

*“Students’, Parents’ and EFL Teachers’ Perceptions about the Project of Learning English From Grade 1 in Bahraini Primary Government Schools”*

Submitted by

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dedicated to the four men in my life

My father: Dad, I did it for you

My husband: I could not have done it without you

My eldest son: This is for your future son

My youngest son: Your autism was my strength to succeed son

## Abstract

The purpose of this case study is to explore the perceptions of Bahraini students, parents and English as a Foreign Language, EFL, teachers about the project of learning English starting from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools. This case study describes and analyses the similarities and differences between the perceptions of all participants. Data was collected from self-completed questionnaires and interviews from students, parents and teachers were analysed. The sample consisted of 262 Grade 6 students with whom the project was applied, 234 parents whose children have been part of the project, 69 parents whose children were not part of the project, and four Bahraini EFL teachers who have been applying the project since it first started in September 2004. The study administered semi-structured interviews for the EFL teachers and Likert-scale questionnaires for students and parents.

Interpretation of the data revealed that the participants have a positive stance towards the project. They agreed on the advantages of starting English from Grade 1. They also revealed the perceived importance of learning English from an early age for the future of both their children and the future of Bahrain. The participants expressed their concerns about the project's textbooks and claimed that they lacked aspects of the Bahraini culture. The parents of the students who were not part of the project had divergent perceptions towards the project. They approved of the advantages of the project of learning English from Grade 1 but were perturbed that their children were not part of it. The EFL teachers stated that the project needed some improvements because it had not been developed since it was first applied in 2004.

The study recommends giving voice to the EFL teachers in the improvement of the project by involving them in the project's developmental plans and processes. The study also recommends adjusting the project's English language textbooks to include the Bahraini culture and heritage and not just the culture of English speaking countries.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduction

When teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) there is a controversy about the age factor, learning English from an early age, and whether and how it affects language teaching and learning processes. Muñoz, (2010) argues that different age ranges should be considered when teaching/learning a foreign or second language because there is a debate whether to accept a straight line relationship between language learning and age. Hu (2007) and Nunan (2005) state that some people in different areas around the world assume that language teaching/learning from an early age is preferable because it gives the young learners a better chance of acquiring the language faster and easier. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are among those countries that assume this (Al-Damegh, 2011). Therefore, the Ministry of Education in many GCC countries, for example the Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman has changed the age of introducing EFL in government schools to a younger age and started teaching from grade 1 (Al-Damegh, 2011: 63).

#### 1.2 Research aims and rationale

Much research has been carried out in the field of teaching English to young learners and second language acquisition and the age factor. For example, Murphy argues that learning a foreign language starting from primary level “is unquestionably a good idea”, for different reasons (2014: 163). She claims that young learners have positive attitudes and a high motivation towards learning a foreign language and if these two qualities were combined with high quality foreign language teaching, it could lead to beneficial and enjoyable learning experiences for the children. Murphy states that both the language and skills developed from these experiences could generate a strong foundation for effective foreign language learning in the future for the children.

The main goal for this study was to fill the gaps of previous research. A lot of work has been explored from students' perspectives and a number of studies have been conducted about students' perceptions about their EFL teachers, and teachers' perceptions about themselves (see Mussou, 2006). Nevertheless, there are few studies that explore the perceptions of students and parents in the Bahraini context (see Leksander-Hayes, 2013). For example, Leksander-Hayes's (2013) study included the views of teachers and students of transition from secondary education to western-medical university in Bahrain but not the views of the parents.

This research is governed by the rationale that there is a need to explore learning English from an early age because there is a debate about this topic among the TESOL researchers and different theories informing different views about this topic have been risen and explored. Learning English from an early age has become a very popular topic that some policy makers started creating certain policies about this issue without concerning stakeholders.

In addition, no previous studies were conducted about this topic in the Bahraini context through exploring the perceptions of three groups, the students, the parents and the EFL teachers. The insights from these three groups could contribute to the EFL literature through exploring an area of TESOL in Bahrain which has not been researched from the perspectives of its participants, by answering the research questions of this study.

The aim for the research reported in this thesis was twofold: practical and personal. Practical because it aimed to explore the perceptions of Bahraini EFL students, Bahrain EFL teachers and Bahrain parents about the project of teaching English from an early age in Grade 1 at primary government schools in Bahrain. On the other hand, it is personal because I was a primary level teacher in primary government schools in Bahrain and I was interested to know whether this project was considered to be a success or failure and whether the MoE's decision of to apply the project from Grade 1 was appropriate.

### 1.3 Research Questions

Concerning the debate about learning English from an early age, stakeholders' views on this topic and lack of literature about this issue in the GCC context, a need emerged to research learning English from an early age in the context of Bahrain from different perspectives. This led to the overarching research question and subordinate questions that guide this study which are:

What are the perceptions of students, parents and EFL teachers about the project of learning English from Grade 1 at primary government schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain?

- A. What are the perceptions of students who have been part of the project and studied English from Grade 1 about the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?
- B. What are the perceptions of parents whose children have been part of the project for 6 years about learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?
- C. What are the perceptions of parents whose children were not part of the project about learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?
- D. What are the perceptions of EFL teachers about the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools knowing that they have been applying the project for more than 10 years since it started in 2004?

The perceptions of students who did not study English from Grade 1 were not explored because they have not experienced or taken part in the project. Whereas, the perceptions of parents whose children did not study English from Grade 1 were explored because some of the parents might have had some experience with the project through their younger children who studied English from Grade 1 or heard about the project from their family and friends. **Headteachers did not participate in this research study because the focus of this research is placed on participants who were directly involved in the project,**

since it seeks what students, parents and teachers think about the project and their experiences. Also, the headteachers did not take part in the project and they have limited knowledge about the project since it was imposed on the schools they managed.

Conforming to the exploratory nature of the study, an interpretive research approach was chosen and a case study methodology was employed.

#### 1.4 Organization of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters as stated below:

- **Chapter One:** introduces and highlights the study's aims, rationale and research questions.
- **Chapter Two:** provides background information about Bahrain and the educational system in Bahrain to provide the setting and context of the research.
- **Chapter Three:** examines the theoretical framework for this study and discusses relevant literature about teaching and learning English as a foreign/second language from an early age with evidence that supports and disputes the claims of the age factor in language learning.
- **Chapter Four:** provides details about the methodology of the research, the rationale for choosing a case study, the study's research design, research methods, trustworthiness criteria, ethical issues, and the limitations of the study.
- **Chapter Five:** presents the collected data and results of the statistical analyses which were implemented on the data.
- **Chapter Six:** discusses the analyses, the results and findings of the data.
- **Chapter Seven:** summarizes the findings of the study, presents the study's contributions and implications, and provides recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. Context

#### 2.1 Introduction: A brief history about the education system in Bahrain

The study took place in the Kingdom of Bahrain which consists of an archipelago of about 40 islands and is situated in the middle of the southern coast of the Arabian Gulf. Arabic is the first and official language of Bahrain and all the government schools (Joshi, 2003). A free public education system was introduced in the Kingdom in 1919 when the first primary government- or public-boys' school was established. The inauguration of this government school marked the onset of an educational advancement. From that time and up to today, Bahrain has accorded particular attention to the education sector and every possible support to that division is offered and provided in order to guarantee its continued development. This is because education is considered to be one of the most important sectors of human development in Bahrain (Alaiwi, 2003). In 2008, the Government of Bahrain decided to invest in education and spent 2.4% of Gross Domestic Product, GDP, on the education of its citizens and in 2012, Bahrain slightly raised its investment and spent 2.6% of its GDP on education (The World Bank, 2016). As a result of this investment and because public education in the Kingdom is free and compulsory for children from the ages 7 to 18, literacy rates reached 90%, a stable increase over the previous decade (UN Human Development Report, 2011). The rate for adult illiteracy was decreased from 8.4% for females and 4% for males in 2010 to about 7% for females and 3.1% for males in 2015 (The World Bank, 2016).

Education in Bahrain is compulsory and all children aged 6 to 17 are enrolled in public or private schools. Government schools are single sex and men teach boys and women teach girls except in some primary schools -which consist of grades 1 to 4 only- where female teachers teach boys between the age of 6 to 9 because of a shortage in male teachers. Educational school years in Bahrain's public schools are of three stages (see Figure 2.1):

- Primary level: Primary level education includes the first two cycles of basic education. It lasts for six years and caters for children between



the age of 6-11, the first cycle –the first three grades- a class-teacher system is applied where one teacher teaches all subjects. From grades 4-6 –the second cycle- an associate class-teacher system is conducted where subjects are divided between two teachers: one for Arabic language, Islamic religion and social studies; the other for mathematics and sciences. The Ministry of Education has initiated several developmental projects in recent years, for example, offering IT curricula and teaching English as a foreign language from grade one, the focus of this study.

- Intermediate level: This is the third cycle of basic education which lasts for three years and where a subject-teacher system is applied; this means each subject is taught through an educationally qualified and specialized teacher.
- Secondary level: Secondary level education lasts for three years and is the final stage where education is free. Admission to secondary level is based upon gaining the Certificate of Intermediate School. The Ministry of Education uses a credit-hours system which provides a wide range of courses and subjects that allows pupils to choose the most suitable track for them from the following: **technical**, literary, commercial, **textile, advertisement** or sciences. After finishing secondary education the students should be prepared for entry to universities, higher institutes or the labour market (Alaiwi, 2003).

Grades	Age							Religious Education Primary, Intermediate, Secondary
12	17	Secondary Education						
11	16	General		Commercial	Technical	Applied		
10	15	Sciences	Literary			Textile	Advertisement	
9	14	Basic Education Third Cycle (Intermediate)						
8	13							
7	12							
6	11	Second Cycle (Primary)						
5	10							
4	9							
3	8	First Cycle (Primary)						
2	7							
1	6							

Table 2.1 The Educational ladder in the Kingdom of Bahrain (Ministry of Education 2004: 49).

The Ministry of Education in Bahrain is responsible for directing the educational system. It creates the educational policy within the framework resolved by the Kingdom, administers and determines the quality criteria and works together with other public bodies and institutions to upgrade and develop the Bahraini educational system and connect it to persons' and society's needs (Eid, 2007). The Bahraini educational system consists of two fundamental principles of the Kingdom's 2002 Constitution (Federal Research Division, 2004):

- 1- To provide free education for all school age children throughout the country.
- 2- To improve the quality of education to meet the needs both of the young students and that of the country's social and economic development.

The foundations were laid during the British administration of Bahrain for the kingdom's modern government school systems and EFL has been part of the daily lessons for Bahraini students since 1920 (British Council UK, 2004). The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Bahrain has made a series of decisions regarding the best age for introducing EFL at primary level government schools. Since 1980, EFL was taught from Grade 4 at the age of 9 to Bahraini learners in government schools and no significant changes in teaching EFL to young learners had taken place since then (British Council UK, 2004). In September 2000 the MoE decided to lower the age of learning EFL to 8 and it was decided to teach EFL from Grade 3 in Bahraini government primary schools (Ministry of Education of Bahrain, 2008). In September 2004, the MoE established the project of teaching EFL to young learners from Grade 1 in only twenty primary government schools in Bahrain. The Ministry has annually increased the number of schools taking part in the project until they reached 83 schools in September 2008. Finally, the MoE decided to expand the project of teaching EFL from Grade 1 at the age of 6 to all 110 primary government schools in Bahrain starting from September 2009 and this is what this research project explored (Ministry of Education of Bahrain, 2008).

## **2.2 Teaching English from Grade 1 to Bahraini primary level students**

English is taught as a foreign language in Bahraini public schools and its importance is due to the rapid growth of the foreign organizations and institutions in Bahrain putting proficiency in English in such a great demand (Al Sabah, 2002). Since the Kingdom has embarked on a path of educational reform and seeks to improve and develop the quality of life for the citizens of Bahrain education, reform, youth issues and training are increasingly demanding the attention of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Bahrain (Eid, 2007). This is how the idea of teaching EFL to Bahraini public school young learners starting from Grade one at the age of six developed in 2003. The ministry stated that the younger the EFL learners are, the better efficiency and success they will have in acquiring English (Ministry of Education, 2004); and that learning EFL starting from Grade one provides young learners with twelve years of practising throughout school years that will enhance their level of proficiency in English gradually (Ministry of Education, 2004). These statements and beliefs of the MoE in Bahrain led this research study to explore the learning and teaching of English at a young age from a theoretical and empirical angle. In 2009 the Ministry of Education in Bahrain employed teaching English to EFL learners **in all schools** starting from grade one, because EFL was taught from grade 4 ever since the education system was established in Bahrain, and then the ministry decided starting teaching EFL from grade 3 in the academic year 2000/2001.

### **2.2.1 Preparation for the *Learning English starting from Grade 1* project**

Phillipson's (1992) argues that the global spread of English and English language teaching is a linguistic counterpart of imperialism that aims at controlling the world through making distinctions between the powerful western countries and the underdeveloped countries. He claims that the dominant western countries impose norms which are internalized by the people in power in the underdeveloped countries to legitimate exploitation (Phillipson, 1992). Phillipson argues that linguistic imperialism presupposes an overarching structure of unequal exchange where language dominance unites with educational, economic, political and other types of dominance (Phillipson,

2009). In the Kingdom of Bahrain, English language has become the 'lingua franca' of banking, industry, commerce and many private establishments. It is used widely in many government departments and ministries such as the Ministry of Works, The Department of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Electricity and Water. English in Bahrain is known as the commercial language, because it is one of the main qualifications required for most jobs and mastering English is a prime requirement that both local and foreign employers demand from their employees. Since English plays a major role in the growth of the Bahraini economy, curriculum constructors have included it as one of the main school subjects introduced into the curriculum in grade three at primary public schools since 2000. English is taught as a foreign language in Bahraini government schools for more than ten years. The students have EFL lessons for five periods per week, that is one period every day, with the duration of each period being 55 minutes. At present, in both government and private schools in Bahrain, English is regarded as one of the core subjects in the curriculum and pupils who want to be promoted from one class to another higher one must successfully acquire a minimum passing grade in English. In 2003, the Ministry of Education in its continuous search for development took two very important decisions which, in my opinion, have had a major positive effect on Bahraini EFL learners, parents and teachers:

- Ministerial decision No. 241/2003 dated 16<sup>th</sup> July 2003, concerning the formation of a higher committee for implementation of teaching English in the first grade of primary education. (Ministry of Education, 2004).
- Ministerial decision No. 242/2003 dated 16<sup>th</sup> July 2003, concerning the formation of a working group for curricula, training, information and administrative affairs for the teaching of English in the first grade of primary education project. (Ministry of Education, 2004).

EFL educational policies which the Ministry of Education developed for the *Learning English from Grade 1* project were concerned with the development of the curricula of teaching EFL in primary level. The committee which was formed to prepare for the project agreed strongly on the need for customizing a grade 1 English language book just for Bahrain. They wanted an English book that enabled the young EFL learners to master skills and abilities that will allow them

to contribute successfully in the communal and social matters and issues with civilized principles which motivates these young ESL learners to improve and use those skills and values in the context of present day Bahrain (Eid, 2007). The ministry formed the committee to accomplish the following tasks (Ministry of Education, 2004):

- To prepare an action plan for the *Learning English from Grade 1* project taking into consideration the financial and human resources available at the Ministry of Education.
- To prepare a syllabus that will flow harmoniously with the children's development later on in primary level. This syllabus will be the basis and completion for the English subject at primary level which started from grade 3.
- To train English language teachers who will implement this project in a way which makes them acquire the experiences and skills needed when dealing with young primary level EFL learners.

Fifty English language primary level teachers, 20 senior teachers and 30 EFL teachers who graduated from English major from the University of Bahrain at advanced levels, were selected and trained for the project which was implemented in twenty pilot primary government schools from the beginning of the academic year September 2004/2005. I was one of those fifty teachers since I was working as a government school English language teacher in one of the pilot schools. The students are at primary elementary level in Grades 1 to 6.

### **2.2.2 EFL Teaching and learning styles for the *Learning English from Grade 1* project**

According to the MoE, teaching EFL to young Bahraini learners should be consistent with fundamental principles of Bahrain's primary level education, as described earlier. Therefore, the Ministry of Education created a list of teaching and learning strategies for the project of learning English from Grade 1. The foremost features of these strategies were (Ministry of Education, 2004):

- Strategies that reflect the modern education theories and translates them in a way that suits the learners, level, teacher's knowledge and the society's anticipations as defined by the curriculum. Strategies should take into consideration students' diversification and differences in terms of their mental abilities and their own learning methods.
- Strategies that rely on information and technology. These strategies should help the students to acquire competencies to make them long-life learners, master self-learning skills and utilize educational technology.
- Strategies that help students to be effective learners who acquire and master abilities in problem-solving, criticism, solution creating, information classification, decision-making, initiative, responsibility-taking, participation and cooperation.
- Employment of various types of teaching and learning strategies according to the educational situation such as individual learning, self learning or cooperative learning.

The Ministry of Education in Bahrain agreed that there is no one method and approach to EFL learning which is best for all Bahraini young learners (Ministry of Education, 2004). Based on that, the ministry sets programs where EFL instructors are trained to be professionally alert to young learners and to EFL methodology and use an eclectic and pragmatic approach that enables the instructors to be observers of their EFL students and always prepared to adapt to their needs. EFL teachers, including myself, were trained at the British Council in Bahrain. They were trained to use teaching styles that help young EFL learners maintain pride in their language and traditions and not allow the experience of learning a new language undermine their self-concept (self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem) because those young students might be entering a cultural and linguistic milieu that is totally different from their own.

From a critical point of view, language plays an important role in the dominant western countries' linguistic/cultural penetration on the underdeveloped countries since it is the primary means for communication (Lin, 2013). Consequently, through spreading ideas and norms of the dominant countries through language, linguistic imperialism becomes a subtype and an integral part of media-based educational imperialism and cultural imperialism (Lin, 2013).

Educational imperialism is reflected in teacher training courses, language textbooks adaptation and the export of Western institutional norms (Phillipson, 2009; Mazrui 2004). This was the case in Bahrain because the MoE had an educational governmental aim of applying the project to the public officially in 2004, therefore it worked on preparing for it and designing its syllabus, textbooks and materials through its own inside committee and with the help of the British Council only. The EFL teachers, students and parents' opinions, views and experiences were not considered as important to the MoE. Cultural imperialism is the practice of imposing and promoting a certain culture, generally of a nation which is politically powerful, over a less powerful nation or society (Hamm, 2005). This was viewed in some of the project's language textbooks' content and activities where there was a dominance of the norms of the western culture over the Bahraini culture. Therefore, a very important issue in Bahrain is whether the transnational corporations which impose a capitalist world order that relegates peripheral languages, nations and economies to secondary positions are setting the agenda for language policies in Bahrain or the local people. Transnational corporations have the media and dominant advertising and they are expanding their influence in education and have gradually become active in determining the content of education globally since it is run to service the economy and finally produce consumers and not critical citizens (Spring, 1998; Monbiot, 2000). According to the MoE, the learning styles that were chosen by the ministry and conducted by the EFL teachers enabled the young learners to understand that the aim of learning English was not to replace their mother tongue and culture, but to add another dimension to their ability to communicate (Ministry of Education, 2004). By showing respect for and interest in the EFL young learners, the EFL teachers were expected to provide the students with self-confidence and encouragement. The teaching and learning strategies which the Ministry of Education -with the association of the British Council- trained EFL teachers to apply provided different developmental stages, varieties of learning styles, active participation and ensured a degree of success for all young learners. While they were choosing the appropriate teaching and learning styles for the project (from their points of view), the ministry had in mind children's needs, interests and experiences which could be accommodated in an EFL program that presents variety in depth, activity and pace. As the ministry examined and searched for the best

approach, it concluded that a grammar-translation method to language instructions was completely unsuitable, because EFL learning involved the gradual acquisition of the four skills –listening, speaking, reading and writing (Wells, 1975). From the outset, the EFL teachers were trained to give constant attention to leading the young learners from structured contexts to free communication of their own ideas whatever the skills the students were learning. There was a strong focus on listening and speaking strategies, because they were given priority in usage throughout the application of the project. While training, the EFL teachers were told extensively and continuously that close observation of the young EFL learners is essential to the diagnostic assessment of their confidence and competence, because this assessment will signify the students' development that will motivate and satisfy them, and that is another educational governmental aim which the MoE wanted to achieve.

### **2.3 Summary**

The Kingdom of Bahrain's commitment to education flows from a tradition that began over ninety years ago and education was not regarded as just a once and for all reform but on the contrary it is considered as a constant and continual responsibility to be met by each and every new generation of educationalists and leaders (Al Khalifa, 2010). The English language is taught as a foreign language in the Kingdom of Bahrain. It used to be taught to all learners starting from the third grade, but in 2003 the ministry decided that English should be taught earlier to young learners in the first grade of primary level starting from the academic year 2004/2005. In order to do that the ministry formed a committee to look after the action plan for the project, the syllabus and teachers' training. Selected teachers were trained at the British Council in Bahrain and the training focused mainly on listening and speaking strategies which were given priority throughout the application of the project. Finally, the project started in September 2004 in 20 primary government schools in Bahrain.



## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1 Introduction

Language learning can be interpreted from different perspectives. For example, a cognitive perspective means language learning is acquiring much of linguistic knowledge and developing linguistic competence without taking context into consideration (Altenaichinger, 2003). On the other hand, there is a social-cultural perspective on language learning which views context as its core because the late language is developed in context, this means language should be used in context (Kirsch, 2012). When learning a foreign/second language, apart from linguistic competence, intercultural competence and self-perceptions are very important because that is when people communicate and when learners, besides from learning a foreign/second language, should acquire intercultural awareness (Byram et al., 2002).

The rationale for reviewing the relevant literature is to present an overview of the literature pertinent to the age factor when learning a foreign/second language and taking different theoretical perspectives to view foreign/second language learning from an early age and some issues which are linked to this topic, for example motivation and environment.

The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section gives a brief history of the theoretical constructs that underpin this research and which are connected to age factor: for example, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Sociocultural Theory. In the second section the pedagogy of teaching English to young learners is reviewed. The third section discusses empirical studies that deal with the age factor when learning a second/foreign language. The fourth section discusses different variables related to age factor, for example, motivation, opportunity, individual personality and age difference. In section five the meaning of the term perceptions is defined in relation to this study and learners' perception is discussed. The fifth and sixth sections define and discuss teachers' and parents' perceptions.

## 3.2 Theoretical studies

### 3.2.1 From Second Language Learning (SLL) to Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

There is much literature distinguishing foreign/second language learning and acquisition, however in this study the focus is not on this debate but on learning English from an early age and for that reason the words 'acquiring' and 'learning' will be used interchangeably throughout this research.

Many people have experienced SLL and might have a fair practical understanding of the aspects that helped them when learning, or even blocking, a new language. Mitchell and Myles (1998) suggest that this practical experience, and the knowledge it indicates, are insufficient to help us fully comprehend how the learning process occurs. Myles (2010) argues that a better understanding of SLL can be pursued in a productive and organized way if it is guided by a form of theory. There are different SLL theories; for example, the social and interactional context of second language learning that views language as a cultural product that is constructed through social interaction Myles (2013). Social theorists, conversation analysts, interactionists and sociolinguists focus on the social context where language learning occurs and the role it plays in co-constructing both the identity and linguistic knowledge of language learners (Myles, 2013). In this theory language learning ranges from micro-analyses of various interactions that aim at investigating the role of scaffolding in SLL (Ohta, 2010) to macro-analyses of the role of contexts and social factors in constructing identity (Norton, 2010) or in the ways that conversations are co-constructed and negotiated (Mackey and Polio, 2009).

A different SLL theory that shifts us from the general perspective of language learning to a more specific aspect of language learning is the linguistic theory. The linguistic theory focuses on the formal properties of language and how they contribute in shaping the development of a second language in the context of both universal properties of human languages and of specific first and second language pairings (Myles, 2013). It implies that a linguistic approach to SLL attempts to describe the language acquired by second language learners and explain why the language they acquired is the way it is. These implications directed many linguistic researchers to investigate and explore SLA.

### **3.2.2 Second Language Acquisition (SLA)**

In this chapter, a number of SLA theories will be investigated and explored because they are the most applicable theories to this research study since they are closely connected with the age factor and foreign/second language acquisition.

#### **3.2.2.1 The Cognitive Theory of SLA**

Cognitivism arose and emerged as a response to Behaviourism which, according to Pinter (2011), viewed human beings as programmed animals. Cognitivists viewed people as rational beings and focused on their inner mental activities and behaviours to understand how they learn because cognitivists argue that SLA is perceived through learners' cognitive development (Pinter, 2011). Cognitive psychologists state that one of the significant aspects of SLA is the structuring of a knowledge system that can in time be called on automatically when required for speaking and understanding (Altenaichinger, 2003). They claim that second language learners must build up a general knowledge of the language they want to comprehend and produce and through practice and experience they will be capable of using certain parts of the general knowledge they built very quickly and subconsciously when needed. Progressively, this usage of the second language becomes automatic giving second language learners opportunities to focus on other parts of the language they are targeting (Altenaichinger, 2003). Cognitive psychologists argue that SLA should not be approached as an isolated process, especially in schools; alternatively it should be viewed as intertwined with cognitive development, developing as an individual and learning about the outside world (Altenaichinger, 2003).

According to Schafer (2012), acquiring a language in early childhood does not seem to be affected by motivation, ability and the tutor as does learning a language in late childhood. In general it is acknowledged that young children master best in phonemic coding, rather than older learners who do better in analysing language, which means "the ability to work out the rules of a language through meta-cognitive processes" (Schafer, 2012: 4). An adult learner is faster when using code-switching and Rosansky (1975, quoted in Brown, 2000, p. 61), provides a clarification claiming that early acquisition of

language occurs once children become highly "centred" or become one dimensional. She claims that children are not egocentric at this time and when a problem occurs they can concentrate "and then only fleetingly" on a single dimension at a time (Rosansky quoted in Birdsong, 2009, p. 5). Rosansky states that lack of both decentration and flexibility could be a necessity when acquiring a language. An adult learner is more deliberately conscious about learning a foreign/second language that can guide him/her to overanalysing language learning. A child learns through listening first; so even prior to their speech, children can comprehend what people are saying to them (Schafer, 2012). As for adult learners, reading is typically the easiest and earliest skill they obtain, whereas listening may be the hardest (Schafer, 2012). Language intermingles with cognition to attain a stage of balance. "Adult learners might be frustrated by the ambiguities and contradictions in a new language and be discouraged by this, although the greater the discipline, motivation and clear goal definition of adults, seem to negate this" (Schafer, 2012: 3). Ausubel (1964) also states that when it comes to children "their intellectual capacities are less differentiated along particular lines and they are more venturesome and less rigid in undertaking new learning tasks" (p. 48).

Adult learners may benefit from the second language by employing cognitive strategies and by being knowledgeable and literate in their first language (De Valenzuela, 2000). Older learners master a great number of vocabulary that support them when studying a second language together with the ability to create "conscious" grammatical generalizations (Ausubel 1964). Cummins (1983), states that cognitive adult maturity is a benefit for obtaining specific aspects of a second language. He claims that adults with schooling in their first language will advance faster when acquiring a second language in context-reduced and cognitively demanding conditions (Cummins 1983). On the other hand, children would find it easy to master cognitively undemanding tasks, for example when using interpersonal communication skills in context-embedded situations (Cummins 1983). Consequently, different researchers, such as De Valenzuela (2000) and Schafer (2012), have proposed different age ranges for language acquisition according to their studies and findings.

### 3.2.2.2 The Socio-cognitive Theory of SLA

The study of SLA has experienced some linguistic, philosophical, psychological and educational changes during the past decade which have resulted in SLA being approached from a number of theories. One of the theories in which SLA has emerged is socio-cognitive theory. Socio-cognitive theory is concerned with the way humans think and how their thinking affects their performances, views and behaviours (Fahim and Mehrgan, 2012). In socio-cognitive theory the process of learning is defined as an internal cognitive process that might or might not be revealed in instant behavioural change (Bandura, 1986). It advocates the idea that a major amount of people's learning takes place in a social environment and suggests that through observing other people, humans gain knowledge of rules, behaviours, principles, strategies and skills (Fahim and Mehrgan, 2012). Socio-cognitive views of learning attempt to connect the social side of learning with the mechanisms of a person's brain because they claim that learning and cognition are social and not autonomous actions (Egan-Robertson, 1998). Atkinson (2011) mentioned that socio-cognitive methods, approaches and views in SLA focus on the integration of the human's mind with his/her body and environment. He stated that:

This is hardly to deny that cognition is crucial in SLA, but cognitivist views ignore the profound embeddedness of language learning in the world. From a socio-cognitive perspective, the best way to promote SLA is to place learners in situations where the L2 is necessary for social action—where they need it to survive and prosper. (Atkinson, 2011: 144).

Atkinson (2011) presented three principles of socio-cognitive approaches to SLA:

#### 1. The inseparability principle

In this approach the mind, body and world work together in SLA. Batstone (2010) states that this is an approach where the cognitive and social are indivisible and can be clearly understood only through keeping their essential unity intact. He claims that if 'environment' and 'body' are added to 'cognitive and 'social' the result would be that eco-social world, body and mind are inseparable contributors to the SLA process (Batstone, 2010). To understand the processes of SLA these

three elements should be considered together. Atkinson (2011) argues that this approach causes difficulties for the study of SLA because treating mind-body-world as one functional unit “radically alters cognition conceptually and our means of studying it methodologically” (Atkinson, 2011: 27).

## 2. The learning-is-adaptive principle

This principle claims that cognition’s main function is ecological, to subserve adaptive action. Atkinson (2011) claims that if embodied and extended cognition enables individuals to adapt to their social worlds and environments and if learning is a cognitive process, then learning is clearly adaptive. He argues that learning processes are processes of better adapting to our environments.

## 3. The alignment principle

Alignment in this principle is the means by which individuals, social actors, take part in the continuous construction of action and social meaning in socio-cognitive/public space. Atkinson (2011) states that by mutually negotiating, solving communicative and interactional problems, sharing information and emotions, individuals adapt to their environments creating shared meaning in mind-body-world. He argues that alignment is a major mechanism of SLA and that by participating in the ongoing construction of meanings in socio-cognitive environments, individuals learn a set of social signifying practices particular to the environment of the second language.

From all these discussions it is concluded that the socio-cognitive theory for SLA states that language learners must be in continuous interactions with the world around them to acquire a second language and that it is not solely a cognitive process.

### 3.2.2.3 The Sociocultural Theory of SLA

Sociocultural Theory originates from “the 1920s and 1930s when Vygotsky, Leont’ev, Luria, and other scholars tried to restructure psychology on Marxist lines” (Kirsch, 2012: 45).

According to Kirsch (2012) many SLA researchers have located language learning within learners and attributed a minimal role to their environments. This led to a number of scholars who were unsatisfied with the separation between the students' performance and competence and their social and mental processes (Kirsch, 2012). Lantolf (1996) argues that language learning is not only about acquiring linguistic structures, because language learning is formed by procedures and processes. A sociocultural approach of SLA takes into account the social factors of SLA (Seedhouse, 2005).

A sociocultural theory claims that language competence, whether in L1, L2 or a foreign language originates from the social reality. Consequently it lies in language use that take place in observable social environments (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Markee 2004). Researchers and supporters of the theory argue that for learners to acquire a language they should take part "in the socially mediated practices of their community. Language learning is therefore a public activity that involves social interactions and that is embedded in a particular context" (Kirsch, 2012: 46).

A sociocultural approach to SLA explores and internalizes the different ways where learners' participation and involvement in a number of sociocultural contexts affects their language abilities. It exposes and describes the learners' personal qualities, offers accounts and explanations of the social developments and processes of ESL learning, and observes and studies a variety of processes which allow ESL students to develop and become active members in the culture of the target language (Johnson, 2004; Kirsch, 2012). A sociocultural approach to SLA suggests that learners acquire the target language when they take part in meaningful and authentic interactions with more experienced members (in the target language) of the community, such as teachers (Kirsch, 2012). Mainstream cognitivists have criticised the sociocultural approach to SLA claiming that it has failed to deliver insights about the cognitive processes which are connected to the acquisition procedure and to provide a set of descriptions of the languages that learners/students learn and acquire (Kirsch, 2012). Learning in sociocultural theory "is a continuous reciprocal interaction of cognitive, behavioural and environmental factors" (Aimin, 2013:164). Thus,

sociocultural theory delivers a new perspective on the SLA process, where young learners are required/encouraged to think and speak in the target language, that is, language and thoughts ought to be closely connected to each other. The core of this connection lies in social communication activities that the young learners engage in (Aimin, 2013).

From my personal experience, it is widely acknowledged that some Bahraini learners may follow this kind of model of learning and internalize and adopt the ways of thinking, behaviours, values and beliefs of their society from interacting with the 'experts' whether they are their EFL teachers or their parents.

### **3.2.2.4 Teaching intercultural competence**

According to Sinecrope et al. (2012) intercultural competence is the ability and preparation of a person to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. There is a strong need for an intercultural focus in language education because of increased immigration, globalization and migration (Moeller and Nugent, 2014). Sinecrope et al. (2012) argue that students should be prepared to collaborate and engage in a global society through learning various approaches and appropriate ways when interacting with other people from different cultures. Interculturally competent (ICC) foreign language speakers acquire communicative competence in that specific language in addition to many knowledge, values, skills and attitudes about that certain culture. They are determined to change intercultural encounters to intercultural relationships to gain an understanding of other people's culture through while also contributing to other people's perceptions and understanding of their own culture from an insider's view (Byram, 1997).

When describing the environments of intercultural classrooms, students' learning skills are often defined as cooperative, participatory, engaging, interactive and learner-centred (Byram et al., 2002; Moore, 2006). Byram et al. (2002) argue that according to the standards stated in the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), a foreign language teacher should create for his/her foreign language learners a learning environment of inquiry and curiosity to direct them to be ICC students because Byram et al. (2002) believe that culture is an ever-changing force. They suggest



forming open atmospheres in the language classrooms and provide examples which allows the learner to compare between the target culture and the native culture. By creating these open atmospheres, the language teachers could present open-ended questions to direct the learner toward independent discoveries of various worldviews through textual material that are common. This could place learners in the role of active gatherers of information and knowledge, which may result in minimizing their judgments about the target culture (Byram et al., 2002).

Understanding of the connection between culture and language is an essential factor for developing intercultural competence since intercultural competence is hindered by people's personal cultural background (Moeller and Nugent, 2014). In the Model of Intercultural Competence by Byram (1997), foreign language teachers were requested to direct the language learners through a process of acquiring competencies in skills attitudes and knowledge which are connected to intercultural competence through using a foreign language. The teachers were asked to direct the learners by using activities where attitudes about the target language and its culture are considered. The aim was for the learners to question their preconceived perceptions about the culture of the target language with the intention of making them become more prepared to find out and engage with people from the target language before they enter into a process of discovery so that they eventually experience reciprocity relationships (Byram, 1997). Based on Byram's (1997) model, a foreign language teacher should reconsider the methods used for teaching a foreign language and culture in the foreign language classroom if he/she is aiming at creating ICC speakers of the language (Moeller and Nugent, 2014). Using traditional methods when teaching a foreign language emphasizes the importance of learners practicing pronunciation, vocabulary and language structures to become like native speakers (Moeller and Nugent, 2014). Byram (1997) argues that focusing on creating native like speakers allow most learners to fail in becoming ICC students since they are requested to separate themselves from their culture and accept that only native speakers have the power when it comes to interaction. This will prevent the learners' growth to become ICC speakers, as they are not given the same equal opportunities to bring their thoughts and perceptions into the language learning process. Therefore, Byram (1997) states that a foreign

language teacher should direct the learners toward using language which structures various discoveries about themselves and about the target language and not push them to using the language like native speakers do (Byram, 1997). “The focus shifts from preparing students to communicate without error in order to survive a foreign culture to communicating openly in order to build relationships so that they can thrive in a foreign culture” (Moeller and Nugent, 2014: 9).

