

Parental choices in early years language
education. A case study of middle class mothers
in Al-Madinah, Saudi Arabia.

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PhD

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

علی انرجند

Table of Contents

Abstract	VII
Acknowledgment	IX
Dedication	X
List of acronyms:	XI
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Socio-cultural perspective of the study	3
1.3 KSA - an overview.....	5
1.3.1 Al-Madinah’s population and its social structure	7
1.3.2 Social structure and oil discovery	11
1.4 The importance of the study.....	12
1.5 The research questions	14
1.6 Framework of the study	15
Part One :	17
Contexts and Methodology	17
2.1 Introduction.....	18
2.2 Historical overview of the Saudi educational system	18
2.2.1 The Ministry of Education	19
Table 1: Age of enrolment in Formal education in KSA.....	20
2.2.2 The General Directorate for Girls’ Education.....	20
2.2.3 The Saudi Educational Policy	21
2.3.3.1 SEP - practice and programme development.....	22
2.3. The Saudi schooling system.....	25
2.3.1 Pre-school stages in the Saudi educational system	25
2.4 Historical background of the educational features in Al-Madinah pre- and Islamic period..	27
2.4.1 The Islamic era.....	28
2.4.2 Common types of educational institutions in Al-Madinah – a historical view.....	30
3.1 Introduction.....	32
3.2 The importance of early years learning.....	33
3.2.1 EYL and cognitive development.....	33

3.2.1.1 Physical facilities and EYL.....	37
3.2.2 EYL and social development	38
3.2.3 EYL as a transition phase.....	40
3.3 Introducing foreign languages to young children	41
3.3.1 The Zone of Proximal Development.....	43
3.3.2 The critical period hypothesis for second language acquisition	45
3.3.3 Early FL and cognitive development	48
3.3.4 Early FL and social development.....	49
3.4 The ideological rationale to introducing FL at pre-school level	50
3.5 The common pedagogical methods in teaching young children FL	56
3.6 A Bourdieusian perspective on power and identity in relation to parental choices	58
3.6.1 Cultural capital	60
3.6.2 Social capital	61
3.6.3 Habitus	61
3.6.4 Bourdieu's concepts in education	63
3.7 Parental choice and education.....	64
3.7.1 Parental choice and private education.....	66
4.1 Introduction.....	71
4.2 Research Stages.....	73
4.3 Research sample.....	74
4.4 Access issues.....	75
4.5 Timescale	77
4.6 Research case study	80
4.7 Research Tools.....	81
4.7.1 Questionnaires.....	82
4.7.1.1 Translation process	83
4.7.1.2 Procedure of filling in the questionnaires	83
4.7.2 Direct observation	85
4.7.3 The blog	86
4.7.4 Interviews.....	87
4.7.4.1 Semi-structured interviews	88

4.7.4.2	Selecting interviewees.....	88
4.7.4.3	Contexts of the interviews.....	89
4.7.4.4	Focus group.....	90
4.7.4.5	E-mail exchanges / online interviews	91
4.8	Analytical framework	92
5.1.	Introduction.....	96
5.2	Choosing Al-Madinah.....	97
5.3	Getting inside kindergartens	98
5.4	Introducing a researcher.....	100
5.5	Adopting a qualitative approach	102
5.6	Judging the researcher as an expert.....	105
5.6.1	Researcher as a mother	106
5.7	Learning from the study.....	107
Part Two	109
Data Analysis and discussion	109
6.1	Introduction.....	115
6.2	Importance of Early Years Learning (EYL)	117
6.2.1	Children’s cognitive development	118
6.2.1.1	Mothers’ perspectives on children’s cognitive development.....	118
6.2.1.2	Professionals’ views on children’s cognitive development	124
6.2.2	Children’s social development.....	131
6.2.2.1	Mothers’ perspectives on children’s social development	131
6.2.2.2	Professionals’ views on children’s social development.....	137
6.2.3	Children’s personality and independence	141
6.2.3.1	Mothers’ perspectives on children’s personality and independence.....	142
6.2.3.2	Professionals’ perspectives on children’s personality and independence.....	144
6.2.4	Children’s preparation for the next level of education	147
6.2. 4.1	Mothers’ perspectives on children’s preparation for the next level of education .	148
6.2.4.2	Professionals’ perspectives on children’s preparation for the next level of education	152
6.3	Mothers’ justification in choosing Rowad kindergarten.....	154

6.3.1 Mothers' informed choice.....	155
6.3.1.1 The impact of friends and relatives on mothers' choices.....	155
6.3.1.2 Having a child already enrolled in Rowad.....	158
6.3.1.3 Professionals' views on Rowad's reputation	160
6.3.1.4 Visiting several pre-schools to choose the best	161
6.3.2 The kindergarten's physical facilities	165
6.3.2.1 Classroom size	167
6.3.3 The kindergarten's curricula	169
6.3.3.1 Learning through playing.....	171
6.3.4 The kindergarten's staff	172
6.3.5 Mothers reflect on their choice of Rowad.....	176
7.1 Introduction.....	181
7.2 Foreign languages in the city of Al-Madinah	183
7.2.1 Mothers' views on Foreign Languages in the city of Al-Madinah.....	184
7.2.1.1 Mothers' use of FL in their communication	186
7.2.1.2 English in Al-Madinah outside the 'school environment'	187
7.2.2 Professionals' view on the status of English in the city of Al-Madinah.....	190
7.2.2.2 The common foreign language is not English	191
7.2.3 English in Al-Madinah compared to some other major cities in KSA	192
7.2.3.1 Mothers' views on English in Al-Madinah compared to some other major cities in KSA.....	193
7.2.4 Mothers' majors and the way they use English with their children.....	195
7.2.5 Children practise English with the housemaid.....	197
7.3 Status of English in Al-Madinah pre-schools	200
7.3.1 Mothers' views of the status of English in Al-Madinah, at the pre-primary stage	200
7.3.2 Professionals' view on the status of English in Al-Madinah private pre-schools	202
7.3.2.1 Head teachers' majors and their views on EFL	204
7.3.3 Native vs. Non-native English language teachers.....	205
7.3.3.1 Mothers' view on native English language teachers.....	205
7.3.3.2 Professionals' view on native English teachers	208
7.3.4 Marketing English programmes to attract prospective pupils	211

7.4 Early exposure to English	214
7.4.1 Mothers advocate early exposure to English	215
7.4.1.1 Early or late exposure to English	215
7.4.1.2 Mothers’ justification through their experiences	219
7.4.1.3 Technology and children’s exposure to English	224
7.4.1.4 English is not that important	227
7.4.2 Professionals advocate early exposure to English	229
7.4.2.1. Meeting the parents’ demands	229
7.4.2.2 No to English at an early stage.....	230
7.4.2.3 Early exposure to English and children’s development.....	231
7.5 Language and Identity.....	234
7.5.1 Impact of English on children’s mother tongue.....	234
7.5.1.1 Mothers’ opinions on the impact of English on children's mother tongue	234
7.5.2 EYL professionals’ views on the impact of English on the mother tongue.....	239
7.6 The English programme provided at Rowad	243
7.6.1 Common features in EFL classrooms at Rowad.....	244
7.6.1.1 The implementation of stories in EFL classes in Rowad.....	246
7.6.1.2 The role of songs in introducing learners to EFL at Rowad	247
7.6.1.3 The status of English during EFL classes at Rowad.....	248
7.6.2 Mothers’ views on the English programme provided at Rowad.....	250
7.6.1.1 Rowad’s English programme is not fantastic but it is OK.....	252
7.6.1.2 The dominant language and the use of the target language	253
7.6.1.3 International schools are better for the acquisition of English.....	255
6.6.1.4 Mothers’ views on the level of fluency in English	257
7.7 Practicing English at home	260
7.7.1 Children memorise new vocabulary	261
7.7.2 English extra classes	262
7.7.3 Fathers’ involvement in the learning process	264
7.8 Travelling and English.....	265
8.1 Key findings.....	270
8.2 Mothers’ ‘hot’ knowledge and informed choices	271

8.2.1 EYL is good even for non-working mothers	272
8.2.2 Islam encourages EYL.....	272
8.2.3 Moral imperative.....	273
8.2.4 Policy emphasis.....	273
8.2.5 Private provision	274
8.3 Cultural capital and mothers' choice	274
8.3.1 Mothers' choice in enrolling their children into pre-primary school.....	276
8.4 Mothers as active agents in the research.....	278
Reference List :	280

Abstract

Recently, a new policy of the reformed Saudi educational system with regard to teaching English as a foreign language in the last two years of primary schools has caused ongoing debate among educators. The local media has its share in that debate with the views of both the supporters and the opposition.

This research focuses on the parents' views and their parental choices in having their children introduced to English at an early stage. The research looks at parents who decide to have their children introduced to English at pre-school level; the rationale for parents' choices at this stage of education is crucial, as this sort of education is not compulsory and therefore the decision is completely parental. Moreover, parents who were involved in the study put their children in a private kindergarten where English is introduced as part of Early Years Learning (EYL) programme.

The context of the study is Al-Madinah, one of the most important cities for Muslims around the world; the city has its own history in foreign languages, and the people are used to foreigners. Even though the study adopts a qualitative approach, questionnaires were sent to 13 private kindergartens for both head teachers and English language teachers in order to explore the wide view of the status of English in private kindergartens in Al-Madinah.

Data collection went through three stages in which Rowad, a private kindergarten was the case for the study. The study had 19 mothers involved in the first stage. Mothers rationalised their choices with academic-like discussion to emphasise their children's moral imperative to early years learning; they also highlighted the importance of early exposure to English. Being from an advanced minority group, the decisions mothers made were affected by several social attributes; their cultural capital along with their social capital have had an impact in the way they justify their choices.

The study succeeded in investigating the views of some mothers in the city of Al-Madinah about early exposure to English as a foreign language, and helped in providing the views of parents with regard to the issue alongside the existing views of educators and researchers.

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Dedication

To my father, Jamal, from whom I inherited my desire for education. In the darkest time of your illness, you were not worried about us – my siblings and me – but about your school, your pupils, the new buildings and about how you could help in improving learning and teaching in the school.

To my mother, Eman, my thanks will never be enough for all that you have been giving me: love, support and faith. Your voice also helps me when I feel down.

List of acronyms:

DGK: Directorate of General Knowledge

EFL: English as Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teacher

ESL: English as Second Language

EYL: Early Years Learning

FL: Foreign Language

GDGE : General Directorate for Girls' Education

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

KSA: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

MDE: Al-Madinah Directorate of Education

MOE: Ministry of Education

SEP: Saudi Educational Policy

SES: Social-Economic Status

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

Allah -God- the Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

And among His Signs is the creation of the heaven and earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge.

(Surah 30: 22)

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Language is the tool human beings use to communicate with one another and, although there are more than 3,000 languages spoken in the world (Lewis et al., 2013), the spread of English as a dominant language in recent years cannot be neglected. As well as being spoken as a first or second language in much of the world, English is widely taught as a foreign language. As an international language it has become the language of communication in today's global world, where dealing with people from another country or even continent is a common occurrence. English is increasingly being used as an international communication tool, a medium between non-native speakers who use it as a common language. Tomlinson (2005:6) claims that people in South Asian countries, for example, use English in their everyday activities and it is the common language when the Chinese have conversations with the Indonesians or the Malaysians, or the Japanese with the Thais, as well as being the language they use when they need to speak to native English speakers who make up part of the expatriate communities in those countries, or are visitors. Thus, the importance of learning foreign languages has increased, particularly in the case of English, which has many potential career benefits and has become a growing influence in career development (Andreou, 2009).

The research takes place in the city of Al-Madinah, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), which has its own historical roots in linguistic diversity. The research looks at the way mothers justify their decisions as members of a socio-cultural milieu of shared views and values. In order

to explore what mothers expect from the English programmes, the research first examines the reasons for their decisions to enrol their children in the non-compulsory pre-primary stage, before specifically concentrating on the language factor.

This research focuses on English in its exploration of the parental choice of introducing foreign languages to children. The global spread of English as a dominant foreign language, which also has an effect on educational contexts, is the reason this study looks solely at English. Though English is not the only foreign language (FL) that attracts learners' attention, it is the language which is taught as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum of many formal education systems worldwide (Nunan, 2003:591). Increasingly, FLs are influencing the type of learning to which young children are introduced during early years learning (EYL) at pre-schools. In some pre-schools, young children are introduced to an FL as a main part of their learning development or as part of mainstream learning classes. Some educators believe that young children in their first five years are able to acquire two languages naturally, when they interact with adults who speak those languages fluently. Moreover, Vos advocates introducing children to FLs at an early age, stating, "It would be a waste not to use a child's natural ability to learn during his or her most vital years, when learning a foreign language is as easy as learning the first" (Vos, 2008:1). In this research, the introduction of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is examined in the context of the city of Al-Madinah , KSA.

The introduction of FLs into the curriculum is directly linked to the educational system of countries. In order to understand the nature of this introduction in any society, it is important to understand the educational system of that society. Therefore, the Saudi educational system is explored in the following chapter.

The demand for pre-schools is increasing in many countries due to changing lifestyles; for instance, with more women involved in the labour market, EYL has become more necessary (Andreou, 2009). This is also true of Saudi women entering the labour market, whose number has increased steadily over the last twenty years. According to Al-Munajjed (2010), the number of Saudi women working outside the home has tripled since 1992.

Even though the pre-primary stage is not compulsory in KSA, policy-makers have shown recent signs that they want to encourage the expansion of this form of education so as to entitle younger children to their right to education. Salman (2011) says that the Saudi Ministry of Education (MOE) has put into action a royal decree regarding the gradual expansion in establishing mixed gender pre-schools either as an attachment to girls' primary schools (schools in KSA are segregated from primary upwards), or as stand-alone schools. The MOE is encouraging the private sector to take part in this step and invest in EYL. In my study, the terms 'pre-primary schools' and 'kindergartens' are used to refer to educational institutions where children between the ages of three and six are provided with an EYL programme under the supervision of the MOE. Recently, the local media have highlighted the MOE's strategy to expand pre-primary education throughout the kingdom; such a shift, according to Salman (2011), coincides with the spreading social awareness about the importance of this stage for children. In this research, early years learning refers to the type of learning to which children in pre-schools are introduced – they are taught reading and writing alongside arithmetic, religion, social values and good manners.

English is the most commonly taught foreign language in pre-schools and private primary schools in KSA and is the only FL considered in the Saudi national curriculum, where children are introduced to English at the age of twelve. Nevertheless, there is an on-going debate in KSA regarding introducing English earlier in government primary schools, and one of the aims of the present study is to contribute to this debate by presenting and analysing some parents' views about introducing English to their young children in pre- schools.

1.2 Socio-cultural perspective of the study

It is important to note at the beginning of the thesis that though this study is conducted from an educational perspective, it borrows some sociological concepts to help in understanding the mothers' views and demands from a socio-cultural perspective. It is also necessary at this stage to explain that the mothers who are involved in this research are considered middle-class

parents. Due to the differences in the social structure between Western societies and that of KSA, I use the term 'middle-class' parents to make it more accessible for western readers.

According to Wright (2003:4), from Weber's perspective, the term 'class' can be used to describe a number of people who share a certain element in their lives. This element is linked to their economical status and their dispositions over material property. In this regard, social classes can be divided into: 1) the capitalist class: individuals who own the means of production, 2) the middle class: individuals who own skills and credentials, and 3) the working class: individuals who own unskilled labour power. The status of a middle class varies from one country to another, but with regard to western civilisation it can be generally summed up as Giddens (1975) does:

The so-called new middle class, consists of two parts: those workers who are part of an administrative chain of authority (bureaucrats), and those who occupy positions outside such hierarchies. The bureaucrat ... shares in the exercise of authority, and thus his position is directly linked to that of the dominant groups in society; those workers in the second type of the situation, on the other hand, are closer to the position of manual workers(Giddens , 1975:56).

The socio-cultural milieu this research focuses on includes a group of mothers who share a set of attributes, such as having a higher than average income, a high level of education and an inclination towards private education. In addition, this socio-cultural group develops international relations through work, business or study, as well as through travel or family ties.

Another important attribute of the group is that these mothers have children attending pre-school. This is not common practice in KSA or in Al-Madinah specifically, and it is in this respect that the group under focus in this study represents a minority in the Saudi society, middle classes included. Their decisions have been influenced by their role as women, but more importantly as educated women who have chosen to introduce their children to formal education and to English at an early stage. A key characteristic of this group is, therefore, a shared

experience of learning second languages and learning English as a second language, as well as a high level of education, often at post-compulsory level. Furthermore, they come from wealthy backgrounds and can afford private education for their children. This element is important to my research as EFL at pre-primary is essentially a feature of the private sector.

Asuyalem (2005), in his research for the Arab educational office about the future of pre-school education in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries, shows that increasing numbers of children are being enrolled in pre-schools although this increase varies from one country to another. While Kuwait is at the top of the list with a 90.7% increase in enrolment between 1992 and 2000, KSA's increase in the same period was only 32.0% (Asuyalem, 2005:85). This figure could explain the considerable disappointment amongst some Saudi educators and qualified but unemployed EYL teachers. According to Al-Eylee (2007), only 8% of Saudi children go to pre-school. He suggests that low awareness about the importance of this stage and the lack of information being made available about its importance contribute to this low attendance.

In the coming section a general overview of the educational context of KSA is presented, which is followed by an analysis of the social structure of Al-Madinah.

1.3 KSA - an overview

This research took place in Al-Madinah, a city in the western part of the country. It is important to explore the city in the context of KSA. At the end of the nineteenth century, the demographic structure of the Arabian Peninsula was varied due to the huge geographical space that it occupies. This may explain the difficulties faced by King Abdul-Aziz in providing stability and security to its people through unification in the early twentieth century. Added to that, a variety of economic, social and political factors also affected the general situation in the area. Najd - the Central province where Riyadh, the present capital of KSA, is located- was neglected by the Ottomans, and the economy of that region was influenced by tribal conflicts in which the more powerful tribes tried to rule over the others (Al-Hamed et al., 2004: 19-20). Meanwhile, in the Eastern region, doctrinal differences between its people and subsequent conflicts affected both the political and educational situation. In contrast, the situation in Hijaz –the western province

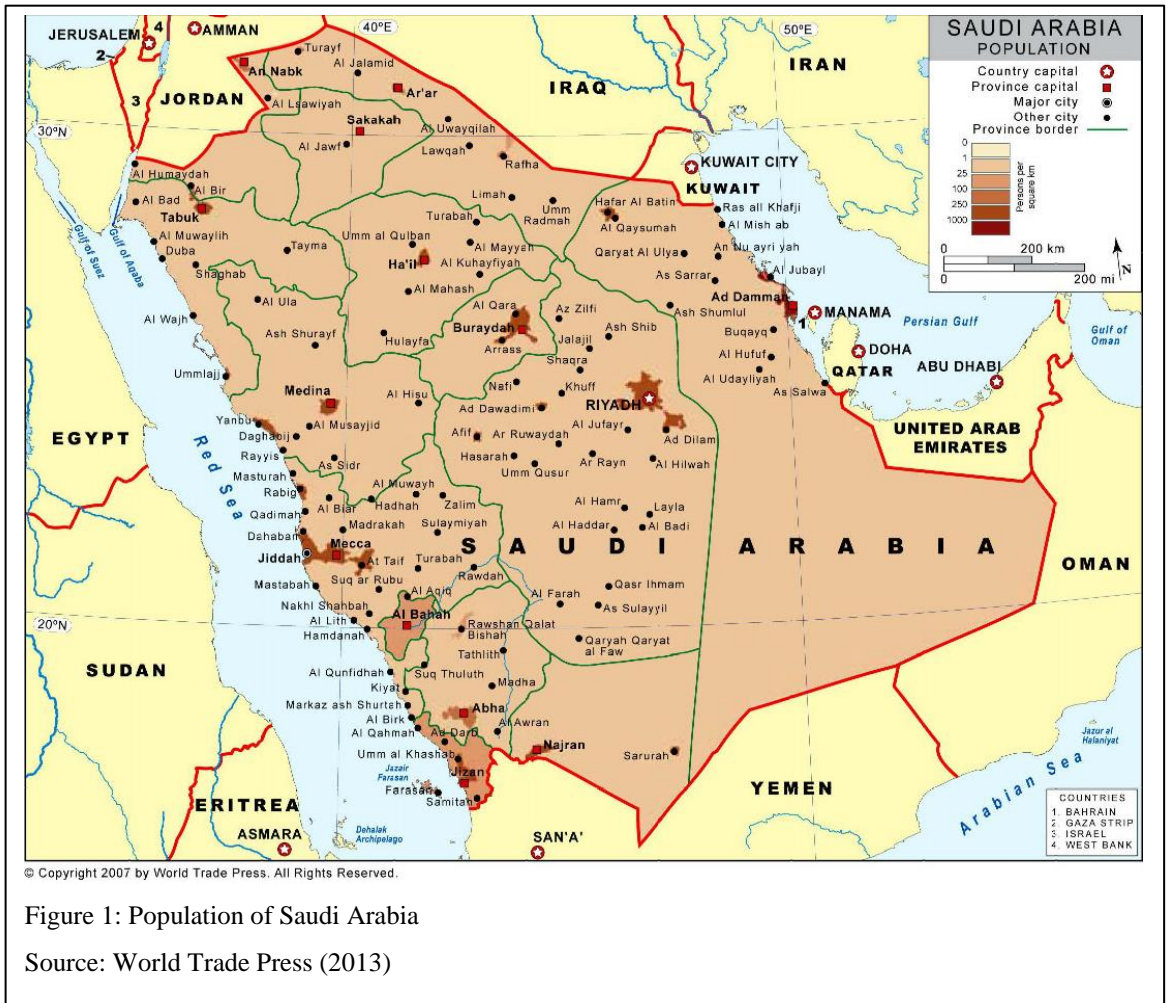
where the holy cities of Makkah and Al-Madinah are situated - was far better due to the fact that pilgrimages and visitors helped to develop the economy, although this growth was subsequently affected by both the Ottomans and King Abdul-Aziz (Al-Hamed et al., 2004:2-21). The Hijaz region was occupied and Makkah was conquered in 1924. One year later, Al-Madinah and Jeddah were taken. This coincided with the establishment of the Saudi educational system. In 1924, King Abdul Aziz called an educational meeting in Makkah and this was followed by the founding of the Directorate of General Knowledge in 1926 (ibid: 92-94). The discovery of petroleum in 1938 led to rapid changes in the young Saudi state as the new oil revolution brought the need to address transportation, communication, health, industry and education (Metz, 1992).

The population of 29,207,277 (including 5,576,076 non-Saudis), as estimated in 2010 (CIA, 2010) is distributed through thirteen main provinces. Al-Sunbul et al (1998: 44-45) describe KSA in terms of its geographical and population distribution: Bedouin communities are nomadic, moving from one place to another seeking pasture and water for their animals and themselves; agricultural communities are located in fertile areas with good water supplies, including the Eastern Province, Jizan Province, Madinah and Hail; industrial communities are found in large industrial cities such as Riyadh, Jeddah, Jubail, Yanbua and Dahrán. These cities are characterised by high density population, diverse industrial production and technology. Finally, there are the coastal environments along the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf (see Figure 1).

One of the sectors on which the state relies to maintain the development of the country is Education, which is the state's responsibility and is represented by the Ministry Of Education (MOE) with thirteen educational directorates (Al-Sulaimany, 2010). In the current study context, the educational directorate in Al-Madinah is the official authority for implementing MOE strategies and decisions in the region. Permission was sought, and granted, from this authority to carry out research at Rowad kindergarten, as well as to visit a number of other kindergartens in order to distribute questionnaires.

The next section gives an overview of the education system in KSA, as well as of Saudi educational policy with regard to EYL and the introduction of foreign languages in particular. It

also presents a description of the social structure and the educational trends and opportunities that exist in Al-Madinah, as this is the locus of the present study.



1.3.1 Al-Madinah’s population and its social structure

During the seventh century, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) migrated to Al-Madinah, and since then Al-Madinah has had a sacred position among Muslims worldwide. Given its sacred status in religious terms, the aim here is to clarify the social structure of Al-Madinah in order to have a clear understanding of the context in which the present study was carried out. Al-Madinah, which in Arabic means ‘city’, is the second most important city amongst Muslims worldwide, since it is the city of the Prophet where His mosque is located and His Honourable

Body is buried. For this reason, it is widely called Al- Madinah Al-Monawarah, which means the Enlightened City (Faqeeh, 2008).

This importance among Muslims has given rise to several historical studies of the people who have been living in Al-Madinah during different periods. Both Arab and non-Arab historians (for example, Burton, 1893 and Al-Ansari, 1993) indicate that the population of Al-Madinah is complex and that it can generally be divided into two main parts:

- Arabs: Arabs living in Al-Madinah belong to two groups; those who are originally from the city and those who came to live there from other Arab regions.
- Non-Arabs: Given Al-Madinah's religious role among Muslims, it is common for Muslims to come to visit the city from all over the world for the *Hajj* (the Pilgrimage which all Muslims should make once in their lives) or for *Umrah* (visiting the holy cities of Al-Madinah and Makkah) and remain there instead of returning home. According to Burckhardt (1829):

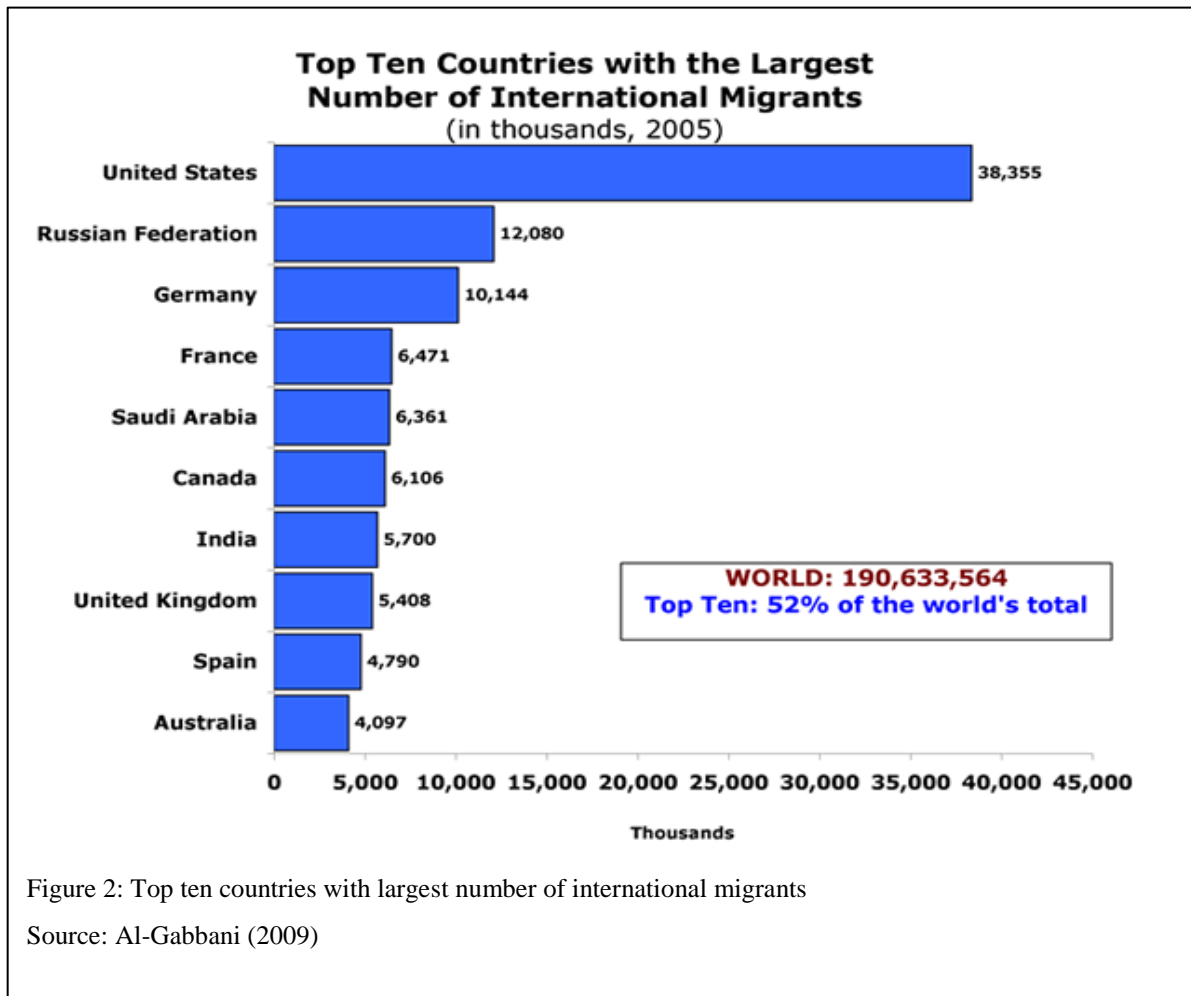
No year passes without some new settlers being added to their number; and no pilgrim caravan crosses the town without leaving here a few of its travellers, who stop at first with the intention of remaining for a year or two only, but generally continue to reside here permanently.

Many scholars have come to the region from all over the Islamic world at different times, and they have preferred to stay in Al-Madinah rather than go back to their homes, mingling with the local community and eventually marrying into it. The Prophet himself migrated to Al-Madinah, so it has become normal practice for Muslims as the sacred nature of the city attracts them as a place to dwell (Al-Ansari, 1993: 56). This has a number of implications for the educational context and learning processes because these migrants have brought their learning methods, and they have attempted to combine them with the traditional methods applied in Al-Madinah (ibid: 239-242). The presence of foreigners in Al-Madinah was recorded as far back as 1819 by Burckhardt (1829) who, on his journey to the city, said that those who came to visit the Prophet's mosque then remained there to be part of its people.

Therefore, it is common today to see people who have Saudi nationality but are originally from India, Turkey, China, Indonesia and many other countries. Their ancestors (mainly men) inhabited Al-Madinah and married local women, thus becoming people of the city. This custom has had a remarkable influence on the populations of the two holy cities of Al-Madinah and Makkah. Personally, I am part of that experience in that my grandmother's father came from Afghanistan with his father when he was a young boy on a trading visit, and they preferred to stay in Al-Madinah because of its holiness, the city being under Ottoman rule at the time.

Another significant aspect which affects the population of Al-Madinah is the result of the policies of the Saudi rulers. King Abdul Aziz, the founder of the Kingdom, had established many cities as new homes for groups of nomadic people. In many cases, such as Al-Madinah, there were Bedouins living near cities and they were encouraged to move into the cities, specifically into new towns set up to accommodate this group, where their children were able to enrol in formal education. This movement was a feature of King Abdul Aziz's era (Al-Ansari, 1993). In recent times, therefore, many Bedouins have moved into Al-Madinah, or have at least sent their children to the University or colleges there.

In his analytical article about Al-Madinah society, Mustafa (2005) refers to the dramatic changes that have taken place in the social structure of Al-Madinah. This is due in part to the fact that the city is surrounded by villages, and that people from those villages have moved into the city itself to take advantage of its health, educational and transport facilities, sorely lacking in the villages (Mustafa, 2005). In contrast to the crucial role that educational facilities play for the Bedouins in their decision to become city dwellers, many people from Al-Madinah move to Riyadh, Jeddah and the Eastern province because of the better work opportunities in those cities, and this also has great implications for the social structure of Al-Madinah (ibid). According to the National Census of 2004, the number of migrants to Al-Madinah was 107,288; while the number of people leaving Al-Madinah was 75,322. These numbers only represent Saudi citizens, according to the Central Department of Statistics and Information (2011). The 2004 census also records Riyadh as coming second to Makkah in attracting national migration, with 174,465 migrants moving there. Moreover, as shown in Figure 2 below, KSA is one of the top ten countries in terms of attracting international migrants.



This description of the population of Al-Madinah helps to further understand the context of the present study by providing a comprehensive view of the social structure of the sample. It is worth considering that the attitude of the various social groups could be influenced by their backgrounds, for example, in the way they look at English as a Foreign Language. Moreover, the opportunity to meet parents who are not Saudis is greater in private schools, such as the one where the present study takes place, as educated foreigners tend to be more aware of the importance of a foreign language for their children’s future (Al-Harhi, 2007).

1.3.2 Social structure and oil discovery

With regard to social classes, according to Rugh (1973:7) Bedouins make up the lower class in the Saudi social structure, along with unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and herdsmen. The ruling classes are those to which the Royal family belong, at the top level, followed by some tribal Shaykhs (Leaders) and some religious men from a specific family whose name is Al-Shaykh. There are also a small number of wealthy merchant families who have risen to a high level in terms of social status.

Between the ruling classes and the lower class is the middle class, which was influenced greatly by the founding of the Saudi state. Before the discovery of petroleum, the economy of the country was reliant on pilgrimage, and the middle class was a small class comprising a few merchants who dealt with foreign businesses (Rugh, 1973: 8). However, the situation changed dramatically as result of the discovery of petroleum and the subsequent economic development. These changes have had a significant impact on the increase of the Saudi middle class which, according to Rugh (1973), includes:

Groups of engineers, administrators, technicians, clerks, teachers of modern subjects ... lawyers, scientists, army officers and others in government and business occupy a middle level in prestige ... [it] also includes merchants, traders and landowners – the bourgeoisie - as well as middle level groups with a traditional education ... and religious scholars as well as teachers of religion and Arabic on all levels of the Saudi school system. (Rugh, 1973: 7)

Rugh's clarification of the social stratification of the Saudi society after the oil discovery supports the categorisation of parents who are involved in the research as middle-class parents. The discovery of petroleum also affected the demand for education (Al-Otaibi, 2010:287). It created new opportunities for Saudis who were willing to gain a good education and to become more skilled in order to attain market standards, which were more professional (Rugh, 1973). As

a result of these developments and requirements, the Saudi educational system was reformed in the 1950s (Al-Otaibi, 2010).

Even though this study is not a historical one, the discussion of the development of the educational system is linked to this context due to its aspects that have had an impact on the educational field. The migration to, and out of, Al-Madinah could have implications for the mothers' attitudes toward EFL and EYL, and the way they justify introducing their youngsters to English at an early age.

As this research takes place in a country where the mother tongue is Arabic, several studies and sources reviewed in this research were originally written in Arabic; these are self-translated in this thesis.

1.4 The importance of the study

The present research stems from observations of EFL classes in two private kindergartens in Al-Madinah, which I carried out as part of the fieldwork for my Masters dissertation in 2008. At that time it was noticed that the teaching approach which was applied in both kindergartens relied on methods which involved teachers giving the information and children repeating it. This was in direct contrast to what took place in Arabic learning classes, where nursery rhymes and stories were widely used as teaching methods. During English classes, therefore, the role of children was found to be limited to that of receivers of knowledge. In effect, many private schools in KSA introduce English as one of the main components of their learning programme, but the quality of the curriculum provided varies from one school to another. It appears that there are some schools which provide high quality English programmes and others who use the term 'English curriculum' solely for marketing purposes (Al-Bakr, 2001).

This study explores mothers' views on introducing English early to their children, by focusing on the way they justify their decisions. Even though the present study does not aim to look in depth at the pedagogies of teaching EFL, there is a minor but important need to consider the

teaching approaches used in this subject in order to reflect what is going on in English classrooms and what mothers' expectations are. Thus, the research makes a case study of one particular private pre-school in Al-Madinah, KSA, where both English language teachers and mothers were interviewed. The study's unique context and the historical roots of FL learning in that context influence the way in which the research looks at the social interaction that forms part of learning EFL for pre-school children both inside and outside school.

According to Al-Bakr (2001:21) teaching EFL in Saudi state schools is such a controversial issue that it is widely discussed among educators, the media and even in family meetings and social gatherings. However, it appears that the parents' views rarely surface in this debate. Hence, with little research done into the introduction of English in pre-schools in KSA, and seemingly none which emphasises the parents' views and strategies, this research seeks to fill a gap and to contribute to the on-going debate into EFL, by emphasising the parental perspective and, more specifically, the perspective of the mothers. This is because, in KSA, it is essentially a mother's job to visit places and make choices of pre-schools as these are under female supervision. Furthermore, since the educational system in KSA is gender-segregated, it would be difficult for a father to visit a pre-school and have face-to-face contact with the staff or have a tour of the premises during the school day.

Some research has been carried out in KSA regarding the importance of EYL (Al-Ameel, 2004, Al-Otaibi & Al-Suywilem, 2002, and Asuyalem, 2005), the common theme being the importance of this stage and its aims, although Asuyalem (2005) looks at the status of EYL in KSA and in other member countries of the GCC. Fewer studies have been done on the introduction of English in EYL, such as Al-Qahtani's (2009), but their focus is not on mothers' choices and their demands.

The gap, therefore, appears to be in the lack of the parents' voices regarding early introduction to English, which the present research aims to fill by highlighting the mothers' views on this through the exploration of their justifications for choosing certain kindergartens. Moreover, the implementation of qualitative research is almost non-existent in comparison with that of quantitative research among educators in KSA (Al-Saggaf, 2004; and Al-Nasser, 1999). The

present explanatory research adopts several tools to gather data and these comprise interviews, questionnaires for professionals, direct observations and a blog (more details of the research tools can be found in Chapter Four). The research analysis mainly draws on the interviews that have been collected through the three stages of fieldwork.

1.5 The research questions

In order to gain a better understanding of the current demand for introducing young children to EFL in Al-Madinah, four broad research questions are intended to guide the investigation, especially with the aim of linking the historical background of the city with current EFL practice and parental expectations seen from a socio-cultural perspective, as well as address the need to briefly explore the pedagogy of EFL with regard to young learners.

The research questions are:

1. When mothers choose a particular kindergarten for their children, what are their drivers and motivations?
2. What is the impact of cultural capital on mothers' decisions in introducing their children to English at an early stage:
 - Is the local community encouraged to learn English?
 - Do young children use English in their community?
3. How do private kindergartens present their EFL programme?
 - How do professionals perceive the role of parental choice in having children introduced to English at an early stage?
 - How does the EFL programme affect the mothers' decision when choosing a kindergarten?
4. How do mothers rate their choice of Rowad kindergarten? Were they satisfied with their choice?

1.6 Framework of the study

This study consists of nine chapters. This, the first chapter, introduces the focus of the project and its context. The chapter also stresses the importance of the contribution this research makes to current debates on EFL in early years learning (EYL) in KSA, and presents the research questions.

The second chapter presents the context of the present study in more detail. A general introduction to the educational system in KSA is given, followed by an overview of its formal education system, educational policy, schooling system and pre-primary education. Then the analysis focuses specifically on the city of Al-Madinah, its social structure and its educational features throughout history with regard to the existence of foreign languages.

The third chapter reviews the literature relevant to the present study, including the importance of EYL, the spread of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), the introduction of FL to young children at the pre-primary stage, parental decision-making with regard to private or state education, and some common pedagogical approaches to teaching FL.

The fourth chapter describes and justifies the research tools I have applied in the current study and explains the rationale for choosing each tool. The research has implemented several types of tools such as interviews, direct observations, questionnaires and a blog.

The fifth chapter discusses the research process in a reflective way, looking at my reasons for choosing to adopt a case study approach. In addition, it discusses what I have learnt from conducting the research and the way I was perceived as a researcher. It also highlights the role of the participants as an active element in this research and the contribution they made through their thoughts about the research strategy and its methodology.

Chapter Six presents and discuss the key findings from the data analysis which are related to early years learning. The focus of this chapter is the importance of EYL, how mothers see the importance of this stage and the ways in which they justify their choices.

The seventh chapter starts by investigating the status of English in Al-Madinah and then moves on to highlight the mothers' rationale for introducing their children to English at an early stage. Professionals' views on several issues related to introducing English at an early stage are also discussed.

The eighth chapter presents the conclusion to the study, highlighting the findings and relating them to literature on parental choice.

Part One :

Contexts and Methodology

The objectives of Saudi educational policy are to ensure that education becomes more efficient, to meet the religious, economic and social needs of the country, and to eradicate illiteracy among Saudi adults. (MOE, 2006 [lines 1-3])

Chapter Two: Research context: Understanding Educational Change in Al- Madinah

2.1 Introduction

Chapter one briefly outlined the importance of this study and introduced the context in which the study took place. The research focus, its questions and importance were presented and sociological terms used throughout the thesis were explained in relation to the group of mothers involved in the study. This chapter explores the educational system in KSA and highlights the social and educational features of Al-Madinah.

2.2 Historical overview of the Saudi educational system

Due to the political, economic and social factors mentioned in the previous section, the inhabitants of KSA had neglected the importance of education (Al-Hamed et al, 2004: 20) until 1926 when King Abdul Aziz united the provinces that make up the Hijaz region under his rule and founded the Directorate of General Knowledge (henceforth DGK) (Al-Hamed et al, 2004: 31). This took place prior to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 (Al-

Ansari, 1993: 355-356), and this might give an indication of the role of education under Saudi rule despite the fact that the new country had to deal with different situations locally and internationally. The educational sector in general, and the establishment of DGKs throughout the country was a vital priority for Saudi decision makers, even before the King's mission to unify the country was accomplished.

The foundation of the DGK coincided with the annexation of Hijaz province, and the two holy cities of Makkah and Al-Madinah located there. According to the MOE official website, when King Abdul Aziz entered Makkah there were four private schools. Scholars in Makkah were invited to the first educational conference in 1924 (MOE, 2010) where King Abdul Aziz encouraged the spread of education amongst all citizens and residents in the country (Al-Hamed, 2004: 31). According to Al-Ansari (1993:355-356), the DGK was the cornerstone of KSA's modern, formal education and it had several distinctive achievements, some of which are:

- Established the schooling system in 1927
- Initiated the first Saudi primary curriculum in 1935
- Established the formation of private schools in 1938
(ibid: 357-358)

2.2.1 The Ministry of Education

Increasing developments in the educational field and the spread of learning across the country established the need for a new administrative body; thus the Ministry of Education (MOE) was founded in 1954 (Al-Ansari, 1993: 360-361). However, there were several challenges which the ministry needed to address (Al-Hamed et al, 2004: 37), including:

- establishing schools in all Saudi cities and villages faced with a lack of human and material potential;
- urgent need for eligible teachers;
- responding to the need for school buildings;
- unavailability of teaching materials and curricula (these were imported from some neighbouring countries whose circumstances were not always relevant to the Saudi context).

The MOE has several types of educational institutions under its direct supervision. Formal education is segregated and includes three levels: primary schools, intermediate schools and secondary schools. Parents have the right to put their children in state schools at the three levels

School/Level	Grade From	Grade To	Age From	Age To	Years
Primary	Primary	1	6	6	12
Middle	Intermediate	7	9	13	16
Secondary	Secondary	9	12	17	19

Table 1: Age of enrolment in Formal education in KSA
 Source: Foreign Credits, Inc, 2012

free of charge. Alternatively, they can go to the private sector. While international schools are only found in the private sector, Quranic schools which concentrate more on religious subjects, although still teaching the other required subjects, are found in both state and private sectors. Table 1 shows the age of enrolment in formal education in KSA.

2.2.2 The General Directorate for Girls' Education

Given the situation regarding the segregation of students in KSA, the education of girls was only formally established in 1960, when the state became responsible for this educational sector (Al-Sunbul et al, 1998:71). The foundation of the General Directorate for Girls' Education (henceforth GDGE) coincided with a steady increase in girls' enrolment in schools. Al-Ansari (1993:375) reports that the number of girls enrolled in schools in 1960 was 5,201 but that, within ten years, the number had increased to 124,933, reaching 328,619 by 1975. The number of enrolments has increased steadily since then. The GDGE was responsible for girls' formal education, vocational education and for the specific colleges set up for them at the time (Al-Hamed et al., 2004: 48-49). However, with the growing numbers of both boys and girls enrolling in formal education in subsequent years, the demand to unite the efforts of the MOE and the GDGE also became greater. Thus, these two public entities were integrated in 2002,

with the MOE becoming responsible for general education in the country for both genders (Al-Hamed et al., 2004:49).

2.2.3 The Saudi Educational Policy

Educational policy is at the core of several state policies in KSA, as the implementation of educational policy is seen as a fundamental step in enabling the continuing development of the through planned strategies (Al-Almaee, 2008).

Educational policy is related to the society in which it is embodied, and Al-Hamed et al. (2004) define it as:

(...) guided and organised thinking which directs activities and projects that are applied in the teaching and educating sectors, which the decision makers look at as a tool to achieve the ambitions of society and individuals regarding the available potential. (ibid: 60-61)

Hakim (2000), whose study looks at educational policy and the extent to which it has been applied from the point of view of secondary school teachers in the region of Makkah, further defines educational policy as:

The general framework of the educational system and its institutions, which demonstrates the relationship between what the country needs, and what should be done by educational institutions, and which can evaluate the work of those institutions. The framework is set out by specialized departments with the participation of some members of society. (Hakim, 2000)

2.3.3.1 SEP - practice and programme development

Before the proclamation of Saudi Educational Policy (henceforth SEP) in 1970, considered to be the official document of the educational system in KSA, this system was linked to those of neighbouring Arab countries, sometimes adopting their plans, methodologies and even their course books (Al-Hamed et al, 2004: 67-68). However, there was an urgent demand for the country to develop a national educational policy which would coexist with Saudi society and reflect the state's identity, in which religion plays a crucial role. Hence, SEP is officially defined as:

(...) a general outline in which learning and educating processes are dependent on achieving the duty of individuals to know their God (Allah), their religion and to behave according to the Islamic principles. Also to obtain the needs of society and the desires of the nation which include several fields of knowledge, whole levels of education, educational plans, curricula, management systems and all the affairs that deal with education or are related to it. (MOE, 2006 and Al-Osaimi, 2007 :22)

SEP consists of nine chapters and two hundred and thirty-six articles. As pointed out above, it is dependent on Islamic ideology, which is the main factor in the country's identity. This entails inculcating Islamic values, doctrines and high ideals in students, through the acquisition of knowledge and diverse skills. Another key concern is that education should also develop positive behavioural attitudes and improve society economically, socially and educationally. This is regarded as an essential part of an individual's preparation for becoming a beneficial member who can help to build Saudi society.

SEP claims to support continuous developing processes in the educational field (Al-Osaimi, 2007:38) but, according to Munagish (2004) and Al-Osaimi (2007), for over forty years there have been no changes in SEP as the only official document that presents the framework of the Saudi educational system. Although educational reforms have been developing and changing rapidly in order to achieve better outcomes, the SEP itself as an official document has not

changed. Munagish's (2004) study, which analyses educational policy in Saudi Arabia and offers suggestions to improve it, claims that given that there have not been any changes made to the SEP since it was instated, there is a real need to look at it and analyse it to make sure that it coincides with developing demands and people's needs (Munagish, 2004:2).

According to Maroun et al. (2008 24), Saudi policymakers are aware of the importance of educational reforms and, in 2004, King Abdullah's project for developing public education (called Tatweer) was launched with a strong emphasis on encouraging students to analyse and look for information by themselves, with the role of teachers as guides (MOE,A. 2012). The Saudi Minister of Education at the time made the following comment: "We need more efforts to strengthen Saudi Arabia's position by building brains and investing in humans" (Al-Fozan, 2011).

This concurs with the plan to provide new teacher training programmes to prepare teachers to be able to implement new curricula in response to developments in science and technology. (MOE, 2012). Moreover, the new programme emphasises the importance of the quality of education and its coexistence with the principles of twenty-first century approaches where learners' ability and creativity are welcomed and a certain attention is given to their talents and hobbies (ibid.). This contrasts with common traditional teaching methods in KSA that depend on memorisation, as in many Mediterranean countries (Bardak 2005:10). Munagish (2004:20) indicates that there is a conflict between some of SEP's articles in that students are encouraged to apply critical thinking and to research during their learning process while the educational process focuses on memorising and testing by studying books that do not allow children to think beyond them. Tatweer is trying to avoid this conflict and to achieve a learning environment that is more autonomous.

One part of SEP which relates to the present study is the clarification that Arabic is the language to be used in education at all levels and in all subjects unless there is a need to study in another language (chapter 1/ 24). The second chapter of SEP includes an article which is even more directly linked to the present study, referring to the following aim:

To provide learners with another spoken language beside their native language, for the supply of science, knowledge, art and useful innovations; also to transfer our knowledge and science to other nations and to contribute to spreading Islam and serving humanity. (SEP, Chapter 2/50)

It is also important for the present research to look at the impact of the Tatweer project on EYL. Thus, the phase in which the state began to become responsible for the educational system is highlighted. Although the kindergarten this study focuses on is privately run, it is still under the supervision of the MOE, being required to fulfil certain criteria and expectations, as shown on the MOE's official website (2006). These are to:

- Improve the methods of teaching in compliance with the general educational framework.
- Contribute to research into beneficial and effective education and schooling.
- Establish training courses for teachers in order to improve their performance level.
- Expand the role of the traditional school and contribute to raising awareness.
- Preserve and abide by public conduct and the rules of decorum of Saudi society.

The decision makers' expectations from a private education, therefore, seem to be somewhat free in their interpretation, and may have implications for the focus of the present research on a particular level of this type of education, namely EYL, and the way mothers justify choosing it for their children.

Thus, although the present study does not focus on SEP, it is essential to understand it and the issues relating to it. This is especially relevant given the current trend of introducing English earlier in the national curriculum and the increasing instances of introducing it as part of early learning in private pre-schools. Furthermore, it also helps in understanding the status of English in the city of Al-Madinah.

2.3. The Saudi schooling system

Formal education in Saudi Arabia is considered to be one that goes from the introduction to schooling at the bottom of the educational ladder, through the specific levels detailed in section 2.3.1 and up to higher education (Al-Hamed et al, 2004: 92). However, the recently established ten-year (2004-2014) comprehensive plan to improve Saudi formal education has made it clear that formal education is to be compulsory by 2014 for the six to eighteen age group (Al-Qurashi et al, 2003:6). This age group includes six years of primary school, three of intermediate, and three years of secondary grades (MOE, 2007; Abdan,1991:267), This step is expected to increase the number of children enrolling in pre-school stages by 40% (MOE, 2007). However, SEP does not contain one single article which indicates that education should be compulsory, despite this being recommended at several Arab conferences on education (Munagish, 2004: 28). This could be used as an example of the urgent need to modify the current SEP to correspond with the educational plans and reform programmes that have been developing on the ground.

2.3.1 Pre-school stages in the Saudi educational system

Initially EYL in the Saudi educational system was exclusively in the hands of the private sector, until it came under the supervision of MOE in 1966, when the first public kindergarten was opened in the capital, Riyadh. Then private kindergartens came under the supervision of the MOE through an independent administration, called the General Administration for Kindergartens (Al-Hamed et al, 2004: 92-97; Al-Ghamdi, 2003). This preparation phase for formal education takes children from the ages of three to six years old, and divides this group into three different levels, as Al-Harthi (2009:3) explains:

1. Children aged three to four are in Nursery
2. Children aged four to five are in Reception 1
3. Children aged five to six are in Reception 2

Although it is not compulsory for children to be enrolled in pre-school before entering primary school (Al-Hamed et al, 2004: 94), the Saudi MOE encourages EYL in both nurseries and

kindergartens, which are under MOE supervision (SEP Chapter 3/ 116- 117). Moreover, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of early learning in the Saudi educational community (MOE, 2008), and a new programme under the supervision of the Social Cooperation Department in the General Administration for Kindergartens highlights this with the slogan “I have the right to early education” (Al-Harhi, 2009: 2). Recently, Salman (2011) pointed out that the MOE has an ambitious plan to launch new pre-schools either attached to schools, or independently. Salman, (2011) reports that Nora Al-Fayiz, the Deputy Minister of Education, announced a strategic plan to enhance EYL to coincide with the Tatweer programme’s aims to improve the educational opportunities provided in formal education in KSA.

Being under the umbrella of MOE, the EYL curriculum has gone through three different phases. The first phase initiated in 1952 focussed on traditional teaching methods which emphasised learning through memorising and delivering information. The aim of this stage was to teach children the basics of reading and writing, and the main role of the children was to be receivers of knowledge (Oday, 2008). The second phase, which started in 1975, concentrated on the basics of reading and writing by applying curricular projects. Although this was not very different from the previous phase, children’s needs to play and move were noticed. By 1975, children were able to do some activities but teachers still played the main role in the teaching process, as deliverers of knowledge (Al-Harhi, 2009: 3-4).

