

**Implementation of Strategic Planning in Educational Institutions:  
Examination of Kindergarten Schools in Saudi Arabia**

A Thesis Submitted to the University of Manchester for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Faculty of Humanities

**2022**

**Duaa Ahmed Alshareef**

**Global Development Institute (GDI)**

**School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED)**

## Table of Contents

<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>COPYRIGHT STATEMENT</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>16</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	16
1.2 Background of the Study .....	20
1.3 The Research Problem.....	21
1.4 Research Aim, Objectives, and Questions.....	22
1.4.1 Research aim .....	22
1.4.2 Objectives.....	22
1.4.3 Research questions .....	23
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	23
1.6 Definitions of Terms.....	24
1.7 Limitations of the Study .....	25
1.8 Contributions of the Study.....	26
1.9 Outline of the Thesis.....	27
2.1 Introduction.....	29
2.2 Strategic Management with Particular Reference to Strategic Planning.....	29
2.2.1 Environmental scanning.....	31
2.2.2 Strategy formulation and planning .....	33
2.2.3 Strategy implementation (action stage) .....	33

2.2.4 Control and evaluation.....	33
2.3. Distinction between Strategic Management and Strategic Planning .....	34
2.4. Strategic Planning in Educational Institutions.....	35
2.4.1 Strategic planning in schools .....	36
2.4.2 Integrating strategic planning in schools .....	42
2.4.3 Strengths and weaknesses of strategic planning in education .....	44
2.5 Leadership Style in the Light of Strategic Planning in Education.....	46
2.6 Strategic Planning in Saudi Schools and Kindergartens.....	49
2.7 Effects of Culture on Strategic Planning .....	51
2.8 Saudi Culture and Applications of Strategic Planning .....	53
2.9. Theoretical Perspectives .....	56
2.9.1. Bureaucratic management theory .....	56
2.9.2. Collegial theory .....	57
2.9.3 Political theory.....	58
2.9.4 Subjective theory .....	60
2.9.5. Ambiguity theory.....	61
2.9.6. Cultural theory.....	62
2.10 Contingency Theory.....	63
2.11 Applying Contingency Theory in the Saudi Educational Context.....	67
2.12 Conceptual and theoretical framework of the thesis.....	68
2.13 Chapter Summary .....	70
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>72</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	72
3.2.1 Ontological position of the study.....	73
3.2.2 Epistemological view of the study.....	74
3.2.3 Axiology .....	75
3.3 Methods and Study Strategies.....	75
3.3.1 Qualitative approach.....	76
3.3.2 Case selection .....	77
3.3.3 Sample population .....	78
3.3.4 Sampling .....	78
3.4 The Fieldwork.....	80

3.4.1 Negotiating access .....	81
3.5 Data Collection Methods and Instruments.....	81
3.5.1 Interviews and typologies .....	82
3.5.2 Structured interviews .....	82
3.5.3 Unstructured interviews.....	83
3.5.4 In-depth interviews .....	83
3.5.5 Focus group discussions .....	84
3.6 Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation.....	85
3.7 Ethical Considerations of the Study .....	87
3.7.1 Voluntary informed consent .....	87
3.7.2 Addressing issues of confidentiality.....	88
3.8 Ensuring the Study’s Trustworthiness .....	89
3.9 Chapter Summary .....	90
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SETTING.....</b>	<b>91</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	91
4.2 An Overview of Saudi Arabia.....	91
4.2.1 The economic performance and growth outlook.....	92
4.2.2 National culture and religion of Saudi Arabia.....	94
4.2.3 The philosophy and purpose of education in Saudi Arabia.....	95
4.2.4 Education system in Saudi Arabia.....	98
4.2.5 Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia.....	99
4.2.6 Government budget for education .....	101
4.3 Kindergarten Schools in Saudi Arabia.....	102
4.3.1 History .....	102
4.3.2 Purpose of kindergarten schools.....	103
4.3.3 Administration .....	104
4.4 Chapter Summary .....	105
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING IN SAUDI ARABIAN KINDERGARTEN SCHOOLS .....</b>	<b>106</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	106
5.2 Conceptual Issues.....	106
5.3 Processual dimension.....	112

5.3.1 Pre-planning:.....	113
5.3.2 Setting goals.....	115
5.3.3 Implementing the plan .....	118
5.3.4 Monitoring and evaluating the strategy .....	120
5.4 Chapter Summary .....	121
<b>CHAPTER SIX: IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC PLANNING: FACTORS AND CHALLENGES.....</b>	<b>122</b>
6.1 Introduction:.....	122
6.2 Factors Affecting Strategic Planning.....	122
6.2.1 Environmental factors.....	123
6.2.2 Overbearing routine processes.....	125
6.2.3 Uncoordinated teacher transfers .....	127
6.2.4 Resistance to the change process.....	131
6.2.5 Staff perception of vision and mission statements .....	133
6.2.6 Managing communication in strategy implementation .....	136
6.2.7 Weak financial capability of kindergartens .....	138
6.2.8 Staff capacity building.....	139
6.2.9 Top management contributions .....	142
6.2.10 The cultural influence of society on planning .....	147
6.3 Chapter Summary .....	152
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ROLE OF KINDERGARTEN PRINCIPALS IN APPLYING STRATEGIC PLANNING.....</b>	<b>153</b>
7.1 Introduction.....	153
7.2 Choosing a Planning Team .....	153
7.3 Experience and Skills.....	155
7.4 Administration Power .....	163
7.5 Evaluation Criteria.....	166
7.6 Requirements and Suggestions for Applying Strategic Planning.....	167
7.6.1 Strategic planning requirements from the perspective of kindergarten principals and teachers .....	167
7.6.2 Environment requirements.....	176
7.6.3 Budgeting process.....	177
7.6.4 Community partnership .....	177
7.6.5 Suggestions and proposals on the way forward.....	178

7.7 Conclusion .....	191
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>193</b>
8.1 Introduction.....	193
8.2 Discussion on Understanding how Strategic Planning is Being Adopted in Educational Institutions in Saudi Arabia (First Objective – Chapter 5) .....	195
8.2.1 Understanding the concepts of strategic planning: The basis of action.....	195
8.2.2 Providing initial strategic guidance .....	196
8.2.3 Navigating the strategic planning process at the school level .....	197
8.2.4 Low levels of parental involvement in planning .....	198
8.2.5 Monitoring and evaluating the strategic planning process .....	200
8.3 Discussion on Exploring the Factors that Affect the Implementation of Strategic Planning in Kindergarten Schools (Second Objective – Chapter 6) .....	200
8.3.1 Poor communication of the strategic change processes .....	201
8.3.2 Non-inclusive decision-making processes in schools – teachers’ perspective.....	202
8.3.3 Resistance of staff to the change process .....	203
8.3.4 Bureaucratic impediments in planning .....	204
8.3.5 Ineffective capacity building initiatives within kindergartens.....	205
8.3.6 Low budgetary support to kindergarten schools.....	206
8.4. Discussion on Investigating the Role of the Principals in the Implementation of Strategic Planning in the Context of Kindergarten Schools (Third Objective – Chapter 7).....	207
8.4.1 Providing leadership for the planning processes in kindergarten schools.....	208
8.4.2 Effective leadership at the school level .....	208
8.4.3 Decision-making at the school level – principals’ perspective .....	209
8.4.4 Professionalism of principals and teachers.....	210
8.5 Staff Voice and Expectations in Strategic Planning at the School Level .....	211
8.5.1 Demand for a blueprint for strategic plan preparation.....	211
8.5.2 Focused practical training for school staff.....	211
8.5.3 Creating an effective curriculum for kindergartens.....	213
8.5.4 Addressing quality control concerns .....	213
8.5.5 Assessing plan impact on educational outcomes.....	214
8.5.6 Establishment of an effective and formalised means of communication .....	215
8.5.7 Ensuring an enabling environment in kindergartens .....	215
8.5.8 Bridging the resource disparities between urban and rural kindergartens.....	216
8.6 Implications of the Research Findings for Practice: Suggestions by Principals and Teachers	217
8.7 Chapter Summary .....	219

<b>CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUDING REMARKS.....</b>	<b>220</b>
9.1 Introduction.....	220
9.2 Summary of the Research .....	220
9.2.1 Research objectives and study rationale .....	221
9.2.2 Summary of the main findings .....	222
9.3 Contributions of the Study .....	224
9.3.1 Theoretical and empirical contributions of the study .....	224
9.4 Implications of the Study for Policy and Practice .....	225
9.5 Recommendations.....	226
9.6 Limitations of the Study.....	227
9.7 Suggestions for Future Research .....	228
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>257</b>
Appendix 1: Field Survey via Semi-Structured Questions.....	257
Pre-departure.....	257
Arrival in Saudi Arabia.....	257
Appendix 2 – Observations.....	258
Observations .....	258

Total words of the main text: 77, 597

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3.1: THE FOUR-POINT APPROACH TO QUALITATIVE SAMPLING	79
TABLE 3.2: SAMPLING DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS	80
TABLE 3.3: CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES OF GROUP MEMBERS' RESPONSES	84
TABLE 3.4: TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY	89
TABLE 8.1: THE MAIN FINDINGS	193
TABLE 9.1: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS	222



## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 2.1: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	69
FIGURE 3.1 PARADIGMS IN THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	73
FIGURE 4.1: MAP OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA	91
FIGURE 4.2: REAL DOMESTIC PRODUCT GROWTH TRENDS (2014 – 2024)	94

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KG	Kindergarten
KPMG	Klynveld Peat Marwick and Goerdeler
LEAD	Leadership Effectiveness and Adaptability Description
LPC	Least Preferred Co-worker
NTP	National Transformation Programme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
R&D	Research and Development
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SWAT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Achievements and Threats
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
SP	Strategic Planning

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. While the concept of strategic planning has been widely explored in educational settings, very little research exists on its applicability for early learning institutions, especially in transitional countries like Saudi Arabia, whose education systems largely benchmark on the successful experiences of the developed countries. This study's significance is linked to a need for an effective strategic planning regime in Saudi educational institutions to support recent educational reforms. The study delves into the obstacles that hinder adopting an effective strategic planning approach and explores how these obstacles can be addressed in a culturally sensitive way. While this study explores other factors like leadership and how they affect strategic planning in kindergarten schools, more focus is given to cultural factors that conflict with the principles of strategic planning as applied in non-Saudi contexts. Therefore, the study aims to clarify best practices that are consistent with the Saudi social context. Contingency theory is used as a foundation for the work, which allows the tailoring of aspects of strategic planning to the school and culture. This study employs a social constructivist paradigm using a qualitative case study approach. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to gain insights from the opinions and experiences of participants about the challenges of adopting an effective strategic planning approach to the issues of kindergarten administration. The findings of the study conclude that most principals know about strategic planning; however, they lack a deeper understanding of what it means as a concept. There are no specific standards and criteria for evaluating planning in kindergarten schools, and the inflexibility of senior management in decision-making is cited as a crucial issue. Disruptions of the strategic planning process occur due to Socio-economic and behavioural factors. Finally, the majority of principals in kindergartens state that they do not have previous experience in the field of planning. This study concludes by making some policy recommendations to the government and the Saudi Ministry of Education to leverage funding and human resources to the kindergarten sector as the bedrock of human capital development in the Kingdom.