### **3.2.2.5 Using intercultural competent activities in the EFL classroom**

It is essential that EFL teachers grant time for their learners to discover the national identity of the English-speaking world and their culture in geography, social studies and history (Byram, 1997). When EFL students have had time to explore the similarities and differences between the culture of the English-speaking world and their home culture then EFL teachers could create activities which may allow them to start building relationships with other people from different languages and backgrounds (Byram, 1997). For example, the EFL teacher could choose a video or a film clip on one of the topics which are related to the curriculum, such as a video about family relationships. This type of activity allows EFL learners to explore, discuss, investigate and evaluate various cultural perceptions driving from the video. Also, communicative activities, for instance dialogues, conversations, skits and roleplay, could create an environment where intercultural competence could be practiced (Moeller and Nugent, 2014). These activities may give EFL students a chance to reconsider their preconceived perceptions about the people from the target culture so that the negative perceptions which some of them may have had could be transformed during these activities. EFL students must be given time to develop skills in relating and interpreting. Once they start to identify and notice misunderstandings and ethnocentric perceptions which are connected to cross-cultural situations, EFL students will be able to explain and understand the sources of the conflict and then judge the situations appropriately so that they prevent future misinterpretations (Byram, 1997).

### 3.2.2.6 Intercultural competence and SLA

Developing intercultural competence helps learners to understand their own culture and the culture of the language they are learning. The development of such an understanding could help learners act culturally appropriate and be sensitive to other cultures. Intercultural competence includes a set of procedures and practices which require skills, knowledge and attitudes, such as: to compare and contrast, to accept differences, to observe and identify, and to be able to defend one's opinions and views "while acknowledging the legitimacy of those of others" (Kirsch, 2012: 157).

Intercultural competence is mostly related to the work of Byram (1997, 1999, 2002) who identified intercultural competence as a set of four aspects of knowledge, or as he named them 'the four savoirs'.

1. Attitudes: When students leave ethnocentric attitudes towards the people and culture of the target language and instead develop curiosity and openness towards them.
2. Knowledge: When learners acquaint themselves with the cultural practices that people of the target language use for communication and share meanings and beliefs.
3. Skills: When pupils enquire, observe, interpret and analyse to gain understanding of events or documents so that they do not become judgemental to the people and culture of the target language.
4. Engaging and interacting: Learners' abilities to draw on the previous three pieces of knowledge 'savoirs' and use them while interacting with people of the target language and their culture.

If language learners develop the Byram's (1997) four aspects of knowledge it is agreed that it will enable them to develop intercultural competence. According to Byram and Doyé (1999) learners could develop intercultural competence in primary school. They state that it requires the language learners to be able to distance themselves from their culture, reflect on it and share their reflections with people of other cultures. This is unacceptable in the Bahraini society especially for primary level students, similar to the students in this research study. The teachers in primary levels try to accustom the children to their

culture, community and religion so it would be very hard to ask the children to distance themselves from their community or culture even if for a short period of time. English teachers have created other ways to make the Bahraini students interculturally competent. EFL teachers, through informal references to words, cultures, celebrities and explanations of festivals and events of the English speaking countries, attempt to develop intercultural competence in some of the children. Doing this was essential especially for the children, or the parents, who might have a negative stance towards a) English, b) learning English or c) the English-speaking countries which will affect the children and result in the children lacking intercultural competence.

### **3.2.2.7 English Linguistic imperialism**

According to Phillipson (1992) English linguistic imperialism is the dominance of English that is maintained and asserted through the establishment and continuous reconstitution of cultural and structural inequalities between the English language and other languages. Cultural refers to immaterial or ideological properties as in pedagogic principles and attitudes; and structural refers to material properties, for example financial allocations and institutions. The cultural and structural inequalities ensure the continuous provision of material resources to the English language than other languages and to benefit the people who are proficient in English (Phillipson, 1992). Phillipson (2009) states that English linguistic imperialism is an example of linguicism (see Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988). "Linguicism involves representation of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for purposes on inclusion, and the opposite for dominated languages, for purpose of exclusion" (Phillipson, 1992: 55). It could be applied in a school where the first language of some children is ignored or if a teacher stigmatizes the local language/dialect which is spoken by the children.

Many factors have contributed to the current dominance of the English language and they could be grouped as: a. ideological through the imagery of English which is the creation of media, implications of success and necessity, b. structural by dovetailing English with global economy, industry, finance, the military, British and American promotion of English and investments in teaching

English in educational systems. Crystal argues that "there is the closest of links between language dominance and economic, technological, and cultural power. Without a strong-power base, of whatever kind, no language can make progress as an international medium of communication." (Crystal, 2003, p. 7). The MoE in Bahrain has invested in the project but the project was imposed on the people which is an example of linguistic imperialism and the teachers were the actors which are supported by an imperialist structure because priority was given to the project's curriculum development, teacher training course and the school's timetable.

English linguistic imperialism is often advanced by some cultural activities such as television, films and videos. For example, in addition to pop music, television is the main source of a considerable amount of English which children in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) acquire before they study English in school (Phillipson, 2003). Many programmes on television in the Nordic countries are of foreign origin, mainly from English speaking countries, and broadcast in the original language. Phillipson (2003) argues that English plays a significant role in the continuing processes of globalization because English has been marketed as the language of economic development, international communication and understanding and other positive terms but these ascriptions obscure the truth about globalization. The reality of globalization is that natural resources are being stolen, poverty is spread around the world, linguistic, global and cultural ecology is under threat and speakers of languages do not have their rights respected (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1994; Kontra et al., 1999). About 750 million people speak English as their second language and 375 million people speak it as their first language and this indicates that English has become the global language that dominates in the globalization era (Al Hosni, 2015). According to Cipriano & Vanco (2010) English has become a global language because of continuous efforts of native English speaking countries, mostly the United States of America and the United Kingdom, to promote English globally. This could be viewed as a modern form of colonialism where economic and cultural imperialism take place through manipulating the exceptional linguistic power of English (Al Hosni, 2015).

Khan (2009) conducted a case study in Saudi Arabia on five teachers of a college preparatory English program and 24 of their female students who are from the upper two levels in the program. The TOFEL test (Test of English as a Foreign Language) which is an international test that measures students' abilities to use and understand English at a university level is used as an entrance exam in the same college and the students consider it a critical step in their academic studies. Khan (2009) argues in her findings' section that the students were extremely dissatisfied with the content of the test because it did not include "neutral content which is of general interest" to its examinees and it did "privilege a specific culture" (Khan, 2009: 202). The students state that the reading comprehension and listening exercises reflected a context which is different than their own and they consider this point an aspect that hindered them from fully understanding the questions in the test (Khan, 2009). This is a sign of educational imperialism since the college is ensuring the place of a certain language (English) as the medium of education and also it could be reflected in the TOEFL exam which, according to the college, ensures international standards (Phillipson, 2003).

### **3.2.2.8 The global craze for teaching English**

McKay (2002) states that the number of speakers of the English language is growing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and he contends that. He argues that this growth is powered by the views of linguistic imperialism which suggest that English speakers have advantages that assist, empower and facilitate them as long as they could readily use the language. Crystal (2003) states that the expansion in the use of English has peaked in more than seventy-five countries around the world, for example Nigeria and the Netherlands, where English is spoken as a second or a foreign language. English is dominant in some Third World countries, Bahrain being among them, and one major characteristic that most Third World countries have is that learning English provides access to wealth, power and a better future for its speakers (Phillipson, 2003). These countries either are so rich, for example Saudi Arabia, or weak in the international balance of power, for instance Mali. One form of aid that the USA and Britain, with New Zealand, Canada and Australia playing a minor role, offer these

countries is through promoting English, curriculum developing activities and teacher training courses. They market English as the language of scientific and technological advance, modernity and development. Teaching English in these countries is financed for specific purposes, for example teaching English as a medium of education in schools, to permit technical training for particular developmental goals or for science and technology in education (Phillipson, 2003). The role of English in a sociocultural context of English-using Third World countries is not understood properly or is ignored (Kachru, 1986). The consequences of this is that the Third World countries are gradually realizing that it is difficult for EFL/ESL specialists to have professional attitudes towards the learners “which would be contextually, attitudinally and pragmatically useful to the Third World countries” (Kachru, 1986: 101).

When people learn English for various reasons, not bearing in mind the method used for teaching/learning it, they may acquire some of the culture of the English-speaking world because it cannot be separated from its social context (Phillipson, 2003). This raises questions about the practice and nature of the English language teaching, ELT, profession and ethical issues about the responsibilities of the kinds of aids that are given to the Third World. There is an awareness among the people who are professionally concerned with ELT that learning English cannot be separated from attitudes to racism, ethnicity or the nature of the societies that are learning English (Phillipson, 2003). Unfortunately, some ELT specialists seem to not appreciate that overcoming negative cultural and linguistic attitudes towards learning EFL/ESL are assets to the society and individuals learning English and ignoring it could result in discrimination between the people who speak English and those who did not acquire it (Phillipson, 2003).

English has recently entrenched around the world, as a result of international interdependence, British colonialism, revolutions in technology, communications, commerce, and because English is the language of the USA, a major political and economic force in the contemporary world (Phillipson, 2003). In Scandinavia and Finland, English textbooks are written for university degree programs because English is used as a precondition for higher education qualifications (Phillipson, 2003; Hollqvist, 1984). English has a social stratification function within these countries and to succeed or fail in English at

schools could be conclusive for career and educational prospects. Many Scandinavian academic discourse, whether in journals or conferences, take place in English and this means that English has become essential for professional skill (Phillipson, 2003; Hollqvist, 1984). In countries where English is taught as a foreign language, as in Bahrain, English is not a medium of instruction in government schools, but it is learnt in government schools. Since English is dominant in many Third world countries, including Bahrain, Phillipson (2003) argues that there should be various teaching strategies and needs in the EFL classrooms because of the differing degree of exposure to English outside the school and the different roles for English within the wider community and education system.

### **3.3 Self-perceptions**

Self-perceptions are the ways people view, consider and think of themselves; and it also means a full understanding of one's self in regard to their context, class, ethics, values, inspirations, motivations and beliefs (Hann et al. 2014). According to Hann et al. (2014), self-perceptions refer to the ways people observe themselves, in addition to understanding oneself in terms of motivations, values, ethics, experiences and self-confidence. Hann et al. (2014: 4) state that as interest grew in the affective domain of SLA, studies were gradually reported on the roles of self-concept and related concepts:

Two papers from psychology seem to be the key to bringing these constructs to the attention of researchers in SLA: Self-concept: The inter-play of theory and methods by Shavelson and Bolus (1982) and Possible Selves by Markus and Nurius (1986). Various terms are used to refer to this set of factors in SLA: self-confidence, self-efficacy, the L2 self, self-esteem to name a few. However, this is usually in relation to the role of these in SLL and the terms are used in the context of SLL.

Kramsch (2008) argues that to improve language learning the learners should hold positive self-concepts. The claim is that positive self-concepts will contribute to the learners' confidence to interact and be engaged with the target language which will then result in improving the learners' language proficiency (Kramsch, 2008; Dörnyei, 2009). Self-concept in language learning is related to learners' motivation and viewed as a tool for successful SLA and learning since



it involves many factors such as, self-esteem, L2 self, self-efficacy and self-confidence (Kormos et al., 2011; Hann et al., 2014). Self-perceptions are considered vital for changing learners' perceptions to positive perceptions about the culture of the target language, the world around them and themselves (Hann et al., 2014). **From my personal experience with teaching the project, this could** be appropriate for some Bahraini learners who have negative attitudes towards the English language. Self-perceptions will enable some of them to have positive perceptions towards learning English and the culture of the English-speaking countries. They would also enhance the Bahraini learners' self-esteem in learning English especially if it upgraded their English language proficiency.

### **3.4 Pedagogical approaches to teaching English to young learners**

Pedagogical principles underlying language learning at an early age are very diverse in their construction and lack explicitness which makes them not clearly recognizable or comparable among countries, disciplines and situations (Beaty, 1998; Edelenbos et al., 2006).

Johnstone (2009) states that the extensive introduction of EFL/ESL in schools as early as primary level has become "possibly the world's biggest policy development in education" (Johnstone, 2009: 33). Recent studies, for example the study by Garton et al. (2011), have researched introducing English to young learners between the ages of 7-12 in primary level, its consequences and outcomes **through five observational primary level classroom case studies of teaching practices in the UAE, Colombia, Italy, Korea, and Tanzania.** One of the important issues Garton et al. (2011) discussed was the best approaches to language teaching. They claim that the hardest of the policy decisions which effect ESL/EFL classes involves the approaches suggested for teaching English to young learners (TEYL). They state that because of the international demand for communicating in English, new TEYL curricula have largely focused on communicative competence. Ho (2003) said that this has directed many language teachers to presenting some kind of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) especially for young ESL/EFL learners. CLT is originally a method used for EFL teaching of adults in the West where the learners are

placed in small groups and in well-equipped classes (Enever and Moon, 2009). This might not be suitable for teaching young learners in over-crowded language classes with little resources and various educational traditions (McKay, 2003). Another important issue discussed by Garton et al. (2011) was young learners' low proficiency in English. Many instructors face disappointment and feel that they cannot do much when challenged with their students' poor levels of language proficiency (Li, 1998). Ho (2003) argues that ESL/EFL students' perceptions about how to learn and what to learn can contradict with what instructors are expected to do. Nonetheless, discrepancies in perceptions might be because the instructors were incapable of choosing the suitable tasks for their young learners (Carless, 2003).

A final issue is the lack of interest and motivation in English which some young ESL/EFL learners have. Sometimes these children might not see the need to learn English or simply do not see themselves mastering it ever (Li, 1998). This might be true especially in villages since young learners have little, or sometimes no, contact with foreigners (Ho, 2003).

Nevertheless, there are recent studies that suggest more successful outcomes in TEYL. These studies will be provided in the following sections and a light will be shed on other important research studies in different matters affecting teaching ESL/EFL to young learners.

### **3.4.1 English language textbooks**

English language teaching textbooks which are produced by the UK and targeted the global market are essential products in a million-pound TESOL industry which involves language learning/teaching/testing, quality assurance for ministries of education globally, teacher education and educational consultancy work (Gray and Block, 2014). Menkabu and Harwood (2014) state that there is a debate about the desirability of second language textbooks and their effects on students and teachers. They claim that for some teachers language textbooks have a positive role in providing structure and guidance for language teachers and saving the teacher's time which is spent on producing resources from scratch (Freebairn, 2000). Other teachers are in suspicion of the

language textbooks and the described teaching resources and view the materials as means of institutional control (Menkabu and Harwood, 2014). These suspicious teachers argue that the language classroom routines described by the teaching materials leaves the teacher with, almost, no decisions to take because they simply enact pre-planned processes and are less multifaceted in skills (Menkabu and Harwood, 2014). In some GCC countries, for example Bahrain, although many EFL teachers may not be in a position where they could select the EFL textbooks they use in their classrooms, they could adapt these textbooks to confirm an optimum match between the students' needs, the teachers' pedagogical preferences, the context and the teaching/learning materials (Harwood, 2010). Language textbooks may not fully meet the needs of the teachers and individual students in language classrooms but the teachers could artfully manipulate the resources making them not culturally bias to the learner's context (Samuda, 2005). If the teachers feel that the language textbooks they are using could be culturally bias, then they have the right to choose which parts of the language textbook to use, which parts to adapt and which parts to exclude (Tomlinson, 2003). McDonough and Shaw (2003: 76) argue that the main objective of textbooks and materials adaptation in a language classroom is to "maximise the appropriacy of teaching materials in context, by changing some of the internal characteristics of a course-book to suit our particular circumstances better".

Menkabu and Harwood's (2014) study on seven Saudi English language teachers in Saudi Arabia revealed that there were several factors why the language teachers in their study adapted then used the English language textbooks. For instance, they claimed that there were reasons related to the language learners, such as lack of linguistic and scientific knowledge where the students could not understand many long and difficult texts in the course-book. Other factors related to institutional demands and learning environment, for example covering the syllabus in a specified time period and the lack of facilities in the English language classrooms. The language teachers stated that the textbooks did not help with pedagogy and activities that actively engage the students and therefore they needed to modify tasks/exercises which took a lot of time and not all the teachers were trained or equipped to do so. According to Menkabu and Harwood's (2014), all aspects of schooling in this study entailed

learning and teaching, cultural models of language use and tasks designed to be developmentally appropriate, familiar and accessible for the Saudi learners. This is because the learners came situated in particular histories, experiences and lived realities that carry with them ways of thinking, perceiving and finally acting (Hawkins, 2010). It is the teacher's responsibility to unpack the tasks of classrooms and modify the activities if they felt that their learners are creating barriers towards the language because of certain cultural messages which are sent through the tasks in the textbooks (Hawkins, 2010).

Gray (2010) focused on the cultural aspects of language textbooks and his 22 language teachers' interviewees in Barcelona revealed that some of them excluded teaching materials/resources which they sensed perpetuated cultural bias and stereotypes because the teachers thought that the students may believe that they endorsed the stereotypes in the language textbooks. Gray (2010) states that the cultural context where the teaching materials were to be used profoundly impacted the failure or success of their application and implementation. In a study by Gray (2000) on 12 native-speaker English teachers in Barcelona, he claims that the teachers were sometimes uncomfortable with some cultural issues discussed in the activities of the English textbooks. 11 out of the 12 teachers adapted and omitted materials that discussed topics which they felt transmitted inappropriate cultural messages to their students and were unsuitable for discussion in class; for instance, materials discussing promiscuous teenagers and alcohol. Gray (2010) suggests that language teachers need to adapt and critically evaluate materials in the language textbooks and make them culturally appropriate for their students and in their contexts. This could mainly be achieved through teacher education programmes that equip the language teachers with such guidance (Gray, 2010). One approach to adapting culturally alien language textbooks materials, is to encourage the learners to talk about and discuss the culture presented in their textbooks and their own culture and compare them (Gray, 2000). Gray (2000: 281) states that students and language teachers could critically discuss these cultural issues and the language textbooks 'can become a useful instrument for provoking cultural debate and a genuine educational tool'.

Gray (2010: 16–17) comments on how English became 'a form of linguistic capital, capable of bringing a profit of distinction to those speakers with the

ability to access it (or more accurately, its socially legitimated varieties), and as an increasingly commodified dimension of labour-power'. He states that a global English language textbook is a commodity, an artefact, that endorses socio-cultural norms in its values, texts, activities and, precisely, through illustrations. Gray (2010) analysed 4 popular British textbooks and concluded that all of them celebrated professional/personal success, mobility, pleasure and materialism. He also interviewed language textbooks publishers and examined their guidelines then concluded that a standardised artefact is being 'delivered through the standardized methodology embodied in the textbook into the global marketplace – in which all are assumed to want and need exactly the same thing' (p. 138).

Many researchers have focused on the necessity of language learning resources and materials not to be culturally bias (see Maley, 2011; Mukandan, 2009; Masuhara et al., 2008; Tomlinson and Avila 2007). These researchers were concerned with the need to help language learning students to localise, make meaningful and personalise their experiences with the target language; in addition to the need for the learning materials to be efficiently engaging and accommodate all learning styles and are not culturally bias. In Bahrain, the EFL textbooks that were assigned for the project were customised for the Bahraini learners and from my experience, with the textbooks, learners and parents, some of the Bahraini children and their parents have perceived the textbooks to be culturally bias and does not represent the Bahraini culture.

### **3.5 Empirical studies and the age factor**

A number of researchers have paid much attention to the notion that a young learner is a better learner, for example Johnson and Newport (cited in Lightbown and Spada, 2008) while some view the adult learner as a better learner (Aoyama et al. 2008). There are many perceptions about how younger and older learners acquire and learn a foreign/second language. Older learners naturally go through circumstances that require more compound language and expressions of more complex thoughts and ideas while younger learners lack stress and maturity when learning a second language (Bista, 2008). Singleton (1989: 31) introduced numerous proposals which are related to acquiring a

second language and the age of the learner, but the most popular proposals are either "the younger = the better" or "the older = the better".

### **3.5.1 Younger learners = Better learners?**

There are many studies that support "the younger = the better" notion, for example the one by Yamada et al. (cited in Singleton, 1989). Yamada studied 30 Japanese elementary school students between the ages 7 to 10 who did not have any knowledge in English. The researchers listed 40 English words and documented the level of success of the students. The result was that the younger the age the higher the score was (Bista, 2008).

Patkowski (1982) conducted a study on 67 highly educated emigrants to America from different social classes. The control sample were 33 subjects who came to America prior to the age of 15 (pre-puberty group) and the remaining 34 were the post-puberty group from the same backgrounds. Patkowski investigated the spoken English of the samples and examined "a difference between learners who began to learn English before puberty and those who began learning English later after puberty" (p. 58). The findings illustrated a powerful negative connection between syntactic rating and age of arrival. He stated that members of the pre-puberty group were superior in learning English than the post-puberty group members. Patkowski mentioned (p.59):

The only factor which was highly associated with the level of syntactic proficiency attained by learners was the age at which the acquisition of English began. The result, then, appeared to strongly support the hypothesis of an age-related limitation on the ability to acquire full command of a second language.

Patkowski has summed up that pre-puberty language learners acquire the target language better and faster than post-puberty learners. The findings are ideal for my research and are strongly connected to my research but the only downside is now a rather dated study in the TEYL field.

A further study supporting "the younger = the better" hypothesis is by Johnson and Newport (cited in Lightbown and Spada, 2008) who chose 46 Korean and Chinese students for their investigation. They tested a number of syntax and

morphology rules of English between the participants who were of two groups. The first group members were between the ages of 3 and 15; the second group consisted of participants from age 17 to 39. Their main finding was that participants who started learning English at a later age lacked native-like language aptitudes and what they accomplished in the test varied more widely against the other younger group who did extremely well in the test and had native-like language abilities. Even though older language learners reveal an initial improvement over younger language learners, long-lasting mastery of the target language drops with increasing the age of language learning and achievement falls linearly following the age of seven. This study is relevant to my research because it covers **full primary age range** and whether it really makes a difference if the language learners were younger when acquiring a foreign/second language or not.

### **3.5.2 Older learners = Better learners?**

The second proposal is that older students are more successful than children when acquiring a foreign/second language. This hypothesis was aided by numerous studies which focus on adult language learners of different ages and on adolescents. The studies and analyses were derived from language teaching schemes and projects and second language teaching and learning immersion programs. The findings for those studies indicated that older students are much better than younger students when it comes to foreign/second language learning (Muñoz, 2006; Aoyama et al. 2008; Bista, 2008).

A major study related to learning a foreign/second language and age is by Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1982) who studied 51 English students in five different age groups **(3-5 years, 6-7 years, 8-10 years, 12-15 years and adults)** who were learning Dutch. The students' achievements at three different periods in Netherlands were weighed against the achievements of native speakers and two advanced speakers of Dutch. The learners were tested three times with an interval of four to five months, whereas advanced speakers were tested once only. The beginners conducted the tests individually at home or at school in different areas, such as "pronunciation, auditory discrimination, morphology, sentence repletion, sentence translation, vocabulary, story comprehension and

storytelling" (Bista, 2008). The entire test showed a rapid language learning for adults and students aged 12 to 15 years old through the first months of learning Dutch. Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1982) mentioned (p. 103):

The teenagers had achieved almost native performance extremely quickly within a few months of starting to speak Dutch. The crucial findings of relevance to the CPH were that three to five year olds scored consistently worse than the older groups on all the test and that the twelve to fifteen years old showed the most rapid acquisition of all the skills tested.

Their result disputed the argument that younger children are better language learners when learning a foreign/second language. Directly following this research Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle tested 81 students whose target language was Dutch, 31 students were advanced learners and the remaining 51 were younger beginners. The results were that adolescent and adult students outpaced the beginners in all areas except in the imitation condition of the pronunciation test (Pinter, 2011). This research opened a new window for questioning the CPH.

SLA researchers have discussed the impact of age when acquiring a foreign/second language. Lightbown and Spada (2008) argue that the learning process highly depends on the learner's environment and his/her characteristics. Their findings proposed that older learners have better problem solving and metalinguistic abilities than younger learners do. Nonetheless, there are various viewpoints on how adults and children learn a foreign/second language. Children are not under pressure when learning a foreign/second language and they also lack maturity when learning (Bista, 2008), whereas adults "naturally find themselves in such situations that demand more complex language and expression of more complicated ideas" (Bista, 2008: 13). Strong evidence that supports SLA from an early age is mainly from immigrants' experiences since a number of researchers (see Appendix A) have discovered a link between the level of SLA and the age of entering the host country and the length of living there (Lightbown and Spada, 2008).

A longitudinal study of Chinese children and adolescents learning English in the United States by Jia and Aaronson (2003) discovered that in one year of arrival



to the host country immigrants, up to the age of 9 and younger, changed their favourite language to L2, while older immigrants stuck to their L1. Jia and Aaronson's (2003) study revealed that older immigrants were able to find out who shared their L1 and mingled with them, while the younger ones started mixing with L2 children and making friends. Caldwell-Harris et al. (2008) state that because of social skills and cognitive development, young age is perceived to be a very powerful organising variable.

Conversely, DeKeyser (2000) chose 46 Hungarian immigrants to the United States and tested some morphological and syntactic English language rules of the participants of age groups from 3 to 15 and from 17 to 39. He found out that younger immigrants lacked the native-like language ability and their performance on the test varied more extensively; he concluded that older learners were better learners supporting one of the hypotheses in SLA that older learners succeed better than younger learners in SLA (Bista, 2008).

### **3.5.3 Hours of exposure to a foreign/second language**

Some instructed contexts studies (e.g. García Mayo and García Lecumberri 2003; Cenoz, 2002) proved through empirical evidence that earlier could be better if it is combined with massive exposure where students could be given an opportunity to take part in various second/foreign language social contexts. Muñoz (2010) argues that it has been recommended that the higher accomplishment of young students in classrooms' settings could take a longer period of time to occur because of the scarcity of the input that the students have access to (Singleton and Ryan 2004). Muñoz (2006) states that the differences in both the quality and quantity of the input that students have access to in a foreign language setting and in a natural setting, like in cases of immigrants, are essential to be ignored. Considering the similarities among instructed language learning contexts and age in a naturalistic language learning contexts, it has been remarked that length of residence seems to be a variable of second language proficiency level after an initial period (Long 2007). She claims that this could not be the case in classroom learning contexts where the amount of input that could be equal to the initial period in a natural setting would not be offered. "In such a context, students' amount of instruction can be

expected to correlate with proficiency scores, although research has shown that the relation of time spent learning a language and the level of proficiency achieved is not always linear” (Muñoz, 2010: 45).

Muñoz (2010) argues that there are crucial differences between foreign language learning settings and naturalistic language learning settings which may prevent the generalization of one context is preferable than the other. According to Muñoz (2010), it has been proved by some researchers (DeKeyser 2000, Johnson and Newport 1989) that long-term advantages of young learners is not found in some foreign language learning settings. Also, she suggests that an instructed language learner does not have the same access to the type and amount of input that engagement in second language communities requires and therefore this lack of exposure may prevent the students from advancing from their supposed superiority at implicit second/foreign language learning (Muñoz, 2010). Simultaneously, explicit instructions which are provided by language classrooms favour explicit language learning, upon which an older learner is superior because of his/her greater cognitive maturity (Muñoz, 2010).

Muñoz (2008:14) proposes that researchers in a language learning educational context should be given guidance to set goals that are relevant for and specific to the field of classroom language learning. She suggests the following points (Muñoz, 2008: 14):

1. *To determine the amount of exposure required for an early start to be effective in promoting language learning.*
2. *To focus on the relative gains of different-age pupils with different types of time distribution.*
3. *To determine short-term and long-term benefits of starting at different ages.*
4. *To compare the learning rate of different age learners to inform educators about what to expect after n years of foreign language instruction from the different age groups.*

#### **3.5.4 Variables related to age factor**

There are many variables which are connected to the age factor, such as learning styles, motivation, attitudes, opportunity, anxiety, environment, self-confidence, individual personality. Those most related to foreign/second

language learning are motivation, opportunity, individual differences and environment (Schafer, 2012).

#### **3.5.4.1 Motivation**

According to Dörnyei (2003) researchers have examined instructional practices which language instructors employ to create and sustain students' motivation. He states that approaches where language learners manage factors and variables which affect their language learning process and motivation have been recently widely explored; for example changing goals, the need of self-assurance and distractions (Dörnyei, 2003).

Language learners' enthusiasm and motivation can easily fluctuate from task-to-task and even from day-to-day (Dörnyei, 2002), but utilizing various and thought-provoking instructional activities can help language learners to concentrate and be occupied with the instructional content (Dörnyei and Csizer, 1998). Studies by Dörnyei (2002) investigating the best way to develop language learners' motivation propose that social factors (like partner's motivation, group dynamics and learning environment) influence learners' classroom behaviour, achievement, effort and attitude. These factors could positively and negatively affect the young Bahraini learners in this study. Some learners are eager to learn especially if their parents support them and have a positive stance towards learning English from Grade 1. On the other hand some students are reluctant to learn English because of their negative stance towards learning English in general and the English speaking countries in particular. They perceive that English is an unimportant language to be learnt especially in an Arabic speaking country like Bahrain.

#### **3.5.4.2 Opportunity**

Opportunity and motivation collaborate in affecting foreign/second language learning (Schafer, 2012). Schafer (2012) argues that enthusiastic and motivated learners are expected to look for opportunities outside the language classroom that develop their language abilities. "It would make sense that the number of

opportunities the brain has to store and reinforce patterns, accents, concepts and meanings of a language the better the information would be stored and processed" (Schafer, 2012: 4-5). Many language instructors emphasize that varied and recurrent compressible/modified input is the basis for foreign/second language learning, (Achibald, 2005).

#### **3.5.4.3 Individual personality**

Achibald (2005) states that it is very hard to predict language abilities or knowledge in any section of communicative competence (like sociolinguistic, syntax, cohesion) based on the age of the foreign/second language learner. He suggested individual differences in personalities that affected language learning. These consisted of attribution theory (the way learners clarify the reasons for their failure or success in language learning), taking risks and defeating the obstacles that may appear while language learning, feasibility of self (when language learners are capable of task performance) and finally readiness to converse in SLL (Schafer, 2012). Individual personalities may play a role in the Bahraini students' achievement in learning EFL since both younger and older learners can face feelings of hostility, indecision, anger, estrangement, sadness, frustration, unhappiness even physical illness while language learning (Brown, 2000).

#### **3.5.4.4 Age difference**

It is suggested that language instructors must generate a setting conducive to foreign/second language learning through supporting group cohesion in class. Group and pair working tasks present language learners with situations where they can develop a sense of community and exchange information (Florez and Burt, 2001). Schafer (2012) stated that the language learning class should be a 'safe place' to study and apply the target language. He argues that the main reason why adults study a second language is for integrating into an inexperienced culture and society, for instance when emigrating to somewhere new or for self-development in academic studies for a better future. He claims that a definite "cool factor exists for adults in learning a second language, but

the peer pressure children encounter in language learning is quite unlike what the adults experience" (Schafer, 2012: 5). This could be witnessed in Bahrain where some younger English language learners often have numerous constraints upon them to be conventional. This is because they are informed in actions, words and thoughts that they should be like their peers, elder brothers/sisters, cousins or neighbours (Fakhro, 2009). It might be more likely that older language learners are likely to endure linguistic differences than younger ones and as a result speech errors are more willingly absolved (Schafer, 2012).

### **3.6 Perceptions**

Many studies have researched the different perceptions of learners about their teachers, the language they are studying and about the language learning process. Also, teachers have their own personal perceptions about their aptitudes, strengths and weaknesses. Even parents have perceptions about how good their children are doing in school, the school their children go to and the EFL/ESL teachers. Therefore, it is of great value and importance for this research to define what the term perceptions means in this research study. The meaning of the term 'perceptions' for my research is based on two definitions from the literature:

- a. Perceptions are the thoughts, experiences, personal points of view, knowledge, values or understanding that influence humans' behaviours (Edwards, 1989). This interpretation is the one to be adapted to define perceptions of the Bahraini students, parents and EFL teachers for this research study.
- b. This definition is old but very valuable and it states that perceptions express and describe human's ultimate experiences about himself/herself and about the world around him/her (Lindsay and Norman, 1977).

How humans consider and analyse whatever they perceive is deeply influenced by a number of factors such as their feelings, past experiences, values,

imaginations, cultural settings, beliefs and memories (Hadla, 2013). Since the degree and subject of these influences will differ from one person to another, the same matter or item may be perceived in a different way by different persons.

The following points will view perceptions from the language learners, teachers and parents' perspectives. Language learners' perceptions are important because it can give a view of their preferences and what they like, dislike or even what to change in the learning/teaching process and in the language class. It is important to explore perceptions from the teachers' perspectives since they are capable of influencing the effectiveness of the language learning/teaching process (Griffiths, 2007). Parents' perceptions are important because they can play an important role in their children's achievement and they may have a vital role in motivating or demotivating their children (Bartram, 2007). For example, from my experience, some Bahraini parents have their own perceptions about their children's English language teachers, the learning/teaching processes, methods used in the English classrooms and even the English syllabus.

### **3.6.1 Learners' perceptions**

Insights obtained from almost two decades of study and research in foreign and L2 development in formal and natural settings have alerted us that language learning is mainly a learner and learning oriented action (Brown, 2001). Therefore, there has been a lot of focus on the premier role of young learners in the language learning process. Their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about the language learning process are becoming the most discussed variables in the field (Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004).

Makarova (1997) argues that in learner-centred approaches to language learning younger students have a better and bigger role in the teaching and learning process which results in positive beliefs, perceptions, interests, and attitudes toward language learning. Learner-centred approaches encompasses teaching methods that change the focus of instruction from the teachers to the learners and they aim at developing students' independence and autonomy through shifting the responsibility to the learners and focusing on practices and skills that enable independent problem-solving and lifelong learning (Jones,

2007). Also, Rifkin (2000) states that students' perceptions, beliefs and preferences about the learning process are always "of critical importance to the success or failure of any student's efforts to master a foreign language" (p. 394). An old study by Nunan (1988) states that not a single curriculum can claim that it is strictly learner-centred except when students' perceptions and subjective needs which are related to the learning process are taken into consideration. Bada and Okan (2000) state that a lot of language instructors do admit the need to realize and understand students' perceptions and preferences, but they might not really consult students when preparing and carrying out language activities. This is why language instructors, syllabus designers and curriculum developers must notice their learners' preferences and perceptions (Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004). When they acknowledge them they can consider those perceptions and preferences, then design and apply alternative methods and activities in their language classrooms (Barkhuizen, 1998). Jordan (1997) argues that even when students' perceptions, requirements and needs contrast with the language instructors' desires and preferences they can both discuss and agree on a negotiated syllabus procedure and come to reasonable agreements and realistic arrangements. This could be highly problematic in reality because negotiating learning materials, learning objectives and syllabus in different contexts between teachers and learners could be challenging. It could be difficult in many countries because they have fixed educational rules, syllabus and textbooks; however teachers might be able to adapt the teaching methodology in order to suit students' needs.

Kumaravadivelu (1991) states that "the more we know about the learner's personal approaches and personal concepts, the better and more productive our intervention will be" (p. 107). I agree with that and strongly believe that EFL/ESL instructors should discover and observe the perceptions of their learners in class. Block argues that students of all age are aware of what goes on in their classes and that instructors ought to try to adjust their task orientation to that of their students.