The awareness of children’s needs and its implementation in their learning process became recognised as a vital principle of EYL, and by 1981 a new curriculum was initiated. The curriculum is known as the ‘immanent’ learning curriculum which is an upshot of several efforts from the Saudi MOE, UNESCO and the Arabian Gulf Educational Organisation (Oday, 2008). In order to achieve the best outcomes of the new curriculum, teachers are expected to uphold its aims which are divided into three main fields (Al-Harhi, 2009:4):

- The cognitive and intellectual area;
- The emotional and sentimental area; and
- The physical and movement area.

The Social Cooperation Department in the General Administration for Kindergartens has established general guidelines for putting the curriculum into practice. These cover four main factors which must apply in all Saudi kindergartens: activities; a rich environment; a daily, diverse and organised schedule; and the teacher (Toojaralshay, 2004). As clarified above, EYL is not a stage on the formal education ladder in KSA and, therefore, the mothers' attitudes towards enrolling their children in that stage, and introducing them to English in doing so, is vital in this research, as it investigates the impact of social factors in choosing a particular kindergarten and what the mothers' expectations are from the programmes provided.

Having given an overview of the educational system, policies and key reforms in KSA, I now turn to Al-Madinah where the research was conducted. In order to have some understanding of the research context, I focus on its social structure and specific educational features.

2.4 Historical background of the educational features in Al-Madinah pre- and Islamic period

According to Mubarakpuri (2002:37), the demographic structure of Al-Madinah before the Islamic era had two groups;

- Arab tribes – the Aws and the Khazraj.
- Jewish tribes whose ancestors immigrated to the city after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed their kingdom in Palestine (ibid: 15), and other Jewish migrants who moved to the Arabian Peninsula during the Roman era, from 70AD to 132AD (ibid).

Although at that time the educational process in Al-Madinah was not formal or well organised, many people from the city were literate (Al-Ansari, 1993). The educational situation in Al-Madinah was influenced by the three main aspects outlined below.

1) Jewish schools: The Jewish culture had played an important role in enhancing education in Al-Madinah, as there used to be schools to teach the Jewish religion, not only to their believers but also in an attempt to spread their knowledge among Arab residents (Al-Ansari, 1993: 77).

2) Christian principles: The influence of Christianity can be seen in the speeches which the Christian Arabs used to make during the annual markets where there were crowds of people (Al-Ansari, 1993: 79-80).

3) Trading caravans: Makkah was at the heart of Arab trading, being a place of pilgrimage for Arabs even before Islam, and Al-Madinah was the place where the merchant caravans rested (Al-Ansari, 1993: 80). The merchants not only benefitted financially from those journeys, but they also learned from each other's cultures. In addition, when they mingled with the local people of the places they arrived at, they transferred the knowledge acquired to those people (Al-Haidary, 1992) 'and that source of knowledge was crucial in the progress of Al-Madinah's education' (Al-Ansari, 1993: 82).

2.4.1 The Islamic era

Al-Madinah was the place to which the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his followers emigrated from Makkah. The people of Al-Madinah who followed the Prophet and welcomed him to their city are known as Alansar (Mubarakpuri, 2002); they still make up the largest group among Al-Madinah's citizens today. When the Prophet settled in Al-Madinah, He built His Mosque, which is considered to be the first Islamic school because it was a place for praying and learning for both males and females. In fact, the Prophet's way of teaching at that time was not only oral and based on memorisation but also containing conversational lessons (Al-Ansari, 1993: 97-110). From the Mosque, the regulations of the new Muslim state were established; therefore, the subject of writing started to become more important and the Prophet encouraged young Muslims to learn to write.

Moreover, the Prophet was aware of the importance of foreign languages in translating and writing books. He also recognised their usefulness in communicating with other nations (Al-Ansari, 1993: 116-117). Therefore, this field of learning has been encouraged since the early Islamic era, and the Prophet insisted on having some trusted followers who were fluent in Hebrew, Persian, Latin, and other languages which were popular at that time (Al-Ansari, 1993: 117). This quick overview of the educational and social features of Al-Madinah is very important and shows the roots of FL learning in this city.

Though religious knowledge was very important for Muslims, they were also encouraged to study other subjects, including geography, mathematics, history, vocational skills, physical education and medical therapy (Al-Ansari, 1993: 127-138). Muslim nations followed the Prophet's path in encouraging the spread of knowledge and learning, during the period from 632 to 661 AD, when the Islamic calendar was founded. The learning process became more organised with weekend breaks and yearly vacations, and the subjects taught were clearly established, such as The Holy Quran, the Sunnah (the Prophet's speeches), writing, reading and Mathematics (Al-Ansari, 1993: 148-145).

This was not specific to Al-Madinah, which was the capital of the Islamic state until 656 AD, but spread throughout the state. As time passed the capital of the Islamic state moved. However, Al-Madinah was still a centre of knowledge to which scholars and travellers came from different places (Al-Ansari, 1993: 161).

As their knowledge increased, there appeared new approaches of teaching such as learning through stories which were influenced by the knowledge Muslims inherited from other cultures such as Persian. Later on, learning through debate was encouraged, where an idea was put forward for investigation and scholars would give their views and discuss their opinions, giving the listeners and learners a wider and deeper knowledge of the subject (Al-Ansari, 1993: 173,190). The spread of knowledge was largely linked to the huge translation movement that happened in the eighth century where books on medicine, chemistry, philosophy and even poetry were translated into Arabic. This movement coincided with the learning of foreign languages as a priority and with the increase of writing in Arabic (Al-Ansari, 1993: 176-177).

Formal education started to appear from 1065, starting in Iraq, then spreading throughout the Islamic world. This was the first step towards the direct influence of the state on education (Al-Ansari, 1993; 212). Moreover, the term 'school' started to be common and several specialised schools were founded at that time (Al-Ansari, 1993; 214).

2.4.2 Common types of educational institutions in Al-Madinah – a historical view

Katateeb (plural; singular *Kutab*), described as places where young children gathered to learn reading and writing and basic mathematics, were known to Arabs even before Islam, but increased dramatically after Islam (Al-Haidary, 1992: 43-46). Moreover, there were *Katateeb* with specific aims: in his study, Al-Haidary (1992: 48-49) indicates that during the Ottoman era, there were *Katateeb* in which learners were taught foreign languages, with a *Kutab* in the Prophet's Mosque in 1885 teaching Persian and another in the same place in the early 20th century for learning both Turkish and Persian. In Al-Madinah, there were several types of *Katateeb*, some located in the Prophet's Mosque and others attached to several other mosques; there were even some *Katateeb* for girls (Al-Haidary, 1992: 50-52). In other *Katateeb* young children of both genders studied together, learning the basics of learning (ibid: 50). This can be compared to the present situation, where young children of both genders are enrolled in non-segregated kindergartens. The number of *Katateeb* have decreased during the Saudi era because of the spread of the formal schooling system which has a wide appeal with its comprehensive curriculum introducing learners to several fields of knowledge (Al-Haidary, 1992: 54).

The previous sections have described the educational features of Al-Madinah during several historical periods, each of which has implications for the present context of the city. They show that the methods of teaching and learning changed according to the demands of society. For instance, in the beginning of Islam, when people needed to learn about their religion and its principles, the Prophet's mosque was the centre of the teaching process and people learnt their religion from the Prophet, who encouraged conversational lessons. When the Prophet's mission was accomplished and the Muslims established their religion, they started to look at the knowledge of other peoples and benefit from them; here the need to learn foreign languages gained importance. The spread of teaching, especially during the Umayyad era with the increase in the number of *Katateeb* coincided with the implementation of teaching through stories. This leads up to the situation which exists in modern Al-Madinah, where there has been a slight increase in the number of pre-schools in the city, and to the ensuing discussion about the way in which English is introduced at this stage and about the mothers' views on this matter.

This chapter has explored the educational system in KSA, and it has provided a historical view of the educational trends in the city of Al-Madinah over time. The following chapter looks at the theoretical framework of the study. It begins by looking at research on the importance of EYL, moves to the introduction of EFL to young children, and is followed by a discussion focusing on private education and the reasons some parents choose it, as well as on the ideological rationale for introducing FL at pre-school. Finally, the common pedagogical methods used in teaching young children FL will be discussed.

Allah - God- the Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

“... and say : My Lord ! Increase me in knowledge “

(Surrah 20:114)

Chapter Three: Literature review: Exploring Educational Developments and Decisions

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the research context was introduced by outlining the educational system in KSA and then touching on the educational and social features of Al-Madinah. The aim of this chapter is to look at previous studies and literature which are relevant to my study, where I look at parental choices and the way parents rationalise these with regard to their children's education. The focus is on the introduction of their children to English at an early stage. Literature on the importance of EYL is reviewed because it is the learning environment in which the study takes place. Selected literature on introducing English as foreign language to young children is also reviewed. This study falls into the area of educational research which adopts a socio-cultural perspective in order to explore the parental choice of introducing young children to English. Taking into consideration the fact that the group of mothers interviewed are a minority in the society of Al-Madinah, analysing their attitude under the umbrella of their social and cultural capitals helps explore the way they justify their decisions.

3.2 The importance of early years learning

The rapid changes of the last century, such as the industrial revolution, discovery of oil and the spread of technology have had their impact on the way education is positioned globally. Each child now has the right to be introduced to appropriate education and this right is no longer exclusive to a particular group in society or monopolised by certain nations. Therefore, in contexts such as KSA where early years education is yet to be institutionalised, parents who introduce their children to this level of education are perceived as advocates of EYL and it can be easily assumed that they are aware of this type of education for their children.

Where education was once the privilege of a minority, it is now recognised as a universal entitlement, with every child's right to education. (Woodhead & Moss, 2007: 22)

The increased interest in formal education is linked also to pre-primary education, where children are introduced to early learning, according to Woodhead (2006). This type of pre-primary education is different from formal teaching in schools. This research will not enter into a debate about whether EYL is a 'sensitive period' or a 'critical period' but will simply begin from the assumption that this stage is important for children both cognitively and socially.

3.2.1 EYL and cognitive development

As they grow, children undergo psychosocial and biological developments which coincide with genetic inheritance (McGregor et al, 2007). These years are vital for children's brain development, and their social interactions within the surrounding environment have implications for children's long-term mental ability (McGregor et al, 2007: 60 and Marriott, 2009). Under this subheading, the focus is on the impact of EYL on children's cognitive development. There has been a growing body of research on EYL which has resulted in the development of several theories about how knowledge should be introduced to young children. Some approaches are more teacher-directed where teachers give the knowledge and the pupils repeat it (Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett, 2009:66). In such approaches children in a classroom learn through repeating the correct information as delivered by their teacher; if they give a wrong response

they will be immediately corrected. According to Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett (2009), this form of learning involves children in rote memorization. Even though there is a huge movement in Saudi education to move toward cognitive learning, especially in EYL, it appears from my analysis that some mothers depend on rote memorization in their children's EFL follow-up at home. However, the EYL guidelines issued by the MOE highlight the importance of cognitive and child centred learning.

From a cognitive learning perspective, learning involves the transformation of information in the environment into knowledge that is stored in the mind. Learning occurs when new knowledge is acquired or existing knowledge is modified by experience ... The cognitive theories (especially Piaget's and Vygotsky's) emphasize on the individual's active contribution of understanding. (Schunck, 2008:161)

Therefore it is important to look at constructivist learning, where children learn through their interaction with their surroundings and where they are given the independence to choose the activities they like to be involved in, with some elements of challenge (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett , 2009: 66).

A study was carried out in the US and Australia to identify genetic and environmental factors in the progress of 172 pairs of identical twins and 153 pairs of non-identical twins. Data was gathered about the children's progress in reading, spelling, phonological awareness, rapid naming and spoken sentences from the first follow-up testing phase (at or by the end of the twins' 1st year in kindergarten) till the 2nd year (Byrne et al, 2005: 219). Some of the skills were found to be heritably latent such as the phonological awareness and the rapid naming while the environment was found to have a minor but significant role (ibid: 227-228). When it came to spelling, both genes and the environment had an important role. The study showed that at kindergarten level, genes and the environment - whether at home or in the class - have some implications on the children's skills.

In their study McClelland et al. (2006) mention that teachers find that many pre-school children are not aware about school behaviours such as being able to work independently and following instructions. One of the two aims of their study was to look at pre-school children's learning-related skills - which they define as needed skills for children to maintain academic achievement and includes self-regulation and social competences such as responsibility, cooperation and independence (ibid:472) - and find out whether initial levels and growth in reading and Maths between kindergarten and sixth grade could be predicted. The second aim was to compare the performance of the children who had low levels in learning-related skills with that of their peers who ranked high in reading and Maths from kindergarten up to years six. The study found that ratings of kindergarten learning-related skills significantly predicted reading and math scores between kindergarten and sixth grade and growth in reading and maths between kindergarten and second grade (ibid:481).

A study from Argentina looks at the effects of pre-primary education on primary school performance. Berlinski et al. (2009) explain that the public school system in Argentina provides pre-primary education for children from 3 to 5 years old, with pre-primary linked directly to primary schools (ibid: 220). The primary source for the children's performance was the administrative records of The Argentina National Education Ministry and teachers' questionnaires (though the number of the sample and the questionnaires were not presented in the paper). The writers claim that test scores do not affect teachers and that the concept of preparing children to pass the exams instead of teaching them the required skills is not in general applied in schools and pre-schools in Argentina. Therefore, they took test scores to compare the performance of learners who enrolled in pre-primary levels with that of those who did not (ibid: 223-225). They found that pre-primary education had a positive influence on the performance of third grade children in both maths and Spanish. Furthermore, pre-primary attendance also affected children's participation and their ability to pay attention during the class (ibid: 220). Berlinski et al.'s study helped me in understanding the nature of early childhood education in a context which differs from the context of my study. It also supports the notion that there exists worldwide a general consensus toward the importance of EYL.

Another study looks at the relationship between pre-school models and later school success (Macron, 2002). The study looks at three pre-school models: the child-initiated model, the academically directed model and the combination model. The study comprised a group of 245 children, 33% of whom had attended child-initiated pre-school, 35% of whom had attended academically directed pre-school and 32% of whom had attended a pre-school that combines the two approaches. Of these children, 183 were in Year 6 and 160 were in Year 5. The study found that in Year 5, children's different pre-school experience did not have a huge impact on their academic performance. However, teachers indicated that children who had attended academically directed pre-schools were poorer than their peers in terms of school behaviour (Marcon, 2002). By the end of Year 6, the school behaviour of children who had academically directed kindergartens began to decline, and gender differences were also found in Year 6 which had not appeared in Year 5, with the girls obtaining 13% higher grades than boys. The study also found that even though learning-related skills in kindergarten did not predict the growth rate in both reading and maths capacity, they significantly predicted the level. This study made me aware of the different types of pre-schools in the US, and directed my attention to EYL practices in Al-Madinah and encouraged me to explore the expectations of parents from the chosen kindergartens.

Another follow-up study examined a cluster of reading skills of fifty-six first grade children from two middle class primary schools in the US. The children had been introduced to a reading programme that includes a phonics programme with a workbook and a spelling and writing programme developed by their teachers (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997:934-936). Ten years later when they reached 11th grade, twenty-seven students who remained in the school had a follow-up test. The test showed that the reading comprehension capacity varied among 11th grade students and that early exposure to reading is likely to encourage learners to engage in reading activities and build up lifelong reading habits (ibid: 942). The direct benefit extracted from that study is the importance of early exposure to reading and how it could have a long term impact. Even though the sample of the study differs from the present study, the common thread is the impact that early exposure has on the later stages. From another angle, this study raises a question whether early exposure to reading English stories in class has any impact on the children's attitude toward learning English. In this study, mothers' views about introducing their

children to English are not restricted to the activities they do in the EFL classroom but also include those they do at home. Reading stories in English as an activity to boost the children's learning, for example, is mentioned by some mothers.

The interest in EYL is a global one. The UNESCO report, 'The Role of Early Childhood Education for a Sustainable Society', based on an international workshop which involved thirty-five participants from sixteen countries (Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008: 9), indirectly guided this study to look at the reality of EYL in Al-Madinah and the extent to which the society is satisfied with EYL programmes. UNESCO believes in the long term effect of early childhood learning and the aims of the workshop was a) to provide new types of education that coexist with the demands of achieving world peace; b) to make the new type of education available to all and not just specific people; c) to begin that education in early childhood (ibid: 27).

3.2.1.1 Physical facilities and EYL

This research looks primarily at kindergartens as an educational environment where children are introduced to learning. Having said that, the impact of the wider milieu of Al-Madinah in encouraging learning EFL is also discussed. Mehaffie and Walfson (2007) offer a profound image of the environment of EYL in which children receive "constant and consistent parental caregiving; adequate food, nutrition, and health care; help in maximizing physical growth, preliteracy cognition, and socializing skills: and appropriate continuous supervision to safely explore their world" (ibid: 3).

Sultan (2010), who conducted a survey in Yemen where she looks at the importance of EYL, highlights the importance of kindergartens' physical location and features of the pre-school being suitable for the young learners. Toilets for instance should be adapted to children's use and the halls should be wide enough to let the children move freely, which is not the case in many Yemeni kindergartens. Sultan (2010) explains that the reason behind the low-quality in pre-school institutions is that they initially opened for investment benefit; many government pre-school institutions are linked to the primary school and many teachers are not qualified in dealing with young children. Sultan's explanation raises the issue of the quality of pre-school programmes. Moreover, the age of children when they enter the preschool learning programme

and the years they spend in the programme also influence their later performance (Branett, 1995: 27). According to Marriott (2009), early exposure:

(...) determines whether a child grows up to be intelligent or dull; fearful or self-assured; articulate or tongue-tied or loving and trusting of the adults in his [her] environment (ibid [lines: 16-19]).

Though I agree with Marriott about the importance of the early years and the experiences of those years, I think that although those experiences are likely to impact on children's future they are not the only factors to determine whether a child is going to be intelligent or not.

There is plenty of evidence from world-wide research of the impact that early introduction to learning has on children's cognitive development. This intervention not only benefits children cognitively, but socially as well, as will be discussed in the following section.

3.2.2 EYL and social development

Early exposure to education not only has a positive impact on children's cognitive development, but also on their social development. At pre-primary schools young learners are introduced to early learning and engage socially with their classmates, teachers and adults around them. According to Berlinski (2009:1417) such engagement in the learning environment is "facilitating the process of socializing and self-control necessary to make the most of the classroom learning". In addition, Mason and Sinha (1992: 7) point out that:

In preschool and kindergarten years, children acquire literacy principally through exploration and adult support, which does not preclude adults from fostering children's interest but also does not lead to direct instruction.

Vygotsky's theory appears to fit ideally with the explanatory approach of my study. His theory emphasises the importance of cultural and social interaction in children's education. Regarding Vygotskian theory, development happens in two ways: naturally and culturally. Natural

development is linked to the general biological and physical development of the child, while cultural development includes what children experience with their culture, such as habits, behaviours and the cultural way of reasoning (Mason & Sinha, 1992:12). The four stages of cultural development from a Vygotskian perspective are elucidated by Mason and Sinha, as follows:

The first stage when children have limited attention, interest and memory.

The second stage when children go beyond memorising and start to make use of what they learn. In this stage adults intervene by providing links between the obtained concepts and easing the demands on the children's memory.

The third stage when children use their obtained knowledge more effectively and start to practise and discover it.

The fourth stage when children start to use inner schemes as signs to remember the knowledge that has been obtained.

(Mason and Sinah, 1992:16)

The Vygotskian approach emphasizes the importance of sociocultural forces in shaping a child's development and learning and points to the crucial role played by parents, teachers, peers and the community in identifying the types of interaction occurring between children and their environment (Kozulin et al, 2003:2).

In a study looking at the effects of different types of pre-school curricula on some aspects of children's experience and social development in Saudi Arabia, Al-Ameel (2004) asked teachers to respond to a questionnaire about 230 children. Her study found that sub-scales such as activities, social interaction and programme structure were positively associated with confidence (Al-Ameel, 2004:40). As Vygotsky's theory relates to EYL and introducing foreign languages at this stage, more discussion on the theory and its approach follows in 3.3.

3.2.3 EYL as a transition phase

Considering the importance of pre-school on later academic achievement, it is important to explore the pre-school stage as a transition phase which helps young children to adjust to an environment outside their homes. The transition process is a two way process that demands the cooperation between homes and teachers. Mehaffie and Walfson (2007) point out that parents tend to like having contact with the schools to ensure that their children make a smooth transition to school, and more importantly to satisfy themselves that the school is aware of their child's personality and individual needs (ibid: 56). Furthermore, pre-school is a preparation phase which teaches children to be apart from their mothers/caregivers before entering formal education. According to Sultan (2010 [lines: 11-14]) entering pre-school programmes helps avoid the so-called "school crisis". To help in understanding a school crisis McClelland et al. (2006) clarify the process of moving up to school life:

The transition from preschool to formal schooling is a milestone in the lives of young children. Although most children successfully navigate this transition, it can be problematic for children who have not mastered the self-regulation and social competence needed to do well in the school. (ibid: 471)

Moreover, Sultan (2010) states that:

Kindergartens are the preliminary stage before a child enters the school. In this stage children can obtain a healthy maturity through conscious education where they enjoy the new experiences and learn through playing; also they learn to be independent and confident (Sultan, 2010 [lines: 4-6])

This research attempts to explore the way a group of mothers justify their decision in introducing their children to English in early years education. As mentioned before, the group of mothers who are involved in the study represent a minority socio-demographic grouping in Al-Madinah. The desire to have their children introduced to English at an early stage is a significant part of their rationale for enrolling their children into pre-school in the first place, as will be

explored in Chapters Six and Seven. Therefore the following section discusses literature about the early introduction to Foreign Languages (FL), with emphasis on English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

3.3 Introducing foreign languages to young children

Among the many learning theories that discuss FL learning and acquisition, I was looking for a theory that focuses on the learning process as well as on the impact of socio-cultural factors on learning. It is believed that the culture of each society imprints on its people, and influences their beliefs, thoughts, ideas and not the least their behaviours. For example, according to Mo Kuo and Chieh Lieh (2003), culture shapes people's attitudes and the way they speak. Hence, Vygotsky's theory enriches the present research.

To gain an understanding about the collaborative scheme between individual and social processes within Vygotsky's theory, Wertsch (1991) elucidates it through the three themes (Palincsar, 1998:351-353) discussed below.

1. The individual development: Vygotsky expresses this as a general sociogenetic law of cognitive development :

Every function in the cultural development of the child comes on the stage twice, in two respects: first in the social, later in the psychological, first in relations between people as interpsychological category, afterwards within the child's intrapsychological category, ... All higher psychological functions are internalized relationships of the social kind and constitute the social structure of personality. (Vygotsky, 1978:57 [cited in Palincsar, 1998:351 and Kinginger, 2002:243])

In this theme, peers play an important role in the child's development (Hamatelah, 2005:129). In this phase children learn from the society they live in and get their knowledge from the people

they interact with, such as their parents, caregivers, peers and, as learners, their teachers (Palincsar, 1998:352). Moreover, according to Turuk (2008:246), Vygotsky claims that in their early years, children take their knowledge from the people around them and those who have connections with them. In their early years young children rely on their parents/ carers and the instructions and disciplines they receive, and they start to build up their values with the emphasis of their society and culture (Turuk, 2008). The focus of this research is the way mothers justify their decision to introduce young children to EFL at an early stage. In order to understand the mothers' views, the research took Rowad private kindergarten as a case study. Here, some EFL classes, and the children's interaction with their peers and teachers during these classes, were observed. Such observations help in understanding the mothers' view by exploring the context in which children are introduced to EFL.

2. Human action on both social and individual planes

In sociocultural theory the interaction with others plays an essential role in acquiring knowledge. As Ellis (2000) clarifies, according to this particular theory, learners learn during interaction and not through it, and this occurs when the learners in the first phase obtain success in a new task with external help, often enabling them to do the task by themselves (Ellis, 2000). The tool that is used to communicate with each other and for transferring the knowledge is language (Palincsar, 1998:353). For the purposes of the present study, it is important to explore the external help available during the EFL learners' interaction and understand whether children are exposed to English only during the English class or whether there are other activities in the kindergarten which provide this exposure. It is also important to understand the wider community the learners come from and the extent to which the children are exposed to English at home, with their parents, relatives and in their leisure time.

From KSA, Abu-Ghararah (1998), whose research looks at the significance of early introduction to EFL in the public schools in Saudi Arabia, explores parent and teacher attitudes towards the English programme provided in private primary schools as well as the rationale for the demand to introduce English to children at the fourth level in primary education; a policy to introduce English to children at the fourth level of primary school came into being in 2010. His study is relevant to my research especially in the emphasis on the parents' and school personnel's attitudes towards teaching English. The study, during which 225 questionnaires were distributed

to 70 parents and 138 English teachers of both genders, finds generally positive attitudes toward teaching English among the participant parents (ibid: 68); the study's statistical findings were as follows:

- 70.2 % of all respondents agreed that parents would like their children to be introduced to English in early primary education.
- 64.4% disagreed with the statement that Arabic teachers would reject the implementation of English in early primary years.
- 58.7% agreed that religious teachers might reject the implementation of English in early primary years.
- 85.1% disagreed with the statement that the Educational decision makers would deal with the issue as a controversial one and would not finance it.
- 83.7% agreed that the new generation would welcome the implementation of EFL in the fourth grade of primary school.
- 65.4% disagreed that teaching English in the fourth primary grade could have a negative influence in learning Arabic and religion (ibid:74-77).

In his conclusion, Abu-Ghararah recommends that the Saudi MOE introduce EFL in the national curriculum in Year 4 (age 10).

3.3.1 The Zone of Proximal Development

In setting out Vygotsky's theory, presenting the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is essential. Vygotsky defines ZPD as:

The distance between the actual and developmental levels is determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development is determined by problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978:86 [cited in Kinginger, 2002: 244 and Turuk, 2008:248-249])

With the on-going debate about whether to introduce young learners to FL at pre-school stages, understanding ZPD is important. Vygotsky looks at ZPD as a maturing developmental stage and not just an instructional tool (Turuk, 2008: 249-250). In schooling practices and the way in which ZPD is applied in transforming from one stage to the other, Turuk (2008:250) offers two

concepts: mediation and scaffolding. Firstly, mediation in Vygotskian theory is a core factor in which the learners' experience is influenced by important people whom they socially interact with, so the learners enrich their knowledge and understanding (Turuk, 2008:250-251). This kind of social interaction is be looked for among the sample of the present study, to gain a better understanding of the role of social interaction in enhancing (or not enhancing) the learning of EFL among young learners in Al-Madinah. Secondly, Turuk (2008:252) clarifies the concept of scaffolding in the educational context: "Scaffolding is an instructional structure whereby the teacher models the desired learning strategy or task and then gradually shifts responsibilities to the students".

Soderman & Oshio's (2008: p.301) study examined the social behaviour and competence of children as they progressed through the stages of second language acquisition in a dual-immersion programme. The study was carried out in Beijing, China; three international schools participated and the subjects of the study were pre-school children (aged 3-5) and kindergarten children (aged 5-6). The one-year long study started in August 2006 and ended in June 2007, with twelve boys, ten girls and six teachers involved in the study. The study indicates that the children's cultures have a huge impact on their attitude. Some examples from the study which illustrate this are:

Some children would wait for the teacher to get them a chair to sit down on; some would finish their snack without clearing their place ... some children in the pre-school also needed help with eating.
(Soderman & Oshio, 2008:309)

The study concludes that the acquisition of a new language "was not as easy for children as had been previously assumed" (ibid). Moreover, FL is generally introduced to children at an age which, according to many educators and researchers, is the best age for second language acquisition. This brings me to the much debated topic of the 'critical period hypothesis' as regards second language acquisition.

3.3.2 The critical period hypothesis for second language acquisition

Lenneberg looks at acquiring languages as a learning process that is biologically controlled, where learning is normally acquired throughout a critical period starting early in life – around the age of two - and ending at puberty (Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle, 1978). In light of this theory, in order to master a native-like accent, the acquisition of a new language must be within that critical period; otherwise, it would be difficult to master that level of proficiency in foreign language (FL) acquisition (Krashen, 1981). A study from the US carried out by Hakuta et al. (2003) tested the critical period hypothesis for second language acquisition among two immigrant groups. Hakuta et al. (2003:37) describe the critical period as “a popular way of explaining the reason for the apparent success of children and failure of adults in learning a second language”.

The study included 2,016,317 speakers of Spanish and 324,444 speakers of Mandarin, and the data of the study was taken from the 1999 US Census containing detailed information on specific language groups by state (Hakuta et al, 2003:32). For instance, the form asked participants to self-evaluate their English; the study also looked at the present age, the arrival date in the US and the educational background, all of which were derived from the census form (Hakuta et al, 2003: 32-33). The authors of this study emphasise the size of the sample and conclude that the proficiency of acquiring a second language “declined with increasing age of initial exposure” (Hakuta et al, 2003:37). Although the young learners in the present study are not introduced to English in a native English context, an early exposure to FL seems to have a significant role in learning the target language. Therefore, it seems relevant to look at the introduction of FL in different contexts. However, there is no consensus among educators on the superiority of early introduction to FL. Marinova-Todd et al. (2000) in their paper “Three misconceptions about age and L2 (second language) learning” say that, even though evidence showing that young learners are more proficient in learning a second language should not be ignored, this does not mean that the critical period exists (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000: 11). The paper reviews several studies by categorising them into the three groups given below; examples from each will be presented,

1. Misinterpretation: In general people tend to refer to children’s achievement in L2 as a proof of their quick speed in acquiring the language, which implies it is an easy process

(Marinova-Todd et al., 2000: 12). Rivrea's (1998) study shows that teenagers perform better than children in phonological acquisition (ibid).

2. Misattribution: There is no consensus among theories about how people acquire new languages. Therefore, to gain a better understanding some researchers turn to neuroscience to give explanations drawing on the working of the brain, specifically the language area of the brain called Broca's area which responds to speech (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000:13-14). Experiments conducted by Weber-Fox and Neville (1992, 1996, 1999), using a range of brain-imaging techniques and different stimuli, found that there were differences between younger and older learners in terms of 'activation patterns and location of language processing' (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000: 16). The results showed that brain responses also differed as a function of age in L2 learning when there were semantic anomalies, with the older age group manifesting the greatest impact. In the case of grammatical anomalies, Weber-Fox and Neville discovered that the brain response most common in younger L2 learners underwent the greatest changes if these learners had had their first contact with the L2 after the age of 11. A final finding of these experiments, as reported by Marinova-Todd et al. (2000:17) was that " ... the type of grammatical anomaly was related to the parameters of the age change, with the response to grammatical anomalies suggesting that age 4 constituted the end of a sensitive period and the response to others suggesting age 11".

Marinova-Todd et al. argue that two misattributions possibly apply in the above findings and in similar ones. Firstly, there is no evidence to show that the accumulation of experimental tasks in a specific part of the brain indicates better performance in the learning process (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000: 17). In other words, it is conceivable that young learners and adults place their L2 experiences differently without presenting different learning achievements. Put another way, they could localize their learning in a similar part of the brain but their performance would vary (ibid). Secondly, researchers in neuroscience look at another factor in acquiring L2, which is *myelination*, described by Marinova-Todd et al. (2000: 18) as " the covering of neural axons with myelin, a process that occurs after birth and that allows for efficient transport of neural impulses"; the myelination then slows down and this affects the ability to learn' (ibid:17).

3. **Misemphasis:** The critical point advocated tends to highlight the low performance of some adults learning L2 and neglects the high performance of others who were able to obtain native-like fluency in L2. Some studies indicate that because of the difficulty some adults face in attaining native-like proficiency in L2, it is wrongly presumed that all adults lack the quality of L2 attainment (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000:18). In their study, Johnson et al. (1996) conclude that there is an optimal age range among L2 learners but they do not provide information about the differences in adults' performance (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000: 19).

Dominguez and Pessoa (2005), who carried out a study in Pennsylvania, US, looked at the performance of thirty-two sixth grade children in Spanish oral and written tests. Twenty-seven of them had been introduced to Spanish at pre-school, and five had only been introduced to Spanish for one year (Dominguez & Pessoa, 2005: 474). Their study, which they admit cannot be generalised due to the small samples involved, shows that students who received early exposure to Spanish gained higher achievement in the oral comprehension tasks, and their confidence in their Spanish oral skills was higher (ibid: 477-478). A one year-long ethnographic study done by Huss in northern England in 1995, involving three Punjabi-speaking children, looked at the way the sample became literate in ESL (Huss, 1995:768). Huss found that the children were positively acquiring the language over the period of the study, and that their families encouraged them to learn English, which was not what the researcher had presumed because of the cultural differences. The context of that study is different from that of the present one as the children were in a native English environment where they interacted with their native English peers which, according to Huss (1995) had a positive impact on their ESL acquisition (ibid: 773). However, the study showed that talking in the target language with their teacher and peers during the writing tasks gave the children some ideas to help them to write in English and reflected the important role of peers in helping each other.

A study from Saudi Arabia by Al-Jarf (2009) entitled "Should children be taught English before the age of six?", indicates that 70% of parents believe in the importance of introducing their children to English at pre-school level (under six years old), along with Arabic, to obtain the benefit of learning both the languages at the same time. The survey shows that only 23% of the

sample believes that their children should only use Arabic without the interference of another language in that learning process (Al-Jarf, 2009: 2).

3.3.3 Early FL and cognitive development

Given that the context of the present study is the learning during early years, it is fundamental to look at the work of others in this field. Snuggs (2008), who advocates introducing children to FL early, proclaims that children at a younger age can acquire FL more naturally once they are introduced to it at that stage. Macros (1996:1) agrees with the previous opinion and declares that “children who learn a language before the onset of adolescence are much more likely to have native-like pronunciation”. McKay (2005: 285) contends that the target of having a native-like competence is decreasing, bearing in mind the rapidly increasing number of people learning English as an additional language, and the fact that many of them are not neglecting their mother tongue. According to Vos (2008), the best time to introduce young children to a new language is during the first three to four years of life as, in these early years, children use their five senses when learning a language. Vos also believes that children who learn FLs through playing and exploring acquire them more easily. Another benefit Vos mentions in her article (2008:[line:30-34]) is this:

Since 50 percent of the ability to learn is developed in the first years of life and another 30 percent by age eight, early childhood development programmes have the opportunity to encourage early learning and development.

Having the advantage of those vital years does not mean that children will not be able to learn FL after that period (ibid). Lipka and Siegel’s study (2007), carried out in Canada, looked at the performance of ESL children while they were at kindergarten level, and later when they were at grade 3, and compared them to their native speaker peers at both stages (Lipka & Siegel, 2007: 105). The study found that, in kindergarten, native children were better in the phonological processing tasks and ESL children were better in recognising letters (ibid: 120), whereas in Grade 3 the two groups were similar on word reading. Mothers in the present research claim that

introducing EFL to their children in an early stage has a positive impact on their cognitive development.

3.3.4 Early FL and social development

Soderman and Oshio (2008) carried out a one year-long study in Beijing, China, with a total of twelve boys and ten girls from three international English-Mandarin immersion schools - pre-schools (3-5 years) and kindergartens (5-6 years). The parents of those children were also involved in the study. The children were of various nationalities: two Australians, one Austrian, six Chinese, one Dutch, one Finnish, one German, four Japanese, three Koreans and two Americans (Soderman & Oshio, 2008: 301). To help in collecting the research data, six teachers were involved in the study: two were from the kindergartens - a Chinese teacher and an American teacher who worked in separate classrooms; two were pre-school Chinese teachers who worked in sessions where only Mandarin was spoken; the two remaining teachers were from the US and taught in sessions where only English was spoken (ibid). The study looks at the social behaviour and competence of children as they were introduced to FL in this type of school (ibid: 297). In order to collect the necessary data, over a hundred observations of the participants' social behaviours were made, with a two- to three-hour observation of each class once or twice a week for twenty-six weeks. The study was split into two periods to compare the children's social competence in both Mandarin and English classes. During the first period, children's social behaviour in the two classes varied (ibid: 302): "Children were rated by the Chinese teachers as significantly more depressive, while western teachers rated children as significantly more egotistical and oppositional".

In the second period, closer to the end of the school year, the children's social behaviour was found to be remarkably improved during the western class, where they were less anxious and the oppositional rate decreased. Children also improved in the eastern class, with fewer instances of depressive behaviour recorded, and their adjustments were more positive than at the beginning of the year (ibid: 302-304).

Interestingly, the study found that girls struggled more than boys when introduced to a new language, and that they were more anxious. This does not coincide with some of the literature on

early childhood language acquisition which indicates that girls' verbal ability is higher than boys' (ibid: 303). Even though the context of Soderman and Oshio's study is different from that of the present study, the age of the children who were involved is similar. However, as the present research does not take place in an international kindergarten, the range of nationalities is not as wide as in Soderman and Oshio's study, although this study included the mothers of some non-Saudi pupils. Moreover, classrooms have pupils who come from various types of backgrounds, and that is reflected in their behaviour and their personalities. Therefore, there is an element of my research in which I look at the impact of the socio-cultural elements of Al-Madinah in children's learning of FL. Thus, looking at the practice of teaching languages in different contexts is likely to help in understanding and later analysing the data.

3.4 The ideological rationale to introducing FL at pre-school level

Even though there is a generally positive worldwide attitude toward introducing young learners to FL at an early stage in their learning journey, there are still some views that oppose early exposure. This section explores several articles which advocate both sides. In order to gain a good understanding of the concept of FL held by a range of people, I tried to not only look at Saudi articles or even those published in other Arab countries, but also considered the discussion from a wider perspective.

Snuggs (2008) in her article claims that if children are not introduced to foreign languages in day care centres, parents/carers need to rethink about enrolling them in such establishments. She does this by setting out some examples of the importance of introducing FL to children as early as possible. One such example is expressed by Thibut, the founder of a language workshop for children:

Since 50% of the verbal portions of the SAT tests measure a child's knowledge of root words, studying Latin based languages (such as Spanish, French, and Italian) gives a child a tremendous start

building the inventory of word roots they will need to achieve high SAT scores (ibid [lines:29-31]).

The article goes on to illustrate the importance of introducing children to FL early in terms of how that could potentially affect the children's future positively, by giving them opportunities to succeed in both business and political fields due to their multilingual abilities. Snuggs' article mentions the importance of early exposure to FL and how that could benefit learners in the long term. The article shows that even in a country of native English speakers, there are people who believe that learning FL has positive effects on the young children's ability. Children in my study were being introduced to a language that belongs to different language family from that of their native language, where even the direction of reading and writing are not the same. Their mothers rationalised the importance of such exposure to their cognitive abilities. Luttrell (2010) from the US who also advocates learning FL agrees with Snuggs that FL learning influences the academic achievement of students. He points out that students who take FL in high school have significantly high scores in college English courses and the reasons according to Luttrell "lie in the range of verbal accomplishment" (ibid [lines: 31-32]).

Another article from Hungary by Hidasai (2009) entitled 'Early Childhood Foreign Language Education in Hungary', clarifies the uniqueness of the Hungarian context in that Hungary is a small country which joined the European Union in 2004, thus increasing the necessity for its people to learn two FL in adulthood. Although, from the fourth grade (age 9) children must be exposed to FL, Hidsai points out that the essential aim of introducing FL at an early stage is to create a positive atmosphere for acquiring languages and to achieve competent communication skills (ibid, 2009).

The increasing awareness about FL learning among parents has its implications not only in adulthood but also during childhood. The Azure Warrenfeltz case discussed in Walton's (2007) article is relevant here though it is not to be generalised. Azure, a 4 year-old American girl, was fluent in Japanese and Spanish, and was able to understand some other languages, This increased her self-confidence and made her feel superior to her own father who only spoke English (Walton, 2007 [lines1-7]). Walton says that some parents look at learning FL as a way

to help their children see things from a different perspective. Thibut - mentioned in Snuggs's article - founded the school in which Azure enrolled, and believes in teaching children FL from the age of 6 months. Although this was uncommon when he started, nowadays the number of parents who want their children to be in one of his schools is increasing (ibid, 2007). This particular article shows that young children can be fluent in more than one FL if exposed to them at an early stage. The children involved in my study were not as young as in Thibut's case; they were around 4 or 5 years old were exposed to EFL though their fluency was only investigated as the research progressed.

From England, Conteh (2008) describes her visit to a primary class where children were introduced to French as FL. She illustrates how children were happy and enthusiastic when greeting her in French and grabbed any opportunity to show their ability in practicing the new language (Conteh, 2008: 17). The aim of introducing modern FL at primary level, according to Conteh, is "about generic skills for learning and about developing the positive values, attitudes and awareness that the language learning experience can provide" (ibid:19).

In the Arab world, the Director of Gulf Educational Office, Al-Qarni, when asked about the practice of teaching English and its application among the Arabian Gulf countries in reality, points out that the Office had carried out a study to investigate teaching English in primary schools, its characteristics, weak points and the difficulties it has faced (Aawsat, 2010). He makes it clear that the Office's remit is not to set any policies or reveal them to its members; rather they work from an educational perspective, offering advice and recommendations. He continues that most Gulf countries opt for teaching English at primary level:

I believe that this language [English] is very important because it is the knowledge language and we have to admit that and without it we will not be able to supply the knowledge sources in a good way to the learners. In addition the Arabic sources of knowledge that [are] available in from the internet [are] limited and weak and we need to teach the learners English because it is a social, modern and occupational demand (Aawsat, 2010 [lines:10-13]).

Al-Qarni's point of view that the learning of English at primary level is a social demand in the present era has opponent views. For example Al-Ta'ai (2009), a writer from Oman – one of the Gulf countries - is concerned about Arab children and their Arabic language; she claims that Arab children today do not have the necessary intention to learn Arabic. One of the reasons for this, she explains, are the foreign languages. She highlights the role of English as a global language and even though she does not neglect the importance of learning it, she is concerned about the Arabic language and how English could affect the children's cultural values and heritage (Al-Ta'ai, 2009).

Al-Ohideb (2002), the chair of the National Family for English Language in Saudi Arabia, has enumerated the instances in which FL can be acquired:

- Children acquire an FL in early childhood at the same time as acquiring the mother tongue and becoming bilingual. An example for this in the Saudi society are the non-Arab minority communities whose children are able to speak their mother tongue and Arabic at the same time. The other example is Arab children born in America who acquire both English and Arabic (ibid [lines: 57-61]);
- Children acquire an FL at school-age where the FL is the formal language in the school. They acquire the FL and use it in their society while using their mother tongue at home with their family members (ibid [lines:61-64]);
- Children acquire an FL in a society in which this FL is a second language or a formal language as is the case in India and Nigeria (ibid [lines: 65-67]);
- Adults acquire an FL in the target language society by mingling with the native speakers such as Arab learners who go to study in the US (ibid[lines: 68-69])
- Adults or children acquire or learn an FL through schools in a society which does not normally use the FL. This is the case in Saudi schools (ibid [lines:69-72]).

Al-Ohideb disagrees with Al-Ta'ai's concerns about the influence of FL on Arab children's mother tongue and even their cultural values. Moreover, he elucidates that English teaching in Saudi schools and Arabs schools in general is limited to the class, and does not facilitate these languages playing a cultural or even a social role. This way of teaching an FL (the fifth case discussed earlier) least affects the mother tongue. He then calls for people who are against

teaching English in primary schools to support the developing idea and help in improving the educational situation where such teaching is not in conflict with Islamic principles (Al-Ohideb, 2002).

Introducing FL in primary schools in Saudi Arabia is an ongoing issue; writers who advocate this trend tend to contribute by suggesting pedagogies and approaches that favour early exposure to English. Al-Karod (2009) who starts her article by encouraging the teaching of English in the pre -schools in Saudi Arabia (fourth grade), considers it a good step that had been delayed too long. She insists that learning Arabic is the cornerstone and the English teachers need to explain to learners that learning English does not mean replacing Arabic, the language of their heritage and social values (Al-Karod, 2009 [lines1-14]). She then talks about the importance of the introduction to the EFL lesson and how that could attract the children's attention to the lesson, and warm them up to gain their enthusiasm and curiosity during the lesson. She suggests using light activities such as a Yes/No game. She provides several activities that could help English teachers to bring life into their classes, an area which is not the purpose of study to cover (ibid,2009).

Al-Badawi (2009), in his article 'the missing ring in teaching English' indicates that the vast majority of Islamic and Arab countries are heading toward introducing learners to English at primary level, which he advocates. However, he places emphasis on the 'missing ring' – as he calls it – (ibid [line: 26]) which he describes as the phenomenon in these countries whereby their current curriculums and pedagogy focus on teaching the language and not acquiring it (Al-Badawi, 2009 [lines: 24-28]). He claims that the poor outcome of English learning is due to the limits that exist in the exposure to English and due to the treatment of English as a subject such as history, geography and maths and not as a language. According to him a language is similar to creation, where it is important to go back to fundamentals in order to help students learn the language and acquire proficiency in it and not to teach it as a subject (ibid, 2009). Though in the present study I do not discriminate between teaching subjects and languages, I still consider Al-Badawi's views about learners' exposure to English relevant, and worthy of investigation, in the learners' schooling environment and from a wider social perspective inside and outside the school.

To gain a better understanding of the ideology behind introducing FL in the Saudi community, I tried to look at the public's perspectives and not only concentrate on writers, educators and researchers. Fortunately, I found an article published in a local Saudi magazine, in which the magazine editors discuss an issue and people call to express their opinions, some of which are then published. In 2007, one of the topics was "Learning FL: is it a luxury or necessity?" Among the eleven people who respond to the question, there is a general consensus toward the importance of FL as a necessity nowadays; only one person expresses grief about the current situation of the Arabic language, harking back to a past when Arabs used to lead the world in knowledge and Arabic was the medium of knowledge; this dissenter sees FL learning as a luxury but feels that if there is a real demand for it; English could be learned provide it does not adversely affect the Arabic language (Al-Jazirah, 2007). A later written response to the same topic from a Saudi educator stresses on the demand for learning FL in the Saudi society in particular (Al-Sighayer, 2007)

Learning FL is not a luxury; it is a real need especially in Saudi Arabia and the Arabic and Islamic worlds to be able to contribute to the present human civilisation in the knowledge and technology fields. That will not be achievable in the light of isolation and seclusion [...]

Learning FL is not a luxury; it is a real need which could have a positive social impact and be symbolic of introducing other cultures and traditions to [the Saudi] society, which helps in creating an open, broad minded society which will be able to understand, respect and deal with others who have different traditions and values from ours (ibid, 2007 [lines: 10-25]).

In contrast, Al-Barrak (2007) states his opposition to teaching FL in the early stages of the educational process. To support this view, he gathered data from several studies carried out in the Arab world, which show the disadvantages of teaching FL in EYL and how this can negatively affect the mother tongue. Al-Harthy's (2011) study looks at the impact of English on children's mother tongue in KSA. The researcher targets international schools where English is the medium of communication and found that 68% of the parents believed that their children

suffered when writing Arabic; that is, from right to left. The study also found that children became more proficient in English than in Arabic in these learning environments. Al-Harthy's research (2011) covers an important element of current educational trends in KSA, despite the small sample size of the study. Although only twenty-four parents of the 100 who received the study's questionnaire responded, the importance of the study lies in the fact that it represents the voice of the opposition to the early introduction of English in the Saudi context.

3.5 The common pedagogical methods in teaching young children FL

It seems that it is not easy to determine whether certain teaching approaches and methods are better than others in FL teaching and learning. However, it seems that there are some methods which are applied in teaching languages to young learners whether as the first language or a second one. Worldwide, nursery rhymes play a crucial role in teaching young children; furthermore, it seems to be a common method in teaching young children a foreign language. Van Der Meer (1999, p:1) summarises the role of nursery rhymes :

Nursery rhymes have a lot more to offer than just entertainment value. They introduce children to the idea of a narrative, promote social skills, boost language development and lay the foundation for learning to read and spell.

It is clear that each culture has its own rhymes which help young children in learning the language patterns and sounds (CILT [The National Centre for Languages]). In addition, when young children are starting to learn a new language, some of them feel enthused to put what they learn into practice but when they cannot, the importance of rhymes become apparent in helping children speak the new language (Dunn, 2003). This could raise young learners' self esteem and encourage them to learn more about the language.

Another common method in teaching FL is stories; Pesola (1991: 340) indicates that storytelling is one of the most important methods in teaching young learners a language. Furthermore, by listening to stories learners' attention can be attracted by the sounds of language which can affect their recall of the stories, in turn enriching their oral language progress (Tsou et al, 2006:18). Moreover, James (1992: 7) who distinguishes between the roles of listening to stories and telling stories among FL learners, clarifies that the former helps learners in obtaining a good understanding of the target language and in drawing their attention to another culture. It follows that telling stories give FL learners the opportunity to practice the target language creatively by linking things they have learned before to shape them into a story, an activity which has a positive effect on their self-confidence (ibid: 7). Correspondingly, Al-Qahtani (2009) has carried out a study in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in which she looks at the effect of using reading aloud stories on the English vocabulary ability of 6th grade primary school learners. With 20 females learners involved in the study, Al-Qahtani finds that read-aloud stories help learners in scaffolding their vocabularies in English and furthermore, positively influence their listening skills. In addition, learners have a motivation to improve their English and read-aloud stories enhance this. This activity also helps in enriching conversations in the class, which the teachers favour.

In another study from Taiwan, Tsou et al. (2006), developed a multimedia Storytelling Website to look at the way that technology can support teaching EFL (ibid: 20). The study was carried out in an elementary school where two 5th grade classes, each containing 35 learners, were chosen to be involved in the study due to their similar in language proficiency levels - as tested prior to the experiment - and because they had the same EFL teacher (ibid: 24). The control group were not exposed to the Storytelling Website and listened to a regular storytelling process while in the experimental group the Storytelling Website was used by both the teacher and the learners. While the control group recalled the story after the teacher told it, the experimental group composed stories by creating or recalling the story on the Storytelling Website (ibid: 20-24). Tsou et al. found that there were some differences among the two groups. In general the pupils in the experimental group performed better as regards sentence complexity. Also, by using the Storytelling Website the learners in the experimental group became introduced to a wider range of audio-visual materials which helped them in creating more detail whilst recalling

the stories. Both groups were interested in having storytelling as a regular activity in their English class. However, pupils in the experimental group were more excited by the story recalling activity.

In Al-Qahtani's (2009) study and in that of Tsou et al. (2006), the children in primary schools benefited from the role of story as enhancer of the learning process. This thesis takes a quick look at the current situation in EFL classrooms and relates the observations to the social interaction between the learners and the teachers and among the learners themselves. The following section looks at some element of Bourdieu's theory, in order to gain a better understanding of the way parents rationalise their choices, understanding parents' social interactions and cultural capital becomes critical. Therefore, it is essential to look at some elements of Bourdieu's work - in particular those which link to cultural capital as an element of the social reproduction theory - which appear constantly with regard to parental choices.

3.6 A Bourdieusian perspective on power and identity in relation to parental choices

As this research is interested in exploring parental decisions regarding the introduction of children to EFL at an early stage, and the way parents rationalise their choices, understanding parents' social interactions and cultural capital becomes critical. Pierre Bourdieu's work - in particular his interpretation of social and cultural capitals in understanding practice - offers an attractive perspective on the sociological determinants of parental choices. Moreover, this research has not adopted a sociological framework from the early stages of the study, although it has been an inductive study from the beginning. The fieldwork started with a loose range of data and the methodology developed as the research conducted.

The shift from the practical scheme to the theoretical schema, constructed after the event, from practical sense to the theoretical model, which can be read as a project, plan or methods...
(Bourdieu, 1990 :81)

In order to understand the parental choice in introducing young learners to EFL at an early stage, it is important to understand that people with similar attributes and habitus engage in similar practices when the environment they act in are similar. Mothers in this research, being part of a social milieu, share the same habitus and have similar dispositions. Having said that, it is important to note that despite the fact that this minority group of mothers have similar socio-cultural backgrounds, they are not identical because their experiences are different, as...

... it is impossible for all (or even two) members of the same class to have had the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class...(Bourdieu, 1990 :59-60)

Mothers in this research are presenting a privileged minority in the city of Al-Madinah. Their cultural needs according to Bourdieu (1983: 1) are produced as a result of both up bringing and education, hence, as going to be expored in chapter Six and Seven, mothers education along side with their social and cultural backgrounds have a noticeable impact on the way they justify their decisions.