*Keywords:* Strategic management, strategic planning, educational management, kindergarten schools, Saudi Arabia.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Duaa Ahmed Alshareef

June,2022

## **COPYRIGHT STATEMENT**

I. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

II. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

III. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

IV. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocInfo.aspx?DocID=24420>), in any relevant thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library’s Regulations (see <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/>) and in the University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to

My Family

My beloved husband Mohammed

For their endless support, prayers and love.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I thank Allah the Almighty for helping me in this research and for giving me the strength and patience to complete it.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Dr Farhad Hossain and Dr Kelechi Ekuma; thank you for your guidance, encouragement, and support. I have appreciated your patience, input, and positive criticism and constructive feedback and guidance throughout the development of this thesis. Also, I would like to thank Professor Aminu Mamman for his support and constructive comments. I also extend my thanks to Dr Admos Chimhowu, whose motivating words were the greatest support for me during my study period.

I am very grateful to my family, who were patient and suffered during my study abroad. Thank you for your feelings, your unlimited love, and your constant prayers for me, which helped me to accomplish my goals. Special thanks and appreciation are due to my sister Ghayda and my husband Mohammed, who provided endless encouragement and support. This has had the greatest impact on completing this research and helping me to overcome many difficulties.

I would also like to thank the entire PGR team and other academic staff at the University of Manchester and my friends for their help and support throughout my PhD journey.

I also extend my gratitude everyone who helped me, whether small or large, in completing this research. Help and support from employees at the Ministry of education and from kindergarten schools are much appreciated.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Over recent years, globalisation has greatly impacted how schools are managed from kindergarten to higher learning institutions. This is because the education sector is significantly influenced by various reforms and changes, underlining the need for leaders in educational institutions to come up with strategic plans and approaches to align learners' experiences and all the activities carried out in learning institutions with global trends (Gunn, 2017). The concept of strategic management has thus attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners in the education sector in a bid to establish a roadmap for effective and successful learning experiences for learners at all levels (Al-Dhaafri, Yusoff, and Al-Swidi, 2014; Suklev and Debarliev, 2012).

Strategic management is related to how educational institutions reflect on their circumstances and capabilities and optimise their internal resources to improve their performance. There are two core concepts in strategic management, namely strategic planning and strategic management. Strategic planning involves setting objectives, analysing the competitive environment, analysing the internal organisation, evaluating strategies and establishing a roadmap on what an organisation seeks to achieve in both the short run and long run (Arshad, Azhar, and Khawaja, 2014). On the other hand, strategic management is simply related to how organisations determine what methods and approaches to leverage and the resources to deploy to meet their goals (Carter and Greer, 2013). More specifically, strategic management is concerned with ensuring that management rolls out relevant strategies across the organisation to meet its short and long-term goals.

Suklev and Debarliev (2012) argue that strategic planning is usually associated with establishing a framework on how to achieve better results leading to improved performance. These findings further reinforce the underlying link between strategic management and organisational performance. However, Saleh, Kaissi, Semaan and Natafqi (2013) found out that although strategic planning is a critical development tool and an important source of organisational success, it sometimes fails for various reasons. Of greatest concern during strategic planning is the organisation's strategic resources (Jung and Lee, 2013). While each organisation has unique resources that facilitate its competitiveness (Hamann, Schiemann,



Bellora and Guenther, 2013), it is important for the organisational management to identify its strategic resources that can be employed in creating a competitive advantage with regard to the changing environment. At the planning stage, goals, missions, visions, and other deliverables are set so as to put the organisation on course towards achieving its purpose and aim.

A study conducted by Jung and Lee (2013) revealed that goal setting is one of the key antecedents of strategic planning that contributes towards increased organisational performance. During the goal-setting phase, it is important to engage other stakeholders in order to collaboratively establish viable goals in a process called performance management (Owolabi and Makinde, 2012). Suklev and Debarliev (2012) also observed that individual-level variables ought to be incorporated in the strategic planning, whereby job goal-commitment, empowerment and the job satisfaction of the employees should be evaluated. This is an important consideration because strategic plans can be established, but when the people meant to implement them are not committed, satisfied or empowered to carry out the strategic plan, it is more likely that the strategy will fail. At its heart, strategic management involves identifying how the organisation stacks up compared to its competitors and recognising the opportunities and challenges facing the organisation, whether they come from within the organisation or from competitors (Tran, 2015). On the other hand, strategic management entails the due process of planning and implementing the fundamental goals and procedures considered imperative in ensuring the success of an organisation. The objective set at the planning stage forms the basis upon which the organisation's specific culture is taken into consideration.

In a school context, it is through strategic management that administrators can measure the effectiveness of all team members in realising the mission and vision of their organisation (Berry, 2007). Strategic management is also vital in enabling a school organisation to be proactive in shaping the future achievements of its students (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Salmah, 2005). To this end, Abas (2005) claimed that school principals should master strategic management skills and model themselves as leaders who are visionary, capable, and efficient in handling problems; otherwise, they will only operate as crisis principals. School leadership is one of the key issues that has drawn a lot of attention among policy makers in the education sector. According to Bambrick-Santoyo, Lemov and Peiser (2012), the competency of school leaders is one of the factors significantly impacting on the performance of the learners. Based

on a recent study conducted by Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2010), the role of school principals and other educational leaders has become broader to incorporate a deeper focus on professional development, learner-centred decision making, and the management of diversity in contemporary learning institutions. This is because the quality of school management and the teaching staff has continuously been pointed out as one of the key determinants of students' success in various fields (Robbins and Alvy, 2014). For instance, if a school fails to establish a strategic fit between the external world and its own internal processes through curriculum implementation, it becomes difficult to achieve success because what goes in schools should reflect the real world. This clearly shows that the role of principals and other leaders in learning institutions cannot be undermined, especially with the growing diversity of students at all levels as a result of the advancing globalisation in most developing countries like Saudi Arabia, where the changes at the international stage, especially from the developed countries, can be considered to have a direct influence on the way learning institutions are managed.

For effective learning among students, Robbins (2012) recommended that a school should have all the necessary factors that enhance the equal opportunity for all students to succeed not only in terms of their academic achievement, but also in their social and individual realms. Some of these factors include equal access to learning materials, access to educational achievements, and high-quality teaching and leadership within the learning institution. Considering that learning occurs through the cognitive process of perception, association, reasoning, and communication, research conducted by Hsieh, Jang, Hwang and Chen (2011) indicated that the suitability of the learning environment plays a central role in enhancing successful learning. This argument was confirmed by Hwang, Yang, Tsai and Yang (2009), who found out that learners' ability is associated with the support and guidance given by their teachers based on their specific learning needs.

While factors like asset accessibility and access, institutional culture, racial elements, and the responsiveness of a school to explicit student needs are key determinants of scholarly accomplishment among students, Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Extensions, and Hayek (2011) called attention to the fact that friendly factors are significant in effecting learning advancement. This suggests that reasonable scholarly accomplishment among students can be fundamentally accomplished by working with a connection between natural and individual variables. In this way, school pioneers (including the school personnel and the school administrators) are today

confronted with the overwhelming task of managing assorted understudy factors emerging from a multicultural climate. Along these lines, principal's main task is meeting the educational needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Denson and Chang (2009) recommended that administrators who stress cross-cultural interaction might be more effective in enhancing learning among ethnic minorities along with that of the majority natives.

There are also broader effects to take into consideration. Educational management holds a high degree of importance because it is central to the achievement of the objectives of humanity at all levels. Therefore, it is essential to identify and resolve problems hindering the efficacious administration of educational institutions. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the belief that the quality of management and leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes has spread, prompting considerable interest in educational leadership (Buhai, 2011; Bush, 2007). The central role of school principals in education reform is indisputable as they are responsible for meeting the various needs of stakeholders within the school community as well as others in the educational setting. The role of principals has developed and become vital for the reforms that are intended by governments across the world. There has been a consensus on transforming the role of the principal from that of control to that of planning and setting school goals and putting the appropriate strategies in place to achieve these goals (Abas, 2005; Normore, 2010). Moreover, the principal's role is to work collaboratively with other stakeholders to enable the school to adapt to the changing social environment in which education now takes place (Abas, 2005; Buhai, 2011; Normore, 2010).

Currently, and with major educational reforms taking effect in Saudi Arabia, strategic planning has become an urgent necessity to meet the requirements of the administrative management process in educational institutions, which is one of the most important means of future development (Buhai, 2010). However, there are social, economic, behavioral and organizational barriers that affect the effectiveness of principals' work in Saudi Arabia and impede development in schools. Among these factors are some of the traditions and behaviours that originated from the Saudi society plays a pivotal role in determining the way principals work, communicate with other stakeholders, make decisions and make plans (Kadir, 2014).

In light of the existing literature and dynamics in the education sector today, this thesis explores strategic Planning practices in Saudi Arabian kindergarten schools and how the Saudi social

structure affects the performance of principals in these learning institutions. The role of strategic planning in the kindergarten context is explored within the framework of discussing the challenges that principals and educational management face in Saudi Arabia. The current study is in response to the National Transformation Plan 2016 (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2016), which aims to increase the efficacy of Saudi schools; in addition, it is in response to recommendations put forward by field researchers (Moxley, 2003; Reinhorn, 2017) who indicate that there is a need to study the application of strategic planning in schools.

## 1.2 Background of the Study

There are wide discussions and debates on how the education sector is transforming in Saudi Arabia in the light of the new vision, mission and goals of the Ministry of Education over recent years. Although a considerable amount of progress is being made compared to past educational policies, some challenges and factors still affect the development of the sector, particularly at the level of pre-schooling. The absence of strategic management and planning makes it difficult for schools to create a vision for the future. The National Transformation Plan 2020, announced by the chairman of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs, has indicated that new initiatives are required in the education sector and has outlined how leaders and management in institutions need to shift in response to this demand for change (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2016; Alsubaie and Jones, 2017). One of these initiatives is to improve the management and planning of institutions in Saudi Arabia.

These new instructive approaches are laid out for the goal of expanding school improvement and learning results. The new decision intends to increase the instructive principles in Saudi Arabia and provide approaches to shape the goals and set the limits of schools. Saudi Arabia has begun a change of course that embraces all parts of life in the realm. One of the areas that has received extensive consideration from the government is training as a result of the indispensable job it plays in the advancement of the nation (Jared, 2017). In Saudi Arabia women's leadership potential is mired in some challenges (Al Dighrir and Al Alhareth, 2015; Alsuwaida, 2016; Alyami, 2018). Although there has been huge support for the role of women in Saudi Arabia, efforts at building their capacities in strategic management and planning are missing. The demand from the government within the ambit of Vision 2030 requires new leaders who will have to cope with professional and personal challenges without limiting the

role of leadership to a single gender. Given these constraints, achieving educational reform in Saudi Arabia requires transformations in the roles of educational leaders and teachers, and the standards of student performance management should also shift in response to these initiatives. For example, the role of the teacher should be shifted from that of an authoritarian to that of a transformative figure who facilitates teaching and involves the students in the process of their learning (Gallagher, 2008). Meanwhile, the student's role should also be transformed from that of empty vessels to be filled with knowledge to those of active learners whose knowledge is essential in the learning process (Berger et al., 2014). Similarly, the job of principals needs to change based on the instructive changes that are occurring in Saudi Arabia. The job ought to be designed by extending their lawful and calculated liabilities and accountabilities into supporting the nature of the learning environment. The principals ought to likewise advance into a multi-layered blend of leadership and management (Normore, 2010).