### **3.6.2 Learners' perceptions and the society**

When considering students', especially young learners', perceptions towards instructional tasks and activities, sociocultural standards of different cultures and societies may play a very significant role. In certain societies with a top-down hierarchy, as in Bahrain, the roles of the instructor and learners are formed in a way that students' participation in class is very limited (Fakhro, 2009). Traditional teaching/learning styles based on a teacher-centred classroom might affect "learners perceived self-confidence and their knowledge base to make informed choices in relation to instructional activities" (Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004, p.2). Encouraging students' participation in the teaching/learning process in such countries requires a lot of patience and could be done with sensitivity and care. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) state that the sociocultural perceptions the instructors and learners take to class becomes a hidden yardstick for judgements on the teaching/learning process, on how/whether to ask questions and on the role of the textbooks in the syllabus. They clarify through illustrations that mismatching in cultures of learning can influence learners' perceptions and occasionally cause major misunderstandings.

### **3.6.3 Learners' perceptions and teachers' awareness of those perceptions**

Students' perceptions and preferences are one side of the story and the other side is instructors' acknowledgment of those perceptions and preferences that play an important role in affecting their decisions and behaviours in class (Spratt, 1999). A considerable number of studies show that there are significant differences in point of views among students of all ages and their instructors (Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004). Divergences of views between these two interrelated groups have been noted in relation to their perceptions of the language teaching/learning process, what they favour, the nature of language, and students' requirements (Kern, 1995). Block stated that "teachers and learners operate according to quite different systems for describing and attributing purpose to tasks" (1994: 473). As claimed by Kumaravadivelu (1991) both students and instructors have fixed in their minds their own personal perceptions of what constitutes language learning/teaching. This means that instructors and students understand classroom behaviours and activities from their own perspectives and according to their own perceptions, which can differ



sometimes (Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004). This is why Cray and Currie (1996) pointed out that teachers must pay attention to learners' perceptions and if they are not aware of those perceptions then they will not be able to reflect them in their language class practices and teaching behaviours.

#### **3.6.4 Teachers' perceptions**

EFL/ESL teachers make many choices, teaching plans and decisions on a daily basis in their classrooms about the teaching/learning process which they consider is best for their students. For instance, Bahraini EFL teachers will include in their teaching plans a variety of activities which they assume their students might enjoy and benefit from. Some of these activities might be effective and students would benefit from them and use them for communicative and academic purposes.

Teachers' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about SLA received much attention in the literature in the 1950s and 1970s and they have re-emerged in the 1990s as crucial components when working out what motivates teachers' actions (Richardson, 1996).

This interest in the perceptions and beliefs of teachers and students goes back to Horwitz (1987) and her questionnaire. She defines the development and use of a language learning belief through a questionnaire entitled the "Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory" (BALLI). Horwitz (1987) administered her questionnaire to both language instructors and beginning-level language learners at the University of Texas at Austin and it revealed very beneficial results revealing teachers/students' perceptions. Also, Kern (1995) administered the BALLI after more than a decade to language instructors and their students at the University of California, using an identical instrument, comparing directly L2 instructors' perceptions and beliefs about language learning with their students. Kern and Horwitz both found out from analysing the perceptions of both teachers and students that beginning-level students have unrealistic and impractical expectations, prospects and narrowly defined views about learning a second language (Brown, 2009). For this study, some items of the BALLI questionnaire were adapted to construct questionnaires for the Bahraini students and the interview schedule for the Bahraini EFL teachers.

A dissertation study by Bell (2005) provided an extensive profile of instructors' perceptions about both abstract SLA theory and concrete principles of L2 pedagogy. Bell used an 80-item instrument which she distributed across 9 different groups, varying between concrete teacher behaviours, to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' National Standards in Foreign Language Education (1999), to theories and to corrective feedback. One of the 8 items relating to grammar teaching and 2 relating to assessment scored a high level of agreement across the groups. Nearly twenty percent of all items did not perceive a majority disagreement or agreement. Bell believed that all these responses reflected teachers' perceptions of controversial areas in SLA and teaching, for instance error correction, assessment, focus on grammatical form in the classroom and individual student differences.

Inbar-Lourie (2006) looked at language teachers' perceptions of themselves and of how others perceived them. She reviewed some variables that have been noticed to strongly affect language teachers such as "pronunciation, familiarity with the target language and its culture, self-efficacy in teaching the various subject matter components and perceptions as to who qualifies as a native speaker of the language" (p.269). Inbar-Lourie (2006) used a self-report questionnaire with open-ended questions for a sample of 102 mainly female EFL teachers in the Middle East and asked if they perceived themselves as **non-native speakers (NNS)** or **native-speakers (NS)** of English. They were also asked about how other people perceived them, such as their students, **NNS** and **NS**. The results confirmed a gap between self and perceived identities which was clearly revealed in the language teachers' perceptions.

### **3.7 Parents' perceptions about their children's education**

Educational reform over the world has emphasized the significance of parents' perceptions, beliefs and involvement in their children's education (Mattingly et al., 2002). A number of studies have implied that parents' positive perceptions about their children and the education system and parents' involvement is associated with student's high academic achievement, an improvement in student attendance and more positive attitudes from the parents and students toward education (Hill and Tyson, 2009; Hill et al. 2004; Eccles and Harold, 1996).

The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll in 1993 of the public's attitude toward public schools in the USA elicited that a large number of parents whose children went to public schools stated that it was vital for public schools to acknowledge the perceptions of the parents. At that time the parents wanted to encourage some educational programs (Elam, Rose and Gallup, 1993). By acknowledging the parents' perceptions this strong call for support in the USA led to a number of programs that aimed at improving student achievement (Mattingly et al., 2002).

Parents' perceptions about their child's education is very important especially with younger learners, as in this study, although in Bahrain they do not really get to choose what is presented to them at schools or even the schools they go to. Bahraini parents, EFL teachers and students cannot contribute to the educational curricula. The curriculum of all subjects in all grades is imposed by the Bahraini MoE. The parents cannot even choose the government schools which they would like their children to attend. The Bahraini children who go to government schools are allocated in schools according to the towns/cities or villages they live in. When the government school has allocated all the children from an area to the schools then it could consider accommodating students who come from different districts and want to be placed in a particular school. This happens occasionally and the parents must have a valid reason for wanting their children to be in a specific government school. For example, it is a school which is close to a hospital especially for children who have certain health conditions like diabetes or epilepsy or a school where one of the parents works.

### **3.8 Summary**

The perceptions and metacognitive knowledge that learners bring with them to the language class have been recognized as a substantial contributory element in the learning process and ultimate success (Breen, 2001). ESL/EFL learners, their parents and teachers might have strong perceptions about the nature of the language, its level of difficulty, the processes of its acquisition, the success of specific EFL/ESL learning approaches and methodologies, teaching abilities and their personal prospects about achievement (Bernat and Gvozdenko,

2005). Identifying these perceptions and reflecting on their potential impact on language learning/teaching could help in the development of future ESL/EFL curriculum designs and ESL/EFL teachers' practice.

There are many controversial issues in the studies of this chapter; some claim that language learning at an early age is preferable while others state that the age factor is not important when it comes to foreign/SLL. The majority of thinking in this field from research perspective advocates learning a foreign/second language from an early age.

Following the theoretical and empirical evidence the proposal that there are some differences in the foreign/SLL process which are related to age is strongly supported. It has been proposed that younger language learners have followed different language learning approaches, methods and styles which, because of their young age, provides them with advantages for acquiring the language over those who have reached puberty. Children and adult language learners seem to reveal developmental patterns that diverge (Pinter, 2011).

## CHAPTER FOUR

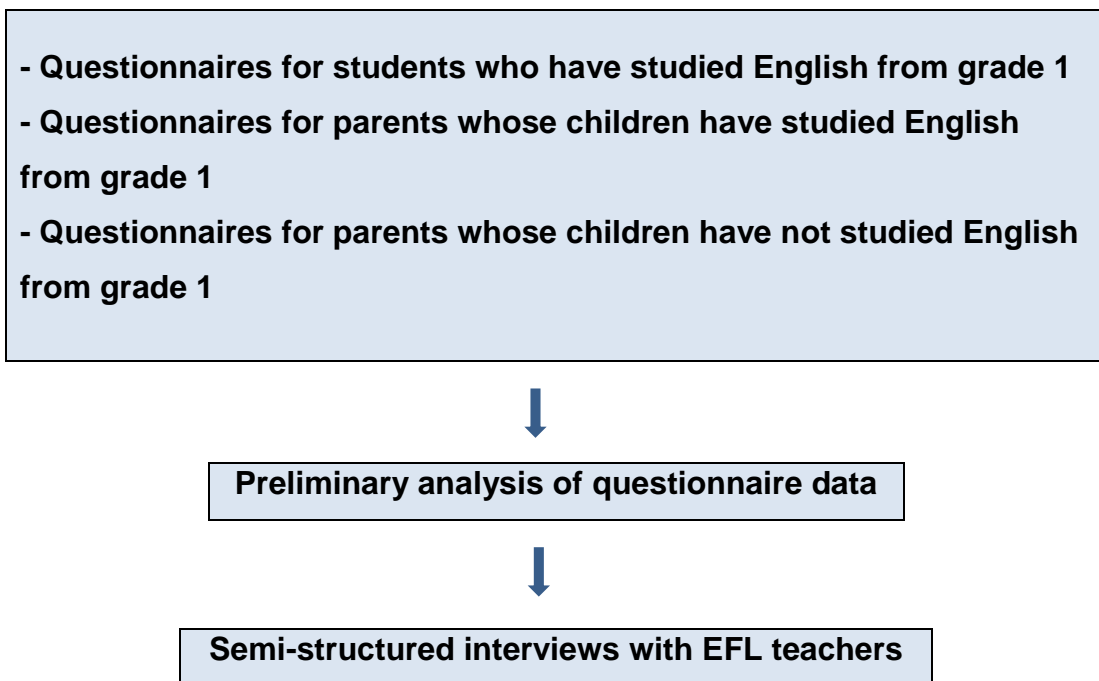
### 4. Methodology

#### 4.1 Introduction

The main objective of this research study is to explore the perceptions of EFL students, parents and EFL teachers about the project of learning English from an early age, 6 years that is in grade 1, in Bahraini government schools. There have been no previous studies examining this subject before in Bahrain and this is the first time in the Bahraini context that a research covers the perceptions of EFL teachers, EFL students and parents in one study. This research asked the following research questions:

- a. What are the perceptions of the students who have been part of the project and studied English from grade 1, now that they are in grade 6 the end of the primary level, about the project of learning English starting from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?
- b. What are the perceptions of the parents whose children have been part of the project for 6 years about learning English starting from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?
- c. What are the perceptions of the parents whose children were not part of the project about learning English from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?
- d. What are the perceptions of the EFL teachers about the project of learning English from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools knowing that they have been applying the project for more than 10 years since it started in 2004?

This chapter presents the paradigm that underpins this research study, the research methodology, the data collection, the sample procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness criteria, ethical issues and limitations of the study. Figure 4.1 shows the general design of this research study where the arrows in the graph represent the logical sequencing of the points discussed in this chapter.



*Figure 4.1: General design of the research study and the data collection sequence*

## **4.2 Paradigm of inquiry**

The interpretive paradigm was chosen to explore the implementation of teaching English from grade 1 with primary level students, their parents and teachers at the end of primary level education in Bahrain.

### **4.2.1 The research is guided by the Interpretivist paradigm**

The interpretive approach for researching has the purpose of interpreting humans' behaviors, their interrelations and contexts. Researchers in this paradigm acknowledge participants' perceptions, views and beliefs of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2003). The interpretive approach is based on interpretations and explanations through their participants' existing ideas, knowledge and attitudes (Radnor 2002). Interpretivists believe that there are many different interpretations of an event or a single situation being studied and the researchers should not manipulate it in any way. This is because they

consider situations as changing rather than stable and they study situations through the participants' eyes and not the researcher's (Cohen et al. 2000).

In this research the participants' perceptions and experiences of the situation being considered and examined is what matters and this is what interpretivists comply with because they advocate the individuality of social phenomena (Creswell, 2003). The study's procedure has the purpose of interpreting humans' behaviours reflected in the perceptions and attitudes of the students, parents and teachers, their interrelations and contexts. It depends on their "views of the situation being studied" (Creswell – 2003, p.8) that is by exploring, studying and interpreting their perceptions.

An interpretive ontology is identified as the product of individual consciousness and the result of individual cognition (Cohen et al. 2000). Walsham (1995) defines the interpretive nature of reality as inter-subjective constructions of shared human's cognitive apparatus and he suggests that people construct their own reality. Ontology concerns the assumptions made about the nature of social reality; these assumptions imply a particular approach to social enquiry. What interpretivists want is to understand the meaning constructed by humans as they fit into the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 2003). Interpretivists state that the existence of objects depend on the awareness of the people (Cohen and Manion, 1994) and since they believe that people view things differently, interpretivists argue that there is no such thing as one reality because each case and every person is unique (Fraenkel and Wallen 2000). Interpretivists presume that reality is constructed by people and that this construction is influenced by cultural and social factors and in the end it guides individuals to shared constructions (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). This is applicable to this research study because the existence of realities, constructed by the participants in this research and influenced by their social and cultural perceptions and beliefs, depend on how the participants interpret the world/situation around them (Radnor, 2002).

An interpretivist epistemology defines knowledge to be the results from interactions between the inquirer and the subject (Hadla, 2013). Interpretive knowledge claims depend on evidence of the interpretive researcher's involvement with other people and how much they accept the researcher's

interpretations. The interpretivist's view of knowledge is something that can be experienced; thus interpretivists study how individuals view the world and consider themselves tools for developing theories through personal experiences (Cohen and Manion 1994). They are concerned with how individuals look at the world because to them this is the only source for interpreting the social world. Cohen and Manion (1994) make it very clear that the interpretive researcher can and does come up with different theories. Theory to them is an interpretation that reveals how people interpret their surrounding world. The epistemological stance in interpretive research is that meaning is subjective (Cohen et al., 2000). The role of this research is to discover the social world as "perceived and experienced by its members, from the inside" so as to value and understand "why people do what they do" (Blaikie, 1993: 176). Grasping the "subjective meaning the action has for the actor" (Carr and Kemmis, 1983: 88) is essential and very important since "what people believe to be true is more important than any objective reality; people act on what they believe" (Fetterman, 1988: 18). Social reality is the subjective meaning and understanding which exist in a person's mind (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). The aim of this study is to portray, describe, recognize and understand the social reality for the EFL students, teachers and the parents based on their accounts of their own perceptions, attitudes and actions and not the actions that others take (Blaikie, 1993).

#### **4.2.2 Reasons for choosing the Interpretive paradigm**

An interpretivist stance was chosen for this research for five reasons. First, this study aims at exploring the perceptions of the students, their teachers and parents and is not trying to make generalisations (Creswell, 2003). Second, I do not agree with dealing with humans as objects and believe that all social phenomena are unique; therefore humans cannot be explored through models created exclusively for physical sciences (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000). Third, the interpretive approach is concerned with revealing knowledge from people, their perceptions thoughts, feelings and preferences about how they feel and think about certain circumstances in their social context. Fourth, humans have intentions, goals and free will, therefore they cannot be studied through models which were made and used for physical sciences (Hadla, 2013); they ought to be studied as active agents (Hadla, 2013). Finally, because the aim of this



research is to explore a certain social phenomenon (Learning English from Grade 1 and the participants' perceptions about it) and as an interpretivist researcher my interests are in the social construction of meaning, this paradigm allows me to have various interactions with the participants in their social contexts to make sense of their experiences and perceptions (Hadla, 2013).

#### **4.3 The research design: A case study**

In compliance with the exploratory nature of the methodological approach adopted in this study, the research design of this study employs a case study approach. An explorative approach was adopted to explore the perceptions of EFL students, parents and EFL teachers about teaching English from an early age to Bahraini EFL students at government schools in Bahrain. In order to accomplish that, case study research approach was chosen because it draws its significance from the "emphasis upon the uniqueness of events or actions, arising from their being, shaped by the meanings of those who are the participants in the situation" (Pring, 2000: 40). Yin (2003, p.13) defines case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident". Lodico et al. (2006) state that case study research is one type of qualitative research which attempts to obtain deep understanding and insights of a situation, an individual or a group, explores processes, and uncovers meanings. The case for this study is the project of learning English from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools. Its goal is to explore the perceptions of three different participants which are the Bahraini students, the Bahraini parents and the Bahraini EFL teachers about the project.

The research's employment of an interpretive paradigm does not mean to depend solely on qualitative data collection methods. In contrast, the data collection procedure in this research made use of various data collection instruments including both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The rationale behind combining both quantitative and qualitative data in a case study methodology is constructed from the view that neither methods are adequate in giving a detailed and complete view of the case being studied if

used solely (Al-Nwaiem, 2012). Consequently, the research utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to complement one another and to benefit from the advantages and strengths of both methods and types of data when combined together (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Weinreich (1996) states that the combination of data methods in a case study methodology provides researchers with the best chance to answer their research question/s and deliver an in-depth understanding of their results. For this research study the case is learning English from Grade 1 studied from different angles through both qualitative and quantitative data collecting methods.

#### **4.4 Data collection methods**

Silverman (2005) stated that when choosing methods everything depends on what the researchers are trying to find out and no research method is intrinsically better than the other.

For this research the usage of both quantitative and qualitative methods was combined which provided more insights to the case being studied that might be missed if only one method was applied. A quantitative data collection method was chosen of EFL students and parents' questionnaires and this method was supported by a qualitative method which was semi-structured interviews with the EFL teachers. The purpose of combining both methods was to try and gain a stronger understanding of the participants' perceptions about the project of learning English starting from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools.

The rationale for using both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments for this research is based on 'triangulation' which means combining and applying more than one method for gathering data when exploring and investigating the same phenomenon (Greene, Caracelli and Graham's 1989). Triangulation was used to determine how far the different chosen methods, questionnaires and interviews, maintain the credibility of the findings of this research. **It allowed** valuable quantitative and qualitative findings to complement each other by seeking "elaboration, enhancement, illustration and clarification of the results from one method with results from the other method and this helps in understanding the overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon" (Johnson and Christensen, 2012: 439). The combination of both methods gave better

chances of exploring and asking different and various questions to the participants in their social context (Cohen et al., 2000). I personally view quantitative and qualitative approaches as completing and complementing each other and not as competing with each other (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003).

#### **4.4.1 Questionnaires**

The questionnaires were constructed after deep reading into the literature of four fields as in the Literature Review chapter:

- a. SLA teaching and learning theories
- b. Learning EFL/ESL from an early age
- c. Teaching EFL/ESL to young learners
- d. Exploring and measuring perceptions

Thomas (2004) stated that questionnaires are used as data collection methods for many types of survey projects including perceptions, identifying interests, identifying experiences, determining attitudes and opinions. Questionnaires have been widely used to explore students' and parents' perceptions (Thomas, 2004) and therefore questionnaires were implemented in this study. On the other hand, some researchers do not employ questionnaires for exploring perceptions claiming that they are inadequate to understand people's emotions, feelings or behaviours (see Ackroyd and Hughes, 1981). For this study, the questionnaires helped in clarifying the related concepts from the participants' perceptions to the research questions.

Questionnaires were chosen for this study because they could comprise a combination of open and closed questions, would cover any sample size, can capture the specificity of any particular situation (Cohen et al., 2000). Another reason for choosing semi-structured questionnaires is that a number of previous studies have asked EFL/ESL students and parents for their perceptions about the teaching of English to young learners, about learning English at an early age, and about SLA using semi-structured questionnaires. These studies were built upon for this research and items selected but modified for the parents and students' questionnaires (See Appendix A). Modifying parents and students'

questionnaires was the best choice for this study. This is because some participants could view questionnaires as an "intrusion into their lives; be it in terms of time taken to complete the questionnaire, the level of threat or sensitivity of the questions or the possible invasion of privacy" (Cohen et al., 2000: 245). Consequently, in terms of modifications, making the questionnaires of this study clear reduced the participants stress and saved their time and energy. Nonetheless, it is not easy to structure questionnaires as they must be carefully designed and constructed so that they generate accurate and usable responses. Therefore, the design of the questionnaire for this research was closed items with a Likert scale for answers with only one open-ended question for both the parents and the students' questionnaires.

Bernhardt (2014) states that questionnaires and interviews are common approaches used for understanding perceptions. She argues that questionnaires are the best way to explore perceptions because they are answered anonymously to explore and measure people's perceptions, experiences and behaviours after exploring them. Various procedures of measurement are used for the determination of perceptions of humans towards a situation or an object. These measurements are either implicit where the participants do not know what is really going to be measured because they were not informed about it; or explicit measurements where subjects are told that the goal is to measure their perceptions towards a particular situation or an object (Houwer, 2003). An explicit measurement was used for this research since the participants were informed that their perceptions would be measured through the study's description sheet which was attached to the questionnaire (see Appendix B).

#### **4.4.1.1 The construction of the questionnaires**

Eiselen et al. (2005) state that when developing questionnaires researchers should consider a number of aspects such the research question(s) and objectives of the research study. By doing this researchers will bound their questions/items to be relevant questions/items and not complicated. They also suggest that the questions should not be lengthy and that needless and pointless questions should be eliminated; "no 'nice to haves' should be asked,

only 'need to haves" (Eiselen et al., 2005: 3). Finally, Eiselen et al. (2005) argue that the meanings of the questions, wording, and implications in the questions should not be offensive, bias, sexist or embarrassing to the participants.

The questionnaires in this research consisted of closed response items and an open-ended item. Closed response items are simply coded and tabulated quantitatively and provide specified answers, such as a Likert scale (Abdel Hamid, 2011). Brown (2001) states that closed response items have three valuable qualities: they offer consistency among items with reference to the different kinds of acquired data, can be answered easily and are unlikely to be left out by participants, and finally are reasonably objective. The response items for this research were in the form of a Likert five-point scale for the parents and three-point scale for the children which required participants to choose one of five/three replies marking their level of agreement with the questionnaire items. This method listed choices for the Bahraini participants underlying a negative-to-positive dimension, for example: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree. The developed questionnaires provided responses which were anonymous, not time consuming, and with a predetermined scale for answers (Cohen et al., 2000). For the participants in this research these qualities were an advantage because from my personal experience some Bahrainis can become frustrated when asked to write down detailed information and questions which require long answers or are complicated will be left out.

While constructing the items of the questionnaires care was taken so that the items would answer the research questions, were clear to the participants, could provide relatively objective analysis when analysing the data at a later stage and did not stray away from the research's objective which is exploring the perceptions of the participants about the project of teaching English from an early age, grade1, in Bahraini government schools. The open-ended question was the last question and it included an item where three response options were offered and participants were asked to select one of the responses and to justify their choice in their own words. The participants were provided with three choices (Grades 1, 3 or 4) and were asked to choose the grade which they think is the most suitable for starting learning English in Bahrain primary government schools. The reason behind selecting these three grades specifically was

because Bahrain has only experienced teaching English starting from Grades 1, 3 and 4. English was taught in Bahrain starting from Grade 4 until 2000, then in 2000 English was taught starting from Grade 3 and finally from 2009 English started from Grade 1.

Three questionnaires were developed for this study. One of the challenges of constructing three questionnaires was that it was a complex task which involved considerable revisions and modifications and then translation into Arabic. The first questionnaire was for EFL students who have studied English from grade 1; the second questionnaire was for parents whose children had studied English from grade 1; and the third questionnaire was for parents whose children had not studied English from grade 1. The questionnaires were divided into 3 sections. The first section consisted of demographic information asking about gender and the name of school (for the students) or the name of school the child goes to (for the parents). The second section in the questionnaire for the parents whose children had studied English from grade 1 consisted of 13 items on a Likert five-point scale; the second section for parents whose children had not studied English from grade 1 consisted of 11 items on a Likert five-point scale. In this part parents were asked about their perceptions on the project of teaching English from grade 1 to young learners in Bahraini government schools. The children's questionnaire consisted of 16 items on a Likert three-point scale asking them about their perceptions on the project. Cronbach Alpha from a Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used to ensure the validity of all the questionnaires and it will be elaborated upon in the next chapter. The third section was the same in all three questionnaires and it consisted of an open-ended question asking the participants about the grade when they feel children should start learning English and an explanation for their given answers was requested. Based on previous research, mainly from Hadla, (2013); Lobo, (2013); Indraswari, (2012); Wang, (2008); Raymond, (2008); and Horwitz (1987); (see Appendix C for Questionnaires' breakdown) the questionnaires were developed. The questionnaire items were put under main constructs so that the validity of the questionnaires is not threatened.

Matthews and Kostelis (2011) state that for any Likert scale item after determination of the different levels to include in the questionnaire and how items should be written, the logical way is to start by looking into the

demographics of the participants. This is the reason why a Likert three-point, not a five-point scale, was used for children in this research study. The demographics of the children were considered and it was decided to use a Likert three-point scale because one of the challenges which the researcher was faced with while constructing this questionnaire was that children at the age of the targeted sample may struggle to differentiate between response choices in Likert scales of four points or more (Matthews and Kostelis, 2011). For example, some of the children in this research may have found it confusing to distinguish between strongly disagree and disagree, therefore to eliminate the confusion it was considered more appropriate to use a Likert three-point scale for children (Royeen, 1985). According to (Matthews and Kostelis, 2011) the best choice a researcher can provide children with is giving them a Likert three-point scale not through words but through pictures of faces (smileys) because children relate more to faces (Matthews and Kostelis, 2011). This was applied in the questionnaire for children in this study; they were given a questionnaire which asked them to tick a smiley face if they agreed, a straight face if they were neutral and a sad face if they disagreed. This made the questionnaire more child-friendly and easier for the EFL students and they were able to identify their levels of agreement in a simple way. The items in the children's questionnaire were written in a child friendly way avoiding complicated words and sentences which may confuse the children or challenge their level of proficiency (see Appendix D for Students' questionnaire).

A Likert five-point scale is a useful method for obtaining people's perceptions and attitudes (Al-Nwaiem, 2012). For adult participants in this research a Likert five-point scale was chosen because it was the most used scale in earlier questionnaires which explored perceptions and learning English at an early age (see Appendices E and F for Parents' questionnaires) and which the questionnaires in this study were built upon. Brown and Rodgers argue that "Likert scales are generally useful for getting at respondents' views, judgments, or opinions about almost any aspect of language learning" (2002, p.120).

A description of the study and an informed consent form were translated from English to Arabic for the parents and students and attached to the top of the questionnaires (see Appendices G and H).

#### 4.4.1.2 The translation of the questionnaires

According to Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg (1998) there are two main reasons why translation of questionnaires should be carried out when needed: a. when researchers need items or coverage from a certain questionnaire which is in a certain language in developing a new questionnaire in another language, and b. for researchers who want to field items which are originally developed in other languages. The need for questionnaire translation is mostly obvious if the target population speaks a different language than the one the questionnaire will be designed in (Harkness et al., 1998).

For this research the questionnaires were composed in English first and then translated to Arabic because previous questionnaires which were built upon for this study were in English. Thus it made the process of building upon the previous questionnaires and research much easier and it made congregating those questionnaires less time consuming. The items for the questionnaires were written in English with clear wording because a. the phrasing of the questions/items can determine the kinds of responses the researcher will attain, b. it was easier for the translation process later on (Eiselen et al. 2005). Subsequently, the questionnaires were translated into Arabic **by the researcher**.

The translation of the questionnaires was a necessity because most parents whose children go to government schools speak very little and sometimes no English at all. Since the level of English proficiency of the EFL students was not really known, it was assumed that it would be much easier for them if the questionnaires were in Arabic. Arabic is the participants' mother tongue and to express their perceptions in their own language would be much easier for them and beneficial for the research because they would hopefully be able to provide data about their perceptions and feelings towards starting English from grade 1 (Behling and Law, 2000).

Questionnaires' translations are commonly expected to ask the same questions and provide the same response options using a close version of the source questionnaire, the original questionnaire. This has been achieved by many researchers in different areas of research (see Behling and Law, 2000; Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg, 1998). On the other hand "languages are not isomorphic and so translation cannot be expected to operate on a one-to-one



basis across languages” (Harkness et al., 1998: 93). Harkness et al. suggest that the content of the ‘source questionnaire’ may not totally match with comes out the ‘target language questionnaire’ and this is a general disadvantage when translating questionnaires (Harkness et al., 1998: 93).

The procedure which was used in this research for translating the parents and students’ questionnaires was ‘direct’ or ‘one for one’ translation as this is the most time and money saving questionnaire translation procedure (Acquadro et al., 1996). The name of the procedure simply defines its process. Basically direct translation of the source language questionnaire (English questionnaire) was generated to the target language (Arabic) to the best of my ability. This was useful in terms of organizing the work although some researchers claim that depending only on one researcher’s skills is unfair (see Acquadro et al., 1996). The translations were therefore checked by a certified translation agency where they modified the wording in some items of the Arabic questionnaire for the children to make it easier for them then back translated the questionnaires to English (see figure 4.2).



*Figure 4.2: The procedure of translation for the questionnaires*

#### **4.4.2 Interviews**

Turner (2010) argues that interviews are useful tools to find out how people perceive and think about a certain issue or topic and why they feel that way or hold certain views about the phenomenon under investigation/discussion. Interviews are the most commonly used research methods for gathering complex and rich data from participants and they are generally associated with qualitative research. In this study semi-structured interviews were chosen because they enabled interaction with the research participants and discussion of their interpretations and meanings so as to examine the phenomenon, their

perceptions towards learning English from an early age in Grade 1, with sufficient detail, openness and depth but from the point of view of a small population. Semi-structured interviews were chosen only for the teachers and not for the students and parents, because the Bahraini Ministry of Education is reluctant to give permission for interviews with children, parents and any person who is not an educationalist. The ministry often takes a long time to decide if such permission can be granted, usually 2-4 months, and frequently the request is refused; this reticence by the ministry could be to silence the parental voice in providing their views about the education system in Bahrain and about the project. This was a strong reason why interviews were chosen for the teachers solely since they could provide their, hopefully, honest answers and perceptions about the project and are not deemed to give only positive responses that satisfy the ministry.

In this research study semi-structured interviews were used where topics and open-ended questions were created but the exact sequence and wording of the interview schedule was not followed with each respondent. This enabled greater flexibility for the interviews and enabled discussion of emerging matters or further details about certain issues. The interviews helped in shedding light on the EFL teachers' personal experiences, insights and perceptions about learning English from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools. They also provided meaningful explanations on how different aspects like cultural differences, gender and even teacher performance affected the participants while teaching English from grade 1. The interview questions were constructed after analysing the questionnaires, knowing more what topics and questions to explore further. The schedule was amended after the preliminary analysis of the questionnaires.

The interview schedule was based on five categories (see Appendix I):

1. The benefits and problems of learning English from a young age.
2. The training and support the teachers received.
3. The teachers' experiences in teaching English to young learners.
4. The difficulties the teachers encountered in this project.
5. Suggestions for the future of the project.

Every category was followed by a set of enquiries/probes to help with eliciting extra information about the areas being explored. According to Hadla (2013) probes in an interview schedule help keep the researcher on track and are helpful for the participants especially when they stray away from the topic or pause waiting for the interviewer to ask them a follow up question so they can resume their talk.

## **4.5 Sampling**

The term sample is used to indicate the proportion of a population selected for participation in a study as it refers to the process of selecting individuals who are going to be questioned and interviewed (Opie, 2004). In this study there are three groups of participants: a- the EFL students, b- the parents and c- the EFL teachers and for each group a different sampling strategy was used.

### **4.5.1 Sample of schools**

Participating in this research were five primary government schools, three boys' schools and two girls' schools which were chosen through convenience and purposive sampling. Given (2008) stated that convenience sampling is operated when subjects are easily accessible and accordingly reasonably easy for researchers to investigate and explore. A purposive sample is chosen based on the objective, purpose, and aim of study and the population's knowledge (Crossman, 2015). Purposive sampling serves very specific purposes and/or needs, and the participants are chosen because of certain shared characteristics among them (Crossman, 2015; Trochim, 2006). It refers to deliberate and purposeful selection of participants for taking part in a research to attain variability in the collected data, and to select cases based on accessibility (Alwan, 2006).

The Ministry of Education of Bahrain gave a limit of five schools only for this study but the ministry did not select the schools. Four schools were chosen based on a convenience and accessibility sampling strategy. They were either schools which I previously worked for or worked with on the project for the

Ministry of Education of Bahrain and had easy access to. The fifth school was selected because it accommodated students who had not studied English from Grade 1. It was chosen based on purposive sampling and served the purpose for the sample and was accessible. There are only a small number of primary schools in Bahrain left which accommodate students who have not studied English from Grade 1. By the academic year 2015/2016 these schools will no longer accommodate them because all the students who have not studied English from Grade 1 will be in Grade 7 and those schools will receive students who started learning English from Grade 1.

Four of the schools (2 boys and 2 girls' schools) had applied the project of teaching English from grade 1 to young learners at primary government schools in Bahrain for more than 10 years. The fifth school was a boys' school which did not apply the project since it was accommodating students who did not study English from grade 1, as noted above. The 2 girls' schools were run and administered by women and the 3 boys' schools by men. Pseudonyms will be used when referring to the schools as following:

- The first primary government girls' school: SG1
- The second primary government girls' school: SG2
- The first primary government boys' school: SB1
- The second primary government boys' school: SB2
- The third primary government boys' school, which had not taught English from Grade 1: SB3

#### **4.5.2 EFL students**

The sampling strategy used for selecting the students' was criterion sampling because it selects "all cases that meet some criterion and the participants are chosen according to some eligibility criteria" (Marlow, 2011: 146). The criteria for the students were: any Grade 6 student in the four schools who agreed to participate in the study and had his/her consent form signed by his/her parents. 369 grade six students from four government schools in Bahrain which applied

the project were requested to take part in this research; 262 students met the criteria and had their consent forms signed (see Table 4.1). This gave a total of 111 boys and 151 girls from Grade 6 participating in this research.

There were no students involved from SB3 because these children were not part of the project and asking them about it may have confused and distressed them. The parents of these children took part in the study because I wanted to explore the perceptions of parents whose children did not experience being part of the project, how they perceived the project and how they felt about their children not being part of it.

School	Number of students in Grade 6	Number of student participants	Number of parent participants	Number of EFL teachers	Number of EFL teacher participants
SG1	93	74	65	6	1
SG2	96	77	72	7	1
SB1	90	53	51	5	1
SB2	90	58	46	5	1
SB3	120	Not applicable	69	Not applicable	Not applicable
<b>Total</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>

*Table 4.1: The study's sample*

#### **4.5.3 Parents**

The sampling strategy used for the parents' sample was criterion sampling and it implies that all participants that share certain criteria of usefulness, importance and significance that can assure research quality could participate in this research (Al-Nwaiem, 2012; Kuzel, 1999; Patton 1990). The criteria for choosing the parents sample were: any parent of a Grade 6 student who attends one of the five school which was part the study, who agreed to participate in the study and who signed his/her consent form. A total of 489 sets of parents were requested to take part in the study and 303 responded. Two papers were added to the parents' questionnaire. The first was a one page description of the study and the second was a consent form (see Appendices B and G).

#### 4.5.4 EFL teachers

The selection of the sample for the EFL teachers' interviews was also based on a criterion sampling strategy. Two criteria were used for the EFL teachers sampling. First, EFL teachers who had been/are teaching English from Grade 1 to young learners in Bahraini government schools from the start of the project in 2004. Second, EFL teachers who had applied the project (regardless of the number of years they have been applying it) and were willing to participate in this research study. They were all chosen from the four schools which were selected to be part of the study and, as noted before, which applied the project of learning English from grade 1. Only four teachers agreed to take part in this research study. Participating in this research were four EFL primary level teachers, two women and two men. Two of the EFL teachers were senior teachers and they were all Bahrainis who graduated from the University of Bahrain. Their ages were between 30 – 49 and their teaching experience in teaching EFL to primary level students varied between 11 to 21 years. They had all applied the project of teaching EFL to grade 1 since it started in 2004 and up to now. Pseudonyms were used to assure the participants' anonymity (see Table 4.2).