Surveys establish that all cultural practices ... and pereferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level ... and secondarily to social origin The relative weight of home background and of formal education . (Bourdieu, 1983:1)

This research started with the practice of those mothers as they decided to send their children to pre-school where the young learners are introduced to EFL, those mothers have share the same ‘illusio, according to Bourdieu (1990:66) people who get involve in the same game – practice, they obtain a ‘feel for the game’ where a non written commitment builds up.

As they make their decision, mothers are influenced by the capitals they have accumulated, Bourdieu explains that capital comes in the form of three main semblances: 1) economic capital:

which links to money and forms of property rights; 2) cultural capital: links to forms of educational qualification; and 3) social capital: which is a product of social connections, whose capitals are convertible (Bourdieu, 1986).

3.6.1 Cultural capital

From Bourdieu's perspective, cultural capital occurs in three guises: 1) the embodied taste: where this form of cultural embodiment of the individual can be obtained by considering time, society and social class (Bourdieu, 1986: 244). 2) the objectified taste: cultural goods that are produced in this taste can only be defined in light of the previous form, being material (economic capital) or symbolic (cultural capital). 3) the institutionalized taste: a form of objectification, this "must set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee". (ibid:245).

According to Tzanakis (2011:77):

Cultural capital refers to transmissible parental cultural codes and practices capable of securing a return to their holders. Cultural capital embodies the sum total of investments in aesthetic codes, practices and dispositions transmitted to children through the process of family socialization, or in Bourdieu's term, *habitus*.

This type of capital includes habits that are needed in the socializing process, and in the evaluation of cultural morals and values (Anheier et al., 1995).

As mothers rationalised their choices, they drew on their embodied cultural capital, their linguistic competence and experiences. The dimensions of their international experience emerged as they spoke of their choices in relation to their travels, their study abroad or their communication with people who are not from Al-Madinah. The educational experience of mothers and the nature of their professions influence the way they justify their decision. Hence, once they make up their mind about the kindergarten they want their children to be enrolled in,

they “depend on the cultural capital embodied in the whole family” as well as the appropriate goods their children encounter in their learning journey such as EFL classes, English stories and TV programmes and so on (Bourdieu, 1986 :245).

3.6.2 Social capital

Bourdieu (1986) considers social capital to be:

(...) the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group.
(Bourdieu, 1986: 248)

The analysis of social relationships of parents in the present research draws on Bourdieu’s and subsequent conceptualisations of social capital. For Schultheis (2009:8), for instance, like other forms of capitals, social capital is affected by communal work and powers; it does not occur haphazardly or only due to biological or social features:

...[It] can be incorporated as a sort of subjective quality of individuals and private property, but also exists at the same time objectively as an essential part of the structures of the social world(...). Individuals always have to work hard with their social capital in order to maintain, to produce or to improve it (Schultheis, 2009:5,7).

3.6.3 Habitus

While cultural capital is represented through rational knowledge, where agents strategically make their decisions, *habitus* provides a cluster of values, attitudes and inherited dispositions (Sullivan, 2002). The concept in Bourdieu’s theory, where it can simply reflect the identity of any individual. Nash (1999: 177) explains thus:

Bourdieu's habitus may be understood as a system of schemes of perception and discrimination embodied as dispositions reflecting the entire history of the group and acquired through the formative experiences of childhood.

The attitudes of individuals in situations of social interaction, and their dispositions, are in large part influenced by their habitus. Habitus is the agent that represents individuals' action in society and enables them "to draw on transformative and constraining courses of action" (Reay, 2004: 433).

In some social situations, individuals tend to communicate with others with whom they share a similar history or background, or similar values and beliefs, in other words a common habitus. They will form a socio-cultural group which starts to discriminate itself and refer to 'those who are like us and those who are not like us' (Reay, 2004; Baker & Brown, 2008).

Despite this implicit tendency to behave in ways that are expected of 'people like us', for Bourdieu there are no explicit rules or principles that dictate behaviour, rather 'the habitus goes hand in hand with vagueness and indeterminacy'. (Reay, 2004:433)

Mothers who participated in this research share such similar social attributes that allow them to constitute a "socio-cultural milieu", where each discourse collected somehow echoes the rationalise behind decisions made by parents 'like them' who value the importance of early years learning, including learning English at an early stage. Thus, they reflect what Sullivan (2001) describes as "dominant habitus" of their milieu:

(...)a set of attitudes and values held by the dominant class. A major component of the dominant habitus is a positive attitude toward education. (Sullivan, 2001:149)

However, in the context of Saudi Arabia, such views – illustrative of interlectual middle classes worldwide - do not represent the views held by the “dominant Classes”. However, the mothers of our sample represent a minority group which holds a set of values and attitudes that they share among themselves. This minority group is influential economically and culturally influential enough to motivate the development of a certain sector of private education in Mal Maduibnah. These values and attitudes, alongside their educational and economic capitals, have a great impact on the way they rationalise their educational choices for their children, and on their abililty to share and to draw on experiences that ar so crucial in informing choices.

3.6.4 Bourdieu’s concepts in education

Several studies in the field of education have been influenced by Bourdieu’s theory. For example, Sullivan (2001) carried out a study in four comprehensive schools in the UK to explore the impact of cultural capital on children’s attainment at GCSE, which found that “parents’ social class retains a large and significant direct effect on GCSE attainment” (ibid: 910). Bourdieu’s theory helps to explore the influence of social class on educational attainment in this study, as Sullivan explains: “Cultural capital is associated with social class, and is transmitted from parents to children... the possession of cultural capital does have a significant effect on GCSE attainment” (ibid: 911).

In their study, DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) find that cultural capital has a positive impact not only on educational attainment but also on college attendance and college completion. As mentioned previously, Bourdieu elucidates three forms of cultural capital; embodied form, objectified form and institutionalized form where, according to Bourdieu (1991:503) linguistic competence is a “socially classified productive capacity” that gained its value by virtue of the spoken language, those who use the language, the groups where the discourses take place and the “whole social structure present in each interaction” (ibid). Thus, in order to acquire a second language, people need to make an effort as it cannot be transmitted from one individual to another.

Since English is widely recognised as being the dominant language in the world, there is a real demand to learn the language, and Kelly's justification of the desire to learn the dominant language suits the perspective of mothers in the present research:

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital explains why minority groups will try and acquire knowledge held by the dominant group, such as acquisition of the dominant language, in an attempt to gain materials, or access to materials, that only the dominant class has access to. (Kelly. 2010:51)

As mentioned previously, mothers in the present research are regarded as being in a minority in terms of their decision to introduce their children to EFL in an early stage. But in their case, the dominant group to which they identify themselves (consciously or unconsciously) is not the Saudi dominant socio-political class only, but rather, a combination of it with those global middle classes aware of the value of early years education and of early acquisition of English. As will be discussed later in the thesis, they are aware of their socio-cultural status (as influential minority) and, they produce a logical and informed discourse on decisions, regarding their children's education in which the importance of network knowledge (hot knowledge) appeared more important than the information available publicly (cold knowledge).

In this research I tried to identify how the capitals operate in terms of mothers' attitudes toward the education of their children, and how a space of common practice can be related to these attitudes.

3.7 Parental choice and education

All parents make choices regarding their children's education. Depending on how informed those choices are, they give parents a more or less active role in their children's education. According to Ball (1997), families' social and economical capitals play a major role in choosing the best available and affordable type of education for their children.

Every family chooses schools inside the idiosyncratic framework of a local education market and within the limits and possibilities of their own specific spatial, time, social and financial horizons and family household arrangements. (ibid:2)

As parents decide on the type of education they want for their children, some are able to incorporate comparisons of state and private schools in their strategy, as in the case with the group of parents analysed in this research.

The decision with regard to school choice, as Ball (1997) points out, is a family matter where one parent or both decide on the best choice, involving children in the process in some cases. Parents seeking to provide their children with the best possible education can also contribute to educational inequalities by generating social class polarization in the school system, as shown by Rucinshiene and Rupsine (2006). A study carried out in Lithuania by these authors collected data via questionnaires administered to a sample of 1078 pupils who had changed schools, and to 999 of those pupils' parents. The research found that parents actively take part in the process of school choice, and that parents take more responsibility for their children when they are younger. In the case of older children, some of the parents share this responsibility with their children, while others transfer the responsibilities entirely to the children (ibid: 61).

Ball et al (1996:93-95) point out that once they make their choice for their children, parents can be seen through three types; firstly, the skilled choosers or privileged parents for whom their social and cultural capital have played an important role in their choice and who tend to make their choice with confidence; semi-skilled parents for whom their social and cultural capital are imbalanced, who are less confident in their choices and depend on what others tell them; the third type is the disconnected whose social and cultural capital are limited and whose choice is mainly linked to materials and locations. Having said that, it is essential to clarify that all parents are looking for the best for their children but some of them happen to have more knowledge in this matter than others:

... choosing a school often emerges as a complex and confusing business. In some ways, the more skilled you are the more difficult it is. A good deal of this stress arises from the significance privileged/skilled choosers, especially, invest in the need to choose the 'right' school (Ball and Vincent ,1998:246).

The group of parents under focus in the present study is clearly one of “skilled choosers” who seem to be trusting their own knowledge and values as well as those of their peers far more than any official advice. Their “local educational market” encompasses both public and private opportunities and in many cases discussed in this thesis the private sector is the only option considered by parents. This introduces another key dimension of the choice: the economic factor. As shown below, the literature on private/public choices in matters of education actually reflects the diversity of status of private education according to countries and socio-economic milieus.

3.7.1 Parental choice and private education

Education is a sector which attracts the attention of public and private interests in most contemporary states. In the public sector education in KSA, children are not introduced to English till they are in the sixth primary grade when they are 11 years old. Since the focus of the study is to look at the socio-cultural aspects that coincide with introducing of EFL to young learners, I have to look at the private educational sector (where EFL can happen EYL level) to be able to get the sample of the study. Thus, the context of the present study is private education, where the age children are introduced to EFL varies from one context to another. In order to have a wide picture of the impact of private education on local communities, this section discusses some studies about private education from several parts of the world.

The first is a study from Singapore where the decision of enrolling children into kindergarten depends on the parents because it is a non-mandatory stage and highly expensive (Hoon, 1994: 4-5). A survey carried out by Hoon to explore the reasons behind sending children to kindergartens (1994) got 437 responses from parents from 10 kindergartens, of which 50 had follow up interviews. Hoon (1994) points that the parents' rationale for choosing between what

in Singaporean context are known as private run kindergartens and government aided kindergartens differs, with 62% parents who chose private kindergartens considering staff qualification as important and only 39% parents who chose government aided kindergartens seeing it as important (ibid: 6). The study also distinguishes between the parents' attitudes about enrolling their children with the regard to their socio-economic status [SES], and it finds that social pressure affects 60% high SES parents who put their children in kindergarten in order not to seem inferior to their peers, while only 37% of low SES parents indicated such a pressure. Hoon's (1994) study is similar to the present one to some extent; pre-school education is also not a compulsory stage in Saudi Arabia and the decision to enrol a child on it is a completely parental decision. In addition, Hoon's (1994) study has distinguished between the impact of SES in the parent's decision and one aspect of the current study is to look at the impact of the social status element and to understand the extent to which it affects the parents' decision regarding their children's EYL.

In another study from Utah in the US, Bukhari and Randall (2009) look at the reason behind parents' choice to put their children in private schools in a context where public schools achieve higher academic performance over the national average, affecting the growth in the number of private schools in Utah where the enrolment is remarkably below the national average (Bukhari & Randall, 2009: 250). Eight private schools were involved in the study with a 1043 students from 695 families, and 209 families randomly selected to take part in the study. The data was collected through survey and semi-structured interviews. The quality of the school facility and equipment was the main factor in choosing private schools and was also the factor in taking the children out from the public ones (ibid:262). In addition, 48% take their children out of public schools because of the shortage of sufficient education; accordingly the quality of the curriculum plays a major role in their choice of private schools (ibid: 263). Parents who have children with special needs, whether they are gifted (54%) or facing some learning challenges (46%), find that private schools are better for their children's education. Moreover, the study concludes that parents who have put their children in private schools do not regret the money and the time they spend, being satisfied with the choice they made.

In China, parents' attitudes toward putting their children in private schools appears similar to the Utah parents' in Bukharei and Randall's study. Cheng and DeLany (1999: 52) indicate the satisfaction of the parents in their children's academic performance and other activities such as dancing, singing, arithmetic etc. The elite private schools, as Cheng and DeLany call them, are very recent in China with the first one opening in 1992 and the number increasing to 60,000 in four years in both primary and secondary level. In addition, the private schools are under state supervision, which is the exact situation in KSA, where private schools which Cheng and DeLany describe as "run by individuals, privately owned enterprises or non-governmental organizations" (ibid: 50) exist. Furthermore, private schools in China attract the people's attention with the diversity in their curriculum and pedagogies as well in introducing FL, computers and in some cases music and dancing (ibid: 52). The common element between Chinese private schools and those in Saudi Arabia is the introduction of FL as part of their curricula. Hence, my study investigates parents' choice of enrolling their children with regard to socio- economic status, an aspect which in Cheng and DeLany's study has a significant role: 39% of Chinese parents who have their children in private schools are heads of companies or factories or senior executives of enterprises (ibid:52). Moreover, Cheng and DeLany (1999) clarify that private schools are good solutions for parents who are very busy and cannot not find time to take care of the children, who in turn rejoice in being with teachers and school nurses in small groups (ibid:52). Implicitly, the mothers' work is likely to be relevant in the present study when discussing mothers' expectations for their children, which is likely to be linked to the mothers' level of education and affected by the employment status of the mothers. Bearing in mind the increase in the number of women in the labour market from 5.4% in 1992 up to 14.4% in 2007 (Dyes, 2010), this aspect could influence the decision in choosing a particular kindergarten.

While the above is the international perspective, a local perspective for my study is provided by Al-Ansari (2004), who studied the reasons that make parents put their children in private secondary schools rather than public ones. The researcher used questionnaires and some interviews to collect his data, carrying out his study in Dammam in the Eastern Province in KSA. There were 214 parents involved in the study. About 60% of them had a higher degree which could indicate that the academic levels of parents have an impact on choosing the type of

school for their children. In addition, several reasons for preferring private schools to public ones are mentioned on Al-Ansari's study (2004: 9). Some of these reasons follow: Firstly, the student number in the classrooms has a major role in enhancing the enrolment in private schools where the number of the students in each class should not exceed 22 or 25. This factor seems to have an impact on the enhancement of collaborative learning and encouraging students to take part in group learning processes. The second reason is the extra curriculum private schools provide to their students; in Al-Ansari's study (2004) 74% of the parents agree that computer education and English - a common language in higher education institutions - play a crucial role in the preference of private schools. A parent who participated in the study said that he put his son in a private school because he wanted him to learn English. After a year the father noticed that his son was weak even in the basics of the language, so he took him out and put him in a public school (ibid:11). In his study, Al-Ansari (2004) indicates that private schools are using English and other extra curricular attractions for the parents to enrol their children there (Al-Ansari, 2004: 10). He also argues that private schools failed in providing a learning environment which not only centralises the teacher's role but also encourages students to look for information within the school and outside. Replicating the public school situation is not what parents and educators expected from private schools (Al-Ansari, 2004:12).

In contrast, Abu-Ghararah's (1998: 69) study shows that the participants who had their children in private primary schools were satisfied with the provided EFL curriculum. A parent said that after noticing his/her son progressing in English s/he made the decision to put the other son in the same school to get the benefit of learning English at an early stage. Abu-Ghararah's findings coincide with those of Cheng and DeLany (1999) from China and also with those of Bukhari and Randall (2009) from the US, and link to the present study indirectly by exploring the mothers' expectations from the provided EFL programme.

On the other hand, according to Ghzendar (2009), many parents tend to enrol their children in private schools not because those schools are far better in their performance or in the level of academic achievement than the state schools, but because the government schools are not able to provide pupils with the required level of education due to the massive increase in enrolment in government schools. Such growth is due to several aspects: the migration of Bedouins to the

cities is one of them and the consistent demand to make formal education compulsory is another (Wahid, 2010). Furthermore, Al-Sehim (2009) emphasises that though the growing Saudi population is not a new phenomenon , it has started to influence some economic and social policies, thus leading to a real demand to put into practice new educational and training policies.

This chapter reviewed the literature which relates to the main area of this thesis, starting with the importance of EYL and then moving on to the introduction of FL at an early stage and how such exposure can benefit children socially and academically. Finally, the cultural cultural capital theory and their impact on parental educational choices were discussed, as key concepts from this strand of literature are informing our conceptual framework. The coming chapter looks at the methodology of the research and the stages the research undertook to collect the relevant data, giving justifications for the rationale behind the use of the research tools.

Allah - God- the Almighty says in the Holy Quran:
“...And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given
only a little “
(Surrah 17:85)

Chapter Four: Methodology: Collecting Discourses

4.1 Introduction

This research adopts a socio-cultural perspective to look at the way mothers justify their reasons for introducing their children to English at an early stage. In order to understand the mothers’ perspectives and their demands when introducing their children to English, the research adopts a qualitative approach which implements some qualitative elements. My research focuses on one kindergarten in the city of Al Madinah and in this sense is treated as a case study in which English language classrooms were observed and some professional educators and mothers were interviewed. The term ‘professional’ in this research includes head teachers, Early Years Learning (EYL) teachers and English language teachers. Rowad kindergarten (a fictitious name) was chosen from a total of twenty-four private kindergartens in Al-Madinah. English is offered as a subject in these kindergartens whereas it is not introduced in the state school system until pupils reach Year 5 (age eleven).

In order to explore the reasons for introducing young children to EFL in Al-Madinah private kindergartens, a qualitative research approach was adopted. The qualitative nature of this research has its imprint on the conceptualisation of the whole thesis, and goes beyond data gathering. Data analysis processes coincided with collecting data, and the analysis is of the sort that is described by Woods (2006); that is, a primary analysis which starts alongside the data

gathering, and is later followed by a comprehensive analysis that utilises themes and categories. In order to investigate parental choices, the qualitative approach helps with “the interpretation of meaning and aims in bringing meaning to experience” where “... the researcher must observe not only events relevant to the framework immediate to the research’s setting but also their relationships to broader socio-cultural milieu” (Lofstedt, 1990:76).

The use of qualitative research is not common in the Saudi context. Al-Nassar (1999), who applies a qualitative approach in order to investigate the way of presenting EFL to pupils in Saudi from the stakeholders' point of view, points to reasons why qualitative research is used so rarely in Saudi educational research:

This, in my view, is because of statistical manipulation imposed by researchers and based on hypotheses derived from theories coming from research conducted in the context of second language teaching or in irrelevant contexts. (Al-Nassar, 1999:77)

In this research, though some quantitative tools are used, the research purpose is primarily an explanatory one in which interviews play a major role. Although a questionnaire was sent out to twelve private kindergartens, most of the interviews and observations took place in Rowad. The reason for including the other kindergartens is not to obtain representative data, but to have an overview of the status of EFL in private kindergartens in Al-Madinah. Reasons for choosing Rowad as a case study are explained in Section 4.4.

In the analysis, different data sets and tools are used to explore particular themes. For instance, in exploring mothers’ reasons and desires to have their children introduced to English at an early stage, the analysis draws on interviews with them. In contrast, when discussing the methods of teaching English, the analysis draws on English Language Teachers’ (ELT) questionnaires, observations and ELT interviews. On the other hand, when the impact of Al-Madinah’s environment on learning English is the focus of discussion, data collected through a blog is used as this seemed to give a wider view of people’s thoughts and opinions.

4.2 Research Stages

The research was undertaken through three main stages (See Appendix 1). The rationale for conducting the research in this way includes two reasons. The first one is to generate a process by which the data collected from one stage leads to the following stage. The second reason is to develop a relationship with the participants that assures them of confidentiality and encourages them to take part in the following stages.

In order to achieve that, two sets of questionnaires were sent to 13 private kindergartens in Al-Madinah during the first stage. The first set was for head teachers and the second was for EFL teachers. This was concurrent with visiting the kindergarten chosen for case study, where interviews were conducted with mothers and professionals, and EFL classes were observed.

During the first stage 15 mothers agreed on having further communication via e-mail. Emails were sent to those mothers during the second stage. Only four of them replied. The discussion continued during a couple of email exchanges, after which some mothers lost interest. In this stage, the blog was activated. The topics posted there were influenced by the analysis of the data from the previous stage.

With previous stages having now established a good relations with some key participants, I started the third phase with two main goals; firstly to have some reflective thoughts from the mothers who were involved in the first and second stages. Secondly, to discuss some of the research findings up to that point with the participants. For the latter, headteachers and blog participants were invited to a focus group in a community hall. As it was during the summer vacation, none of the headteachers were able to attend. There were 7 blog participants, one of them a mother who was involved in the two previous stages .

4.3 Research sample

Participants in this research can be divided under two main categories:

1. Survey participants: In order to send the questionnaire to private pre-schools in Al-Madinah, I visited the MOE website in the early stage of my research and identified 18 private kindergartens. Unfortunately I could not find some of them, because their locations were not available on the web site. Hence, the two sets of questionnaires were sent to 13 kindergartens. All except one responded. which meant I had responses from 12 head teachers and 21 EFL teachers.

2. Participants in the qualitative study:

A case study approach was adopted. Samples of parents and staff used can be characterised as opportunistic samples as discussed by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007:114) who describe the process in which “the researcher capitalizes on opportunities during data collection stage to select cases... [The process] takes place after the study begins in order to take advantage of developing events”.

First Sample - Professionals: The Rowad head teacher was interviewed, along with all EFL teachers and 6 EYL teachers (all those willing to take part).

Second Sample - Parents (Mothers): On the basis of my criteria (working/non working mother, Saudi/Non Saudi) the head teacher contacted the mothers and invited them to take part in this study. Interviews of 19 mothers were conducted in this way during the first phase.

Third Sample - Blog Commenters: This sample was a snowball sample with 24 participants who were interested in taking part in the research. I had limited control on who could be involved, as the blog was in the public domain and some participants were sharing it with their friends and family members.

Four of the participants in this project, have had prolonged involvement in the research (individual interview, follow up interviews, blog participation, focus group) and their

experiences are therefore used in part two of the thesis , in four stories illustrating mothers' strategies in their decision making.

Having introduced my case study and research methods, I now discuss the process of obtaining approval to carry out my study, before describing in-depth the research tools used in this study, with clarifications about how my adoption of a qualitative approach helped to overcome the obstacles and make the most of the opportunities.

4.4 Access issues

For this research, it was necessary to gain access to a number of places and people in order to conduct the research as it was initially planned. The first point of access was Rowad, the main case for study in this research, and access needed to be obtained before starting the fieldwork; as illustrated later, this depended on the completion of several steps. Then, access to several private kindergartens was required in order to hand out the questionnaires to the head teachers and EFLteachers.

In order to obtain permission from Rowad, it was necessary to draft a letter explaining the purpose of the study. That was followed by several e-mails being exchanged with the school manager, as I was away from Al-Madinah at the time. Unfortunately, the use of e-mail was not always successful and sometimes personal contact with the school director was required to ensure the process was successful. Finally, permission to conduct the research in Rowad was approved. Written permission from Rowad was also vital, as it was a requirement of the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London in order to fund my fieldwork trip. Permission was also required from the Al-Madinah Directorate of Education (MDE), which I managed to obtain before starting the fieldwork. The latter permission was crucial as MDE is the representative power of the Saudi Ministry of Education in the region of Al-Madinah. By the same token, all private schools and pre-schools are under their supervision and are required to follow the regulations issued to private education institutions. With all permissions granted, the process with the Saudi

Cultural bureau went ahead and, as a result, the fieldwork started as planned, with eleven private kindergartens visited during the first stage of the research, besides the case study kindergarten.

Once I had all the necessary documents including information sheets and consent forms (see Appendix 1), I went to meet the heads of the private kindergartens to explain the aims of my research and the purpose of my visit. Head teachers' attitudes differed from one kindergarten to another, in that some head teachers were willing to help not only by filling in the questionnaire but also by taking me around their kindergartens to see the facilities. On the other hand, others had some suspicions about a PhD student studying abroad coming back to her hometown to conduct her research. For example, when I went to one of the kindergartens and gave the head teacher the folder with all the necessary documentation, she asked me several questions before going through it:

Head Teacher: Are you doing your degree at Taiybah University?

Me: No, actually I am studying in the UK (pointing to the cover page of the folder where the name of University of East Anglia was written).

Head Teacher: Then why are you coming here to do your study? Why did you not do it there?

After I explained my reasons to her, she agreed to take part in the study. However, one kindergarten refused to take part, even though it was of special interest as it was mentioned several times as being a competitive kindergarten by mothers interviewed at Rowad. Head teachers' attitudes and their responses are discussed in more detail in the reflective chapter, Chapter Five. In order to hand out the EFL teachers' questionnaires, the teachers were summoned by the head teachers who introduced me to them, before requesting them to take part in the research. Even though most EFL teachers filled out the questionnaire, the fact that they had done so because the head teachers asked them to do so is important. Nespor (1997) emphasizes how power relationships in the school can affect an on-going study. In my case, one of the kindergartens was eliminated because I could not manage to meet the head teacher, even though I had been told that EFL teachers at that particular school were cooperative and helpful.

In the case of Rowad, the general director for schools informed the kindergarten's head teacher about my planned arrival. Therefore, when I went to introduce myself to the head teacher she welcomed me and took me to see around the kindergarten, despite the fact that the general director was away at that time. Again the power relationship inside the school became apparent as the head teacher did not have the chance to refuse my attempt to carry out my study in the kindergarten once the general director had given her approval.

The way in which I gained access to mothers was partly arranged by Rowad's head teacher, after I explained my preference for finding mothers from various backgrounds: working mothers, non-working mothers, Saudi mothers and non-Saudi ones. Some mothers became participants as a result of my meeting them in the kindergarten's playground during the first week of the second semester, and I approached them after obtaining the head teacher's approval.

4.5 Timescale

The timescale below reflects the implementation of the three stages of data collection. The fieldwork as explained before was carried out between 20.12.2010 and 14.01.2012. The stages are described below, together with a justification of the methods that were used in each phase. The rationale for using each tool is explained in Section 4.5, Research tools.

Stage 1: 20.12.2010 – 18.03.2011

This was the main phase of data collection and the aim was to answer the following questions:

1. When mothers choose a particular kindergarten for their children, what are their drivers and motivations?
2. How are EFL programmes presented in pre-schools? What are the mothers' expectations from such programmes?
3. What is the impact of cultural capital on mothers' decisions in introducing their children to English at an early stage:
 - i) Is the local community encouraged to learn English?

ii) How do non-Saudis look at introducing EFL to their young children?

iii) Do young children use English in their community?

As the fieldwork started, the phrase “parents’ expectations” in first question was modified to “mothers’ expectations”. The reason behind changing the question is that in reality I only met mothers during my research, and the possibility of meeting fathers was really limited due to the segregated education and lifestyle in Al-Madinah. Therefore, my research became more focused on mothers as they were the ones who were ultimately involved in the research, and that was not surprising as all the staff and teachers at EYL schools in Saudi are female. Moreover, education in KSA is segregated at all levels after pre-primary, which is mixed gender, but the pre-primary stage is linked to the girl’s sector. As a consequence, it was more logical, as well as easier, to explore mothers’ views. Similarly, Al-Motairi (2005:122) notes that his research was restricted to a boy’s school because of Saudi culture, which would not allow him to have access to female teachers to conduct interviews and carry out classroom observations. Obviously, this situation would not have arisen if questionnaires had been used as these do not require direct communication with the researcher, and both parents could have taken part in the present study with no cultural conflicts. Al-Nassar (1999:83) suggests that this is perhaps one reason why in the Saudi context, people are more used to quantitative research than qualitative. However, this research was not quantitative, and the mothers’ voices regarding their expectations from the English programme in kindergartens became the focus of the investigation leading to the question being modified to: *What expectations do different mothers have from EFL programmes?*

As the research looks at the way mothers justify introducing their children to English in their early years, it seemed more reasonable to start the fieldwork during the first term of the 2010/2011 academic year in KSA, which begins in September. Consequently, besides talking to the mothers about their expectations of the English programme provided at Rowad, it also seemed logical to discuss their reasons in general for choosing this pre-school for their young children to attend. In order to understand the way mothers justify their decisions from a socio-cultural perspective, nineteen mothers from Rowad kindergarten were interviewed in this phase.

Moreover, e-mail exchanges were arranged with seven mothers, and the research blog was launched. The latter was the core tool used during the second phase of the research.

Stage 2: 29.01.2011-14.01.2012

This phase was a continuation of the previous phase as it started when the research blog, with public access, was activated and an e-mail exchange began with those mothers who agreed to be involved in this process, the main tools therefore being e-mail exchange and the blog. This phase was the longest of the three because it was also active during the third phase. Although the blog went well, ethical issues arose about dealing with the data collected from it, due to the blog's public access status raising concerns about safeguarding the anonymity of the participants in some cases. The way these issues were dealt with is discussed in the section on research tools. Although the blog provided rich data, which needed to be handled in a careful way, the e-mail exchange process did not go as planned and, therefore, the need for a third phase came about.

Stage 3: 22.07.2011- 15.09.2011

This was the shortest phase, and was very useful in terms of having the mothers' feedback on their decision to choose Rowad. However, as it took place during Ramadan (the holy month of fasting), it was also the mid-term holiday of the second semester. Therefore, it was not easy to encourage many participants to be involved. Despite all this, four follow-up interviews were held, and mothers did reflect on their reasons for choosing Rowad, expressing their expectations and speaking about how far these had been met by the kindergarten. When I reflected on the timing of this phase, several possibilities occurred to me. If I had gone there before the end of the semester, I would have been able to meet more mothers than I did. In that case, the location of the interview would have been in the kindergarten, just as it was in the first phase. However, instead we met outside the kindergarten and mothers did criticise some elements of the teaching process more clearly than they did in the first phase. This could be explained in two ways: firstly, their children having spent a whole year or term in the kindergarten, mothers were more aware about the kindergarten's practices and the teaching process. Secondly, with the interviews taking place outside the school environment in a one-to-one situation with the interviewer, the interviewees might have felt more able to express their views. Therefore, even though only three mothers were interviewed in this phase, these interviews were as important as the previous interviews despite the difference in the number of participants in both phases.

In this phase, besides the follow-up interviews, some participants who had identified themselves on the blog were invited to a focus group discussion. Here, parts of the research findings were presented and discussed and the participants had the chance to challenge some of the findings from their personal perspective.

4.6 Research case study

The present study aims to understand in depth the parents' choices regarding their young children's education; therefore, Rowad kindergarten was chosen as a research case to study. A case study approach aims to "gain a rich, detailed understanding of the case by examining aspects of it in detail" (Thomas, 2009: 115). The case study is explanatory and hence, as Yin (1984) suggests, it is to explore a phenomenon of interest to the researcher. In order to understand the parents' drivers in their educational decisions for their children, several research tools were applied under the umbrella of the case study, Nevertheless, the choice of Rowad as a case for study is due to its ultimate interest for me as a researcher (Stake, 1995). As the research aims to investigate how mothers make their decisions and why they make those decisions, an explanatory case study is adopted with a single kindergarten - Rowad.

The choice of Rowad over other kindergartens was due to several factors. Firstly, the information and views gathered about this school while doing my Masters research in Al-Madinah in 2009 identified it as being at the cutting edge of language teaching (Al-Harhi, 2009). Secondly, Rowad's official website states that the school is adopting an international curriculum for English rather than the national curriculum (KAZM, 2008). Finally, there was a personal interest in Rowad due to the reputation it had gained among private kindergartens in Al-Madinah, which affected a certain group of people who see this kindergarten as the best available option.

Applying a case study approach allowed me to discover the mothers' views and expectations with regard to the introduction of English to their children. Al-Motairi's (2005) research,

looking at teaching EFL as social behaviour through adopting a case study of five boys' secondary schools in Riyadh, presented a rationale for using this particular methodology which seemed to be particularly relevant to the present study: "Case study facilitates deep understanding of the phenomenon under study and can empower participants and giving a voice to those who might otherwise go unheard" (Al-Motairi, 2005:121).

As outlined in the previous chapters, this research focuses on the mothers' views, and their voices are essential in expressing their justifications for their decision of introducing EFL to their children in early years' education. However, although Rowad was the case for study of this research, it was not the only kindergarten I visited. I went to some other kindergartens in order to obtain a broader perspective of head teachers' points of view on the impact of English programmes on their curricula and on the status of English in Al-Madinah, as well as to understand the EFL teachers' views on the teaching methods used and the children's attitudes towards learning English.

4.7 Research Tools

Overall, this research adopts a qualitative approach but it implements some quantitative elements. Similar to Al-Nasser's study (1999:92), the use of questionnaires seeks to explore the views and practices of some of the participants rather than test certain hypotheses or follow specific measurements.

As mentioned previously, several research tools were used in gathering the data needed. The main aim of using a variety of tools was to increase the potential to gather relevant data from the prospective participants. When I started the process of gathering data, I was not sure if any other kindergartens apart from Rowad would be willing to take part in the study. Therefore, having a wide range of research tools helped me in adjusting to unexpected situations and getting the most out of them. Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all the tools covered all aspects of the research questions as the study adopted a socio-cultural perspective. Thus, it was necessary from my perspective to employ a variety of tools to fulfil the various dimensions of the research

without losing the main focus. In this regard, Atkinson (2005) suggests that having several methods to find data rather than being limited to one method is important in analyzing data that reflect the social and cultural aspects of the research context. For example, using a questionnaire was helpful in gaining an understanding of the common practice of introducing English at pre-primary level from a wider perspective, and then moving to a more specific level by focusing on the case study kindergarten - Rowad. Moreover, by looking at the general status of EFL in private kindergartens in Al-Madinah, the research explores the head teachers' and language teachers' attitudes toward EFL in pre-schools. Then it moves to the particular case where the focus was on Rowad and the implementation of EFL in practice. In the latter, the mothers' views were investigated along with those of the EYL teacher, EFL teachers and the head teacher. The rationale for choosing each research tool is given below.

4.7.1 Questionnaires

In order to explore the implementation of EFL in private kindergartens in Al-Madinah, questionnaires were sent to twelve selected private kindergartens in Al-Madinah and these were filled in by the respective head teachers. Another questionnaire was completed by EFL teachers from the same kindergartens. Although according to Woods (2006: 16), questionnaires are not a common or vital tool in qualitative research, they are still useful in exploring general opinions among certain groups of people. In order to be able to explore the way mothers justified their choice of Rowad over other kindergartens and their desire to introduce their children to English at an early stage of their educational development, it seemed important to explore the head teachers' perspectives in this regard in order to obtain a general picture about the way English is taught at this stage from EFL teachers' perspective, rather than limiting the research to case study. Moreover, during the first stage I felt the need to understand the rationale behind introducing English to young learners and the impact of Al-Madinah's environment on learning English as foreign language. These areas relate to the second and the third questions of my research:

2. What is the impact of cultural capital on mothers' decisions to introduce their children to English in an early stage:

- Is the local community encouraged to learn English?
 - Do young children use English in their community?
3. How do private kindergartens present their EFL programme?;
- How do professionals perceive the role of parental choice in having children introduced to English at an early stage?
 - How does the EFL programme affect the mothers' decision when choosing a kindergarten?

4.7.1.1 Translation process

Once the research was approved by the faculty REC, the process of translating the questionnaires, along with the other necessary documents (consent form, information sheet and so on) started. After the translation was done, a colleague of mine who was carrying out research in an Arabic context also checked it. Further checks took place in Al-Madinah by an academic in the local university in Al-Madinah who specialises in teaching methodologies. Moreover, before sending the questionnaires out, they were piloted by two people, a former manager of a private kindergarten and a mother whose children were in private schools. The purpose of such a process was to double-check the translation of the questionnaire as well as the clarity of the information and statements in them; they were not used as research data as their sole purpose was for use in checking the clarity and validity of the questionnaires. It is important to note that the questionnaire was self-translated and, therefore, it was very important to have it checked before sending it out. In addition, as the questionnaire was sent to an international kindergarten, where the medium of communication is English, it was vital to keep the style and order of all the questions in the two versions the same.

4.7.1.2 Procedure of filling in the questionnaires

When data gathering process started in December 2010, I was aware of the existence of approximately eighteen private kindergartens in Al-Madinah and the plan was to approach as many of them as possible. Considering that any prospective participants would be approached

during their working time, all the necessary documents were organized in divided folders to be easily reached by the heads – figure 2. A total of eighteen folders were ready by the time the study began, thirteen of which I distributed to the head teachers myself, and twelve of which were returned. I was not able to cover all the kindergartens for several reasons. Firstly, the address and contact details of some kindergartens were not updated on the MOE website so it was not easy to find them. Secondly, I started to visit the known kindergartens in Al-Madinah after which I chose others randomly as I passed them. Thirdly, once I started to focus on Rowad as the case study, the time needed to conduct interviews and observations prevented me from covering all the 18 private kindergartens. However, the data from the 12 kindergartens gave me the information I sought as regards the status of English in private schools.

When I visited a kindergarten, after introducing myself, the folder was handed to the head teacher with a brief explanation about the research. Some of them asked me to give them some time to complete the questionnaire and to collect it later, while others preferred to fill it in immediately. Once the head teachers agreed to take part in the study, I asked them about the possibility of giving the other questionnaires to the EFL teachers. Again, the head teachers' attitudes varied, with some asking the teachers to come and meet me personally, and others asking me to hand them the questionnaires to pass on to the teachers. As EFL teachers were informed about the research in all cases either by the head teacher herself or in her presence, I had concerns about the extent to which their participation was entirely voluntary, given the impact of the head teachers' power in convincing them to take part. If I had been allowed to approach the teachers without the head teacher being present, they perhaps would have been less willing to take part. However, in one case where the head teacher, Amnah, was very supportive and willing to help, she apologized for the English teacher's reluctance to take part and when I asked about the possibility of talking to the teacher to explain my research. The response was:

I suggested that to her yesterday after you left but she refused. She is a science teacher, and she teaches science to Years 5 and 6, and English to pre-primary. But she is against the idea of introducing English to young learners; she thinks they can learn English later, but that in the early years, they need to have a strong basis in the Quran and Arabic.

You know, we are a Quranic School and we do provide extensive Quranic curricula but, at the same time, we think it is good to introduce children to English twice a week.

(Amnah - Head Teacher)

Despite the qualitative nature of this research, using questionnaires helped in understanding the general status of English in Al-Madinah's private kindergartens from the head teachers' perspectives. Moreover, gathering some quantitative data about the methods of teaching English from the EFL teachers helped explore the macro level of the practice of teaching English in pre-primary. Later, with the interviews and observations, the way of looking at the process of teaching English was modified to the micro level, which looked at the status of English in the class and the children's reactions during the class.

4.7.2 Direct observation

The main aim of applying direct observation in this research was to help explore the status of the EFL classroom at Rowad and to look at the social interactions between young learners among themselves and with their teachers. Even though this research is not about pedagogies of introducing EL to young children, it was important to understand the practice of teaching English in the classroom by focusing my observations on the communication and social dimensions of the classroom. Hence, it was important to apply this tool in investigating the pupils' and teachers' interactions in the EFL classrooms during the observations (Taylor-Powell & Steele, 1996). Such observations require no interference from the researcher in the process as the researcher is not a participant in the study context; therefore, the time needed is less than the time required for participant observation (Trochim, 2006). Before starting to observe EFL classes, I asked the English supervisor whether the children would find it strange to have a new adult in their classroom, but she assured me that this would not be the case, as they were used to having adults attend the classes occasionally (some mothers, the General Director of Rowad or the head teacher).

The data gathered through the six forty-five minute observations allowed me to focus on specific elements which I wanted to investigate. For instance, this instrument was applied mainly at

looking at the way English was taught at Rowad, the children's behaviour and interactions during the classes, and also their attitudes when they came to the EFL classrooms (there are specific classrooms for English). In addition, the status of English use during the lessons was observed, with special consideration for the switch between English to Arabic, and vice versa. Therefore, these observations were structured, with specific elements to look for during the class.

Also during my fieldwork I deliberately observed the way in which kindergartens present their English programme. This was through various ways; firstly, I observed the schools banners and checked whether they mentioned English. Secondly, I browsed the internet to find out how English was emphasised, if at all. Finally, I looked at the flyers some kindergartens used to attract parents to enrol their children.

4.7.3 The blog

The blog entitled "English in Al-Madinah" was activated in this second stage. The main purpose of applying this instrument was to obtain wider participation in the study (Saka, 2008: 8) in order to explore the status of English in Al-Madinah. Even though this was considered to be a subsidiary tool, it is important to understand the reliability and validity of its use in the research (James & Busher, 2006). Therefore, on the first page of the blog, it was mentioned that the blog was intended to be a research tool to collect data from people in Al-Madinah on their thoughts about young children learning English at an early age. Such a clear declaration is ethically required to be able to use the information provided by this means (Mann & Stewart, 2000: 41). As I started to post on the blog, I took on three roles: creator, mediator and commenter, although my main role was researcher. Access to the blog was open to everyone, as were all the comments and discussions. Unlike Saka's (2008) blog, used as a primary tool in an ethnographic study on journalistic representations of Turkish and European relations, the Al-Madinah blog was frequently accessed. Despite the fact that in this research, the blog was a secondary source of data, Friedman (cited in Saka, 2008:7) points out that the low number of frequent participants in a blog, when compared with some of the leading blogs, does not diminish its value as the participants are likely to be very interested in the topics and, therefore, their participation is highly considered. The researcher's discussions about the topics posted in the blog, and the

participants' engagement with the ongoing debate provides great motivation for the research and the researcher (Saka: 2008). Such conversations and discussions can enlighten the researcher on some elements that are directly related to the core aim of the study.

One of the problems in using the blog was the fact that it was difficult to guarantee anonymity as all the comments and posts are in the public domain (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Even though I was aware of that, the blog was activated, from the third topic onwards, covering themes that had emerged from my interviews and observations. Some participants were using their email accounts in order to comment, while others wrote their names at the end of their comments. However, the possibility of remaining anonymous encouraged some participants to express their opinions more freely. That was made clear in an e-mail from a participant who informed me of her identity, but said she was more comfortable joining the discussion anonymously.

In order to cultivate a relationship with the blog participants, during the third stage the female participants were invited to meet up for a focus group where they were each given a consent form in order to give their agreement to having their comments used in the research. I also contacted the male participants and they were sent written consent forms as well.

4.7.4 Interviews

Interviews were implemented as the primary instrument for this qualitative research. The application of semi-structured interviews was helpful in clarifying and exploring specific information which could be strengthened by, or conflict with, other information that was gained either through questionnaire or another interview (Dawson, 2009). For instance, the results of the head teachers' questionnaires showed that most of them agreed about the positive role of Al-Madinah's environment in enhancing English learning, which contradicted some of the mothers' views that the general milieu in Al-Madinah did not encourage children to practise what they learnt. Therefore, seeking the information from several perspectives was important to obtain a better understanding of the situation. According to Lofstedt (1990: 76), in qualitative research the meaning of what the people say, their social interaction, the way they behave and their thoughts are vital in obtaining a comprehensive picture of the context of the study. In order to obtain more in-depth information, several semi-structured interviews were carried out with

mothers and Early Years Learning (EYL) professional educators to explore their views and expectations of EYL programmes and introducing English at that stage, as well as the impact of Al-Madinah's community on learning the language.

4.7.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

With both mothers and professionals I adopted semi-structured interviews, where I started with a general question or statement, then gradually moved with the interviewees to my questions. Adopting such interviews gave the participants the freedom to ask me questions. Also, it allowed me as a researcher to find a balance between having a flexible interview and bringing the discussion back when it diverged to far from the topic. In order to get the most from applying this tool, writing questions in advance was avoided. However, I did identify the topic on which I wanted my participants to express their views.

4.7.4.2 Selecting interviewees

The warm welcome from Rowad's head teacher gave me the impression that it would not be difficult to interview teachers in the school. That was indeed the case with the EYL teacher and the head teacher herself; however, the EFL teachers refused to have their interviews recorded and asked about the possibility of having an open-ended questionnaire instead. Therefore, the research plan was slightly changed: rather than participating in in-depth interviews, those teachers completed the questionnaire after which informal interviews were held, where we discussed their answers and talked more about their views and opinions.

The EYL teachers from Rowad were asked if they would like to take part in the study during their break time and four of them agreed to have their interviews recorded. Two EYL teachers from the international kindergarten also agreed to be interviewed after they had answered the questionnaire.

Some mothers were chosen by the head teacher to take part in the interviews and they came to the kindergarten for this, while I met other mothers in the kindergarten and asked them if they would like to take part in my study.

4.7.4.3 Contexts of the interviews

Interviews played a vital role as the primary source of data collection in this research; therefore, it seemed important to consider the context of the interviews during the data analysis process. Wallis (2003:82) notes that where interviews take place can influence the way interviewees respond to the discourse and how much they engage in terms of speaking. In his case, Wallis left the choice of the interview place to the participant “to avoid inhibiting influence” (ibid: 82). In the present research, the venue of the interviews varied according to the research stages. While in the first stage interviews took place inside the kindergartens, in the third stage that was not the case and three interviews were held online.

During the first stage, Rowad’s head teacher arranged for her office to be used for the interviews with the mothers. In this stage, a total of nineteen mothers were involved in the study, although the interview process did not go as planned due to inevitable changes during the fieldwork. For instance, in the first week at Rowad, some mothers arrived earlier than they were expected and others later. As a result, instead of having individual interviews, there were two group interviews. The adoption of a qualitative approach was helpful in terms of changing the research tool at the fieldwork stage. Even though the possibility of having in-depth information from individuals was limited by this situation, another advantage occurred in that my part in the conversation became less prominent and I was able to observe much more than in the individual interviews. That was due to the nature of the conversations which developed between the participants where the mothers tended to ask questions and argue among themselves, which I found helpful when I started to analyse the data. Apart from these two group interviews, one mother who was willing to take part in the study stated her preference for an online interview so that she could respond to the questions when she was not busy thinking about her work or her children.

Due to the participants’ preferences and for their comfort, the way in which notes were taken also varied; for participants who agreed to have their interviews recorded, I was more focused on our conversation and could deal with the information provided later; I have referred to this kind of interview as formal interviews. With regard to this point, Woods (2006:12) says that when the researcher listens to the interviewees carefully and shows that this is the case, they will

start to engage in a livelier manner. This engagement in the conversation was absent in the case of some participants who agreed to take part in my study but did not want to have their conversations recorded. Having to take some notes while the participants were talking affected the depth of these interviews, and they were found not to be as rich in data as the recorded ones.

In addition, there were some informal interviews and conversations initiated naturally with teachers, head teachers and mothers. Some of these conversations took place in Rowad, while others happened in the kindergartens where the questionnaires had been distributed. In some cases, notes were taken during these conversations, but in others the information was noted down later in the fieldwork notebook.

4.7.4.4 Focus group

Several kinds of interviews were implemented during the research: individual interviews, focus group interviews, and online interviews. The two focus groups were held as a result of specific circumstances explained above. In their discussions what Kidd and Parshall (2000: 294) comment on focus groups; they state that participants in such groups are likely to share some beliefs and experiences, which could lead to ‘debate’ type conversations. Moreover, according to Wilson (1997:217), unlike during individual interviews, the researcher’s role is diminished during a focus group and respondents’ conversations collaborate. Furthermore, the acquiescence of less committed individuals to positions more passionately argued by others are all processes of social influence that may be critically relevant to the acceptance or rejection of a new or changed programme or product (Kidd and Parshall, 2000: 295).

Moreover, people speak differently when they are part of a group (Kidd and Parshall, 2000: 295); therefore, Wilson (1997: 218) suggests that researchers need to choose whether they want to interview their participants before or after the focus group. In this research, during the third stage I managed to have a face-to-face interview with a mother from the first group, and an online interview with a mother from the second group. I also had a number of e-mail exchanges with three other mothers who responded in the early stage of the e-mail exchange process.

In addition to the above, there was a planned focus group which took place during the third stage of the study, and to which blog participants were invited. There were several reasons behind planning this focus group. Firstly, only one of the blog participants was involved in the research done through other means, like the interviews, though all the participants I interviewed were introduced to the blog through the information sheet. Secondly, as the study pays a great deal of attention to the role of Al-Madinah's society in discouraging or encouraging learning English, listening to views of people outside 'the school context' appeared to be a logical step. Thirdly, the blog participants had not had the chance to speak face-to-face about the research and it was a good opportunity for them to become acquainted with it. Finally, some research findings were presented to the focus group, and the participants had the chance to reflect on them, and agree or disagree. In addition, unlike the focus group in the first stage where all the participants were mothers, in this group there was diversity among the participants, who included undergraduate students of English, English teachers, mothers and other females, enabling the discussion to "maximise exploration of different perspectives within a group setting" (Kitzinger, 1995: 300). By implementing this instrument in the final stage of the research, the participants were introduced to some findings from the first and second stages, and they engaged in discussion about these findings, expressing their views to each other. The participants were then involved in a group exercise similar to that used in Kitzinger's (1995: 301) focus group, where large cards were used to display a number of statements. In the present study, three case studies which stemmed from the research were presented via PowerPoint. The participants were divided into two groups and each was provided with sheets of A3 paper, coloured pens and sticky notes in order to demonstrate their solution for each case within a time limit of twenty-five minutes. Finally, each group explained their outcomes and the similarities and differences between the other group's solutions.

4.7.4.5 E-mail exchanges / online interviews

In order to be able to obtain a deep understanding about the way mothers justified their decisions in introducing their young children to English, which is the core aim of this research, it was vital to maintain contact with some mothers after the first stage. Consequently, e-mail exchanges seemed to be the perfect way to have this contact, due to their effectiveness in keeping communication going with the participants despite the geographical distance (Harries & Dersch,

n.d.) between us as I was back in the UK by then. The main idea of using the e-mail exchange was to be in touch with some mothers throughout the year, to discover their expectations and demands from the English programmes and how that might change with the passing of time. Unfortunately, although seven mothers initially agreed to take part in the e-mail exchange during the first stage, only four of them responded and, after the second reply, two out of the four did not respond to my emails any further. This could be because they had lost interest in participating in the research, or simply because they did not see the e-mails; as Opdenakker (2006) points out, both of these are possible drawbacks of using this instrument.

Applying online interviews can be convenient as enquiries are easier than in face-to-face interviews, although the social cues are diminished and the researcher's questions can be ignored (James & Busher, 2006).

4.8 Analytical framework

This research draws on content and thematic analysis as its analytical framework. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 79), thematic analysis is “a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. Smith (2000:314) defines content analysis as “a technique used to extract desired information from a body of material (usually verbal) by systematically and objectively specified characteristics of the material”. In this research, the way in which data was analysed was inspired by these two frameworks. As previously explained in this chapter, the data was collected through various means. In the process of analysis and during the discussion of the findings, not every tool covers all the aspects of the research. Due to the fact that several tools were used, a great deal of data was collected; therefore, they were organized into themes, under each of which several topics emerged. The way in which the themes were generated from the data is vital, but the first step was to cluster together important information to shape the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82).

The themes were organized simultaneously with the transcribing and translating processes. Initially, some themes which appeared to be desirable information as described by Smith were

linked to the research questions (2000), while other themes emerged from the data and occurred several times to make patterns, as Braun and Clarke (1995) suggest. Then, data records (transcripts, blogs, and observation notes) were coded and read through several times, and topics were organised under each relevant theme. Such a process, albeit lengthy, is essential in order to categorise the topics into their themes (Burnard, 1991:462).

In order to be able to return to the data more easily, I put Mind Mapping techniques into effect. In the early stages of introducing the data, these were helpful in terms of organizing the amount of data in a more accessible way. The data from the interviews conducted in the first stage were organised into themes (see Appendix 3). Each theme had its own map where the participants' views relevant to that theme were collated (see table 3). However, at first the data looked out of place, and I found it difficult to start analysing. Therefore, I went back to the transcripts again and started to write memos and the data seemed more exhaustive. The latter process made the use of mapping easier and, with time, my need to refer to the main transcript diminished. Braun and Clarke's (2006: 87) table of the phases of thematic analysis summarises the procedure that was followed in the main in this research:

Table 3: Phases of thematic analysis (source: Braun & Clarke, 2006:87)

Phase	Description of process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data ;	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes;	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes;	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to coded extracts (level1) and the entire data set (level2), generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report for the analysis.