### 1.3 The Research Problem

While the concept of strategic management has been widely explored in the context of the education sector (Owolabi and Makinde, 2012; Hsieh et al., 2011); very little is done in the context of schools preoccupied with children's early years of learning. Essentially, there seems to have been an under-exploration and under-appreciation of how strategic planning facilitates educational success in early years, despite the changes that the education sector in most developing countries are experiencing as globalisation sets in. Based on these gaps, this study seeks to explore how strategic planning, as a component of strategic management, is applied in the kindergarten division of the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia. Considering that early years of learning are crucial since they form the foundation for the children's life-long learning, it is expected that the kindergarten division should provide a governing framework for administration in the school system so as to implement strategic changes in the education sector (Alameen et al., 2015; Khan, 2016). As noted in the literature, culture is revealed conceptually, through ideas that are valued and promoted in an organisation or state (Lumby and Foskett, 2003). In many cases, customs and traditions values can be barriers to applying change (Little and Leach, 2013). The current status of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia is likely to be connected to how traditions and social structures are barriers to strategic planning, which is problematic due to the fact that strategic planning is a

required approach to managing the needs of kindergarten students in this country; therefore, this disconnection needs to be unpacked.

Despite recent reforms that have shown that principals should demonstrate competence and knowledge of strategic management tools, unfortunately, the role of principals as leaders in the school system is still not meeting the expectations regarding strategic management in Saudi Arabia (Alameen et al., 2015; Khan, 2016). This can be explained in terms of two issues: the first is that the role of the principal is still exclusive to legal and logistic responsibilities instead of being both a principal and a leader in schools (Normore, 2010). The second issue is Saudi socio-economic context, considering that this context is thought to have an impact on how people plan and respond to planning, on the relationship between the principals and the stakeholders, and on the way people make decisions (Adekola and Sergi, 2016). Based on these issues, this study seeks to investigate the current level of effectiveness of Saudi principals' roles in strategic planning initiatives and determine the factors that are surrounding the schools in which Saudi principals and other stakeholders are interacting.

#### 1.4 Research Aim, Objectives, and Questions

##### 1.4.1 Research aim

The aim of this study is to explore the implementation of strategic planning in the kindergarten school setting in Saudi Arabia. To achieve this aim, the researcher intends to investigate how school principals understand the dynamics in kindergarten schools and how they respond to these changes through strategic planning.

##### 1.4.2 Objectives

Based on the research aim outlined above, the study intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To understand how strategic planning is being adopted in educational institutions in Saudi Arabia.
2. To explore the factors that affect the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia.

3. To investigate the role of the principals in the implementation of strategic planning in the context of kindergarten schools.

#### 1.4.3 Research questions

With reference to the research aim and objectives outlined above, the researcher seeks to achieve the following overarching research questions:

1. To what extent is the concept of strategic planning understood in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?
2. What is the current state of the application of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?
3. What are the main factors that affect the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?
4. To what extent do principals facilitate the use of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?

#### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The proposed study is expected to be significantly important, both practically and theoretically. With the transformations witnessed by Saudi society in recent years, the concept of ‘strategic planning’ is expected to be useful in educational settings across all levels. Specifically, in the early years of learning, such as the kindergarten level, there is a growing need to understand strategic planning and its impact on learning and student achievement. There is a need to review and re-explore the role played by teachers and their managers (principals) in designing learning environments and activities that foster learner achievement by focusing on the roles of school principals in Saudi kindergarten establishments. The present study examines the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional role of school principals in Saudi Arabia, where a traditional understanding of their role still prevails amidst the changes in the wider education sector. Thus, it is expected that the current research effort will provide relevant insights for educators in Saudi Arabia regarding best practices linking strategic planning and student engagement.

The study equally aims to examine the link between the socio-economic context and structure of Saudi society and the effectiveness of principals’ multi-dimensional role in schools. As such, this study is expected to address the impact of the socio-economic factors that are prevalent in

the kindergarten school system in this case in terms of the ways of management and the process of planning and making decisions. Additionally, this study provides insights into issues related to strategic planning in infant educational establishments; through this, the directorate of kindergarten schools at the Ministry of Education could formulate better policies and strategies in relation to strategic planning. This study also proffers recommendations about how a more effective management system can be created in light of the cultural reality of Saudi schools and kindergartens. To succeed, any suggested management style should consider the cultural and social circumstances of an institution to avoid implementation pitfalls (Kern, 2007). This study contributes to the available literature by developing a framework to examine the factors determining strategic planning implementation in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. This study fills the gaps identified in studies conducted in the Saudi setting (Al Ghamdi, 2005; Allui and Sahni, 2016; Alhazemi et al., 2013; Alameen et al., 2015). In this study's proposed framework, the principals' role comprises both leader and principal, which is a revolutionary way of understanding the principals' role in the educational system of Saudi Arabia.

This study offers empirical perspectives to the Saudi situation in relation to strategic planning implementation in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. Besides, most studies on strategic planning in Saudi Arabia are either quantitative or mixed method studies. However, the present study is a purely qualitative study and therefore captures information based on interviews with experts involved in strategic planning implementation in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. This has thus far not been documented and the experts' minds and interpersonal skills cannot be captured via a quantitative approach, while mixed method approach can only partially and narrowly capture experts' views and ideas.

## 1.6 Definitions of Terms

In order to ensure a common understanding of this research effort and for purposes of consistency, the following operational definitions are provided:

*Strategic Management:* Strategic management includes choices concerning what an organisation could do, offered the chances to do so in its current circumstances; what it can do, given the assets available to it; what it needs to do, given the individual qualities and desires of key leaders; and what it ought to do, given the moral and legitimate setting in which it is



working. Key administration comprises the examination, choices and activities an association embraces to make and support upper hands (Renzl, 2008).

*Strategic Planning:* Strategic planning is a process of creating the activities required to achieve strategic objectives; it includes defining requirements, vision building, message formulation, external environment assessment, internal resource assessment, and strategic issue identification (Bryson, 2018).

*Strategic School Planning:* This is "the process that is designed to develop educational institutions by understanding changes in the external environment, assessing internal strengths, weaknesses in the organisation, developing a vision for the future of the school expected, the teams used to accomplish those tasks, and developing plans to transform the school from now to where the school is headed after a certain period, including the implementation of such plans, the development of an upcoming system, the identification of necessary changes and the possible adjustments to those plans" (Brown and Marshall, 1997, p. 3)

*Culture:* "Culture expresses itself conceptually, verbally, behaviorally and visually, and which is a product of the complex interaction of communities, socio-economic contexts and contrasts, ethnic and faith-based values and beliefs, and the history of that community as a whole and of the individuals within it" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 5).

*School Culture:* "Culture is the set of beliefs, values and behaviours, both explicit and implicit, which underpin an organisation and provide the basis of action and decision-making and is neatly summarised as '*the way we do things around here.*' In a strict sense we might argue that the culture of every educational institution is unique, derived from the context in which the school operates and the values of those who have led or been part of the organisation over time" (Lumby and Foskett, 2003, p. 58).

## 1.7 Limitations of the Study

There were a number of factors that the researcher encountered during the course of the data collection exercise that in some way hindered the study outcomes. One of the limitations of this study in terms of data gathering was the unwillingness of some participants to participate in interviews and discussions because of the sensitive nature of the topic and its possible consequences regarding reprisal. We were denied the diversity of views that could have come

from mixed focus group discussions. Another challenge faced was that some of the school principals were very preoccupied with administrative work to bring their schoolwork to a closure since it was the end of the year. As a result, some interviews had to be postponed; in some cases, some postponements had to be made after the arrival of the researcher to the school. In order to measure change or stability in any research, a considerable timeframe needs to have elapsed. In the face of time constraints, it was not possible to reschedule meetings within the same day with other principals in other schools. Unfortunately, the perspectives of the respondents from such schools, which could have enriched the findings of the study, were lost. Also, the researcher was time-bound and was required to complete the fieldwork in six months and to submit the research report (thesis) within a period of three years. Financially, the researcher incurred travel expenses from the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom to Makkah in Saudi Arabia, where the study was located, in addition to in-country travels within the Makkah region to the numerous study sites. Additionally, the interviews were conducted in Arabic and then transcribed and translated into English. Bryman (2012) states that even when the translation of texts is carried out, there is usually the problem of the translator's insensitivity to national cultures. This situation could have impacted the quality of the responses.

## 1.8 Contributions of the Study

With the notable exceptions of a handful of studies conducted in the Saudi setting (Al Ghamdi, 2005; Allui and Sahni, 2016; Alhazemi et al., 2013; Alameen et al., 2015), the subject matter of strategic management and planning remains a grey area for research in kindergarten education in Saudi Arabia. To this end, the current study is unique in several ways. For example, it presents the principal's role as both a leader and a principal, which is a revolutionary way of understanding the principal's role in the educational system of Saudi Arabia. This study could be among the very few exploring the subject matter of strategic planning in Saudi Arabia in a conscious attempt to understand the factors that impede the implementation of effective strategic planning in kindergarten schools and how the Ministry of Education should take into consideration these cultural factors to guarantee a safe and effective application of strategic planning. This study provides empirical evidence on the Saudi situation in terms of strategic planning. Furthermore, most studies on strategic planning in Saudi Arabia are either quantitative or mixed method studies; however, the present study is a

purely qualitative study and therefore a complete departure from what is predominant in the literature. Thus, the research will broaden the existing literature on strategic planning by adding perspectives on this issue in Saudi Arabia.

## 1.9 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into nine chapters. The content of each chapter is briefly stated as follows:

*Chapter One:* This chapter presents the background to the study, statement of the problem, aims and objectives of the study, research questions and significance of the study. The scope and limitations of the study, as well as the contribution of the study to the knowledge and the outline of the study, are included herein.

*Chapter Two:* This comprises an extensive review of the literature on the characteristics of strategic management and the strategic planning process in schools. The chapter explores strategic management and strategic planning in educational institutions, drawing out its impact in schools and the role of leaders in the successful implementation of strategic planning. The chapter also examines the differences in cultural contexts as a moderating factor in the strategic planning process. The Saudi culture is analysed and its impact on strategic planning is discussed.

*Chapter Three:* This chapter presents the methodology of the study. This study adopts an overarching social constructivist ontology with the orientation that knowledge does not exist independently of the social set-ups but rather what is known is socially constructed. Also, the chapter highlights the methods of data collection and analysis influenced by a qualitative case-study approach. Additionally, the ethical principles followed in the course of the study are explained, followed by a chapter summary.

*Chapter four:* This chapter is organised into seven sections comprising the kingdom's location within a broader geopolitical community following the macroeconomic landscape. The second section brings into sharp focus the national culture (social, religious and value systems). The third section highlights the purpose of education in Saudi Arabia. The fourth and fifth sections discuss the Saudi education system. The sixth section looks into government expenditure on

education. The last section reviews the history and purpose of kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia.

*Chapters five, Six, and Seven:* present the results of the data collected from the selected kindergarten schools that constitute the sample. These chapters present a detailed discussion of the findings of the research based on the research questions. Chapter five presents details on the first and second questions, which are “To what extent is the concept of strategic planning understood in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?” and “What is the current state of the application of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?”. Chapter six presents the details of the third research question “What are the main factors that affect the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?”. Chapter seven presents the details of the fourth research question “To what extent do principals facilitate the use of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?”.

*Chapter Eight:* This chapter presents the discussions and interpretation of the research findings and results.

*Chapter Nine:* This is the concluding chapter; it presents the summary of the key findings, policy implications and practitioner recommendations for further research as well as the conclusions.