School	Teachers (Pseudonyms)	Teaching experience	Degree	Current position
SG1	Layla	11 years	Bachelor degrees in English Literature and a Diploma in Education	Teacher
SG2	Esmat	21 years	Master degree in Linguistics	Senior teacher
SB1	Mohamed	18	Master degree in Linguistics	Senior teacher
SB2	Ali	14	Bachelor degrees in English Literature and a Diploma in Education	Teacher

*Table 4.2: Information about the EFL teachers participating in this research*

#### **4.5.5 The sample for piloting the data collection methods and instruments**

The students' questionnaire was piloted with 12 Grade 6 students who studied EFL from grade one, all from the same school, and their parents; in addition 10 parents whose children did not study EFL from grade 1 also participated in the pilot and two EFL teachers piloted the interview questions.

##### **4.5.5.1 Schools**

The schools which were selected for the pilot study were SG1 and SB3 and both were chosen through convenience sampling based on two grounds, accessibility and purposiveness. SG1 was a primary government school which I previously worked for and therefore was easy for me to access. SB3 was selected deliberately because it was the school which accommodated students who were not part of the project and also I had worked with them formerly, as noted before.

##### **4.5.5.2 Participants**

All the participants in the piloting of the data collection methods and instruments were chosen on the basis on convenience sampling. Convenience sampling was chosen because it allowed the selection of participants who are close, reachable, and could elucidate and enrich the case being studied (Ahmed, 2011). The 12 EFL students and their parents were chosen through convenience sampling by the EFL senior teacher in the school. The head mistress in SG1 asked the senior teacher in that school to choose students and their parents who were willing to pilot the questionnaires, whom she knows personally and who could be accessed easily. The same sampling strategy was adopted by SB3 where the head master asked the head teacher in school to select parents who he knew personally would agree to pilot the questionnaire and who were accessible. For the two teachers who piloted the interview questions, they were chosen from SG1 through convenience sampling which enabled the selection of two teachers who previously worked with me and who were perceptive and provided rich information about the interview questions.

## **4.6 Piloting the data collection methods**

Castro (2013) argues that piloting data collection instruments is significant for their success. It helps in refining the data collection plan which normally involves both the procedures to be followed as well as the content of the data (Yin, 2009). It was important for the piloting process to be performed to intensify the trustworthiness and credibility of the methods of this research. The pilot data granted this study a valuable chance to check the simplicity of the wording and clarity of the questionnaire statements and interview questions and to detect any redundancy or/and leading statements/questions to attempt to ensure objectivity in the questionnaires. It also helped in providing considerable insights into the main issue being explored and ensuring that the acquired data would be able to answer the study's four research questions (Cohen, et al. 2007).

### **4.6.1 Piloted questionnaires**

12 students and their parents piloted the questionnaires for the students who studied English from grade 1 and parents whose children took part in the project, all from one school. 10 other parents piloted the questionnaire of the parents whose children did not study English from grade 1 in another school.

The reason for piloting the questionnaires is that although the questionnaires were translated into Arabic **by the researcher** and the respondents were Arabs, the language of the questionnaires required checking and confirming that it had no ambiguity and was not complicated. Arabic like other languages has words with double meanings and those words or any other unclear items which will result in vague meanings of the questions and confuse the respondents needed to be avoided. The questionnaires, especially the children's questionnaires, needed confirmation that they were clear enough without changing the meanings of the items.

The senior teacher in the school which had applied the project (SG1) presented the questionnaires to the EFL students and their parents and collected them back. She provided EFL students with two questionnaires, one for them and the second for their parents, and requested that they hand over the questionnaires to their parents to sign the consent forms. Only by having their consent forms



signed, both the students and their parents, could participate in the pilot study. Attached to the questionnaires were three papers, 1. a consent form, 2. a description of the research study, and 3. a blank page. The blank page contained simple instructions informing the parents and students that they were kindly requested to write their feedback about the questionnaires on this paper. They were asked to note down any changes needed in the wording or content of the questionnaires in their opinion, and state how long it took them to complete the questionnaire.

All the necessary modifications needed for the clarification of all the questionnaires were completed after piloting the questionnaires and receiving feedback from EFL students and parents. For example, some Arabic words/sentences required rephrasing and others were omitted and replaced to make them more comprehensible.

Teijlingen and Hundley (2001: 2) stated that data contamination can arise in two ways “where data from the pilot study are included in the main results and where pilot participants are included in the main study, but new data are collected from these people”. Thus, neither the data gathered from the piloted questionnaires were counted in the main research results nor did the people who took part in the pilot questionnaires/interviews participate again in the research study.

#### **4.6.2 Pilot interviews**

An important aspect for the preparation of interviews is implementing a pilot trial for the interview questions (Turner, 2010). This helps researchers in verifying any mistakes, weaknesses, limitations or other flaws in the design of the interview and gives them a chance to make amendments and revisions before conducting the actual interviews (Kvale, 2007). It also enables them to practise interviewing and using an audio recorder. Piloting the interview questions should be conducted with respondents who share the same interests with the actual participants of the interview, but certainly not the same people (Turner, 2010).

The interview questions were piloted to make sure that they were well-founded and effective in encouraging participants to talk about their perceptions, to discover the different problems that could arise when conducting the actual interviews, to remove/avoid vague and confusing questions, and to find out how long an interview would last. The piloting of the interview questions took place after analysis of the questionnaires (see figure 4.1). Two female teachers from the same schools who had taught EFL for more than ten years to young Bahraini learners in government schools piloted the interview questions and they were not chosen to be among the main study sample. Convenience sampling was used for selecting the sample for the piloted interviews.

The EFL teachers were interviewed separately in the English Language Teachers' Room at the end of term when there were no students. The first interview was completed in 42 minutes and the second in 47 minutes; both interviews were audio recorded. The teachers were very welcoming and they both provided feedback on the interview questions especially on the probes which should be asked or eliminated. Their suggestions and comments were taken into consideration and modifications were made to some of the interview questions especially the questions which the teachers stated were redundant and would deliver the same answers. For example, the third question was: What do you think of the project? The teachers stated that the question was vague and could be divided into several categories, such as difficulty, enjoyment, personal experiences and language proficiency. Based on the teachers' feedback, the second question was broken into several questions and probes (see Appendix I).

#### **4.7 Data collection procedures**

The research study's data was therefore gathered through four different methods:

- a. EFL students' questionnaires
- b. Questionnaires for parents whose children have been part of the project, questionnaires
- c. Questionnaires for parents whose children have not been part of the project, questionnaires
- d. EFL teachers' interviews

#### **4.7.1 Students' questionnaires**

In each school the EFL teacher and I, the same teachers who were later interviewed, explained to the students that the questionnaire was about exploring their perceptions on the project of teaching EFL from grade 1 which had been applied with them for 6 years. A description of the study was handed to the students and it was made clear to them that answering the questionnaire was voluntary (see Appendix B). The EFL teachers handed the questionnaires only to those who volunteered, wanted to participate and showed interest. They were asked to take the questionnaires home and have the consent form, attached to the top of the questionnaires with a description of the study, signed by their parents because they were underage and the legal age for adulthood in Bahrain is 18 (see Appendix H for Students' consent form). The EFL teachers were given specific guidelines for the collection of the questionnaires (see Appendix J) and they were provided with returning envelopes for the questionnaires to be placed in and sealed. The collection period for all questionnaires, whether students or parents' questionnaires, was one week after the date they were distributed. This period was chosen by the Ministry of Education claiming that pupils/parents need time to answer questionnaires due to their busy schedules or family commitments. The teachers followed the collection procedures accurately, collected the questionnaires then sealed them one week after distributing them. They handed the sealed envelopes to the head master/mistress who took the responsibility of contacting me for the collection of the questionnaires.

#### **4.7.2 Parents' questionnaires**

The five schools participating in this study took the responsibility of handing the questionnaires to the parents of all Grade 6 students. It is against government schools laws in Bahrain to approach parents directly without approaching the Ministry of Education first which hands researchers permits and directs them to the head of schools. A file which contained the questionnaires was given to the head mistress/master in each school with return envelopes and he/she was asked to hand them to the parents. The head master/mistress was given guidelines for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires (see Appendix J). The head master/mistress handed the teachers a copy of the guidelines and directed them to distribute the questionnaires to the students and ask the students to hand them to their parents. The EFL teachers took the responsibility of handing grade six students the questionnaires and they collected them back after one week and returned them sealed to the head master/mistress who contacted me for collection.

In total, 369 questionnaires were distributed to grade six students who studied English from an early age in grade 1; 369 questionnaires were distributed to the parents of grade six students who studied English from an early age in grade 1; 120 questionnaires were distributed to the parents of grade six students who did not study English from an early age in grade 1.

#### **4.7.3 EFL teachers' interviews**

The EFL teachers' semi-structured interviews were conducted in English and took place separately in the English Language Teachers' Room in schools for about forty minutes. Before starting the interview all EFL teachers were given a full description of the research study and were asked to sign a consent form where they stated their consent to be interviewed, audio recorded, and quoted in the research. They were assured that pseudonyms would be used to ensure their anonymity. In total, four interviews were conducted with EFL teachers who applied the project of teaching English from an early age in grade 1.

## **4.8 Data analysis**

The analysis of data involves a methodical search for meaning from the gathered information so that what is learnt can be communicated to others in an understandable way (Hatch, 2002). The data gathered in this study consisted of:

- 262 EFL students' questionnaires
- 303 Parents questionnaires
- 4 EFL teachers' interviews

The data analysis for this research combined both qualitative and quantitative data and the data analysis methods that were utilized aimed at integrating statistical results with qualitative findings.

### **4.8.1 Quantitative data analysis**

For the questionnaire, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were used. For analysing the quantitative data of the questionnaires, that is the results of the response items of the questionnaires:

1. An Excel file was created to simplify and enable access to the numerical data and to keep a safe/electronic copy of the data.
2. A Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 file was used to carry out the various statistical treatments of data and to generate descriptive statistics.
3. The respondents' answers were scored in the excel file using the numbers 1–5 for parents and 1-3 for children according to the Likert-scale format of their questionnaire, then they were imported to SPSS.
4. Percentages and frequencies were counted and calculated for every item in the questionnaire and all the data was displayed visually in tables as shown in the next chapter.
5. Since mean, standard deviation, mode and median “are absolute data on statistical samples, they do not permit a direct comparison of variation between

samples with different means or different units of measurement” (Hadla, 2013: 116). Therefore, SPSS was utilised to form and create constructs to obtain measurements of variations with no units.

6. The large number of related questionnaire responses were reduced to a manageable and smaller number creating coherent themes. The statements from the close-ended responses in the questionnaires were grouped into one particular aspect. The data of the responses were summarized by clearly identifying the relationships among the responses before locating them in groups based on shared variance. All the responses from the statements that explored a specific issue were put together under one theme. The theme is categorized as the most/least important depending on the variance in the responses.

#### **4.8.2 Qualitative data analysis**

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state that qualitative data, when analysed with close focus on detail and when understood in terms of its internal forms and patterns, will have relevance beyond the data itself. Such qualitative data need to be managed and sorted into what is beneficial for the purpose of the research being carried out. The qualitative data in this research was used to triangulate and back up the quantitative data from the questionnaires.

For the qualitative analysis, from the students and parents responses to the last question in the questionnaire and the interviews with the EFL teachers, the data was a. transcribed (for the EFL teachers) / translated (for the students and parents), b. coded and c. categorized. A computer-based software that was created especially for qualitative data analysis, MAXQDA version 11, was used to count frequencies which enabled quantitative analysis of the qualitative data, (see Appendix K for captures of the responses to the open-ended question coded through MAXQDA).

The data for the students’ and parents’ responses to the open-ended question in the questionnaire was translated from Arabic to English. Unfortunately, not surprisingly, some participants did not answer the open-ended question and this could be because of the lack of time or their commitments (Alaiwi, 2003).

The EFL teachers' interviews were held in English. They were recorded, transcribed and emailed to the teachers for respondent validation, that is asking the participants for feedback about the accuracy of the data which they have provided the researcher (Torrance, 2012). The four teachers checked the transcribed interviews and they all sent an approval email back stating that the interviews reflected their perceptions about the teaching of English from grade 1 to young Bahraini learners. For the interviews, the transcription was verbatim, but hesitations, laughs and pauses were not transcribed. Accordingly:

The data was imported to the computer-based software which was designed specifically for qualitative data analysis, MAXQDA version 11. With MAXQDA the coding of the data began using line-by-line coding of text (see Appendix L for captures of the interviews coded through MAXQDA). The data was organised and guided by levels of coding (Henning et al., 2004; Creswell, 2005) which were:

- a. Open coding: Tentative codes were created for segments of raw data which summarises what the researcher views as happening.
- b. Axial coding: Identifying the different relationships between the codes and putting them into groups in order to create categories.
- c. Selective coding: The main categories were selected then refined and related to other categories to develop themes.
- d. Placement of themes in relation to the research questions.

This process of grounded theory coding approach which enables filtering, managing, highlighting, ordering and focusing the outstanding features of the data to generate categories and themes, and to grasp the meaning, was followed for this research study (Charmaz, 2003). The grounded theory approach "has considerable significance because it (a) provides explicit, sequential guidelines for conducting qualitative research; (b) offers specific strategies for handling the analytic phases of inquiry; (c) streamlines and integrates data collection and analysis; (d) advances conceptual analysis of qualitative data; and (e) legitimizes qualitative research as scientific inquiry" (Charmaz, 2003: 440).

1. Preliminary codes (open coding / first level codes) were developed through highlighting the words and phrases that were considered important from the participants' responses. Through this process, the data was sorted according to the information received from each participant which allowed the development of tentative ideas and views about relationships and categories (Maxwell, 1996). A large number of codes was generated which required to be arranged in a clear way under broader categories. All the similar codes were grouped together establishing coding families and common classifications. These groups along with the text segments were read several times to allocate relationships among them so that they could be assembled into categories. Subsequently the codes were refined to develop pertinent categories (see table 4.3).

2. A number of readings and re-readings were carried out so that a preliminary categorization could be created and to ensure that they were connected to the research questions, axial coding. The data was then categorized by cutting and pasting the codes where they belonged according to what they addressed (see table 4.4).

3. The categories were refined and those which were interrelated closely were systematically combined in order to develop themes, selective coding (see table 4.5).

4. Themes were developed and then linked with the research questions. Every theme was given a number and since the data was now coded it was organized to allow data interpretation (see table 4.6).

5. MAXQDA was helpful in connecting texts with codes to assist with managing the data. It helped with quantifying the results of the analysis because it indicated the frequency of reoccurring responses from different participants to different questions.



Raw data from an interview	Open coding
<p>Interviewer: Are you with or against learning English from a young age?</p> <p>Interviewee: I am all for learning English from an early age and in my opinion grade 1 is not early enough.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can you explain to me why?</p> <p>Interviewee: I completely agree that if our children started learning English from kindergarten then their English will be excellent. The children who we teach now can speak English very well. I won't say perfectly because it requires a lot of practice, but if you compare them to students who learnt English from grades 3 and 4 they are surely better. Much better. It is all about the age you start learning English.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can you explain what do you mean by that?</p> <p>Interviewee: Sure. It's simple the younger you learn the better and faster your language will be. I am absolutely not talking about English only here but about all languages which are not your original language. We see with our own eyes children in the Bahraini society who come from Indian mothers for example. They speak Urdu with their mothers and Arabic with their fathers from a very young age.</p>	<p>Young learners are better learners</p> <p>Learning English from an early age</p> <p>Practicing English</p> <p>Teaching English from Grade 1 is better than Grades 3/4.</p> <p>Children's backgrounds.</p>

Table 4.3: Example of open coding

Open codes	Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young learners are better learners</li> <li>- Learning English from an early age</li> <li>- Practice makes perfect students</li> <li>- Teaching English from Grade 1 is better than Grades 3/4.</li> <li>- Childrens' backgrounds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advantages of the project</li> <li>Advantages of early learners</li> <li>Students with different backgrounds.</li> </ul>

Table 4.4: Examples of codes being grouped into categories

Categories	Themes
Advantages of the project	Perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of the project.
Advantages of early learners	
Students with different backgrounds	Perceptions about teaching English to young Bahraini learners from Grade 1

Table 4.5: Example of combining categories to develop themes

Finally, conclusions were drawn from all the data of this research study by what Holliday (2002) described as the mixture of the data and argument to create insightful perceptions and thick layers of description about the respondents with regard to learning English from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools.

Research Questions	Type of Data	Themes
What are the perceptions of the students who have been part of the project and studied English from Grade 1, about the project of learning English starting from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?	Open question in the students' questionnaire	1. Early learning advantages
		2. Usefulness of starting leaning English from Grade 1 in Bahrain
		3. Disadvantages of the project
What are the perceptions of the parents whose children have been part of the project for 6 years about learning English starting from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?	Open question in the parents' whose children have been part of the project for 6 years questionnaire	4. The effectiveness of the project on Bahraini learners
		5. Young EFL learners are better and faster EFL learners
		6. The project's disadvantages
What are the perceptions of the parents whose children were not part of the project about learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?	Open question in the parents' whose children were not part of the project questionnaire	7. Starting English from Grade 1
		8. Not starting English from Grade 1
		9. The age factor when starting English
		10. The project and the EFL teachers
What are the perceptions of the EFL teachers about the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools knowing that they have been applying the project for more than 10 years since it started in 2004?	The interviews with the EFL teachers	11. The advantages and disadvantages of the project
		12. Teaching English to young Bahraini learners from Grade 1
		13. The development of the project

Table 4.6: Themes linked with research questions

## **4.9 Trustworthiness criteria**

Trustworthiness also known as 'authenticity criteria' is defined as a set of quality criteria for judging interpretive research (Guba and Lincoln, 2000; Schwandt, 2001). Johnson and Saville-Troike (1992) state that the procedures the investigators perform in qualitative research establish trustworthiness of their data and research; consequently they should explain the precautions they took to enrich the trustworthiness of the results of the research. As stated by Poland (2001) determining the trustworthiness of transcripts is believed to be an essential element of qualitative research; because transcripts offer perpetual evidence of the data which could be sought, reinterpreted, and shared with various researchers (Grundy et al., 2003). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) the three trustworthiness criteria are credibility, transferability and dependability. These are the criteria that apply to this research study.

### **4.9.1 Credibility**

Credibility is defined as "whether the participants' views of the setting or events match up with the researchers' portrayal of them in the research report" (Lodico et al., 2006: 273). This means since qualitative research usually develops its results from multi-constructed realities, it is necessary for a qualitative researcher to ensure that the final conclusions are credible to his/her research participants (Mackey and Gass, 2005).

For this research study different strategies were used to obtain credibility. First, triangulation. Two data collection methods, questionnaires and interviews were conducted for this research study. This allowed confirmation of data from the various sources to achieve maximum understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007).

Second, theorists such as Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Holliday (2001) state that member-checking is a very helpful and beneficial process for establishing credibility. Member-checking is the practice of seeking feedback on the analysed data from the participants. After the transcriptions of the interviews were completed they were emailed to the EFL teachers who were asked to check and approve them. This technique helped in finding out if the transcripts

reflected the realities as perceived by the research participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

Fourth, to assure credibility peer review was sought to provide the research with an external check (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, in Creswell, 2007; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A colleague who was the head of the English Department at one of universities in Bahrain was asked to critically comment on the work throughout the stages of this research.

#### **4.9.2 Reliability**

**Reliability** is a consideration that a study's conclusions could be transferable to another similar context or setting (Punch, 1998). Schwandt (2001: 258) acknowledges that **reliability** is concerned with

The issue of generalization in terms of case-to-case transfer. It concern(s) the inquirer's responsibility for providing readers with sufficient information on the case studied such that readers (can) establish the degree of similarity between the case studied and the case to which findings might be transferred.

The justification for not considering generalizations is that an interpretive researcher studies multiple realities and emphasizes the uniqueness of the context (Cohen et al. 2000). The aim of the study was not to generalize across different contexts and settings; but to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers, students and parents about the project of learning English from grade 1 at Bahraini primary government schools. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the methodology, analysis and conclusions in this research cannot be related to other situations especially countries who has started in the past 10 years teaching English from grade 1, such as KSA. The research provides readers with an example of one possible way of exploring the perceptions of EFL teachers, students and parents. Thus the study, its findings, and results may be transferred to other contexts.

### **4.9.3 Validity**

Validity is the degree to which the research instrument gauges, what it is designed to gauge and it checks whether the scale produces the expected results or not because it focuses on accuracy (DeVellis, 2003). Lodico et al., (2006) state that **validity** refers to the capability of an individual to track the processes and procedures used for collecting and interpreting the data. Kirk and Miller (1986) argue that qualitative researchers do not pay much attention to reliability and have mainly focused on achieving superior validity in their research. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 316) mentioned that "since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter". This research study attempted to **achieve** dependability through explaining and describing the processes within the research in detail. It is assumed that such a description could be helpful for further research on the perceptions of EFL teachers, students and parents about the project of learning English from grade 1 at Bahraini primary government schools in other contexts and circumstances.

### **4.10 Ethical issues**

With regards to the established codes of ethics, all researchers share responsibilities towards their research respondents. Chilisa (2005) argues that ethical considerations in research studies involve codes of conduct which are concerned with the security and protection of the individuals being researched from mental, physical and psychological harm in addition to anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of their answers.

In this research I was conscious of a number of ethical considerations involved especially as I was seeking perceptions of children who were 11-12 years old. The participants were respected as individuals and I proceeded in this research doing my best not to harm my participants in any way. For maximum assurance the following ethical guidelines were pursued:

- The purpose of the research study ought to be conveyed to the participants (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Randor, 2002). All the participants in this study were informed about the study before they were handed the consent forms.
- Ethical approval was gained from the University of Exeter.
- Before carrying out the study and to access the schools a letter requesting consent was sent to the Ministry of Education of Bahrain and the Research and Development Unit requesting their approval after providing them with a description of the study (see Appendix M). The request was approved.
- Official permission letters were sent to the schools' principals asking for approval before the study was conducted.
- Two consent forms were sent to the parents. The first was for them, asking for their permission to be part of this research, and the second was for them to grant permission to their children to be part of this research (if the children wanted to) since the children are under age between the ages 11-12 and in Bahrain the legal age is 18. The parents were responsible for signing both their children's and their own consent forms (see Appendices G and H). Silverman (2001) and Punch (1998) state that the participants have the full right of refusing to take part in any study and if they initiated participating it is their right to withdraw at any stage/time of the study. Even if the consent form was signed, the participants were made aware that they were free to withdraw from the study anytime they wanted and no reason for clarification will be required.
- Maykut and Morehouse (2002) argue that it is unethical for a researcher to record participants without/before obtaining their approval. The EFL teachers' permission was taken for using a technical recording device by asking them in advance and respected if they refuse, although none of the teachers refused. They signed an approval consent form to be part of

the study and for the usage of the recording device (see Appendix N). They were also asked for permission to use quotations when needed from the interviews so that evidence could be enriched and supported for the research's outcomes and findings.

- One important aspect in ethical considerations is to protect the participants' identities so that they are not identifiable and to assure that their responses are confidential (Burton and Bartlett, 2009; Punch, 1998). For this research the participants' privacy was honoured so that their identities will remain anonymous and protected. They were ensured anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. The data were confidential and only used for the purposes of this research project. The participants were promised anonymity and confidentiality and ensured/reminded that whatever information they give would be used for my research project only. They had the freedom that whatever information they gave could be removed and discarded based upon their request.
- For storage and the use of personal data, the participants were assured that the data would be stored in a secure place. This was an encrypted computer username and password for the electronic data; and the paper data was locked in a secure cabinet at a secure building in Bahrain only the researcher would have access to. The participants were assured that all data will be disposed of once my thesis is completed.
- The children were given the right not to take part in this study if they did not want to even if the consent of their parents was given. The children were verbally informed about the study before the questionnaires were given to them and they were assured that they have the right to withdraw even if their parents had signed the consent form.
- It was ensured that the data collected did not harm, hurt or embarrass the participants. All the participants were treated with respect with no discrimination. They were given verbal and written assurances that no one would have access to the responses except for the researcher and that their personal information would never be disclosed.

#### 4.11 Limitations of the study

Research limitations are the conditions which are beyond the control of the researcher but may place some restrictions on the findings, conclusions, and outcomes of the research and its application in other contexts (Best and Khan, 1989). For this study I acknowledge the following limitations:

- If interviews with the parents and the EFL students were conducted it might have strengthened the evidence for the research findings but it was unfeasible because it was asking too much of the parents who had a busy schedule. Also, it might have pressurized the children because government school students are not accustomed to being interviewed so they might be reluctant to participate. The MoE often refuses students, especially primary level students, or parents to be interviewed and many requests to do so by researchers have been refused. This could be because the MoE requires that government schools in Bahrain must follow the ministry's guidelines and policies although parental involvement is an essential part of the partnership between schools and the parents (Darlow, 2011). The student often feels secure if he/she knows that their school and parents are working together (Darlow, 2011). The MoE may feel threatened if the students and the parents provided negative perceptions about the project or the education system in Bahrain which might require further questioning by the parliament and the government to the Minister of Education about the issues which the parents revealed in their perceptions.
- The convenience sampling which was used to select the participants in this research is a limitation in this study. Convenience sampling involves using for the sample the most convenient group of subjects or the most readily available (Cohen et al. 2000). This type of sampling has sometimes been criticized for sampling bias and that the chosen sample cannot represent the entire population (Cohen et al., 2000). Unfortunately all the EFL teachers in the participating schools in this study could not be included (a total of 23 EFL teachers) because they did not choose to volunteer. This could have been because the teachers thought it would be time consuming and they have both personal and



work commitments. Convenience sampling was selected because it offered an easy access to the participants since it is quick, does not require an elaborate sampling frame, practical, simple and economical (Nachmias and Nachmias 2000; Cohen et al., 2000).

- The time period spent at the schools was very short but it is prohibited by the Ministry of Education in Bahrain for researchers to stay in schools after they collected their data unless they were doing observations. The ministry gives a certain time period for the whole data collection method process to be complete.
- The research was conducted among four schools which applied the project and only one school which did not apply the project. If at least four schools which did not apply the project were chosen it might have enriched the data of the parents whose children were not part of the project more.
- The translation process of the questionnaires and the data from English to Arabic and then back to English could have affected the accuracy of the participants' answers. A colleague who was the head of the English language department at the University of Bahrain was asked to check the translations in order to provide the most accurate translation of the data and questionnaires.

#### **4.12 Summary**

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the methodology utilized in the present study. This included the research questions, the rationale for the adoption of the research paradigm, the research design, and the data collection methods. It also explained the procedures used when **piloting the data collection methods**, conducting the study and when analysing the data. It described the criteria used for ensuring the study's quality and finally the study's limitations. In the following chapter, the findings of the research study will be presented and discussed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5. Findings

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the findings obtained from the study and supported by evidence from the interviews and questionnaires. The data were collected through two main methods which were 262 students' questionnaires and 303 parents' questionnaires, and four interviews with EFL teachers (see table 5.1). Verbatim quotes will be used to illustrate comments from both the parents and students' questionnaires and from the EFL teachers' interviews to confirm, support and corroborate the study's findings. In addition, illustrative tables will be used to help present data from the questionnaires.

Participants	Questionnaires	Interviews
Students	262	Not Applicable
Parents of the students who participated in the project	234	Not Applicable
Parents of the students who did not participate in the project	69	Not Applicable
EFL Teachers	Not Applicable	4

*Table 5.1: Details of data gathered for this research study*

In order to present findings for to the four research questions of this study, this chapter is divided into four main sections:

- Perceptions of students who have been part of the project about starting English from Grade 1 and learning English from an early age in Bahraini primary government schools.
- Perceptions of parents whose children have been part of the project about starting English from Grade 1 and learning English from an early age in Bahraini primary government schools.

- Perceptions of parents whose children have not been part of the project about starting English from Grade 1 and learning English from an early age in Bahraini primary government schools.
- Perceptions of EFL teachers about starting English from Grade 1 and learning English from an early age in Bahraini primary government schools.

## **5.2 Perceptions of the students who have been part of the project**

These students have been involved in the project of learning English from Grade 1 for 6 years. The students started learning English from Grade 1 when they were 6 years old for 45 minutes on a daily basis and this process continued for 6 years until the end of primary level in Grade 6. Students' questionnaire data collected from 262 students (111 male, 151 female) was used to address the first research question which was:

- What are the perceptions of the students who have been part of the project and studied English from Grade 1, about the project of learning English starting from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?

This research question aimed at exploring different students' perceptions about the project of learning English starting from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools. To answer it data were collected from closed-ended questionnaire items and the open-ended item at the end of the questionnaire. The students answered all the items in the closed-ended part of their questionnaires but not all of them answered the last open-ended question.

For the quantitative part of the questionnaire and in order to analyse the data, the 16 questionnaire items were grouped into four main constructs and by using Cronbach Alpha from IBM SPSS version 22 the reliability of each multi-item construct was measured (see Appendix O). The results were as follows:

- Students' attitudes towards learning English from an early age: Items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 13, 15 and 16
- Students' perceptions about the English language textbooks: Items 5 and 14
- The role of the EFL teachers in the project: Items 8, 10 and 12
- Students' attitudes towards the English lesson: Items 4, 9 and 11

### **5.2.1 Students' attitudes towards learning English from an early age**

The first construct that emerged from the analysis of the closed part of the students' questionnaires was their attitudes towards learning English from an early age; details regarding the students' responses are illustrated in table 5.2. Nearly three quarters of student participants (74%) disagreed with item 1 which indicates that learning English from Grade 1 is difficult, but 15% agreed with it (see table 5.2). This implies that there is a percentage of students who find starting English from Grade 1 difficult for them and even though they were a minority they must not be neglected and their reasons should be explored. A large number of students (229) agreed that starting English from Grade 1 is a good idea and this indicates that the majority of students (87.4%) perceive learning English from Grade 1 is a good decision to be taken by the MoE of Education.

The vast majority of the students (90.1%) perceived that the earlier they started learning English, the better their English language could be. This could indicate that the students believe in 'the earlier, the better' assumption as in Singleton's (1989) proposal about the age factor when learning a second language. The next item explored their perceptions about whether learning English from an early age was useful for them or not. 87% of the students agreed that it was beneficial for them. 89.7% of the students disagreed with item number seven which suggested that learning English from Grade 1 was a poor idea.

50 EFL students (19%) disagreed with statement number 13 which proposed that everybody should learn English from Grade 1 and in my opinion that is because not all students were happy with the project. My opinion is based on some of the students' responses to the open-ended question about the project;

where some students thought learning English from Grade 1 was hard for them, while others thought that it should be an elective course not a compulsory one since Bahrain is an Arabic speaking country. More than half of the students (58.8%) agreed that learning English from an early age has motivated them to communicate with others in English when needed was an essential factor that motivated them to communicate in English when needed; whereas 69 students (26.3%) disagreed with this.

Items	Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree	
	No. #	%	No. #	%	No. #	%
1. I think learning English from Grade 1 is difficult.	194	74%	29	11.1%	39	14.9%
2. In my opinion, learning English from an early age in Grade 1 is a good idea.	12	4.6%	21	8%	229	87.4
3. In my opinion, the earlier we start learning English the better our English language could be.	8	3%	18	6.9%	236	90.1%
6. I think learning English from an early age is useful for me.	23	8.8%	11	4.2%	228	87%
7. In my opinion, to start learning English from an early age in Grade 1 is a poor idea.	235	89.7%	16	6.1%	11	4.2%
13. I think everybody should learn English from Grade 1.	50	19.1%	34	13%	178	67.9%
15. Learning English from an early age has motivated me to communicate with others in English when needed.	69	26.3%	39	14.9%	154	58.8%
16. Learning English from an early age has motivated me to use English outside school.	54	20.6%	0	0%	208	79.4%

*Table 5.2: Students' perceptions about learning English from an early age*

208 students (79.4%) stated in their perceptions that learning English from an early age has motivated them to use English outside school, whereas 20.6% disagreed with that and no students (0%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement (see table 5.7). This could be a primary indicator of the project's

success because it might have enabled the majority of the students to communicate in English outside the EFL classroom or school hours.

### **5.2.2 Students' perceptions about the English language textbooks**

Unfortunately, the EFL textbooks themselves which were used by students during the project were not explored in this research, but it was important to look at students' perceptions about them because they had worked with those textbooks for 6 years.

Just over half of the students (53%) perceived the textbooks to be interesting. However, a considerable percentage (43.9%) of the students disagreed with this (see table 5.3). Additionally, 40.8% of the students thought the textbooks were hard whereas nearly half of them (48.1%) disagreed with that and the remaining 11% of the students neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

The students who perceived the textbooks to be uninteresting and who thought the textbooks were hard could have strong reasons for that which will be discussed in the next chapter. One of these reasons was exposed in their responses to the open-ended question in the students' questionnaire. Student 89 stated in her perceptions that the textbooks were boring because there was not much 'computer work' involved with the books. She stated that the book does not involve much work to be done online or tasks to be completed through computers. This student seemed to be requesting more technologically advanced resources whether inside the EFL classroom or outside it and less classic materials, such as textbooks, workbooks and tape recorders.

40.8% of the student participants did not perceive the English textbooks to be difficult, but what cannot be overlooked is that almost half of the participants (48.1%) thought the textbooks were hard for them. There are many reasons why students might have perceived the textbooks, which are imposed by the MoE, to be difficult or uninteresting. For example, student 167 in his response to the open-ended question claimed that the book was culturally biased because "there are no Arab characters only English families with English names and yellow hair", he meant blond hair. It seems that this student considers the

textbook to be not related to his social context and that is why he cannot relate to it; when on the contrary EFL textbooks should be culturally appropriate rather than culturally biased (Weninger and Kiss, 2013).

Items	Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree	
	No. #	%	No. #	%	No. #	%
5. I think English textbooks are interesting.	115	43.9%	8	3.1%	139	53%
14. I think English textbooks are not hard.	126	48.1%	29	11.1%	107	40.8%

*Table 5.3: Students' perceptions about the English language textbooks*

### 5.2.3 The role of the EFL teachers in the project

72.1% of the students agreed that their English teacher makes learning English enjoyable and pleasant for them; and 206 students (78.6%) agreed that the English lessons are fun (see table 5.4). 73.3% of student participants agreed that their English teacher uses a variety of teaching materials in class, which is one justification of why the majority of the students thought the English lessons were exciting and enjoyable. This was also revealed in the participants' responses to the closed-ended question. For example, student 137 stated that her English language teacher uses "unique" teaching materials and always surprises them with new items like funny hats and costumes.

62.2% of the students perceived that their EFL teacher encourages them to use English during school time and only 11.8% disagreed with this. An important detail to be mentioned at this point is that more than one quarter of the students (26%) responded to this statement by neither agreeing nor disagreeing with it. This may be assumed that because most Bahraini students are reluctant to give their perceptions and feelings when there is a negative side that might affect their teachers or classrooms. They have great respect for their teachers and

have been brought up in a system which states that the teachers are always right and must not be questioned.

Items	Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree	
	No. #	%	No. #	%	No. #	%
8. My English teacher makes studying English enjoyable.	39	14.9%	34	13%	189	72.1%
10. My English teacher uses a variety of teaching materials, such as flashcards, posters and a tape recorder.	43	16.4%	27	10.3%	192	73.3%
12. My English teacher encourages me to use English in school time.	31	11.8%	68	26%	163	62.2%

Table 5.4: Students' perceptions about the role of the EFL teachers in the project

#### 5.2.4 Students' attitudes towards the English lesson

The fourth construct that emerged from the analysis of the closed part of the students' questionnaires was their attitudes towards the English lesson; details regarding the students' responses are illustrated in table 5.5. 71.4% of the EFL students agreed that their English lessons are not very hard and more than three quarters of them (78.6%) agreed that the English lesson was fun. There were 60 students (23%) who perceived the English lessons to be difficult for them, but a large number of students (59%) disagreed with this statement; which might indicate that some lessons might have been challenging for the students' level of proficiency. 41 of the students who thought that the lessons were difficult were male students and the majority of students who disagreed with this items were females, 97 students. The level of difficulty of the lessons is a problem that some students revealed in their responses to the open-ended question. For instance, student 246 perceived the English lessons to "be simple and easy in Grade 1 and until Grade 3, but after that they become more difficult" as the students progress to Grades 4, 5 and 6.