As the thematic analysis concern, content analysis was adopted, as the latter is applied to both verbal and non-verbal data collected through the three phases of the research. Adopting content analysis allowed me to look at the language of the data because according to Smith (2000:313) “language is a major and often distinctive source of information ... language both facilitates and reveals the developments of persons and cultures”. The flexibility of adopting content analysis

became evident in my research as the data was formatted into text, when I looked at the linguistic elements, where some participants used some English words in the conversations.

In this chapter, the research methods have been described, along with a the rationale for using them and the process used to analyse the data. The following chapter begins to present the research findings, focusing on the rationales mothers offered for their choice to enrol their children into EYL, while also drawing on professionals' points of view.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon) him says:
Madina would have been better for them if they only knew.
(cited in Bin-Hanbal, 1993)

Chapter FIVE:

Research as Dialogue: Reflections on the Research Process

5.1. Introduction

Throughout the research stages, the importance of introducing youngsters to both EYL and to English at this stage was discussed with mothers who put forward well elucidated points of view. Hence, it appears that there is a social relation between the knowledge and the knowers; also the social position of the participants and the level of knowledge they have regarding the research topic have an impact on the results of the study (Maton, 2003:55). In this research, mothers as knowers of the importance of early years learning and the importance of introducing English in this stage, are linked to the discussed issue among academics and scholars which is the knowledge, and these two inform the researcher. This understanding of the relations between knowledge, knower and known is influenced by Bourdieu's distinctive contribution to conceived knowledge (Maton, 2003:57). The social relations between the research and its participants and the researcher allow to reflect on the process which as Bolton (2010) indicates is a reflective strategy that allows people to learn from their work and from the people they meet in the wider society. It also allows me as a researcher to indicate from the beginning my position in the research context, especially considering that the study took place in a context the researcher is familiar with, the situation is well expressed by Nespor (1993:203):

Those of us who study education in our societies ... are not so much creating new relationships when we do school ethnography as we are trying to extend and redefine already existing relationships.

This chapter starts with the choice of Al-Madinah as the geographical focus of the study and how the participants perceived such a decision, then moves to look at relationship between the researcher and the participants inside kindergartens, and finally discusses the implementation of qualitative research.

5.2 Choosing Al-Madinah

Compared to its neighbour Jeddah, Al-Madinah has few notable private pre-schools. If the study had taken place in Jeddah there would have been a higher possibility of finding pre-schools where English of a standard that meets mothers' demands is introduced to children at an early stage.

During the first stage, when the research objectives were explained to Hanen she was surprised about the fact that the study was in Al-Madinah, and claimed that compared to Jeddah the level of English in Al-Madinah schools and pre-schools was poor. Hanan, who is originally from Jeddah, proved during the interview to be a good source of information about the status of English in the two different cities, the strength of her views deriving from the fact that she lived in Jeddah, and makes frequent visits to that city. Nevertheless, the fact that Hanan questioned the location of the study and suggested that if the study had done in a different context that might provide different results, indicates the nature of interviews the mothers had, in that they were welcome to ask questions about the research and its motivations.

The interesting point in this case is the way Hanen rationalised her preference of another context for the present study. Such an attitude indicates the type of the social interaction during the process of the data collection. As Hanen reflected on her personal experience about the type of learning programmes provided in pre-schools in Al-Madinah and Jeddah, such experience might

have encouraged her to challenge the choice of the context for the study. Due to the nature of this research, whose aim is to explore the mothers' views through the way they justify their decision, what Pritchard (2002:4) suggests about practitioner research is applicable in it:

In some research, people serve as the objects, that is, researchers interact with or study them because the researchers seek knowledge or understanding of human beings. The nature of these people's involvement is determined by the overarching purpose of the research goal.

When spending time with the participants to explore their views and demands, asking them questions and listening to their inquiries, sometimes unexpected issues appear. According to Pritchard (2002), these issues need to be taken into account by the researcher. In the present research, the fact that the choice of Al-Madinah was challenged by Hanen is linked to the way mothers look at the status on English nationally.

Unlike the city where the research was conducted, which was always a given, the pre-school which became the case for study was chosen after some research and through some personal contacts.

5.3 Getting inside kindergartens

To serve the nature of the research, which is an exploration of the mothers' wish to introduce their young children to English, private pre-schools needed to be selected as the venue, where the questionnaires were to be given to the head teacher and the EFL teachers. Thus Rowad was chosen as the case for study. In order to avoid conducting the study in a familiar context, the kindergarten I went to as a child was excluded from being the case for study in this research; the same also applied to the two kindergartens which were involved in my Master's dissertation research. Thus the venue of this research was not part of my previous experience and I have

only a few acquaintances there. However, the process of getting permission to carry out the study in Rowad was not an easy one.

In order for me to get into Rowad and start the fieldwork, I needed the permission of the General Director of Rowad, Mrs. Azhar; she holds a PhD in education and supervises Rowad as a whole from pre-primary stage up to high school, and is the person authorised to give permission to carry out a study in the pre-primary section of Rowad. I was required to give a Mrs. Azhar written letter which contained the study's aims and the reason of choosing Rowad. About seven months passed and there was no response from Rowad. As a result, the possibility of conducting the study in another private pre-school seemed high at that stage. However, I had personal contact with a deputy head teacher of a boys' private school, and he advised me that Rowad was the best place to conduct the study. He got in touch with Mrs. Azhar who gave the required permission. This situation indicates the social relations between the members of educational institutions and the way they perceive outsiders. It appeared that once Mrs. Azhar was informed about the research by a person who belongs to the same group as hers, she felt more comfortable about the research to be done in her kindergarten. Moreover, when I met her during the first stage of the field work, Mrs. Azhar asked me the reason for not choosing the pre-school which was attached to the school where my acquaintance, the deputy head teacher, worked. The reason she was given by the deputy head teacher of the boys' school was that even though the boys' branch of his school was doing very well nationally, the girls branch was still developing and had not obtained a reputation similar to that of Rowad. However, the boys' school in question was one of the schools whose pre-school was part of the study in that the head teacher and EFL teachers of the pre-school were given the questionnaires and the head teacher took part in an informal interview. This situation illustrates the impact of power relations in the process of conducting research (Nespor, 1997). In his study Nespor mentions that his research was connected to the elementary school of his study. As the head teacher of the school had approached some academics to implement a new teaching theme in the school and as Nespor was interested in doing long term ethnography and the theme the head teacher was interested in was one of Nespor's areas of interest, in Nespor's own words "I thought I'd found a point where his needs and mine connected" (ibid: 204). The relationship between the researcher and participants and the social power in the context of the study became apparent in this study, for

instance, when Mrs. Azhar – the Rowad General Director - told Hamsa, the head teacher of Rowad kindergarten, to cooperate with me and to give me the freedom to observe the classes and attend the lessons. So, when I arrived at Rowad, Hamsa was very welcoming and introduced me to the kindergarten staff and teachers and made contact with mothers on my behalf. This experience with Rowad’s head teacher is similar to that of Nespor’s (1997:203):

The principal, Mr. Watts, orchestrated my access to the school... introduced me to teachers, gave me time at a staff meeting to pitch the project, and helped me send letters to parents... without his help the project could have never been undertaken.

5.4 Introducing a researcher

When the fieldwork started my assumption was that there would not be any teachers of my acquaintance at Rowad, but that was not to be the case. On the first day at Rowad, Hamsa introduced me to a group of EYL teachers while the others were in their classes. One of the teachers in the staff room was surprised.

Teacher: Maryam.. are you the researcher ?

Head Teacher: Do you know her?

Teacher: Yes, we went to the same school, she was Roza’s friend

Maryam: Yes , what a small world! How is Roza by the way? I miss her so much.

Teacher: She is well, you might see her during the break. She has started to teach here as well.

Later in that day I met up with the friend of my school days and talked about many things. When I was introduced to the rest of the teaching staff, Roza’s sister (the teacher who was surprised) said:

Come on ladies, she is one of us

The teachers' reaction and their relief when they saw me made me reflect again on power relations, as it was obvious to me that Mrs. Azhar had informed the kindergarten staff about the prospective visit of a researcher, and as Mrs. Hamsa indicated, they had been asked to collaborate with me. As this instruction was given to the teachers from the head of Rowad, the cautiousness among the teachers with regard to the visit is understandable. Moreover, another factor that helped in reducing the gap between the researcher as an outsider and the teachers as insiders is the fact that three of the EYL teachers and two of the EFL teachers studied at the same private school that I had. Therefore, an experience shared by the researcher and participants helps in creating a positive relationship between them.

Apart from the teachers, there were a couple of mothers who went to the same school as me; I remembered Walaa, her sister Bayan and Sammar from my school days. In addition, Samah and Wijdan had also been to the same school. Having a similar experience as my participants in this aspect allowed me to understand their justifications of their choices. For instance, Sammar and Samah point out that initially they went to the international branch of their former school, but they were not satisfied and therefore, they chose Rowad. Walaa claims that in our time the school was the best but it has not kept up its excellence and therefore Rowad has surpassed it.

At that time it was the best school, you remember our teachers, and they used to give us extra knowledge and activities. Now, they rely on their reputation, they do open the international school but it does not meet my standards.

(Walaa-Mother)

Such familiarity with some participants, even though it was not anticipated before the start of the fieldwork, brings up an important issue regarding the social relation with the participants. The type of relation with some participants took the research to some extent to the edge of practitioner research where a researcher works with colleagues and therefore needs to set professional boundaries (Shaw, 2005:1241). It is important to note that teachers' and mothers' attitudes toward the familiarity differed; it appears that teachers felt more comfortable with a researcher of their acquaintance, while the mothers did not, as the researcher was unknown. It

was Mrs. Hamsa the kindergarten head teacher who contacted the mothers to invite them to take part in the research.

The fact that mothers were contacted by the head teacher of their children might have affected their response. For instance, if the mothers had been informed about the research through letters, they might not have been interested in participating. Alternatively, if I had wished to contact mothers personally, there would have been an ethical consideration regarding the procurement of their contact details from the school. Hence, when Mrs. Hamsa offered her help, I agreed, and asked about the possibility of having mothers with different backgrounds: Saudi and non Saudi, working and non working.

5.5 Adopting a qualitative approach

The present research aims to have the mothers' views heard and a qualitative approach proved helpful in producing findings through a real world investigation without manipulating the situation in order to achieve the research objectives (Golafshany, 2003).

Qualitative research aims to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans' lives and social worlds ... Qualitative research is a broad umbrella term for research methodologies that describe and explain persons' experience, behaviours, interactions and social contexts. (Fossey et al, 2002:717)

Most of the qualitative research I came across was done by Saudi researchers who had studied abroad. For instance, in the case of Al-Saggaf and Williamson (2004) who applied ethnographic enquiry to study the online community in KSA, did the study in Charles Stuart University, though the context was KSA. In addition, Al-Nassar, who also conducts qualitative research in EFL in KSA, has his degree from the University of East Anglia. This would explain the exclamations and comments I received several times throughout the fieldwork. Even though

some questionnaires were sent out to private pre-schools in Al-Madinah, choosing Rowad for case study was a questionable issue among some of the participants. For instance, Randah, the EFL supervisor at Rowad kindergarten was very surprised when she knew that the research observations and the mothers interviews were only to be in Rowad:

Only here!! Are not you going to send questionnaires to mothers from other kindergartens and visit them and observe the EFL classes there?

I then explained that the research was qualitative and was not going to provide a representative snapshot of Al Madinah trends, as its focus was to explore the way mothers justify their choices of introducing their children to both EYL and English in this stage. The nature of the research and its approach helped me engage with participants more freely, considering that the interviews were semi-structured in that the directions of the conversations were not rigidly linked to a specific list of questions. According to Fossey et al (2002:727) “qualitative research interviews aim to elicit participants’ views of their lives, as portrayed in their stories and so to gain access to their experiences, feelings and social worlds”.

Applying qualitative research even though it elicits some questions from the participants, can also contribute to the expanding of this type of research in education among mothers and also professionals. For instance, one of the blog commenters, Rawan, who came to the focus group during the third stage points out:

I was not sure what you were doing, I liked to participate but it was weird in the start you did not give us several sheets of questionnaires to fill up as we used to do when we participate in a research while doing our degree at the university

Then she continues:

I can see why you like it, you are dealing more with people than with numbers and I like the fact that you are keeping in touch with us.

(Rawan- Blog commenter)

Alongside interviewing mothers and professionals, several EFL classes were observed, and these direct observations took place in Rowad as the research case study. When I started to observe EFL classes at Rowad, Randah the EFL supervisor asked me to look at the method of teaching during the classes and give her my opinions and feedback. When I explained to her that I was not specialised in teaching EFL and did not have any required equivalent qualification give such opinion, she insisted on having a report about my visit to the kindergarten, to be translated into English by her. I told her that I could write a report regarding my visit to the kindergarten as a researcher and so I did by the end of my visit during the first stage. When I gave her the report, Randa asked me whether I was going to enrol my daughter at Rowad once I come back to Al-Madinah. I told her that this was possible, though I was not certain about the level of Rowad at the higher levels. From such situations, I have learnt that sometimes participants like to have something in return for their involvement. As I was in the first stage and was unsure at that time if I needed to come back to the kindergarten again, I planned to maintain a good relationship with the kindergarten. So, doing a report about my visit to the kindergarten did not seem a difficult task. For some participants, I seemed to be an example of a local mother who had gone into higher studies with a scholarship; Wijdan once saw me at Rowad as she came to see one of her daughter's teachers, and she stopped to have an informal chat:

I have always wanted to continue my higher education, but since I got married and had my children I put that thought aside, but while talking to you, I think that is not impossible.

Then, she asked me whether I had a scholarship from a local university or college and when I told her that I had an external scholarship under the King Abdullah programme, she stated that she would seriously consider applying for a scholarship.

This programme is amazing and the best of it, is the fact that boys and girls have equal right to join, which we missed before. I will think seriously about having a scholarship.
(Wijan-Mother)

Nespor (1998) has mentioned a similar situation with the head teacher of the school where he did his ethnography:

Mr. Watts [head teacher] began talking about the doctoral program at education at my university ... Mr. Watts had decided he wanted a PhD rather than EdD. He was sure PhD would be ‘more marketable’.
(ibid:206)

5.6 Judging the researcher as an expert

In addition, doing my study abroad gave some participants a false impression regarding my ability in teaching English. Once Rania said:

You are expert in this field, Has your child’s Arabic not been affected
[by living in the UK].

‘I am not an expert in the field’, I said ‘but I will share my experience; I never speak to my daughter in English at home.’

As already discussed in previous chapters, Rania does not support the idea of introducing English to young learners and claims that in international schools and pre-schools where the medium of communication is not the mother tongue, the children lose their native language and consequently their identity. In the same group another mother asked how I am able to protect my daughters’ mother tongue as they go to English schools. I explained that at home, we speak to them in Arabic and teach them Arabic. Having said that, I have to clarify that in order to have the mothers easily engaged in my research, I willingly responded to their questions, emphasising that I was talking to them to understand their motivations and needs and not as an expert in teaching EFL to young children.

The situation I had with some mothers is not uncommon. Nespor (1997), who had for two years worked in a primary school in the US, where the school principal had been implementing new innovative curriculum, points out:

The parents of children at the school were especially critical of the the novel-based curriculum, ... They often asked me as an education professor, what I thought about such things and listened politely while I explained their values. (Nespor, 1997:1)

5.6.1 Researcher as a mother

From another perspective, it seems that there are some similarities between me and the mothers, which might have helped in having smooth conversations. For instance, just like the mothers who took part in the research, I have two children in pre-school. Even though, due to my studying abroad, pre-primary is my only choice to provide a safe environment for my children whilst I study, talking with the mothers and hearing the way they justify their decisions helped me to look at my situation differently. If I was not doing my study abroad, I might be in the same position as the mothers I met; the way I would have justified my reasons would not have been different from the way some of them did it - in terms of the type of education I had when I was a child and its implications on my decision in choosing a specific kindergarten. Apart from that, visiting several kindergartens and chatting informally with some head teachers renewed my relationship with the environment of schooling in Al-Madinah. Nevertheless, observing classes and visiting kindergartens made me aware of the ongoing development practised in education in KSA, which starts with the Tatweer programme. I would not have been able to experience this in reality if my research did not take place in local kindergartens.

As I believe that doing research means learning from the people and the situation the researcher goes through, I gave the participants the right to have the transcriptions of their interviews and of the focus group discussion. Only one mother asked for her interview transcription during the first stage, though I have not received any comment from her so far. In the third stage, the focus group participants asked to have the transcription e-mailed to them. From the seven who were emailed this, I got responses from only two.

During the third stage when I had a focus group, in which blog participants and the mothers who took part in the first stage were invited. The participants were introduced to some findings from the research and were encouraged to comment on them. They pointed out that it was the first time for them to be involved in a research where they didn't have to fill questionnaires of several pages.

I like the way you are doing your research, the use of the blog and sharing your findings with us is a really nice approach.

(Rawan-blog commenter)

Another important aspect, which the some focus group participants pointed out as an interesting experience, is that meeting with them and explaining the findings helped create links between the researcher and the participants.

Besides, when giving the participants the chance to reflect on the research findings, we did three activities which encouraged them to work in a group and discuss. These activities were three case studies which stemmed from the information I had during the previous stages.

5.7 Learning from the study

Apart from Mrs. Azhar, the General Director of Rowad, none of my professional participants held a PhD degree. However, the cooperation I got from most of the head teachers I met, gave me the impression that improving the current situation in education is a collaboration process between the academics, professionals and the schools and families. The shortage of post graduates who work in schools reflected in the participants' responses when they asked if I plan to work in a university or in a college. Whenever I explained that I hope to work in a private pre-school to boost the learning, people looked at me in surprise. Among my acquaintances, most of the MA and PhD holders work in either universities or colleges. However, from my fieldwork experiences during my masters degree study and now, I find that I would rather work with the children and improve the situation by being an insider rather than an academic.

However, I plan to carry on researching but hope that in the future I will be able to conduct research where I can be more an insider than an outsider. I have to admit that in order to be able to do that I need to have a qualification to teach EFL. I would need this before starting my future research which I plan to do once I am done with the current research. In that case, the possibility of applying practitioner research would be high. However having an academic qualification is arguably a drawback for that kind of research. According to Shaw (2005: 1241)

The drawback of some practitioner research stems from a tendency to regard 'practice' as a distinct from theory.

Part Two

Data Analysis and discussion

The following four stories show, each in its own way, the imbricated impact of the social and cultural capitals on mothers' decisions and justifications regarding educational strategies. Each of these mothers has her own motivation in choosing the best pre-school for her child, and all of them stand by their decision and rationalise the reasons behind it. As Ball et al. (1996) suggest, the more information parents have, the more difficult the choice becomes, and some parents sometimes have more than adequate information at their disposal to guide their choice. The present qualitative inquiry using multiple tools offers insights into the uses made of that information as well as into the justification of these uses.

Story one

Sammar enters Rowad with her daughter on the first day of the second term. Her attention is attracted by the wide kindergarten playgrounds with plenty of areas where children can safely play. During the previous term she had spent a lot of time trying to convince her daughter that her international kindergarten was safe and that the dark room the teacher threatened to lock the naughty children in did not exist. But her daughter was scared; she believed that the room was somewhere in the kindergarten and even her mother could not spot it. Despite her eagerness to see her daughter mastering fluent English, Sammar, who strongly advocates introducing children to English early and sees no threat to their native language at all, then started to consider moving her daughter to another kindergarten. She then met up with her school and university friend Bayan during the school break, who said how happy she was with the attention and level of education her daughter was receiving in Rowad. Sammar seriously thought about visiting the kindergarten and enrolling her daughter there. So here is Sammar at the very beginning of the second term, meeting with the head teacher and asking her to put her daughter in the same class as Bayan's. Later that week, after producing some documents relating to qualifications, for example a certificate proving her degree in English Literature, she is interviewed for a job as kindergarten EFL teacher.

So without ever contemplating to work where her children are taught, Sammar starts to teach at Rowad as an assistant teacher with the EFL supervisor. The situation allows Sammar to look at the teaching process from two different angles as a mother and as a teacher. When she starts, Sammar is determined to only use English during the class but as the days pass she notices that

the EFL supervisor uses Arabic with the children even for simple instructions. Hence Sammar becomes more tolerant about using a little Arabic during the class. As a mother, Sammar notices that while her daughter's Arabic writing has improved since joining Rowad, her English has not. But considering her daughter's happiness at Rowad, Sammar does not consider taking her daughter back to the former international kindergarten. However, given the level of English she expects her daughter to achieve, Sammar is determined to keep looking for a good international school in Al-Madinah where the academic level is as good as the physical facilities, with teachers who know the best way to get the most out of each child.

Sammar's case typifies a decision-making process where the mother's personal network plays a massive role in identifying places and getting informed reassurance on their standards. However, her initial choice was primarily driven by considerations of English language acquisition in a pre-school context, influenced by her own cultural capital. Considering her child's happiness to be as important as cognitive and linguistic development led Sammar to choose Rowad kindergarten, with the support of her personal network. Ball and Vincent (1998: 240) refer to this type of information gathered by mothers through their social interaction as 'grapevine knowledge'. 'Grapevine' knowledge is 'hot' knowledge, based on affective responses or direct experiences. For some parents, personal recommendation is perceived to be far more trustworthy than apparently 'objective' data (ibid: 240). The impact of grapevine knowledge is of particular importance in the context of non compulsory education in Al Madinah where 'cold' information on institutions (inspectorate's reports etc.) is not widely available.

Story Two

When visiting her hometown, Jeddah, Hanen always feels embarrassed about her English. All her nieces and nephews speak fluent English with their housemaids as well as in restaurants and indoor playgrounds. Accompanied by her daughter, Hanen finds it difficult to speak in English in public places in Al-Madinah. The few times she does so she feels as if people are criticising her. Therefore, when the time comes to put her daughter into pre-school, she finds it difficult to decide on a pre-school. She compares kindergartens in Al-Madinah with those in Jeddah where there are many notable pre-primary schools to choose from. Having moved to Al-Madinah,

Hanen finds the choice of kindergartens very limited. One of the places she visits has very good physical facilities but the children are required to talk in traditional Arabic (Fusah) during the school day. Therefore Hanen does not consider placing her daughter there, as she wants her daughter to master fluent English. When she visits Rowad which has high standard material facilities and where English plays a key role in the learning programme, Hanen feels encouraged to register her child as a student there. Moreover, children are introduced to English in an interesting way, which is very important for her. But by the end of the year, Hanen is not happy with the outcome, especially in English, where her daughter's progress is not remarkable. Therefore, Hanen decides to take her daughter out and put her in an international pre-school. Despite Rowad's better physical facilities, education for her daughter at a higher cost in a less attractive kindergarten seems better to Hanen whose priority is improving her daughter's language abilities.

Both these stories show the impact of social interactions on the mothers' choice of introducing their children to English. They also reveal that there is not one single factor commanding this process of choice, which on the contrary, appears to be holistic. Also, once mothers decide to put their children in private schools, they seem more confident to move their child from one kindergarten to another if their standards are not met.

Story Three

Rania's son starts pre-primary school at a young age, As he is an only child, his mother wants him to be in a safe environment with children of his own age and feels a kindergarten is the best choice. The first kindergarten he goes to has two branches, a conventional private kindergarten and an international kindergarten. Rania decides against the international option because she believes that an English medium kindergarten would damage his mother tongue. Two years later, Rania takes her son out of that Arabic-medium kindergarten because it is too academic and her son has started to hate doing his homework. She enrolls him at Rowad for the last year of his pre-primary education. During a group interview, Rania repeats several times that her child's social development has been her main motive to introduce him to pre-primary schooling.

When the conversation turns to discussing the advantages of introducing children to English at an early stage, Rania feels that she has to stand up for her native language and the children's identity. And so she does! When other mothers in the group enthusiastically point out the impact of early exposure to English on the level of fluency learners of English can obtain, Rania disagrees and says that early exposure does not guarantee children achieving a high standard in learning the language as this is ultimately left to the children themselves when they get older. With examples in mind of Arab children she knew who communicate among themselves and their family in German or English, Rania does not want her child to have such an experience. She does not hesitate to confront other mothers about the potential damage English might cause to the children's identity and to their Arabic.

The impact of the family's sociocultural environment and their social interactions is tangible in this story, as is the mother's cultural capital, surfacing in her strong convictions about children's identity. Rania's views on the threats posed by languages to the identity of young children apparently stems from her own international relationships, with her Egyptian friends in particular. This perceived threat alone, she says, influenced her choice of a mainstream private pre-school rather than an international one. As in the earlier examples, this mother develops market-led behaviours - typical of "alert clients" - for securing improved learning outcomes for her child, including "signaling (her) dissatisfaction through exit" (Gorard 1998). Mothers' search for another kindergarten when not fully satisfied with their first choice is, according to Hoxby (2003: 303), not unusual and is often driven by availability as much as by personal interests.

Story Four

Samah believes in the importance of enrolling her daughter in a kindergarten to get the most out of the EYL programme the kindergarten provides. Despite the fact that Samah has a reliable housemaid whom her children can stay with safely while she goes to her work as a teacher in a public school, she goes to search for the best available kindergarten.

As she searches for the best, she bears in her mind the importance of introducing English at this stage. Having experienced the benefit of knowing another language, she is influenced by this experience. As a little girl Samah used to talk to her grandmother in Arabic and to her mother in Turkish, as her grandmother spoke no Turkish and her mother spoke no Arabic. Later on, as she grew up, Samah found herself eager to learn English, never limiting herself to what she was taught at school, but going further to improve her English. This helped her very much when she got married; her father in law, who was born in the UK, was more comfortable speaking in English.. Therefore, Samah goes with her daughter to the international kindergarten, newly opened in Al-Madinah, where she is shocked by the school general atmosphere and the way children are dealt with. Even before a week is over, Samah is convinced that native English speakers with no teaching qualifications do not necessarily teach English as excellently as qualified English teachers – whose first language may not be English – are able to. Hence, she decides not to send her child to the international kindergarten and continues searching for an alternative till she finds Rowad. From the first moment she enters Rowad, Samah knows that this is her choice, but she investigates further about the way the teachers deal with the children. She is happy with what she sees. Even though in the beginning she is eager to find a good quality international school, a year later Samah stops thinking about taking her daughter out of Rowad. With her efforts at home and her careful choices of English Learning Apps, Samah is happy with her daughter's English progress.

Allah - God- the Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

“Wealth and children are the adornment of the life in this world. But the good righteous deeds that last, are better with your Lord for reward and better in respect of hope”
(Surrah 18:46)

Chapter Six: Exploring the Choices of Early Years

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the way a group of mothers from the same social network rationalise their decision to introduce their young children to English at pre-school. These mothers, as indicated before, are a minority in the Al-Madinah milieu. Therefore, it is essential for the present research to link the mothers' decision to their cultural capital by considering their social interaction within their social class.

At the very beginning of this research, my assumption was that mothers who put their children in pre-schools have a well-informed awareness - which is not reflected in the majority of KSA's population - of the importance of this stage for their children. This was influenced by Asualym's claim that the number of kindergartens in KSA is lower than in the neighbouring Gulf countries (Asualym, 2005) and by my own investigation regarding the availability of early years provision in Al Madinah. According to the Ministry of Education (2012), Al-Madinah has twenty-nine private kindergartens and twenty-two private primary schools for girls, while the state sector has seventeen kindergartens and 250 girls' primary schools. Both genders attend the same pre-schools, but it is important to note that boys attend separate primary schools, of which there are

264 state and 14 private schools. This gap between the number of kindergartens compared to primary schools, especially in state education, supports the assumption made at the beginning of this study that children who go to pre-school are a minority in Al-Madinah.

Mothers who decide to enrol their young children into pre-school are a sociocultural minority in the city of Al-Madinah. Hence, their decision is made through a cluster of social and cultural attributes, where they share similar values and views. For example all the mothers who were involved in this study have a higher education, and this level of education seems to have an impact on the way they rationalise their decision. Furthermore, they share an economic background which allows them to afford the fees of private education. For some mothers, the choice of kindergarten is greatly influenced by members of their social milieu, an issue which is explored later in this chapter. During interviews, mothers speak at length about the importance of EYL for their young children, which may be due to the fact that they have previously needed to justify their decision among their social milieu.

Even though the present research focuses on the mothers' voices, it does not ignore the views of professionals in the field of Early Years Learning (EYL). As can be anticipated, professionals support the early introduction of learning. Some teachers' attitudes towards mothers who send their children to pre-school is therefore perhaps surprising; they state that some mothers send their children to pre-schools so they can have some free time for themselves. If one takes into account the fact that it is common for Saudi households to have a maid who does the housework and helps with the children, then mothers appear to be highly motivated to take the decision to send their children to pre-schools, where they are introduced to early learning.

This chapter starts by discussing the perceived importance of EYL and the rationale for providing this stage of education. This rationale is explained through four main realms: the children's cognitive development, their social development, their personalities and independence, and their preparation for the next level of education.

6.2 Importance of Early Years Learning (EYL)

The increasing interest in providing high quality EYL programmes is becoming international (Asualym, 2005; Woodhead, 2006), although the speed of this increase varies from one country to another. Early years are crucial for children's development, and when mothers search for a good education for their children, they focus on two main areas: social development, and educational and cognitive development. These two areas are fundamental for EYL educators and experts when they look at the needs of young children today (Woodhead, 2006: 8). In this research, while exploring the way the mothers justify their decisions to introduce their children to English, it is essential to look at the features of EYL cognitively, socially and academically. As the interviewed mothers express other issues, such as children's independence and preparing them for the next level in education, the rationale for introducing children to EYL programmes is generally discussed through four main realms:

- Children's cognitive development;
- Children's social development;
- Children's personalities and independence; and
- Children's preparation for the next level of education.

The analysis in this part draws on the interviews held with mothers and with professionals. In this study, the latter consists of EYL teachers, English teachers in kindergartens and the head teachers of kindergartens. These interviews took the form of face-to-face interviews, online interviews and group interviews. The analysis also comprises the data from the interviews held during the first and third stages.

6.2.1 Children's cognitive development

In order to understand the rationale for introducing young children to English in this stage, it is worth examining the reasons for introducing them to EYL programmes generally. Considering that this educational stage is non-compulsory in KSA, the decision is generally seen to be a parental choice (Toojaralshy, 2004). As mentioned above, children who go to pre-schools in Al-Madinah are in the minority; therefore, the way in which mothers justify their reasons for enrolling their children in kindergarten is an essential point for this study.

6.2.1.1 Mothers' perspectives on children's cognitive development

Mothers in the present research elaborate quite sophisticated rationales for their decision to enrol their children in pre-school. Wijdan, a mother involved in the first stage of this study and a former EYL teacher at Rowad, states that:

The learning process is initiated at this stage, and if the starting point is correctly established, it will support the children throughout their learning journey; and vice versa, if the foundation is not good, children will suffer educationally in the long term.

(Wijdan, Mother)

When Wijdan talks about the importance of this stage, she draws on her experience as an EYL professional, and as a mother of a child in Rowad kindergarten. She claims that children are able to understand many more things than adults may assume that they are able to; the key is to find a good kindergarten where their needs can be met.

It is also important that as parents we choose a good kindergarten to put our children in, where children can find the attention and care needed alongside friendly teachers who are willing to get the most out of these vital years.

(Wijdan, Mother)

It appears that as a qualified EYL teacher, Wijdan can see the importance of an early introduction to learning. She highlights the importance of choosing a kindergarten where children will be introduced to early learning, as what matters most is not that children go to kindergarten but that they go to a good one where their needs are fulfilled. This opinion follows what Branett (1995) points out; that regardless of the number of years a child spends in pre-school, the quality of the kindergarten attended matters. Hence, when children have the opportunity to attend a good kindergarten, there is a high possibility that they will benefit from this early exposure to learning.

It is not only about going to a pre-school, as parents we have to make sure that we have chosen the best place to enrol our children in. It is not about putting them in any pre-school.

(Wijdan-Mother)

In terms of the importance of EYL for their children's cognitive development, both Saudi mothers and non-Saudi mothers draw on the same factors to justify their choices. For instance, Niveen, an Egyptian mother with children at Rowad (two at Rowad primary school and one in the kindergarten), justifies her reasons for introducing her children to early learning thus:

Early years are vital for learning; it is the time when children's cognitive development is improved... it is a foundation stage where children obtain the basics of knowledge and, once they have a solid base, that will help them in their future learning.

(Niveen- Mother)

Niveen also mentions the importance of the way in which children are introduced to learning at this stage:

Considering the nature of learning in this stage, children will learn letters and numbers through playing, and this will enhance their learning and widen their knowledge.

(Niveen- Mother)

It appears that there is a relationship between the mothers' level of education and their decision to introduce their children to EYL. Such a link has been mentioned by professionals in this field; for instance, a study carried out in England by Sammons et al. (2004) indicates a positive relationship between mothers' high educational qualifications and their children's cognitive skills at pre-primary level, in that the latter increases with the former.

6.2.1.1.1 Islam advocates early learning

One example in this study of the influence that the mothers' area of study has on how they justify their motives to introduce their children to EYL programmes is Wijdan, who has a qualification in EYL. Mozon, a Saudi non-working mother with a degree in Islamic Studies, also advocates EYL and expresses the importance of pre-primary from her personal experience with her older children.

Young children are very fresh and they are able to absorb the information they receive much easier than older ones. I can tell you from my personal experience with my older children that what children learn at the pre-school level has an impact on their attitude towards learning.

(Mozon- Mother)

She says that when children are introduced to knowledge early, that would probably help them to look at knowledge and learning as a life-long process. She also claims that:

For us as Muslims, seeking knowledge is not questionable, as it is explicit in Quran that it is part of a Muslim's obligations and duties; you know what Allah says in Quran:

Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endowed with understanding that receive admonition.

(Qura'an, Surah 39/9)

(Mozon-Mother)

The examples of Wijdan and Mozon illustrate the impact of the mothers' experience and background on how they weigh the importance of EYL for their children. In the present study, it appears that the mothers' qualifications had an impact on their decision to introduce their children to early learning, whatever their own area of qualification. However, the way they rationalised their decision and built up their arguments does seem to be influenced by their branch of education.

Discussion

Mothers in this research represent a social network which shares similar values and social attributes. This social network can be viewed as middle class in the society of Al-Madinah, and includes both Saudi and non Saudi mothers who share similar cultural capital in terms of being well educated women and belonging to families which can afford to privately educate their children.

With their cultural capital, mothers in this study can be placed in the first type of parents- skilled choosers- described by Ball et al. (1996), as their educational background and their level of education provide them with a certain amount of knowledge that helps them in being more confident when choosing the right pre-school for their children. Furthermore, as a minority, these mothers manage to conduct elaborate and sophisticated discussions in support of their decisions. Sammar's story shows the impact of mothers' own cultural capital in their strategies to choose the best for their children. Hence, when she discusses her rationale of choosing specific kindergarten, Sammar is confident in justifying her decision with insight into the advantages and disadvantages of what she chose.

Mothers in this research develop a social network that has shared attributes and values in regard to certain topics, for instance Wijdan's view that "the learning process is initiated at this stage" is not different from that of Niveen who says that "early years are vital for learning". This view on the importance of EYL coincides with what plenty of researchers believe about the importance of early learning. Starting with the educational and cognitive dimensions of enrolling children in kindergartens, mothers view this stage as a foundation for their children's development. In this stage, the learning path for children is established early on, and that is

likely to stimulate their long-term learning experience (Berlinski et al., 2008). Likewise, Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) refer to a Matthew effect in academic achievement whereby “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer mechanisms embedded in the social and cognitive contexts of schooling”. Moreover, awareness of the importance of EYL is not new; Plato (428-348BC) expresses the importance of this critical period thus:

And the first step ... is always what matters most, particularly when we are dealing with [the] young and tender. This is the time when they are taking shape and when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark. (Cited in Woodhead, 2006: 6)

Saudi mothers tend to elaborate upon more arguments in support of their decision and this can be linked to the latest move from Saudi policymakers to encourage the enrolment of young children in pre-schools. Also, being in their hometown where the majority of people do not send their children to this kind of education, they are likely to have discussed the importance of this stage in their social circles and hence, when asked about their reasons, they were ready to defend their decision.

Though mothers agree on the importance of this stage for their children, the way in which they justify their choices differs according to their profession. Again, Wijdan’s views are probably shaped by the fact that she is an EYL teacher herself and that was clear as she talked within the group of mothers I interviewed. Although she speaks from the perspective of a mother, she also talks as an EYL professional. Furthermore, she is perceived as a professional by the other mothers, even though she had resigned from her job at the time of the study. Therefore when she discusses the importance of EYL for children she emphasises the role of parents in choosing a high quality school for their children as well as the provided curriculum in the chosen kindergarten.

Niveen, who had a degree in accounting, put more emphasis on the way children benefit from this stage and how such early exposure to education is going to affect their long term learning acquisition. Niveen, whose children are likely to attend university in their home country, Egypt,

is affected by her social capital and draws on a social habitus from another context that has relevance in her justification. Meanwhile, Mozon, who holds a degree in Islamic studies, justifies her decisions by drawing on Islamic principles. Having a good knowledge about Islamic principles, Mozon succeeds in justifying her decision by drawing on religion; confident in her choice, she is able to support her views by referring to the Quran and the Prophet's words. Her opinion on the role of Islamic principles is likely to have been affected by her studies, and that is made clear when we later discuss the introduction of young children to English. She claims that, as Islam encourages early exposure to learning, it also encourages learning foreign languages. Thus, in all three cases, their qualifications and professional backgrounds influence their justifications.

Finally, mothers show awareness of the differences in the way of teaching between formal education and pre-primary level. This is sometimes due to their experiences with their older children or their own experience when they were young or through their reading, practice and observation. In actual practice, however, they vary from one another, In Danyah's case, her son was enrolled in Rowad during the second term of the academic year when he only had half of the year to be there before his transfer into Year 1. Despite her son having spent only a short period to in pre-school, Danyah strongly advocates the importance of this stage in her children's learning process without neglecting to explore the way of teaching in this stage. In terms of Danyah's situation as a non-working mother, she does not need to look for an alternative place for her child to be in before being old enough to go to the school. Thus putting him in a kindergarten for the last term before starting school was not out of necessity but because of an increasing awareness about the importance of this stage. Nevertheless, the fact that by putting her child into Rowad, she has joined a minority social network explains her strong attitude toward EYL, and where she stands in relation to her decision and her well defined reasons for introducing her child to early learning .

This section has discussed mothers' views of the importance of EYL for their children's cognitive development. It is argued that even though mothers who decide to put their children into pre-schools are a minority in Al-Madinah, these mothers believe in their children's right to be introduced to this type of education and they succeed in conducting elaborate academic-

sounding discussions in this matter. Moreover, considering the rich religious heritage in the Saudi society, mothers draw on Islamic principles to support their choice. The coming section explores the professionals' view on the importance of EYL for young learners' cognitive development.

6.2.1.2 Professionals' views on children's cognitive development

The professionals' view of the importance of EYL does not differ greatly from the mothers', which is understandable as their work focuses on making this educational stage as advantageous as possible for their young pupils. Hence, the analysis of this section not only looks at the way professionals see the importance of this stage to children's cognitive development, but also at how teachers regard enrolment in EYL and the way mothers make their decisions.

Huda, who has been teaching young children for four years, says:

In kindergarten you can plant in children whatever you want, in their behaviour, learning skills and religious principles.

(Huda-EYL teacher)

Having dealt with children in kindergarten for some years, Huda is quite confident when she talks about children and how they can easily learn things at this early stage. Furthermore, her usage of the verb 'plant' gives the feeling that she strongly believes in her pupils' abilities, caring about their growth and development, and what they need to be fed mentally and physically to be successful in their future. Moreover, as plants need a certain care to grow healthy, children need special attention and care to develop their learning and to go further in their journey. Huda's view is not very different from those of her colleagues who emphasise the importance of these vital years in children's learning. This is not surprising since, as EYL teachers, they have studied the importance of this stage for young children.

A similar view is expressed by Shorooq, a newly graduated English assistant teacher, who points out that:

Pre-school stage becomes a necessity and not a luxury anymore. It prepares children for formal education and introduces them to the basics in learning and numeracy, which they will depend on in their future education. Now in the new curricula for Year 1, children are introduced to words, and they cannot really do it without being in kindergarten; they need to be introduced to letters and know them before going to Year 1.

(Shorooq- EFL teacher)

Shorooq states that this stage is a necessity and children have the right to be introduced to it before starting formal schooling. She also believes that if a few years ago parents tended to put their children into kindergarten to provide them with extra education, this is no longer the case and kindergarten has become a fundamental phase for children to be enrolled in. Despite all the on-going updates and reforms in the Saudi curricula, children do not need to go through pre-primary education before they start formal education. Shorooq says that she does not subscribe to this view, not only because she has just started her teaching career in this stage, but also because her opinion is influenced by the fact that her nephew, who did not go to pre-school, struggled a great deal in Year 1.

It was my sisters' mistake she did not enrol him in pre-school. By the age of six he immediately started in Year 1 and it was difficult for him especially with the new curriculum.

(Shorooq- EFL teacher)

A similar opinion is provided by Rosa, an EYL teacher at Rowad, who reflects on her own experience as a mother, saying:

I thank God that I put Maia in this kindergarten even before I started teaching here, you know that the teaching standards here at Rowad especially in pre-primary are very good. Now she is in Year 1 in a developed public primary school and I am not struggling with her. She knows most of the words she is introduced to. If she had not

been at kindergarten before, she would be lost, the new curricula is hard if the child has not got the basics of learning... the kind of knowledge they normally acquire at kindergarten.

(Rosa- EYL teacher)

Both Shorooq and Rosa express the importance of EYL, especially considering the new curricula. Rosa's view is affected by her position as an EYL teacher; she refers to the challenges in the curriculum for Year 1: children need to work out words when they have not yet learnt the letters. Children who have not been to kindergarten where they are introduced to letters, she says, will struggle. Her own daughter who did attend kindergarten not only knew letters but some words by the time she began Year 1. Thus the way professionals look at the impact of EYL on children's cognitive development seems to be linked to on-going changes in the curriculum in KSA. In addition, there has also been a change in governmental attitudes towards encouraging EYL programmes in KSA, which can be seen as a factor that might affect teachers' views on this issue. Such interest is linked to the continuing enhancement of EYL programmes in the Gulf States, which is also affected by the global interest in early learning.

When professionals discuss the importance of EYL, their focus is not on rationalising the importance of this stage for young learners; rather they emphasise the children's ability to adjust to the new environment.

Pre-school is very important for young children; it is the first cornerstone on which they build. In this stage children will be apart from their families for a couple of hours every day, and to have a child of the age of three or four who is able to spend some time away from his family, it is great.

(Ahlam- EYL teacher)

As a qualified EYL teacher, Ahlam views the importance of enrolling children in the pre-primary stage as unquestionable, and she describes the children's learning process in terms of her daily interaction with them:

In this stage, they absorb knowledge much more than you may think; even if they do not respond immediately, they will keep it in their minds. Suddenly you will be surprised at the amount of knowledge they have.

(Ahlam- EYL teacher)

When talking about the time children spend in the pre-primary stage, Ahlam claims that spending only one year in this stage is not really sufficient to help them to make the most of it:

When children are three or four years old and are enrolled in kindergarten, they will probably get the most out of this stage. But if they only come in the last year where the following year they are going to be in Year 1, they will miss lots of early experiences.

(Ahlam- EYL teacher)

Educational professionals share the same values of EYL as mothers, which is understandable considering their area of work. The reason to look at the professionals' views is not only to support the mothers' views about the importance of EYL but also to investigate how mothers' choices are perceived by professionals.

6.2.1.2.1 Mothers send their children to pre-schools so they have time for themselves

Another theme is how professionals viewed the justifications mothers gave for their decisions to enrol their children in the pre-primary level.

Not all parents are aware of the importance of EYL; some mothers just want to get rid of their children for the day, so they put them in a safe place and have free time for themselves. Others want to get the most out of these vital years for their children.

(Sanaa- EYL teacher)

Therefore Sanaa, who clearly supports EYL, claims that some mothers send their children to pre-school not because they support their early learning but primarily for the mothers' own peace of mind. According to her, the concern to provide children with an education that corresponds with their needs in early childhood (as discussed above) is only a secondary one. Even though the idea that mothers enrol their children in kindergarten to have some peace of mind and personal ease is not surprising, Sara, a non-working mother who was involved in Ahmed's study (2004:4), admits that explicitly:

The thing [EYL] is not about teaching children or the acquisition of new skills or even mingling with other children - all these are nonsense. It depends on my personal comfort and I want to say straightforwardly that all mothers, working and non-working, put their children in kindergartens because they are eager to have a special time for themselves.

Having an EYL teacher who frankly claims that some mothers put their children in kindergarten for this reason indicates that teachers reach this conclusion through their interaction with the mothers throughout the academic year. Sanaa tends to have informal conversations with mothers when they drop off or pick up their children, and it seems that her daily work with children and her occasional conversations with mothers have given her an insight into the reasons behind the children being in the classroom. She adds that she is confident of her opinion and that she can tell by observing the children's follow-up at home if a mother cares about her child's learning process, or if she only wants to have a peaceful time for herself. Sanaa mentions that some mothers come to the kindergarten frequently and ask about their children's progress while others only appear at the end of the year school activity day and blame the teachers if they are not happy with their children's development. This prompts Sanaa to ask: "Where were they the whole year?".

Some professionals criticise the way mothers cooperate with the kindergarten in terms of taking advantage of this stage. The question raised above by Sanaa shows that in some cases, mothers only appear at the end of the school year and then express their dissatisfaction with their

children's progress. The point Sanaa makes is that these mothers do not seem to show interest by following their children throughout the year, thus not demonstrating that they consider this stage important for their children's cognitive development.

In contrast to Sanaa's surprise and disappointment with the way some mothers demonstrate the importance they give, or rather do not give, to EYL, Linda, an Austrian teacher who was teaching in an international kindergarten, has another viewpoint:

Exposing young children to EYL in kindergarten is influenced by the media, which tries to convince parents that children of that age need to be enrolled at this stage.

(Linda- teacher from an international Kindergarten)

This opinion only holds for Linda if mothers agree that they cannot fulfill their part in educating their children at home, or if the mother is working. She points out that her opinion stems from Islamic principles, mentioning the following:

(...)despite the fact that "Islam says that children should stay with their mothers until they are seven".

(Linda- teacher from an international kindergarten)

What Linda states conflicts with a common and on-going aphorism among Muslims, "Seek the knowledge from the cradle to the grave", which, as Halstead (2004) explains, is widely used to encourage learners to seek knowledge, though it is not a saying by the Prophet:

Linda's view on EYL is likely to have been affected by her experience of putting her children into a kindergarten ten years ago, where she was not satisfied with the programme and knowledge provided, saying "It was not good enough for me as a mother". However, at that stage she wanted her children to learn Arabic as she was not able to teach them at home. Therefore, what she states about the variations in mothers' demands shows that she is aware that what may not be good for her could be good for another mother.

Discussion

As specialists in EYL, it is not surprising that teachers advocate early learning, and claim that such kind of education is no longer a luxury. As Shorooq says, and children do have the right to be enrolled in pre-school. Teachers discuss more about the children themselves as an active factor in the learning process, and how they see these children once they arrive from their homes. Having said that, professionals also reflect on their own experiences not only as teachers but as members of Al-Madinah society. For instance, Shorooq strongly advocates children's right to be in pre-school; she gives an example from her own family where she saw her nephew struggling in Year 1 because he had not been to pre-school. According to Shorooq, her sister made a mistake in not sending him to pre-school. Shorooq, who is teacher at pre-primary stage, completely ignores the fathers' role and this reinforces the suggestion that has already been made, that pre-primary education is seen as the mothers' responsibility - more details are given in 7.7.3 .

As seen above, both Shorooq and Rosa discuss the importance of EYL in relation to the new curriculum introduced in Year 1, and their role as teachers in pre-primary influences their linking of children's readiness to cope with the new curriculum to their experiences in pre-school.

An interesting point appears as some teachers express very forcefully their view that mothers who put their children in kindergarten do not necessarily do so because they are aware about the importance of this stage, but do so because they can have some free time for themselves. This judgment about mothers' motivations in enrolling their children in pre-school appears to be based on mother-teacher interactions throughout the academic year and derived from how the teachers see children's education being followed up at home with regard to their study and homework. Moreover, the role of religion appears once again when Linda argues that children need to be introduced to EYL in their homes while Mozon as a mother sent her child to pre-school in response to the Islamic principle that posits seeking knowledge as religiously important. Linda argues that EYL needs to be initiated at home and a child is to go to school by the age of seven. In the case of Linda, there might have been a language barrier, and a misinterpretation regarding the age of learning, as it is clear in the Prophet's saying that children

need to start to learn to pray by the age of seven - “order your children to start praying by the age of seven” (Sunan Abudawud, Hadith).

Professionals confidently discuss the importance of EYL for children’s cognitive development; this is important for the present study as it indicates that once mothers made their choices and did what Ball and Vincent (1998:242) calls “maximise their market information” in their process to choose the right pre-school for their children, they considered the kindergarten staff who would be dealing with their children on a daily basis.

In sum, children are enrolled in kindergartens such as Rowad from the age of three till the age of six when they are ready to go on to formal education. Mothers emphasise the importance of this stage for their children as a foundation on which their future learning will rely. Moreover, EYL professionals are confident about the importance of this stage for young learners and they mention the children’s ability to learn and adjust to a new environment. In the following section, the social dimension of pre-primary schooling is discussed.

6.2.2 Children’s social development

In kindergarten, children meet up with peers and adults, and their social circle becomes wider than it used to be. Discussed below is how mothers and professionals see the importance of kindergartens for children with regard to children’s social development.

6.2.2.1 Mothers’ perspectives on children’s social development

In addition to the cognitive and educational benefits of EYL, there are also social dimensions to early years’ learning. These social dimensions have their own sizeable impact, convincing mothers to enrol their children in kindergartens. Through social networking among friends and family members, mothers start to gather information about the available choices of schools (Goldring & Philips, 2008:214). In the present study, the social capital of mothers plays a major role in the decisions they make and the way they justify their decisions. In some cases the limited social activity in the children’s life encourages parents to send them to pre-schools. This ‘social limitation’ view is shared by Mayadah, a non Saudi mother and also by Raniaa, a Saudi

mother. Mayadah, a Syrian mother, explains that her children do not mingle with others of their age group as they do not have many acquaintances in Al-Madinah. Therefore, she was highly motivated to put her daughter in kindergarten so that the child would have the opportunity to interact with other children.

So by being in kindergarten they have the chance to mingle with other children and interact with them, which will help in developing their social abilities.

(Mayadah- Mother)

Similarly, Rania, a Saudi mother, states that she initially put her son in kindergarten because he is her only child, and there are not many children in her family he can play with. Moreover, at this age he needs to be with children of his own age to play and communicate with.

He is not used to having children to play with at home, even among my family there are no children his age. So I started to put him in kindergarten when since he was three years old so he can mingle with other children.

(Rania- Mother)

These two mothers mention the social development factors of kindergarten, and how these influenced their decision to enrol their children. Mayadah also expresses the social dimension of this stage, saying that she looked at the importance of kindergarten for her children's social needs, at the same time discussing other reasons mentioned in the previous section. Moreover, she finds that in kindergarten, teachers do listen to the children, and encourage them to speak and take part in lessons and activities. This situation corresponds to the opinion of Linda (the English teacher from Austria) in that many mothers believe they fail to fulfill their part in educating their children at home and, therefore, they send them to pre-school. Nevertheless, Mayadah follows an academic belief that the process of building confidence in children is a collective task between home and kindergarten, so that children need to have the necessary care and attention in both environments to develop their self-confidence (Roberts, 2006). Mayadh states:

I agree about the importance of this stage for the children's learning skills; however, I put my daughter here because we do not know many people here. We also do not go out that much and I want her to mingle with others.

