive, and emotional development n early childhood learning.

Enrich early learning programs with research that informs policy and practice to improve early childhood care and education programs, curricula, and pedagogies.

Motivate innovative teachers, who are the creators of change, through best practices and innovation in early learning.

Promote the role of institutions that specialize in early childhood education and development, broadly defined.

Recognize innovative, successful approaches for parents and other individual caregivers to support early education, learning, and development.

Benefit from the best research, especially rigorous studies of highly successful early childhood learning programs and approaches that could be applied to educational policies and early learning teaching practices in the UAE.

Defining the Categories Offered for the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning :

Best Research and Studies **Category**

We seek to identify research on early childhood learning and care that supports development in practice. This includes studies that provide innovative solutions to problems and insights into education and teaching that enrich the evidence base for policies and practices and can lead to meaningful improvements in early learning.

Best Research and Studies **Criteria**

Applications for the Best Research and Studies are judged on four measures: **innovativeness**, **importance**, **methodological rigor**, and **impact**. Each submission must demonstrate rigorous evaluation, and each criterion will be assigned equal value when judging the applications. To assist in preparing applications, we provide four main questions (with sub-questions under each) that should be addressed in each application. Research should have been previously published in some form (for example, a government or nongovernmental organization report, a book or book chapter, or a journal article). Still, such publications should be the basis for an application, not the application itself. Each application should include an **abstract** of **no more than 300 words**, a brief description of the research, and **an address to all four criteria**. Applications should be **no more than 10 pages**, **excluding** the **abstract**, references, and an **optional appendix** of **up to 3 pages** that may include links to publications and other materials online.

The extent of the innovativeness and originality of the research ?

- Does the research support the development of new policies or practices?
- Does the research provide new insights into early learning and early childhood education or alter how these are understood?

The significance (importance) of the research ?

- Does the research address one or more critical issues for early learning policy or practice?
- Does the research include populations or contexts of particular importance, for example, children who are highly disadvantaged or children or contexts that are understudied, excluded, or underserved?

Does the research employ appropriate, clearly defined, and ethical methods ?

- Are the research methods clearly described, explained, and replicable?
- Has the research been reported in a publication?
- Do the methods provide a strong basis for trust and confidence in the findings and conclusions?
- Does the methodology offer a model to inspire and/or be followed by future studies?

What are the potential and/or demonstrated impacts ?

- What are the implications of the research for practice? These may be for caregivers, teachers, parents, or others who influence young children's learning and development.
- Does the research have a potential or documented influence on policy or practice?
- Are findings and insights from the research applicable to similar populations and contexts elsewhere?
- How strong is the evidence for a causal relationship with quality and/or outcomes?
- How large are the estimated impacts on quality and/or outcomes?
- At what scale has the causal evidence been obtained?
- How generalizable across contexts and populations is the evidence?
- Have costs as well as outcomes been estimated?

Defining the Categories Offered for the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning :

Best Programs, Curricula, Teaching Methodologies, and Practices **Category**

The Khalifa Award for Education seeks to identify initiatives aimed at improving early education of any type whether through formal organizations, e.g., childcare centers and schools, or informal organizations and activities, e.g., home learning and home-based childcare.

Best Programs, Curricula, and Teaching Methodologies and Practices **Criteria**

Applications for the Best Programs, Curricula, and Teaching Methodologies and Practices will be judged on four measures: **innovativeness**, **importance, impact**, and **feasibility/sustainability**. Each submission must demonstrate rigorous evaluation, and each criterion will be assigned equal value when judging the applications. To assist in preparing applications, we provide four main questions (with sub-questions under each) that should be addressed in each application. Each application should include an **abstract** of **no more than 300** words, briefly describing the program **and addressing each of the four criteria**. All programs submitted for consideration should have been subject to an evaluation of implementation or outcomes that provides evidence of program implementation and potential or documented impacts on practice in early learning and on early learning outcomes. Applications should be **no more than 10 pages**, excluding the abstract, references, and an **optional appendix** of up to **3 pages** that may include links to videos, publications, and other materials online.

How innovative, creative, and ground-breaking is the program ?

- Does the program inspire or offer a model for new, creative approaches to early learning activities in early learning settings, which may include the home (and other informal setting) or childcare centers/ schools (formal settings)?
- Could this approach cultivate dispositions, skills, knowledge, and self-awareness that will shape society for the better?

How important is the program ?

- Does the program address one or more critical issues or problems that families, communities, and broader societies encounter in supporting early learning?
- What are the program's goals for expanding access, improving the quality of early learning experiences, or producing better outcomes for young children's learning?
- How extensive are the intended changes in practice or outcomes of the program from what is typical?