## 1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the research context whereby the background of the study has been set out. The concept of strategic planning in kindergartens has been put forward, thereby establishing the significance of the study. From the analysis in this chapter, it becomes evident that very little is known about strategic planning, especially in the kindergarten division of the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this study seeks to provide answers to questions relating to strategic planning and the factors that shape it in the Saudi Arabian context. This section has also presented the research objectives and questions to guide the development of data collection instruments and consequently the data analysis. As the chapter concludes, the specific activities and events that form an integral part of the research process are highlighted. The next chapter explores the research problem in light of the theoretical perspectives and the conceptual framework that underpins the current study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical, theoretical and practical landscape of strategic management with particular reference to strategic planning from various perspectives. This chapter positions the current research in the context of the knowledge and practice of the two concepts globally, including in the Saudi Arabian educational setting. In line with the research aim and study objectives, the review commences with a historical outlook of strategic planning that ties into its methods, processes, and relevance in organisations. For a better theoretical basis for an empirical discussion of the study, several theories have been reviewed; these include cultural theory, subjective theory, political theory, contingency and ambiguity theory, largely covering the depth of the knowledge of the topic under study.

### 2.2 Strategic Management with Particular Reference to Strategic Planning

Historically, the concept of strategic management has its roots in the military and comes from the word 'strategy'. Despite its military roots, the word strategy can be found in the lexicon of business and economics. In recent years, thinking strategically has become an indispensable factor in leading and managing organisations, whether for-profit or non-profit organisations (Moore, 2000) as well as large and small organisations (Kraja and Osmani, 2013; Agwu, 2018). It has been regarded as a process involving environmental scanning, strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation (Barney et al., 2010; Cristiana and Anca, 2013). The procedure includes principals who make a choice based on a set of strategies (for the organisation), consequently allowing it to improve its performance outcome (Hitt et al., 2007). Essentially, the strategic management process involves four steps: environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation. One of the crucial steps that researchers agree to be a key determinant of the success of every strategy is environmental scanning and strategy formulation (Barney et al., 2010). This is because, with poor environmental understanding, it would not be easy to formulate plausible and relevant strategies that enable organisations to achieve their goals.

The process of strategic management should be carried out in a way that ensures that all four steps express attention towards development and better performance. While principals must

have a clear picture of the end result during strategic planning (Cristiana and Anca, 2013), a study conducted by Barney et al. (2010) revealed that any mistakes made in the initial stages affect the entire strategic management process, and this makes strategic planning a crucial step in strategic management practice.

As such, organisations and leaders are increasingly turning to strategic planning to facilitate the resolution of problems related to risks and uncertainties (Hill, Jones and Schilling, 2014). As discussed earlier, when risks are not managed well and uncertainties are not avoided, there is a possibility that the combined effects of these two elements lead to a crisis situation. While risks and uncertainties can never be fully ascertained (Barney, 2017), options for reducing risk and uncertainty play a critical role in managing uncertainties effectively. The question here, however, is whether an organisation is able to survive without a plan in place. To reiterate an earlier and important point, there are risks and crises for which analytical tools may be used. Consequently, it becomes possible to identify value drivers through competitive intelligence. These will not always provide coherent results but, for minor risks, simple analytical tools will no longer be sufficient (Morden, 2016). This does not imply that strategic decisions will not work in managing crises or that they will not aid in avoiding uncertainty. What is implied is that working backwards from potential strategies to what needs to be delivered could prove successful for some non-profit or public organisations such as schools (Anheier, 2014).

Nonetheless, fast-moving and unstructured firms often have grassroots strategies (Peng, 2017). This may mitigate the effect of environmental turbulence on strategic planning. To this end, some academic pundits explain that strategic planning is a multidimensional and complex construct with few indicators (Barney, 2017; Hill, Jones and Schilling, 2014). What this means is that strategic planning is a construct that can be measured reliably through seven indicators: trend analysis, long-term goals, short-term action plans, ongoing evaluation, mission statement, competitor analysis, and annual goals (Hill, Jones and Schilling, 2014). However, these indicators might fail to evoke the distinctiveness of the overall configurations of strategic planning and their associations with other procedures of control and decision making. Environmental scanning is a very important part of strategic planning, and hence there is a need to explore it in detail.

It should be recalled that Hossain et al (2020) address the worries about the unethical conduct of leaders and public officials that contribute to the revival of concern in public services ethics and values. To overcome the concerns regarding these unethical practices and values in the public sector is to implement good governance. In the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the implementation of digitisation and digitally transforming of the public institutions has reduced the unethical conduct of the leaders and public servants to a great extent. Furthermore, Jamil et al (2013) address the administrative culture aspects in hypothesising administrative culture various approaches, as well as the ontology of administrative culture aspect. Further, the administrative culture concerns the epistemology aspect focusing on how cultural knowledge is being created.

Finally, the axiology of administrative culture concerns the applicable administrative standards and ethical standards of public officials. Lastly, the methodological part indicates in what way to examine and describe various attributes of administrative culture. Moreover, Rowley et al (2010) show a theoretical outline of what creates a leader via useful utilisation of the theoretical lenses of behavioural and contingency theories and the theory of transformational leadership. These theories employed by the studies analyse the factors determine the leadership creation from gender perspective. The article discusses gender discrimination's existence and consequences in the workplace. Besides, managerial and leadership styles and potential female leaders in the past studies were critically reviewed and discussed. The paper aims to discuss the interaction between national and organisational culture and gender in terms of leadership opportunities.

### 2.2.1 Environmental scanning

For established firms to survive and prosper, they need to understand their environment better through scanning the factors that affect their performance (Anheier, 2014; Berman, 2015). Research shows that strategic planning is one of the bases for institutional inertia, apart from innovation, and it remains a crucial element for today's organisations to differentiate preparation and strategising (Anheier, 2014). Systematic approaches to strategising could encourage principals to explore new processes and systems in which they have had no prior experience (Peng, 2017). Strategic inertia might have more to do with the planners than the planning. If top management teams are characterised by a deficiency in heavy investments and

genetic diversity in terms of emotional equity, strategic planning may have a conservative bias against younger organisational members (Morden, 2016). Moreover, strategic innovation can be improved by increasing sensitivity to new discontinuities in a firm's evolution. In this environment, strategy misalignments provide the potential for radical strategic alteration (Anheier, 2014; Morden, 2016).

Environmental scanning is a foundational step in the strategic planning process. It involves taking a deliberate look at how internal and external factors affect the success of an organisation. It helps in analysing the internal and external factors. The external analysis assists the organisation in identifying its opportunities and threats and the internal analysis identifies the distinctive competencies of the organisation (Kraja and Osmani, 2013; Agwu, 2018; Barney et al., 2010). When directing an outside examination, components to consider are political, monetary, social, mechanical, legitimacy, and environmental conditions.

The process of environmental scanning involves large amounts of information to better anticipate changes in the marketplace (Robbins and Coulter, 2007). As a result, assessing Porter's 5 Forces to determine the potential barriers to entry, the strength of the local rivalries, the power of both the buyers and suppliers, and any potential local substitutes is an essential additional step in the strategy formulation process. This information can – and should – come from many sources, including:

- **Competitor intelligence:** This involves assessing publicly available information on an organisation, as well as information from competitors' advertising and promotional materials, press releases, governmental and annual reports, job vacancy postings, and newspaper reports, all of which may yield useful information. In addition, attending trade shows or reverse engineering a competitor's products are both ethical ways to gain competitive intelligence (Robbins and Coulter, 2007).
- **Benchmarking:** This entails a search for the best practices among both competitors and non-competitors to achieve superior performance (Robbins and Coulter, 2007).
- **Breadth:** These scans must also include information on the national, regional, and multinational levels in order to ensure they possess enough of the information necessary to make appropriate strategic decisions (Deresky, 2014).



- Continuous improvement factors: While conducting an internal environmental analysis, factors such as the strengths and weaknesses in the organisation's resources, its human resources, processes and technological systems should be considered (Muriuki et al., 2017; Agwu, 2018). After conducting this analysis, management should perform evaluations continuously, striving to maintain forward momentum (Aguinis, 2017).

### 2.2.2 Strategy formulation and planning

Strategy formulation and planning is the process of deciding the best course of action for accomplishing organisational objectives. It includes developing the vision and mission, identifying the organisation's external opportunities and threats as well as determining its internal strengths and weaknesses, launching long-term objectives, creating alternate strategies and setting policy guidelines and rules (Branislav, 2014; Agwu, 2018; Barney et al., 2010). This facilitates the formulation of a superior competitive strategy (Burugo and Owour, 2017) and must therefore be systematic and rigorous. The strategy formulation stage is incomplete without strategic planning, which conveys life to the mission and vision of an organisation. A well-crafted strategic plan is driven from the top downwards and considers the internal and external environment of the work. When the strategic plan is treated as an ongoing process, it becomes a competitive advantage and an assurance of the improved day-to-day execution of the work practices (Mathews, 2002; Maccarthy, 2017).

### 2.2.3 Strategy implementation (action stage)

Strategy implementation is simply putting the organisation's chosen strategy into action, that is, it involves the activities and choices chosen for the execution of a strategic plan in order to accomplish the said objectives of the organisation (Wheelen and Hunger, 2011). The process incorporates the functional, business and corporate levels of the organisation (Koech and Were, 2016).

### 2.2.4 Control and evaluation

Following the implementation of strategies, it is necessary to conduct a post-mortem to establish whether the policies and strategies are achieving the expected outcomes. The part of the strategic management process in which top principals decide whether their strategic choice, as implemented, is meeting the organisation's objectives is known as strategy evaluation. It is

both the final stage of the procedure and the foundation for the previous stages (Makadok et al., 2010). It is the process of evaluating all prior decisions made at all levels of the business in order to fix any anomalies before the end of the year, as judgments can be exceedingly harmful to the firm (David, 2010). The evaluation procedure can be lengthy.

### 2.3. Distinction between Strategic Management and Strategic Planning

Research shows that both strategic management and strategic planning are closely related because they concern strategies in the organisation (Cristiana and Anca, 2013). How organisations leverage strategic planning and strategic management formulates a concrete basis from which an organisation can consolidate its initiatives of meeting both future and current objectives (Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman and Bamford, 2017). Strategic planning entails the formulation of directions in a prioritised manner with the aim of achieving the organisation's goals and objectives (Steiner, 2010). The leaders in organisations play a central role towards strategic planning in the sense that they integrate their vision for the organisation into the organisation's strategy. In the context of kindergartens, strategic planning can be implemented if principals in the kindergarten institutions set priorities that concentrate on the aspects of teachers focusing their energy to achieve higher performance in the institutions. The principals can equally strategise the institutions' resources and strengthen operations to ensure that every staff in the institution is set to achieve the common goal of higher performance.

Strategic planning and strategic management are firmly related in that they complete one another. Strategic management includes the most common way of carrying out a system. Dissimilar to strategic planning, which spotlights forming a course for an organisation, strategic management centres on how the organisation's goal will be accomplished (Wheelen et al., 2017). This suggests that essential administration assists principals in understanding the objectives set through essential preparation. Strategic planning transpires as a foundation based on which an administration can practice strategic management. Without key preparation, the administration could neglect to understand its objectives for key administration as it would come up short on the premise of objectives to zero in on (Steiner, 2010). With regards to Saudi Middle Eastern kindergarten establishments, principals can define boundaries to accomplish the school foundations' mission and vision. The needs must be accomplished assuming that the administration uses strategic management.