(Mayadh- Mother)

Rania, on the other hand, explicitly points out that social benefit was the first motivation for her to send her child into kindergarten, as well as her situation as a single mother with an only child, who travels to visit his father during holidays. Her highlighting of the social benefits of kindergarten in that particular situation seems to be sensible. However, her decision to put her son in another kindergarten, described by herself and another mother as strict, before Rowad, implicitly indicates that, to some extent, there were educational reasons that drove her to put her son in pre-primary education. Rania explains that he was at a well-known kindergarten for two years and when he started to complain about the homework he needed to do every day, she started to look for a kindergarten where the learning was more child-centred. Therefore, she took him to Rowad. Rania was in one of the two group interviews which took place during the first stage where other mothers highlighted the importance of EYL for their children's cognitive development and also advocated early exposure to English. Rania, however, spoke of cognitive development as far less important than social development in her decision to enrol her child at Rowad.

For me when I put my son here [Rowad] I was looking for the social benefits more than the educational. I wanted him to mingle with other children.

(Rania- Mother)

In other cases, there are children who regularly meet up with others of their ages in their social class but their mothers put them in Rowad not only for their cognitive development but also for their social development. For instance, Sara, who came to Rowad with her sister in law, says:

I think EYL helps him to gain better social concepts and understandings. He will also be able to deal with others, play and

communicate with his peers. He needs to be in a safe and comfortable place other than his home.
(Sara- Mother).

Razan, Sara's sister-in law, also agrees about the role that kindergarten plays in enhancing children's social behaviour and skills. Even though their children already meet regularly, these mothers chose to enrol them in the same kindergarten, Rowad.

It is good for them to mingle with other children outside their family, and it is also good for them to be in a group of children of a similar age and to be in a new milieu away from home.
(Razan- Mother)

Although most of the mothers talk about the positive influence that the kindergarten has on their children's social abilities, one mother, Niveen, also mentioned certain drawbacks, specifically that children can pick up unsuitable words and phrases when mingling with their peers. They are not introduced to such expressions at home, and their parents probably do not want them to learn them:

They start to learn from their peers certain behaviours and words which I normally do not want them to know. You know the use of certain words. Before they went to school, I used to control that more.
(Niveen-mother)

Nevertheless, mothers generally agree that, besides the learning and educational benefits their children will obtain by being in kindergarten, they will also gain from being with children of a similar age which encourages healthy communication with peers, and with adults around them. Similarly, kindergarten is an alternative place for young children where they come to understand that when they speak, the adults around them will listen and, as a result, their confidence will increase (Roberts, 2006).

6.2.2.1.1 Having a housemaid does not stop mothers from sending their children to kindergarten

The widespread existence of housemaids in the Saudi community would seem to diminish the need to send children to pre-schools; nonetheless some mothers believe that being in kindergarten is more beneficial for their children than staying at home with the housemaid, as this affords the children the opportunity to learn through interaction with their peers and teachers on a daily basis. For instance, Samah, an Arabic teacher in a public school, as a working mother would have needed to look for a safe place for her child to be while she is at work, but that is not her only motivation, as she points out:

I have a very good housemaid, who my children really love and enjoy being with. I leave my son with her when I go to work, but for my daughter I thought it would be better for her to be in kindergarten, so she meets up with friends and starts to learn and get used to the school environment. If I go to work and leave her at home, she will spend the day playing or watching TV, and she would not learn plenty of useful things, which is a waste of these vital years.

(Samah- Mother)

The existence of maids can be linked to the low enrolment in kindergarten for working mothers as they do not have to look for an alternative safe environment for their children. The implication of this situation appears again with regard to the status of English at home, as many of the housemaids communicate in English.

Discussion

Mothers see their pre-school children as benefitting not only cognitively but socially as well and express the importance of this stage for their children's learning through their daily interaction with their peers and their teachers. Some children's lack of social interaction with other children of their age drive their mothers to enrol them into Rowad; some other children are at Rowad even though they are part of a socially active group outside this kindergarten. It was clear from the beginning of this research that for women in this group, all well-educated, being a working

mother or not does not play a significant role in their decision to enrol their children in Rowad. The fourth story - Samah's - elucidates clearly a pattern of a middle class working mother who is not in a situation where she has to look for an alternative safe place for her children while she works. The reason is that as many middle class families in KSA, Samah has a housemaid who is very good and can be trusted with her children. However, Samah decides to put her child at Rowad at the age of 5 because she wants her to be introduced to early learning, the area the child would miss if she stays at home. By being in Rowad, she would spend two academic years at pre-primary before moving on to formal education. Samah's decision is highly influenced by her education and especially by being a primary teacher. Thus, rather than there being one factor, several factors contribute to her decision:

...parental choice cannot be adequately conceptualised in isolation from localised issues of history, geography, understandings of the psychological impact of social class, and the influences of different access of social power and material resources (Ready, 1996:581).

What Ready suggests is linked to mothers' practice and the way they justify their decision as a result of those factors. Some mothers highlight the importance of EYL for their children's social development, being encouraged to enrol their children in pre-schools as safe places for them to mingle with other children of their own age, something which they might miss if they stayed at home. Others have made the same decision even though their children interact with peers in their social circle; these mothers believe that being in pre-school has an even greater impact in terms of enhancing their children's social skills. Rania, on the other hand, emphasises social benefit as her main motivation for enrolling her child in Rowad and as discussed above, the importance of cognitive development is less important in her decision, since her son had been in another kindergarten for two years where he probably had already been introduced to learning.

As a minority in Al-Madinah society, mothers who send their children to kindergarten are aware of the questions their decisions might raise in their social milieu; hence, when they are asked about their motivations in enrolling their children at Rowad, they easily develop logical

discussions in support of their decisions. This might indicate that mothers have had to justify their decisions in their sociocultural milieu.

6.2.2.2 Professionals' views on children's social development

As Griebel and Niesel (2002) point out, mothers look at their children's progress before and after their enrollment in kindergarten, while teachers look at their pupils' progress before and after they leave their homes. Therefore, mothers express the importance of having a safe, alternative place for their children, because part of their parental role, they feel, is to provide a secure place for them. On the other hand, the teachers know their kindergarten and the facilities they provide; therefore they look at the children's adjustment to their new surroundings from a different angle.

Teachers' views on the benefits of EYL for social development do not differ greatly from the mothers', but the picture is given from a different angle. Ahlam, who has been an EYL teacher for six years, says:

When [the children] first started, they needed some time to settle down and get used to their teachers, peers and the whole new environment, but as the days pass, their confidence starts to build up.
(Ahlam- EYL teacher)

Ahlam then moves on to explain the teacher's role in helping children to adjust to the new environment:

We as teachers try to make the children to feel happy and secure, we listen to them and encourage them to talk to us; for some of them it is a bit hard to come to us but gradually they do.
(Ahlam- EYL teacher)

During the first stage of the research, when the second term of the academic year started, and newcomers were starting to arrive at Rowad, I had the chance one day to see Ahlam during the

free-play period. The assistant class teacher was observing, and playing with, older children - those who had been there in the first term - while Ahlam was trying to encourage the newer ones to take part in the activities and games with their classmates, which some of them did after some hesitation. Ahlam tried to convince one little girl to join a group of children who were playing but the little girl was firmly reluctant; then Ahlam asked her if she would rather play another game and the little girl pointed to a nearby bicycle. There was a boy playing with it but, when he saw the little girl wanted it, he gave it to her. Ahlam told the girl to thank him and they both gave him a clap. This incident helped me to understand the importance of being in kindergarten from the teachers' perspective. The teachers do provide a safe place for children to be in, and they are qualified to teach the children; otherwise, they would not be there. For the teachers, therefore, the concept of looking for a safe place is not an issue as they already provide a suitable and safe environment for their young learners. What they do count on is help for the children to adjust in the new environment and the support needed for this to happen. This is their mission, which is not easy in the beginning of a new academic year or a new semester, as Sanaa says in the interview held with her during the first stage of the research.

It is obviously not unusual for children to be unsettled at the beginning of a school term and, at that time, the teachers' role becomes very important. They create a positive relationship with the children, who then form a good image of the new environment where they feel that they are emotionally and socially supported (Ladd et al., 1999). This type of relationship which teachers manage to build with their pupils is likely to affect the children's general attitude towards the kindergarten, and towards learning in general. As an illustration, Randah, the English language supervisor at Rowad, brings up the fact that, in the beginning, children are slightly frightened, being in a new environment where they cannot see the people they are used to seeing at home. Besides, they find themselves in a situation where they need to communicate with new adults around them, and with their peers as well (Coplan and Arbeau, 2008). This situation, as Randah explains, gradually changes as the children start to get used to their surroundings and to their teachers, and start to form a relationship with the kindergarten and the people there. In addition to their duty to help their pupils settle down in the new environment, teachers consider the individual differences among children and deal with them according to their needs. When the

children develop a positive attitude towards the kindergarten, it is likely to have an impact on the children's confidence and their self-esteem.

When they start some of the children are very quiet and hardly communicate with others, but once they have the time to settle in, they start to come out of their shells and interact with their peers and their teachers. Gradually they build their confidence which affects their general attitude towards being here.

(Randah- EFL supervisor and teacher)

Shorooq, an EFL teacher, says that children take their time to adjust to the kindergarten, and that the length of time varies from child to child. However, once they are settled, they benefit a great deal; their self-esteem is boosted and they become more independent. In addition, they start to be responsible for their actions. Having the chance to learn through playing and making decisions about which activity they would like to be involved in, children explore their skills and abilities (Bunker, 1991).

Professionals' views on the impact of EYL on children's social development is similar to the mothers'. However, while professionals explicitly indicate that enrolling children at pre-school is a moral imperative, mothers focus on rationalising how their decision will benefit or has benefited their children socially and educationally, the criteria they have in their mind as they look for the right choice of kindergarten and the teachers' qualifications and their way of dealing with young learners.

6.2.2.2.1 Introducing children to society's values

By being in kindergarten, children experience a different environment from that of their home with the familiar cultural values of their families. However, in the kindergarten, children learn in an environment which is adapted to the values of the society. Although these values are in general similar to those that children will have been introduced to in the home, the EYL teacher's role in introducing them becomes crucial in case some values may be unfamiliar to

individual children,. Heba, an EYL teacher, points out that they introduce the children to certain behavioural and religious rules which they need to follow.

For me as a class teacher it is very important to make sure that I teach them Islamic manners and embody them in their behaviour.
(Heba- EYL teacher)

Heba also says that the teaching of these rules and manners is applied naturally during daily activities:

In the first week we normally say with them *Bismellallah* [In The name of God] before we start our day, and along with them we say the morning grace, but in a few weeks they learnt to do that independently.
(Heba- EYL teacher)

Particularly during the first stage of fieldwork, I observe several occasions where children apply Islamic principles. For instance, when the children are in the dining-room, teachers help them to use their napkins and remind them to eat with their right hands, and then all the children together say grace before they start eating. Another situation arises during the first lesson in the morning where the children, along with the teacher, say the morning grace. This is praised by a visiting teacher who has come to observe the teaching process at Rowad.

I was impressed by the way children follow the Islamic values and apply it in their behaviour, it is my first visit here but as I teacher I can see that my colleagues here at Rowad did a very good job in teaching their pupils their graces and social behaviour. I have not heard them telling the children to say the morning grace, the children started once they were all seated on the carpet.
(A visiting teacher)

A noticeable practice is the way teachers in Rowad tend to implement Islamic values and social behaviour in a natural way without telling the children directly. Such an approach encourages the children to learn through their daily interactions with their peers and their teachers (Howes et al., 2008).

Being specialists in EYL, professionals' supportive view of early learning is a given. Thus when they discuss the impact of pre-primary education on children, the importance of being in pre-schools does not enter their discussion; instead, they focus on the children's daily interactions and their practices in the classroom and outside. Being aware that their pupils need time to get used to the new environment, teachers give them the time and the support that they need for coming out of their shells and to start to enjoy the new experience, which, alongside early learning, includes being introduced to the society's values and Islamic manners.

To sum up, professionals discussed the impact of EYL on children's social development in relation to their daily interactions with them. Consequently, they were aware of individual differences among children and the time each one might need to adjust to the new environment and become comfortable in interacting with others around them.

6.2.3 Children's personality and independence

As has been discussed, when children first come to kindergarten, they need time to settle down in the new environment. When they find that their teachers and other adults around them take care of them, they start to come out of their shells. Children benefit socially through their interactions with their peers and their teachers in the kindergarten, and such social development can be relevant to the children's learning skills (McCelland et al., 2000). Moreover, when children find a safe environment where they can speak freely and know that when they speak they will be listened to, this will affect their self-esteem and encourage them to be more involved in the classroom, and later in the wider community (Barbarin & Wasik, 2009: 154-155).

6.2.3.1 Mothers' perspectives on children's personality and independence

Mothers express the importance for their children of the educational and social developments experienced by them in kindergarten. This development, according to those mothers who participated in this study, has an influence on the children's personalities and their independence. On several occasions mothers say that certain features of their children's general character convinced them to enrol their children in kindergarten. One of the common reasons is shyness, and kindergartens appear to be the ideal place for mothers to help their children overcome that. Coplan (2008:377) agrees that pre-primary pupils are often shy, as is reflected in some mothers' views: "For younger children, shyness manifests itself primarily as nervousness and fear when encountering new people and new situations".

Hanen, a Saudi mother, gives a clear picture of her daughter, who used to be very shy and did not talk to others even when her mother was with her.

There are some improvements in her personality, she is better in dealing with her classmates and children of her age. I cannot say she is not shy any more, she is still shy.

(Hanen- Mother)

This situation is also linked to the impact of the social network of the family, and the mothers' decision to enrol their children in kindergarten, as discussed previously in Rania and Mayadah's situations. However, mothers do not expect to find an immediate change in their children's behaviour. For instance, Danyah, a Saudi non-working mother, describes her son thus:

His personality has changed slightly; he used to be introverted and scared, but now he is better, he is braver and even his speech has developed.

(Danyah-Mother)

The progress children make in their cognitive and social skills can be linked to the development in their personalities and feelings of independence. Furthermore, in the present research it

appears that pre-primary schooling is following a policy of inclusion with regard to children with difficulties in mainstream schools. When I was in Rowad's teachers' room, chatting informally with Ahlam, one of the EYL teachers, a girl with Down's syndrome came looking for her class teacher. Ahlam excused herself and took the girl to the teacher, and then said:

We have to be very careful with her, she has the right to be taught and be with normal children. However, her class teachers need to watch her carefully to make sure that she does not hurt other children.

(Ahlam- EYL teacher)

The notion of disabled children's misbehaviour was previously mentioned by Ahlam; teachers in Rowad see it as their responsibility to help such children to integrate with society, and for the other children to respect them. Ahlam's attitude in showing her eagerness to help the children according to their needs is similar to what Einarsdottir (2006: 172) notes about teachers' different approaches in enhancing their pupils' learning process; while some teachers are more concerned about scaffolding children's learning, others emphasise the importance of social competence. From the mothers' perspective regarding Rowad, it appears that teachers work to prepare children for the formal school environment without neglecting their social needs.

Another case of a child with disability was presented by Abeer, whose son has speech difficulties. She admits that at home she and her older children tend to spoil her youngest son due to his disability and, even when she herself wants to be strict with him, his brothers step in and overprotect him. As a result, he depends on his mother and siblings for everything:

Especially, with Abody, because of his disability I am really tolerant with him... I don't like this, it is not healthy for him, he needs to be treated like a normal child... Therefore, I decided to look for a kindergarten ... when he started to come to [Rowad] he became a bit more independent and the teachers here told me to leave him in the classroom and they will take care of him. I was really concerned ...

he gets upset when others pick up on his speaking.
(Abeer- Mother)

Mothers claim that being in pre-school helps their children to build up their confidence and self-esteem, and the results seem to coincide with their view on children's cognitive and social development.

6.2.3.2 Professionals' perspectives on children's personality and independence

Like the mothers, teachers too see early learning as playing an important a role in building children's personalities. Randah, the English supervisor and English teacher at Rowad, says that, at this stage, children transfer from their family atmosphere to another atmosphere in which they start to depend on themselves. She also points out the importance of their growing awareness of other people who care about them outside their own families.

When they come to kindergarten, children in the beginning are afraid of the change, then with time and the teachers' care and support, they start to like the place and show their own personalities, they start to share their ideas and choose what they want to play and the activity they like to take part in. To reach this point, teachers need to be patient and give the children security.

(Randah- EFL supervisor and teacher)

A similar view is shared by Areej, an EFL teacher at Rowad, who states that pre-schools help in building children's confidence and personalities as they begin to find themselves in a context without their parents, where they can boost their moral and social skills and, at the same time, are encouraged to think 'outside the box' and be creative.

In order for pupils to enjoy coming to the kindergarten, teachers need to provide a supportive environment where children can feel that they are secure and cared for (Edwards, 2011). From the EYL professionals' perspective, two main aspects of the children's personalities and independence emerge from the effect of being in kindergarten. Firstly, from the moment the children are first dropped off at Rowad, they have to learn to walk to the entrance and go to their

classes. This probably enhances their independence, as does the fact that they will spend seven hours there with their teachers and peers.

The fear children sometimes have in the beginning of the year starts to disappear as the time passes, and they start to become more confident in moving around in the kindergarten

(Rosa, EYL teacher)

Through several observations at Rowad_during the first stage of the research, I see that young children are arriving happily at the kindergarten in the morning and heading to their classes; they move confidently, greet their teachers and occasionally the head teacher, and then they stay in their class chatting with their classmates till the teacher tells them the lesson has begun. When they need to go to the English language classroom or ICT lab, they put away their materials and line up to go and their teacher watches them till they enter the class they are heading to. Hamsa, the head teacher, comments:

By this time of the year, when the children are used to the kindergarten, they can freely move from one place to another. In the beginning of the year they need their teachers to take them to the English language class, now they can go by themselves and sometimes if they want something, they come to me and ask, or just come and greet me. It is really good to see how their confidence grows during the year.

(Hamsa- Head Teacher)

The second point is that they are mingling with children of their own age and making friends. Building relationships with their peers and teachers, children feel more secure and, as a consequence, they will be more motivated to learn and explore (Ladd et al, 1999). In addition, children choose the activities they want to be involved in, and sometimes play in groups or teams during their games in the playgrounds, or in the classrooms in the activities period. I go to observe one class whose topic is ‘water’, and the classroom is divided into five corners, each with an activity (the classrooms are described in chapter 3). Mrs Azhar, Rowad’s general

director, admits that Rowad might not be the perfect school but that it is the best available as they believe in children and their right to have good quality education and facilities.

Discussion

Apart from the cognitive and social benefits children obtain in pre-schools, mothers claim their children's personality is positively affected. The impact is gradual but significant enough to be mentioned, and this seems to be regardless of the length of time a child spends at pre-school. For instance Danyah, whose son was at Rowad for one term before moving to Year 1, notices that her son has started to be bolder. Hanen has a similar view, although her daughter spent two years in pre-schools before going to Year 1. When I first meet Hanen in January 2011, she has just moved to Al-Madinah from Jeddah for a year, and all her nieces and nephews of a similar age to her daughter are still in Jeddah. Therefore, her daughter does not know many children in Al-Madinah and Hanen thinks that a supportive EYL environment would help make her daughter more outgoing. Hanen points out that although still somewhat shy, her daughter has improved a little since enrolling at Rowad, Hanen's story shows the the impact of the social pressure in her decision making and how she wants to provide her daughter with the kind of education that children in her social circle are introduced to, despite the fact that she is physically in another place.

Another major finding in this section is the importance teachers gave to the integration of children with special needs in mainstream schools. Both private schools and pre-schools provide facilities and train their teachers to comply with the inclusion policy imposed by the decision makers. According to the UNESCO report , in KSA "there are now support systems that help the inclusion of special needs students within mainstream schools" (UNESCO, 2008:30). Although this theme was not part of the research focus, having a mother of a child with speech difficulties involved in the study, such elements become important as they enrich they way mothers justify their choices, and allows the research to encompass views of mothers who have particular circumstances that are likely to affect their decisions.

Abeer notes that her desire to improve her child's personality encouraged her to send him to kindergarten, but that she was aware that, due to his disability, he might act differently, although

she was assured that her son would be cared for in the same way as other children. Abeer's case again reflects the impact of her social capital on her decision to place her child at Rowad. Abeer could choose the group of children her child would interact with while in school. She has had an experience in a special pre-school where she was advised to put him in Rowad; she has seen the impact of EYL on her older children and has the economic capital that allows her to enrol her child in a private pre-school. Moreover, she is a well educated mother who values education.

Teachers at Rowad support the inclusion of children with disabilities in their school. For example, when Ahlam is interrupted during her break by a girl with Down Syndrome who is looking for her teacher, Ahlam goes with her and on her return, talks about the moral imperative for children with disabilities to be taught with other children. Again to go back to their social capital, once they decide to put their children in a private mainstream pre-school, mothers of children with special needs select the sociocultural milieu in which their children are going to interact throughout their learning journey.

Both mothers and professionals consider pre-schools important for children's personalities. They share the view that children's personalities are affected by being in a courteous educational environment, in that they develop confidence and independence. Professionals do not question the children's right to be in a pre-school, but reflect on the children's experience in the school and their progress throughout the academic year. They consider children's independent navigation in the kindergarten as an indication of their development. Through spending hours with their young pupils, teachers can see their social and academic improvement.

6.2.4 Children's preparation for the next level of education

Around the world, children transfer from one social environment to another when they move from their home to the kindergarten, where they go through another process of starting to learn to be pupils in the new environment (Lam & Pollard, 2006). By the same token, mothers and teachers in this study whose children or students go through these stages, consider pre-school a transition phase, where children prepare socially, physically and educationally to go to formal school. Both mothers and professionals see this stage as a foundation stage to prepare children

for formal education. For instance, when Samah decides to enrol her daughter in kindergarten, she is determined to provide her with the level of education that suited her age.

Children cannot start by going to formal education straight away, they need to go through the schooling environment gradually. They start with pre-schools where they receive the basics of learning in a way that takes their age into account.

(Samah- Mother)

During the first week of the new academic year, Samah tends to go every morning with her daughter:

In the first week, and a few days in the second week as I well, I came in the morning with her, dropped her off and then stayed for a while. She did not see me, but I was there to see how she adjusts and the way teachers deal with the children... For me, it is very important that my daughter has got the attention she needs.

(Samah- Mother)

This step of sending a child to a kindergarten is not only new for the child, it is also new for the mothers who start to rethink their decision with the experience of watching their children mingling with other adults who provide them with care and attention (McClelland,1995), possibly questioning this decision. In Samah's case, her experience is of sending her first "spoiled" daughter - as she described her several times - to kindergarten where she would have individual care and attention. Therefore, along with a good curriculum, Samah looks at the teachers' way of dealing with children.

6.2. 4.1 Mothers' perspectives on children's preparation for the next level of education

Given their desire to provide their young children with basic knowledge and social skills, mothers look at kindergarten as a bridge their children need to cross to adjust to a new environment. On several occasions, mothers express the idea that EYL is a preparation or

transition phase they want their children to go through before going into formal education. This aspect, though not initially part of the research, emerges strongly from the interviews. Hence, adopting qualitative enquiry was very helpful in terms of being flexible in gathering data and welcoming any new themes or ideas to include in the present study, provided they were linked to it.

Abeer, the mother who has a child with a speaking disability, points out that, besides the effect pre-schools have in helping children to adjust to a school environment, it also affects their attitude when they start Year 1.

My second son went to pre-school since he was three, so his transition to Year 1 was easy and smooth. His father did not have any problems with him at all, even on the first day.

(Abeer- Mother)

Then Abeer indicates some gender differences that coincide with children transferring from pre-school to formal school:

As you know the boys situation is different from the girls, when the girls move to primary school they still have female teachers. Whereas with the boys it is a different story; once they move to primary school all their teachers are male.

(Abeer- Mother)

Although there seems to be a general consensus among the mothers in this research about the importance of EYL programmes in preparing young children for formal education, their opinions vary about the age at which children are ready to go to kindergarten.

6.2.4.1.1 The best age to enrol children in pre-school

While some mothers enrol their children in pre-primary schools for two or three years, others enrol them for a year or even a semester before sending them to formal school. In their study, Sammons et al. (2004:704) suggest that children who start pre-school when they are young develop more cognitive skills than children who start later. In this regard, Bayan says that she

regrets not sending her elder child to kindergarten when she was four and waiting till she was five:

When I see the amount of knowledge they get, and how happy they feel, I regret not sending Lana earlier. Although in the beginning I was worried that she was too young to go with her sister and cousin, I was wrong, she will get the most from this stage.

(Bayan- Mother)

Bayan and Walaa, whose children are enjoying being in Rowad after their unsuccessful experience in another kindergarten, say that they are adjusting well in the new environment. Furthermore, Bayan recommends Rowad to her friend Sammar, encouraging her to move her child there as well because she likes the teachers' way of dealing with the children. Sammar's daughter's is a slightly different story in that she was enrolled in a private kindergarten when she was three, where she was happy and was introduced to early learning and numeracy. However, in that kindergarten the English programme did not meet Sammar's demands. Therefore, she decided to put her child in an international kindergarten when she was five. The English programme there was excellent, according to Sammar, but the teachers' way of dealing with the children was not what she wanted for her daughter:

When Bayan told me about Rowad and how her daughters were happy there, I planned to come and see the kindergarten myself. I liked it and Nody liked it as well, so in the second semester I registered her and asked the admission office to put her with Bayan's daughter.

(Sammar-Mother)

Even though Bayan and Sammar enrol their children in kindergarten at different ages, both of them emphasise the importance of this stage in preparing them for formal education. Sammar considers that the age at which a child should be enrolled in kindergarten depends on the child. Some children show an interest in reading and writing; therefore, it is good for them to be in an environment where their interests are boosted. Moreover, Bayan feels that her younger daughter

has greater opportunity to benefit from this stage than her elder daughter, who only had one year in kindergarten. Her sister, Walaa, also agrees on the importance of this stage in preparing children for the next level of education:

You cannot put them immediately into Year 1; they need to do things step-by-step so they gradually get used to the learning process. Here [kindergarten] they are introduced to reading and writing in a simple way. They do maths through playing. They need to be prepared for formal schooling and, in order to understand that, they need to be in pre-primary education first.

(Walaa- Mother)

Another view is provided by Danyah, a Saudi mother who enrolls her child in Rowad in the second term:

He is now six and next semester he will be in Year 1. This is the first time for him to be in kindergarten and my main target was to prepare him for school. I wanted him to understand the concept of learning, classrooms and obeying the rules. He needs to obtain several social and learning skills before entering Year 1, which will be more rigid than kindergarten.

(Danyah- Mother)

Even though Danyah's son spends less time in kindergarten compared to his peers who started at the beginning of the academic year, he is still seen as able to obtain necessary skills. Danyah as a non-working mother is probably not in a situation which forces her to look for the appropriate kindergarten earlier. However, she does not want her son to start formal education without having a notion of what a formal learning environment is, and that is provided by the kindergarten to some extent.

6.2.4.2 Professionals' perspectives on children's preparation for the next level of education

Class teachers in kindergartens are qualified EYL teachers who prepare their pupils for the next level of education and make sure that they obtain the necessary academic skills (Howes et al., 2008). However, the importance of this stage as a preparation phase is not explicitly expressed by the professional participants in the present research. This seems to be because it is obvious for EYL staff that parents put their children in kindergarten so that they will be prepared to move on to formal education. However, the professionals' interests, as reflected in their interviews, are more focused on the children themselves and the process of settling down in the kindergarten. They also emphasise the children's ability to absorb knowledge at this stage. Furthermore, the teachers' perspective is that pre-primary education is a child's right and they must be given that right:

It is not fair to send children to schools without sending them to kindergartens first... at this stage children can absorb knowledge, and they can keep it till they need to show it.

(Ahlam, EYL teacher)

EFL teachers highlight the importance of pre-primary schooling as well. For instance, Areej, an EFL teacher, refers to the fact that children are encouraged to gain the necessary skills, cultural values and customs of their society through the educational programme and activities they are introduced to. Moreover, the teachers' behaviour and their way of dealing with the children are very important as children listen to their teachers and take the knowledge gained in kindergarten into the wider society.

Being in kindergarten, children can become accustomed to the teaching environment, they start to learn to obey the rules and listen to their teachers. They are also introduced to their community's values.

(Areej- EFL teacher)

As mentioned above, the teachers do not talk directly about their role in preparing the children for the next level of education since for educators, this is a given. However, through their activities with the children, helping them adjust to the learning environment, they fulfil their role. According to Fabian and Dunlop (2007:10), when teachers receive the information they need about their pupils, it helps them to stimulate the children's ability to learn and engage in the classroom environment.

Discussion

In addition to the social benefits of being in kindergarten, mothers consider it a natural process towards making a smooth transition to Year 1 of formal schooling. Even though the MOE data shows that the enrollment in pre-primary in Al-Madinah is considerably low compared to the number of children in Year 1, for these mothers having their children in pre-primary education is unquestionable. Moreover, they argue that the choice they have made is the right one as it allows the children their right to be educated at an early stage. Thus alongside their own social capital, they align themselves with the decision makers who impose the importance of EYL, confidently pointing out that being in pre-school is the normal choice a parent can take before Year 1. . The four stories in the beginning of Part Two show that as mothers justify their strategies to choose the best for their children, they never doubt their children's right to be introduced to this type of education. Even though Rania's main argument is pivoted around the social benefit of this stage, it can be argued that mothers see this as a moral imperative, because they believe that other mothers have a moral duty, to take the same decision – that is, to introduce their children also to EYL - for the benefit of their children.

The view of EYL among mothers is fostered by the experiences of this type of education undergone either by themselves or by their older children, and through their social interactions among family members and friends. In some cases mothers go with a relative or a friend to visit pre-schools before choosing the they consider right for their child. Sometimes social networks have a very direct impact on their decision, seen in the way Bayan who looks for a kindergarten along with her sister Walaa, and convinces her friend Sammar to enrol her child in Rowad. In the latter case, Sammar and Bayan share several social habitus as they went to the same private primary and intermediate school, then met up again while they both doing English Literature.

Discussion about school choice in their socio-cultural milieu is a common practice among parents across the globe.

It is almost impossible to find transcript where parents do not refer to drawing upon the impressions and experiences of friends, neighbours and relatives in their choice-making. (Ball and Vincent, 1998:235)

In general, mothers consider this stage a transition phase which will help their children to adjust to the new environment of formal education. This follows Fabian and Dunlop's view (2006:1), that regardless of the age at which children are enrolled in pre-schools, which varies from country to country, they benefit greatly from their experience of this preparatory stage. Mothers who choose to enrol their children into Rowad advocate EYL, and such advocacy is highly affected by the mothers' social and cultural capital. Their choice of Rowad over other private pre-schools in Al-Madinah is also influenced by the interaction these mothers have in their social milieu.

6.3 Mothers' justification in choosing Rowad kindergarten

Against the backdrop of parental rationales regarding early years' education in general, this section explores the mothers' justification for choosing Rowad kindergarten among the seventeen state, and twenty-nine private, kindergartens in Al-Madinah. Overall, the decision is approached in three main ways: some mothers go to visit several kindergartens before they chose Rowad; while others have experiences with other kindergartens and not being satisfied with them, move their children to Rowad; others rely on the reputation that Rowad kindergarten has gained in Al-Madinah.

In order to choose the best school for their children, ten mothers out of the eighteen interviewed visited several private kindergartens before they made their decision. Furthermore, five of the children had been in another kindergarten for a whole year or a full semester while others had

attended for a few days or weeks until their mothers decided that those kindergartens did not satisfy their expectations. Therefore, their decision is not only based on the kindergarten's reputation, but also on the fact that they had visited other kindergartens and compared the different facilities each provided. The impact of the kindergarten's buildings and facilities seems to be an essential part of the decision-making process (see 6.3.2).

The analysis and the discussion below draw on interviews held with all individuals, on group interviews, and on online and follow-up sessions. Comments were also made on the blog and in my personal observations. In this section, the analysis first explains the reputation of Rowad kindergarten; then it focuses on the kindergarten's physical facilities, followed by the EYL curriculum provided in the school, and finally the kindergarten staff and their way of dealing with young learners.

6.3.1 Mothers' informed choice

Although Rowad seems to enjoy a good reputation in Al-Madinah, before they choose to enrol their children there, several of the mothers go to visit many other kindergartens. Mothers come across information about Rowad in two ways, either through friends and relatives or because they already have an older child studying at Rowad. Examples which illustrate these two ways are discussed in the following sections.

6.3.1.1 The impact of friends and relatives on mothers' choices

The impact of friends, neighbours and other parents on the choice of kindergarten is indicated in Bossetti's study (2004: 395) as one of the three top sources of information parents take into account when they seek information about schools. The second is 'talking with the school staff' and the third is 'visiting the school' (ibid).

Six mothers involved in the present study point out that their decision was affected by their friends or relatives. The case of Sammar is a good example of this. Sammar is not satisfied with the international kindergarten her daughters used to attend, and discusses this several times with

her friend Bayan, looking for the best available kindergarten in which to enrol her children. After Bayan and her sister enrol their daughters in Rowad, they start to recommend the kindergarten to friends, including Sammar who states this as the main reason for choosing Rowad for her daughter.

Bayan convinced me to put my daughter at Rowad, she is always happy with her daughters being there and never stops saying that it is the best. And because I was not happy with the kindergarten my daughter was in, I followed her advice

(Sammar- Mother)

Sammar continues:

I asked the head teacher to put my daughter in the same class with Bayan's; if they manage to become friends, it will be brilliant.

(Sammar- Mother)

This case illustrates the role that sociocultural factors and social networks and milieu play in the process of choosing a kindergarten. Sammar and Bayan studied in the same private school and were also together during their undergraduate study. They still keep in touch and meet occasionally. This dimension of shared sociocultural values arises several times as they talk about their desire to see their daughters as friends; Sammar goes as far as to ask the head teacher to put her daughter in Bayan's daughter's class at Rowad.

Even though social factors in Sammar's case have a noticeable impact on her decision to enrol her daughter in Rowad, some mothers choose Rowad for its reputation and facilities despite being encouraged by their family and friends to choose another kindergarten:

All my friends who put their children here [at Rowad] are very happy with the kindergarten and later their daughters moved to the school. They praised it to me.

(Samah- Mother)

In the third stage, during an individual face-to-face interview, Samah points out that some of her relatives tried to convince her to enrol her daughter in a different pre-school as they thought it was better than Rowad. However, as she was advised by some of her friends to enrol her daughter in Rowad, she preferred to stick to her choice.

I preferred Rowad, it has a good reputation and I observed the teachers' way of dealing with the children myself.

(Samah-Mother)

During the first stage, Samah is in one of the group interviews and, at that time, the conversation focuses more on the way mothers choose schools, with Samah relating her experience of visiting an international kindergarten, and her disappointment at the school buildings and the way children were dealt with. In the third stage, Samah reflects more on her daughter's experience and, instead of referring to her personal journey in looking for the best for her daughter, she refers to how some members of her social group, including relatives and friends, questioned her decision to choose Rowad and expressed their opinions. Therefore, in Samah's case, her decision was made due to her preference based on her personal observations, as she put her child in the international kindergarten during the first week of the academic year, later taking her out when she was not satisfied with the facilities or the way teachers dealt with young learners. As a working mother, she found it difficult to find the time to have frequent direct communication with her daughter's teacher, but she wanted her daughter to be in the best possible place. When I meet Samah in the first stage, she is teaching in a village outside Al-Madinah, and even though the distance to her work is much more than when we met in the third stage, she says in her third stage interview:

I was lucky at that time, I used to teach in a village and the head teacher was tolerant and flexible if I came a bit late especially in the first week, where I used to go with my daughter when she was in the international kindergarten.

(Samah-Mother)

When Samah moved to teach in a primary school in the city of Al-Madinah, she lost the chance to see her daughter's teacher in the mornings. Therefore, although Samah's work had not influenced her choice of kindergarten, it did affect her personal communications with the teachers.

Despite putting their daughters in Rowad, during the first stage both Sammar - Story one - and Samah – Story four - say that they are keeping their eyes open for a decent international school to put their children in, and that so far, Rowad is their best choice. By the third stage, Sammar expresses her dissatisfaction with EFL outcomes at Rowad, and claims that she is still waiting for a remarkable international school in which to enrol her child. On the other hand, Samah states that she is satisfied with the educational outcomes and she has no plans to take her daughter out of Rowad as the child has settled in very well and has started to make friendships.

It seems that the difference in opinion between Sammar and Samah may have something to do with the mothers' majors in universities, which might affect their expectations. Samah, who is a qualified Arabic teacher, is happy with her child's progress even in English, while Sammar, a qualified EFL teacher, is happy with her child's progress except in English. More details about the mothers' views on the EFL programme in Rowad are presented in Chapter Seven.

6.3.1.2 Having a child already enrolled in Rowad

When some of the mothers choose Rowad, they already have older children enrolled there, either in the kindergarten or the school attached to it. This means that they are aware of the quality of the education and the facilities provided. Wafaa is one of these mothers, and her comment serves as an illustration of their views regarding Rowad:

My elder daughter suffered a lot; she has been to several schools, and every two years or so I used to take her from one school to another, until I enrolled her in Rowad. The suffering ended, and now she has been here for three years, and in two years she will have graduated from secondary school.

(Wafaa-Mother)

Wafaa explains that she did not search again with her younger child:

So when the time came for my youngest child to be in kindergarten, I already had a good understanding about the kindergartens here, so immediately I put her in Rowad.

(Wafaa- Mother)

Having a child in the same kindergarten or in the school attached to it seems to save the mothers' time in looking for a kindergarten, as this mother shows:

Why go and look for a kindergarten? My daughter is already in the primary school there and my nieces are there at a higher level. We are all happy with Rowad, so with my son I did not give it a thought – I put him here immediately.

(Sara- Mother)

Sara decided to enrol her son at Rowad as she was satisfied with the education her daughter was receiving. Her sister-in-law also enrolled her child at Rowad:

Most of the children in our family come to Rowad as the school has a good reputation and they provide high quality education.

(Razan- Mother)

To reiterate, although the mother's job seems to have little impact on the journey they took to choose the best for their children, it does have an influence on the way communications between home and school take place, as in Samah's case. Moreover, the fact that several mothers in this study are not working mothers shows that when they make their decision about which kindergarten to enrol their children in, they are obviously not forced to do so because of their work, but due to the benefits for their children, as explained in Section 5.2. According to Bossetti (2004), when parents exercise their right to choose the kindergarten they want their children to be educated in, they hold the responsibility for the quality of education their children

receive. Therefore, it is important to investigate Rowad's reputation from a perspective other than that of the mothers'.

6.3.1.3 Professionals' views on Rowad's reputation

The chance to find out what the professionals thought of Rowad's reputation comes when the head teacher, Mrs Hamsa, invites me to an organised activity in the kindergarten. The kindergarten's EYL supervisor, from the EYL department in the Al-Madinah Directorate of Education, has asked Rowad kindergarten to organise this activity in which she wants the teachers to adopt a new approach in teaching young children. In addition, EYL teachers from both public and private kindergartens in Al-Madinah are invited to come and observe the lessons along with some of their head teachers. The visiting teachers and head teachers are divided into two groups and attend two lessons in the morning; then, they meet in the school hall and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of applying the new approaches. The discussion lasts for forty-five minutes before the group is again divided into two, and two more activities are observed. In order to understand more about the reputation which Rowad has gained, I mention to a member of staff in Rowad that their kindergarten must be very good to be chosen to hold this activity, and I suggest that the EYL supervisor might like their kindergarten. Her reply is:

You know, she has several kindergartens to go to and assess the quality of teaching and the learning environment, apart from us. She inspected the teaching materials and the extra-curricular activities which go beyond the Ministry's curricula. To be honest we feel that she is trying to pick on something wrong here but she cannot find anything. She never praises our kindergarten but she likes it even if she does not admit it, and that's why she asks our teachers to adopt a new methodology and asks us to invite other EYL teachers from both state and private kindergartens.

(Rowad's registrar)

This event shows that Rowad kindergarten has managed to gain a good reputation even among their competitors. Hind, the head teacher of another private kindergarten whom I met in Rowad,

admits that even though her kindergarten was established years before Rowad and their fees are quite similar, in a few years Rowad, with its facilities and the teachers' proficiency, had managed to reach a higher position and to help other kindergartens understand how they reached that position.

I heard a lot about Rowad and I think in pre-primary level they are at the top of the ladder. I wish we could provide what they have for our pupils, but you know we are charity-based schools and we do not have sufficient budget to afford such a building. But I was enthusiastic to come and bring two teachers from my kindergarten so we can get some ideas and implement them.

(Hind- Head Teacher)

Thus, as discussed above, Rowad has obtained a good reputation among a group of mothers and also among professionals in EYL. Nevertheless, some mothers do not rely solely on this reputation, and they visit several kindergartens before deciding to enrol their children in Rowad.

6.3.1.4 Visiting several pre-schools to choose the best

As explained in the previous sections, some mothers hear about Rowad before they enrol their children in that kindergarten, but this is not true of all the mothers in the study. For instance, Nidaa, a Saudi non-working mother, explains that in the first week of the school year, she visited several kindergartens with her son:

You know, sometimes when we entered a kindergarten I felt him squeezing my hand tightly and then he refused to enter. I liked one kindergarten and although its building was great, he did not like it. Finally, I came to Rowad; honestly it is better when you see it than hearing about it. Even my son, when he went in he was happy and turned to me and said: Mum, you can go now.

(Nidaa- Mother)

There are often specific reasons why mothers eventually choose Rowad for their children. It may not always be their first choice as it is far from their home, for example. This is the case with Walaa and her sister Bayan, whose daughters were initially enrolled in a private kindergarten near their homes.

When we decided to enrol our daughters in pre-school, my sister and I went to see the kindergartens near to our houses, and we thought one [among these] was good.

(Walaa- Mother)

Bayan enrolled her younger daughter, who was four, in that kindergarten for a week with her slightly older sister and cousin. However, it was a struggle with regard to getting the girls ready for kindergarten in the morning as they would give excuses to avoid going. This attitude led Walaa and her sister to react quickly and find another kindergarten in order to fulfill the objective for taking this step in the first place, which was to get them used to the school atmosphere and prepare them for the next level of education. It seems that that the first kindergarten was not a positive experience for them, nor was there the expected positive attitude on the part of the children towards learning and schooling in general; indeed, what happened was exactly the opposite.

So we started again to look for an alternative pre-school and this time we did not restrict ourselves to our area... We heard about Rowad and we went to see it.

(Walaa- Mother)

Thus Walaa and her sister Bayan visited several kindergartens to look for the best one for their daughters. When they heard about Rowad, despite it being far from their homes, they went to see the school and, as the girls seemed to like the school, they went ahead with enrolment. As Bayan explains, the girls' attitude towards going to school has now changed:

Now they like to go to the kindergarten, they have become more motivated to go and mingle with other children. They are enjoying their time and they have learnt plenty of useful things;

they would miss it if they stayed at home till the time came to go to school again.

(Bayan-Mother)

As Walaa and Bayan themselves used to go to private schools when they were children, when they were not satisfied with the first kindergarten their children were in, they went to look for the best available option, and Rowad met their requirements. In addition, Walaa and Bayan are non-working mothers and because there is no conflict with work duties, they are able to take the decision to put their children in a kindergarten that is some distance from their homes. In contrast, a blog participant claims that, even though she believed that a kindergarten's facilities and its reputation are vital in order to achieve the most out of EYL, and despite being a teacher, the most important thing for her is to have a kindergarten near to the school where she works. This is because she cannot manage to take her child to a kindergarten far away and then travel to her work which is near to where she lives.

The mothers' decision to visit several kindergartens in order to choose the best for their children seems to be common practice for both Saudi and non-Saudi mothers. Zahraa explains that her elder daughter was in another private high school which had a pre-school attached to it. However, she did not want to put her two younger children in that kindergarten because she thought that Rowad was much better.

I wanted them to be here at Rowad, my eldest daughter's school is good at the higher levels, and the attached pre-school level is ok. If I had not come across Rowad, I might have put them there but now as I have seen the differences, I have decided to enrol them here.

(Zahraa- Mother)

However, such a decision is not only taken by mothers and, in Zahraa's case, it took her several months to convince her husband to enrol their younger daughters in Rowad while the eldest remained in her school. Zahraa's expectations of private education may be affected by the fact that she was educated in a private French school in Syria and that, when she first came to Saudi, she lived in Jeddah where there are several notable private schools.

With their visits to several kindergartens, mothers have the chance to compare the buildings and other facilities of the kindergartens they visit. From the comments made, the physical facilities which Rowad provides to its pupils seems indeed to have a huge impact on many of the mothers' decision regarding which kindergarten to choose.

Discussion

As discussed earlier, and as confirmed by enrolment figures, choosing a kindergarten is not common practice in Al Madinah. According to the MOE official website, in January 2012 the number of private kindergartens in Al-Madinah was twenty-nine while there were seventeen state kindergartens. In contrast, there were twenty-two private girls' primary schools and fourteen private boys' schools, with 134 state girls' schools and 137 state boys' schools. Although the enrolment rate in pre-schools in Al-Madinah is low, it is important to indicate that recently there has been a noticeable increase, with the MOE official website showing that seven kindergartens opened in Al-Madinah between 2010 and 2011, four of them private. Such growth is linked to the emphasis given to the importance of EYL by educational policy-makers in KSA. Moreover, such slight yet stable increases in the spread of pre-schools in Al-Madinah can indicate the growing awareness about the importance of this stage.

Mothers' choice of a kindergarten is affected by their social network and interactions. It is during the interactions which take place within these networks that they discuss their preferences, views, experiences, and expectations. Through such interactions with other mothers, they start to have a clear picture about the facilities provided in different kindergartens. If mothers are not satisfied with the outcome, they can immediately take their children out and move them to another school, as Walaa and Bayan did, or they might discuss their problem with

their friends or relatives before deciding to move their children from one pre-school to another, as Sammar did.

Middle-class parents, like all parents, can only do their best, deploy their capitals as strategically as they are able ... some families are able to use economic, social, cultural and emotional capitals at the moments of crises or key moments of transition to ensure access to privileged trajectories or to avert calamity (Ball, 2003, 265 ,269)

6.3.2 The kindergarten's physical facilities

Although the role school buildings and facilities play in parental choice was not intended to be a focus of the research, it consistently appears as an essential reason why mothers favour Rowad over other kindergartens. Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2008:56) indicate that there is a relationship between learners' attitudes and achievement, and a school's buildings and the facilities provided. Berlinski and Galiani (2007) suggest that the facilities offered by pre-schools have positive implications for children's attendance.

Therefore, with the steadily increasing number of private kindergartens in Al-Madinah, their productivity and their facilities start to play a crucial role in attracting parents, and create an enriching environment where children are encouraged to explore and develop. In order to achieve high educational productivity, Rowad kindergarten was initially established with buildings that would provide a positive learning environment. The general director of Rowad Schools, Mrs Azhar, said:

From the beginning we aimed to be the best. Our buildings are designed and equipped to meet the needs of each group. As you see in the pre-primary area, all the buildings are on one level and they have plenty of playground areas. If we want to have a good

outcome, we should create the environment in which students will be creative and stimulated to learn.

(Mrs Azhar- General Director, Rowad)

On another occasion, when Mrs Azhar takes me on a tour of the school, including the intermediate and secondary laboratories and the English classes, she is straightforward in stating that they believe that Rowad is the best in Al-Madinah, but they want to go beyond that; they want to provide high quality education which leaves parents with no regrets about the money they spend on their children's education. This is what Hoxby (2003) mentions about measuring the productivity of schools with the remarkable results of students for each dollar spent. Moreover, Rowad's vision seems to sit well with the mothers, who visit several kindergartens in order to choose the best for their children. The mother of a six- year-old boy, who was in kindergarten for the first time, gives a clear picture of the impact of the physical facilities:

This kindergarten is special in several dimensions; the building, the classroom layout, the playing area, the natural light and the teachers. Everything here is different, and it is better.

(Danyah- Mother)

Samah's daughter provides a good example of this as she used to complain about the heat in the classroom in another kindergarten she had attended, because the air-conditioning system had broken down and her learning process was distracted by that. This also affected her general attitude toward kindergartens and she used to hate going to school. This situation changed when her mother decided to take her out of that kindergarten and to put her in Rowad:

She started to enjoy coming to the kindergarten and did not want to be late, so if her father was still sleeping, she would insist on waking him up, and she told him he would be in trouble if she was late. She did not want to miss anything in the kindergarten.

(Samah-Mother)

6.3.2.1 Classroom size

Rowad's classrooms have large windows that allow light to come in, and they also have a good air-conditioning system (important in a country such as KSA), aspects which cumulatively affect the children's learning. Within the context of this study, some mothers are clear about their demands and expectations. For instance, Zahraa, Samah, Niveen and Walaa explicitly emphasise the importance of cleanliness in Rowad. This attitude can be related to what Petronio (1996) mentions about how a school building can influence the parents' decision, with an example of how dirty water in a fountain could eliminate the choice of a specific school. In the same way, Samah explains how the poor layout of the classroom in the international kindergarten, along with the lack of order during mealtimes that she noticed in the first week, prevented her from enrolling her daughter in that kindergarten.

She was there for less than a week, there were two air conditioners in the classroom and neither of them worked probably. The children were feeling hot and it was really difficult for them to concentrate on what the teacher was telling them. Also, there was not enough natural light because the windows were too small.

(Samah- Mother)

Then she compares it to Rowad:

It is different in here [Rowad], the air conditioners are working well and they are turned on before the children come in the morning. My daughter does not complain about the hot weather in the classroom any more.

(Samah- Mother)

Walaa has a similar view as regards the Rowad classrooms:

The classrooms here are much wider, and when the children settle down completely and comfortably in the classroom, it helps them to concentrate on learning and paying attention to their teachers.

(Walaa- Mother)

Walaa's opinion is influenced by the experience her daughter and two nieces had in their previous kindergarten, compared to their more recent experience at Rowad. With a smaller number of children and two EYL teachers in each class at Rowad, the mothers appear to be more confident about their children's welfare. According to Bayan, in the first kindergarten, her younger daughter left the classroom and lost her way in the building, but the teacher had not noticed that the child was missing and it was her sister and cousin who made the teacher aware of this.. When Bayan came to collect the girls, she heard the story and went to the head teacher. Bayan's daughter had been found safe in the basement, playing, as that was where the children in that kindergarten spent their break and playtime. With no outside play area, they had to go down a spiral staircase, which I found difficult to manage when the head teacher of that kindergarten showed me around. Even though Bayan's daughter was not in real danger, the two sisters decided to put their children in a place where they could receive the required attention and, when the little girls moved to Rowad, their attitudes changed; they started to enjoy going to the kindergarten in the morning and they were willing to learn. They now enjoy learning and always come home with new information and knowledge, Bayan says, also mentioning another important facility:

Each classroom in Rowad has an en-suite toilet which means that children do not need to leave the classroom.

(Bayan- Mother)

Along with the reputation Rowad has gained with its building and physical facilities, that has informed the choice of a group of mothers, the kindergarten's curricula have also played an important role in driving mothers' choices.

6.3.3 The kindergarten's curricula

Rowad kindergarten is located in Al-Madinah and, not being in a crowded or popular area, it is easy to get to by using the main roads in the city. As mentioned previously, it is situated at a distance from some of the children's homes but, as Walaa, one of the mothers, explains, the concern about the distance was outweighed by the appeal of the school's facilities and the education it provides. Zahraa, the mother who convinced her husband to enrol their younger children in Rowad, says that this kindergarten provides a healthy atmosphere for young children, and since the school attended by her older daughters was not as good at the pre-primary level as Rowad, she saw no point in having all their children in one school. Zahraa's opinions are formed from her experiences of several private schools and kindergartens with her older children but, for her, the advantages of Rowad lie in its buildings and the teachers' way of dealing with the children.

Along with the building and the playing area that give priority to the fact that young children use them, the kindergarten provides a variety of subjects and activities.

(Zahraa- Mother)

In Rowad, the EYL programme follows the Ministry of Education's (MOE) guidelines for pre-schools: children are introduced to the Quran, Arabic literacy and numeracy. As a private kindergarten, it provides extra activities such as EFL and ICT. In their search for the best place for their children, the curricula played a vital role for some mothers. For instance, Arwa focuses primarily on the curricula and the extra-curricular activities offered by the kindergarten:

There are so many activities the children are involved in throughout the day that they are kept busy during the day. The variety of activities helps them to enjoy themselves and to benefit at the same time.