Items	Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree	
	No. #	%	No. #	%	No. #	%
4. The English lesson is not very hard.	42	16%	33	12.6%	187	71.4%
9. The English lesson is fun.	37	14.1%	19	7.3%	206	78.6%
11. Most English lessons are difficult for me.	155	59%	47	18%	60	23%

*Table 5.5: Students' perceptions about the English lesson*

### 5.2.5 Students' perceptions about the best grade to start learning English

The findings of the students' responses to the first part of the open-ended question about the best grade for children to start learning English, whether Grades 1, 3, or 4, revealed that students only selected Grades 1 and 3 (see table 5.6). The reason behind only selecting Grades 1, 3 and 4 in the choices for the open-ended question is because Bahrain has only experienced learning English starting from these three grades as illustrated in table 5.6. Qualitative data were gathered from 176 students' responses for the second part of the open-ended question in the students' questionnaires. The students were asked to justify their preferences about the best grade for Bahraini students to start learning English in primary government schools. Following data analysis three main themes emerged which were:

- Early learning advantages,
- Usefulness of starting learning English from Grade 1 in Bahrain, and
- Disadvantages of the project.

<b>Grades</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Grade 1	216	82.4%
Grade 3	46	17.6%
Grade 4	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table 5.6: Students' responses to the appropriate age to start learning English*

### **5.2.5.1 Early learning advantages**

Most of the EFL students in their responses to this part of the study perceived age as an essential variable for learning EFL. The students' written perceptions suggested that they were "happy" to start from Grade 1 because it gave them a chance to learn English gradually and practise it for 6 years. 32 of the male student participants implied through their responses that young students learn English faster and 44 females perceived age to be an important factor for learning English.

The students' positive stance toward learning English from an early age in Grade 1 also reflected in their responses. For example, student 194 claimed that starting English from Grade 1 was "entertaining" because they were introduced to a foreign language through "giant stories, pictures and songs". This exciting introduction to the language seemed to be interesting to the children and it could have simplified the learning process for them. Student 34 perceived that she had a fair command of the English language in its reading and writing forms by the end of Grade 2, which is even before Grade 3 where some older schools started teaching English in the past. She mentioned that because of this achievement the school awarded her "a Certificate of Honour for this accomplishment and a gift". This suggests that some children **in this research study** "enjoyed" learning English from Grade 1.

Student 19 stated that it was good that the project enabled her to learn English from an early age because otherwise she would not have been able to communicate with her cousin who she likes to play with. She claims that her cousin who is the same age as **her** speaks English all the time because she learnt English at a very young age from her English-speaking nanny. The student said “I always wanted to speak like her and play with her, and now I can and I don’t feel different from her anymore”. This implies how learning English from an early age could affect the pupils’ personal and social perceptions about themselves; which is related to SLA and referred to as self-perceptions.

#### **5.2.5.2 Usefulness of starting learning English from Grade 1 in Bahrain**

Many students perceived that learning English from Grade 1 enabled them to communicate in English when needed in their daily lives. Student 202 stated that her background knowledge of English was limited to some cartoons she watched on television, the alphabet, and numbers which they learnt at nursery and this project was beneficial for her because it built on her simple knowledge and improved it. She claims that now she insists on ordering her food personally when her family goes to the mall. This indicates that learning English from an early age for this student contributed to her self-confidence, widened her relationships’ network and simplified her access to her leisure time.

To speak English in Bahrain is linked to being well-educated and open-minded. The EFL students perceived that the project gave them a chance to be among the elite students who go to private schools and speak English inside and outside their classroom. Student 16 stated that learning English from Grade 1 allowed him to have “rich friends from private schools” and in the future he would be “guaranteed a good job with a big salary because only students who speak English would have these advantages”. He finally stated that his father always advises him “to learn English for a better future”.

According to the students’ perceptions, learning English from an early age positively affected the students’ social lives. Student 71 stated in his perceptions that learning English from an early age enabled him to become “cool like students from private schools who speak English in public and those

who attend private institutions like the British Council”. This student seems to be referring to mixing with the high social class of the Bahraini society and wanting to be part of it through learning English from a young age. An important fact to know is that most private school students in Bahrain speak English in public and only mix with people who speak English. Speaking English to them is a sign of being a high class person. If a person does not speak English then he/she will not be part of their group and they will be rejected. Speaking English is like a bond that brings these students together and connects them to other friends. I assume this student wanted to learn English from a young age so he could socialise with the students from private schools because the only way to get into their groups is through speaking English.

#### **5.2.5.3 The disadvantages of the project**

Some student participants stated in their responses that they perceived learning English from Grade 1 to be difficult for them because they had no background in the language. Student 113 stated that he understands a very limited number of words in English because he only uses English in the classroom. He stated that he does not need to learn English because “Bahrain is among the Arab world and Arabic is the official language of the country”. As for student 64, he claimed that “English has always been hard for me to learn and it is not important at all because we only see English people on television and when we see them outside we do not talk to them and they do not talk to us”. **The students in this part of the study could be questioning the educational governmental aims of the MoE for applying the project on them because some students might have felt that the project was imposed on them and their right to start learning English from an early age or at a later stage was not considered.**

#### **5.3 Perceptions of the parents whose children were part of the project**

234 parents whose children have been part of the project for six years responded to the questionnaire and stated their perceptions about the project. The data collected from these questionnaires was used to address the second research question which was:

- What are the perceptions of the parents whose children have been part of the project for 6 years about learning English starting from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?

The parents' closed questions in the questionnaires were divided into four main constructs after analysing them. Cronbach alpha was used to measure the reliability of each constructs (see Appendix P and table 5.7).

- Parents' attitudes towards the project of learning English from Grade 1: Items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.
- The role of the EFL teachers in the project: Items 6, 7 and 8.
- Motivation towards learning English from an early age: Items 11 and 13.
- Parents' perceptions about the age factor: Item 9, 10 and 12.

		Attitudes towards the project	The Role of EFL teachers	Perceptions about the age	Motivation
N	Valid	234	234	217	234
	Missing	0	0	17	0

Table 5.7: Statistics of the valid and missing responses in each construct

### **5.3.1 Parents' attitudes towards the project of learning English from Grade 1**

The details regarding parents' responses are provided in table 5.8 below. The parents had a very open stance towards the project and this was revealed from their perceptions. A large number of parents (70.5%) strongly agreed that the project of learning English from an early age is a success and a larger number (82.1%) strongly agreed that they prefer their children to start learning English from Grade 1 rather than Grade 3 as in the past. More than half of the parents (53.4%) strongly agreed that starting English from Grade 1 is useful for their children, which suggests that parents think that their children have benefitted from the project. Nearly two thirds of the parents (64%) strongly disagreed that learning English from Grade 1 is difficult for their children, whereas only 1.7% strongly agreed with this item. When parents were asked if starting English from Grade 1 was a poor decision to be taken by the MoE, 84.2% of them strongly disagreed with this, 6% disagreed and the remaining 3% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. None of the parents agreed/strongly agreed with this statement.

### **5.3.2 The role of the EFL teachers in the project**

More than three quarters of the parents (76.5%) perceived and strongly agreed that the EFL teachers encourage their children to speak English whether inside or outside the classroom during school hours; whereas 3.8% of them strongly disagreed with this. 25.2% of the parents agreed that the teachers make their children enjoy learning English and 56% strongly agreed, while 2.1% disagreed with that statement. 167 parents strongly agreed that the EFL teachers made learning English from Grade 1-6 easy for their children, but 6% disagreed with that and 11.1% of the parents neither agreed nor disagreed with this item. The details regarding parents' responses are provided in table 5.9 below.

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1. In my opinion, the project of learning English from an early age in Bahraini primary government schools starting from Grade 1 is a success.	6	2.6%	4	1.7%	12	5.1%	26	11.1%	165	70.5%
2. I prefer my child to study English from Grade 1 rather than starting from Grade 3.	0	0%	0	0%	11	4.7%	16	6.8%	192	82.1%
3. I think learning English from Grade 1 is difficult for my child.	168	64%	21	9%	12	5.1%	9	3.8%	4	1.7%
4. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 is a poor decision to be taken by the MoE.	197	84.2%	14	6%	7	3%	0	0%	0	0%
5. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 is useful for my child.	8	3.4%	17	7.3%	21	9%	52	22.2%	125	53.4%

**Table 5.8: Parents' perceptions about the project of learning English from Grade 1**

*\*Some of the results in this table do not total 100% because of the lack of responses from participants who did not answer some items.*

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	No. #	%	No. #	%	No. #	%	No. #	%	No. #	%
6. The English teachers made learning English from Grade 1 up to Grade 6 easy for my child.	9	3.8%	14	6%	26	11.1%	9	3.8%	167	71.4%
7. The English teacher makes studying English enjoyable for my child.	9	3.8%	5	2.1%	25	10.7%	59	25.2%	131	56%
8. The English teacher encourages my child to use English during school time.	9	3.8%	8	3.4%	17	7.3%	19	8.1%	179	76.5%

**Table 5.9: Parents' perceptions about the role of the EFL teachers in the project**

*\*Some of the results in this table do not total 100% because of the lack of responses from participants who did not answer some items*

### **5.3.3 Motivation towards learning English from an early age**

7.7% of the parents disagreed with the item that stated that learning English from an early age motivated their children to communicate in English when needed and 5.6% strongly disagreed with that. On the contrary, more than half the parents (51.7%) strongly agreed that their children use English outside school and 25.2% agreed with this statement (see table 5.10).



Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Q11. The project motivated my child to use English outside school.	15	6.4%	19	8.1%	13	5.6%	59	25.2%	121	51.7%
Q13. Learning English from an early age motivated my child to communicate in English when needed.	13	5.6%	18	7.7%	21	9%	34	14.5%	143	61.1%

**Table 5.10: Parents' perceptions about motivation towards learning English from an early age**

*\*Some of the results in this table do not total 100% because of the lack of responses from participants who did not answer some items.*

### **5.3.4 Parents' perceptions about the age factor**

61.1% of parents strongly agreed that children who learn English from an early age more easily accept other cultures than those who are not early learners of English, whereas 4.7% of the parents strongly disagreed with that. The parents were asked if they thought that children who learn English early struggle to learn their native language, 61.5% of them strongly disagreed with this item and 9.8% strongly agreed with it. 174 parents strongly agreed that the earlier the children started learning English the better their English language could be, whereas the total of the parents who strongly disagreed and disagreed with this item were 17 parents. These large numbers of positive perceptions towards learning English from an early age indicates that the parents have an optimistic attitude towards the project and most of them are pleased with it (see table 5.11).

Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Q9. I think children who learn English early are easier to accept other cultures.	11	4.7%	18	7.7%	27	11.5%	33	14.1%	143	61.1%
Q10. In my opinion, the earlier children start learning English the better their English language could be.	8	3.4%	9	3.8%	12	5.1%	16	6.8%	174	74.4%
Q12. I think children who learn English early struggle to learn their native language.	144	61.5%	29	12.4%	18	7.7%	16	6.8%	23	9.8%

**Table 5.11: Parents' perceptions about the age factor**

*\*Some of the results in this table do not total 100% because of the lack of responses from participants who did not answer some items.*

### **5.3.5 Parents' perceptions about the best grade to start learning English**

Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered for the open-ended question which asked parents for their perceptions about the best grade for children to start learning English in Bahraini primary government schools and why.

#### **5.3.5.1 Quantitative data**

Quantitative data was gathered for the first part of the open-ended question which asked parents about the best grade for children to start learning English in Bahrain (Grades 1, 3 or 4). 88.9% of the parents perceived Grade 1 to be the "best" and "most appropriate grade to start learning English", whereas only 9 parents chose Grade 3 (see table 5.12). 153 parents did not answer the open-

ended question. It was expected that many parents would avoid answering this question because such questions require more time and effort to answer. It could be also that some people do not have an answer so they would rather leave the question unanswered.

Grades	Parents	Percentage
Grade 1	72	88.9%
Grade 3	9	11.1%
Grade 4	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	81	100%
<b>Missing answers</b>	153/234	

*Table 5.12: Parents' responses to the appropriate age to start learning English*

### 5.3.5.2 Qualitative data

Qualitative data was gathered from 81 parents' responses for the second part of the open-ended question which asked parents to justify their choices for the best grade to start learning English in Bahrain primary government schools. Parents' responses were categorized under 3 main emerging themes after analysing the data with regards to the research question (see Appendix K). The main themes are:

- (A) The effectiveness of the project on Bahraini learners
- (B) Young EFL learners are better and faster EFL learners
- (C) The project's disadvantages

#### **(A) The effectiveness of the project on Bahraini learners**

It is clear from the parents' perceptions that some parents claim and argue that the project has been a success since it has enabled their children to perform simple daily life tasks in English without their help. Parent 127 stated that her daughter can now perform simple tasks in English, for example "ask for prices

of clothes, her size and the direction for the fitting rooms” when they go shopping without her help. The mother claims that her daughter refuses help with the language even when she offers and she states that the project gave her daughter “confidence in her language ability although her English is not 100% perfect but this did not stop her from communicating using her simple English language”. Parent 214 stated that her daughter “shows off her English language ability by reading some of the names on the labels” when they go to the supermarket “even though she does not know what all the words on the labels mean”, but she is happy to read them for her mother. This suggests that the project has enabled, at least some, children to become more confident when speaking or reading English.

52 parent participants claimed that their children had “enjoyed” the project and commented because this was new to them and consisted of a lot of fun tasks to perform and they mentioned a number of activities, for example cutting, colouring, singing, roleplaying, and storytelling.

Parent 106 perceived the project to be a huge step for the “Bahraini children because it is a preparation for the coming stages of school, intermediate and secondary levels, where English becomes harder”. Similarly, parent 231 stated “teaching English from Grade 1 was like the basis for secondary school education when English is taught based on the specialty of the students”. Students in secondary schools in Bahrain are taught English according to the division they choose in secondary school Year 1 (whether sciences, commercial, literary or technical divisions). For three years the students study the language which is related to these divisions only, for instance in the commercial division they will study English for Business. English in Bahraini secondary schools is changed from EFL to ESP which is English for Specific Purposes.

The findings of this part of the study reveal that most of the parents approved of the project, because they feel it developed their children’s English language proficiency and it improved their self-esteem and confidence to speak the language.

## **(B) Young EFL learners are better and faster EFL learners**

The perceptions and attitudes of some parents towards their beliefs about the benefits of learning English from an early age was clearly echoed through their responses to the open-ended question. Parent 85 stated that before learning English from Grade 1 was official in Bahrain he personally approached the MoE through a local newspaper and asked for English language classes to start from Grade 1. He claims that the MoE replied in the same newspaper and mentioned that this was their plan in the near future. He mentioned that he thinks that “it is easier for young learners to learn a foreign language at an early age than in higher levels at school later on”. This parent and parent 139 believe that learning English from an early age will enable his child to grasp the language “faster” and “fluently”. Another parent (number 186) perceived that “the decision of teaching English from Grade 1 should have been taken ages ago”. She claims that this decision does not require thinking or investigating because it has already been proven that young learners are “faster” and “better learners than older ones”. This parent gave an example of her 5 year old son who can speak three languages: Arabic, Urdu and a little English. She stated that “Arabic is our mother tongue while he learnt Urdu from his grandmother and aunts (the side of his father)” who live with them and “he learnt simple English before Grade 1 from watching English educational programs for children on television such as Barney and Dora”.

The findings of this part of the study reveal that some parents perceive the project to have enabled their children to learn English faster because they started learning it earlier. It also reveals that some parents believe that the Ministry of Education’s governmental aim to start learning English from Grade 1 was late and should have been taken earlier.

## **(C) Disadvantages of the project**

Some parents stated some disadvantages of the project and in their responses they urged the MoE in Bahrain to solve them. Parent 9 perceived the project not to have “changed or developed over the past years”. He stated that the same learning materials were used throughout the six years of his daughter’s primary

level years. He claims that “the project does not make much use of technology which is a big part of this new generation’s lives”. Another parent (number 151) stated that the textbook should be culturally appropriate and “should have stories from the Arab world with Arabic families and not only English families who have pets”. For example, it is rare to see Bahraini middle/working class families who own pets and this is part of the culture and some religious beliefs. The textbook targets the middle/working class families and that is why some parents thought having a family in the book which owns a cat to be a little strange to the Bahraini culture. The attitudes of the above parents show that some of them felt threatened that a foreign culture could be imposed on their children through the project’s textbooks. The fact that the textbooks content and activities had to be adapted for the project by an inside committee from the MoE which the parents were not part of could be a reason why some of the parents do not approve of the textbooks.

It was realised that the project was mostly perceived as successful and effective. Some parents believed that there are some changes which are needed for the development of the project. They urged the MoE, through their perceptions, to modify and upgrade the project so that it could be more successful and efficient when applied with young Bahraini learners in the future. For example, parent 93 perceived the project to get gradually harder as the children progressed in each grade and wanted the MoE to simplify it as the students proceeded in their primary level education. One of the ministry’s educational governmental aims for the project was to be able to connect it to the English language syllabus in middle and high school (Ministry of Education, 2004) and that is why some of the parents could have felt that the project became harder as their children proceeded to higher levels in primary school. Since there is no communication between the parents and the people in the MoE who are in charge of the project, the parents do not know the educational governmental aims of the MoE for the project or for their children who are part of the project.

#### **5.4 Perceptions of the parents whose children were not part of the project**

The parent participants in this part of the research had children who were not part of the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools. Nevertheless their perceptions are significant. The parents are likely to have heard or known about the project because it has been applied in Bahrain for more than 10 years.

69 parents whose children were not part of the project answered the questionnaire and stated their perceptions about the project. The data collected from these questionnaires was used to address the third research question which was:

- What are the perceptions of the parents whose children were not part of the project about learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?

In order to address this research question and since the questionnaire was very short (only 11 items) the questionnaire's quantitative data in combination with the open-ended question data is used together to explore parents' perceptions for this part of the study. Cronbach Alpha was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire items (see Appendix Q).

After analysing and grouping the data, the parents' responses and perceptions were divided into three main themes:

- Parents' perceptions about starting English from Grade 1: items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 11
- Parents' perceptions about the age factor: items 8 and 10
- Parent's attitudes towards the EFL teachers and the English lessons: items 6 and 9

### 5.4.1 Parents' perceptions about starting English from Grade 1

Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	1. I wish my child was part of the project of teaching English from Grade 1 to students in Bahraini government schools.	4	5.8%	3	4.3%	7	10.1%	25	36.2%	30
2. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 is a poor decision to be taken by the MoE of Education.	20	29%	10	14.5%	14	20.3%	13	18.8%	9	13%
3. I think learning English from Grade 1 would have been difficult for my child.	6	8.7%	11	15.9%	7	10.1%	30	43.5%	15	21.7%
4. I think that all children should start learning English from Grade 3 and not Grade 1.	3	44.9%	5	24.6%	6	8.7%	17	7.2%	31	4.3%
5. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 would have been useful for my child.	2	2.9%	8	11.6%	9	13%	20	29%	29	42%
7. In my opinion, it is unfair that my child started learning English from Grade 3 and not Grade 1.	3	4.3%	9	13%	5	7.2%	22	31.9%	21	30.4%
11. I am pleased that my child was not part of the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools.	27	39.1%	16	23.2%	6	8.7%	7	10.1%	5	7.2%

**Table 5.13: Parents' perceptions about starting English from Grade 1**

*\*Some of the results in this table do not total 100% because of the lack of responses from participants who did not answer some items.*



43.6% of parents for whom the project was not applied with their children, strongly agreed that they wished their children were part of the project and started English from Grade 1 rather than Grade 3 as they did; and 36.2% agreed with that (see table 5.13). Parent 53 stated that his younger son who is now in Grade 3 and goes to a school which started teaching English from Grade 1 “can communicate better in English than the eldest son who is in Grade 6 because the younger learnt English at a younger age in Grade 1”.

When the parents were asked if starting English from Grade 1 was a poor decision to be taken by the MoE of Education 29% strongly disagreed, whereas 20.3% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement and 13% strongly agreed. This variation in the parents’ choices could be because neither the parents nor their children have experienced the project, although some parents may have through their younger children as parent 53. Parent 15 stated that “the project was the best decision the MoE has taken in its history, but unfortunately my son did not benefit from it because the school he goes to was not among those which applied the project”.

42% of the parents strongly agreed and 29% agreed that starting English from Grade 1 would have been useful for their children, while 11.6% disagreed with this item and 13% neither agreed nor disagreed with it. More than two thirds of the parents (39.1%) strongly disagreed and disagreed (23.2%) with the item that stated they were pleased that their children were not part of the project. On the other hand, 7.2% of the parents strongly agreed and 10.1% agreed with this statement which shows that there is a fair number of parents which were pleased that their children were not part of the project.

Almost half of the parents strongly disagreed (44.9%) and 24.6% disagreed when they were asked if all children should start learning English from Grade 3 and not Grade 1. This shows that the parents felt their children should have had the same opportunity as others. It also indicates how much the parents believe in the benefits of learning English from an early age for young Bahraini learners in primary government schools.

Nearly one third of the parents (31.9%) agreed that it was unfair for their children to start English from Grade 3 and not Grade 1 and (30.4%) strongly agreed with this statement. Parent 2 stated that starting English from Grade 3

was a disaster because the students feel that they have “matured so they get really bored when being taught the A,B,C,D nursery rhyme at the age of 9”. One mother (parent 39) perceived that “not learning any foreign language from an early age would not enable the child to learn it fluently”. She gave an example of why Moroccan immigrants in Bahrain talk French to their children and how their children learn French quickly and fluently from an early age. The parent explained that “Moroccan children acquire three languages which are Arabic (because it is their mother tongue), English (because they learn it early at school), and French (because they practise it with their parents from an early age and on a daily basis at home). This is a good example because French is taught in Bahraini government schools as an elective course starting from secondary school.

#### **5.4.2 Parents’ perceptions about the age factor when starting English**

13% of the parents disagreed or strongly disagreed (8.7%) with item 8 that stated that the earlier children start learning English the better their English language could be, but 21.7% agreed or strongly agreed with it (29%) (see table 5.14 below). Parent 46 mentioned that she took her son to a national institute from Grades 1-3 which teaches English and it cost her a lot of money. She stated that she had to do that because she believed that her son “could learn English better and faster only at a young age and not starting from Grade 3”. She said that if her son “had not learnt English at that stage and waited until Grade 3, his English level would not have been as developed/good as it is now”.

Only 4 parents strongly agreed and 7 parents agreed with the item which states that it does not matter what age children start learning English, while 30.4% strongly disagreed and 37.7% disagreed with it. None of the parents chose neither agree nor disagree for this item which suggests that they have a strong opinion about starting English from an early age.

Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
8. I believe that the earlier children start learning English the better their English language could be.	6	8.7%	9	13%	12	17.4%	15	21.7%	20	29%
10. Children at all ages will be good language learners.	21	30.4%	26	37.7%	0	0%	7	10.1%	4	5.8%

*Table 5.14: Details of the parents' perceptions about the age factor when starting English*

*\*Some of the results in this table do not total 100% because of the lack of responses from participants who did not answer some items*

### 5.4.3 Parent's attitudes towards the EFL teachers and the English lessons

20.3% of the parents agreed and 10.1% strongly agreed that the English teacher uses a variety of teaching materials for their English lessons (see table 5.15), whereas a close number to the previous percentage (21.7%) disagreed with this statement or strongly disagreed (17.4%). The remaining 18.8% neither agreed nor disagreed with this item. Parent 30 stated that her sister "teaches English to students from Grade 1 and she prepares different activities for the students, for example making simple toys or buying them gifts to motivate them". The parent claimed that EFL teachers in her boy's school do not really care about using a variety of teaching resources. She said that "they are careless men especially this year because it is the final year for them to teach the book they are using with our children". What this parent is suggesting is that during the next academic year 2015/2016 the school will apply the books which are related to the project since the school will accommodate students who have learnt English from Grade 1.

49.3% of the parents agreed when asked if the English lesson was difficult for their children, whereas 4.3% strongly disagreed with this statement. Parent (24) mentioned that "I don't blame my child for his low grades in English, but I blame the MoE who made my son a victim and did not give him a chance of learning English from Grade 1". The parent claimed that "the English lessons are difficult for my son because he did not learn English from Grade 1 and unfortunately

neither his father nor I can speak English and we were hoping that he would be better than us”.

Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
6. The English teacher uses a variety of teaching materials, such as flash cards, posters and a tape recorder.	12	17.4%	15	21.7%	13	18.8%	14	20.3%	7	10.1%
9. The English lesson is difficult for my child.	3	4.3%	8	11.6%	7	10.1%	34	49.3%	17	24.6%

*Table 5.15: Details of the parents’ attitudes towards the EFL teachers and the English lessons*

*\*Some of the results in this table do not total 100% because of the lack of responses from participants who did not answer some items.*

### 5.5 Perceptions of the EFL teachers

4 EFL teachers were interviewed for this research, 2 females and 2 males between the ages of 33 and 47. The 4 EFL teachers have been applying the project in Bahraini primary government schools since the start in 2004. In this part of the study I will discuss the findings of the interviews with the EFL teachers to explore their perceptions about the project and answer my final research question which is:

- What are the perceptions of the EFL teachers about the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools knowing that they have been applying the project for more than 10 years since it started in 2004?

Following the analysis of the interview data three main themes emerged which were:

- Perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of the project
- Perceptions about teaching English to young Bahraini learners from Grade 1
- Perceptions about the development of the project.

Pseudonyms were used to assure the participants anonymity (see Table 4.2 in chapter 4).

### 5.5.1 Perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of the project

Advantages of the Bahraini project of learning English from Grade 1	Disadvantages of the Bahraini project of learning English from Grade 1
Enabled some students to use English outside school.	The difficulty of learning English from Grade 1 for some children, especially those who struggle to learn their native language.
Motivated many students to communicate in English when needed.	Very few parents do not approve it from a cultural point of view.
Enabled some students to accept other cultures.	The redundancy of the project's learning materials discouraged some of the EFL teachers.
Many students' English language became better.	Demotivation of some EFL teachers for not being recognised for taking part in the project, whether sentimentally or financially.
Encouraged students to use English not only in the EFL classrooms but during school time.	.
Most students and parents perceived learning English from Grade 1 as useful.	

*Table 5.16: The advantages and disadvantages of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahrain, according to the participants*

#### 5.5.1.1 Perceptions about the advantages of the project

When the EFL teachers were asked about their perceptions about the usefulness of the project they all agreed that the project was a major success. In fact Mohamed mentioned that it is the most successful English language project the MoE has ever implemented. Also, Esmat stated that she was among those who were chosen for piloting the project in 10 primary schools around Bahrain and because of the huge success of the pilot study the MoE decided to

apply it in 20 primary schools in 2004 and each year more schools were covered.

Esmat argues that the project is successful and useful in all ways because “it presents English to students in easy, simple and gradual steps along the primary level years”. She claims that one of the project’s aims is to assure that students know how to read and write almost flawlessly by the time they finish Grade 4, but because the project is so successful she has “a large number of students who have reached Grade 3 and could read and write not flawlessly but in a reasonable way”. Along the same lines, Layla stated that:

*The project is fruitful because whenever I see my students outside the classroom, whether inside or outside the school, they start greeting and talking to me in English because they want to prove to me that they can speak English.*

She pointed out that the parents perceived the project to be useful and they continuously compliment it.

Ali stated that the project is the number one compared to failing previous projects “like teaching English from Grade 3 once a week, then twice a week, then three times a week and finally in 2000 it was official and we taught Grade 3 every day”.

#### **5.5.1.2 Perceptions about the disadvantages of the project**

When the EFL teachers were asked if they faced any difficulties with the project, all four teachers stated they had no problems with the project but two of the EFL teachers made some points about the textbooks which are assigned for the project.

Ali claimed that:

*The MoE needs to make the book more related to the Bahraini culture and society. It should put some Bahraini characters or some passages about places in Bahrain or events that happen in Bahrain like the Formula ne which happens every year in April.*

The project’s textbooks have not changed since the beginning of the project in 2004 Layla stated and she said that she wanted the textbooks:

*to have people with different skin colours. Not necessarily English people meaning white people with blond hair. We have people in Bahrain who are blond and in England there are people who are English but with dark skin and dark hair. Also, it should have at least one character in a wheelchair for example, so we can teach the children about accepting different people no matter how they are.*

These different points about the textbooks are valuable because since the textbooks are customized for Bahrain, as stated by Esmat and Mohamed, it might be expected that they would include various aspects of the Bahraini society in them. For example, the Bahraini culture and heritage should be included in the textbooks. Since there is no mention of the Bahraini culture or Bahraini people in the textbooks, some of the EFL teachers and parents could feel that the project's adapted textbooks might foreignize their children/students and therefore some of the parents and EFL teachers did not approve of some of the content in the textbooks and rejected them.

### **5.5.2 Perceptions about teaching English to young Bahraini learners from Grade 1**

All EFL teachers had previously taught English starting from Grade 3 before the project and now they all teach English to young learners starting from Grade 1. They have been involved in the project for more than ten years. The EFL teachers perceived teaching young learners as an easier and more relaxing task than teaching grades 3 and 4. Mohamed stated that because in Grade 1 they were young children they could easily grasp a new language and there was not as much repetition as 10 years ago:

*All we needed were routines for the young learners and fun activities and using a bit of Arabic in class so that the kids do not feel terrified from the language; but it was such an easy job because they were at such a young age that will let him easily learn another language.*

According to Esmat, the project succeeded because the students were young. She claims that young learners have a period in their lives where they can easily learn and understand a foreign language because their brains can digest it easily and quickly because of their young age:

*Think of the Bahraini children who are still young to enter school but can speak English in a good way because they have Filipino housemaids or nannies who talk to them in English and that's why they learn English before learning it in schools.*

Age is also an essential factor for learning a foreign language according to Layla and she argued that the reason why the MoE applied this project starting from Grade 1 is because “the MoE of Education knows for sure that younger learners are much better and faster learners than older learners in Grade 3 or 4”. Ali also perceived that the project succeeded because it targeted students in Grade 1:

*The main reason why this project became successful is because it was directed to young people in Grade 1 otherwise it would have failed because only young children can learn a new language easily with less effort and more practice and of course a little bit of Arabic.*

He also stated that because of the international demand for communicating in English, the MoE came up with this project and took the right decision when it decided to start English from Grade 1.

### **5.5.3 Perceptions about the project's development**

The Bahraini EFL teachers stated that when the project started in only 20 schools around Bahrain, the staff were not asked if they wanted to teach it or not. The teachers mentioned that they were made to take a course imposed by the MoE which prepared them for the project. All the teachers said they would not have refused if they were asked, but they were not asked. The teachers stated that, being amongst the 50 pioneering teachers who applied the project since it started in 2004 forced the MoE to consult them about different aspects of the project over the years. The EFL teachers perceived that the project needed a few developments. Layla mentioned that the project needs to include the Bahraini culture in its English activities and the textbook:

*I think that a Bahraini family should replace the English family in the textbooks and the nursery rhymes we teach could be replaced with words from the culture but keeping the same music and tunes. We should include the culture and introduce the children to vocabulary*



*talking about the Bahraini culture like the word fasting or island or palm tree all these words are related to Bahrain.*

The rest of the teachers also perceived that the project requires a few advancements, for example Mohamed mentioned that the project needs an online site. He argued that:

*An educational website for the project with its different levels would be an excellent idea with links to the textbooks, stories, songs and additional tasks which make the students play and learn at once.*

Ali stated that he was bored using the same teaching materials for more than ten years since they are the same for every primary level and only differ in their quantity and aims. He stated that they only use “flash cards, posters, and a tape recorder and even the children get bored by the end of the term” and that is why he prints material from the internet to vary his teaching aids and break the routine for his students.

Esmat stated that the stories, which are used for the storytelling activity, have not been changed since the piloting of the project and they need replacements with new stories. Along the same lines, Layla argued that she develops her own teaching materials because the young learners become bored with the same materials every day. She stated that she logs on to different English language teaching websites which inspire her with different ideas and provide the material free online.

*From these sites I can print out a free short story with maybe three different activities about it including things that children like to do like a picture puzzle of the story or a colouring activity or a cut and stick activity, all free.*

The EFL teachers therefore perceived a number of developmental problems about the project but at the same time they suggested solutions for solving them and developing the project. They think that after more than ten years of experiencing with the project they know exactly where the weaknesses are in the project and how to overcome them.

## 5.6 A comparison between students' and parents' perceptions

The findings revealed that none of the parents chose Grade 4 which coincides with the children's responses (see table 5.6). According to their responses, the majority of students (82.4%) and their parents (88.9%) both perceived Grade 1 to be the suitable grade for starting learning English in Bahraini primary government schools (see table 5.12). 90% of the parents of children who did not take part in the project agreed with this point as well (see table 5.17).

Grades	Parents	Percentage of respondents
Grade 1	36	90%
Grade 3	4	10%
Grade 4	0	0%
Total	40	100%
Nonresponse to open question		29
<b>Total number</b>		69

*Table 5.17: The responses of the parents' whose children did not take part in the project to the appropriate age of starting learning English*

59% of the children did not perceive English lessons to be difficult for them. On the contrary, the responses of the parents whose children did not take part in the project revealed that almost half of them (49.3%) perceived English lessons to be difficult for their children.

When the children were asked if they thought that everybody should learn English from Grade 1 19.1% disagreed and 13% neither agreed nor disagreed with this item. The parents whose children did not take part in the project were asked if they thought that the earlier children started learning English, the better their English language could be. This item does not match with what was asked to the children but it is related to it since it explores learning English from an early age. 21.7% of the parents disagreed/strongly disagreed with this item. This suggests that some of the Bahraini parents and students do perceive age to be an important factor when learning English.

## 5.7 Corroboration between the perceptions of students and parents whose children took part in the project

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean 3	Standard Deviation
Factor 1: Attitudes towards learning English from an early age	262	1.00	3.00	2.66	.48
Factor 2: Perceptions about the textbooks	262	1.00	3.00	2.00	.76
Factor 3: Perceptions about the role of the EFL teachers	262	1.00	3.00	2.70	.53
Factor 4: Attitudes towards the English lessons	262	1.20	3.00	2.56	.55

Table 5.18: Students' descriptive analysis

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean 5	Standard Deviation
Factor 1: Attitudes towards the project	234	1.80	5.00	4.2292	.81690
Factor 2: Perceptions about the role of EFL teachers in the project	234	2.00	5.00	4.5717	.69234
Factor 3: Motivation towards learning English from an early age	234	1.00	5.00	4.5000	.72853
Factor 4: Perceptions about the age factor	217	1.00	5.00	4.5067	1.01434

Table 5.19: Descriptive analysis of the parents' whose children took part in the project

Two tables (tables 5.18 and 5.19) were generated using SPSS IBM version 22 to present corroboration between perceptions of the students and the parents whose children took part in the project. These are the same factors which were revealed earlier from their responses to the quantitative part of the questionnaire.

The parents and the children have different preferences, priorities and expectations when perceiving learning English from Grade 1. The first factor for the students revealed a mean of 2.66 out of 3 (because there were only 3 Likert scale choices in their questionnaire) which shows a very positive perception towards learning English from an early age. The parents also had a positive perception about the EFL teachers and the project which was suggested from their means 4.57 and 4.22 out of 5 (because there were 5 Likert scale choices in their questionnaire). Interestingly, the small number of the standard deviation (which shows the spread and distribution of scores in the study) revealed that the students' replies are not spread but focused (.55). When the standard deviation is close to 0 it suggests that the responses are likely to be very close to the mean, whereas a high standard deviation implies that the responses are spread out over a wider range of the set of data (Pallant, 2013). This shows which answers were very similar among the students and the items most of them agreed on. On the contrary, the parents had a large standard deviation which indicates that their answers were very much varied and they had different perceptions about factor 1 but most of their perceptions were positive; and this is what their mean (4.22) revealed.