Here, the management might coordinate the initially aligned resources to ensure that the execution of the planned priorities is done, and the goals are achieved. For example, the principal can explore strategic management by organising activities such as benchmarking for the teachers and students to ensure that the initially strategised plans (higher performance) have been achieved. It is, therefore, evident that strategic management helps organisations in aligning the ongoing actions set through strategic planning, which brings out a clear distinction between the two aspects.

Since strategic planning acts as a guide to the routines in an organisation's operations, through strategic planning principals can visualise the long-term goals of an organisation. This means that the implementation of strategic planning requires a lot of creativity and critical thinking for the management to visualise the opportunities it can explore or challenges that might face the company (Steiner, 2010). In the context of kindergarten institutions, principals can visualise the optimal score they want the institution to achieve. Through well-strategised plans, the principal can visualise the obstacles that might limit the achievement of such a goal and set solutions to counteract such challenges. In the same scenario, strategic management can be implemented differently to achieve similar results. The management can simply focus on the principles of management by directing, coordinating and controlling human resources to ensure that their efforts align with the visualised goal (Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson, 2012). This implies that planning facilitates the implementation of management roles.

#### 2.4. Strategic Planning in Educational Institutions

Strategic planning in the education sector context has been widely debated since schools or the education sector can be considered as non-profits that offer both private benefits and public benefits (Anheier, 2014; Berman, 2015; Peng, 2017). An educated population is essential for society and can have social benefits. Additionally, being educated is a private benefit in the sense that higher degrees of education are required for higher rates of pay (Brown, 2014). The shortfall of a suitable strategic management structure keeps associations from powerful strategic planning, execution, and assessment, which influences the organisational capacities generally (Alalwan et al., 2012). Therefore, the enactment of strategic planning is necessary for educational institutions if a society aims to achieve educational reforms and changes in the educational systems and in teacher and student performance (Odden and Kelly, 2008).

Strategic planning is required in all schools for a number of reasons: firstly, because strategic management is a powerful tool and can be used to improve the overall performance of a school. Secondly, because strategic planning is systematic, comprehensive, inclusive and ongoing, it can be an approach that suits schools. Thirdly, it is ongoing and continuous, so it can adapt to a changing world. Fourthly, strategic planning is comprehensive because it is based on a vision-making process, so it makes all parties focus on the big picture of school development. Fifthly, strategic planning is a suitable tool for schools because it enables the school community to embrace any major change arising from the social structure of schools. Sixthly, because strategic planning is rational and systematic and based on vision and mission and action plans, it helps schools to combat the special interests and pressures that tend to pull them apart (Crowley, 2011). In order to understand the specific impact of strategic planning in kindergarten, we turn to exploring its applicability in schools.

#### 2.4.1 Strategic planning in schools

During the last ten years, there has been an adjustment of the school systems of numerous nations from a model of instruction rooted in the past to strategic planning with an emphasis on the future (Lattore-Medina and Blanco-Encomienda, 2013). Lattore-Medina and Blanco-Encomienda (2013) did a study to investigate the impact of strategic management on school improvement, seeking to highlight the differences in the schooling system. They observed that the main changes are those connected with school improvement and that the presence of key components, such as strategic educational administration is fundamental for accomplishing school improvement. As per Lattore-Medina and Blanco-Encomienda (2013), government plans to make changes in educational systems very often fail, and one of the reasons for this failure is the fact that the interests and needs of schools or learning institutions have not been taken into consideration. Recently, a change in the view has been that innovation should be approached in a different way. The dialogue between schools and society should be recognised, while taking into account that every educational institution has a unique context.

Amoli and Aghashahi (2016) consider that schools are the best option to apply strategic management because schools have human beings as their input and output. Moreover, schools have added values such as knowledge, awareness and skills, which require purposeful management to turn them into high-performing organisations (Amoli and Aghashahi, 2016).

According to Amoli and Aghashahi (ibid), strategic management in a school influences its management, planning and prediction of changes. It can also take advantage of the existing threats and turn them into opportunities and use the school resources to benefit from these opportunities through environmental opportunities. They also state that one of the advantages of strategic management is that it puts everyone in a properly determined position, which makes the staff work hard to fulfil their duties and keeps them motivated.

Odden and Kelly (2008) discuss how the implementation of strategic management in 100 USA urban district schools led to school improvement, among other benefits. There was a significant need to improve the performance of the students in these districts, who came from low-income and minority backgrounds. The results of applying strategic planning were summarised as follows: the districts and every school in these districts had sufficient quantities and quality of talent equitably distributed in all jobs and in all schools; teacher retention increased and teacher turnover decreased; the individuals who performed these tasks had the core competencies, which improved over time through the development, management and reward systems; the educational improvement of the system was made clear to everyone and implemented in an effective way; and the focus of the improvement was on both teachers and students, for example, aiming to enhance teacher performance and student achievement.

The role of strategic planning has been broadly conceptualised by designing and developing a culture that has high expectations about students and their achievements as well as a shared understanding of the most educational practices, giving support to the educational improvement strategy and vision of every district and creating collective responsibility for student achievement (Odden and Kelly, 2008). In a report by OECD (2010), it was shown how Mexico, which experienced some difficulties in its educational system, adopted strategic management to meet its national goals in education. Improving the quality of education is a social and political priority for Mexico. The development of social and human capital is yet another essential factor that is helping to improve the living conditions of Mexicans. What makes improving the quality of education a priority is the high poverty rate, crime rate and social inequality (OECD, 2010). Despite the reforms by the Mexican government, there is still a lot to be done. For example, despite these wide ranging reforms over the past twenty years, which led to an improvement in enrolment and the quality of education, there are still numerous

young people without education and the student achievement is still not sufficient to provide Mexico with the skills it needs (OECD, 2010).

On the other hand, in the Arab world education has faced challenges despite the many attempts to reform educational systems. For example, there are still some gaps in access to education, with approximately 5 million school-aged children out of school, of which 60% are girls (UNESCO, 2016). The challenges that face the Arab governments are similar to those of Mexico: high rates of poverty, high rates of illiteracy and social inequality. However, education is still an unfinished business: there is a need to improve teacher education, public policies and laws in education are in need of reform, and there is also a need for quality learning (UNESCO, 2016). Arab governments also should ensure the quality of early learning and readiness to learn. UNESCO (2016) has laid out a methodology to confront these difficulties. This procedure depends on the following components: upgrading school systems to advance quality, engaging students to be inventive and skilful, and emphasising innovativeness among students and networks through education to mitigate the impacts.

Based on these findings, strategic planning can be a solution to the problems which Arab countries are facing. With regards to a study by Albadri and Nasereddin (2019), whose focus was the reality of the Arab world in terms of the economy and employment and education, education access was found to be correlated with economic progress. In terms of economy and employment, the study found that most citizens in the Arab world do not have sufficient incomes that meet their daily needs, the rate of unemployment is high, and the economic concerns outdo social and political issues. Moreover, most of the citizens believe that corruption is endemic. The study also found that many people live below the poverty line. In terms of health and well-being, the study showed that the Arab region is slightly above the world average regarding immunisations against infectious childhood diseases, and obesity among children is still a persistent problem. At the education level, the study demonstrated that the Arab world failed to achieve the Millennium targets of school enrolment in the primary education sector, gross intake in the final year of primary education, and of universal literacy, while Arab governments spent 17.6% less on education-related issues. The rationale for assessing the situation in the Arab world by Albadri and Nasereddin (2019) was to find the points of weakness and strength, and the discussion of these points will lead to the study of the effectiveness of strategic management practices whose implementation is believed to assist in

solving the problems faced by the Arab world. The bottom line for successful strategic planning initiatives lies squarely on the effectiveness of leadership in schools.

As Frick (2009) has suggested, at the present time, “school administrative decision making requires more than the mechanical application of existing rules, regulations and various levels of school and school-related policy” (p. 51). The drive to adopt strategic planning in schools essentially refers to the school’s aim to improve the performance of its teachers and students (Hodgkinson and Kelly, 2007). There are a number of factors that necessitate schools to adopt strategic planning management; the most important two of these are the need for a more comprehensive assessment of teachers, students and technology. There is a real need to carry out an appropriate and valid assessment of teacher performance and student achievement. The second factor is that teachers have established many virtual communities where they exchange their perspectives and experience with each other. However, these communities are not connected to officially recognised reform networks. Thus, it is essential to connect these communities to the policy makers' networks and officially working state networks to be aware of the challenges of the teaching staff and how to address them (Odden, 2011). Moreover, technology creates a new environment for learning and teaching – a change to which schools must adapt rapidly – and thus adopting strategic planning will help these schools to adapt to that change (Manohar et al., 2016).

Researchers concur that many external factors impact student achievement, including socioeconomic factors, the education level of parents, and the challenging home lives of some students (Leithwood and Prestine, 2002; Li, Hallinger, and Ko, 2016). According to Marzano (2006), within a strategic management framework, *“an array of innovations has been experimented with to improve student achievement including changing the school schedule, decreasing student-to-teacher ratios, and increasing the use of technology; however, not even the most intuitively best has demonstrated the impact on student achievement like the most important variable—the classroom teacher”* (p.1). Carter (2013) explains that while schools have little control over external factors that affect student achievement, they do have internal control over some of the factors that directly impact student achievement, which is linked to the development of strategic management protocols. Frantzen (2018) stated that strategic planning is a dynamic process that helps schools to adjust to the unpredictable demands brought by changes in the environment.

Strategic planning in schools helps to address the challenges facing them by mapping them out in straightforward and highly pragmatic terms and drawing a management framework for them (Frumkin, Manno, Bruno, and Edgington, 2011). It is this process that guides schools in a rapidly changing environment. Moreover, strategic planning is concerned with the effective utilisation of resources to accomplish educational goals (Norton, 2008). There is no single approach to management that suits every context. Furthermore, different situations give rise to different styles of management (Jamil et al., 2018). Teachers and students will respond positively to strategies that are consistent with their cultural and social backgrounds (Connolly and James, 2014). The aim of strategic planning is to create the potential for a successful future through planning and how the environment determines strategic decisions (Frantzen, 2018). The need for planning is concerned with whether scholars will assume strategies to be planned or the extent to which these strategies can be placed in action. In terms of environmental determinism, it is about finding whether the environment can be a constraint (high determinism) or is established by the actors (low determinism) (Rasche, 2007).

An important issue in strategic planning is the management of human capital. This strategy addresses the talent of teachers and leaders, who are the instruments for achieving school improvement because an effective quality-oriented teacher enhances student learning more than any other internally controllable aspect of the school (Marzano, 2006). Quality teachers are capable of inspiring significantly greater learning gains in their students when compared with their weaker colleagues (Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq, and Berhanu, 2011).

Danielson (2007) indicated that quality teachers should know about content and instructional methods, stating that "educators' arrangements, and practice reflect broad information on the substance and of the design of the discipline. Teachers effectively expand on information on essentials and confusions while depicting guidance or looking for purposes for student misconception". Although there is no single "definition" or description of a quality teacher, the research confirms that quality teachers demonstrate characteristics that have a positive effect on student learning, including the ability to provide evidence of producing high levels of student learning, knowledge of academic subject matter preparation and knowledge of social, cultural and multilingual competencies.



Strategic planning of human capital, to this end, aims to provide these schools with teachers and principals equipped with the instructional and leadership expertise to be able to dramatically improve student performance and bridge gaps (Conway and Andrews, 2016). The strategic management of human capital is also aimed at retaining successful teachers and principals in schools who support the achievement of these objectives and let unsuccessful teachers go. Talent and human capital strategic planning have gained considerable attention recently, and they have become very influential in educational policies and practice agendas (Jung and Lee, 2013).