(Arwa- Mother)

Arwa's son, who is bilingual, enjoys his time in the kindergarten; I meet him once during my visits, and he is playing with a toy car which he then gives to another boy and goes to join other children who are playing a group game. This point also links to the importance of having safe spaces for children to play in while they are in the kindergarten, which was also discussed above.

Another view is expressed by Walaa, whose daughter and two nieces went to a kindergarten where they were not happy, and then moved to Rowad. She clarifies that in addition to the kindergarten's physical facilities, Rowad gives equal importance to the teaching methods and to the physical features with this bridge-building between the children and the school makes the children willing to attend kindergarten.

In both kindergartens they have the same curriculum to follow, but here [Rowad] it is more pupil-centred learning. The children here do not feel that they are in a school, they learn in a fun way and that will have a long term impact.

(Walaa-Mother)

All kindergartens, being under the supervision of the MOE, have to adopt the EYL curriculum it issues. According to Tojaralshay (2004), the programme centres on spontaneous learning and children are encouraged to innovate and create. In Rowad the classrooms are organised to support this kind of learning, as mentioned before, with the classrooms divided into corners, each having its educational purposes. In the first kindergarten Walaa's daughter and nieces went to, the classrooms were organised in a U-shape and children had their desks and chairs to sit at. Other classrooms were arranged as Corner Classrooms in order to fulfill the MOE requirement to provide children with plenty of activities to stimulate their learning. This way of organising the classrooms indicates the approaches each school adopts in teaching children. Although most private kindergartens implement English in their EYL programme, Rowad's English programme enjoys a good reputation in Al-Madinah. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven. The following section discusses the role which EYL teachers and other Rowad staff in general play in convincing mothers to choose Rowad over other pre-schools.

6.3.3.1 Learning through playing

As children who are enrolled in kindergarten are under the age of six, the teaching methods applied in their learning process are designed to be appropriate for their age. Several mothers discuss the importance of learning through playing at this stage, such as Danyah:

I want him to start learning through playing first before going to a real schooling scheme. I want him to understand the concept of learning, being in a classroom, he needs to experience this before going to Year 1.

(Danyah- Mother)

Danyah also notes some of the improvements she has seen in her child since he started at kindergarten, even though he only has one term to be introduced to learning before being enrolled in formal education:

His personality has changed, he used to be introverted and scared but now he is better, he is braver and even his speech has developed.

(Danyah- Mother)

Danyah wants her son to start learning at a stage where children learn through play. However, it seems that the fact that she is a non-working mother meant that she was not in a hurry to look for a kindergarten for her child before.

From another perspective, in the case of Walaa and her sister Bayan who are both non-working mothers, what was considered were the benefits of pre-primary education in terms of teaching approach and methods which reflect the needs of young children and focus on learning through playing. When interviewed, Walaa's daughter had been in pre-school for one year before going into year one with one of her cousins, while another cousin was in pre-school for two years before moving to year one. Walaa states:

Children need to understand the concept of schooling and learning before starting formal education... they learn through playing and this is what suits this age.

(Walaa- Mother)

Bayan mentions the impact the way children are introduced to knowledge has on their attitude towards learning:

They are introduced to learning and numeracy in a motivated environment, which affects them and makes them eager to learn more... The way my daughters are introduced to numeracy in this stage is really nice, it's all through playing... This way of teaching helps to create a positive attitude toward the kindergarten.

(Bayan- Mother)

Walaa's and Bayan's daughters had spent one week in another kindergarten before going to Rowad, but their experience was not a positive one; therefore, their mothers decided to look for another kindergarten. This issue is covered in section 5.3.

These quotes illustrate how mothers want their children to obtain learning skills, but they do not reduce achievement at this stage to mean academic performance. This matches the increasing attention being paid everywhere to students' achievement and learning beyond tests scores and exams (Petegem et al., 2007).

6.3.4 The kindergarten's staff

Apart from the above-mentioned elements that mothers express as reasons for choosing Rowad over other kindergartens, one of the main reasons is the kindergarten's staff, specifically the teachers. Samah makes the following comment in a group interview in the first stage:

Mrs Hamsa, the head teacher, is so nice, the children are not afraid of her and they respect her; she has adopted the open-door policy and when any child wants to see her, s/he can pop in.

(Samah-Mother)

Other mothers who are in the same group agree with this statement, which is made during the first week of my fieldwork. Although the staff-children relationship was not initially an aspect on which this research intended to focus, it has become an important theme in explaining the mothers' views of the teachers at Rowad, and the role they play in encouraging mothers to enrol their children there, along with the other reasons presented above.

Mrs Hamsa explained that she usually leaves her door open so the children feel free to come when they want to, unless she has an urgent meeting. Mayadh, a mother, highlights the teachers' patience in dealing with the young children especially during the first few days, when many of them are upset about being away from their mothers, and cry.

Teachers here are very kind and they know how to deal with the children despite their noisiness and quarrelling. They know how to make the children follow their instructions without shouting. I cannot do what the teachers here do with my own children. They are well-qualified to deal with young children and that is very important.

(Mayadah- Mother)

Abeer agrees with Mayadh, also expressing her satisfaction with the way the teachers dealt with her child's speech impediment.

The teachers were very sensible in regard to my son who needs special attention due to his speech disability, the class teachers took him from the first day, introduced him to the class and got him used to the atmosphere, he felt secure with them, and I do not have to be

around him all the time. The teachers will make sure that he will not harm other children and the others will treat him courteously.

(Abeer- Mother)

Samah also agrees on the importance of the teachers' role in her preference of Rowad, stating that it was important for her daughter to have the necessary attention and care. She illustrates this with the following story:

When I saw the teachers' way of dealing with the children, I was happy with my decision. One day when I dropped off my daughter I stayed and went for a walk in the kindergarten's grounds and, in the open play area there was a class with their two class teachers. A girl's shoelaces had come untied so one of the teachers came to her and sat her on a chair beside her and helped her to tie it.

(Samah- Mother)

Several mothers mention the importance of the curricula provided at Rowad in their choice. One mother makes the following comment regarding her son:

The way of teaching here is more joyful than in the kindergarten where he was for two years.

(Rania- Mother)

Some kindergarten head teachers I visit are critical of the regulation of employing only Saudi teachers in schools; mothers, on the other hand, look at such regulations from a different angle. For example, Samah sees the staff's nationality as important in relation to their ability to understand the children's needs. Indeed, the presence of Saudi teachers at Rowad to deal with the children convinced her to enrol her daughter:

At least the teachers here are Saudis; they know us and they can easily understand the children's needs. I have seen their way of

dealing with the children... In the International Kindergarten, everyone was busy, and when one child needed to go to the toilet, no one showed him so he wet himself. Here, the toilets are en-suite and the teachers do take care of each child.

(Samah-Mother)

Only Samah and Walaa mention the teachers' nationalities but most mothers praise the way in which the teachers deal with the children and how they help to settle them in the kindergarten environment. Moreover, when Hanen takes her daughter out of Rowad, she indicates that she recognises the teachers' efforts with her daughter, who has started to come out of her shell because of this.

As I told you before she is very shy, but her teachers give her the needed attention so she is gradually improving.

(Hanen- Mother)

Having teachers with such high qualifications in dealing with the children is not an easy task for the kindergarten, as teachers in private schools have lower salaries than their peers in state schools. Moreover, there is always a chance that a teacher can leave her job in a private kindergarten once she obtains a governmental one. Mrs Hamsa, Rowad kindergarten's head teacher, talks about this issue as she faces two resignations at the beginning of the second term, when an EFL assistant teacher resigns without giving the kindergarten the expected one month's notice, and an EYL teacher leaves as she has got a job in a state kindergarten. This is her comment:

It is really tough for us, we have teachers when they are newly graduated with little experience, we have them and train them till they become professionals in dealing with the children; then they leave us once they get a better job.

(Hamsa – Rowad's head teacher)

Discussion

Through their aim to provide learners with a suitable environment, Rowad kindergarten seems to have achieved what Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2008:59) state is ‘a reflection of the personality of the place’. In Rowad’s case, this reflection has a positive impact on the children attending classes there and this is likely to influence their general learning attitude. In Bayan’s and Walaa’s case, it is clear that mothers want their children to be introduced to learning in a safe environment where the children enjoy their learning process. For some mothers who involved in this study, their ability to pay the tuition fees makes them more determined to find the best choice, even if that means taking their children to a pre-school that is far away from their home, as in Bayan’s and Walaa’s case, or not being able to introduce their children to early learning in an English medium pre-school because the physical facilities do not meet the mothers’ standards, as in Samah’s case.

Mothers rationalise their decision to send their children to Rowad by indicating the important role of the kindergarten’s reputation and that of informed choice, which usually results from information provided by their social groups. These are the main factors that mothers consider as they try to make the best choice for their children. In addition, the physical facilities in the kindergarten have a noticeable impact on this choice as the school’s surroundings and play areas are designed for young children. Rowad also provides extra-curricular activities which are designed to enhance the children’s learning, along with well-qualified teachers. These activities include English, which children are introduced to in four forty-five minute sessions each week. Having some EFL teachers trained by a British teacher, Rowad is eager to provide high quality English programmes to its learners where they adopt the Jolly Phonics approach in introducing young children to English. This approach is not widely applied in private pre-schools in Al-Madinah. Therefore, the EFL programme at Rowad play a significant role in convincing mothers to choose Rowad.

6.3.5 Mothers reflect on their choice of Rowad

As mentioned before, during the third stage fewer mothers are involved in follow-up interviews. These interviews show that the mothers’ expectations, and their level of satisfaction with the provided programmes and facilities, vary. One of the mothers involved in this stage is Sammar,

who put her daughter in Rowad after her friend convinced her to do so. When she is interviewed in the first stage, her daughter has just been enrolled in Rowad, but six months later, during the follow-up interview, Sammar has begun teaching English at Rowad. Therefore, in this stage, Sammar is talking as a mother and as an EFL teacher at the same time. She says that when she first enrolled her daughter in Rowad, she was happy with its facilities and the way they were designed for young children. However, she is not aware of the extent to which such facilities could stimulate children's learning process until she starts to teach at the kindergarten. She believes that the large classrooms allow the children to move freely inside, and the outdoor area, which is linked to each classroom via a back door, allows the children to play freely without disturbing the other classes:

When we were talking about sand, we went to the outdoor area and the children started to play with the sand. They kept on saying "ssssss" and practicing the sounds. They enjoyed playing, and learned new words with 's'.

(Sammar-EFL teacher and mother)

Such an understanding of the impact of the physical facilities on the learning environment for young learners is essential for children's cognitive development (Duran-Narucki, 2008:279). However, the mothers' perspective is different from that of the teachers in this regard, as illustrated in Sammar's case. As a mother she is more concerned about the 'production' of learning as she follows her daughter's learning progress and praises her activities and the materials she keeps bringing home. This perspective changes when she starts teaching in the same kindergarten, and the way in which she looks at the kindergarten's facilities also changes because of her role as a teacher. She comes to see the facilities not only as attractive, safe and suitable for children, but also as having a significant influence on children's learning. This is sometimes achieved directly - by engaging them an activity like moving them to the attached sand pit in the play area outside the classroom; sometimes this is achieved indirectly through the facility to move safely in the classroom and become involved in one activity or another. This environment of enhancement is the second most important environment – the first being their own homes - for building children's development (Duran-Narucki, 2008).

During the first stage of this study, mothers do not emphasise the importance of the physical facilities for their children's academic achievement. However, this perspective changes through the year. For instance, during the first stage Hanen, a mother who had moved to Al-Madinah from Jeddah, explains her rationale for choosing Rowad:

Many kindergartens I visited were small and short of space in which children can play freely; here the situation is different. It is the only school that has large spaces and playgrounds.

(Haneen- Mother)

At that time, Hanen's concern is about the kindergarten's facilities and its building. About a year later, in an online interview, she tells me that she had taken her daughter out of Rowad and enrolled her in an international school. She points out that, although the new school lacks the physical facilities Rowad provides, she is willing to sacrifice that for the quality of the English programme at the international kindergarten. After the year her daughter spent at Rowad, Hanen notices that, despite the high quality physical facilities of the kindergarten, her daughter's academic achievement does not meet her expectations. Therefore she looks for an alternative solution where the outcome in terms of English language acquisition is likely to be better.

By the end of the year I found out that the English outcome is very poor, after a whole year she does not know all of the English alphabet and only few sentences and phrases.

(Hanen- Mother)

This is the reason why she moves her daughter to an international pre-school, and she comments on the problem this represented for her child:

Thank God I still have one year before she gets to Year 1. I went to an international kindergarten where they said she needed to re-take the year she was in... I asked them to put her in the class for her age with a promise to work hard with her at home.

(Hanen-Mother)

However, she admits that the international pre-school's physical facilities were poor compared to Rowad:

The physical facilities are not comparable to what Rowad has, but she was there for a year and what did she learn? A few words in English! I can sacrifice the physical facilities for a high-standard English curriculum.

(Hanan- Mother)

During the third stage, when mothers reflect on their children's achievements, the interviews are held off the kindergarten's premises, and sometimes online. Therefore, the possibility that they express their opinions more openly, away from the kindergarten's atmosphere, is taken into account. Moreover, during the first stage, the children have spent only about half of the academic year in kindergarten and the overall outcome is not clear at this stage. By the end of the year, on the other hand, mothers feel more able to assess whether their expectations regarding their children's development have been met. Apart from Hanan, who actually takes her daughter to another kindergarten, the other three mothers keep their daughters at Rowad. Sammar, as reported in the following chapter, is not happy with the outcome of the English programme at Rowad either. However, she does not take her daughter out but is looking to move her back to an international school which provides learners with high quality physical facilities alongside a good English curriculum.

When mothers reflect on their children's experience in Rowad, achievements in English come to the surface. For some mothers, Rowad fulfills most of the elements in the EYL programme, apart from English. Walaa states this clearly:

I never regret putting her in Rowad, it is the best choice in Al-Madinah. I am happy with her progress in almost everything... The English programme is fine but it is not way better than other kindergartens.

(Walaa- Mother)

Discussion

Having four mothers reflect on their choice of Rowad has strengthened the present research as it provides the opportunity to hear mothers' views on the decision they made in the beginning of the academic year. Mothers reflections vary but for those who are not happy with their choice, the reason is the English outcome as they had suspected. Since Rowad claims that children are introduced to English following a phonetics approach which is not common in teaching English in pre-schools in Al-Madinah, mothers expect to have better a English learning outcome than what their children have achieved. None of the mothers have any complaints about the teachers, the extra activities or physical facilities.

While collecting information about the prospective pre-school to enrol their children in, mothers are the active agents; this feminine dimension is not only restricted to the Saudi society but relates to the type of education.

Information mainly flows around women, often focused around primary schools and neighbourhoods, Mothers are seen as primarily responsible for their children[‘s] primary [pre-primary] education, regardless of whether or not they are in paid employment. (Ball and Vincent, 1998: 244-245)

Chapter Seven investigates the way mothers justify introducing their children to English at an early stage in more detail. This includes the status of English in private pre-schools in Al-Madinah, children's early exposure to English and how that can affect the mother tongue and, finally, the mothers' perspective of EFL at Rowad.

Allah- God- the almighty says:
O Mankind! We have created you from a male and a female,
and made you into nations and tribes,
that you may know one another
(Surrah49:13)

Chapter Seven: Exploring the Choices of English

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Six discussed the mothers' rationale for introducing their children to EYL and their strategy in choosing the appropriate kindergarten for their children. Mothers' discussions in the previous chapter centre on the children's right to be introduced to EYL and they provide academic-sounding arguments in support of their view; they argue that this educational stage is necessary for preparing children for the next level, formal education. They also emphasise the importance for their children of being in pre-school in terms of social and academic benefits. Sharing a socio-cultural milieu, their justifications draw on their social and cultural capitals, where their level of education along with their previous experiences influence their decision. While these mothers constitute a minority in Al-Madinah, their view on the importance of the pre-school stage coincides with the policy makers' move towards increasing the awareness of the importance of this type of education amongst the population.

As this thesis explored in depth the mothers' rationale for introducing their children to English at an early stage, an important issue regarding learning English and national identity emerged. It is vital when it comes to learning English to look at the context of learning English, Cummins

(1993: 33) points that “language is also never devoid of content, so the nature of the content that students are exposed to in learning English must be considered”. Since this research takes place in a country where a debate regarding the introduction of EFL earlier in the mainstream schools exists,) there is an understandable fear among some educators in KSA, which El-Beheri (2013) discusses, regarding the introduction of English to young children. This is because this matter is closely linked to the cultural differences between the Saudi national culture which stems from Islamic principles and the cultures of English speaking countries which are not based on these principles. El-Beheri sees this as

...one of the basic reasons behind concern relevant to teaching English language to Saudi children; the fear originates from the probability of transferring certain non-preferred elements from the components of western community to Muslim children in our Saudi community especially in childhood. (El-Beheri, 2013:2)

The national identity of the country my study takes place is different from the identity attributed to English, as containing Westren perspectives. Mingyue Gu (2010: 140) “ English plays invasive and aggressive role that [sometimes] conflicts with the linguistic and cultural integrity of other nations”. As this study developed, several conversations with regard to the mothers’ decision of introducing their children to English at an early stage alluded to the influence English might or might not have on their children’s identity.

In this chapter the focus is the way mothers justify their decision to introduce their young children to English, the study context being the city of Al-Madinah in KSA. Chapter Six comprises two main areas. It begins with a discussion about the status of English in the city of Al-Madinah and they way mothers perceive it, bearing in mind that the notion of introducing foreign languages in Al-Madinah is a recent phenomenon. It then moves to explore the mothers’ rationale for introducing their children to English at an early stage. Again professionals’ views are also discussed in this chapter in order to triangulate the mothers’ views.

In order to achieve such an understanding, the following analysis is focused on data gathered from the interviews, questionnaires, and also from the blog. According to the pattern in the previous chapter, the data is presented first, after which findings are highlighted for each topic introduced. Discussions of the individual findings follow.

7.2 Foreign languages in the city of Al-Madinah

Inhabitants of Al-Madinah are used to dealing with people from different places. As mentioned in Chapter Two, throughout history the inhabitants of Al-Madinah have been accustomed to dealing with visitors using foreign languages.

People of Al-Madinah are used to have visitors who do not speak Arabic, so it is not unusual to hear people communicate in a foreign language... Even though nowadays the situation has changed due to the myriad changes in the social and geographical features of the city, there are some people who are speaking more than one foreign language.

(Bayan- Mother)

Moreover, in the past, dealing with visitors to Al-Madinah provided generations of children with the opportunity to learn through their interactions with these visitors. From about five decades ago, the Prophet's mosque and the shops near it have been witness to daily interactions between the locals and visitors, and children going to the mosque during the weekend or to pray in the evening, would mingle with the visitors. Such interactions between locals and newcomers to Al-Madinah encouraged indirect learning, which can be related to the social interaction among these two groups. This interaction is one of the major features of Vygotsky's theory which states that "social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development" (Nicholl, 1998: 1).

7.2.1 Mothers' views on Foreign Languages in the city of Al-Madinah

Considering the roots of FLs in Al-Madinah's history and the few current opportunities to have high quality EFL programmes in the city, in comparison to other cities in KSA, it is worth exploring the mothers' opinions in this regard.

In Al-Madinah there always used to be people who speak languages other than Arabic, during the Ottoman era it was definitely Turkish. And that is normal but the domination of FL is due to the number of arrivals and whether they decided to live in Al-Madinah or went back to their homes.

(Bayan- Mother)

Walaa, Bayan's sister, compares the past and present situations for children, in terms of how they interact with the visitors;

When you talk with your parents you hear many stories of the visitors to Al-Madinah. One of the reasons is the city itself, it was smaller and the people were living in the area surrounding the Prophet's mosque. The situation has changed now and you barely find local people who live in the central area now.

(Walaa- Mother)

Then Walaa claims that there are groups of local people who are communicating with the visitors and pilgrims in FLs.

It is not only in the past that the people of Al-Madinah were communicating with visitors in FL, but nowadays [too], if you want to meet up with those people, you have to go to the central area.

(Walaa- Mother)

It appears that mothers approve of the use of FL in Al-Madinah but only among certain groups of people. Razan has a similar view to Walaa's.

Even today there are still many people who speak foreign languages - those who deal with the visitors and pilgrims. But [they are] not all people in Al-Madinah, only certain groups of people, mainly those who work in the central area.

(Razan- Mother)

Mothers point out that the style of modern life, bringing about geographical changes to, and the growth of, the city of Al-Madinah have had an impact on the way children interact with visitors to the city, the opportunity for which is now limited. Mothers state that their children no longer have the opportunity to mix with the visitors as their grandparents did when they were children themselves. Even though mothers agree that foreign languages are still a feature of Al-Madinah, they feel their children do not benefit from it.

For us we tend to listen to our parents when they talk about their childhood and how they picked several phrases from different languages through their interaction with the visitors on pilgrimages. Some of them used to help their family by working in their shop after school and the family learnt foreign languages better than their peers.

(Walaa- Mother)

Some opportunities for their children to practise English exist, for example, when they order from a fast food restaurant:

In a fast food restaurant, you need English to communicate with the foreign workers there.

(Zainab- Mother)

The fact that mothers emphasise that interacting with others help children learn a foreign language is supported by Vygotsky's theory. Therefore, the impact of pilgrims and visitors remains, but only for specific groups of people who work in the centre of Al-Madinah, or in the Prophet's Mosque and other historical places.

7.2.1.1 Mothers' use of FL in their communication

Earlier in this research, in Chapter Three where the context of the study is discussed, the demography of Al-Madinah is explained from a historical point of view. The impact of the cosmopolitan nature of the city is evident in the case of Sammah, a mother who was interviewed at Rowad in the first stage of the field work, and at her house in the third stage.

Sammah's grandmother, even though she had Saudi nationality, did not speak a word of Arabic, and when Sammah discussed the status of FL in Al-Madinah, she recounts her memories.

You know I experienced this diversity of languages in Al-Madinah, when I was a little girl, my grandmother, who was originally from Turkey did not speak Arabic at all, and I do not speak Turkish. But we used to chat together in different languages and believe I understood her and she understood me.

(Sammah- Mother)

Then Sammah moves on to talk about the diversity of the population in Al-Madinah:

As someone from Al-Madinah, you know that there are many families who are not originally from here, they are not even Arab. Take my husband for instance, his dad came here when he was a young man; they are originally from India but they were born in the UK.

(Sammah- Mother)

Sammah also refers to how she and her father-in-law communicate:

It is easier for us to communicate in English, even though in the beginning it was weird as I am more used to the American accent; when he talks [with a British accent] it is like listening to a very high level of language, not what I am used to.

(Sammah- Mother)

The follow-up interviews were held outside the environment of Rowad kindergarten, and were face-to-face. During this stage Sammah speaks more freely about her personal experience of using another language in dealing with some members of her family. This attitude is understandable as, in the first stage, Sammah was in one of the group interviews with other mothers and she might have hesitated in sharing her experience openly. However, her attitude changes when the interview is held in the place she chose, and only with her.

Due to the social features of Al-Madinah, it is not unusual to speak to some relatives in a language other than Arabic, and such diversity among the population of the city impacts on the way mothers want their children to acquire English.

7.2.1.2 English in Al-Madinah outside the 'school environment'

All the participants in the first stage who were met in a 'school environment', refer to the status of English in the wider context throughout the society. When questioned about whether Al-Madinah's milieu encourages the practice of English, mothers state that the community does not encourage the practice of English and that their children's opportunity to practise English in the wider society is very limited.

Apart from Rania, who does not believe in the importance of practicing English in the wider community, all the other mothers indicate that the spread of English in Al-Madinah is noticeable, yet the outcome is beyond their expectations. Mozon gives the following examples:

When you walk down the main roads, all the signs are written in both Arabic and English, and ten years ago that was not the case.

Now in some restaurants, there are some workers who only speak English.

(Mozon-Mother)

In such a situation, where children are being introduced to English in their classrooms and are seeing signs of it in their local areas, their awareness of the language grows.

When we stop at the traffic light, if he sees a sign in English he can recognise some letters and says them out loud.

(Mozon-Mother)

With regard to the workers who speak English in restaurants or theme parks, Wijdan points out that even this group of people who can be a good source of English practice in the wider society are learning Arabic, so the chances are reduced.

When they first started they spoke in English, and because most of the people talk to them in Arabic, they began to learn Arabic and soon they could communicate with the customers in broken Arabic.

(Wijdan-Mother)

Wafaa agrees with Wijdan but also claims that, due to the small number of people who speak English in Al-Madinah, the workers are forced to learn the local language to be able to communicate.

I agree that it could have been a good way to practice English, but if you look at the wider society of Al-Madinah, people who can speak English are few and even those who speak, they would probably rather talk in Arabic.

(Wafaa-Mother)

As they discuss the status of English in Al-Madinah and the situations where the language can be used, mothers rely on their experiences of the use of the language in their lives. For instance,

Mozon indicates the use of English at the traffic signs as evidence of the spread of the language. This probably does not target the local people of Al-Madinah, but it indicates the cosmopolitan nature of this city in a Muslim nation, where the use of English is to guide the visitors and workers in the city who do not know Arabic.

Being aware of the limited opportunities their children have to learn through their interactions in the wider society, some mothers discuss the steps they take to enhance their children's opportunities to learn English. These mothers form one group which, despite their ways of enhancing their children's English outside the EFL classroom, cannot elevate the low status of English in the city and openly discuss their wish to have a better situation where children can use English widely in the local community.

No, the Al-Madinah milieu does not encourage practicing English; actually you will be criticised if you do, so when I told my daughter to put on her shoes [in English], they repeated what I had told her in Arabic.

(Hanan- Mother)

There is a second group of mothers who express their wish to introduce their children to English for the children's own benefit in the long term, although they rely more on the EFL teachers and have not planned a long term process to enhance their children's level of English. This group of mothers cannot ignore the importance of English in their social circle, and they are not happy with the status of English in Al-Madinah either:

No, it [English] is not really encouraged - you do not use English in daily conversation at all.

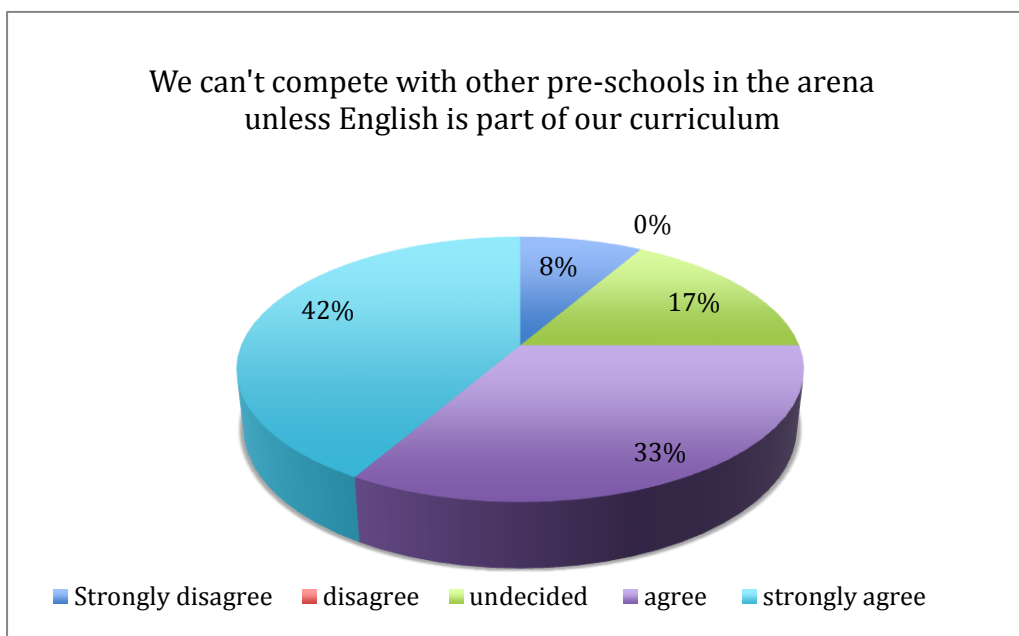
(Sarah- Mother)

The third group is made up of the mothers who believe that Al-Madinah's context encourages the learning of English, and think that children can practise their English when they order from a fast food restaurant, for instance, or when they read road signs.

7.2.2 Professionals' view on the status of English in the city of Al-Madinah

Interestingly, some head teachers share the view of the third group regarding the status of English in the city, with seven of the twelve head teachers agreeing that Al-Madinah's milieu is a suitable environment to practise and learn English. This agreement can be linked to the positive responses from nine head teachers on the impact of having English as part of their EYL syllabus in order to compete with the other kindergartens - figure 3.

Almost every pre-school now introduces English as part of their learning programme and to have our position we are providing a unique EFL programme to make it more interesting for the children.
(Hamsa- Rowad's head teacher)



In addition, they complain about the shortage of activities and workshops that target young learners and introduce them to English:

The population of Al-Madinah is growing rapidly, but children don't have the chance to mingle with the visitors and they have no summer

clubs or after-school clubs where they can improve their English either.

(Suhailah- Head Teacher)

Suhailah's view on the limited opportunities for children of Al-Madinah to mingle with visitors of the city whose mother tongue is not Arabic is similar to the mothers', who claim that in modern Al-Madinah their children have no chances to mingle with the visitors - see 7.2.1.2. Suhailah's view can be seen as supporting the mothers' argument in this regard as it comes from a head teacher who has a degree in English Literature and speaks English and Turkish fluently, which can explain her desire to provide a high quality English programme, although lately this has come into conflict with MOE regulations.

7.2.2.2 The common foreign language is not English

Nine of the twelve who completed the head teachers' questionnaires disagree that English is the dominant foreign language in Al-Madinah. Again, the argument regarding the dominant foreign language in Al-Madinah is closely linked to the mother tongue of the majority of visitors and newcomers. Amnah, for example, points out that, even though English is a very important language globally, it is not always the most useful tool for dealing with visitors to Al-Madinah. She believes that Urdu, Farsi and Turkish are spoken more in Al-Madinah than English.

Visitors and pilgrims come from different backgrounds and different ages, not all of them are educated and some only speak their native language so it will not make a difference if you speak in English or Arabic, some will not understand either of them.

(Amnah- Head Teacher)

Rawan, a blog commenter, agrees with Amnah to some extent, as she claims that although Al-Madinah's milieu does not provide the ideal environment for learning English, it is a good one to learn Farsi. Then she distinguishes between the environment and the community when she refers to some community members' actions in boosting English learning.

As a community, I see a positive attitude towards English that is evident in some families who send their children to London during the summer holidays to be enrolled in language courses when they are still in high school.

(Rawan- Blog commenter)

The decision of some members of the community to send their children to English-speaking countries to benefit from learning the language in its context can indicate that, despite the fact that the environment in Al-Madinah does not encourage locals to speak English, it does not prevent them from learning it in English speaking countries.

However, the positive picture of the long history of learning in Al-Madinah conflicts with the dissatisfaction of some mothers with the quality of the English programmes provided in pre-schools. The head teachers' positive responses to the importance of introducing English to compete, can be explained as their marketing in order to 'sell' the provided English programme. With regard to the questionnaire, findings show that six head teachers agree with the statement that Al-Madinah is considered to be a supportive environment in which to learn and practise English, and two more believe that children in Al-Madinah will be able to communicate with foreigners in English if they learn English at an early age. This optimistic positive image conflicts with the mothers' expressed belief that their children will not be able to master fluent English if they rely on what they do in their EFL classes (see 7.7.1.1).

7.2.3 English in Al-Madinah compared to some other major cities in KSA

Despite the importance of the city of Al-Madinah, the participants in the present study claim that the city does not receive the attention that is its due. The status of English in Al-Madinah is compared on several occasions to that of some other major cities like Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam (in the Eastern province). Such comparisons emerge from the data and the participants' responses, becoming a key part in exploring the status of English in the Al-Madinah milieu.

7.2.3.1 Mothers' views on English in Al-Madinah compared to some other major cities in KSA

The comparisons made by the mothers and the commenters are based mainly on two experiences: the first one is that of education in another city when living there, and the second one is that of frequent visits to another city where relatives live.

In this study, there are two mothers who lived in Jeddah and, therefore, their opinions stem from their experience or their children's experience in schools there. Some other mothers who draw comparisons are either originally from another city or have been there frequently enough to be able to make a comparison.

Zahraa is from the first group, and having lived in Jeddah, she feels able to compare the educational status between the two cities:

You know I really like Al-Madinah but I have been suffering from two things; health and education here.
(Zahraa- Mother)

Zahraa's liking of Al-Madinah as a place to live is understandable, due to the city's role in Muslim life. However, Zahraa comes from Syria and the opportunity to live in Al-Madinah conflicts with the possibilities of providing her children with as high a level of education as she received herself.

A similar situation is described by Hanen, who is originally from Jeddah and who has moved to Al-Madinah recently. She draws on her experiences from her own life in her hometown, and also refers to the experiences of her relatives who remain in Jeddah:

In Jeddah you will not have a problem to find good schools where English is taught with high standards. You might find it difficult to pick one school as there are so many remarkable ones.
(Hanen- Mother)

In supporting the view regarding the quality of schools in Al-Madinah compared to Jeddah, Hanen claims that private schools in Jeddah are much better than in Al-Madinah as, in order to choose a kindergarten for her daughter, she visited several of them. She was not happy with the buildings and the facilities provided:

In Jeddah, this is not the situation; I would not have to suffer that much looking for a good kindergarten. There are plenty of good kindergartens and schools, private schools there are competitive and plentiful.

(Hanen- Mother)

Sammar, who belongs to the second group, demonstrates the multi-ethnic nature of Al-Madinah when she compares the city with Riyadh, from where her grandfather had to Al-Madinah, Though she was born in Al-Madinah, Sammar does considers herself to be from Riyadh and she speaks the dialect of Riyadh people; when she discusses the process of teaching English, she indicates that the way the people in Al-Madinah speak English is different.

The way the people of Al-Madinah speak English is obvious - it is kind of sharp yet soft, one of my colleagues speaks like this.

(Sammar- EFL teacher and mother)

When Sammar discusses English, Riyadh is mentioned more often than Jeddah, as she has roots in that area and tends to visit her relatives there, which allows her to have an idea about the educational status there. Nevertheless, Sammar sees the status of English in Riyadh's milieu from her observations in public places, where English is used consistently in restaurants and shops. As mentioned before, Sammar's daughter noticed that the status of English in Riyadh is different from that in Al-Madinah, and asked her mother if they were still in Saudi Arabia. Such a comment reflects the fact that children can distinguish between the languages spoken in the different local communities they interact in.

God protect Al-Madinah, the status of English in the city is very poor; in Riyadh you can hear some people use English in their daily life.

(Sammar- Mother)

Wijdan, who is from Al-Madinah and often goes to Jeddah, continually compares the situation between the two cities, and her comparison of the situation beyond the schools and kindergartens is noteworthy.

You see when you go to Jeddah, every one speaks in the language [English] even young children, how awesome. I wish my children could achieve the same level of English as those children. If you go to malls, theme-parks, you always hear people communicating in English.

(Wijdan- Mother)

7.2.4 Mothers' majors and the way they use English with their children

Interestingly, the present research found a link between the mothers who have a degree in English Literature and their way of introducing their children to English. The common pattern is that they do not rely on memorising the words, but they try to talk to their children in English by giving them some instructions, as Walaa explains:

You do not teach English by telling the child 'this is a pen, this is book', but you tell the child: 'Can you bring that book for Mama please?'

(Walaa-Mother)

Walaa's point of view is to some extent is shared by her sister:

I try to use some sentences and phrases with my daughters in everyday conversations... to learn English does not mean to have a list of vocabulary and get the child to memorise it.

(Bayan- Mother)

Bayan continues explaining how English is introduced in her home:

My daughters like to watch Disney's children's movies in English and they can understand them in general. They might not know the meaning of each word but by watching they can improve their listening.

(Bayan- Mother)

Bayan also indicates the impact of the home in enhancing learning English;

As my daughters are not in an international kindergarten, if I want them to master a high level in English, I should not rely on what they are taught in their English language classes. I have to broaden their knowledge, through reading and watching [programmes] in English.

(Bayan- Mother)

Bayan is a non-working mother who is qualified to teach English, and she was taught in a private school where she was introduced to English at an early stage. Hence, the way she introduces her children to English at home is affected by her studies. This is similar to the attitudes of both her sister Walaa and her friend Sammar. The three of them share the desire that their children master a high level of English which, in their opinion, will not be achieved if they depend on the English programmes their children are introduced to at kindergarten.

7.2.5 Children practise English with the housemaid

As mentioned in Chapter Five, having a maid is common in KSA and is not linked to whether the mother works or not. However, having a maid from the Philippines is more common among middle class people, as their salaries are higher than those of maids from Sri Lanka or Indonesia.

When Sammar discusses the use of English in her daughter's daily life outside the kindergarten, she points out that her daughter speaks English at home with the Filipino maid, and she imitates her mother who uses English with the maid.

She also interacts in English with our housemaid who does not speak Arabic, which in my opinion is a good supportive way to enhance learning English.

(Sammar- Mother)

In addition, Dina, an EYL teacher, says that her children were initially introduced to English by their maid, who used to speak to them in English and, in this way, they learnt some words.

I used to have a maid from the Philippines, my children learnt English from her and they would talk to her in English.

(Dina- EYL teacher)

An interesting point that arises in this research is that when professionals provide their views about introducing English to young learners, they tend to reflect on their experiences as mothers and share their stories. Such an attitude is understandable as they are part of the social cluster of Al-Madinah and express their own experiences as working mothers. Furthermore, Dania as a working mother might have a real need to have a house maid to help her, unlike Sammar.

Discussion

Since the sixth century, the people of Al-Madinah have been used to receiving foreigners from several parts of the world who come and visit the Prophet's city and mingle with the locals. As mentioned before in Chapter Three, some of those visitors stay in Al-Madinah and become part of the demographic of Al-Madinah. The modern lifestyle in Al-Madinah has affected social

interactions between the visitors and the locals; the local adults, like their children, no longer have much opportunity to mingle with the visitors, in contrast to their parents and ancestors.

The fourth story of Samah gives a clear picture about the variety of languages used in the family, and where family members sometimes search for a common spoken language in order to make their communication easier, as was the case with Samah and her father-in-law who use English to communicate. Samah is not the only case; there are many people in Al-Madinah who are in a similar position and this racial variety in the population is one of Al-Madinah's attributes.

When mothers talk about their use of English and the status of the language in their hometown, they agree that the existence of FL in Al-Madinah is limited to certain groups of people, with whom they themselves and their children did not interact directly due to the changes in lifestyle. When discussing the status of English in Al-Madinah, mothers' views and opinions which draw on their own or relatives' international experiences can be seen as the influence of globalisation. While some mothers relate directly to the social features of Al-Madinah and others link the discussion to their own cultural capital, their personal international experiences are also important. Indeed, this international dimension is a recurring theme in mothers' rationalisations of their decision.

The international dimension also appears when head teachers discuss the status of English in Al-Madinah. Suhailah, who holds a degree in English literature, is one of the head teachers who is not happy with the status of English in Al-Madinah society. Her international experience as an EFL teacher in a Turkish school helped her to openly share her views on Al-Madinah's level of English, comparing it to that of other cities. There was a marked tendency among both mothers and professionals to refer to an international dimension in explaining the status of English in Al-Madinah.

Data from interviews and blog posts helps draw a comparison between the quality of English learning outcome in Al-Madinah and that of other cities such as Jeddah and Riyadh. Such comparison occurs through mothers' social interaction in two different contexts where they

manage to observe the status of English through their communication. Even though Al-Madinah is no less important than Riyadh or Jeddah, the fact that Riyadh is the capital of KSA and Jeddah is the main port in the western coast give the two cities an advantage in terms of job opportunities. Moreover, there are more comparisons drawn between Jeddah and Al-Madinah than between Al-Madinah and other cities, as Jeddah is historically linked to Al-Madinah, and both cities are located in the western province of Hijaz. As Mustafa's (2005) explanation discussed in Chapter Three shows, many people from Al-Madinah move to other cities for better careers and Riyadh and Jeddah the main destinations they emigrate to. Such social movement between the Saudi cities allows the participants to draw comparisons between the facilities in Al-Madinah for their young children and those in other cities, resulting in considering life in Al-Madinah limited in comparison to the life their relatives and acquaintances lead in other cities.

I have not come across a comparative study of the English learning outcomes in Al-Madinah and in Jeddah or Riyadh. In order to have an indication of the status of English in the educational sphere in these cities, the number of international schools and pre-schools have to be looked at. In Al-Madinah there are only two international schools while in Jeddah the number is nine times higher (MOE, 2012). The number of private schools higher in Jeddah than in Al-Madinah and hence the competition is higher in the private sector. Another indication can be found in higher education, where high school graduates in Jeddah have the opportunity to go to one of the two private colleges where the medium of communication is English. Having said that, mothers seem to be aware that as there are fewer high-quality private schools in Al-Madinah in comparison with Jeddah and Riyadh, they belong to the minority social network in Al-Madinah as parents eager to have their children acquiring English early.

Mothers justify their decisions in introducing their children to English at an early stage. In their discussions some of them claim that Al-Madinah is less fortunate with regard to facilities for introducing English to their children, their opinion needs to be considered by policy makers and the private sector.

This section has looked at the status of English in the city of Al-Madinah in general; the coming section discusses the status of English in pre-schools in Al-Madinah in particular.

7.3 Status of English in Al-Madinah pre-schools

The status of English in pre-schools in Al-Madinah varies from one kindergarten to another. In all the kindergartens surveyed in the present study, English has been introduced from the very beginning as part of the learning programme. However, the way in which English has been introduced varies in terms of demand and the schools' ability. The analysis in this part draws more precisely on the way mothers justify their motivations and expectations in introducing their young children to English from a socio-cultural perspective.

7.3.1 Mothers' views of the status of English in Al-Madinah, at the pre-primary stage

English forms part of the curriculum in all the kindergartens involved in the present study. However, it is important to note that some mothers are not happy with the English curriculum that is provided.

In general there is no pre-school in Al-Madinah where I can say that they have a good English curriculum. The curriculum in Rowad is better than the other available choices. But if I want my daughters to obtain a good level in English, I cannot just depend on their programme.

(Bayan- Mother)

Bayan, who moved her daughters to Rowad after they had a bad experience in another kindergarten, is not happy with the status of English in pre-schools in Al-Madinah, but she states that:

The girls are enjoying the English language classes, they like the songs and the activities they do during the class. This teaching approach is not common in other kindergartens.

(Bayan- Mother)

Bayan graduated from the English department of the local university and, during the interview, she pointed out that during her undergraduate study she went with some of her friends - Sammar was one of them - to look at the practice of EFL in some private pre-schools in Al-Madinah. Therefore, when she moved her daughters to Rowad, she was able to compare the way English is taught there and the way it is taught in other kindergartens.

Bayan's view on the status of English in the private kindergartens in Al-Madinah is shared by another group of mothers. However, there is another view in that some mothers claim that the status of English in Al-Madinah has improved. Mozon, one of the last group, makes this comment:

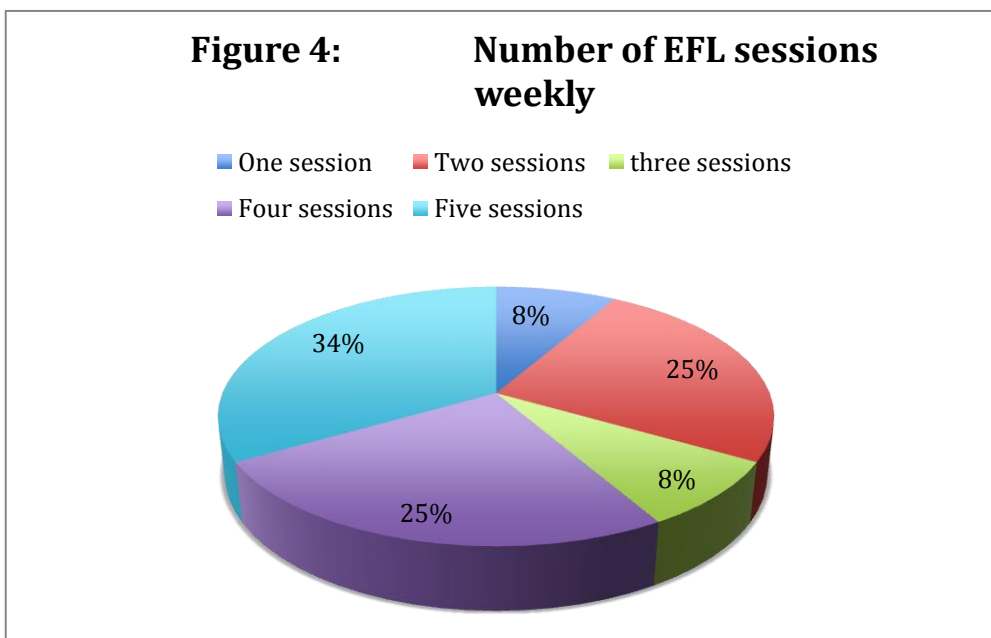
In recent years, the status of English in Al-Madinah has improved; if you walk around the city you can see that. The street signs are written in both Arabic and English. If you go to most private kindergartens, English is introduced as part of early years' learning.
(Mozon- Mother)

The mothers' opinion on the status of English in the private pre-schools in the city of Al-Madinah might be affected by their own experience. As commented above, Bayan, who holds a degree in English literature, expresses her view that the English programmes provided in the private kindergartens do not meet her standards. Having said that, she praises the EFL teaching methods in Rowad, and this opinion stems from her personal and professional experience. From another angle Mozon, who holds a degree in Islamic studies and also advocates early exposure to English, compares the status of English now to the situation which existed a few years ago; hence, her opinion supports the positive progress of English.

We want our children to learn English, if they do so they can explain our religion clearly. That's why the Prophet asked his followers to learn FL.
(Mozon- Mother)

7.3.2 Professionals' view on the status of English in Al-Madinah private pre-schools

In order to explore the status of English in private pre-schools a questionnaire was sent to the head teachers of 12 kindergartens; this shows that English is part of early learning programme in all the respondent pre-schools. Head teachers response shows the variation of EFL sessions from one pre-school to another - figure 4.



For instance one kindergarten, when it was first established, taught French to its pupils along with English. At that time, the number of private schools in Al-Madinah was low, as Hind, the head teacher of that kindergarten, explains:

In the very beginning when the school was established, there were about three or four private pre-schools in Al-Madinah. The kindergarten used to employ native English teachers at that time and the MOE regulations regarding this were easy to comply with. Also, back then, learners who were enrolled in the school [pre-school and formal school] had the opportunity to be introduced to both French and English.

(Hind-Head Teacher)

Hind also comments on the current status of the EFL programme at this kindergarten, which she acknowledges has not really improved:

The situation has gradually changed; more private schools have opened and English is introduced in almost all of them. English is still part of our early years programmes but it is not special, I cannot claim that we are providing a superior programme.

(Hind- Head Teacher)

It appears that there is a relationship between the increase in private pre-schools and the introduction of English at that stage, considering that the number of private schools has increased slightly but steadily. Hind's views are similar to those of the head teachers from nine kindergartens, who agree on the importance of including English in their EYL programme in order to be able to compete with the other kindergartens in the arena. Besides, with the MOE's recent move toward the early introduction of EFL in the national curriculum, private schools are determined to provide high quality EFL programmes.

In addition, the two Quranic pre-schools involved in the study also consider English to be an important part of their early learning programme, as it was introduced when they opened. Amnah, the head teacher of one of these schools, highlights the importance of having some members of staff who are able to speak English because the school attracts pupils from different backgrounds, some from families whose first language is not Arabic.

If I have some teachers who can speak English well, it will be very convenient for the mothers who do not speak Arabic.

Sometimes non-Arabic speaking mothers come to speak to their daughters' teachers but, as the vast majority of the school staff do not speak English, communication gets very difficult; sometimes I can step in, but not always.

(Amnah- Head Teacher)

The effect among decision makers of all the emphasis on early introduction of English appears to be the implementation of English as part of EYL programme in private pre-schools despite that fact that this stage is not compulsory. Moreover, head teachers feel that by providing EFL to their young learners, they are responding to parents' demands.

7.3.2.1 Head teachers' majors and their views on EFL

The way head teachers view English in their kindergarten varies. For some of them the importance of introducing the language is closely linked to the ability of their kindergarten to compete.

Even if we provide a high quality EYL programme, if English is not part of our learning programme, we would definitely lose some prospective pupils to another kindergarten where English is introduced.

(Ameerah- Head Teacher)

Ameerah, who holds a degree in EYL, expresses that she is satisfied with the English programme provided in their pre-school.

Children are introduced to English on a daily basis and they do enjoy their English language classes.

(Ameerah- Head Teacher)

She also emphasises the children's abilities at this stage:

Whilst they are young, children are able to absorb a huge amount of knowledge and what matters most is to have it introduced by professionals and in a safe environment.

(Ameerah - Head Teacher)

From another point of view, Suhailah, the head teacher of a kindergarten where children are also introduced to English every day, shows that she is not satisfied with the level of English in the kindergarten.

We are doing all we can to provide a high quality EFL programme, but the Ministry of education does not make it easy ... we were forced to change the English curriculum by the beginning of this year, even though it was very successful.

(Suhailah- Head Teacher)

7.3.3 Native vs. Non-native English language teachers

An important issue emerges while discussing teaching EFL to learners, which is having native English speaking teachers. Some mothers, and some professionals also, claim that having native English teachers can have a significant impact on the outcomes of EFL programmes, while others prefer to have qualified Arab EFL teachers. Both groups have supported their opinions with their experiences as will be explored in the following sections.

7.3.3.1 Mothers' view on native English language teachers

While discussing the mothers' rationale for introducing their children to English at an early stage, the issue of native English language teachers comes up, and mothers hold differing views on this. For instance, Sammar considers having a native English teacher a positive aspect of her daughter's experience at an international kindergarten, before she moved to Rowad:

Only English was much better in the international kindergarten, and that is because the teachers [there] are native English, while here they are not. My daughter made huge progress in acquiring English when she was there. Up until now when I hear her use more advanced English vocabulary or phrases I believe that is a result of

being in an international kindergarten for one term. Even her accent became more native-like.

(Sammar- Mother and EFL teacher)

It would be logical to think that Sammar's expectations for her daughter's level of English are high as she is a qualified EFL teacher herself and began to work at Rowad in a later stage of the study. This is reflected in this comment:

I will still keep my eyes open for a good international school to move my daughter to. Having a native English teacher will boost her learning and that was proved last semester when she was at Manarah

(Sammar- Mother)

Some mothers prefer to have local teachers as they are more capable of dealing with the children, as Samah states:

I went with my daughter to an international kindergarten for a week, where the teachers are all native speakers of English, but I was not satisfied with the general atmosphere. Also, even though the teachers are native I had the feeling that they are not specialised in EYL, I had the feeling that children are not getting individual care and attention . Hence, here [Rowad] the teachers are local and they do give their children the individual care they need in this stage so I personally am more comfortable in having them to deal with the children, as they know our customs.

(Samah- Mother]

Such a view expresses the link that exists in Al-Madinah between English as an international language, where a diverse group of people communicate through English, and the local impact of the language. Samah herself has such experiences with her father-in-law:

My father-in-law was brought up in the UK... I have always spoken to him in English; he speaks British English and in the beginning I found it weird as I am used to the American accent.

(Samah- Mother)

When it comes to her daughter's education, however, she would rather have local teachers who she assumes will be more capable of dealing with the children. During the third stage, Samah points out that her daughter's English has progressed and, contrary to what she has said previously, she is no longer looking for an international school:

Her English has improved. Even when my cousin who studies in the US came during the summer holiday with her children who are enrolled in schools there, my daughter was able to understand them and communicate with them in English. My cousin noticed that her English level is good... To be honest I stopped looking for an international school, as the teachers there [Rowad] are good and the English programme is advanced.