What are the impacts of the program ?

- What impacts have been documented by the evaluation (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods) on access, quality of practice, and/or learning outcomes?
- To what extent have persistent and sustained changes in practice and outcomes been demonstrated with rigorous evaluation methods?
- How substantive or transformative is the new program for practice for those who conduct the program (e.g., parents, caregivers, teachers) and for the young children who experience the program?
- What is the estimated number of children directly benefiting from the program annually?
- How strong is the evidence for a causal effect on quality and/or outcomes?
- How large are the estimated effects on quality and/or outcomes?
- At what scale has the program/practice been successfully implemented, and how many children, families, and/or teachers have benefitted?
- How long as the program/practice been sustained?

How feasible and sustainable is the program ?

- To what extent has the program or practice been scaled so far?
- What is the potential for it to be further scaled up or adapted to similar populations and contexts elsewhere?
- How well is the program documented, and is sufficient information provided to support its replication and implementation?
- How much does the program cost, and what resources are required to implement the program at scale?

Eligibility & Award Benefits

ELIGIBILITY & RECIPIENTS

- Individual
- Team
- Organization

Team, institutional and organizational applications must nominate an authorized representative with a thorough understanding of the submitted work.

AWARD BENEFITS

- USD 100K per winner
- Trophy
- Certificate
- Recognition

WINNERS

- 1 Winner per category

General Instructions for Candidates for the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning

A. Terms of Candidature:

- For the application to be valid and complete, it must be submitted through the online application system http://el.khaward.ae before the deadline.
- The submission must comply with the General Instructions, include agreement to the undertaking, and contain all required documentation for nomination.
- The application must be submitted in English; applications in Arabic will NOT be considered.
- Each candidate may apply for only one category of the Award. Multiple applications in the same year are not permitted.
- Candidates must also not have received another award in the same field for the same or a similar work within the past two (2) years, including the year of nomination.
- The submitted work must not have been prepared as part of a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree requirement, or its equivalent.
- Previous winners of the Khalifa Award may reapply after two (2) years in any award field, except the field in which they previously won.

B. Applications Acceptance Terms & Conditions:

- Applications should be submitted in 12-point font, Times New Roman, on standard letter size/A4 pages, and limited to no more than 10 pages single-spaced, excluding the abstract, references, and an optional appendix of up to 3 pages. The abstract must not exceed 300 words. The optional appendix may include figures, tables, and links to videos, publications, and other supporting materials.

- Application and all supporting documents must be submitted electronically through the designated platform.

- Candidates may not use the Khalifa Award for Education's logo in any form of media, commercial promotions, or social media without prior written consent from the General Secretariat.

C. Award Procedures for Winners:

- If the candidate is a team, the monetary value of the Award amount will be distributed equally among the team members.

- If the candidate is an institution, the Award amount will be transferred directly to the institution's official bank account.

- Please nominate the individual authorized to represent the institution or team and specify whether the application is being submitted as a Team or an Institution.

- In the unfortunate event of a candidate's death after nomination and winning, the right to the Award stands and shall be granted to the legal heirs.

D. Post-Winning Arrangements:

- The General Secretariat shall have the right to publish the winning research or program on the official website of the Khalifa International Award for Early Learning.

- In case the candidate publishes the winning work independently, they are required to clearly state that the work has won the Khalifa Award for Education, specifying the following:
  - Award field and category
  - Award Year and cycle
  - A copy of the published work must be submitted to the General Secretariat.

- The Award's General Secretariat shall have the right to circulate winning submissions to all relevant authorities in the name of the General Secretariat and the winner.

- According to the by-laws of the Award, following the announcement of the winners:

  - The General Secretariat shall bear the winner's expenses – including air ticket, hotel stay, and entry visa – solely for the winner to attend the Awarding Ceremony in Abu Dhabi.

  - The General Secretariat will not cover expenses for accompanying individuals.

  - Only individual winners shall appear on stage; nomination of a representative to receive the Award on their behalf will not be permitted.

Timeline and Contact Information

14 July 2026
Application portal for 2026 opens

31 December 2026
Final date to submit applications for 2026

January 2027- March 2027
Screening and Review of Awards for 2026

April 2027
Announcement of Winners for 2026

May 2027
Award Ceremony for 2026

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For any questions or inquiries related to the KIAEL **el.info@khaward.ae**

For technical support or issues related to the online application system **el.support@khaward.ae**

el.khaward.ae