In school management, communication between the leader and the other stakeholders is crucial in ensuring a coordinated approach in managing the learning activities (Van Niekerk and Van Niekerk, 2006). Alhazemi, Rees and Hossain (2013) note that the duties of the leader are to create a suitable environment that empowers stakeholders and inspires them to work towards achieving the school vision, including nurturing, interpreting, coaching, caretaking, directing and navigating. The leader's success in carrying out these tasks depends to a large extent on the cultural norms that rule the school and on how people perceive authority and their relationship with leaders. While the quality of instruction remains essential to student accomplishment, another key variable has an effect on this, namely cooperative culture. A cooperative culture is delivered through a precise cycle wherein individuals cooperate to ensure proficient practice to work towards good individual and aggregate outcomes (DuFour et al., 2010). In a cooperative culture, proficient advancement is incorporated, and it upholds collegial association, which improves proficiency development and student accomplishment (DuFour et al., 2010; Cox, 2011).

A collaborative culture can also act to offset some of the challenges associated with teacher quality by building a highly professional culture (DuFour et al., 2010; Cox, 2011). This means that the duties and responsibilities of the principal should include more than controlling and giving orders, extending to setting plans to create a professional learning environment and inspire everyone at school to do their best to achieve the school's strategic goals and mission.

In essence, in schools that share a collaborative culture, educators within them embrace the premise that the fundamental purpose of the school is to see all students learn at high levels, rather than merely be taught at high levels (DuFour et al., 2010). Collaboration also requires

trust. As noted by Mitchell (2006), one of the building blocks of organisational trust in schools, however, is the willingness to address awkward questions, and to do so will often require trying something and failing. As Hoy and Miskel (2006) write, for principals or others in a leadership role in a school, this means “*motivating others to change, protecting and nurturing the vital role of creative mavericks, signaling respect for, and actively reinforcing, crucial core values, constraining the power of obstructionist ‘grand dukes’, as well as initiating and sustaining cross-cutting actions to nullify the polarising effect of ‘fiefdoms’*” (p. 132). This means that in order to move forward, educational leaders who are strategic must be willing to admit that mistakes can be made by everyone at every level, including their own, and that they are willing and open to discovering new ways of teaching and learning in the educational environment and manage variation in ethical processes as a result.

#### 2.4.2 Integrating strategic planning in schools

There are two key requirements for effective strategy management in schools. The first is talented people. Improving student achievement and performance in schools requires not only talented teachers, but also talented leadership. So, one of the prime emphases of human capital strategic planning is to recruit, develop, retain and place talented people within the learning institutions. Research suggests that there is an ongoing isolation of individual teachers within non-strategic learning organisations (Conway and Andrews, 2016; DuFour et al., 2010). Despite the abundance of evidence regarding the benefits of teachers working together for the purpose of increasing their knowledge and that of their students and the virtual absence of evidence to the contrary, it is still a norm for school teachers to work in isolation, and professional development has been seen as an external source that is not sufficient to foster sustained improvement for students or teachers (DuFour et al., 2010). Odden (2012) discussed strategies whose application can prompt the upgrading of student achievement in schools whose students' presentation is low. This implies that it is critical to characterize what it is that we need every understudy, as well as how we might know when every understudy has learned it (Conway and Andrews, 2016).

Constraints have to be lifted in order for best practices to be effectively put into place. The results of a study by Wanjala and Rarieya (2014) in Kenyan schools, for example, revealed that a range of constraints in planning, such as lack of knowledge and awareness of strategic

planning, the traditional leadership style in schools, the lack of experience, the weak physical and financial resources, and the lack of professional development lead to a need for planning for any and all contingencies. These strategies include the process of analysing relevant data in order to determine the low-performance context and the factors that contribute to it with keeping the main focus on boosting the students' performance even in tough financial times; setting goals and using them to establish resource allocation priorities; choosing a curriculum programme and developing teaching practice with extra focus on reading programmes; developing effective methods for assessment and using data for improving teaching practice; encouraging teachers to work in collaborative teams; and utilising leadership and completing comprehensive professional development (Conway and Andrews, 2016; Fernandez, 2011).

In terms of management, there are also a number of obstacles. These include a low level of public funding allocated to schools and education in general; inefficient intra-sectoral arbitration (Fernandez, 2011; Murphy, 2009); compulsory learning and poor educational management that is unable to transform already existing resources into scholastic outcomes (Murphy, 2009); poor capacity to manage the staff, low capacity of communities to manage schools, and insufficient leadership and management training for headteachers (Sun and Van Ryzin, 2014); and insufficient involvement in training and vocational courses as well as limited managerial capacity to manage resources and transfer them in a way to meet educational needs (International Monetary Fund, 2013).

To face these obstacles, the International Monetary Fund (2013) suggests a set of strategies that contribute to improving the quality of learning in schools, such as increasing the funding school share in the National Development Budget and allocating primary schools sufficient fiscal support; strengthening the capacities in the areas of planning and management, promoting a management approach that is based on aligning existing resources to educational outcomes; improving the management of human resources through the individual monitoring of teachers; motivating teachers, especially in the poor areas through incentives; strengthening the community capacity to support training centres and primary and high schools; and training headteachers and principals through a leadership and management system and creating policies to encourage the efforts of the teaching staff (International Monetary Fund, 2013). The reason why these examples of management obstacles and suggestions are mentioned is to give a wider idea about the significance of management in dealing with the limitations and challenges that

an educational system can face and the role of strategic planning in overcoming or at least mitigating these challenges. Fontaine and Ahmed (2013) suggest school-based management as an effective way to make schools work.

SBM is a process of decentralisation wherein the responsibilities of school management are transferred from the government to the school itself. It also involves attempts to strengthen parental involvement in the school decision-making. SBM can have the following objectives: increasing the participation of local teachers and parents in the process of decision making, increasing the more effective use of resources, because locals know better how to use resources in the right place, and providing a higher quality of delivery of educational services (Bruns, Filmer, and Patrinos, 2011). Strategic planning in schools and kindergartens has been characterised by effective deliberation, which requires a willingness by the stakeholders to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity, consider different views and believe that there is no one correct solution or one best answer to the problem they face; there is rather wisdom to be found (Bryson, 2017). Therefore, because human beings and their welfare are the goals of education and management, talent and human capital strategic management plays a pivotal role in any reform. In other words, the focus of strategic planning should be on how to support schools fiscally, align resources to educational outcomes, improve the management of human resources and motivate teachers.

#### 2.4.3 Strengths and weaknesses of strategic planning in education

School strategic planning does not have to differ from strategic planning in other contexts since the pillars of strategic planning are the same except for the scope of application (Bardus et al., 2018). Strategic planning in schools is believed to have a number of benefits and strengths. For instance, Jamil et al. (2018) state that establishing strategies in a school creates power points in the school, which are represented by firstly, networks, which means that organisations do not work in isolation and they need to interact with other companies. By adopting strategic planning, schools broaden their relationships and connections with each other. Secondly, a collective strategy, which means that when schools adopt strategic planning, they create a joint strategy between the members of the networks and collaboration takes place between them to solve the complicated issues and to replace competition. Thirdly, strategic alliances, which means a kind of joint venture where the members of the network take positions in the new

business that has been created by the adoption of strategic planning, such as the sharing of development skills and research. Fourthly, strategic outsourcing, which means a sort of cooperative agreement to do what can be done internally.

Moreover, strategic planning is the way to create an ‘empowered school’, which is defined as a school which is neither the unwilling victim of external changes nor the innovator who unthinkably reacts to every whim and fad. Rather, it is the school that responds to changes by creating its own vision and releasing the confidence and energy required to put its ideas into practice as well as redefining its management to face the challenges of change (Coleman, Thurlow and Bush, 2003). One of the benefits of strategic planning in schools is that links with the governing body become well-developed and headteachers support governors to be involved in the school life and develop a better understanding of how schools operate at the school-whole level and at the individual classroom level. As a result, governors become encouraged towards more involvement in the life of the school and create targets that improve learning at the school and enhance student achievement (Connolly and James, 2014).

However, despite these strengths and benefits, strategic management as applied in a school environment seems to have some weaknesses, the first and foremost of which is its being culturally sensitive. Gay (2018) believes that culture is at the heart of everything done in the name of education and school strategic management is not an exception. Culture is deeply ingrained in the structures, programmes and ethos of schools (Gay, 2018). This makes applying strategic planning subject to being affected by the culture that dominates the educational context and shapes all its aspects and processes. This also means that adopting strategic planning principles that have been successful in other contexts is not linked with the same success. Strategic management issues and processes, therefore, should highly consider the culture to which teachers and students belong in order to be successful; otherwise, a kind of conflict will be created that leads to a breakdown in communication between the school and its members (Bergin and Bergin, 2014; Thompson and Martin, 2010). This makes the task of principals and governing bodies difficult if they do not address management from a culturally appropriate approach.

## 2.5 Leadership Style in the Light of Strategic Planning in Education

Strong leadership has always been associated with management that explores both leadership and managerial roles. In the same way, effective strategic planning can be realised in Saudi Arabian kindergarten schools if the principals practise both the role of a principal and that of a leader. There is a strong relationship between leadership functions and the operational functions of management in a school (Leithwood and Prestine, 2002). The concept of professionalism in an educational organisation makes it possible to bridge the responsibilities tied to educational inquiry and standards with those tied to the needs of individual children (Li, Hallinger, and Ko, 2016). Thus, it is vital that an all-encompassing authoritative strategy for an educational body considers the more extensive reasons for its order (Leithwood and Prestine, 2002; Li, Hallinger, and Ko, 2016).

Kassim and Habib (2011) outline the various studies of the Gulf States that depict that there is a strong interconnection between leadership and strategic management that enhances organisational performance. Leadership enables a principal to implement the aspects of collaboration and teamwork in an organisation. In his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, Freeman (2010) depicted that strategic management can only be effectively achieved if people coordinate and work collaboratively. This implies that the implementation of the participative leadership style will ensure that individuals are part of the management process that promotes effective strategic planning. A study conducted by Jabbar and Hussein (2017) evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of leadership in strategic management depicted that leadership results in flexibility in organisations' managements, which improves the utilisation of strategic management. It is clear that strategic management is effectively achieved in organisations whose managements explore flexibility (Jabbar and Hussein, 2017). Flexibility is well-depicted through effective leadership skills. A leader can effectively strategise and implement changes due to the fact that s/he possesses good problem-solving abilities and communication skills (Anderson and Anderson, 2010). Leaders can, therefore, integrate their skills with strategic management to ensure that subordinates are indispensable and embrace any managerial alterations. Principals who embrace integration between leadership and strategic management can, therefore, successfully achieve an institution's objectives as they can easily make teachers part of the alterations the institution needs to achieve success.

A study by Jabber and Hussein (2017) regarding strategic leadership epitomises that organisations that integrate leadership and strategic management exhibit excellent performance. This is a clear indication that the integration of strategic management and leadership results in superlative performance. This aspect has been evidenced by the fact that effective leadership assimilates the strategies developed through strategic management to align the organisation's capabilities to conform to the strategic plans. Strategic management heavily depends on an efficient decision-making process (Freeman, 2010). Decision-making is better influenced by a well-established leadership system. Principals in kindergarten institutions can embrace leadership to formulate frameworks in the institutions that support strong strategy formulation that promotes the management process. Through such frameworks, the institutions can achieve distinctively better performances resulting from the integration of strategic management and leadership.