Even though descriptive statistics are used in this part and for some researchers differences could not be claimed from them, but the dissimilarity in the children's perceptions and the parents' perceptions about the important factors in the project coincides with studies by Butler (2013) and Stevenson and Stigler (1992). The studies stated that for some parents, learning is thought to be a continuous/incremental process where all children should show and earn the potential to be successful. In contrast, the parents' and children's perceptions contradicted and this is exactly what happened to the Bahraini parents and their children. The contradiction occurred when the parents' perceptions and behaviours did not coincide with their children's perceptions and attitudes towards the most important factor in the project.

There was a difference in the perceptions of the children and the parents in terms of what they perceived to be the least important factor in the project. The students' findings revealed that they did not perceive their attitudes towards the English lesson to be of importance in the project. Bahraini children's perceptions about the English lesson are related to self-perception theory (see

Hann et al., 2014) which proposes that individuals analyse their personal behaviours by observing them. Their observations lead to making judgments about the reasons which encouraged them to perceive what they thought was the most and least important actions, factors and issues to them (in this case the English lesson). As in the self-perception theory, while Bahraini students were observing their behaviours, they were also subconsciously assessing the sufficient effort which involves the English language lessons.

This part of the research shows that Bahraini parents' perceptions about the learning English from Grade 1 and the children's perceptions about their ability to learn English from an early age "was a major predictor for their children's English learning" (Butler, 2013:20). The data revealed that the parents mostly attributed the children's success in learning English from an early age to the EFL teachers and project. They have perceived their children to be successful in English from Grades 1-6 because, according to Greenwood (2014), they could have had high expectations of them. This positive stance from most of the parents was reflected in the children's perceptions and that could be why most of the EFL students had a strong and positive attitude towards the project.

### 5.8 Perceptions of the parents whose children were not part of the project

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Factor 1: Perceptions about starting English from Grade 1	69	1	4	2.59	.708
Factor 2: Perceptions about the age factor	61	1	5	2.82	1.310
Factor 3: Attitudes towards the EFL teachers and the English lesson	69	2	4	3.05	.543

Table 5.20: Descriptive analysis of the parents whose children did not take part in the project

The findings revealed that the most important issue for the parents whose children were not part of the project was starting English starting from Grade 1. From their responses to the questionnaire items and from the standard deviation, it could be viewed that the parents had a neutral perception about the project which could be also verified from the means of the questionnaire factors. The means were between 2.59 and 3.05 (see table 5.20) which represent a neutral feeling about the case being explored (Pallent, 2013). Neither the parents nor their children have experienced the project and their responses to the open-ended part of the questionnaire revealed frustration directed towards the MoE. They held the MoE responsible for keeping schools, such as the ones which their children went to, 10 years without applying the project. They were frustrated that their children were the final students who were not part of the project only because they started Grade 1 in schools which have not yet applied the project.

The closed-ended questionnaire data suggested that the parents have a neutral stance towards learning English from an early age, but there were some contradictions which emerged from their replies to the open-ended item. A large number of parents did not answer the last item in the questionnaire which was the open-ended question. The responses revealed that 4 people out of the 39 who answered the last item chose Grade 3 as the best grade for their children to start learning English and, as expected, no parent chose Grade 4. Some of the parents who chose Grade 3 defended their choices by stating that they think that Grade 3 was the perfect grade for their child to start learning English because learning English from an early age could have been hard for their children. They claimed that they learnt English from Grade 4 and that their English was perfect. The contradiction here is, if those parents strongly believed that Grade 4 was an appropriate grade to start English then why was it rejected in all questionnaires from students and parents, including their questionnaires? They perceived the project to be "boring", "imperfect" and "insufficient". They stated that the MoE did not think of the impact of learning English from Grade 1 on the new generation. According to the parents, learning English from an early age may have a negative impact on the children because it will introduce them to the language of the "sinners" and "disbelievers". The second contradiction that emerged from the 4 parents' findings was, if learning English will have such

a negative impact on the children then why have they chosen Grade 3 and not Grade 4. From their point of view, the higher the grade was, the less impact English will have on the children. Nonetheless, they did not choose Grade 4. The final contradiction that emerged from the study was that in the questionnaire items they had a neutral stance towards starting English from an early age and starting English from Grade 1. Nevertheless, in their responses to the open-ended questionnaires they chose Grade 3 and contradicted their questionnaire answers.

On the other hand, the rest of the parents who answered the open-ended item agreed that learning English from an early age and starting English from Grade 1 was a correct decision, but they felt victimised. Some of them blamed the MoE for their children's low command of English and suggested that because they were poor, the MoE did not consider applying the project in the school. This shows a connection between the responses of the parents who wanted their children to start learning English from Grade 1 and those who wanted Grade 3 on their views about the MoE.

## **5.9 Summary**

In this chapter, the results from questionnaires from the students and parents and EFL teachers' interviews revealed that most of the participants think positively about the project. They stated that it is a huge success but requires a few modifications. The findings were presented in detail and the analysis of the data from the questionnaires and interviews showed a very strong preference towards starting English from Grade 1 rather than waiting until pupils are older in Bahraini primary government schools. The findings also revealed that the EFL teachers are aware of some problems within the project and acted upon that by securing some solutions for them in their own learning contexts.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6. Discussion

#### 6.1 Introduction

This research study aimed at exploring the perceptions of students, parents and EFL teachers about the project of learning English from Grade 1 at primary government schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain. In this chapter the key findings of the current study will be discussed in terms of the research questions and the literature reviewed in Chapter 3.

The key findings are:

1- According to the first research question concerning students' perceptions about the project:

- The project was a success
- Learning English from Grade 1 was beneficial and enjoyable for them

2- According to the second research question concerning the perceptions of the parents whose children have been part of the project:

- Learning English from an early age is better for children
- The project's teaching materials require updating

3- According to the third research question concerning the perceptions of the parents whose children were not part of the project:

- The project is useful for Bahraini young learners
- Age is not a determining factor of language learner's success

4- According to the fourth research question concerning the EFL teachers of the project:

- The project was exceptionally successful because it started from Grade 1
- The project's textbooks need to be amended and its teaching materials need to be technologically advanced



The study has shown that from the perceptions of the Bahraini stakeholders the majority of them seem to perceive learning English from Grade 1 is better for the Bahraini students. The research study also revealed some cultural issues concerning learning English from an early age and about the project. For example, intercultural competence and problems with the project's textbooks. The study has also shown the role of the MoE according to the Bahraini stakeholders' perceptions.

## **6.2 Learning English from an early age**

Consistent with the findings of significant studies, for example Dörnyei (2002), Achibald (2005) Pinter (2006) and Schafer (2012), this study's findings revealed that most students have a positive attitude towards learning English from an early age. The students in this research perceived learning English from an early age to be significant for a better future. Lamb (2004) found the same about the children he was studying; he carried out a study in provincial Indonesia with children in their first year in junior high school using questionnaires and focus groups. His students, similar to the Bahraini students, perceived English to be important to them; some even claimed English to be the most important subject among all school subjects (Lamb, 2004). Also, in elementary schools in North Carolina Heining-Boynton and Hiatemala (2007), explored a group of children who felt that learning a foreign language from an early age helped them to maintain a positive attitude towards language learning in general and they regarded learning a foreign language to be valuable for them. The perceptions of the students in Heining-Boynton and Hiatemala's research coincide with the Bahraini students' perceptions in this study. It was realised from the responses of Bahraini students that they had clear self-perceptions about the essential and effective role that English plays in securing their future jobs. As also suggested by Birdsong (1999) and Dimroth (2008), most Bahraini students think it is beneficial and advantageous to learn English from an early age.

This part of the research verifies findings of earlier studies in other countries and different educational contexts. Lamb (2003) and Pinter (2011) claim that older children are better at reporting, writing and expressing their perceptions

and experiences. The children taking part in this research study were aged between 11 and 12 and were given a chance to personally answer the questionnaire and express their perceptions and thoughts about learning English from an early age and their experiences with the project.

The findings show consistency with previous literature in Chapter 3 especially with Bista (2008) and Lightbown and Spada (2008) who argue that age is an essential factor which effectively brings about various performance stages when learning a foreign/second language. Also, the students' perceptions seem to support one of the versions of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) which proposes that younger language learners have less difficulty learning a language in comparison to older learners (Singleton, 1989). Ellis (2008) states that that younger learners have specific advantages over older learners when learning a foreign/second language because of the age factor (Ellis, 2008). This applies to the case of these Bahraini EFL students who perceived that younger EFL learners are better learners.

Some researchers state that the younger the learner is, the easier his/her ability to acquire and communicate in a target language will be (Ho, 2003). Unfortunately, there is little literature on teaching EFL from a young age because pedagogical principles underlying language learning at an early age are diverse in their construction and lack explicitness (Edelenbos et al., 2006). However, studies in the available literature have researched the field of introducing EFL to young learners at primary schools between the ages of 7-12 as the situation in Bahrain. Evidence from these studies which coincides with the findings of this part of the research and the EFL students' perceptions revealed that the best approaches to language teaching are motivating the pupils, making the lesson fun and pleasant to the pupils, and diversifying the EFL language materials (Ho, 2003). The findings agree with what Garton et al. (2011) claimed and that is to make a decision involving methods and strategies suggested for teaching English to young learners is a very difficult task because it will have a strong, either positive or negative, affect on the ESL/EFL classroom. Ho (2003) and Garton's (2011) arguments are closely related to this research study because the students and parents perceived that Bahraini EFL teachers diversify their teaching materials and make the English lesson enjoyable for their students. Enright (1992) argues that the younger the

students are the easier it could be for the teacher to approach them with simple ideas and methods which would make them happy, enjoy the lesson and experience something new and this could encourage them to learn English.

Bahraini parents voted online in 2009 in favour of the project to make it official in primary government schools. Evidence from both parts of their questionnaires suggested that parents whose children were part of the project have a positive stance towards the project, perceived it to be a success and wanted their children to learn English from an early age. The present findings also support Singleton's (1989) conclusion, that there are advantages for language learners whose experience with the target language starts from an early age. Bahraini parents mentioned in their responses to the open-ended question that the new generation should speak English not only for communicating but for Bahrain's future. They revealed how English has become extensive in Bahrain and how simple things such as signs on shops have been required to have both Arabic and English names on them by law since the 1970s.

The findings also suggested that there were a number of parents who perceived that age of students when starting learning English was not an important factor. In their responses they mentioned that learning a foreign language depends on the learners' effort to learn the language, the parents' help and motivation for their children and the teachers' ability to teach the language. Their perceptions coincided with the findings from Butler (2013) and Stevenson and Stigler (1992). The studies found out that the learning process is identified as a continuous course of actions where learners acquire the aptitude to succeed by showing enough effort to learn (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992). It was shown from their responses that the parents' perceptions about their child's success could be main indicators for the children to succeed in learning English. Additionally, Wigfield et al. (2006) stated that these perceptions suggest reciprocal relationships. Consequently if Bahraini parents have lower expectations of their children it could negatively affect their children's English learning processes and their performances which could change the Bahraini parents' expectations about their children to low expectations (Butler, 2013; Wigfield et al., 2006).

Parents with lower social-economic status in Bahraini villages encounter a number of burdens and problems with their children's education because of the lack of sufficient social and economic capital (Butler, 2013). This study found out that learning English from Grade 1 was a priority for some of these parents and that many of them perceived they were resented by the MoE because of their class in society. They perceived learning English from an early age starting from Grade 1 to be a vital tool for achieving economic, social and scientific developments. It would seem to be a great opportunity for the parents if they could develop an intercultural understanding of the English speaking countries, people and culture because learning English has become in some parts of the world connected to social/economic powers (Butler, 2013).

The findings of the Bahraini EFL teachers' perceptions are also similar to those of previous studies (Penfield and Roberts, 1959; Lenneberg, 1967; Bialystock and Hakuta 1994; Singleton and Lengyel, 1995; Yan and Horwitz, 2008; Kirsch, 2012) about the advantages of learning English from an early age. The Bahraini teachers claimed that because of the input hours, where the children started learning English from Grade 1 on a daily basis for 45 minutes and with homework and practise, they were able to learn English faster than those who learnt it in Grades 3 and 4. Studies have found a direct connection between language proficiency and the input hours of tasks students perform (Curtain and Pesola, 1994; Kirsch, 2012), and this coincides with the EFL teachers' perceptions in this study. Some studies have suggested that learning a foreign/second language from an early age can promote intercultural competence and positive attitudes towards language learning (Blondin et al., 1998). This was contradicting to what some teachers reported about some of their students' perceptions. Blondin et al. (1998) stated that language learning from an early age provides the learners with motivation, enthusiasm to learn, confidence and reduces stereotyping and ethnocentricity. Nevertheless, Bahraini teachers claimed that a small number of the children were reluctant to learn English and thought it to be against their religion. Other Bahraini students, according to the teachers' perceptions, were not willing to learn claiming that they will not need it for their future. These perceptions from the students, which their teachers mentioned, contradicts some of the parents' perceptions who generally view learning English to be essential for their children's future.

From a sociocultural point of view, Hall (2002) mentioned that cultural and local perceptions, beliefs and perspectives should be given significant emphasis. Hall (2002: 64) states that:

In locating learning in social activity, and defining it as a process of sociocultural transformation, it makes it impossible to consider the process and outcomes of learning apart from their specific sociocultural context. No aspect of learning can be considered context-free, i.e. 'uncontaminated', or isolatable from the specific context in which it occurs.

What Hall (2002) claimed coincides with the perceptions of the teachers, parents and students, that when students (the Bahraini children in this case) are learning in a specific context and setting, the first thing they are learning is how to be better engaged in their social context (Alfahadi, 2012).

### **6.3 Cultural issues**

Spodek et al. (1998) state that children's qualitative data helps researchers to have an understanding of the perspectives of their young participants. Bahraini children revealed their perceptions and reasons for wanting to learn English from an early age in the qualitative open-ended question. From a sociocultural point of view, the relationship between Bahraini children and their environment is dynamic (Kirsch, 2012). This means that learning English from an early age, with help from their teachers and parents, enabled them to acquire more than the mere language, but an understanding of the beliefs, values and hopes which are connected to learning a second language. Several children mentioned different reasons notifying why they need to learn English from an early age, for instance, for a better future in a banking firm or to be successful like the Crown Prince of Bahrain who speaks excellent English. They perceived learning English from an early age as a condition for a better life. This view of English is what Phillipson (2003) calls glorifying the English language. Learning English from an early age seemed to affect some Bahraini young learners' thoughts and views about their own language and culture because they perceived learning English to offer them a better status whether financially, materialistically or even emotionally (Al Dhubaib, 2002).

Pinter (2011) states that children sometimes provide a more favourable picture than the actual case especially if the subject they are talking about is sensitive such as educational matters and this was evident in some of the replies of the Bahraini children. For most Bahraini students and parents any matter that discusses and questions their education system, schools, teachers or the MoE is perceived as sensitive and this has cultural reasons. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) societies look up to their teachers and schools and, coming from the same culture, I assume that most Bahraini parents and students thought it would be inappropriate to talk negatively about their teachers, the English lessons or question the ministry's decisions. From exploring the children's perceptions it can be stated that most Bahraini students in this research seem to have faith in the EFL teachers of the project, because of certain social and cultural issues not only in Bahrain but in all GCC countries (Fakhro, 2009). The people are raised on a principle which states that the teacher is always right even when he/she is wrong. The Bahraini people are raised to highly respect and not question their teachers because it is a top-down hierarchy society (Fakhro, 2009). Some Bahraini students may not only respect, but also fear their teachers. Bahraini children in this study, interestingly, but not surprisingly, provided contradictory data in their responses to the questionnaire's open-ended question because of the reasons mentioned above. For instance, the questionnaires revealed an overwhelming indication of a positive stance towards learning English from Grade 1 as opposed to Grades 3 and 4 (88.9% see table 5.15). On the contrary, many students in their responses to the open-ended question reported that they were not completely pleased with learning English. This takes us back to the literature where many young learners perceive language acquisition and SLA negatively and are not motivated to learn because of certain aspects, for example not being exposed to the language, not using the language outside school and poverty (Dudley-Marling, 2009). Young learners sometimes strive to comprehend the significance of learning English because they rarely see English speaking people (Ho, 2003). Another reason could be that Bahraini students might have encountered some difficulties or barriers with the English language. For example, they might have come from a background where English is thought to be an unimportant language because it is "not the language of their cultural heritage", not the

language of “their intense personal feelings and the community” and that is why they could not relate to it (Phillipson, 2006: 286).

Also, a contradiction was noticed in the students’ opinions about the project’s textbooks where more than half of them agreed in the questionnaires that the textbooks were interesting. Nevertheless, in their response to the open-ended questions some students mentioned that they did not relate to the textbooks for different reasons. For example, some children stated that the characters were not Arabs, others mentioned that they did not look or dress like Bahrainis and some said that the books were boring. These different views among the Bahraini children could be an indication that some children have provided the answers which they thought their teachers wanted them to write in the close-ended part of their questionnaires (Pinter, 2011).

The Bahraini parents’ perceptions coincide as well with the sociocultural view of second language learning. They perceived that the project was important for their children’s futures and the sociocultural approach to second/foreign language acquisition states that language learners learn how to communicate in the target language in order to participate in society (Kirsch, 2012). The sociocultural approach to second/foreign language acquisition suggests that language learners not only acquire the second/foreign language with the beliefs attached to it; but they also develop thoughts of that society. The learners then shape those thoughts to transform or influence their community to the better (Kirsch, 2012).

From the analysis of their perceptions, it showed that some of the parents wanted their children to be part of the high paid working firms in Bahrain which demand English as a main requirement for their jobs. This perception from the parents is connected to what Schafer (2012) named as instrumental motivation where learning a second/foreign language has a number of abstract aims such as learning English for self-improvement, learning English for professional development or learning English for self-empowerment.

### 6.3.1 Intercultural competence

The findings of the Bahraini parents' perceptions, whose children did not take part in the project, are strongly linked to Byram (1997), (1999), (2002), Beacco and Byram (2003) and Kirsch's (2012) views about intercultural competence. These researchers stated that to be intercultural competent a person should abandon ethnocentricity attitudes towards other people and cultures (Byram, 1999). Unfortunately, some of the Bahraini parents in this part of the research provided some responses which seemed to be culturally inappropriate. They provided responses which disagreed with and seemed to lack respect to other people's perspectives. Intercultural competence means that the Bahraini parents should have an understanding about how the English speaking countries experience and perceive their environments and worlds (Beaco and Byram, 2003). According to Byram (2002) these parents could engage themselves with other cultures and have a clear understanding of the perceptions, viewpoints and beliefs of people of other languages. Byram (2002) suggests that people could start familiarising themselves with insights into the ways people in the target language act and live and not be judgemental. Kirsch (2012) and Byram (1997) state that language teachers should also start teaching intercultural competence in their language classrooms through a series of activities that allow the learners to discuss, explore and evaluate different cultures without attempting to foreignize or alienate them from their own cultures. Bahraini EFL teachers could provide communicative activities in their classrooms, for example conversations and roleplay activities, which might create an environment that encourages the students to practice intercultural competence in their learning environments, and this coincides with studies by Moeller and Nugent (2014) and Byrum and Doyé (1999).

However, a connection was noticed between a) parents who chose Grade 3 as the best grade for learning English, and b) parents who did not answer the last item on the questionnaire (which was I am pleased that my child was not part of the project of learning English from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools) and the neutral responses in the whole questionnaire. This connection coincides with cultural competency because the parents felt their children, the school which their children go to and themselves were marginalised by the MoE. This is because they were working class families who live in a small



village, where the school which was not part of the project was located. They were very sensitive to this issue and mentioned that the MoE deliberately chose their children's school for the last group of students. The parents questioned the ministry's educational governmental aim for choosing the school which their children went to not to be among the schools that applied the project because they sensed a form of othering from the ministry's side. The parents' attitudes coincide with Phillipson's (2003) views and attitudes about not overcoming negative cultural attitudes towards EFL/ESL learners and ignoring them which might lead to discrimination between people who do not speak English and those who acquired it. The parents' feelings of othering had some of them perceive that the MoE did not allow their children to be part of a global society which teaches them ways of accepting and interacting with people from other cultures, by choosing the school not be part of the project. These attitudes coincide with Sincope et al. (2012) and Moeller and Nugent's (2014) attitudes over intercultural competence and the need for providing an intercultural focus in language education that provides EFL/ESL learners with equal chances to study the language and become ICC speakers of it. The parents' attitudes also coincide with Phillipson's (2009) claims about linguistic imperialism and that it involves unequal communicative rights and exchange among groups or people defined on the bases of their position in society and competence in certain languages with unequal benefits in a system, in this case the MoE, that naturalizes and legitimates such exploitation.

### **6.3.2 The project's EFL textbooks**

There was a similarity between the teachers' perceptions and the children's perceptions about the project's textbooks but this connection was not viewed in the parents' perceptions because they were not questioned about them. Both the teachers and the students thought the books were boring, not interesting, needed to be replaced and some of them thought they were culturally bias. This strong connection was supported by studies which state that EFL textbooks should be appropriate for the culture it is going to be taught in and should provide cultural diversity as long as it does not impact the local culture, like it did for some Bahraini young learners in this study, or threaten the values and

norms of the country (Alfahadi, 2012; Hinkel 1999). Another connection was seen between the perceptions of the teachers and students about the project's textbooks not showing a fair proportion between the Bahraini culture and the culture of the English speaking countries. The teachers reported that they wanted the culture of the English speaking countries to be introduced but they also demanded more chapters about the Bahrain culture to be included in the project's textbooks. The teachers' perceptions coincided with the views of Alfahadi (2012) on EFL textbooks. The teachers perceived that EFL textbooks should present both the local and target language culture, but there should be a clear distinction among them when presented. "Every culture should be presented in its own rights" and there should be clear features of the Bahraini culture in the project's textbooks and these features must be preserved (Alfahadi, 2012: 180). The teachers stated that they were approached by some parents who perceived that some models in the project's textbooks were sensitive to the Bahraini and Islamic values. Some of the EFL teachers and parents perceived that the project's textbooks might foreignize the students because the focus is on the culture of the target language, and not the Bahraini culture, and to consider native speakers' competencies as the norm will most likely result in an inequitable hierarchy (Phillipson, 2009). The parents and the EFL teachers' attitudes coincide with Phillipson's (2009) study that echoes the anti-global English stance and reveals one of the aims of linguistic imperialism which is the transfer of a dominant language and the aspects of it to speakers of other languages through language textbooks. This was clearly the case with the project's textbooks because the content of them glorified the English language and English speaking world and that is why some textbook activities were adapted by the EFL teachers to provide the children with material that is not culturally bias and close to their religious beliefs and Bahraini heritage. The EFL teachers' adaptation of some of the textbooks' activities and the project's resources coincide with studies by Harwood (2010), Hawkins (2010), Samuda (2005) and Tomlinson (2003) which state that language teachers have the right to adapt, manipulate and even exclude their language textbooks and material if they feel that they are culturally bias and do not meet the needs of their students or the language teachers. They claim that it is the language teacher's responsibility to modify the activities in the language classroom if they sensed that the students are starting to create boundaries and barriers towards the

target language because of certain cultural messages which are sent in the resources and tasks of the language's textbooks. The perception of the teachers and parents coincide with what Alfahadi (2012: 62) claimed that "by introducing the students' own cultural model, the learning process becomes much easier for both the students and their EFL teachers".

#### **6.4 The role of the Ministry of Education in Bahrain**

His Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince of Bahrain and the chairman of the Economic Development Board of Bahrain (EDB) developed with EDB members a long-term plan in 2008: Bahrain Vision 2030. The aim of this plan is to develop "a productive, globally competitive economy, shaped by the government and driven by a pioneering private sector" not depending on oil or energy (Global Arab Network, 2014). This vision has invested in education in Bahrain and the project of Learning English from Grade 1 was a result of this educational reform.

##### **6.4.1 Teachers' perceptions about the Ministry of Education**

The Bahraini teachers claimed that the MoE has always been the only authority which decides and imposes things on teachers in all grades, but this was only partially the case with the project. They stated that the MoE rarely consults EFL teachers, because they usually import experts from Britain, but the teachers were consulted about the project because it was part of the Bahrain Vision 2030.

The teachers perceived the MoE to be slightly authoritative when it came to the project. They claimed that although they were consulted and they reported their viewpoints about the disadvantages of the project, only a few suggestions which they made were taken into consideration. This part of the study echoes with research by Alsubaie (2014) and Elyas (2011) about another GCC country, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The position which the MoE holds in KSA is similar to the position of the MoE in Bahrain. Alsubaie (2014) and Elyas (2011) stated that the MoE controls and centralises the English language syllabus and the entire curriculum of English in school grades. Alsubaie (2014) and Elyas

(2011) also mentioned that the EFL teachers follow and apply English syllabus guidelines and deadlines which are imposed by the MoE. Their views about the Saudi MoE coincide with the perceptions of the Bahraini teachers about the Bahraini MoE. The Bahraini teachers perceived what (Alsubaie, 2014: 37) stated and that is most of the “educational decisions are made at ministerial level and managed by supervisors whom teachers strive to please” and that could harm any language teaching process. This could affect the teaching process in the project.

#### **6.4.2 Parents’ perceptions about the Ministry of Education**

Some of the parents whose children were part of the project perceived the MoE to be developing its plans for a better future of Bahrain and starting to take serious reform steps to upgrade language and knowledge in Bahraini schools. Their positive perceptions about the ministry did not coincide with the perceptions of the parents whose children were not part of the project.

Some of the parents whose children were not part of the project revealed that the MoE was biased and does not think about small schools in rural areas that accommodate children of working-class families. They perceived the MoE to be unreliable, prejudiced and imposing. This is partially related to the views of the EFL teachers where they thought the ministry to be authoritative and imposing in the areas of the syllabus and curriculum.

Some of the parents in their responses to the open-ended question showed a negative attitude towards the MoE which may have had a negative impact on their children’s perceptions about learning English. From a sociocultural point of view, the parents’ neutral perceptions about the project and their disapproving attitudes towards the ministry may affect their children’s values and beliefs about the target language (Kirsch, 2012). This could cause their children to lack intercultural competence. In the future these Bahraini children might not be able to appropriately, sensitively and effectively interact with other people who are culturally and linguistically different from them (Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006). The parents’ perceptions contradict with the ministry’s current educational policy which has introduced intercultural competence in its teaching aims as part of

Bahrain Vision 2030. If the contradictions develop, the EFL teachers may face challenging environments when teaching English because of structures of society which enable some people more than others. Since Bahraini teachers have **not** been trained in sociocultural aspects of language teaching and learning in 2004, some of them might lack the appropriate strategies for dealing with the problem of negative perceptions and views of parents and children. This may lead the EFL teachers to feel ill-equipped when dealing with such concerns whether inside the classroom with the students or outside the classroom with the parents. Findings in this part of the study are related to the findings of Butler (2013) that reveals the role of social status, perceptions and behaviours over young learners' English language learning.

## **6.5 Summary**

In this chapter, the details of the findings of this research study have been discussed regarding the perception of the students, parents and the EFL teachers about the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools. The findings were discussed in the light of the literature presented in Chapter 3 and the four research questions. They demonstrated various factors that had major impacts on the project like learning English from an early age, cultural issues and the role of the MoE. Also some challenges were revealed, for example **namely parents'** views about the importance of maintaining traditions and local cultures rather than a globalised English-speaking world.

The study revealed that the majority of the participants thought the project to be a success and that learning English from an early age has benefitted their children, while there were mixed views, notably from the parents whose children were not part of the project, about the project and about learning English from an early age.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### 7. Conclusion

#### 7.1 Introduction

This final chapter is divided into five sections: (1) Summary of the findings in relation to the research questions, (2) Contribution to knowledge, (3) Implications of the study, (4) Recommendations for future research, and (5) My personal reflection on the research study.

The findings of this research study are exclusive to the Bahraini EFL students, parents and EFL teachers participating in this study and outlines their perceptions gathered through survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews used for exploring the participants' perceptions about the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools.

#### 7.2 Summary of the findings in relation to the research questions

##### 7.2.1 Students' perceptions

**What are the perceptions of the students who have been part of the project and studied English from Grade 1, about the project of learning English starting from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?**

Analysis of the collected data for answering the first research question which explored the perceptions of the students who have studied English from Grade 1 revealed that most students perceived the project to be a success and that they found learning English from an early age useful. Many students' perceptions were positive towards the project because, as they argued, they benefitted much from it whether for communication or for educational purposes at school. They also mentioned that because of their young age when starting learning English they were able to learn it easier and faster and practice it more.

On the other hand, the students also talked about the problems of the project and what they wanted to change about it. Some of the students mentioned that they cannot relate to their textbooks because the textbooks have nothing to do

with their culture and even the characters in them looked different than they do, had different customs and carried names they hear for the first time. The students' perceptions are related to some of the parents and EFL teachers' attitudes about the project's textbooks being culturally bias and imposed by the MoE on their children for an unknown educational governmental aim. This aim could be related to linguistic imperialism because it focuses on why and how certain authorities allow specific languages to dominate nationally and internationally and on several attempts to account for such a dominance in a theoretically explicit founded way (Phillipson, 2009).

The students also stated that there is no technology involved in the learning process which caused a boring routine for them in the EFL classroom and that could demotivate some of the children (Ho, 2003).

### **7.2.2 The perceptions of the parents whose children have been part of the project**

**What are the perceptions of the parents whose children have been part of the project for 6 years about learning English starting from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?**

The parents of the students who applied the project of teaching English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools were satisfied with the project and had a more positive stance towards it than their children. They perceived the project to be extremely effective and successful for their children who (according to the parents) benefited exceptionally from it and it showed in their children's language and communication skills. They also perceived that starting teaching English from an early age is a step which should have been taken by the MoE a long time ago. They stated that there was evidence that younger learners are faster and easier learners of foreign languages and they gave examples from the Bahraini environment which indicates this point.

A number of parents talked about the imperfections of the project. Some of the parents perceived the project's textbooks to be culturally bias and that their children could be foreignized by some of the content in the textbooks especially that they contained nothing about Bahrain's culture and heritage and/or

Bahrain's customs and traditions. The parents sensed a cultural inequality in some of the content of the textbooks where the culture of the target language was dominant and this cultural inequality is related to inequalities in ideological properties as in pedagogic attitudes and principles (Philipson, 2009).

The parents were also not satisfied with some of the teaching materials and felt that there has been a redundancy in the materials for a long time. They stated that nothing new was introduced to the learning methods and as the students advanced in primary level, the materials became more limited to the textbook, some stories, and a tape recorder. Some were also dissatisfied with technology not being a major part of the project.

### **7.2.3 The perceptions of the parents whose children were not part of the project**

**What are the perceptions of the parents whose children were not part of the project about learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools?**

80% of the parents whose children did not go to primary schools which applied the project wished their children were part of the project but some of them thought their children should not learn English from an early age. They claimed that it does not make a difference if their children started learning English from Grade 1 or Grades 3 or 4 and that their children would not have benefited from the project. They perceived the age of starting learning/teaching English not to be an important factor and that their children would not benefit from starting learning English from an early age in Grade 1. On the other hand, some parents were dissatisfied and frustrated that the project was not applied with their children and resigned into acceptance of nonparticipation of their children in the project. They perceived the project to be very useful for Bahraini young learners because it gave them a chance to study English from an early age but this chance, as they mentioned, was not given to their children. The parents felt that they were othered and marginalized by the MoE because of their social status in the Bahraini society, most of them were working class families who lived in a village, and they stated that this could be the reason why the MoE did not apply



the project in the school where their children studied. The parents claimed that their attitudes and feeling of othering developed because they felt victimized by the MoE and because they felt powerless since they did not choose for their children not to learn English from an early age but it was imposed on them and their children. Also, because in some Third World countries, for example in Bahrain, learning English is connected to access to power, wealth and a better future for the people who acquire it (Phillipson, 2003). Therefore, some of the parents might have felt that their children were deprived from these privileges, as they view them, and they could not do anything about it because their children did not have a choice of learning English from an early age or at a later stage.

#### **7.2.4 EFL teachers' perceptions**

**What are the perceptions of the EFL teachers about the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools knowing that they have been applying the project for more than 10 years since it started in 2004?**

The EFL teachers in this research perceived the project to be the best project the MoE has introduced and argued that it had succeeded more than they expected, because it was targeting young learners who can easily and quickly grasp a foreign language because of the young age factor. They mentioned that they thought teaching English to young learners is going to be a challenging task but it turned out to be an easy job because the young children were fast at grasping the language and did not require a lot of repetition.

On the other hand, EFL teachers in this study perceived the project to have some disadvantages which the MoE should address and work on in the near future. They perceived some content in the project's textbooks not to be related to the Bahraini culture or society and that is why they had to adapt some textbooks' activities and make them culturally appropriate for the children. The EFL teachers perceived that even some of the textbooks resources and materials were culturally bias and had to be adapted and made related to the Bahraini culture so the children do not feel foreignized or threatened by the

culture of the target language. Adapting activities and language resources in the EFL classrooms could provide the EFL teachers with a good chance to teach intercultural competence in their language classrooms (Moeller and Nugent, 2014). The EFL teachers could prepare their students to engage in a global society by teaching them different appropriate approaches of interacting with people from different cultures without harming their cultural identity (Sincope et al. 2012; Byrum, 1997).

The EFL teachers also mentioned the lack of technology in the project. They stated that the textbook had a website but it is not user-friendly and boring. They claim that it has no creative exercises for the students or useful teaching materials for the teachers and they state that since some students and their parents have issues against the textbooks not many teachers informed the parents about the textbooks' website.

### **7.3 Contribution to knowledge**

This research contributes to the local and global knowledge worlds since it is the first study to focus comprehensively on the project of learning English starting from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools and explored students, parents and EFL teachers' perceptions about the project. Generally, the findings in this research uphold some of the results of previous studies about students, EFL teachers, and parents' perceptions about learning English from a young age. They signify that the majority of participants have perceived a positive stance towards learning English from Grade 1 and from an early age, as some participants in similar research studies in different parts of the world (see Bista, 2008; Hornberger, 2003; Baker and Prys Jones, 1998). This research study contributes to the knowledge about learning EFL from an early age by filling a gap in the literature regarding learning English from an early age in the Bahraini and GCC countries' educational context. Research studies of this type would help in rising TESOL policy makers' consciousness on how intercultural awareness should be considered when designing projects or implementing policies for EFL/ESL learners. This research study would also contribute to the literature on linguistic imperialism and how it affects Third World countries, as in Bahrain, where the government and certain authorities,

for example the MoE, promote and impose learning English where the EFL teachers are only actors that are supported by an imperialist structure since priority in the project was given to the project's teacher training course and curriculum development (see Crystal, 2003 and Philipson, 2003).

In view of the research being the first of its kind in Bahrain, it reveals to the wider TESOL community the advantages and disadvantages of learning English in Bahraini primary government schools from Grade 1, from the perspectives of its participants. TESOL policy makers in other parts of the world may benefit from those findings by avoiding the errors the Bahraini MoE made while designing the project and not correcting them after implementing it. It would benefit the TESOL community on how to deal with culturally bias textbooks and resources and on how to adapt culturally appropriate activities in their classrooms especially if the students or/and their parents feel that some of the content tends to foreignize the learners. It also encourages EFL/ESL teachers to teach intercultural competence in their language classrooms through allowing their students to acquire communicative competence in the English language, knowledge and attitudes about the English speaking world without affronting the students' culture or trying to change their cultural identity (Moore, 2006; Byrum et al., 2002; Byrum1997). In addition, TESOL researchers could conclude from stakeholders' perceptions about their views, requirements and suggestions for upgrading learning English from Grade 1 especially in similar context where English had been taught recently in grade 1, for example in some GCC counties like Saudi Arabia (see Al Dhubaib, 2002). Therefore, this research contributes to the gaps in the fields of EFL teaching and learning in the GCC countries.