(Samah- Mother)

Discussion

As they assess their children's progress in learning English, mothers go through different strategies. While some mothers depend on the work their children do in the EFL classes and as their homework, others go beyond the taught curriculum and look at their children's use of the language outside the teaching environment. Samah, whose daughter joined Rowad, states that her daughter's level of English has improved and assesses her daughter's progress by providing an example of the use of English by her daughter in a non-teaching situation. Samah's view is supported by her cousin who has lived in the US and who noticed that the child's English is good. The view of a person who lives in the US is taken as authoritative, as she lives in an English-speaking environment and her children are learning the language from one of its main sources. This situation illustrates that family members share some cultural capital and one of the cultural attributes is practicing an FL in their social milieu.

Thus, the way mothers view having native English teachers to introduce their children to English differs according to their experiences. On the one hand, Sammar was able to observe her daughter's progress in learning English when she was taught by native English teachers for one term in an international kindergarten and when she was taught English by locally qualified EFL teachers. The different outcomes from the two kindergartens makes Sammar determined to look for a better international school for her daughter. On the other hand, Samah's experience is the opposite in that her daughter only spent one week in the international kindergarten where the English teachers were native speakers but, according to Samah, did not give the children the necessary individual care. Therefore, her comparison between the two kindergartens was more focused on her observations of her daughter's overall care rather than her progress in English.

7.3.3.2 Professionals' view on native English teachers

The status of introducing English in pre-schools is greatly affected by regulations of the MOE, which bans non-Saudi teachers from teaching in both public and private schools, except in those that are designated international schools. Hind, the head teacher of a kindergarten, compares the outcomes of EFL in the kindergarten before this rule came into being :

When there used to be native English language teachers, the pupils' outcome was better than at the present time. There were native English teachers who tended to teach the pupils English every day. Besides, children at that time had the opportunity to be introduced to French as well. But the situation was changed with the Saudization policy.

(Hind- Head Teacher)

Similarly, the head teacher of another kindergarten claims that the MOE regulation of prohibiting private schools from employing native English teachers is the main cause of the poor outcomes in English learning nowadays:

Not only the teachers, we can find good teachers and train them, but even the curriculum. We are forced to teach the national curriculum

and although we had another extra curriculum from the US, we have been told to refrain from teaching it.

(Suhailah- Head Teacher)

Suhailah points out that many head teachers of the private kindergartens are disappointed by the MOE regulations which prevent the children of Al-Madinah from receiving a similar quality of education to that available in several other cities, such as Jeddah and Riyadh. This reflects the variations that exist with regard to following the MOE's rules among the different education directorates in the kingdom.

It is not only our schools and pre-schools that are affected by such regulation, but the directorate of Al-Madinah appears to be stricter than our neighbours in Jeddah. It is really a shame that we cannot provide the children of Al-Madinah with a high standard English programme like their peers in Jeddah and Riyadh.

(Suhailah- Head Teacher)

Although both Hind and Suhailah link the MOE regulations to the level of English which can be provided in their schools, the status of English in both schools is different. For instance, in Hind's kindergarten children are only introduced to English twice a week, which is quite limited. Therefore, even if the school were able to employ native English teachers, the EFL outcomes of the kindergarten might still be negative.

7.3.3.2.1 Local EFL teachers are better for this stage

From another perspective, Amnah, the head teacher of a Quranic kindergarten, is not against early exposure to English, but she believes that having local teachers who are qualified in EFL is better:

At this early stage, I prefer to have a local EFL teacher as she can easily communicate with the children, and the pupils themselves will not be comfortable if they have a teacher who does not speak the

same language as them. In this stage, I think a local EFL teacher is a better choice than a native English teacher.

(Amnah- Head Teacher)

Even though Amnah is not against introducing English at an early stage, she is not comfortable with the notion of creating a positive attitude towards the English language, and its embodiment of Western values and culture:

This stage is critical and as professionals we have to build the children's identity from our religion, values and culture. We have to be careful about the way children are exposed to English and the type of relationship they are going to have with the language as it is linked to the Western culture and its values, which sometimes conflicts with ours.

(Amnah- Head Teacher)

Amnah's role as a head of a Quranic pre-school has affected her view on the impact that the introduction of EFL can have on young children, and this is an argument put forward by many who are opposed to the early implementation of English in the Saudi national curriculum. Head teachers seem to have a similar positive attitude towards teaching English at an early stage, with ten of them agreeing on the relationship between teaching English and children's cognitive development. This is supported by research discussed in the literature review, which shows that there is a relationship between learning FL and the cognitive development of young learners.

The previous section discussed the mothers' and professionals' views on the status of English in Al-Madinah's pre-schools. The impact of having native English language teachers was discussed from both points of view, with varied opinions from each, but it seems that their expectations of the English programmes provided by kindergartens in Al-Madinah have been generally fulfilled. The following section discusses early exposure to English, and the way mothers' justify the importance of such exposure through their own experiences.

7.3.4 Marketing English programmes to attract prospective pupils

As mentioned previously in this study, private pre-schools were chosen as a research context as English is taught in them. The impact of private schools in providing a high quality education is discussed in a blog response by Shahad, who raises the issue of the role of the private sector in providing good teaching programmes to fulfil its part in enhancing the learning atmosphere. Dalal, another blog commenter who received her education in a private school and holds a degree in English Literature, refers to the part played by private schools in the lack of positive outcomes regarding English:

In the vast majority of private schools English is introduced, and some schools do provide an advanced English curriculum. However they do not have well-trained teachers to deliver it in the proper way. Besides, private schools exaggerate the cost of materials and books in the fees they charge families.

(Dalal- Blog commenter)

The strategy of implementing English to attract prospective parents to enrol their children in a specific kindergarten seems to work, despite the quality of the provided programme, according to Dalal. However, the suitability of the provided programmes for the pupils' age is questionable. Shahad also agrees on the poor quality of the English taught to kindergarten-age children:

For example, from my experience in my Master's degree, I interviewed many teachers who teach English while they are not specialists or even have a degree or background in English.

(Shahad- Blog commenter)

Therefore, a topic on the blog about English and marketing was posted. Interestingly, two male commenters took part in that topic. Yousef, one of the two, points out that despite the fact that

almost all private schools put English in their advertisements, they do not know whether such advertising has any competitive advantage.

Having English in itself is not an attractive tool, while the outcome of English in a school is. Almost all private kindergartens present English as part of their learning programme, the question is whether the programme is really beneficial or not.

(Yousef- Blog commenter)

Yousef has not yet put any of his young children in a pre-school, so he might need to reconsider his opinion once the time comes to choose a school; the choices are few, as there are not many schools that can provide a good outcome; hence an indication of the outcomes of English would be useful for parents to judge the quality of the provided programme.

There seems to be a sense of shared disappointment in the EFL programmes provided in private pre-schools in Al-Madinah as it is a common complaint among some mothers and blog commenters.

It is really sad that our children cannot receive high quality education in English, though English is indeed introduced in most private kindergartens and schools.

(Bayan - Mother)

She goes on to refer to the outcomes of English learning :

But if you look at the outcome, it is really poor and it makes you think whether these private sector [schools] really care about teaching learners English, or whether they use it as a tool to convince parents to enrol their children there.

(Bayan- Mother)

A comment from a mother with a degree in English Literature claims that the problem is not with the Al-Madinah milieu, which welcomes people from all around the world; rather it is due to the private sector not handling their responsibilities as they should do.

I think Al-Madinah is not less important than Riyadh or Jeddah as it is a historical and beloved city for all Muslims all over the world and it has millions of visitors every year ...I know more than one family who came here and enrolled their children in Arabic schools to learn Arabic but I think they struggle to find a good school that teaches both Arabic and English in the same way. I think the problem that we have is not the environment but the carelessness of the private sector in establishing international schools which do not conflict with Islamic values and the Islamic society in Al-Madinah.

(Shahad- Blog commenter)

It is important to discuss the mothers' views on the status of English in Al-Madinah in comparison to the status of the language in some cities that were frequently mentioned by several mothers and participants in the blog.

After discussing the mothers' justifications for introducing English to their young children, it is important to also consider the EYL professionals' points of view. The following sections discuss the professionals' views with regard to early exposure to English.

Discussion

It is clear by now that in private pre-schools English plays an important role in the learning programme, as it is taught in almost all private pre-schools including Quranic schools. Having said that, Mozon, a mother who has a degree in Islamic study, does not agree with the previous suggestions. She brings evidence from the religion to support her decisions in having her children introduced to English in an early stage.

This trend of introducing English at an early stage is mentioned by mothers and it can be logically linked to the decision of introducing English earlier in mainstream schools. Despite

this, not all mothers are satisfied with the outcome of EFL. Due to the mothers' own experiences and the vision they have for the children's future, they take the next step, which will be explored later in the discussion of the existence of English outside schools. While some mothers are happy with what their children learn during EFL classes at Rowad, others claim that the EFL classroom is not enough. Here the introduction of English to children in contexts away from school becomes relevant. When they discuss native English speaking teachers, mothers again do not agree whether it is better to have a native English teacher or not. This is due mothers' personal criteria regarding the teachers' assisting their children. For instance, Sammar points out that her daughter's obviously improved English shows that she was benefited a lot by being in an international school. However, Sammar takes her daughter out of that school as she feels that the teachers were not "professional" in dealing with the children. When she visits a international pre-school, she decides not to enrol her daughter there as she notices that teachers are not qualified to teach young children; the fact that the teachers are native English speakers, she feels, does not mean that they are qualified teachers. She therefore states a preference for locally qualified EFL teachers rather than native English speaking teachers.

When professional educationalists discuss the status of English in the Al-Madinah community, they tend to link the situation with MOE policies and regulations and how such decisions affect EFL outcomes. More importantly, mothers have the professionals' view on their side with regard to the importance of English as part of the EYL programme. The following section looks in detail at mothers' and professionals' justifications for early exposure to English.

7.4 Early exposure to English

As shown in Chapter Three there is a debate among scholars and researchers about early vs. late introduction of an additional language. Though it is not the remit of this research to participate in that debate, it is important to explore the mothers' views on early exposure to English and their motivation to have their children introduced to English at an early stage.

7.4.1 Mothers advocate early exposure to English

Zahraa's first response during the group interview is, "You are talking about just what we need", making it very important for me to explain from the very beginning that I am not there to assess the programme, or to provide recommendations about the best practice of teaching English to young children. I make it clear that the research's aim was to explore from a socio-cultural perspective the way mothers justify their expectations about introducing EFL at pre-primary level. However, Zahraa's enthusiastic response clarifies the need to explore mothers's views – or parents' views in general – with regard to their children learning EFL.

I always encourage my children to learn English, telling them that they are still young and they can learn a lot.

(Zahraa- Mother)

Zahraa goes further and claims that the importance of introducing English is indubitable:

The reason for introducing our children to English is obvious, it is a necessity.

(Zahraa- Mother)

7.4.1.1 Early or late exposure to English

There is on-going debate about the notion of whether younger is better in terms of introducing children to FL. Marinova-Todd (2000) clarifies the situation by claiming that, even though young FL learners tend to have higher proficiency in acquiring the target language, adult learners make faster progress. Among the research participants, this debate was reflected in comments made by two mothers, Rania and Wijdan. Rania claims the following:

Even if you introduce your child to English at a very early stage, they will not be able to obtain a native like accent.

(Rania- Mother)

She also refers to the fact that children can make their own decision about English later on:

If ...[my son] decides in the future that he likes the language and wants to learn it, I will support him and enrol him in language courses. There are many adults who learn the language and they master a good level in it.

(Rania- Mother)

In contrast, Wijdan strongly disagrees with the idea of introducing EFL later, and her argument is based on the poor results in English in many Saudi schools, which is blamed on this practice.

I have noticed that children who are introduced to English early are likely to have a positive attitude towards learning the language.

(Wijdan- Mother)

Her opinion stems from her personal observations of the children in her social circle, as well as from her position as a former EYL teacher.

By the same token, Hanen, a mother who is originally from Jeddah, points out that some parents are not aware of the importance of English for their children, and therefore, the English programme does not play a vital role in improving their children's learning skills. She claims that:

Al-Madinah lacks good kindergartens providing good quality English programmes, unlike Jeddah where my nephews and nieces are attending very good kindergartens and schools.

(Hanen- Mother)

In addition, Hanen points out the advantages of introducing English early to youngsters:

When young children are introduced to English early, they have the ability to store the knowledge in their sub-conscious and, even if they

do not use it immediately, one day they will.

(Hanan- Mother)

Considering the fact that the best age for exposure to FL is a controversial issue among scholars and educators, it is important to note that mothers who advocate early exposure to English expect their children to have a positive attitude towards learning and practicing English in the long term. In this regard, Dominguez and Pessoa (2005:477) carried out research which found that children who started to learn Spanish from pre-school level had a more positive attitude towards practicing the language, and more confidence in using it.

7.4.1.1.1 The view of a mother with a bilingual child

This positive relationship towards foreign language classes is also expressed by Arwa, a mother whose child is bilingual, as she spent some time in Canada and Australia during her postgraduate course, where he lived with her:

He has a solid background in English, you know he has been in an English-speaking environment since he was two years old and he naturally picked up the two languages simultaneously.

(Arwa-Mother)

Arwa's son is one of the few bilingual children in the kindergarten, whose parents chose to enrol them in Rowad rather than in an international kindergarten where English is the medium of communication. Furthermore, Arwa says that even though she is happy with her child's fluency in English, she wants him to learn Arabic and be as good in it as he is in English. On this point, Arwa agrees with Rania regarding the important role of a language and its implication for children's identities.

I did not put him in an international kindergarten because it is important for me to keep his identity.

(Arwa-Mother)

Arwa also shows an understanding of some mothers' concerns about introducing their children to English early:

Even though my son is bilingual, I do understand that some mothers have concerns about introducing their children to English at an early stage, as some children at pre-primary level sometimes do not master the fluency level of their mother tongue, so introducing them to another language can be seen as a real threat.

(Arwa- Mother)

She, however, does not consider that introducing English to young learners can conflict with their mother tongue.

But at this stage children do have the ability to learn more than one language. If the foreign language does not substitute the mother tongue as a medium of communication and is added as part of youngsters' early learning programme, children will benefit from that.

(Arwa- Mother)

Arwa is aware that her son can express his feelings much more easily in English than in Arabic because of his previous experience of living in English-speaking countries.

If I put him in an international kindergarten, he would have settled in quicker, as he is used to being in an educational context where English is the medium of communication.

(Arwa- Mother)

Nevertheless, Arwa's concern is his Arabic fluency, and this situation corresponds with what Rania suggests about the fluency of Arabic among Arab children who go to international schools, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Thus when justifying their desire for their children to be introduced to English at an early stage, mothers use the same argument as professional educationalists.

7.4.1.2 Mothers' justification through their experiences

As discussed in Chapter Five, when the mothers justify their decision to introduce their children to early years learning, they provide an advanced discourse which matches to some extent the specialists' views. When it comes to the way they justify their decision to introduce their children to English at this stage, however, the impact of their own experiences in rationalising their decision becomes vivid. This could be due to the urge to clarify the fact that their decision is not only affected by the level of their education but also by their experiences in real life.

7.4.1.2.1 Mothers' experiences with their older children

When they talk about their expectations, mothers' personal experiences come across as differing in various ways. Some mothers reflect on their experiences with their older children. One example of this is Abeer, the mother of a child with a speech disability, whose older sons were introduced to English when they were in intermediate school.

My older sons used to have a negative attitude towards learning English, and their excuse was *"It's not our language, so why bother and waste our time learning it?"*

(Abeer- Mother)

Abeer did not give up and she assumes that, as a mother, she knows what is best for her children; hence:

During the summer holiday I forced them to go to English courses, with no benefit, because they did not believe in the importance of English at that time.

(Abeer- Mother)

Therefore, when her younger son showed interest in learning English, she encouraged him and tried to create a positive attitude in him towards learning the language at an early stage to avoid the dilemma she had had with her older children, who only started to care about the importance of English for their future when they reached high school. This experience most likely affected her attitude with her disabled child so that, when he showed interest in the language, she further motivated him and encouraged him:

When he showed his interest in learning the language [English], I took that opportunity to provide him with English CDs and educational games, even though for him in particular English was not my main concern.

(Abeer- Mother)

Abeer's son, who enjoys learning the new language despite his speech disability, transfers what he learns in school and now uses it with his family.

7.4.1.2.2 From private to state education

Mozon talks about the importance of early exposure to English, drawing on her experience with her older children, who were introduced to English in the pre-primary stage:

In the pre-primary stage, my daughters used to be in a private kindergarten, where they were introduced to English. Later they went to private primary school where they continued to learn English. I saw the impact of the early exposure to English when I moved them to state intermediate school where their peers [had only] started their introduction to English. My daughters enjoy the subject of English and its classes, unlike their peers who consider English the toughest subject and dislike the classes.

(Mozon- Mother)

Mozon's situation draws attention to the role of investment in children's education and where EFL fits in this situation. Due to high private school fees, not all parents are able to enrol their children in such schools. Therefore, some parents who are eager to introduce their children to English tend to enrol their children in private schools in primary and pre-primary level, moving them to a state school when they are about to go to intermediate level. Thus, private schools are where mothers feel that their needs with regard to their children's education will be met, since private pre-schools provide EFL as part of their EYL programme. For this group of mothers, having their children at home was not a choice; their decision was to choose the best kindergarten in which their children would be introduced to English. Mozon is not the only participant to refer to the parents' attitude to investing in their children's education with regard to the family financial status. Ahlam, an EYL teacher at Rowad, talks about the importance of early exposure to English and, in addition to her views in the role of an EYL professional, shares her decisions as a mother. She points out that she is one of the mothers who want to introduce their children to English early but, without being able to pay private school fees, cannot opt to do that.

As a mother I believe in the importance of introducing English to young children, but such a decision is linked to the financial status of the family. Not all families are able to pay for private education and I consider myself one of them.

(Ahlam- EYL teacher)

In this situation, Ahlam does what many other mothers do; she enrolls her children in a private pre-school and then in state schools.

There will be a gap until they are introduced to English again, but at least it will not be something new or weird. And they will still hear English on TV and in electronic games.

(Ahlam-EYL teacher)

The way in which parents look at the kind of education they choose for their children as investment is affected by the level of acknowledgment English has in society, as learning English is widely considered to be a good investment strategy (Pittaway, 2004).

7.4.1.2.3 One mother's experience as an EYL professional

When Wijdan discusses her rationale for introducing her daughter to English at an early stage, she also refers to her own experience as a former EYL teacher at Rowad:

When I was teaching children, the language [English] was very important for me. As a class teacher I used to use some English words and encourage the children to use them. When I taught them the colours, we started by saying them in Arabic then I introduced them in English. I did that by myself because I believe in the importance of introducing children to English in an early stage.

(Wijdan- Mother)

Wijdan also advocates the notion of 'younger is better' in terms of introducing English:

...It [English] is today's language and if children do not have a good start from the very beginning in learning it, it will be difficult to teach them later. When they are young, children are like sponges and they can absorb whatever information you give them.

(Wijdan- Mother)

Furthermore, Wijdan claims that the policy makers' shift toward introducing English earlier in the national curriculum was a step that was taken very late; the private sector is always ahead of public policy decisions:

After what? This step should have been taken years ago, and now it is too late. Look at the poor outcome of secondary school graduates

in English.

(Wijdan- Mother)

Wijdan's support for early exposure to English and her highlighting the role of English as the world's language now, conflicts with Rania's views. This dialogue is from a group interview held in the first stage:

Wijdan: It is nice to have a young child who can speak English fluently.

Rania: Why speak in English when my mother tongue is Arabic? Why even introduce them to all the subjects in English, we are Arabs and it is our language.

Wijdan: You are right but if you look at the real world, English is everywhere; if you want to go for a job interview, the first question you will be asked is: " Do you know English?". After twenty years no one will speak Arabic.

During the interview, Wijdan refers to English as 'al-language' means 'the language', showing her natural relationship with English. Her experience as an EYL teacher makes her confident in her decision to introduce her daughter to English early without worrying about her mother tongue.

They [children] are able to learn Quran, Arabic and English. As much as you give them they will [be] eager for more. You can make them the shape you want, but if you limit their learning they will stick to your limits.

(Wijdan - Mother)

7.4.1.2.4 Mothers' experiences with foreign languages

Viewing the introduction of English to young children as a necessity is quite fanciful on the part of the mothers who do so, as the formal language in KSA is Arabic and English is introduced as

a foreign language in the Saudi National Curriculum when children are twelve. As shown in 6.3.1., Zahraa claims that learning English is a necessity nowadays as it is the language that people cannot do without. Zahraa was educated in a French school in Syria, and her ability to speak English and French fluently has influenced her desire for her children to learn English fluently. It seems that her personal experience in acquiring foreign languages shapes her expectations for her own children to some extent.

Me and my sister were educated in a French school in Syria, so we speak French, English and Arabic, [as] for my children, I do not ask them to learn French but they have to learn English; they can go without French or any other languages, but not without English, no.
(Zahraa-Mother)

Mayadah, a Syrian mother, gives another image of the impact of a mother's experience on her expectations for her children. She says that her English is not very good and she wants to avoid that happening with her children;

I was never happy with my own English and I want to avoid that [happening] with my children. I want them to pick the language when they are young so they can master it at a high level as they grow up.
(Mayadah- Mother)

Therefore, she advocates introducing them to English early so their potential to acquire a good level in the language is enhanced.

7.4.1.3 Technology and children's exposure to English

The rapid growth in electronic devices has its implications for the exposure of young children to English. With the availability of a range of software and applications, children can easily access various English activities, in addition to programmes on television, and all of these attract children's attention and influence their relationship with the English language. Soderman and

Oshio (2008) indicate that once children are introduced to FL at pre-primary level, they do learn the new language simultaneously with their first language. Moreover, the same authors point out that, due to the diversity of backgrounds that young learners come from, some of them are aware of the existence of other languages while others are not, which may confuse them (ibid: 300).

For instance, Wijdan emphasises the importance of introducing English at an early stage by providing the example of her daughter who used to watch a certain educational channel in English which targets pre-schoolers before they are enrolled in kindergarten. Wijdan attributes her daughter's positive attitude towards acquiring the language to this early exposure to English. Wijdan's daughter was in one of the classes I observed and she was active during this class when the teacher revised sounds in English and asked the children for words with each sound; the child responded quickly three times and she was confident in using her knowledge.

When my daughter was younger, I used to turn on a professional channel in English which is specialised for toddlers and young children. She picked up loads of words and she has never forgotten the words she learnt through that channel.

(Wijdan- Mother)

During the third stage of the fieldwork, Samah prefers to have the follow-up interview at her house and, during our conversation, her two young children are playing with the Ipad. Her little girl, who is at Rowad, is playing games with colours and letters in English, whereas her son is playing car racing games where the instructions are given in English.

With all this technology, it is rare to find a child who has never been exposed to English.

(Samah-Mother)

She continues to explain the impact of technology on the children's learning progress.

There are several educational applications and I tend to encourage them to play these games; there are applications for them to learn English, and also for Arabic and Maths.

(Samah-Mother)

The power of technology in today's world makes it common for children to be exposed to English at an early age. Such early exposure might affect the mothers' decision to introduce their children to English in an appropriate way through early learning programmes. Besides, in some cases mothers look at the use of technology as a support to enhance their children's English learning:

Children learn a lot from TV as they like to copy anything at this age, so when they watch English programmes they copy what they watch... There are some good English programmes on TV, like 'Barney' - my daughters like that.

(Mayadah-Mother)

The way mothers select the programmes for their children to watch varies from one mother to another. Abeer advocates the use of DVD players:

Personally, I prefer to choose DVD videos programme for him, in this way I can control what he watches, and when he chooses the DVD he wants to watch, we sit and watch it together.

(Abeer- Mother)

Mayadah, who was interviewed at the same time as Abeer, makes the following point:

TV is easier - you only need to turn it on and they will start watching but with DVDs you need to choose one, then put in the DVD player and you might ask them to choose the episode they want

to watch. Just put the TV on and the children will pick up some words.

(Maydah- Mother)

Abeer, on the other hand, claims that for her DVDs are a better choice than TV:

With DVDs we can practise what we hear, we can play it again, but TV I do not really encourage, even children's specialists claim that it has lots of disadvantages for young children.

(Abeer- Mother)

The spread of English as an international language has its impact on the programmes children are introduced to, either on TV or by means of other devices. Hence it appears that most children involved in this study seem to be exposed – either by themselves or through their mothers - to English in one way or another. Research has been carried out by Hawkins (2005), particularly with regard to exposure to English before enrolment in kindergarten, into the role of TV and videos with two children whose first language is not English, and who attended a mainstream kindergarten in the US.

7.4.1.4 English is not that important

Apart from the rationales discussed by the mothers regarding the introduction of children to English at an early stage in their development, Rania disagrees about the importance of such exposure and states that:

Personally, I feel that English is not important, at the end of the day it's not our language and not even a national language in the country. I never need to use it in Al-Madinah ...Frankly I am not that interested in [my son] being taught English.

(Rania-Mother)

Moreover, she points out that her child does not like watching programmes in English:

He hates it when I suggest he watches something in English. He watched a movie in Arabic, the next time I asked him to watch it in English, but he got upset and said: “Why?, we have Arabic, so why English?”

(Rania-Mother)

Rania's strongly expressed opinion against introducing English to young children is influenced by her Egyptian acquaintances, whose children attended international schools in Egypt, and who do not use Arabic in their daily communication, which Rania is not in favour of.

I went with them to a restaurant one day and their children were talking in either German or English all the time, and once we had the menu they did not even open the right side, they immediately turned to the left [side] and started to read it in English

(Rania- Mother)

Rania justifies her opinion, saying that although she enjoys learning English, she will not force her only son to learn it as it is not vital for him; if, in the future, he decides to learn the language, he will make the choice himself.

Wafaa, a mother who was in the same group interview, comments:

There is an internal restriction, he might have had a bad experience, believe me he has got the ability to learn the language.

(Wafaa-Mother)

Rania disagrees and emphasises the fact that her son does not like learning English because of the language itself. Rania eliminates the possibility of this being due to his having had a bad experience, pointing out that when he was younger, he used to prefer English programmes to Arabic ones, and that when he recently went to visit his father who was studying in the UK, he picked up English vocabulary. Therefore, Rania's son shows an ability to learn English, which might indicate that Rania has some suspicions about the impact of English on her child's

identity. This becomes clear during the group interviews when Wijdan suggests an English club where its members could meet and discuss topics in English:

Wijdan: It will be lovely if we have a cafe where we can meet regularly and talk and discuss some issue in English to practise the language.

Rania: Where is our identity? Why speak English in the first place when you are here?

7.4.2 Professionals advocate early exposure to English

The views of the EYL professionals who took part in this research on the introduction of English to young children are similar to those of the mothers. In order to provide a cohesive picture of these views, data from the questionnaires is used along with those collected from the interviews and observations.

All the twelve kindergartens involved in the study have English as part of their EYL learning programme, but the way in which it is introduced varies from one kindergarten to another, as does the number of English language classrooms.

7.4.2.1. Meeting the parents' demands

The findings of the first questionnaire sent to the head teachers showed nine of them agreeing that by introducing English to young learners, the school is responding to the parents' demands.

Children are introduced to English everyday; parents want their children to learn English. For us to be able to compete with the other schools and pre-schools, we have to provide a high quality programme that meets the parents' demands.

(Suhailah- Head Teacher)

Kindergartens quasi-marketing to the families' needs is likely to affect the introduction of English in EYL. This is the case of one of the Quranic kindergartens, where English is introduced to children once a week, as this is mentioned in the advertising flyer immediately after the details of Quran classes. Such an image reflects the power English can have as a tool to attract parents, if used by private schools to target their prospective students. A head teacher from one of these kindergartens says:

We are a Quranic kindergarten, but we cannot neglect the importance of English; if we do not provide it as part of our learning programme, parents will ask for it. So we have introduced it twice a week.

(Hessah- Head Teacher)

In the two Quranic kindergartens, therefore, English does form part of their programme, but it is only introduced as an activity once or twice a week.

7.4.2.2 No to English at an early stage

Amnah, the head teacher of the Quranic kindergarten where English is introduced once a week, says that English is an optional activity as some parents do not want their children to be introduced to English at this stage.

Some parents do not want their children to enter the English language classes, so we took them out.

(Amnah- Head Teacher)

This attitude from the parents is shared by a teacher in the same school who is reluctant to meet with me, but whose comment is transmitted by the head teacher:

I tried to convince her to come and talk to you but she was reluctant, she is against the idea of introducing young children to English even

though she was asked to teach it to Year 6 pupils.

(Amnah- Head Teacher)

Due to the type of school where this attitude is expressed, chosen by parents because of the extra Quran lessons in the curriculum, the on-going debate in Saudi Arabia regarding the introduction of English at an early age becomes relevant with the understanding that there are parents who are against introducing English to their children. However, Amnah states that, being a Quranic kindergarten, they have children from different backgrounds, some of whose mother tongue is not Arabic. As she herself has a good level of English, she manages to communicate with those mothers, and she would rather have several members of staff who had the ability to communicate in English when needed.

The interesting point here is the way English is illustrated on the two kindergartens' signs, alongside the Quran and ICT. In general, parents who send their children to such schools are more concerned about Quranic learning. However, even in this type of pre-school, English is introduced as part of the curriculum as a result of parents' demands in terms of private education, and due to the competition among pre-primary institutions to provide the required curricula to satisfy those parents.

7.4.2.3 Early exposure to English and children's development

Apart from the introduction of English as a response to parents' demands, it is important to note that eleven of the head teachers agreed about the relationship between learning EFL and children's cognitive development. Despite the varying quality and duration of EFL classes, the fact that children are introduced to a new area of knowledge seems to have a positive impact on cognitive development from the head teachers' point of view. The EYL teachers whom I met in Rowad also agree on this, with Sanaa stating:

...[Children] will accept anything you introduce them to... when they know things in Arabic and English, that boosts their self-esteem.

(Sanaa - EYL teacher)

In addition, Ahlam, another EYL teacher at Rowad, believes that the ability of children to understand and learn new things is reflected in a necessity to stop them from using ‘bad words’ in Arabic, which neither their parents nor their teachers want them to learn, by getting them to learn new words in English:

... and they [children] will keep on saying that inappropriate word for hours, so instead if they learn a new word in another language and keep on saying it all day, that’s good. Even better than picking the wrong words in Arabic.

(Ahlam-EYL teacher)

EFL teachers also agree on the importance of early exposure to English, with Areej supporting Sanaa’s opinion on the impact of acquiring English on the children’s personalities, as suggested previously:

As they are young children, they are open to learning anything and when they get used to using some English words when they are young, that promotes their confidence and, as we say, ‘early start, grow smart’.

(Areej-EFL teacher)

Discussion

As discussed in the following section, the context in which English is introduced to young children is very important. Despite the fact that the study took place in a pre-school where English is taught to children four times a week, mothers did discuss the various possible ways through which their children might be introduced to English.

Given the different reasons why mothers choose Rowad kindergarten, as discussed in Chapter Five, they are inevitably aware – or at least became aware as the year progressed - of when English is introduced during the academic year, and how often it is taught. Thus, in the discussion on the introduction of English to their children, they do consider the type of school in which they have enrolled their children. The group interview gives rise to an opportunity for

Rania and two other mothers to discuss this topic from various perspectives with limited interference from myself, and this is an advantage in that the mothers start asking each other questions that relate directly to the research topic, discussing the importance of introducing English to young children and, as explained above, expressing contradictory views. However, with two mothers who strongly advocate early exposure to English, Rania's strong attitude against it is again highlighted. It would seem that the attitude of the other two mothers towards English puts her in a position where she feels she has to protect children's identities from the threat of FL and, therefore, she understates the importance of the early introduction of English, even though she herself admits that the way English is taught in Rowad is acceptable.

The possible threat to their mother tongue posed by introducing English to young children - either as a taught subject or as the medium of communication - is discussed in a Saudi local educational magazine by Al-Faisal (2005), who states that, in order to look at the extent to which English influences young learners, it is important to consider the context in which English is introduced. He also claims that the way in which English is introduced in KSA schools does not harm the mother tongue as it is taught as a subject and is not at the core of the learning process (see 7.5).

In discussions about early exposure to English, mothers claim that children are introduced to English in one way or another, even if the introduction occurs indirectly and in an informal learning situation through, for example, their use of technology; mothers refer to the way in which children pick up English words while use various gadgets and devices.

Professional educationalists have the same view as the mothers regarding the importance of early exposure to English, emphasizing children's ability to absorb new knowledge at this stage.

7.5 Language and Identity

7.5.1 Impact of English on children's mother tongue

Most of the mothers express a positive attitude towards learning English alongside the children's mother tongue, with the exception of one negative opinion on this from Rania, presented previously. However, Rania herself says that the way in which English is taught at Rowad does not really threaten the children's mother tongue; the real threat to the children's identity and first language occurs if they are in international kindergartens. Razan points out that as children have been exposed to Arabic since they were born, by the time they go to kindergarten, their Arabic is strong, and their exposure to English comes later when they enter kindergarten. Therefore, children are believed to benefit from learning English early and there need be no worries about their Arabic.

7.5.1.1 Mothers' opinions on the impact of English on children's mother tongue

Learning a new language tends to raise issues about the native language. Mothers are aware of this, pointing out that learning English does not in their view have a negative impact on their children's mother tongue.

There is no real threat to Arabic, [the] society's language is Arabic and even if they were in an international school, they [would have] learnt Arabic in one way or another... with their relatives and cousins they use Arabic to communicate.

(Razan- Mother)

When Sammar discusses the impact of English on the children's mother tongue she refers to her daughter's experience of studying for one semester at an international kindergarten before her enrolment in Rowad. She has this to say when I ask her if she is not worried about her daughter's development in her mother tongue:

If we were not in Saudi then maybe, but when she went to the
[international] kindergarten she was speaking Arabic fluently.
(Sammar- Mother)

Sammar gives a clear indication that the environment in which English is introduced is very important. She believes that, because English is not widely spoken by many Saudis in their daily lives, neither her daughter's Arabic fluency nor her identity is negatively affected even though she is in an English-medium kindergarten.

She shares with me a story about something that happened when she went to Riyadh for several months:

There [in Riyadh] my daughter saw people communicating in English in the malls and restaurants; she turned to me and asked: 'Are we in Saudi?.' I said: 'Yes, but not in Al-Madinah'.
(Sammar- Mother)

Sammar's comment indicates her view on the status of English in Al-Madinah, where English is not noticeably used in public places as a medium of communication. Because of this, she has decided to enrol her daughter in an international pre-school:

I have noticed that she likes learning English, she had been enrolled in a private kindergarten for two years where she was introduced to English daily, but I was not happy with the provided English curriculum. So this year I put her in an international kindergarten.
(Sammar- Mother)

Sammar then discusses the advantages and disadvantages of her decision:

Her English has improved in the international kindergarten ... but I was not satisfied with the way teachers dealt with the children... here [Rowad] teachers pay a lot of attention to the children.

Despite her initial disagreement with the possible impact of English on her daughter's native language, Sammar states that:

Her spoken Arabic was not affected by being in an international kindergarten, but her written Arabic was. She used to write better before her enrolment there. But I think as she is here [Rowad] now, her Arabic writing will improve.

(Sammar- Mother)

Even Rania, who does not advocate early exposure to English, admits that the way EFL is taught in Rowad does not threaten the mother tongue.

Wijdan: The way English is presented here does not threaten the mother tongue.

Rania: Here in this kindergarten [Rowad], I do not see any problem. The problem appears when I put my child in an international kindergarten where all subjects are taught in English. WHY? I am an Arab, why do I have to study all the subjects in English? Here it is not the medium of communication, unlike in international schools.

7.5.1.1.1 Mixing Arabic and English

In the context of this research, mothers agree that the way their children are introduced to English does not threaten their mother tongue. Furthermore, some of them explicitly attribute to English the role of an enhancement tool for their children's cognitive development.

Their [children's] ability to understand things in the two languages broadens their knowledge, and that gives them extra benefits in terms of their confidence and self-esteem.

(Danyah- Mother)

However, the fact that children are introduced to English early in their learning programme leads to them mixing Arabic with English in certain situations. For instance, Mayadah says her

daughter sometimes becomes confused between the two languages in her writing, especially with similar sounds.

When she writes her name - Asalah - in English, sometimes she writes the “L” with the Arabic letter “ل” [AsaLah]
(Mayadah- Mother)

Having said that, Mayadah also claims:

They [young children] do not learn the language at this stage; they are taught letters, numbers and a few words.
(Mayadah-Mother)

Mayadah looks at the introduction of English as a kind of “split up” English learning, when she separates the children’s learning of English letters, numbers and some words from learning English as a language. For her, learning the language means gaining the ability to speak and understand the targeted language. What her daughter acquires does not link to that image of acquiring the language as a whole, and it was from here that the concept of “splitting up” learning English originated. However, Abeer, who was interviewed at the same time, does not agree with this idea;

Young children can understand that English is different from Arabic, like history is different from geography. This is one language and that is another.
(Abeer- Mother)

Even though Abeer’s child had a speaking disability, and teaching him English was not her first motivation for enrolling him at Rowad, she notices that he enjoys English language classes and has started to pick up some words in English.

You cannot limit their learning to letters and numbers, they are learning the language and they will learn as much as you give them.

Abodi is really enjoying the English language classes and he has started to practise at home what he learns in the classes.

(Abeer- Mother)

The fact that Abeer and Mayadah have a pair interview in which they are both interviewed at the same time, helps in that they have an in-depth discussion in which they question each other's views and opinions. Such a situation helps the discussion to develop between mothers with little interference from the researcher. It can also be related to the way mothers see their own English. Mayadah, for example, is not satisfied with her level of English and that seems to influence her view of the process of language learning.

Furthermore, the mixing of Arabic with English happen when I observe the English language classrooms. In one of the classes, the English teacher turns on the screen where an image of a garden is shown.

Teacher: What can you see?

Children (giving different answers): A tree... a house....flowers

Child 1: *Murjahah*

Teacher: Good, but how do we say it in English?

Child 2: A game,

Teacher: Kind of... this is a swing. Let us repeat! SWING.

This code switching is seen in this research from a social perspective, where it is important to look at the way children interact with their teachers and peers during EFL classes. In one class which I observe, children mix the two languages together in several situations, and freely use what they have learnt in their speech. In another class where the children are doing a written assessment, the teacher instructs them to tell her when they have finished.

Child one: Teacher *Abghah* [I want] red colour

Child Two: *Ablah* [teacher] I finished

In fact, the code-switch between two languages occurs in many classes where foreign languages are introduced to young learners (Soderman & Oshio, 2008), and is a critical element in acquiring a new language. It seems to be an important aspect to consider due to its frequent occurrences in this research, either from my observations or from that of mothers, although it is not the research's aim to cover this aspect .

7.5.2 EYL professionals' views on the impact of English on the mother tongue

Before going further into this section, it is necessary to note that EYL teachers are not trained to teach English as it is not a requirement in the National Guidelines for Pre-schools in KSA. However, nine head teachers agree that policy makers encourage the introduction of EFL. As mentioned previously, the number of lessons in which young learners are introduced to English varies from one kindergarten to another.

Even though EYL teachers support the early introduction of English to young learners, they do not all have a role in its teaching. EYL teachers see EFL lessons as an extra activity which does not relate to the curriculum they follow and therefore, class teachers do not take any part in introducing children to English at Rowad. Heba, an EYL teacher, highlights the role of the class teacher:

We have our own curriculum to follow, and we cannot allow the children to practise their English during our class. I do struggle with some of my pupils saying the colours in English; I tend to remind them that they are not in Ms. Areej's class.

(Heba-EYL teacher)

Heba is not against the early introduction of English as her own young children are introduced to English at home through TV programmes. However, it seems that she does not encourage the domination of English over Arabic; therefore, she explicitly says that if her pupils speak in English during her class, she tells them off and reminds them to speak in Arabic. Being in a

kindergarten where the medium of communication is Arabic, Heba's attitude is not unacceptable. Nevertheless, such an attitude contrasts with Wijdan's opinion on implementing English during the normal classes:

When I used to teach here [Rowad], I encouraged my pupils to learn English, we used to say things in both Arabic and English.
(Wijdan-Mother)

Moreover, EYL teachers do not disagree that EFL is important for children's learning, clearly stating the vital role that EFL teachers play in creating a positive attitude toward EFL classrooms:

If the EFL teacher is enthusiastic about teaching her pupils and she creates new approaches and implements plenty of songs and actions while teaching them new letters and words, children will pick up her enthusiasm.
(Ahlam- EYL teacher)

However, EFL teachers claim that EYL teachers do not cooperate with them for the enhancement of the children's English learning. The EFL supervisor, Randa, claims:

We do not expect them to help in teaching the language, but when we have activities and open days we really want them to cooperate with us. Sometimes we need extra lessons so the children can practise their roles, but we never get it.
(Randa-EFL supervisor)

Such a lack of cooperation between EYL teachers and EFL teachers can be due to the absence of guidelines for EFL in pre-schools, as the decision regarding the number of lessons during the week and the materials used is taken wholly by the school. It is worth noting that I did not witness a lack of cooperation or communication between the two groups of teachers during the time I spent in the teachers' room. The EFL and EYL teachers share this room and talk freely to

each other without labelling themselves as belonging to one group or another. In fact, EYL teachers encourage the early introduction to English from their perspective as professionals in EYL, as they look at the way children react to English:

Children like to go to the EFL classroom, they look happy and very excited, and they start to sing the songs they have learnt on their way to the classroom.

(Ahlam-EYL teacher)

With the limited practise of English outside the EFL classroom, and the domination of the mother tongue during the school day, teachers seem to worry less about the impact of English on Arabic:

Arabic is the language of the society in which the children live and they have to learn it to communicate with everyone around them. By the same token, learning English becomes a necessity when dealing with the wider environment.

(Areej-EFL teacher)

The impact of the domination of the Arabic language on the people of Al-Madinah in their daily lives seems to go some way towards diminishing the threat of English to the mother tongue:

They [the children] speak Arabic almost everywhere outside the EFL class; they use it with their friends and relatives, at home and when they are out. English will never take over their mother tongue.

(Shorooq-EFL teacher)

In sum, both the mothers' and the professionals' points of view indicate that the way in which English is introduced at Rowad does not pose any real threat to the children's mother tongue. Thus, it is important to look next at the way English is introduced at Rowad.

Discussion

Mothers claim that English has not had a negative impact on their children mother tongue; this opinion is similar to the response from parents in Indonesia as found by Djiwandono (2005:68-69) who looked at the reasons why parents introduce their children to English at an early stage, and found that parents send their children to private kindergartens to expose them to English at an early age. However, such exposure does not pose a threat to their mother tongue as all the other subjects are taught in it. Moreover, if young children are simultaneously introduced to both languages, as Soderman & Oshio (2008) suggest, it could help them to acquire the two languages naturally.

In the Saudi Arabian society, almost all children are spoken to at home in Arabic, which means that introducing another language for young children at school is almost the only alternative for the absence of this language in the child's home where the parents are Arabic monolingual people (Al-Mansour, 2009:10)

The domination of the Arabic language in the Saudi community cannot be neglected. On the other hand, considering the introduction of English in school as the only alternative for children does not correspond with the views and practice of the participants in this research. In their case, it can be argued that children are exposed to English at home even before their enrolment into pre-schools and this is because of the rapid spread of technology where the common language is English. Besides, many of the research participants themselves speak English, albeit with varied levels of fluency, so Al-Mansour's reflection on monolingual parents does not apply to the kind of sociocultural milieu targeted by this research.

So far the thesis discussed mothers' demands in relation to introducing their children to English at an early stage and the way they justify their decision. The coming section explores in detail the English programme at Rowad. The analysis draws on interviews and observations.

7.6 The English programme provided at Rowad

In Rowad kindergarten, pupils are introduced to English four times a week, with each EFL class lasting for forty-five minutes. There are three EFL classrooms for fourteen groups, so for their EFL class, children move from their normal classroom to their EFL classroom. In order to clarify what an EFL class at Rowad can consist of, figure 5 presents a summary of one of the EFL classes I observed as part of my research.

Rowad was established to provide the children of Al-Madinah with a high quality education, as Azhar, the General Director for Rowad Schools points out. The English programme is provided as a result of the parents' demand and the on-going trend in private education, not only in KSA but worldwide. Moreover, English is one of the elements the school counts on. At their higher levels, intermediate and secondary, learners have the facility of an English lab. Mrs. Hamsa explains the way English is taught to pre-schoolers at Rowad:

Every week, each English language teacher gives her pupils a sheet where the phrases and topics the children are going to be introduced to are written. Pupils have four EFL classes every week and they have a monthly activity which is also in English.

(Mrs. Hamsa- Rowad's head teacher)

At Rowad there used to be an American supervisor for the English programme, and the English curriculum is different from that of the mainstream. According to Al-Harhi (2009), in some kindergartens in Al-Madinah teaching English at this level focuses on the names of letters rather than the sounds. In contrast, at Rowad there is an awareness of the importance of introducing English through a phonological approach. Moreover, Randa, the EFL supervisor in Rowad, states:

EFL teachers at the kindergarten are trained to apply the Jolly Phonics approach in teaching English. We had a British expert who

introduced them to the programme and it has been implemented for the past four years.

(Randah- EFL supervisor and teacher)

During the EFL class, the Jolly Phonics approach is obvious, with the use of the sounds of the letters and the actions related to each sound. In order to obtain a better understanding about the Jolly Phonics approach, I start to expand my knowledge regarding this approach at the earlier stage of data analysis. Before discussing the EFL classes in depth, it should be noted that the analysis in this section is derived mainly from the research observations that took place during the first stage of the fieldwork, in which the focus was on the social aspects of the classroom and the way children communicate among themselves, and with the adults around them, given that this research does not aim to look at the best practice of introducing EFL to young learners. From the information presented above regarding the EFL classes at Rowad, it is important to look at some common themes that appear in several of the observations carried out in these classes with different EFL teachers: the use of stories for introducing pupils to new sounds and revising previous knowledge; the role of songs in teaching EFL to young children; and the status of English during EFL classes, taking into consideration the importance of social dimensions in these classes due to the nature of the present research. Therefore, although the following part of the analysis looks at some teaching methods, my focus is on the way interaction and communication take place during the lessons, rather than assessing the use of a certain method.

7.6.1 Common features in EFL classrooms at Rowad

EFL plays a noticeable role in the learning programme at Rowad; therefore it is essential to investigate EFL classes at Rowad, with reference to the teaching methods applied and the social interaction between the pupils and their teachers and among the pupils themselves.

Figure 5. EFL classroom at Rowad:

The children left their classroom with their class teachers (two of them), they stood in a line and started to count in English :1, 2 ,3 . Then they started to sing songs while crossing the playground to get to the EFL classroom, where the EFL teachers (the teacher and a teaching assistant) were waiting for them

Teacher: Good morning Stars Class

Children: Good morning, Teacher

The nineteen children sat in a circle and they started to sing The Rainbow Song, while the teacher used soft toys of different colours to indicate which colour they mentioned as they sang. Once they finished, they started to sing Our Little House, while the teaching assistant was preparing the software. When they finished, the teacher asked:

What day is it today?

Monday

Tuesday

Friday

Teacher: We do not go to school on Fridays

Saturday

A little girl gave the answer, and then they started to sing with the teacher Seven Days of the Week (starting with Saturday).

Once the software was ready the children adjusted their positions to face the big screen., The teacher started to ask them about the images that were displayed in front of them, and some children gave answers in English and others in Arabic. If they

responded in Arabic, the teacher told them the meaning in English and they repeated it several times. When the children finished revising the week's topic, which was Our Home, they sat in a circle again and the teacher used large flash cards with letters printed on each card. The teacher held up the card with 'A a' on it and the children's response was :

aaaa (they said the sound of 'a' with the related action)

Capital A

small a

Then the teacher showed them several picture of images starting with a sound and the children responded. Then they revised seven more sounds, before they started listening to a story, with pictures displayed on the screen. The story introduced the new sound 'Ii' which the teacher emphasised during the story, and the children copied her in making the sound and doing the action.

When the story was over, the teacher asked the children some questions before they went to play with puzzles of numbers and colours. Just before the end of the class the teacher told the children to put the stuff back and then they queued to head to their classroom.

7.6.1.1 The implementation of stories in EFL classes in Rowad

Using stories in teaching FL is not uncommon practice according to Hendrickson (1992:3, 7), especially when introducing FL to learners at an early age. Telling stories to young learners is beneficial in enhancing their understanding of the target language and their ability to connect events. The way in which stories are applied in FL classes varies from one kindergarten to another. While in Rowad the teachers depend on electronically aided stories, where all the pupils in the class face a screen and listen to the teacher while she tells the story, Al-Qahtani (2009) looks at the role of reading stories for enhancing learners' vocabulary in English in a primary school in the Riyadh, with study showing a positive relationship between reading stories and the pupils' understanding of the English lexicon. Even though Al-Qahtani's study is different from mine in terms of the pupils' age and the nature of the research, the implementation of stories in the EFL classrooms of private schools in KSA seems to attract the attention of specialists who study the impact of story-telling on the introduction of EFL. This probably indicates a growing awareness of the use of stories in such classes.

In Rowad's EFL classes, children show interest when their teacher tells them a story of a man who lived in an igloo and some of the children are able to bring their previous knowledge to the class. For instance, when the image of the igloo appears on the screen with all the snow around it, a little girl -Wijdan's daughter- interrupts:

Miss, Mum said in America they have Santa Claus now.

I like snow

Such a situation has several elements to consider; firstly, the way in which children communicate during the class shows the switch between Arabic and English, as the underlined words above were expressed in English. In addition, they manage to express their ideas by mixing languages easily and using English words confidently. Secondly, children's awareness of global events and their ability to relate what they have learned outside the school to what they are learning inside the school are evident. To clarify the second point, it should be noted that children in KSA are not introduced to Santa Claus and there is no school holiday for Christmas as it is not celebrated. However, being introduced to English either at home or in school,

children become aware of other cultures and the events related to different cultural traditions. Thirdly, EFL teachers allow the children to express their ideas in either language, which is likely to encourage the children to use English freely. Randa, the EFL supervisor at Rowad kindergarten, states the following:

Many children fear the language in the very beginning, you know like anything new, but it is our job as teachers to make them like learning the language and introducing it in an easy way which the children enjoy. With our patience, the children will start to like EFL classes and they will start to use what they have learnt.

(Randa-EFL supervisor)

7.6.1.2 The role of songs in introducing learners to EFL at Rowad

When I carried out the fieldwork for my master's research, I had the opportunity to observe some EFL classes at two private kindergartens in Al-Madinah and, at that time, I noticed that the use of songs during EFL classes was very limited (Al-Harhi, 2009). This experience influenced my assumption that the scarcity of songs in the introduction of EFL to young learners was universal. However, from my first day at Rowad the image changes as I see the children singing in English on their way to their EFL classes, and during the classes.

The songs that are used in EFL classes are not usually the classic nursery rhymes, as the choice of songs has to do with the weekly unit to be taught. For instance, when the week's topic is colours, children are introduced to the Rainbow Song and asked to sing it, though pupils are encouraged to sing all the songs they learn throughout the year. Moreover, EFL teachers hold specific English Day activities for the children to facilitate their enjoyment of singing and acting in English. According to Areej, children enjoy such activities:

Every year we have an English Day; it is different from one year to another. It is important for the children to enjoy English outside the classroom, and such an event allows them to dress up and use

English in a joyful way. They like to see us dressing up just like them.

(Areej-EFL teacher)

7.6.1.3 The status of English during EFL classes at Rowad

At the beginning of this section, 6.6, a description of an EFL class at Rowad is given, but in this sub-section, the main focus is on the status of English during the classes, specifically how children communicate with their teachers and their classmates. For their EFL class, children physically move from one place where they speak in Arabic to a place where they are encouraged to speak in English with teachers who speak to them in English most of the time. Some children seem to go through this process easily while others need much more time to feel comfortable using English. That can be related to previous experiences children have had regarding English, as commented by one of Rowad's EFL teachers:

Some children are very enthusiastic about learning English, and they are involved in many activities during the class and they become very excited to show their knowledge of English in the class. However, others do not enjoy the class as much as they are not exposed to English outside the class, so they enjoy playing and colouring more than singing.