Leaders are crucial individuals who promote the achievement of strategic planning by integrating their roles to conform to the process of strategic management. Every principal should equally embrace leadership qualities to promote the success of his/her organisation. This indicates that the schools' principals in Saudi Arabia must strategise on effective leadership roles to attain strategic management in their entities. A leader should be in a position to make effective decisions that facilitate the enactment of strategic plans (Jabbar and Hussein, 2017). This infers that principals can enact prodigious strategies in favour of the students and teachers to facilitate an environment where students can maximise learning. The decisions made by the principal can also promote an environment that supports theories of management, such as the Fredrick Herzberg's two factors theory, which promotes motivation among teachers to strive for excellence.

As leaders, principals should equally utilise their ability to direct effectively. Leaders act as models who embrace a transformational leadership style to reform the management of an institution (Anderson and Anderson, 2010). This denotes that principals can act as agents of transformation by displaying abilities such as intellectual skills in managing issues related to incompetent managerial skills. Such leadership icons can be emulated by the subordinates and the teachers to promote performance and the utilisation of strategic management. Jabber and Hussein's study (2017) supports that an effective leader must formulate an effective evaluation system that will continuously evaluate the management strategy and plans of an organisation.

Such plans will help in restricting the management culture to cultivate an environment that supports strategic management. Even though the Saudi Arabian educational system is strict and provides little avenue for reforming the institutional culture, the principals as leaders should try to reform the institutions with the power within their authority. These reforms can be related to aspects such as endorsing a culture where teachers are made part of the decision-making process. Additionally, a culture like evaluating the teachers' performance on a regular basis can be important in promoting strategic management in the institutions.

Alhamadi (2018) outlines that multiple efforts are in place to restructure the Saudi Arabian education system. The attempts are in line with reforming the Saudi Arabian and the Middle East countries' education systems to conform to the Western system management styles. According to Algarni and Male (2014), the majority of Saudi Arabian education institutions still support the traditional system, which is limited in its future orientation. The Saudi Arabian education system is also set in a very strict manner in that it lacks the aspect of delegation of authority to the principals in the schools (Algarni and Male, 2014). A traditional education system utilises managerial capabilities and processes that do not align with the current dynamic strategic planning skills. A strict centralised system inhibits the school principals from setting management rules or restricts the schools' managements to manipulating objectives in a way that promotes strategic planning. Studies show that principals equally fail to implement complex information technology ideas in schools unless mandated by the Ministry of Education (Albugami and Ahmed, 2015). For instance, a school principal cannot organise a team-building session for teachers as the principal lacks the full mandate to allocate the managerial duties to the teachers.

Another study conducted regarding early childhood education in Saudi Arabia by Rabaah et al. (2016) also depicted that the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia is very authoritative and has limited avenues where participative leadership style is practised. Such a system has greatly inhibited the abilities of the principals in the schools to practise effective leadership. Studies depict that principals in Saudi Arabia are demotivated to practice appropriate leadership and effective management as the ministry does not rank the schools (Rabaah et al., 2016). This is a clear indication of how a well-strategised theory should be implemented to restructure the education system in Saudi Arabia.



## 2.6 Strategic Planning in Saudi Schools and Kindergartens

Abdel-Moneim (2015) states that educational issues in the Middle East are not connected to the manner by which resources are utilized, but rather to educator and managerial administration mentalities. There are various issues that hamper change in the schooling system in the Middle Eastern nations overall and in Saudi Arabia specifically, for example, the advancement of school systems that are grounded in the desire to maintain a conventional position based on the assumptions of educators, students and guardians. In any case, the executives remain the indispensable issue facing schools and education overall in Saudi Arabia (Abdel-Moneim, 2015). Another study highlighted the absence of data and obstructions among school chairmen while evaluating the execution of strategic planning in Saudi schools (Makhdoom, 2012). Saudi Arabia is among the Middle Eastern nations whose administration frameworks and practices are affected by the local frameworks and culture. These frameworks and cultural-structural boundaries can accommodate the positive management styles elements needed to transform the management styles to fit with 2030 vision goals to transform the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia into developed nation.

Moreover, Jawhar (2009) illustrates her own experiences in a Saudi classroom, where she writes that the increase in challenges between the West and the Islamic world in the last twenty years has led to an intensification of teachers' demands for rote obedience in the classroom. She feels that this type of environment is neither conducive to learning nor in line with Islamic values. As she writes, *"Saudi teachers have full control over questioning, feedback and content in the classroom. This all but eliminates an interactive learning environment. Students typically are not encouraged to give their own views on subjects, demonstrate their knowledge or to seek explanations and clarifications of lessons they may have difficulty understanding"* (Jawhar, 2009, p.2). As a result, Jawhar (2009) recommends that the Saudi government take into consideration the fact that their country's economy depends on developing intercultural skills as well as critical thinking skills to work within the global business environment.

There have been many attempts to adapt management styles from the developed countries to suit the cultural context of Arab and Middle Eastern countries. The terms that have been used to identify management in Saudi Arabia are traditional, limited in future orientation, lacking the delegation of authority, manifesting an authoritarian system rather than a participative style,

emphasising sensitivity to the norms of the local culture, and limited participation in decision making (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006). One of the features of strategic planning in schools and other organisations is that there is a failure of principals and employees to communicate, and top management decisions very often contradict the plan and do not involve the employees in the process of planning (Fontaine and Ahmed, 2013). In school and kindergarten management, the headteacher plays a vital role in the process of managing. In terms of the weaknesses in education in Saudi Arabia, a dependence on rote learning or memorisation and on a teacher-centred classroom begets students. These rote learning or memorisation should be revised to help in creating creativity, as noted by Rugh (2002). The focus of principals in planning, just like teachers in the classrooms, is controlling people's behaviour rather than developing their capabilities (Fontaine and Ahmed, 2013). Headteachers also adopt a long-term plan in that they do not check continuously, and they do not use plans for measuring performance (Rugh, 2002).

There are three misconceptions in school management that can be applied to the management context in Saudi Arabian schools and kindergartens (Bell, 2004). The first relates to the leadership function, whereby the school principal or head is viewed as the person who carries the complete burden of the responsibility of planning. Furthermore, the principal is perceived to be at the top of the hierarchy of school management wherein the headteacher is the heroic, solitary and accountable leader who personifies the totality of leadership skills and competence. Teachers are not involved in leadership or decision making. The second misconception that Bell (2004) identifies, and which is consistent with the school management in Saudi Arabia, is predictive fallacy, which means that the principal is able to predict the school's future based on the present data and adopts procedures that make this prediction come true. This requires the principal to have complete control over the school environment to ensure that the planned outcomes will be achieved by deploying resources. In fact, strategic planning is intended to enable teachers and headteachers to shape the change in the school environment and to not consider the school environment as immutable. The third fallacy that Bell (2004) defines is the effectiveness fallacy, which points to the common belief that effective schooling is measured against the criteria of obtaining assessable, discrete and comparable segments of academic knowledge. In other words, schooling effectiveness is restricted to gaining some parts of numeracy and literacy knowledge and passing exams. This simplistic assumption about learning is based on deductive logic.

## 2.7 Effects of Culture on Strategic Planning

Strategic planning in a school context, as pointed out earlier, is the process that helps schools to adapt to changes in the environment. In other words, it is an approach to management that aims to define the organisational roles in terms of the external environment (Little and Leach, 2013). Hence, this planning and management will differ according to the environment or the context in which it takes place. There is no single approach to planning that can be applied to all contexts. It also takes account of the organisation and its culture. In fact, a great focus has been placed on the relationship between organisational culture and structure (Martins, 2003). Reculturing should be prior to restructuring. Many cultural values can conflict with the change, so before applying the new management approach. The existing management styles should be modified to create a strong background to accommodate the new management approach instead of conflicting with it. For example, many challenges can be found when applying existing theories and values of management in schools in developing countries that should be revised to cope with the management styles needed. Strategic management deals with explicit orientation in coping with uncertainty in the environment. In cultures with high power distance and vertical structures, there should not be a clash between these characteristics and those of horizontal organisational structures of strategic management (Little and Leach, 2013).

One cultural difference depends on vulnerability evasion, which alludes to the degree to which individuals feel compromised by eccentric circumstances and the degree to which these individuals can endure vulnerability (Hurn and Tomalin, 2013). A culture with high vulnerability evasion will embrace prestige and make foundations that assist in averting vulnerability. Individuals follow extremely severe codes of conduct as a reaction to their inclination to be shaky in uncertain conditions. Social orders with a low degree of vulnerability aversion will generally be more ready to acknowledge vulnerability and creative thoughts as well as handle each day as it comes (Hurn and Tomalin, 2013). These societies see conflict, competition and risk as a normal part of life. People have the tendency to be pragmatic and accept change as a part of life. In terms of management, societies with high levels of uncertainty avoidance will be more cautious in terms of decision making, and they will adopt solutions that have been tested and found successful somewhere else. Low uncertainty avoidance societies will be prepared to take risks and accept a high degree of uncertainty in their decisions (Hurn and Tomalin, 2013).

The other difference that Hofstede (1991) identifies between cultures is power distance. This difference is about the extent to which less powerful members of society or an organisation accept that power is unequally distributed. Societies that are characterised by high power distance accept the fact of social or political hierarchy, whereby the people placed at the lower position of the hierarchy should obey those who are in a higher position and rarely contest the status quo. The other difference between cultures is the collectivist/individualist difference. According to Hofstede (1984), people in collectivist cultures prefer to identify themselves with the group, and they have more loyalty to the group values than to their own individual interests. They believe that loyalty to the group provides them with belonging, safety and security. Unlike in a collectivist culture, people in individualist cultures follow their own individual interests and values and tend to identify themselves with their individual characteristics (Franz, 2012). Another difference between cultures is the masculinity/femininity difference, which points to the role distribution between genders. In masculine cultures, people are generally assertive and display competitive behaviour, while in feminine cultures people prefer caring and cooperative behaviours (Franz, 2012).

Understanding the culture of the institution is critically important since it is within the school settings where strategic planning will be applied. For example, in a school that has a collectivist culture, there are few social distinctions and a competitive role status. Groups have a strong influence and because of these rules for status definitions, placements are believed to be more stable than schools with individualist cultures. Moreover, perpetuating group goals is highly valued in these schools (Harris, 2015). Conversely, in schools where individualist culture rules, there are more casual methods of correspondence. There are fewer proper gatherings and more instructor to-educator or instructor to-head gatherings. Choices are haggled situationally, and instructors have a major measure of force and autonomy in numerous areas. Educators likewise have the ability to decide the educational plan and strategies, which vary from one instructor to the next; however, there are a few common rules shared by every one of the educators. There is additionally a solid feeling of variety and independence that rules the school.

There is no agreed group consensus on how to meet the students' needs, but there is a great focus on the individual development of every student in the school (Harris, 2015).

## 2.8 Saudi Culture and Applications of Strategic Planning

There is a need to analyse the Saudi context and culture and create a management system that is sensitive to the cultural and social norms and values of Saudi society. To be successful, management systems should be tailored to suit the culture of Saudi people and their understanding of leadership, communication and decision-making. Therefore, the following sections will focus on identifying the Saudi culture and its uniqueness in order to make suggestions for management systems that are consistent with this culture and do not conflict with it. Strategic management is rarely found in Saudi Arabian schools (Hamdan, 2015). Planning is usually dictated by the Ministry of Education, and teachers and other school staff have to carry out these plans (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013).