It also contributes to the EFL literature and addresses the shortage in the current available literature on the pedagogy of teaching EFL to young learners through exploring the perceptions of the stakeholders about learning English from Grade 1 and through addressing the insights that are related to teaching and learning EFL from an early age in the Bahraini context.

Specific insights this study has shown is that the failure or success of all the work that material developers, test developers, administrators and curriculum managers accomplish relies on the EFL/ESL teachers since they are the link between what is designed and the implementation of the policy. Also students'

views should be taken into consideration when implementing a new TESOL policy or project in order to explore the gaps and errors in those policies and determine what is needed for improvement. Therefore, this research contributes to the Bahraini and global TESOL community through comprehending the educational authorities in Bahrain and globally about the performance of the project, the students, parents and EFL teachers' preferences and needs. That could be significant if the MoE considers developing the project in the future which, if achieved, will expand the TESOL community more in Bahrain because new things could be explored about learning English in Bahrain. It could also benefit other communities that applied or thinking of applying similar projects that introduce English from an early age to EFL/ESL students through enlightening them on how certain issues, for example culturally bias textbooks and not teaching intercultural competence in the language classroom, could be critical factors when designing and implementing such projects because it directly affects the leaners and their families.

#### **7.4 Implications of the study (policy and practice)**

The findings of this research imply that there are some modifications which could be performed to develop the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools.

##### **7.4.1 What EFL teachers could do to improve the project**

The EFL teachers who are applying the project tend to have some concerns about it and although some of them have tried solving the problems they have faced with the project, others have just avoided them until a higher authority addresses them and acts on them. These problems covered two parts of the project which were (a) the lack of variety in the teaching materials and (b) problems with the content of the textbook from a cultural perspective.

#### **7.4.1.1 Teaching Material – specifically online**

The teachers have materials that come ready with the textbooks or which the language specialists in the MoE provided as supplementary materials but are considered insufficient by the EFL teachers in this study. For the lack of variety in teaching materials, some free online sites may provide EFL/ESL teachers with materials depending on their learners' ages and their aim for the lesson. These sites have different free EFL educational materials which could fill in the gap of the lack of learning materials. Also using a broader range of creative teaching methods because the children enjoy it and the EFL teachers are motivated by it since, according to Edwards (2002), different learners learn in different ways.

#### **7.4.1.2 The project's textbooks**

The problems with the content of the textbook, from a cultural perspective, could be treated as an introduction to diversity in the English language classroom through teaching intercultural competence by providing unique opportunities for the development of intercultural competence in the EFL classroom. The young learners could be talked to about the culture of the family in the book, their looks, and their customs without tackling the issue of religion because it is such a critical issue. It is outlawed to talk about religious beliefs in government school classrooms other than which the students learn about as part of the Islamic curriculum. Another way would be by introducing some vocabulary from the Bahraini or Arabic culture and presenting it in class. An easy and useful way of doing this, from my personal experience with the textbooks, is by taking advantage of traditional, national, and religious celebrations that occur during school days like Bahrain's national day and the holy month of Ramadan. The learners could be provided with some knowledge about these celebrations in simple English so that they feel they could relate to their English classes and that learning English does not segregate them from their Bahraini culture, heritage, customs and traditions.

#### 7.4.2 What the MoE could do to improve the project

The MoE could collaborate with the EFL teachers who apply the project and listen to their perceptions, views and concerns about the project and try to overcome the difficulties the EFL teachers face. The MoE could also try to develop the project especially since some students and parents have started to complain about some issues with the project, for instance some of the textbooks' content and resources being culturally bias and the lack of technology in the English language classes.

After more than ten years of applying the project one can argue that the EFL teachers should have representatives on the board which decides the curriculum for the project, examines and pilots its content, and finally agrees or disagrees with it. Some of the EFL teachers have more than 10 years experience of the project and their opinions and apprehensions about the project could be considered, acknowledged and acted upon.

Also, the stakeholders could improve young learners' experiences of the project. Stakeholders refer to those who take the decisions in the MoE in Bahrain about different EFL projects and plans for primary level education and primary school. They are in a descending order:

- The Minister
- Directorate of Curricula → Foreign Languages Section → English Department
- The English Language Department in the Directorate of Supervision
- The English Language Department in the Directorate of Training and Professional Development
- The English Language Department for Primary School Education.

Representatives of all these sectors in the Bahraini MoE take part in taking the decision when it comes to the project the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools.

My study proposes that these representatives should meet with the EFL teachers, parents and even students and cooperate with them for the sake of the development and progress of the project and take advantage of their experience with the project. They should all work on developing the project's

curriculum so that it includes Bahrain's essential characteristics, the projects' aims and objectives, EFL learners' characteristics, EFL learners' standards, EFL teachers' preferences and mainstream curricula. Additionally, the MoE could undertake a survey in Bahrain targeting the students who have started learning English from Grade 1 more than ten years ago and are now in secondary school and explore their perceptions and experiences with the project. The ministry could explore the students' perceptions about the project and ask them different questions about it. For example the MoE could ask the students if they have benefitted/did not benefit from the project and how/why, the project's advantages and disadvantages from their point of views, and even ask if they have any ideas or suggestions which could improve the project for future learners.

### **7.5 Recommendations for future research**

Further studies could be undertaken to explore the factors that affected and influenced the participants' responses in this research because people's perceptions change over time. Consequently, some insights for further future research are as following:

- As it was mentioned in the previous point (see 7.4.2) the MoE could conduct a longitudinal study exploring the perceptions of the older students who studied English from Grade 1 more than ten years ago. This study will provide the ministry with full analysis about the students' perceptions about the project, its benefits, and its limitations so that the MoE could work on improving and developing the project for the next generations of learners. The study could also explore their English language outcomes and compare them with the outcomes of the students who have not studied English from Grade 1.
- There is an importunate need to review and modify the goals of the project and its curriculum so that they are well-matched with the students, EFL teachers and even parents' needs and demands. Thus, the MoE could obtain feedback about the project and research it from the students, EFL teachers and parents' perspectives.

- A large scale research study may help in investigating the effect of starting learning and teaching English from Grade 1 on developing students' English language proficiency. An investigation like this may reveal the best teaching and learning methods, techniques and materials which would be helpful and effective in improving Bahraini students' communicative and cohesion skills.
- It was not feasible to conduct observations during this research because of the length of time it takes to gain approval from the MoE especially when underage students are involved. Therefore, future research could include observations in the EFL classrooms that apply the project to examine and investigate the teaching/learning practices and obtain useful information about the teaching and learning processes that take place inside the EFL classes.
- Another suggested issue that is worth exploring is the impact of Arabic usage in the EFL classrooms that apply the project. Arabic is the students and EFL teachers' mother tongue and their first language (L1). Thus, investigating the impact of L1 use on the students' foreign language learning would be beneficial for developing the project because it could reveal the social, psychological, and cognitive influences and effects of the impact on the Bahraini learners.
- A suggested future research could include exploring the project's textbooks and resources and examining the amount of culturally bias content in them. This research would be beneficial especially if the MoE attempts to improve some aspects of the textbooks that are culturally unacceptable in Bahrain and bias. It would also help the EFL teachers who are currently applying the project and have never adapted the project's culturally bias activities, because they are waiting for the MoE to act upon this issue, by guiding them through ways of making the activities more culturally appropriate for their young Bahraini learners.



## 7.6 My personal reflection on the study

As a Bahraini student, I came to study in the UK with enthusiasm and beliefs that I could build on my experiences, knowledge and skills which I had developed at that stage. It was an opportunity because it was the second time for me to study out of Bahrain since I was able in 2004 to earn an MA in Education from the University College of Dublin.

I faced a number of challenges during my EdD study, such as time management because I did not organize my time very well when I first started my study but with the guidance of my two supervisors I was able to learn how to meet the deadlines and devote a certain amount of time for each chapter.

When I was gathering data for my research study I was transformed to a busy professional researcher who had chunks of data which needed interpretation, analysis, translation, and re-visiting because the more I was engaged with the data the more I was able to discover and understand the issues and areas of my study. This experience enabled me to believe in my research skills and abilities.

In conclusion and in the light of all the reflections that are mentioned above, I consider myself with a huge responsibility which I will be taking back with me to Bahrain's educational contexts and that is all what I have learnt throughout my EdD journey. I will use all the experiences I gained **and the findings of my study** to continue researching in Bahraini educational EFL settings and improve Bahraini students and teachers' learning environments. Finally, I want to use all the knowledge I gained from doing my EdD in TESOL to be able to publish in one of the TESOL journals one day. Therefore, this research study is only a start for me in my long journey back in my home country Bahrain.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A:

**8** examples of empirical studies and findings on different areas of second/foreign language learning and teaching



<b>8 examples of empirical studies and findings on different areas of second/foreign language learning/teaching</b>	
<b>Study 1</b>	Johnson, J. S., and Newport, E. L. (1989). Critical period effects in second language learning: The influence of maturational state on the acquisition of English as a second language.
<b>Context</b>	In the USA. The subjects were 46 Korean and Chinese students. The first group members were of ages between 3 to 15; the second group held participants from the ages 17 to 39.
<b>Focus and aim</b>	To prove that younger learners are better learners when it comes to using and applying syntax and morphology rules of English.
<b>Methods of collecting data</b>	An aural grammatically judgment test. The students were requested to evaluate the grammaticality of 276 English spoken sentences.
<b>Key findings</b>	Participants who started learning English at a late age lacked native-like language aptitudes and what they accomplished in the test varied more widely against the other young group who did extremely well in the test and had native-like language abilities.
<b>Comments</b>	Even though older language learners reveal an initial improvement over younger language learners, long-lasting mastery of the target language drops with increasing the age of language learning and achievement falls linearly following the age of 7. This study is relevant to my research because it investigates the same area of age and whether it really makes a big difference if the language learners were younger when acquiring a foreign/second language or not.

<b>8 examples of empirical studies and findings on different areas of second/foreign language learning/teaching</b>	
<b>Study 2</b>	Yamada, J., Takatsuka, S., Kotake, N., Kurusu, J. (1980). On the optimum age of for teaching foreign vocabulary to children.
<b>Context</b>	Japanese learners of English. Thirty Japanese elementary school students between the ages 7 to 10. All the participants were of average scholastic achievements that were distributed evenly across 3 age groups. The groups were of 10 graders aged 7, 10 third graders aged 9 and 10 fifth graders aged 11. All participants had no experience of English.
<b>Focus and aim</b>	To prove that younger learners are rapid and better learners than older learners.
<b>Methods of collecting data</b>	Individual tests. From a list of 40 English mono-syllabic and di-syllabic words. The subject of each of which was represented in a related picture. Each participant was given 4 items to study along with the matching pictures in 2 learning sessions separated by a 24 hours period.
<b>Key findings</b>	Mean learning scores fall with age, this proves that the older the age the lower the score.
<b>Comments</b>	The findings to this study are so related to my research and strengthens my idea about the younger=the better concept. The only irrelevant thing is that the sample had no previous experience of English, whereas some Bahraini learners have interacted with the English language humbly.

<b>8 examples of empirical studies and findings on different areas of second/foreign language learning/teaching</b>	
<b>Study 3</b>	Snow, C. and Hoefnagel-Hohle, M. (1982). The Critical Period for Language Acquisition: Evidence from Second Language Learning.
<b>Context</b>	In Holland. The subjects were 51 English students in 5 different age groups who were learning Dutch.
<b>Focus and aim</b>	Does acquiring native-like proficiency in the target language starts by acquiring the language at an early age?
<b>Methods of collecting data</b>	The students' achievements at three different periods in the Netherlands were weighed against the achievements of native speakers and two advanced speakers of Dutch. The learners were tested three times with an interval of four to five months, were the advanced speakers were tested once only. The beginners conducted the tests individually at home or at school in different areas, like storytelling, morphology, auditory discrimination, sentence translation, sentence repletion, story comprehension, vocabulary and pronunciation.
<b>Key findings</b>	The tests revealed that older language learners aged 12 to 15 years old learnt rapidly through the first months of learning Dutch.
<b>Comments</b>	This study stands against the idea which I support about the younger=the better. Although the findings are very valuable but they prove the opposite of what I am trying to investigate in this research. This research opens a new window for questioning the CPH because the data it provides does not support it.

<b>8 examples of empirical studies and findings on different areas of second/foreign language learning/teaching</b>	
<b>Study 4</b>	Barkhuizen Gary P. (1998). Discovering Learners' Perceptions of ESL Classroom Teaching/Learning Activities in a South African Context.
<b>Context</b>	It was set in a former House of Representatives (so-called coloured) high school in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. The language of learning/teaching in schools was Afrikaans, the first language of the majority of learners at schools. About 10% used Xhosa as their first language. All learners, about 600, did ESL as a subject. English classes varied in size from 25 to 40 learners.
<b>Focus and aim</b>	Perceptions as a non-linguistic outcome (attitudes developed as a result of formal instruction and learning) were the focus of this research. It explored the perceptions, as non-linguistic outcomes, of ESL students towards the classroom language learning and teaching activities in which they participated in their high school language classroom.
<b>Methods of collecting data</b>	<p>a. A multi-method qualitative approach was employed for data collection and analysis. A questionnaire, the ENLEAS-Q, was designed and distributed randomly to sixty students from grades 8-11.</p> <p>b. Also, one class from each grade was asked to write a one-page composition with the following title: "What I like and dislike about English classes at school".</p> <p>c. Qualitative in-depth individual interviews were conducted with five English language instructors.</p>

	d. Group interviews were conducted with six students from each of grades 8-11 (two each from the top, middle, and bottom of the class, positions being based on grades for work done throughout the academic year).
<b>Key findings</b>	The learners' perceptions did not always match with their language teachers' perceptions.
<b>Comments</b>	Although this is an old study but I found it to be very useful for my research because it gave me an insight on the kind of work I will be conducting and what to look for and ask about when choosing and writing my methodology.

<b>8 examples of empirical studies and findings on different areas of second/foreign language learning/teaching</b>	
<b>Study 5</b>	Levine, G. S. (2003). Student and instructor beliefs and attitudes about target language use, first language use, and anxiety: Report of a questionnaire study.
<b>Context</b>	The participants were 600 foreign language learners and 163 foreign language instructors who were asked to do an internet-based questionnaire on target language (TL) and first language (L1) use in university-level foreign language classes.
<b>Focus and aim</b>	To develop preliminary components of a descriptive model of TL and L1 use and explore the relationships between TL use and student anxiety about TL use.
<b>Methods of collecting data</b>	A questionnaire was designed to measure 1st and 2nd year foreign language learners' and teachers' (a) perceptions about quantity of target language use in different classroom settings and contexts at the university's second language (L2) classes (b) beliefs and perceptions about the importance of target language use, (c) beliefs and perceptions about student anxiety due to target language use. Two versions of the questionnaire were designed, one for the teachers and the other for the learners.
<b>Key findings</b>	Learners and instructors felt that learners used the L2 less than their instructors did and even less when communicating with other students than in their communication with their instructor. Learners who perceived a higher level of target language use in their classrooms showed lower levels of anxiety about TL use. Also, the instructors who

	answered the questionnaire perceived higher levels of L2 related anxiety among the learners than the learners themselves did.
<b>Comments</b>	This study was very powerful because it was based on a questionnaire that asked for teachers and students' perceptions and beliefs and was able to identify effective pedagogical principles that both acknowledge and support the classroom as the multilingual environment in the USA.

<b>8 examples of empirical studies and findings on different areas of second/foreign language learning/teaching</b>	
<b>Study 6</b>	Brown. A. V. (2009). Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Foreign Language Teaching: A Comparison of Ideals.
<b>Context</b>	83 intact 1st and 2nd year language classes across nine languages at the University of Arizona; in addition to 49 foreign language instructors and their students.
<b>Focus and aim</b>	To compare and identify, overall and by teachers, teachers' and students' ideals of effective teachers' behaviours.
<b>Methods of collecting data</b>	24 item Likert-scale questionnaire which covers numerous areas of foreign language pedagogies.
<b>Key findings</b>	Learner were in favour of a grammar-based method and approach, while their instructors favoured a more communicative language classroom, as evidenced by significant differences in such areas as target language use, error correction, and group work. There were major discrepancies between instructors and learners' perceptions in several relevant areas in this study.
<b>Comments</b>	This study and the following research study, study 9, share the same comments. They were very useful to me because they both explained, in details, about language teacher's perception whether of effective foreign language teaching or of learners' FL academic skills; what they think of them and what do they mean to them. They also talked about the students' perception in those matters.



<b>8 examples of empirical studies and findings on different areas of second/foreign language learning/teaching</b>	
<b>Study 7</b>	Sparks, R. L. and Ganschow, L. (1996). Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Foreign Language Academic Skills and Affective Characteristics.
<b>Context</b>	168 girls in a single-sex college preparatory high school and enrolled in 1st-year foreign language courses.
<b>Focus and aim</b>	To examine the relationship between instructors' perceptions of learners' FL academic skills and affective characteristics and their performance on tests of native language skill and FL aptitude.
<b>Methods of collecting data</b>	a. Individual and group tests. b. Foreign language instructors were asked to assess every student ,using an instrument (Teacher Rating Scale for Foreign Language Learning) which the researchers developed. Instructors were asked to rate students from low (1) to high (5) in the following areas: (a) perceptions of students' FL academic skills in reading (FL reading), writing (FL writing), listening (FL listening), speaking (FL speaking), and overall proficiency (FL proficiency) and (b) perception of students' affective characteristics in the FL class in motivation (FL motivation), attitude (FL attitude) and anxiety (FL anxiety).
<b>Key findings</b>	a. Learners who achieved low on the testing measures were perceived by instructors as having weaker foreign language academic skills and lack positive affective characteristics (i.e., anxiety, motivation, attitude) than learners with strong native-like language skills and foreign language aptitude.

	b. Also, learners who scored low on the testing measures got lower foreign language grades than learners who scored high on the measures
<b>Comments</b>	This study and the previous research study, study 8, share the same comments. They were very useful to me because they both explained, in details, about language teacher's perception whether of effective foreign language teaching or of learners' FL academic skills; what they think of them and what do they mean to them. They also talked about the students' perception in those matters.

<b>8 examples of empirical studies and findings on different areas of second/foreign language learning/teaching</b>	
<b>Study 8</b>	Zhang, C., Ollila, L. O. and Harvey C. B. (1998). Chinese Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's Literacy and Schooling in Canada.
<b>Context</b>	87 Chinese immigrant parents whose children go to schools of two major metropolitan areas of British Columbia in Canada. 31 parents from the People's Republic of China, 31 from Taiwan and 25 from Hong Kong. All 87 families immigrated to Canada.
<b>Focus and aim</b>	What are the Chinese immigrant parents' perceptions of the differences of schooling in Canada?
<b>Methods of collecting data</b>	A very simple questionnaire which explored parents' perceptions of their children's literacy and schooling. For the coding and data analysis to be convenient, 12 items were either scaled questions or multiple-choice, 7 items needed "yes" or "no" answers, and the remaining 7 items asked the parents either to add comments of no more than two lines or to give short and very brief answers.
<b>Key findings</b>	<p>a. 98% noticed a huge difference not only in the two cultures, but also in their educational ideologies.</p> <p>b. The parents noticed stem from the style of teaching and learning in the Canadian system called flexibility ,creativity, and autonomy. Flexibility meant that instructors design the instruction according to individual differences and that the learners were allowed to make their personal choices. On the contrary, the learners were not given as much freedom in their home</p>

	country so the parents perceptions revealed that they were not used to and not happy with this education system.
<b>Comments</b>	This study was like a preparation for me for the different parents I will be dealing with. I state that some parent's perception can be sometimes very old school and against change so it is good for me to be prepared for such people and such perceptions.

**Appendix B:**

**A description of the research study**

**Appendix B1:**

**A translation of the Description of the research study in Arabic**



Dear Sir/Madame,

My name is Sofia Hashim and I am a student at the University of Exeter doing my Doctorate of Education degree in TESOL. My research project entitled: Student, teacher and parent perceptions about the teaching of English from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools.

I would like to give you a brief description about my study before you agree/disagree to take part in it. In Bahrain students usually start studying English at grade 3, but in 2004 the Ministry of Education decided to implement teaching English to grade 1 primary level students in 20 schools only. The aim of this research is to explore the EFL teachers, students and parents' perceptions at the end of their primary level education i.e. grade 6 after learning English from grade 1 for the first time in Bahraini government schools.

The participants will be EFL students from 4 different primary public schools; 2 boys' schools and 2 girls' schools. To explore and then measure the perceptions, I will conduct an empirical study at your child's school and collect data through interviews with teachers and questionnaires with students and parents.

There are no identified risks from participating in this research for all the data will be confidential and for research use only. Participation in this research will be completely voluntary and the participants may refuse to participate without consequence. Responses to the survey will only be reported in aggregated form to protect the identity of respondents. The data collected from this study will be stored in a locked cabinet or drawer and digital data will be stored in my password-protected account on the University of Exeter U-drive.

Further information regarding the research can be obtained from me. Thank you for your consideration. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Yours,

Sofia Hashim  
[sofiauob@gmail.com](mailto:sofiauob@gmail.com)

## شرح مفصل عن بحث دراسي

اعزائي المشاركون في البحث الدراسي

تحية طيبة و بعد

اسمي الاستاذة صوفيا هاشم وانني في الوقت الحالي أقوم بالتحضير للحصول على درجة الدكتوراة في التربية من جامعة اكزتر بالمملكة المتحدة و ستكون الأطروحة حول انطباعات معلمين/معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية و طلبة صف السادس الابتدائي و اولياء الامور حول مشروع تدريس اللغة الانجليزية ابتداء من الصف الاول الابتدائي في مدارس البحرين الابتدائية.

يسعدني انه سحت لي الفرصه لاقدم لكم شرح وافي عن بحثي الدراسي. لقد قامت وزارة التربية و التعليم في عام 2004 ببدء مشروع تدريس اللغة الانجليزية ابتداء من الصف الاول الابتدائي في مدارس البحرين الابتدائية في عشرون مدرسة فقط و اخذت في زيادة عدد المدارس شيئا فشيء بعد ذلك. لقد مرت الان عشر سنوات على مشروع مشروع تدريس اللغة الانجليزية ابتداء من الصف الاول الابتدائي في مدارس البحرين الابتدائية لذلك هذا البحث سوف يقوم بدراسة انطباعات معلمين/معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية و طلبة صف السادس الابتدائي الذين طبق عليهم المشروع من الصف الاول و حتى الصف السادس الابتدائي و اولياء امور الطلبة الذين ابنائهم طبق عليهم المشروع و الذين ابنائهم لم يطبق عليهم المشروع حول هذا المشروع.

سوف يطبق البحث في خمس مدارس ابتدائية حكومية في البحرين، اربع مدارس طبقت المشروع و المدرسة المتبقية لم تطبق المشروع. سوف يستخدم البحث الاستبيان من اجل الطلبة و اولياء الامور و المقابلات الشخصية مع المعلمين/المعلمات.

لقد اطلعتكم على مشروع بحثي و لكم الحق الكامل في الموافقه او رفض المشاركة في هذا البحث بدون اي ضغوطات اي كان شكلها و إن قبلتم المشاركة فإنه لكم حق الانسحاب في اي وقت و في اي مرحلة من مراحل البحث. كما يحق لكم رفض التصريح للباحث بنشر اي معلومات عنكم و للعلم انه اي معلومات تدلون بها للباحث سوف تستخدم لغرض واحد و هو للبحث العلمي الدراسي فقط لا غير و ربما تستخدم للنشر في مجال الابحاث فقط. كما ربما يتم استخدام المعلومات بين اكثر من باحث في هذا البحث الدراسي مع الإبقاء على سرية هويتكم سرية تامه لا محال حيث ان كل ما تدلون به سوف يعامل بسريته تامه و المعلومات سواء من الاستبيانات او المقابلات الشخصية سوف يحتفظ بها في اماكن امنه جدا لا يستطيع الوصول اليها الى الباحث و القائمين على البحث و سوف يتم التخلص منها بعد قياس محتواها من التصورات و المدركات حال الانتهاء الكلي من البحث الدراسي.

لأي معلومات إضافية يرجى الاتصال بمن يلي:

الاستاذة صوفيا هاشم، الايميل: [sofiauob@gmail.com](mailto:sofiauob@gmail.com)

## **Appendix C:**

### **Questionnaires' breakdown**



Questionnaire items	Research study	Item from the research study's questionnaires
<p><b>Students' questionnaire:</b></p> <p>1. I think learning English from Grade 1 is difficult.</p> <p>2. In my opinion, learning English from an early age in Grade 1 is a good idea.</p> <p>3. In my opinion, the earlier we start learning English the better our English language could be.</p> <p>4. The English lesson is not very hard.</p> <p>5. I think English textbooks are interesting.</p> <p>6. I think learning English from an early age is useful for me.</p> <p>7. In my opinion, to start learning English from an early age in Grade 1 is a poor idea.</p>	<p>Horwitz (1981)</p> <p>Lobo (2013)</p> <p>Horwitz (1981)</p> <p>Lobo (2013)</p> <p>Wang (2008)</p> <p>Horwitz (1981)</p> <p>Lobo (2013)</p>	<p>4. English is: 1) a very difficult language, 2) a difficult language, 3) a language of medium difficulty, 4) an easy language, 5) a very easy language</p> <p>5. What is your opinion about early English (from grade 1) at primary school?</p> <p>1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.</p> <p>15. In your opinion, how difficult were the lessons for the children?</p> <p>29. In many textbooks designed for young learners of English in Taiwan, new units begin with a mini-dialogue. In your course, were you taught how taught to teach the meaning of the new language in these mini dialogues?</p> <p>27. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.</p> <p>25. What did the parents think about the research project?</p>

<p>8. My English teacher makes studying English enjoyable.</p>	<p>Raymond (2008)</p>	<p>5. The teacher: Is enthusiastic for subject/towards teaching.</p>
<p>9. The English lesson is fun.</p>	<p>Indraswari (2012)</p>	<p>3. Does she/he (the student) enjoy the English lessons?</p>
<p>10. My English teacher uses a variety of teaching materials, such as flashcards, posters and a tape recorder.</p>	<p>Raymond (2008)</p>	<p>41. The teacher: Uses a variety of teaching techniques/methods.</p>
<p>11. Most English lessons are difficult for me.</p>	<p>Lobo (2013)</p>	<p>6. What did you not like about the English lessons?</p>
<p>12. My English teacher encourages me to use English in school time.</p>	<p>Raymond (2008)</p>	<p>40. The teacher: Improves students' self-concept.</p>
<p>13. I think everybody should learn English from Grade1.</p>	<p>Horwitz (1981)</p>	<p>34. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language well.</p>
<p>14. I think English textbooks are not hard.</p>	<p>Wang (2008)</p>	<p>28. Did your course include advice about using textbooks?</p>
<p>15. Learning English from an early age has motivated me to communicate with others in English when needed.</p>	<p>Horwitz (1981)</p>	<p>31. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know its speakers better.</p>
<p>16. I use English outside school.</p>	<p>Horwitz (1981)</p>	<p>23. If I get to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.</p>

Questionnaire items	Research study	Item from the research study's questionnaires
<p><b>Parents' questionnaire:</b></p> <p>1. In my opinion, the project of learning English from an early age in Bahraini primary government schools starting from Grade 1 is a success.</p> <p>2. I prefer my child to study English from grade 1 rather than starting from Grade 3.</p> <p>3. I think learning English from grade 1 is difficult for my child.</p> <p>4. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 is a poor decision to be taken by the Ministry of Education.</p> <p>5. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 is useful for my child.</p>	<p>Lobo (2013)</p> <p>Indraswari (2012)</p> <p>Horwitz (1981)</p> <p>Lobo (2013)</p> <p>Horwitz (1981)</p>	<p>5. What is your opinion about early English (from grade 1) at primary school?</p> <p>5. Why do you want your child to learn English?</p> <p>4. English is: 1) a very difficult language, 2) a difficult language, 3) a language of medium difficulty, 4) an easy language, 5) a very easy language</p> <p>25. What did the parents think about the research project?</p> <p>27. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.</p>

<p>6. The English teachers made learning English from Grade 1 up to grade 6 easy for my child.</p>	<p>Hadla (2013)</p>	<p>18. A non-native English speaking teacher who speaks the students' first language is more capable of predicting students' difficulties in learning the English language.</p>
<p>7. The English teacher makes studying English enjoyable for my child.</p>	<p>Indraswari (2012)</p>	<p>3. Does she/he (the student) enjoy the English lessons?</p>
<p>8. The English teacher encourages my child to use English during school time.</p>	<p>Raymond (2008)</p>	<p>48. The teacher: Encourages student participation</p>

<b>Parents' questionnaire:</b>		
9. I think children who learn English early are easier to accept other cultures.	Horwitz (1981)	8. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English well.
10. In my opinion, the earlier children start learning English the better their English language could be.	Horwitz (1981)	1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.
11. The project motivated my child to use English outside school.	Horwitz (1981)	23. If I get to speak English very well, I Will have many opportunities to use it.
12. I think children who learn English early struggle to learn their native language.	Lobo (2013)	18. What consequences did the lessons have on the children's development of the Dutch language?
13. Learning English from an early age motivated my child to communicate in English when needed.	Horwitz (1981)	31. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know its speakers better.

Questionnaire items	Research study	Item from the research study's questionnaires
<p><b>Parents' (whose children were not part of the project) questionnaire:</b></p> <p>1. I wish my child was part of the project of teaching English from Grade 1 to students in Bahraini government schools.</p> <p>2. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 is a poor decision to be taken by the Ministry of Education.</p> <p>3. I think learning English from Grade 1 would have been difficult for my child.</p> <p>4. I think that all children should start learning English from grade 3 and not Grade 1.</p> <p>5. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 would have been useful for my child.</p> <p>6. The English teacher uses a variety of teaching materials, such as flash cards, posters and a tape recorder.</p>	<p>Lobo (2013)</p> <p>Lobo (2013)</p> <p>Lobo (2013)</p> <p>Horwitz (1981)</p> <p>Horwitz (1981)</p> <p>Raymond (2008)</p>	<p>5. What is your opinion about early English (from grade 1) at primary school?</p> <p>25. What did the parents think about the research project?</p> <p>15. In your opinion, how difficult were the lessons for the children?</p> <p>34. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language well.</p> <p>27. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.</p> <p>41. Uses a variety of teaching techniques/methods.</p>

<p>7. In my opinion, it is unfair that my child started learning English from grade 3 and not Grade 1.</p>	<p>Lobo (2013)</p>	<p>4. What is your opinion about starting English from grade 5 at primary school?</p>
<p>8. I believe that the earlier children start learning English the better their English language could be.</p>	<p>Horwitz (1981)</p>	<p>1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.</p>

<p>9. The English lesson is difficult for my child.</p>	<p>Horwitz (1981)</p>	<p>4. English is: 1) a very difficult language, 2) a difficult language, 3) a language of medium difficulty, 4) an easy language, 5) a very easy language</p>
<p>10. Children at all ages will be good language learners. 11. I am pleased that my child was not part of the project of learning English from Grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools.</p>	<p>Horwitz (1981) Lobo (2013)</p>	<p>34. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language well. 4. What is your opinion about starting English from grade 5 at primary school?</p>

**Appendix D:**

**Students' questionnaire**

**Appendix D1:**

**A translation of Students' questionnaire in Arabic**





Title of the research:

Student, teacher and parent perceptions about  
the project of learning English from grade 1  
in Bahraini primary government schools

A questionnaire for the students who have studied  
English from grade1 in Bahraini primary  
government schools

Researcher's name: Mrs. Sofia Hashim




Dear Students,

You are being asked to complete this questionnaire for a research which is trying to find out about the project of teaching English from grade 1 to Bahraini students in Bahraini government schools. You have been chosen because you have studied English from grade 1 that is for 6 years now. For this research to be successful, please just answer the questions based on what you really think, know, and do. Do not pick an answer because you think that is what somebody wants you to say. The answers you give will be kept totally private. This means that your answers will not be connected with anything that can tell who you are. No one, including your parents or teachers, will ever know your answers.

Thank you for your help which is highly appreciated

Gender: Male  Female

Name of the school \_\_\_\_\_

Statements	Disagree 	Neither Agree nor Disagree 	Agree 
1. I think learning English from Grade 1 is difficult.	1	2	3
2. In my opinion, learning English from an early age in Grade 1 is a good idea.	1	2	3
3. In my opinion, the earlier we start learning English the better our English language could be.	1	2	3
4. The English lesson is not very hard.	1	2	3
5. I think English textbooks are interesting.	1	2	3

6. I think learning English from an early age is useful for me.	1	2	3
7. In my opinion, to start learning English from an early age in Grade 1 is a poor idea.	1	2	3
8. My English teacher makes studying English enjoyable.	1	2	3
9. The English lesson is fun.	1	2	3
10. My English teacher uses a variety of teaching materials, such as flashcards, posters and a tape recorder.	1	2	3
11. Most English lessons are difficult for me.	1	2	3
12. My English teacher encourages me to use English in school time.	1	2	3
13. I think everybody should learn English from Grade 1.	1	2	3
14. I think English textbooks are not hard.	1	2	3
15. Learning English from an early age has motivated me to communicate with others in English when needed.	1	2	3
16. Learning English from an early age motivated me to use English outside school.	1	2	3

17. a- When do you think children should start learning English in Bahraini primary government schools?

- Grade 1
- Grade 3
- Grade 4

b- Why?

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**عنوان البحث:**

**انطباعات الطلبة و المدرسين و اولياء الامور حول مشروع تعلم  
اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي لطلبة المدارس  
الحكومية**

**استبيان خاص بطلبة المدارس الحكومية التي طبق فيها مشروع  
تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي**

**الباحثه: الاستاذة صوفيا هاشم**

أعزائي الطلبة،

أود لو تكرمتم بإستكمال هذا الإستبيان الذي يتعلق ببحث يسعى لمعرفة المزيد عن مشروع تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الإبتدائي للطلبة البحرينيين في المدارس الحكومية البحرينية. لقد تم إختيارك لأنك درست اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الإبتدائي اي لمدة ست سنوات حتى الآن. لكي ينجح هذا البحث، الرجاء الإجابة على الأسئلة فقط على حسب إعتقادك، و معرفتك، و أفعالك. لا تختار إجابة لأنك تعتقد أن هذا ما يريده شخص ما أن تقوله. سيتم الإحتفاظ بالإجابات بسريه تامه. هذا يعني أن إجاباتك لن تكون مرتبطة مع أي شيء يمكن أن يكشف من تكون. لا أحد، بما في ذلك الأباء أو المعلمين سوف يعرف إجاباتك.

شكرا لمساعدتكم والذي هو محل تقدير كبير.

الجنس: ذكر  انثى

العمر \_\_\_\_\_ اسم المدرسه \_\_\_\_\_

اوفاق	لا اعارض ولا اوفاق	اعارض	الجملة
			
3	2	1	1- عتقد أن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الإبتدائي شيء صعب.
3	2	1	2- في رأيي، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في سن مبكرة من الصف الأول الإبتدائي هو فكرة جيدة.
3	2	1	3- في رأيي، بدأ تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في سن مبكرة قد يجعل لغتنا الإنجليزية أفضل.
3	2	1	4- حصة اللغة الإنجليزية ليست صعبه جدا.
3	2	1	5- أعتقد أن كتب اللغة الإنجليزية مشوقه و مثيرة للاهتمام.
3	2	1	6- في رأيي، تعلم اللغة الانجليزية في سن مبكرة مفيد بالنسبة لي.
3	2	1	7- في رأيي، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في سن مبكرة من الصف الأول الإبتدائي هو فكرة غير جيدة.