(Shorooq-EFL teacher)

Although teachers try to speak in English most of the time, on several occasions EFL teachers switch to Arabic to clarify something for the children, For example, in one of the classes the EFL teacher is working alone without an assistant and she has given her pupils a writing activity to do. One of the boys who has finished keeps on saying this in Arabic. The teacher tells him in English to wait, but he says again in Arabic that he has finished in Arabic. Then another boy sitting beside him says:

Wait she told you

The second boy uses the same English word the teacher has done to tell his friend to hold on, and then he says the rest of his sentence in Arabic. During the class, as the children move to another activity, they use the words they knew in English and complete the rest in Arabic.

Student: Teacher, Teacher I want *Maqas*

EFL teacher: Scissors, say with me all of you - scissors

It appears that children are happy to use the words they know during the EFL class and, by the same token, EFL teachers use any opportunity to introduce the children to new vocabulary. In another class, the EFL teacher shows the children a picture of insects.

Teacher: *Yallah* [Come on] Come on children, what can you see?

Children: *Hasharat*

Teacher: Yes, but in English, who knows?

(No response)

Teacher: Insects! Say it again: Insects.

The italicised words are said in Arabic. Despite the teachers' efforts to engage the children in speaking English, they themselves sometimes use Arabic, giving their instructions in English first, then repeating them in Arabic. Sammar, who became an EFL teacher after I had met her for the first time, says her attitude has changed slightly:

I did not use any Arabic words during the lesson, but when I saw the EFL supervisor using Arabic during the class for instructions and new vocabulary, which I think children need to learn in English, I became more tolerant in terms of not refraining from employing some Arabic words - though I am still trying my best to use more English.

(Sammar- EFL teacher)

During the third stage, Sammar provides a perspective as an EFL teacher, and expresses her own interest as a mother in exposing her child to English as, from her position as a teacher, she

knows that children need to listen to English as much as they can to learn the language. Although Sammar is qualified to teach students in intermediate and secondary school, her use of some Arabic words during the kindergarten class could be due to her limited experience with EYL approaches, and the fact that she is with the EFL supervisor, who might have influenced Sammar's views on the best way to teach English to young learners.

This section illustrated the status of English in the EFL classrooms at Rowad as I saw them from an outsider's perspective. Next, it is crucial to explore the mothers' points of view on the EFL programme provided at Rowad.

7.6.2 Mothers' views on the English programme provided at Rowad

In order to explore the mothers' views on Rowad's EFL programme, these are explored here through the data gathered from interviews during the first and third stages.

As illustrated before, English is an important pre-requisite for some mothers when they look for the best kindergarten in which to enrol their children. The mothers' views on the standard of the English programme at Rowad vary. Sara, who holds a degree in English Literature and whose daughter has attended both pre-primary and primary school there, comments on the English programme provided at Rowad:

I asked about the English programme here [at Rowad] and I was informed that the curriculum is American, so I looked at the books for the primary and the intermediate [levels] and they are amazing. We have not seen such colours, photos or layout in English language books before.

(Sara-Mother)

As Sara trained to teach English to intermediate and secondary students, she is familiar with the English syllabus under the Saudi National Curriculum, and she can see how useful and attractive the English programme at Rowad primary school looks. Her daughter who has been introduced

to English at Rowad during pre-primary, makes a smooth transition to learning the language at the primary level. Even though there is no specific English curriculum for the pre-primary stage, the teaching approach, including Jolly Phonics, appears to work in preparing children for a well-organised programme at the formal stage when they transfer to that stage.

In the pre-primary stage, the EFL curriculum was vague for me as there were no specific books or workbooks to follow and [learning] depended on the worksheet they had in the class. But the situation has changed since she moved to Year one.

(Sara-Mother)

The mothers' view on the English programme provided at Rowad is likely to have been affected by their personal experiences or by their motivation in enrolling their children in Rowad, Abeer, for instance, focuses on the teachers' way of getting newcomers to English to join in the learning process, and she describes the situation when she attended an EFL class with her son on his first day:

When I went to the English language class with him, the teachers were very friendly and they encouraged the children to take part. The children themselves were amazing, when the teacher revised the letters [sounds] with them, they were moving their hands and doing the actions with the teacher. Even Abody [my son] was involved in the games and activities; their topic was about family and they were introduced to the words for some members of the family. He started to call me Mummy.

(Abeer-Mother)

Abeer initially took her son to Rowad as she was advised to do so because of the staff's qualifications and their ability to deal with disabled children. She used to have some concerns about her son's adjustment to kindergarten, but now she is very satisfied with the way the children are dealt with. Moreover, she finds that, despite her son's speaking disability, he enjoys

learning a new language, and he uses what he learns in different contexts and does not limit this to the English language classroom, or even the kindergarten.

7.6.1.1 Rowad's English programme is not fantastic but it is OK

In order to explore the mothers' level of satisfaction with the EFL programme provided at Rowad, the research goes through a third stage where I manage to contact four mothers who are willing to share and expand on their views. One of the mothers is Walaa, who has enrolled her daughter at Rowad along with her two nieces after a bad experience in a private kindergarten. During this third stage, Walaa, who has a degree in English Literature, says that she believes that she made the best choice when she chose Rowad, despite the fact that the EFL programme is not remarkable:

I still believe Rowad is better than other kindergartens, as I told you before from several perspectives: suitable building, qualified teachers and not least the care and attention they give to the youngsters... in Al-Madinah, an international kindergarten is worse than the worst.
(Walaa- Mother)

She then gives her thoughts on the English programme, at the end of the academic year:

To be honest with you, regarding English I have not witnessed the required attention to learning the language. There is no remarkable interest in teaching English, their focus is on letters, numbers and songs.
(Walaa- Mother)

In spite of her disapproval of the English programme at Rowad, Walaa points out that:

It is really a standard programme, but still the best in Al-Madinah, and if I want to put her in an international school it would be worse than the worst itself.
(Walaa- Mother)

Walaa also reflects on the progress of her daughter in English:

Her language does improve but not to the level I expect. She learns more [English] at home than in the kindergarten.

(Walaa- Mother)

In Walaa's case, her priority is her child's welfare, so she seems less concerned about her daughter's English not improving to the level she was expecting it to. It is likely that Walaa heard about the situation in the international kindergartens from people in her social circle, as well as from her sister Bayan who played a role in convincing Sammar, her friend, to enrol her daughter in Rowad. Nevertheless, it is common for mothers to share their views and ideas on their children's education among their social peers, and such exchanges can affect a mother's decision regarding choosing one kindergarten over another, as explained in 6.3.

7.6.1.2 The dominant language and the use of the target language

The children's use of the knowledge acquired in English classes and its application in different contexts outside the classroom, or with people who are not from their family, varies in my study. Hanen says that while her daughter has a good amount of English words and phrases at her disposal, uses them freely at home with Hanen, and does well in the EFL class, she refrains from speaking English when she moves to another context where she meets new people. Haneen talks about a recent situation:

Her problem is confidence, yesterday I took her to visit my English teacher - she is a native English speaker - and when she asked my daughter, 'How are you Lyian?', she did not answer, but she knew the answer because whenever I ask her or her teacher at the kindergarten asks, she responds.

(Hanen- Mother)

Hanen, therefore, considers the importance of being in a context where the dominant language is English, as a way of enhancing her daughter's learning process in English.

My sister is now in the US and I am planning to spend the summer holidays there, so my daughter will be in an English[*speaking*] environment and her knowledge will increase.

(Hanan- Mother)

The context where a child uses the target language might influence his/her use of that language. In a context where the medium of communication is Arabic a child might not be encouraged to use the English s/he has acquired even if the person s/he is speaking to is a native speaker of English. The opposite might apply if a child finds him/herself in a context where the target language is the dominant one. Danyah gives the example of her son when she discusses the role travelling plays in enhancing the learning of English,

When we travelled, he was able to use his English knowledge confidently. When we go to restaurants, as he knows the names of some foods, he uses them.

(Danyah- Mother)

In the case of Danyah's son, he found himself in a context where all his family members were communicating in English, and was thus implicitly encouraged to apply his own knowledge as well. Moreover, Danyah allows her child to practise what he has learnt without limiting the use of English to a specific context.

The various situations children experience in their English learning process are shared by other children in similar age groups across the world. For instance, Dominguez and Pessoa (2005:477) find that learners of foreign languages, whether they are introduced to the FL at kindergarten level or later, rarely use the target language outside the classroom or with their families. Other children may do the exact opposite and, as Soderman and Oshio (2008) suggest, be brave and put their new knowledge into practice.

7.6.1.3 International schools are better for the acquisition of English

During the first stage, Hanen shows her enthusiasm for enhancing her child's opportunity to learn English, emphasising the limited choices she has in Al-Madinah compared to Jeddah:

In Al-Madinah, in kindergartens they do not care about English, which is very important for me.

(Hanen- Mother)

Along with English, the kindergarten's physical facilities are important for Hanen:

Here [Rowad] they have a good English programme and the school buildings and facilities provided are suitable for the children... I visited an international kindergarten but the buildings were dull and not designed for young children. Hence I put her here.

(Hanen- Mother)

Hanen then reflects on what her daughter learnt:

Initially she learnt the letters, some phrases and words; now she says:

Mama I wanna bathroom, you know something like that.

(Hanen- Mother)

At this stage, Hanen's daughter has only spent three quarters of the first term at Rowad, and Hanen does not appear to regret her choice. However, during the third stage, in an online interview, Hanen claims that the English outcome from Rowad is far behind her expectations and, even though her daughter is doing well in all the subjects including English, as a mother she is disappointed by the kindergarten.

I am just so disappointed with her level of English, I expected her to improve her English more than she did. For a whole year, she only

learnt songs, and a few sentences... This is not the level of language I expect.

(Hanan- Mother)

As a result, by the end of the year, Hanen decides to put her daughter in an international kindergarten.

The fees in the international kindergarten are far higher than in Rowad, so I thought deeply and I prefer to put my daughter in a school where she gets a good foundation, despite the poor physical facilities compared to Rowad.

(Hanan-Mother)

For Hanen, although the facilities are important in enhancing an educational environment, her priority is to improve her daughter's English. Hence, an international kindergarten is a better place for her as all communication is in English, and Arabic is introduced as a subject.

Another mother who shares Hanen's disappointment in Rowad's EFL programme is Sammar. When I meet her in the first stage she has just moved her daughter to Rowad from an international pre-school because she was not satisfied with the way teachers there dealt with the young children. At that time, she assumes that Rowad has a good English curriculum compared to the other private kindergartens, but when I meet Sammar again during the third stage, she has this to say:

I really regret taking her out of the International kindergarten... English was much better in the International kindergarten, maybe because the teachers there are native [English speaker]s. While here, four of us are Saudis and the supervisor is Syrian.

(Sammar- EFL teacher and mother)

When I meet Sammar in the third stage, I have no idea that she has started to teach EFL in Rowad. Hence, when she expresses her dissatisfaction with the EFL programme in Rowad, she speaks as a mother and as an EFL teacher.

International schools and pre-schools in KSA are part of the private sector; these schools mainly follow either US or UK curricula where obviously the medium of communication is English, though Arabic and Islamic studies are compulsory. For such schools, owners do have the opportunity to hire native speakers of English and the Saudization policy is applied only on a small scale. In Al-Madinah, there are only two international schools, and recently Saudi people were allowed to put their children there, before which this type of education was restricted to foreigners.

6.6.1.4 Mothers' views on the level of fluency in English

From the information presented in the previous sections, it is possible to state that, apart from Rania, the mothers who took part in the present study are happy to introduce their young children to English. Moreover, the EYL professionals view the introduction of EFL to young pupils positively. However, considering the variety of experiences that the mothers have had, and their expectations, it seems important to highlight the level of fluency in English that mothers want their children to achieve. There are various means of exposing children to English outside the EFL classroom and, as a result, this question of fluency level is important. Hanen says that although she wishes her daughter could speak with an American accent, she knows that she will not achieve that in a year or two:

I really want her to have perfect English, if I have the chance to go to the US during the summer holidays, I will put her in a school to learn the language in an English environment, but if I can't do that, I will make sure that she is exposed to plenty of English in other ways.

(Hanen-Mother)

As explained previously, by the third stage, Hanen is not happy with her daughter's level of English so she has enrolled her in an international school. Hanen had been taking an English course during the first stage and she gives a clear picture of the level of English she wants her daughter to obtain.

From another perspective, Rania claims that when children are a little older, they can make their own decisions about learning the language by enrolling in an English language school abroad or at home.

Even if the children start to learn English at pre-primary stage, they will not be able to master a native-like accent.

(Rania-Mother)

This statement encourages the other mothers in the group to justify their decisions along with Wijdan, when for instance, she mentions that she wants her daughter to be able to read, write and speak fluently:

The most important thing is to be fluent and know how to use the language.

(Wijdan- Mother)

Children's ability to communicate fluently in English and demonstrate reading and writing skills is more important for mothers than their mastering a native-like accent.

7.6.1.4.1 Learning English is prestigious

Niveen is an Egyptian mother who received her education in Egypt. The image of Egypt in KSA is that of a country where education and schools are very competitive and parents push their children to study hard at an early stage. Niveen indicates that entering college or university in Egypt is very difficult as students have to have very high grades in secondary school. Therefore, English is important in terms of academic achievement, and it also has an influence on the pupils' social life:

It is prestigious for them to obtain a good knowledge of English; this will indicate that they are well-educated and they can take part in conversations where English is the medium of communication.

(Niveen-Mother)

Niveen clarifies that she has set a plan at home for her children where she provides them with extra English lessons and exercises to do besides the school/kindergarten programmes. Moreover, she says that she helps her daughter, who is in kindergarten, to revise and memorise the English words learnt in EFL class every day. The idea of encouraging children to memorise new vocabulary is mentioned by several mothers when they discuss their role in enhancing their children's acquisition of English.

Discussion

English is provided at Rowad from pre-school level to secondary level. The school has adopted the American curriculum as a substitute for the national EFL curriculum. Even though mothers are happy with Rowad teachers and facilities, they claim that they cannot rely on the taught EFL if they want their children to master fluent English. It is not surprising to find mothers who are not supportive of the early introduction of English. This attitude is common among some educationalists and researchers. For instance, in her paper, Jado (2010) claims that the early stages are vital in building children's personalities, and that introducing FL at this stage threatens such a process. Similarly, Erqsoosi (2009) claims that in those vital years the focus should be on the mother tongue, in this case the Arabic language, in order to allow children to understand and absorb Arabic and Islamic values.

Having such arguments among themselves indicates the mothers' knowledge and information about the matter and that awareness of professionals' debates which impact on the question of early vs late introduction of foreign languages.

As discussed in Chapter Six, for some mothers the EFL programme at Rowad is one of the main reasons for choosing the kindergarten. Aware of the importance of this programme for their school, Rowad has facilitated three EFL classes. In each class there is the main teacher and an assistant. Teachers are told to speak English during class time. Children are encouraged to use English while talking with their teachers or peers. Thus, there are frequent occasions when children and teachers switch between Arabic and English. In several cases, EFL teachers help children to express themselves and talk in English. Moreover, the children during their EFL classes show clearly the impact of their cultural capital in learning English. For example, one of

the children talked about Santa Claus and showed her awareness of cultural differences. Such cognitive understanding is one of the main reasons mothers and professionals highlight early EFL introduction as an advantage.

With regard to the level of English mothers expect their children to achieve through formal learning, several cultural aspects influence their expectations. One of these aspects is the mothers' own level of English, which in turn directly links to another aspect - the international dimension. The extent to which English or other FLs are used in their social milieu, or the frequency with which they use other languages when travelling abroad, are contributing aspects in this regard (see 7.9). Mothers also are aware of the dominance of English as an international language, and also argue that learning English need not be centered on acquiring a native-like accent.

Moreover, since some mothers have high expectations for their children's acquisition of English, they do not rely only on what their children do during EFL classes, but find other ways to expose them to English at home.

7.7 Practicing English at home

Sammar indicates that even though she does not speak to her daughter in English very often at home, she does read a story in English to her every other day at bedtime.

Frankly I do not speak to her a lot in English at home, it is around 3 to 10% of our daily speech, but I read stories in English to her at bedtime, one day in English and the following in Arabic and so on.

(Sammar-Mother)

Other mothers also indicate the importance of stories and reading in enhancing their children's learning of English. Besides Sammar, Danyah also points out that she encourages her son to read in English even if she does not know the meaning herself. This final example shows that

some mothers do not let their lack of proficiency in English prevent them from encouraging their children to practise and read English at home; Danyah says: I let him read and we spell the words together.

Following up what the children have been taught in the kindergarten, and getting them to memorise the vocabulary is another strategy that is frequently mentioned when mothers discuss the role of the home in enhancing learning English.

7.7.1 Children memorise new vocabulary

When mothers are asked about the steps they take to develop their children's learning of the target language, some of them emphasise the importance of following up what the children have learnt in the kindergarten.

I should follow [up] at home what they have studied in the school, I have to focus on the words the teacher gave them and get them to memorise what they have learnt.

(Mayadh- Mother)

A similar opinion is also expressed by Mozon, who has had a positive experience with her older children in early exposure to English.

There should be cooperation between the school and the home, with my child we always revise the vocabulary he learnt in the class.

(Mozon- Mother)

Hanen, who points out that she tends to use some English phrases with her daughter on a daily basis, states where the phrases she uses come from.

Most of the phrases I use with her are from the paper I get from the teacher at the beginning of the week. That in my opinion is very

helpful as she is going to practise at home what she learnt in the classroom.

(Hanan- Mother)

Interestingly, some EYL teachers share with mothers the notion that memorising new vocabulary with their children at home is a step mothers can follow to take part in their children's learning of English.

As a mother you can practise with your children the new words they see at kindergarten until they memorise them perfectly.

(Heba-EYL teacher)

Although Heba adopts spontaneous learning during her classes, where the learning process is more child-centred, the notion of repeating and memorising repeats itself when she talks about English. This can indicate the experience Heba might have had when she was a learner of English herself, or has with her children at home.

Memorising new vocabulary when learning EFL is common practice and, according to Ozkan and Kesen (2008:60), information that is stored in a person's memory in order to be repeated and retrieved later plays a key role in EFL learning, as in any other kind of learning process. Moreover, Asgari and Mustapha (2011), who discuss the impact of EFL learners' culture on their way of acquiring English, indicate that Arab learners, particularly those who study the Quran, tend to rely on memorising new vocabulary. They also mention that children whose parents actively engage in their learning of the target language tend to have a more positive attitude towards acquiring the language, than those whose parents do not (Asgar & Mustapha, 2011:9-10).

7.7.2 English extra classes

Another dimension that can boost a child's level of English is mentioned by Razan. She points out that, though her child is in a school where English is not the medium of communication, she

can provide him with extra English lessons with a private tutor if he shows interest in learning English.

If in the future I find out that he really likes to learn English, at that time I will provide him with extra opportunities to learn, and bringing him a private tutor is a possible choice.

(Razan- Mother)

The idea of providing children with extra English is introduced by Niveen, who has earlier indicated that learning English is prestigious.

They have to do extra work in English, and I do give them worksheets to do everyday. If I want them to master a high level in English, they must work harder to get to that level, and what they have during English languages classes is not enough.

(Niveen- Mother)

Even though both Niveen and Razan talk about providing extra English lessons for their children, Niveen makes a real effort to provide her children with extra English at home so they can maintain a good level of English. This is so they will not suffer when the time comes to enter a college or university back in Egypt. In contrast, Razan sees extra exposure to English as being dependent on the child's interest in the language. Such a difference in attitude is likely to be linked to a mother's long-term plan. As Niveen expects her children to continue their education in their home country, she is preparing them to be able to do so. Razan expects her child to enter a university in KSA, where the level of English demanded is not as high as in Egypt, even though students do have to pass certain exams (including English exams) as part of university entrance. This shows the impact of the mothers' expectations on the way in which they support their children's acquisition of English.

The way mothers' rationalise their role in enhancing their children's learning of English differs from one mother to another; for some mothers telling stories and reading along with their children is one of the strategies. Another aspect which is socially related to the context of Al-

Madinah is speaking English with the housemaid. Thus, using English in daily communication and integrating it into normal speech are strategies some mothers adopt to enhance the learning of English.

7.7.3 Fathers' involvement in the learning process

The extent to which fathers become involved in their children's learning process is interesting. Abeer states that she helps her younger child with his learning and spends time with him watching DVDs in English and playing some educational games. The role of the father only appears with her older children, although they were not interested in improving their language till later.

With my older children, when their father teaches them English grammar, they are reluctant and keep on protesting that their teacher did not give them that information.

(Abeer-Mother)

From the mothers' interviews, it appears that the role of fathers in EYL is limited. During the third stage of the fieldwork, Walaa points out that because the pre-primary stage is attached to girls' schools and all the working staff there are females, the mothers have the opportunity to visit the premises and look at the facilities provided, which the fathers do not.

[As] for me I went to visit several pre-schools before enrolling my daughter, then I discussed with my husband who agreed with my choice.

(Walaa- Mother)

In addition, when Nidaa talks about spending time with her children watching some American movies as a way of exposing them to English outside the EFL class environment, she explains:

I choose a suitable movie to watch with my children in English, me and them, but their father rarely joins us. We watch and if they do not understand something, I explain it to them. Once the movie finishes, we discuss what we watched and what we have learnt.

(Nidaa-Mother)

Nidaa indicates that at home her husband does not join them when she watches English films with the children. As a non-working mother, Nidaa appears to enjoy such activities with her children.

7.8 Travelling and English

As this research looks at the way a group of mothers justify their decision to introduce their young children to English in an early stage, it is worth noting that those mothers who participated in the study are a privileged minority, and travelling abroad during the summer is common among their social class. A popular local newspaper reported that, during the summer holidays in 2008, 4 million Saudis spent their holidays abroad (Al-Suliman, 2012). Some visited places within KSA or in neighbouring Gulf countries but others' destinations varied from Egypt, Turkey, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand to some European countries. While discussing the environment outside school for practicing English, mothers take into consideration the impact of travelling on the progress of their children's English language learning.

Hanen talks about her desire to spend the summer holidays in the US to enhance her daughter's English, and she also discusses her personal experience when she was a schoolchild. While spending the summer holidays in Lebanon or Egypt, Hanen and her sisters would enrol in an EFL course, which allowed them to benefit from the holiday and enjoy being abroad at the same time.

It turns out that my father's idea about taking language courses during the summer holiday is really beneficial. When my sister went

to the US, she did not struggle to pass the TOFEL as many of her friends do.

(Hanan- Mother)

Sammar points out that the duration of the holiday is directly proportional to the level of its benefit regarding learning the language.

If you are going to spend less than two weeks away, you will not have enough time to learn the language. I went to Turkey for two weeks and I did not learn any Turkish - all our communications were in English. However, my cousins spent two months in the US and their English has improved incredibly.

(Sammar- Mother)

Interestingly, when English is associated with travelling, it appears that some mothers consider it a vital tool during the time abroad.

When we travel abroad we only use English; people do not speak lots of Arabic when they travel outside KSA.

(Sara- Mother)

Razan recognises, as her sister-in-law does, the importance of English as the language necessary when travelling, while Hanan reflects that:

I am a person who travels a lot, and I couldn't let my daughter travel without knowing English - impossible!

(Hanan- Mother)

The impact of travelling on enhancing children's acquisition of English is also discussed in the blog under the topic, Summer Holidays and English. It is seen as one way to improve their English, along with other means like technological devices and language courses which have

been mentioned previously. Regarding the language courses, one participant who is a member of a female youth organisation notes that although the summer holiday is a good time for children and young people to explore new knowledge and experiences, not all people tend to make the most of this time:

My children are not young any more; there are several English language courses that they can attend, but to be honest I am not aware of any language institutions where young children can go to have a summer course in English, though that would be very beneficial if it was delivered in an attractive way.

(Blog comment)

Discussion

While they are at home, children are encouraged to do some of their activities in English. While some of them read stories with their mothers in English, others watch cartoons or children's programmes in English. Some mothers prefer to be involved with their children as they engage in these English-related activities; Nidaa for instance, watches English movies with her children and afterwards they discuss together what the movie was about. Sammar reads a bedtime story in English every day and another mother tells her children a story in English. The activities mothers tend to do with their children are likely to be linked to their expectations. This is illustrated for example by Niveen whose children do extra English tasks at home; she regularly gives them extra worksheets to do. For her children who are likely to go to Universities back in Egypt, academic English is very important. Hence, Niveen helps her children to obtain what they are likely to need in the future.

The impact of technology emerges as very significant in introducing children to English. In some cases, children are haphazardly introduced to English, while in others' mothers deliberately choose a particular channel or install a specific application so they plan in advance what their children are going to watch or play with. Another opportunity for which mothers look outside the EFL programme to develop their children's English is a trip to a country where

English is widely spoken. Mothers point out that these occasions are opportunities for their children to put into practice what they have learnt.

This chapter has looked at the way mothers justify their reasons to have their children introduced to English in an early stage. It started by investigating the status of English in Al-Madinah society and how mothers and professional educationalists perceive the status of foreign languages in the city. Whilst acknowledging a long tradition in the city of speaking and learning foreign languages, mothers claim that Al-Madinah milieu is currently not a fruitful environment in which to acquire English.

The status of English in pre-schools in Al-Madinah was discussed; it emerged that English is an important factor for private pre-schools as it helps them to compete with other private pre-schools in the arena. Therefore when professionals discuss the status of English in the Al-Madinah milieu they give a offer a brighter view than mothers. Mothers on the other hand claim that the English curriculum provided does not meet their standards and therefore tend to look for other means to improve their children's English language, such as reading English stories and watching English TV programmes.

When later rationalising their decision to have their children introduced to English at an early stage, mothers succeed in developing academic-sounding discussions and more importantly, they are supported by the view of the professionals, since both agree on the importance of early introduction to English for children's cognitive development. Moreover, professionals agree with mothers that introducing English early does not have a negative impact on the children's mother tongue, but in fact boosts their cognitive learning. In addition, mothers claim that children are introduced to English in one way or another even before their enrolment in the school, through the technology around them.

The stories in the beginning of Part Two reveal a decision making process involving tests and checks as well as a measured loyalty towards institutions, informed by child development and learning expectations. By referring to Ball et al.'s (1996) typology of parental choices for their children's education, the mothers mentioned in the stories can be viewed as "privileged

choosers". Ball et al. suggest that privileged/skilled choosers are engaged in a process of child-matching. That is, they are looking to find a school which will suit particular proclivities, interests, aspirations and/or personality of their child (Ball et al. , 1996: 94). Hanen, for instance, is not happy with the outcome of English learning for her daughter at Rowad; she believes that in an international kindergarten this outcome would match what she wants for her daughter.

Finally, mothers adopt a professional approach when deciding to have their children introduced to English. As they make such decisions, mothers go through a deliberation process to arrive at an informed choice, in that they discuss their reasons and expectations and available choices with other mothers in their socio-cultural milieu. This chapter shows how mothers' social and cultural capitals greatly affect their decision, and more importantly, the way in which they justify their choices. Being women in a minority in a city where few children go to pre-schools, mothers argue that their decision is made for the children's benefit and it is a choice they view as a moral imperative, especially with the policy makers recent move towards implementing English earlier in the national curriculum.

Allah- God- the almighty says:

Read! in the name of your Lord who has created all that exists...

Read! and your Lord is the most generous.

(Surrah96:1,3)

Chapter Eight:

Conclusion: Situated decisions and choices

8.1 Key findings

This study has highlighted the ways in which parents (mothers in this context) justify their decision in having their children introduced to English in a pre-school context. As shown before, children who are enrolled into pre-primary schools are a minority in the city of Al-Madinah. Therefore, the way mothers refer to their reasons for introducing their children to this type of education often takes the form of a justification. A key consideration in the analysis of mothers' motivations and expectations has therefore been their minority status in the society of Al-Madinah, both in terms of their socio-cultural background and position and in terms of the educational choices they made for their children. Such a standpoint inevitably implies emphasizing the importance of social and cultural capitals in decision-making processes.

This concluding chapter draws on suggestions from the sociology of education to try and bring these together into an explicatory argument. In this respect, the following two key findings of the research need to be emphasised here:

1. The mothers' choices and rationalisations regarding their children's education are closely informed by their own educational trajectories and other cultural capital elements.

2. These rationalisations take the form of justifications in that they remain the choices of a minority and do not necessarily reflect the views of the dominant Saudi standpoint (of the ruling classes to use Bourdieu's terminology) on early years education.

These key findings offer useful elements of response to the core research questions of this project, which were:

1. When mothers choose a particular kindergarten for their children, what are their drivers and motivations?
2. What is the impact of cultural capital on mothers' decisions in introducing their children to English at an early stage:
3. How do private kindergartens present their EFL programme?
 - How does the EFL programme affect the mothers' decision when choosing a kindergarten?

8.2 Mothers' 'hot' knowledge and informed choices

In regard to mothers drives and motivations in making their decision, the research confirms that even in the case of Saudi Arabia, parents' cultural capital influences their educational choices. In this respect, the following point by Lee and Bowen (2006: 197) applies very much to my research context:

Cultural capital for parents related to educational system exists in three forms: personal dispositions, attitudes and knowledge gained from experiences; connections to education-related objects (e.g., books, computers, academic credentials), and connections to education related institutions (e.g., schools, universities, libraries).

Mothers who were involved in this research belong to the same sociocultural milieu, and often the same networks and as shown in this study, share common values on the importance of EYL and introducing English at this stage. Being part of a social network helps them gather information about kindergarten options, as Goldring and Philips (2008:214) say, “from people they know from their neighbourhood and other social groups such as friends, families and co-workers”. Hence, this sample of women does provide a clear image of a social group’s desires and attitudes as well as empirical evidence of the social and cultural attributes driving them. The study showed in particular the importance of the information shared in those networks (hot knowledge) of socially advantaged and culturally aware women in Al-Madinah.

8.2.1 EYL is good even for non-working mothers

It is important to take into account that the enrolment of children in pre-schools is considerably low in the city of Al-Madinah. Hence, for this minority of mothers who decided to enrol their children in this level of education, their occupational status has not played as crucial a part as their educational background. As mentioned before, having housemaids at home make it easier for some mothers to leave their children while they go to their work. However, that was not the case for the mothers participating in this research. Samah explicitly says that her housemaid is very good, hence her decision to put her daughter in Rowad was to get the most out of these years and not because she needed childcare. Other non-working mothers indicated that they had maids – some English speaking - who could look after their children, but this did not prevent them from sending their children to pre-school. The study revealed how mothers from this milieu draw on children’s cognitive development discourses to justify choices that that they know are not shared by dominant conservative voices in the country. They are also keen to relate their choice to the current policy move in the country to encourage EYL across the nation.

8.2.2 Islam encourages EYL

When mothers discuss their decision to send their children to Rowad, they emphasise their religious principles to support their views. Mozon, as discussed before, uses quotes from Quran

or Sunnah to support her view. Moreover, as introducing English earlier is an ongoing debate among Saudi educators, mothers stress that their desire to introduce their children to English at an early stage does not conflict with Islamic principals. On the contrary, they point out that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encourages his followers to learn FL.

The relationship between religion and the mothers' decision to enrol their children into pre-schools emphasises the impact of their cultural capital on the rationalisation of their choice. Given that the members of their social network constitute a minority in the society of Al-Madinah, having religious discussions to support their choice is important in their local community

8.2.3 Moral imperative

Mothers see their choice as a moral imperative in that they believe that each child should be introduced to EYL for cognitive and social benefits, for its impact on the children's personality and for preparing them for the next level of education. Mothers who strongly advocate the importance of EYL draw on their holistic knowledge and they make strategic choices when they choose Rowad for their children. This view in which early learning is seen as a moral imperative coincides with the global trend regarding children's right to education; Monteriro (2010: 1990) points out: "It is a human right of everyone to every education they are entitled to, including having their human dignity and all human rights respected, everywhere, every time".

8.2.4 Policy emphasis

This research has looked at two main issues: first, the enrolment of children into pre-schools and second, their introduction to English at this stage. In this research, both issues are explored primarily from the mothers' points of view. However, the two issues are also on the agenda of the Saudi MOE, where policy makers are encouraging EYL and there is a plan to introduce EFL earlier in its national curriculum. This step follows the decision made in 2006 to introduce English at the 6th grade in primary school. The early introduction of English is currently a controversial issue. However, mothers' decisions presented in this research are on par with the

policy makers' move toward both encouraging parents to enrol their children into pre-schools and to introduce them to English at an early stage. One may ask what distinction strategies will be adopted by such groups should the government start making EYL widely available and fully acceptable in the society.

8.2.5 Private provision

The importance of the mothers' decisions and the way they justify these are very important as they have chosen private education to fulfil their desires and needs. This opens the gate into a view of the way private pre-schools respond to the mothers' demands and the mothers' level of satisfaction with what is provided for their children. Also, after putting their children in such schools, mothers feel more confident in taking their children out if they feel that the kindergarten is failing to meet their expectations.

Of those parents who participate in school choice, some parents may choose schools in an attempt to increase their satisfaction with their children's schools. For example, parents might choose a school – public or private- because they are dissatisfied with their child's previous school. (Goldring & Philips, 2008:212)

This is clear in the first and second stories in which mothers move their children because the kindergartens fail to satisfy them.

8.3 Cultural capital and mothers' choice

Thinking of these mothers as a minority in the city of Al-Madinah inevitably impacts on our interpretation of their parental choice and decisions. This section has opted to discuss the expressions of parental choice and the impact of the mothers' cultural capital on their decision-making. According to Reay (1996:581)

Educational choices take place in specific socially and economically structured contexts... parental choices cannot be adequately conceptualised in isolation from localised issues of history and geography, understandings of psychological impact of social class, and the influences of differential access to social power and material sources.

In order to understand parental choice through the lens of cultural capital, it is important to focus on the major issues that stem from the mothers' discussions. To make their choice for their children's education, mothers have gone through remarkably similar processes: the education market and the educational policy, their own level of education, the status of early years learning in Al-Madinah, their own status as Saudi women facing educational choices for their children, the acquisition of English and the role of the father in the decision made.

Those factors and attributes have been discussed in this thesis through Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital. According to Swartz (2002: 62)

Bourdieu's concept of habitus builds on the idea that actors act strategically and practically rather than as conformists to external sets of formal rules... Actors are not usually simple conformists to cultural norms or external constraints ... they are strategic improvisers who respond in terms of deeply ingrained past experience to the opportunities and constraints offered by present situation.

Mothers involved in this research view the importance of both EYL or English at this stage through their own cultural capital and their social interaction in a particular sociocultural milieu. For instance, mothers emphasize the notion that 'younger is better' in terms of acquiring English. But their view and "strategic improvisation" are influenced by their own experience of learning English and/or their experience with their older children and their awareness of ongoing debates about the early introduction to English.

8.3.1 Mothers' choice in enrolling their children into pre-primary school

This thesis has hopefully succeeded in exploring the drivers of parental decisions regarding their children's pre-primary education, by understanding their values, expectations and status. Some mothers who have been involved in the three stages of the research have provided the insight to understand their motivations and their reason for changing their choices throughout the period of the study. Mothers, as explained previously, were encouraged to be in touch and this methodological strategy has allowed a restitution of the coherence of their discussions on choice, while relating mothers' strategic behaviours to other contextual elements (status in society, policy and cultural context).

When parents make their decision in favour of a particular type of education, they do their best to ensure that their children get the most out of it. A study by Crozier et al. (2011) looked at the rationale for white middle class parents to enrol their children into working class schools in the UK. The study looked at the experience of those children and their parents as a minority in some schools in London. Parents who decide to put their children into working class schools claim that they do not want to take part in the education market and the associated competitiveness as consumers. They argue that they made their decision to enrol their children into schools that are at or even below the average national grades, in order to prepare their children to be global citizens (ibid:2011). Even though those parents are against the idea of an educational market and hence they put their children into working class schools, they are also demanding to have their children's needs met in the school.

On such occasions the parents used their educational capital to ensure their children were suitably placed and positioned in order to access what is 'rightfully' theirs... (ibid: 2011)

One of the reasons given by mothers for deciding to put their children in Rowad is its English programme. As in the UK example above, their choice is always driven by a desire to "equip" their children for their future life.

In the first story - at the beginning of Part Two - Sammar decides to put her daughter into an international kindergarten so the child would be able to master a high level of fluency in English. Once her daughter is admitted there, her English improves. However, an unexpected situation occurs, which leads Sammar to look for an alternative. Sammar's ability to quickly draw on her and her network's knowledge of the EYL market in Al Madinah is an interesting reflexion of the importance of cultural capital in strategic choices.

Habitus is not fixed but transferable and changeable; it also varies from one person to another, and individuals assess their experiences differently. For instance the second story reveals a decision making process very different from that of the first, as Hanen in the very beginning was very happy with the facilities but then decided, to take her daughter to the international kindergarten instead due to her disappointment with the English programme at Rowad. Hanen's perception of the situation prompts her wish to enrol her daughter in a kindergarten where her English would be enhanced rather than a kindergarten which provides suitable physical facilities and where the kindergarten staff are highly qualified. According to Reay (1998:582) contexts differ and so do the options provided in each context, which sometimes means that a particular context may not comply with a mother's demands. In her analysis, Reay investigated mothers' choices from a range of options using the concept of habitus.

Similarly in this research, I have shown how the level of education of mothers plays an important role in their decision to enrol their children in pre-primary and introduce them to English at that stage. But the level of education and other personal dispositions are not the only determining factor; trends within the mother's networks also have an impact on her choice. Hanen's decision to take her daughter to an international pre-school is closely linked to Hanen's perception of the type of pre-schools her sisters send their children to. Also, Sammar points out that her choice of Rowad was mainly driven by her friend's advice. So, on the one hand, the mothers' social interactions within their social circle have a huge impact on their choice of school; on the other hand, the high level of education mothers have also plays a noticeable role in the way mothers justified their choices.

8.4 Mothers as active agents in the research

Conducting this type of qualitative research is not common in KSA, especially with regard to early years education. Several research studies have been conducted in the Saudi context on early years learning, but as discussed in the literature review, none draw on a qualitative approach and therefore none are able to consider both parental choices and voices.

The situation with research on EFL in Saudi schools is also as mentioned above in that outcome measures dominate and data on pre-school level remains scarce. This research offers a different perspective with a design that allows participants to reflect on their choices and to suggest and develop their own voice within the research. I believe that it is this flexibility that allowed me a unique entry into mothers' perspectives on language and educational choices.

Sammar, the lead character in the first of the three stories above, has for instance been involved in all three stages of the research: in the first stage, she has just moved her daughter to Rowad, while in the second stage she joins several discussion threads in the blog where she deplores the shortage of good schools in Al-Madinah and actively seeks reactions from the other participants. In the third stage, she states that she would continue to look for a school that provides a good English curriculum. The research methodology allows participants a space to express and assess their own choices, in a truly participatory process. The length of the study along with the variety of research tools used, helped to cement a group of mothers who saw in this an opportunity to test their arguments. Such participation was made possible by the cultural proximity between me as a researcher and most of the participants.

This research achieved its aim of exploring the factors driving mothers' decision to introduce their children to English at an early stage, with an attempt to share the main findings with private pre-schools in Al-Madinah to ensure that mothers' views were heard by the providers of education. The central aim of the thesis was to give mothers a voice and to add this voice to ongoing discussions regarding early exposure to English in the Saudi National Curriculum. This is hopefully the first attempt to conduct a study in which mothers, who are important agents in the educational process, become more actively engaged in educational research as well. In this

case, the mothers became active participants in a research that looks at EFL in EYL in the city of Al-Madinah and in Saudi society in general.

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Appendix 1:

1.A: Consent Form:

<p>Title of the research: The impact of socio-cultural factor in teaching young children English as foreign language in AL-Madinah , Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>Name of the researcher: Maryam Jamal Alharthi</p> <p>Position and contact information: School of Education and Lifelong Learning University of East Anglia Norwich NR4 7TJ e-mail: A.Al-Harthy@uea.ac.uk http://www.uea.ac.uk/edu</p>
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Please read the following instruction carefully and if you need any clarification do not hesitate to ask for :

I agree to take part in this above research, and I am willing to (to be ticked):

- Be interviewed by the researcher.
- Have my interview recorded .
- To have e-mail regularly interviews with the researcher.
- Participate in this research for one year.
- (For teachers) to be observed in my class.
- (For parents) to have my child photographed.

The information I provide:

- Could be used by other researchers as long as my name is removed.
- Could be used by the researcher for another project.
- Can only to be used in this study.

I understand that the information I give is confidential and my identity is protected. Also all the information I give is used for educational and academic uses only.

Name of participant:

Signature:

Date:

1.B: Participants' information sheet

The title of the study:

The impact of socio-cultural factor in teaching young children English as foreign language in AL-Madinah , Saudi Arabia.

Dear participant:

You are invited to take part in this study, please take time to read the information following to understand the reason of doing this research. Do not hesitate to ask any question.

You have been chosen to take part in this study because you whether you are a parent of a child who is a pupil in *Rowad* kindergarten or a member of the academic staff there.

Time of the study:

This study is to last for one year , including two periods of field work, the first period will be in December and lasts for two months in which face to face interviews and direct observations likely to apply . Through the year, there will be an e mail interviews and discussions between the researcher and some of the respondents.

The purpose of the study:

This study is applied in *Rowad* kindergarten in Al-Madinah, Saudi Arabia. The aims of the research are to look at the influence of the cultural aspects in acquiring English amongst Saudi young children. As well as looking at the applied methods in teaching young children English in light of the Saudi society believes and culture.

The research methods:

To explore the impact of the socio- cultural impact on learning English among young children, the researcher is to have e mail interviews with the English teacher and some parents who take part in the study. In addition, the researcher is to be in the field work to do observations and face to face interviews. Some photographs for a class likely to be taken and your child might be appear, if you are not happy about your child been photographed please, make it clear in the consent form.

If you decide to participate in, you will be asked to sign a consent form. All given information will be treated confidently and the individual's names as well as the schools' will not be identified.

Thank you for your kind cooperation

1.C.a Head teachers questionnaire

Questionnaire

This research is looking at the socio-cultural perspectives of the introduction of English as a foreign language in private kindergartens, in Al-Madinah, Saudi Arabia. I want to explore the parents' demands and their expectation and the kindergarten's provided programmes to achieve the parents' expectations.

A) Principals or school owners' points of view on the introduction of English as foreign language in kindergartens

I. Basic information regarding your kindergarten:

When did it open?

.....
.....

How it is managed (owner, funding)?

.....
.....

When was English introduced for the first time?

.....
.....

How was English introduced: as a taught subject? Part of the medium of instruction? For all children or optional?

.....
.....

II. Kindly circle your opinion on the shown scale:

1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=undecided 4=agree 5=strongly agree

Aspect 1	Item	Measures				
English as a subject in early years learning curricular	a. We meet to parents expectations concerning the introduction of English to their young children.	1	2	3	4	5
	b. If we neglect English as part of our early years literacy programme, we won't be able to compete with other kindergartens in the area.	1	2	3	4	5
	c. There is no relationship between our English programme and the kindergarten's reputation.	1	2	3	4	5
	d. children do benefit cogitatively from learning English in early stage.	1	2	3	4	5
	e. Our English teachers are highly qualified.	1	2	3	4	5
	f. We provide English training sessions to our EFL teachers.	1	2	3	4	5

Aspect 2	Item	Measures				
environment foreign language and the cultural as	a. Al Madinah offers a good context to promote and practice English language.	1	2	3	4	5
	Children in al Madinah will be able to use their English in their community or in their relations to foreigners if taught from an early stage.	1	2	3	4	5
	c The government is encouraging people to take English seriously.	1	2	3	4	5
	d. English is the most used foreign language in Al-Madinah.	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the following questions:

1. Do you have English native teacher in your Academic staff??

Yes

No

If Yes, what is the advantage of having English native in your kindergarten?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. What do you think are the main reasons why parents in Al Madinah would like their children to learn English at pre school level:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. What steps do you think the Ministry of Education can take to improve the English curriculum in early years learning?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your cooperation

1.C.b. EFL teachers questionnaire

Questionnaire

A) Current practice of teaching English as foreign language from **English teachers' point of view** Kindly circle your opinion on the shown scale:

1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=undecided 4=agree 5=strongly agree

Aspect 1	Item	Measures				
Pupils behaviour in English class	a. Pupils enjoy English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
	b. Pupils do not enjoy learning new words.	1	2	3	4	5
	c. Pupils are confident in practising what they have learnt.	1	2	3	4	5
	d. Pupils get bored while listening to English stories.	1	2	3	4	5
	e. Pupils can retell English stories.	1	2	3	4	5
	f. Pupils do not read English stories.	1	2	3	4	5
	g. Pupils enjoy English nursery rhythms	1	2	3	4	5
	h. Pupils are not able to communicate together in English	1	2	3	4	5
	i. It is hard for pupils to express their feelings in English	1	2	3	4	5

Aspect 2	Item	Measures				
The teaching methods in English classes	a. I use a lot of images to introduce new words	1	2	3	4	5
	b. Stories do not play vital role in my teaching process.	1	2	3	4	5
	c. I give my pupils word lists to memorize.	1	2	3	4	5
	d. I do not speak Arabic during my English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
	e. I encourage my pupils to use English when they want to ask me something.	1	2	3	4	5
	f. I do not have enough time to encourage my pupils to practice what they have learnt.	1	2	3	4	5
	g. I focus on the pupils speaking skills.	1	2	3	4	5
	h. I use activities to teach new information.	1	2	3	4	5
	i. I use several sources in my teaching and my focus is not only in the school text book.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your cooperation

Research Tools						
Stage one	1. questionnaires			2. Interviews		3. Observation
	Head teachers – Private kindergartens	EFL teachers	Open Questionnaire	Mothers (Rowad)	Professionals	9
				19	16	6 EFL Classes
	12	21	3 EFL at Rowad	15 non working	6 Head teachers	2 EYL Classes
				5 went to the same private school.	10 Teachers (6 EYL, 4EFL)	1 English Activity Day
				1 Online Interview	3 EFL informal interview	
				2 group interviews		
In this end of stage one participants were invited to take part in the blog						
Stage Two	1. Blog			2. E- mail exchanges		
	Topics	10		15 Mothers were willing		
	Comments (total)	94		4 responded		
	Most active	26 comments				
	Least active	2 comments				
	Total commenters	24				
Active commenter (more than 3 comments in di	8					

Stage Three	1. Follow up Interviews (Mothers)		Focus Group	
	2 Face to Face	2 Online	7 blog commenters	1 mother
	1 at the mother's home	1 active one-day interview	4 Mothers	The manager of the organization where a hall used to do the focus group. She asked if she can take part and join in. * has not included in the sample
	1 before the focus group	1 took few days	1 Mother involved in the first and second stages	
			1 University	
			1 qualified EFL- Banker	

Stage	Mother	Major/ work	Experience with kindergartens	Interview type	Relation with	Educational back ground	Key view on EFL	Key view on pre- school	More about English
One	Sammar	Holds a Bachelor -EFL	Her child went an international kindergarten	Face to face	Bayan in school and at University	Went to preschool- private school	Advocates early introduction	Depends on the child.	Uses in travel ,with the house maid. English stories
	Samaah	Holds a Bachelor-Arabic. Teacher in a public school	Tried the international kindergarten for 1 week.	Group interview	_____	Private school	Advocates early introduction	A child needs to formally educated in this stage	Uses English with some relatives (non-Arab)
	Wijdan	Holds a Bachelor -EYL. Used to teach at Rowad	_____	Group interview	_____	Private school	Must be introduced early	Fundamental stage	TV programmes
	Hanen	Student in a diploma course	Visited several kindergartens before Rowad	Face to face	_____	Educated in Jeddah	EFL better in Jeddah		TV programme, summer language courses

Stage	Mother	Major/ work	Experience with kindergartens	Interview type	Relation with	Educational background	Key view on EFL	Key view on pre- school	More about English
One	Walaa	Holds a Bachelor -EFL	Her daughter had bad experience in a kindergarten before Rowad	Group interview	Bayan's sister	Went to pre-school-private school.	Better to start early , never stick to what taught at the EFL classes	Necessary experience before Year One – children has the right to it.	Books, simple instructions at home
	Bayan	Holds a Bachelor -EFL	Her daughters had a bad experience with their cousin	Face to face	Walaa's sister and Sammar's friend	Went to pre-school – private school	The EFL programmes not good enough	Regret haven't put her elder daughter earlier	TV programmes and stories
	Mozon	Holds a Bachelor Islamic studies	Her elder children benefited from early introduction to English	Face to face	_____	_____	Send children to private schools to learn English	Religiously encouraged	Indicated to the spread of instructions in English
	Zahraa	Holds a Bachelor. Speaks fluent English-French	Suffers from schools in Al-Madinah	Group interview	_____	Private school in Syria	English cant pass by	Must choose the best possible	Desperate with her children to master a good level

Stage	Mother	Major/ work	Experience with kindergartens	Interview type	Relation with	Educational background	Key view on EFL	Key view on pre- school	More about English
One	Rania	Holds a Bachelor.	Moved her son to Rowad as it is not too rigid.	Group interview	_____	_____	Not important, can threaten Arabic	Focuses on the social importance	against early introduction of English
	Niveen	Holds a Bachelor-accounting	Have her elder children at Rowad	Face to face interview	_____	Educated in Egypt	Prestigious and important for future career	Talks about the negative and positive	
	Abeer	Holds a Bachelor.	Advised to put her special need child into Rowad	Pair interview	Mayadah's friend	_____	Important to be introduced early	Children need to obtain this before Year One	English summer courses for her elder children
	Mayadah	Holds a Bachelor-working mother	Has elder children at Rowad	Pair interview	Abeer's friend	Educated in Syria	Children learn letters, words but not the language	Teachers know how to deal with children in this age	Wants her children to have better English than herself
	Wafaa		Tried several schools with her elder child. Rowad the best	Group interview	_____	_____	English needs to be introduced early	A stage where a child needs to go before school	Uses English with the housemaid.

Stage	Mother	Major/ work	Experience with kindergartens	Interview type	Relation with	Educational background	Key view on EFL	Key view on pre- school	More about English
	Sara	Holds a Bachelor-EFL	Has elder children in Rowad	Face to face interview	Razan's sister in law	_____	Younger is better	Preparation phase	
	Razan	Holds a Bachelor	Children in the family go to Rowad	Face to face interview	Sara's sister in law	_____			
	Danyah	Holds a Bachelor					Children are exposed to English through technology	At least at one term before the school	
	Arwa	Holds Masters'	Bilingual child.	Online interview	_____	Private school-studied abroad	Understands some fears about the identity but sees no real threat	An essential stage socially and academically	Wants her child to master a fluent Arabic
	Zainab	_____	Heard about Rowad from friends	Group interview	_____	_____			Used in restaurants and theme parks

Stage	Mother	Major/ work	Experience with kindergartens	Interview type	Relation with	Educational background	Key view on EFL	Key view on pre- school	More about English
	Nidaa	Holds a Bachelor	Visited several kindergartens. Her child express his satisfied one he entered Rowad	Group interview	_____	Private school- introduce d to English and French at school	Children can learn the language better when they are young	Children have the right to it, cant send them directly to Year One	Watched with her children Movies and discussed about them
Stage	Research tool					Research tool			
Two	E-Mail- Exchange					Blog activities			
	Mother	Frequency	Attitude						
	Sammar	Fast respond	Engaged with the researcher till the final stage and willing to participate.						
	Samah	Short response	More interested in Face to face conversation, was not interested in blog participation.						
	Walaa	Fast respond	Prefers to reflect on her experience. Not interested in public discussion						
	Hanen	Delay in respond	Prefer online communication that always her to response in her ease time.						
	Zahraa	Lost interest after 2 emails	Despite her eagerness to discuss about the status of English in Al- Madinah. She lost her interest early and did not participate in the blog						

Stage	E-mail exchange					Blog activities			
Two	Wijdan	Lost interest after 3 emails							
	Rania	Engaged in several emails,							
	Arwa	Fast respond							
Stage	Follow up interviews					Focus Group			
Three	Mother	Interview	location			Sammar			
	Sammar	Face to face	Community hall						
	Hanen	Online							
	Walaa	Online							
	Samah	Face to face	Her house						

Appendix 3: iThought mind mapping

Research Themes