3	2	1	8- المعلم يجعل دراسة اللغة الانجليزية ممتعة.
3	2	1	9- حصة اللغة الإنجليزية حصة مرحه و ممتعه.
3	2	1	10- يستخدم معلم اللغة الإنجليزية مجموعة متنوعة من المواد التعليمية، مثل بطاقات العرض والملصقات الكبيره وجهاز التسجيل.
3	2	1	11- معظم دروس اللغة الإنجليزية صعبة بالنسبة لي.
3	2	1	12- يشجيني معلم اللغة الإنجليزية على استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في وقت المدرسة.
3	2	1	13- انا اعتقد أنه يجب على الجميع تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الابتدائي.
3	2	1	14- انا اعتقد أن كتب اللغة الإنجليزية ليست صعبة.
3	2	1	15- تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من سن مبكرة شجيني على التواصل مع الآخرين باللغة الإنجليزية عند الحاجة.
3	2	1	16- تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من سن مبكرة شجيني على استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية خارج المدرسة.

17- أ- في إعتقادكم متى يجب على الأطفال في مدارس البحرين الابتدائية الحكومية البدء في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟

- الصف الأول الابتدائي
- الصف الثالث الابتدائي
- الصف الرابع الابتدائي

ب- لماذا؟

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**Appendix E:**

**Parents' (whose children were part of the project) questionnaire**

**Appendix E1:**

**A translation of Parents' (whose children were part of the project)**

**questionnaire in Arabic**





Title of the research:

Student, teacher and parent perceptions about  
the project of learning English from grade 1  
in Bahraini primary government schools

A questionnaire for the parents of the students  
who have studied English from grade 1 in Bahraini  
primary government schools

Researcher's name: Mrs. Sofia Hashim

Dear Parents,

I would kindly like to know your perceptions about the project of learning English from grade 1 to students in Bahraini primary government schools after 6 years of applying the project with your children. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statements below. This questionnaire is confidential and you may withdraw at any time or refuse participation without any penalty. Please be as honest as you can when answering the following questions.

Thank you for your help which is highly appreciated

Gender: Male  Female

Name of the school your child goes to: \_\_\_\_\_

Items	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. In my opinion, the project of learning English from an early age in Bahraini primary government schools starting from Grade 1 is a success.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I prefer my child to study English from Grade 1 rather than starting from Grade 3.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I think learning English from Grade 1 is difficult for my child.	1	2	3	4	5
4. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 is a poor decision to be taken by the Ministry of Education.	1	2	3	4	5

5. In my opinion, starting English from grade 1 is useful for my child.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The English teachers made learning English from Grade 1 up to Grade 6 easy for my child.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The English teacher makes studying English enjoyable for my child.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The English teacher encourages my child to use English during school time.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I think children who learn English early are easier to accept other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
10. In my opinion, the earlier children start learning English the better their English language could be.	1	2	3	4	5
11. The project motivated my child to use English outside school.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I think children who learn English early struggle to learn their native language.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Learning English from an early age motivated my child to communicate in English when needed.	1	2	3	4	5

14. a- When do you think children should start learning English in Bahraini primary government schools?

- Grade 1
- Grade 3
- Grade 4

b- Why?

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**عنوان البحث:**

**انطباعات الطلبة و المدرسين و اولياء الامور حول مشروع تعلم  
اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي لطلبة المدارس  
الحكومية**

**استبيان خاص باولياء امور طلبة المدارس الحكومية التي طبق فيها  
مشروع تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي**

**الباحثه: الاستاذة صوفيا هاشم**

اعزائي أولياء الأمور،

أود لو تكرمتم باطلاعي على انطباعاتكم حول مشروع تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الابتدائي للطلبة البحرينيين في المدارس الحكومية البحرينية بعد ست سنوات من تطبيق المشروع على ابنائكم. أرجوا منكم الاجابة بالموافقة او الرفض على مايلي من اسئلة الاستبيان. نود ان نذكركم ان هذا الاستبيان سري تماما و يحق لكم الانسحاب او رفض المشاركة فيه في اي وقت شأتم و بدون اي غرامات. نرجوا منكم تمام الصدق عند الاجابه.

شكرا لتعاونكم معنا و لكم منا كل التقدير و الاحترام.

الجنس: ذكر  انثى

اسم المدرسة التي يرتادها الطفل \_\_\_\_\_

الاسئلة	اعارض بشدة (1)	اعارض (2)	لا اعارض ولا اوافق (3)	اوافق (4)	اوافق بشدة (5)
1- في رأيي، مشروع تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الابتدائي للطلبة البحرينيين في المدارس الحكومية البحرينية مشروع ناجح.	1	2	3	4	5
2- أنا أفضل ان يدرس طفلي اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي بدلا من البدء من الصف الثالث الابتدائي.	1	2	3	4	5
3- أعتقد أن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الابتدائي صعب بالنسبة لطفلي.	1	2	3	4	5
4- في رأيي، بدء تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي هو قرار غير صائب من وزارة التربية و التعليم.	1	2	3	4	5
5- في رأيي بدء تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي مفيد بالنسبة لطفلي.	1	2	3	4	5
6- معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول إلى السادس الابتدائي جعلوا دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية سهلة لطفلي.	1	2	3	4	5
7- معلم اللغة الإنجليزية يجعل دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية ممتعة لطفلي.	1	2	3	4	5
8- يشجع معلم اللغة الإنجليزية طفلي على استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في وقت المدرسة.	1	2	3	4	5
9- أعتقد أن الأطفال الذين يتعلمون اللغة الإنجليزية في سن مبكره يتقبلون الثقافات الأخرى بشكل اسهل.	1	2	3	4	5

5	4	3	2	1	10- في رأيي، بدأ تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في سن مبكره قد يجعل اللغة الإنجليزية أفضل لدى الأطفال.
5	4	3	2	1	11- شجع المشروع طفلي على استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية خارج المدرسة.
5	4	3	2	1	12- أعتقد أن الأطفال الذين يتعلمون اللغة الإنجليزية في سن مبكره يصاروا لتعلم لغتهم الأم.
5	4	3	2	1	13- تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من سن مبكرة شجع طفلي على التواصل مع الآخرين باللغة الإنجليزية عند الحاجة.

14- أ- في إعتقادكم متى يجب على الأطفال في مدارس البحرين الابتدائية الحكومية البدء في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟

- الصف الأول الابتدائي
  - الصف الثالث الابتدائي
  - الصف الرابع الابتدائي
- ب- لماذا؟

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**Appendix F:**

**Parents' (whose children were not part of the project) questionnaire**

**Appendix F1:**

**A translation of Parents' (whose children were not part of the project) questionnaire in Arabic**



Title of the research:

Student, teacher and parent perceptions about  
the project of learning English from grade 1  
in Bahraini primary government schools

A questionnaire for the parents of the students  
who have NOT studied English from grade 1 in  
Bahraini primary government schools

Researcher's name: Mrs. Sofia Hashim



Dear Parents,

I would kindly like to know your perceptions about the project of learning English from grade 1 to students in Bahraini primary government schools, even though the school which your child went to was not a part of the project. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statements below. This questionnaire is confidential and you may withdraw at any time or refuse participation without any penalty. Please be as honest as you can when answering the following questions.

Thank you for your help which is highly appreciated

Gender: Male  Female

Name of the school your child goes to \_\_\_\_\_

Items	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. I wish my child was part of the project of teaching English from Grade 1 to students in Bahraini government schools.	1	2	3	4	5
2. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 is a poor decision to be taken by the Ministry of Education.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I think learning English from Grade 1 would have been difficult for my child.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I think that all children should start learning English from Grade 3 and not Grade 1.	1	2	3	4	5
5. In my opinion, starting English from Grade 1 would have been useful for my child.	1	2	3	4	5

6. The English teacher uses a variety of teaching materials, such as flash cards, posters and a tape recorder.	1	2	3	4	5
7. In my opinion, it is unfair that my child started learning English from Grade 3 and not Grade 1.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I believe that the earlier children start learning English the better their English language could be.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The English lesson is difficult for my child.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Children at all ages will be good language learners.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am pleased that my child was not part of the project of learning English from grade 1 in Bahraini primary government schools.	1	2	3	4	5

12. a- When do you think children should start learning English in Bahraini primary government schools?

- Grade 1
- Grade 3
- Grade 4

b- Why?

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**عنوان البحث:**

**انطباعات الطلبة و المدرسين و اولياء الامور حول مشروع تعلم  
اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي لطلبة المدارس  
الحكومية**

**إستبيان خاص بأولياء امور طلبة المدارس الحكومية التي لم يطبق  
على أبنائهم/بناتهم مشروع تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول  
الابتدائي**

**الباحثه: الاستاذة صوفيا هاشم**

اعزائي أولياء الأمور،

اود لو تكرمتم بإطلاعي على انطباعاتكم حول مشروع تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الابتدائي للطلبة البحرينيين في المدارس الحكومية البحرينية بالرغم من علمنا بأن المشروع لم يطبق في المدرسة التي يرتادها طفلكم. ارجوا منكم الاجابة بالموافقة او الرفض على مايلي من اسئلة الاستبيان. نود ان نذكركم ان هذا الاستبيان سري تماما و يحق لكم الانسحاب او رفض المشاركة فيه في اي وقت شأتم و بدون اي غرامات. نرجوا منكم تمام الصدق عند الاجابه.

شكرا لتعاونكم معنا و لكم منا كل التقدير و الاحترام.

الجنس: ذكر  انثى

اسم المدرسة التي يرتادها الطفل \_\_\_\_\_

الاسئلة	اعارض بشدة (1)	اعارض (2)	لا اعارض ولا اوافق (3)	اوافق (4)	اوافق بشدة (5)
1- أتمنى لو كان طفلي جزء من مشروع تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الابتدائي للطلبة البحرينيين في المدارس الحكومية البحرينية.	1	2	3	4	5
2- في رأيي، بدء تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي هو قرار غير صائب من وزارة التربية و التعليم.	1	2	3	4	5
3- أعتقد أن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الابتدائي كان قد يكون صعب بالنسبة لطفلي.	1	2	3	4	5
4- انا اعتقد أنه يجب على جميع الأطفال البدء بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الثالث الابتدائي و ليس من الصف الأول الابتدائي.	1	2	3	4	5
5- في رأيي، بدء تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الاول الابتدائي ربما كان مفيد بالنسبة لطفلي.	1	2	3	4	5
6- يستخدم معلم اللغة الإنجليزية مجموعة متنوعة من المواد التعليمية، مثل بطاقات العرض والملصقات الكبيره وجهاز التسجيل.	1	2	3	4	5
7- في رأيي، ليس من العدل أن طفلي بدأ تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الثالث الابتدائي و ليس من الصف الأول الابتدائي.	1	2	3	4	5

5	4	3	2	1	8- في رأيي، بدأ تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في سن مبكره قد يجعل اللغة الإنجليزية أفضل لدى الأطفال.
5	4	3	2	1	9- حصة اللغة الإنجليزية صعبة بالنسبة لطفلي.
5	4	3	2	1	10- لا يهم في أي سن يتعلم الأطفال اللغة الإنجليزية.
5	4	3	2	1	11- يسرني أن طفلي لم يكن جزءاً من مشروع تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية من الصف الأول الابتدائي للطلبة البحرينيين في المدارس الحكومية البحرينية.

12- أ- في إعتقادكم متى يجب على الأطفال في مدارس البحرين الابتدائية الحكومية البدء في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية ؟

- الصف الأول الابتدائي
  - الصف الثالث الابتدائي
  - الصف الرابع الابتدائي
- ب- لماذا؟

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**Appendix G:**

**Parents' consent form**

**Appendix G1:**

**A translation of Parents' consent form in Arabic**



**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**CONSENT FORM**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

All information I give will be treated as confidential

The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

I accept to take part in this research .....

I refuse to take part in this research .....

(Signature of participant)..... (Date) .....

.....  
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Email [sofiauob@gmail.com](mailto:sofiauob@gmail.com)

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

موافقه على المشاركة في بحث دراسي

- لقد تم الشرح لي شرحاً وافياً عن البحث الدراسي و اعلامي عن اهدافه و مقتضياته. و افهم من ذلك ان :
- لي الحق الكامل في الموافقه او رفض المشاركة في هذا البحث بدون اي ضغوطات اي كان شكلها و إن قبلت المشاركة فإنه لي حق الانسحاب في اي وقت و في اي مرحله من مراحل البحث.
  - يحق لي رفض التصريح للباحث بنشر اي معلومات عني
  - اي معلومات ادلي بها للباحث سوف تستخدم لغرض واحد و هو للبحث العلمي الدراسي فقط لا غير و ربما تستخدم للنشر في مجال الابحاث.
  - ربما يتم استخدام المعلومات بين اكثر من باحث في هذا البحث الدراسي مع الإبقاء على سرية هويتي سرية تامه لا محال.
  - كل ما ادلي به سوف يعامل بسريته تامه.
  - سوف يعمل الباحث باقصى جهده و بكل مافي وسعه ليبقي هويتي مجهوله.

توقيع الشخص المشارك في البحث ..... التاريخ .....

اسم الشخص المشارك فب البحث العلمي الدراسي .....

نسخه من هذه الورقه سوف تبقى مع المشارك في البحث و نسخه اخرى سوف تبقى مع الباحث.

لأي معلومات إضافيه يرجى الاتصال بمن يلي:

- الاستاذة صوفيا هاشم, الايميل: [sofiauob@gmail.com](mailto:sofiauob@gmail.com)



**Appendix H:**

**Students' consent form**

**Appendix H1:**

**A translation of Students' consent form in Arabic**



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

**CONSENT FORM FOR THE PARENTS' OF UNDERAGE PARTICIPANTS**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

There is no compulsion for my child to participate in this research project and, if he/she does choose to participate, he/she may at any stage withdraw his/her participation

He/she has the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about him/her

Any information which he/she gives will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which he/she gives, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

All information he/she gives will be treated as confidential

The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve his/her anonymity

I accept that my child takes part in this research .....

I refuse that my child takes part in this research .....

(Signature of participant's parent)..... (Date).....

.....  
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant's parents; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher: 17640124

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Mrs. Sofia Hashim, Email sofiauob@gmail.com

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

موافقه على المشاركة في بحث دراسي

لقد تم الشرح لي شرحاً وافياً عن البحث الدراسي و اعلامي عن اهدافه و مقتضياته. و افهم من ذلك ان :

- لإبني/إبنتي الحق الكامل في الموافقه او رفض المشاركة في هذا البحث بدون اي ضغوطات اي كان شكلها و إن قبل/قبلت المشركه فإنه له/لها حق الانسحاب في اي وقت و في اي مرحله من مراحل البحث.

- يحق لإبني/إبنتي رفض التصريح للباحث بنشر اي معلومات عنه/عنها

- اي معلومات يدلي/تدلي بها للباحث سوف تستخدم لغرض واحد و هو للبحث العلمي الدراسي فقط لا غير و ربما تستخدم للنشر في مجال الابحاث.

- ربما يتم استخدام المعلومات بين اكثر من باحث في هذا البحث الدراسي مع الإبقاء على سرية هوية إبني/إبنتي سريه تامه لا محال.

- كل ما يدلي/تدلي به سوف يعامل بسريه تامه.

- سوف يعمل الباحث باقصى جهده و بكل مافي وسعه ليبيقي هوية إبني/إبنتي مجهوله.

توقيع ولي الامر ..... التاريخ .....

اسم الشخص المشارك فب البحث العلمي الدراسي

.....

نسخه من هذه الورقه سوف تبقى مع المشارك في البحث و نسخه اخرى سوف تبقى مع الباحث.

لأي معلومات إضافيه يرجى الاتصال بمن يلي:

- الاستاذة صوفيا هاشم, الايميل: sofiauob@gmail.com

## **Appendix I:**

### **EFL Teachers' interview schedule**

#### **THE INTERVIEWS' SCHEDULE**

Categories of Enquiry:

1. The benefits and downsides of learning English from a young age
2. The training and support the teachers received
3. The teachers' experiences in teaching English to young learners
4. The difficulties the teachers encountered in this project
5. Suggestion for the future of the project

The interviews explore in more depth some of the categories of enquiry from the questionnaires of the EFL students and parents. Categories number 4 and 5 were not included in the EFL students or parents' questionnaires.

#### **Category of Enquiry Number 1: The benefits and downsides of learning English from a young age**

**Q A:** What are your perceptions about the project of teaching English from an early age in Bahraini primary government schools since you were part of it from day 1 in 2004?

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you give me an example .....

(Answers might be related to knowledge, personal experiences, language proficiency, learning skills, teaching methods, teaching approaches, teaching materials, etc.)

(NB: Asking the EFL teachers' about their perceptions from the start will form a strong structure for the interviews and will give the EFL teachers chances to slowly release their insights about the project which will allow for their perceptions to be gradually revealed throughout the interview.)

**Q B:** Do you know anything about the project's background and policy?

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you give me an example .....

**Probe:** Was it a good/poor decision to .....

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to knowledge, personal experiences, language proficiency, learning skills, teaching methods, teaching approaches, etc.)

**Q C:** Are you with or against learning English from a young age?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you give me an example .....

**Probe:** Was it a good/poor decision to.....?

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to knowledge, personal experiences, language proficiency, learning skills, teaching methods, teaching approaches, etc.)

### **Category of Enquiry Number 2: The training and support the teachers received**

**Q A:** Did you receive any special training when you were assigned to teach young learners?

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you give me an example .....

**Probe:** Was it a good/poor decision to .....

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to knowledge, personal experiences, language proficiency, learning skills, teaching methods, teaching approaches, etc.)

**Q B:** Did you receive any support from the Ministry of Education or any other interested parties?

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you give me an example .....

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to knowledge, personal experiences, language proficiency, learning skills, teaching methods, teaching approaches, etc.)

**Category of Enquiry Number 3: The teachers' experiences in teaching English to young learners**

**Q A:** Tell me about your experiences with teaching English to young learners.

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you explain to me how .....

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to knowledge, personal experiences, language proficiency, learning skills, teaching methods, teaching approaches, teaching materials, context, etc.)

**Q B:** What do you think of the project's level of simplicity/difficulty with regard to young Bahraini learners?

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you give me an example .....

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to knowledge, personal experiences, language proficiency, learning skills, teaching methods, teaching approaches, etc.)

**Q C:** Do you think the children are enjoying learning English from an early age?

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you give me an example .....

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to knowledge, personal experiences, language proficiency, learning skills, teaching methods, teaching approaches, student's reflection, etc.)

#### **Category of Enquiry Number 4: The difficulties the teachers encountered in this project**

**Q A:** Did you face any difficulties or barriers in teaching English to young learners?

**Probe:** If Yes, What are they?

**Probe:** If No, What makes you say that?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you give me an example .....

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to teaching materials, learning skills, teaching approaches, cultural issues, vocabulary, speaking, writing, knowledge, personal experiences, etc.)

(NB: In this point the EFL teachers might talk in details about their perceptions of the project's advantages and disadvantages.)

#### **Category of Enquiry Number 5: Suggestion for the future of the project**

**Q A:** Do you have any suggestions or proposals for developing the project of teaching English to young learners in Bahraini government schools?

**Probe:** If Yes, What are they?

**Probe:** If No, What makes you say that?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** Can you give me an example .....

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to teaching materials, learning skills, teaching approaches, cultural issues, vocabulary, speaking, writing, knowledge, personal experiences, etc.)

**Q B:** Do you have any other comments you wish to make?

**Probe:** If Yes, What are they?

**Probe:** If No, What makes you say that?

**Probe:** Can you explain to me why .....

**Probe:** Can you explain what do you mean by.....?

**Probe:** What makes you so sure that .....

(Answers might be related to teaching materials, learning skills, teaching approaches, cultural issues, vocabulary, speaking, writing, knowledge, personal experiences, etc.)



## Appendix J:

### EFL Teachers' guidelines for the collection of the questionnaires

#### **Directions for the collections of the questionnaires**

Dear EFL teachers,

Please follow these guidelines when collecting the questionnaires. Your help and support is highly appreciated. Thank you.

Yours,

Sofia Hashim

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#### Guidelines for collecting the questionnaires:

- The collection must take place a week after the distribution day as requested by the Ministry of Education.
- Please check that all participants' consent forms are signed.
- Please do not accept any questionnaire which has an unsigned consent form.
- After collection, please place the questionnaires into the envelopes which were provided to you and directly seal them
- Finally, please leave the questionnaires with the head mistress/master who will contact me for collection.

## Appendix K:

### Captures of the parents' qualitative data coded through MAXQDA

The screenshot shows the MAXQDA 11.1.0 interface. On the left, the 'Code System' is visible with the following structure:

- Documents: 13
- Sets: 0
- Code System: 13
  - Grade 1: 3
  - Communication: 1
  - More practice time: 2
  - Brain elasticity: 2
  - Future: 5
  - Sets: 0

The main window displays a document titled 'Future' with the following text and codes:

- Parent #79
- Children learn languages since childhood and **they can learn more than two languages** because **their brain allows them too.** (Codes: Brain elasticity)
- Parent #57
- They must learn English from Grade 1** or even before for a better future job and to study at the university because everything is in English at the university unless you are going to study Arabic, Islamic Studies or Physical Education. (Codes: Grade 1, Future)
- Parent #62
- Grade 1 is the suitable grade** because the children need time to learn and they have all primary level to learn English step by step. (Codes: Grade 1, More practice time)
- Parent #29
- chose Grade 1** because if the children learnt English from childhood they will be able to communicate better and this is very important because they will go to university and they need to speak in English at the University of Bahrain. Also, you will not a good job in Bahrain if you cannot speak English fluently. (Codes: Communication, Grade 1, Future)

The 'Code variables' window displays a table with the following data:

Code-ID	Position	Parent code	Code	All coded se...	Activated co...	Author	Creation date	All coded se...	Activated co...	Documents
1	5		Future	5	0	Sofia H.	28-Jan-16 10:53	38,46	0,00	1
2	4		Brain elasticity	2	0	Sofia H.	28-Jan-16 10:58	15,38	0,00	1
3	3		More practice time	2	0	Sofia H.	28-Jan-16 10:59	15,38	0,00	1
4	2		Communication	1	0	Sofia H.	28-Jan-16 11:03	7,69	0,00	1
5	1		Grade 1	3	0	Sofia H.	28-Jan-16 11:05	23,08	0,00	1

## Appendix L:

### Captures of the interviews coded through MAXQDA

The screenshot displays the MAXQDA 11.1.0 interface. The 'Document System' pane on the left shows a tree view of documents under 'Interviews', with 'Interview 1 - MRS. ESMAT' selected. The 'Code System' pane below it lists various codes and their frequencies, such as 'Textbooks' (4), 'Usefulness' (2), and 'Perceptions about' (0). The main window shows a document browser for 'Interview 1 - MRS. ESMAT' with a list of interview questions and answers. The text is color-coded and annotated with code labels like 'Practice makes', 'Usefulness', and 'Perceptions about'.

The screenshot displays the MAXQDA 11.1.0 interface. The 'Document System' pane on the left shows a tree view of documents under 'Interviews', with 'Interview 1 - MRS. ESMAT' selected. The 'Code System' pane below it lists various codes and their frequencies, such as 'Younger is better' (7), 'Practice makes perfect' (4), and 'Using English for' (4). The main window shows a document browser for 'Interview 1 - MRS. ESMAT' with a list of interview questions and answers. The text is color-coded and annotated with code labels like 'Using English for', 'Younger is better', 'Practice makes perfect', and 'Right decision'.

**Appendix M:**

**A letter sent to the Ministry of Education in Bahrain requesting consent to access schools for data collection.**

To the Head of the Research and Development Unit at the  
Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Bahrain

Dear Sir/Madame,

My name is Sofia Hashim and I am a student at the University of Exeter doing my Doctor of Education under the supervision of Dr. Li Li and Dr. Hazel Lawson. My research project entitled: Students, teachers and parents' perceptions about the project of learning English from grade 1 at primary government schools in Bahrain.

The participants will be EFL students from 5 different primary public schools; 2 boys' schools and 2 girls' schools which have applied the project. One boys' school which did not apply the project will take part as well.

The participants I will be exploring are EFL students from the 4 different primary government schools between the ages of 11-12, EFL teachers who applied the project, parents whose children applied the project and finally parents whose children did not apply the project. To explore perceptions I will collect data through interviews with English language teachers and questionnaires for the students and parents from the mentioned schools.

It is my hope that this information would be beneficial to the English Primary Level Directorate at the Ministry of Education in Bahrain. There are no identified risks from participating in this research for all the data will be confidential and for research use only. Participation in this research will be completely voluntary and the participants may refuse to participate without consequence. Responses to the survey will only be reported in aggregated form to protect the identity of respondents. The data collected from this study will be stored in a locked cabinet or drawer and digital data will be stored in my password-protected account on the University of Exeter U-drive. Audio data will be downloaded from recording devices at the earliest possible opportunity, and then deleted immediately from those devices.

Further information regarding the research can be obtained from me or my faculty advisors:

Dr Li Li, [Li.Li@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:Li.Li@exeter.ac.uk)

Dr Hazel Lawson, [H.A.Lawson@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:H.A.Lawson@exeter.ac.uk)

If you would like to know the results of this research you can contact me directly. Thank you for your consideration. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Yours,  
Sofia Hashim  
[sofiauob@gmail.com](mailto:sofiauob@gmail.com)

**Appendix N:**

**EFL teachers' consent form**



**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**EFL Teachers' CONSENT FORM**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation.

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.

Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications.

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form.

All information I give will be treated as confidential.

The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

I give the researcher the right to use a recording device and to use quotation from the interviews when needed.

I accept to take part in this research .....

I refuse to take part in this research .....

(Signature of participant).....

(Date) .....

..... (Printed name of participant)

- One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

- If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact: Email [sofiauoob@gmail.com](mailto:sofiauoob@gmail.com)

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

## Appendix O:

### Cronbach Alpha for the constructs from students' questionnaire items

1- Cronbach Alpha for the first construct: Students' attitudes towards learning English from an early age (items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 13, 15 and 16).

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.714	8

2- Cronbach Alpha for the second construct: Students' perceptions about the English language textbooks (items 5 and 14).

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.701	2

3- Cronbach Alpha for the third construct: The role of the EFL teachers in the project (items 8, 10 and 12).

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.721	3

4- Cronbach Alpha for the fourth construct: Students' attitudes towards the English lesson (items 4, 9 and 11).

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.703	3



## Appendix P:

### Cronbach Alpha for the questionnaire items of the parents whose children were part of the project

1- Cronbach Alpha for the first construct: Parents' attitudes towards the project of learning English from Grade 1 (items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5).

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.715	5

2- Cronbach Alpha for the second construct: The role of the EFL teachers in the project (items 6, 7 and 8).

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.706	3

3- Cronbach Alpha for the third construct: Motivation towards learning English from an early age (items 11 and 13).

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.712	2

4- Cronbach Alpha for the fourth construct: Parents' perceptions about the age factor (item 9, 10 and 12).

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.702	2

## Appendix Q:

### Cronbach Alpha for the questionnaire items of the parents whose children were not part of the project

1- Cronbach Alpha for the first construct: Parents' perceptions about starting English from Grade 1 (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 11).

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.705	7

2- Cronbach Alpha for the second construct: Parents' perceptions about the age factor (items 8 and 10).

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.708	2

3- Cronbach Alpha for the third construct: Parent's attitudes towards the EFL teachers and the English lessons (items 6 and 9).

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.703	2

## **Appendix R**

### **Semi-structured interview with a Bahraini EFL teacher**

Date: June, 10 2015

Duration: 42 minutes

Setting: English Language Teachers' Room in SG1

Participants: Mrs. Layla and the interviewer

#### **Category of Enquiry Number 1: The benefits and downsides of learning English from a young age**

**Interviewer:** What are your perceptions about the project of teaching English from an early age in Bahraini primary government schools since you were part of it from the start in 2004?

**Interviewee:** In my opinion, the project is doing perfectly well especially after making it official in all schools in 2010. The children in government schools have the right to learn English from grade 1 like other children in private schools. It is not their fault that they were brought up by parents who cannot afford private schools. Education in Bahraini government schools is free and learning English from grade 1 was the missing link which those schools needed. To think of teaching English to young children is an excellent job and it is a sign that the Ministry of Education is trying to be fair between government schools and private schools.

**Interviewer:** Can you explain what do you mean by that?

**Interviewee:** I mean that teaching English to young children will give them the chance to feel that they are not less than the children who go to private schools and are in the rich class. Most government schools students are from the middle class or lower and they have the right to learn English like any other child who comes from the high class. In my opinion, now that the children learn English from grade 1 this gave them the feeling of justice.

Interviewer: Can you explain to me why?

Interviewee: Sure. What I mean is this. Our primary level children now do not need to compare themselves to private schools' students and feel because they are in private schools, richer and can speak English they are better than us. No, they are not. Just because private schools' students learnt English from an earlier age from maids and nannies does not make them better than my poor students.

Interviewer: Are you with or against learning English from a young age?

Interviewee: I am all for learning English from an early age and in my opinion grade 1 is not early enough.

Interviewer: Can you explain to me why?

Interviewee: I completely agree that if our children started learning English from kindergarten then their English will be excellent. The children who we teach now can speak English very well. I won't say perfectly because it requires a lot of practice, but if you compare them to students who learnt English from grades 3 and 4 they are surely better. Much better. It is all about the age you start learning English.

Interviewer: Can you explain what do you mean by that?

Interviewee: Sure. It's simple the younger you learn the better and faster your language will be. I am absolutely not talking about English only here but about all languages which are not your original language. We see with our own eyes children in the Bahraini society who come from Indian mothers for example. They speak Urdu with their mothers and Arabic with their fathers from a very young age. Maybe the age of 2. Then they come to school and they learn English from grade 1 in the age of seven and they do perfectly. So the younger they are, the easier for them to learn English. Trust me; I have more than 11 years' experience in teaching primary school and I have seen children like this in front of my eyes.

Interviewer: I do believe you Layla. So tell me please, do you know anything about the project's background and policy?

Interviewee: I don't have any information about this but I am sure it is about teaching young learners and nothing else.

Interviewer: What makes you so sure?

Interviewee: You see the ministry of Education in Bahrain does care about the English language since Bahrainis are known among all the citizens in the Arabic Gulf that they speak English. We are culturally known for that and it makes me proud. So in order to keep this image and make it better the ministry started teaching English from the third grade. After a while when it realized that the children did better in learning English in the third grade than when they were in the fourth grade, they decided to start English from grade 1. Although unofficially some schools had English tuition lessons for children in grade 2 when English was learnt starting from the third grade. All these things tell you that the ministry here in Bahrain cares about learning English from a young age. The Ministry of Education knows for sure that younger learners are much better and faster learners than older learners in grade 3 or 4.

Interviewer: Was it a good or a poor decision by the Ministry of Education to teach English from an early age starting from grade 1?

Interviewee: In my opinion, it was an absolutely right decision. This is not about a good or poor decision with all respect Sofia. It is about the right or wrong decision and I believe that the ministry took the correct decision. Teaching English from grade 1 is the right decision because it means that you are teaching English to young children. The project is useful and the parents like it and they always complement it.

### **Category of Enquiry Number 2: The training and support the teachers received**

Interviewer: Did you receive any special training when you were assigned to teach young learners?

Interviewee: Sure we did. All teachers who will teach grade 1 for the first time get sent to the British Council; for free. There they take a course for one semester and learn how to teach young children, how do you treat them, the games and crafts you can do for each lesson in the book. The book at first comes with no words, only pictures and drawings. Then in the second grade there are a few short sentences and these sentences become more and develop to paragraphs year by year.

Interviewer: Did you receive any support from any interested parties other than the Ministry of Education?

Interviewee: No. Only the British Council who the ministry had to pay to give us the course.

### **Category of Enquiry Number 3: The teachers' experiences in teaching English to young learners**

Interviewer: Tell me about your experiences with teaching English to young learners.

Interviewee: I really enjoy it because it's like you live with your young learners for three years.

Interviewer: Can you explain to me how?

Interviewee: Sure I can. You teach the students either from grades 1 to 3 or from grade 4 to 6 and this is part of the project. It consists of 2 parts. The book's characters change in the second part. The language becomes more and it requires more practice. The children don't find this hard because there are a lot of chants and games. I am so proud of the children in government primary schools because they are doing their best to be like or better than the students from private schools.

Interviewer: What do you think of the project's level of simplicity/difficulty with regard to young Bahraini learners?

Interviewee: In my opinion, the project is simple from grade 1 to grade 3, then it becomes a little bit harder from grade 4 to grade 6 but this is for the benefit of the children.

Interviewer: Can you explain to me why?

Interviewee: If the project was all simple the children will not be competitive to learn English and they might get bored because they will feel that there is nothing to learn. And if it was too difficult they will be challenged and not motivated to learn. So in my opinion it was a good idea to make these differences in parts 1 and 2 in the project's level of difficulty.

Interviewer: Do you think the children are enjoying learning English from an early age?

Interviewee: I am sure they are. The English lesson is like combining sports, arts and music in one lesson so any child will enjoy this class. The project is fruitful because whenever I see my students outside the classroom, whether inside or outside the school, they start greeting and talking to me in English because they want to prove to me that they can speak English.

#### **Category of Enquiry Number 4: The difficulties the teachers encountered in this project**

Interviewer: Did you face any difficulties or barriers in teaching English to young learners?

Interviewee: Only once I faced a very uncomfortable situation with one of my young girls in grade 1.

Interviewer: Can you explain to me what the situation was, if you can and want to?

Interviewee: Sure, I will. It breaks my heart whenever I remember. I had a child in my class who had dark skin. She was bullied because of that and I took care of it. Once she came to me crying and said to me Mrs. Layla I don't like English and I don't want to learn English. I was amazed because I know that she likes me and respects me especially after the bullying incident. When I asked her

why, she replied that she thinks that English people will hate her. And when I asked her why, she said that she looked at every page in the book and she didn't see one person with a dark skin. At first I didn't know what to tell her, but I solved it quickly thank God.

**Interviewer:** May I know how did you solve this problem?

**Interviewee:** Sure, I will tell you. I told her do you know America and she replied yes and then I turned on the computer and showed her his picture and told her that he has dark skin and he is the president of an English speaking country. Then I started talking to her and I told her that dark people live everywhere and that the prophets <sup>1</sup>'*moathen* مؤذن had dark skin and this changed her mind a little bit and she felt better.

### **Category of Enquiry Number 5: Suggestion for the future of the project**

**Interviewer:** I am glad you were able to solve that problem in a very clever way. So do you have any suggestions or proposals for developing the project?

**Interviewee:** Sure I have and the first one is about what happened to me with the little girl I just told you about. I want the English textbook to have people with different skin colours. Not necessarily English people meaning white people with blonde hair. We have people in Bahrain who are blond and in England there are people who are English but with dark skin and dark hair.

What happened with my student should not happen to any other child. She broke my heart. Also, it should have at least one character in a wheelchair for example, so we can teach the children about accepting different people no matter how they are. I think that a Bahraini family should replace the English family in the textbooks and the nursery rhymes we teach could be replaced with words from the culture but keeping the same music and tunes. We should include the culture and introduce the children to vocabulary talking about the Bahraini culture like the word fasting or island or palm tree all these words are related to Bahrain.

1. '*moathen* مؤذن: A person who recites the adhan (call for Islamic prayers) from the mosque announcing that it is prayer time.



Interviewer: Do you have any other comments you wish to make?

Yes, I want to tell you that I have had with the same materials of the project. I now develop my own materials thanks to the internet, because the children get bored with the same materials every day. All that I do is log on to different English teaching websites that give me different ideas and offer the materials free online. From these sights I can print out a free short story with maybe three different activities about it including things that children like to do like a picture puzzle of the story or a colouring activity or a cut and stick activity, all free.

Interviewer: That is great Layla good for you. Would you like to add anything?

Interviewee: No, thank you Sofia and I wish you all the best.

Interviewer: Thank you for being part of this study Layla.