Schools have the task of teaching the National Curriculum designed by the ministry and applying its teaching methods, and the headteacher's responsibility is how appropriately the plan from the ministry has been applied (Topor, 2016). In other words, all schools and educational institutions are treated as one body where the same curriculum is taught, the same planning is decided and the same goals are set, based on teaching generations from the national curriculum and helping them to pass tests (Topor, 2016).

In 2007, a project was started by King Abdullah to foster education; the undertaking was called "Tatweer", which is an Arabic word for development. The point of the venture was to work on the nature of learning in schools through the reception of a cutting-edge arrangement of guidance. This required giving compelling teacher training classes and expert advancement for educators and teachers (AlAhmari, 2017).

Despite undertaking these steps to develop learning in schools, there have still been challenges that hinder the application of appropriate school strategic management, as discussed in the following paragraphs. The first obstacle that impedes the application of strategic planning principles as discussed above is the Saudi culture. As discussed earlier, there are differences between cultures, and these differences shape how every culture conceptualises and identifies strategic management. In terms of uncertainty avoidance, there are cultures with high uncertainty avoidance and cultures with low uncertainty avoidance. The former type of culture tends to take steps to overcome unpredictable changes and events and establishes values and codes of behaviour to feel secure when unpredictable circumstances take place. Unlike the high

uncertainty avoidance cultures, low uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to be more prepared to accept uncertainty and take every day as it comes. Saudi Arabia is a high uncertainty avoidance society (Nestorović, 2016; Chadee, Roxas and Rogman, 2014), which means that some people in this culture are not very likely to take risks and initiate projects due to fear of failure with rigid codes of beliefs and behaviour to face uncertainty (Chadee, Roxas and Rogmans, 2014).

Saudi culture is characterised by collectivism where a member's devotion is to the group's values, regardless of the individual interests (El-Gohary, 2014). While individuals in individualist cultures are independent, they are highly interdependent in collectivist cultures. In collectivist cultures, people belong to 'in groups', take care of them and are responsible for them in exchange for loyalty; thus, in collectivist cultures there is a long-term commitment to family and friends. Any breaches of social norms are considered an offence that leads to the loss of face and the shame of the group member and those related to them. Collectivist cultures do not encourage their members to ask questions; their members are tied with strong bonds and are integrated into a strong cohesive group. People in collectivist cultures do not stand out from their group lest they jeopardise the harmony of that group (Mphatsoe, 2015).

However, what seems to be a point of contradiction is that teamwork is thought to be more successful in individualist cultures than in collectivist cultures. Teamwork is based on how groups collaborate and work interdependently to solve problems and achieve tasks. Moreover, teamwork uses the methods of cooperation, communication and compromise (Fulop, 1999). Resistance to teamwork is, in fact, resistance to interdependence, which is the key component of the team's success in collaborating and cooperating. Interdependence also involves highly effective self-management. People within collectivist cultures tend to identify with the group values and put them prior to individuals' interests, so they rely on group decisions. Individual differences are not regarded when granting employee rewards. An individual's behaviour that does not conform to the group norms will be shamed and lose face. In contrast, individualist culture cultivates a sense of self, which enables self-management and interdependence (Fulop, 1999). Therefore, adopting strategic planning in schools and kindergartens can be impeded by the Saudi collectivist culture, which is based on conformity to the group values and principles and disregards the self or ego of its members. Strategic management involves teamwork and the collaboration of the team members.

The other culture-related factor that hinders the application of strategic planning in Saudi kindergartens is the hierarchal nature of Saudi society. This is linked with the collectivist culture that governs social relations in the society. In groups such as work there is a hierarchy of relationships. The head of the group is placed at the top of the hierarchy, while the subordinates are located at the lower levels. The subordinates have to obey the head and never argue with him, and they have to show respect and obedience in all forms of behaviour (Felix, 2011). Listening to the head and carrying out his orders is a sign of respect, while questioning or arguing with the head is a sign of disobedience for which the subordinate should be punished (Steensma and Vermunt, 2013).

The relationship between the boss and his or her subordinates is formal, so there is little expectancy of contact between them (Felix, 2011). This also causes employees to compete with one another for the satisfaction and reward of the boss, which is another reason why collaboration does not function successfully in this culture (Steensma and Vermunt, 2013).

This also explains why hierarchal societies impede successful strategic planning that is based on collaboration and cooperation as well as on exchanging knowledge and experience between team members and their principals. Another reason why strategic planning has not gained much attention is that schools and kindergartens are viewed as only places for teaching and not for investment or business, with strategic management primarily being linked with business, economic success and the marketplace (Stead, 2014). However, strategic management, with its definition of having goals and endeavouring to achieve these goals by providing the means and setting for this achievement, can be applied to any company and can also mean planning to fulfil them (Analoui and Karami, 2003).

In the section above, the types of culture and their differences have been presented. The discussion has focused on how Saudi culture affects the implementation of effective strategic planning, more precisely, the effectiveness of the principal's role in kindergartens and schools. This section is related to the exploration of the challenges that impede the effectiveness of the principal's role as it should be to cope with the changes that the country is undergoing.

## 2.9. Theoretical Perspectives

The significance of theory is that it provides a rationale for decision-making and that the explicit awareness of theoretical frameworks enhances managerial activity. Theories of strategic planning in schools tend to be normative in the sense that they reflect beliefs about schools and other educational institutions and the individuals who work for them. Theories of school strategic management are also selective, which means that they emphasise certain aspects of an educational institution at the expense of others (Bush, 2003). In other words, schools and educational institutions cannot be amenable to analysis through a single dimension due to their complexity. Educational strategic management theories have been classified into six models: bureaucratic, collegial, political, subjective, ambiguity and cultural.

### 2.9.1. Bureaucratic management theory

This theory posits that bureaucracy is the most “efficient form of management” (Bush, 2003, p. 47). This theory considers that the purely bureaucratic type of administration is the type that is capable of achieving the highest degree of efficiency because it provides stability and reliability. Bureaucratic theory is based on the principle that bureaucracy is the inevitable result of the increasing complexity in an organisation. The features of bureaucratic theories are: First, a hierarchal authority structure, where there are individuals at the top and others at the bottom; they are connected with chains of command and the head has authority over the teachers and students. Second, a goal orientation, where these organisations have goals set by official leaders and organisations are treated as systems that have clear links with each other (Bush, 2003), Third, a division of labour, where staff do different tasks depending on experience (Bush, 2003). Fourth, rules and regulations, not personal initiative, govern decisions and behaviour. Fifth, a rational process is adopted to make decisions and starts with defining the problem, assessing solutions and selecting the most appropriate solution that achieves the organisation’s goals (Bush, 2003). Sixth, leaders have authority, which is the product of their positions in the organisation. The structures are hierarchal (Bush, 2003). In terms of bureaucratic theory, however, there are significant restrictions. To begin with, it is unrealistic to believe that schools are goal-oriented organisations because determining the goals of an educational organisation is extremely difficult; formal objectives are often general and vague because there may be multiple goals competing for resources, and they can come from different individuals and



leaders (Bush, 2007). Second, the theory tenet that decision-making is the result of a rational process is also unrealistic because human behaviour can be irrational most of the time, and this influences the process of decision making in education.

The belief that the principal carries out an evaluation and assessment of the alternatives and then choose the most appropriate option is not realistic (Bush, 2007). Third, the focus of the bureaucratic theory is on the organisation as a whole, and it underestimates the role of the individuals. The theory posits that people in an organisation take preordained positions and they represent their organisational positions and not their individual qualities (Bush, 2007). Fourth, the theory views the system in schools as hierarchal, which means that principals have authority over teachers; this leads to viewing management as top-down, i.e., teachers have to carry out instructions and orders from principals, who have a higher authority, without discussing or being able to object to them (Bush, 2007). Fifth, the assumption made by bureaucratic theory that schools are stable is unrealistic, especially in contemporary times when change is the most realistic feature (Bush, 2007).

The tenets of this theory are found in the Saudi educational context. In every school the system is hierarchal, and the teachers receive instructions from the head or principal, and the teachers' obedience is unproblematic. The principals, on the other hand, take orders from the Ministry of Education. The use of this management approach is believed to create stability in the school; stability means that everyone in the school does their job without effort and has recourse to participate in decision making.

### 2.9.2. Collegial theory

This theory posits that schools reach consensus about decisions and policy through a process of discussion. Unlike bureaucratic theory, collegial theory assumes that power is shared among the members of the organisation, who are connected with a mutual understanding of the organisational objectives (Bush, 2003). The features of the collegial theory are: First, the authority of the leaders emanates from knowledge and experience rather than positions in the school. Teachers need to collaborate, and they have the right to share in the process of decision making. Second, the staff is related to each other through a set of values. Third, it is always possible for professionals to reach an agreement because they have a set of mutual values and understandings. Decisions are arrived through consensus rather than conflict.

However, collegial theory is believed to have some limitations. For example, this theory is strongly normative in the sense that it has a tendency to obscure reality rather than portraying it. Another example of the limitations of collegial theory is that the process of decision making is very slow (Bush, 2006). Another example of the theory's limitation is that it has an assumption that debates can be sorted by discussion, after which the individuals reach a consensus. Nevertheless, what happens in reality is that teachers have their own views and they may represent constituencies within the school. These sectional interests have an influence on the processes of the committee. Thus, the participatory framework can become the focus for disagreement between the factions. Another limitation is that the evaluation takes place in relation to the features of educational institutions. The decision-making participative aspect can exist with the structural component of the school (Bush, 2006). This is the source of disagreement between different aspects of management. The participative element is based on the authority of expertise that the professional staff has, but it does not trump the positional authority of official leaders or the bureaucratic power of external bodies. Moreover, collegial processes depend on the principals' attitudes rather than the teachers' support, which limits the validity of this theory (Bush, 2006). The tenets of this theory cannot be found in the Saudi educational context due to the hierarchal structure of the educational system in Saudi Arabia. Discussion is not used as a tool to reach a consensus because everyone takes orders from those who occupy higher positions in the organisations or institutions. Command is the link that connects the people on the hierarchy rather than discussion.

### 2.9.3 Political theory

This theory posits that there is a conflict between stakeholders and that disagreement is resolved in favour of the most powerful side (Bush, 2007). Political theory characterises decision making as a bargaining process, which means that policy and decisions are the result of a process of negotiation and bargaining. It is about the distribution of influence and power. According to this theory, the management of an organisation is directed toward regulating political behaviour (Bush, 2003). Interest groups form alliances in order to pursue particular objectives. In this case, conflict is considered as a natural phenomenon and power accrues to the most powerful coalitions, rather than being the preserve of formal leaders. Political theory has the following features: First and foremost, the focus is on group activity rather than the organisation as a whole. Such "baronial politics" is a term used in this theory to reflect the

conflict between barons, which is basically about power and resources (Bush, 2003). Also, the focus in this theory is on interests and interest groups. Different individuals have different interests, and they pursue them in an organisation. “Interests” mean a pre-disposition to embracing values, goals, desires and other inclinations that drive a person to behave in a certain way (Bush, 2010). Furthermore, political theory focuses on the conflict in an organisation as a prevalent element. Interest groups pursue their objectives, which may contrast with those of other subunits, leading to conflict between parties whose interests are in jeopardy. Conflict is a feature of organisations because there is always a divergence of interests. Furthermore, the idea of power is critical in political theory since it is the primary means by which conflicts are resolved. The outcomes of the decision-making process are decided through the power of the persons and interest groups engaged in the dispute (Bush, 2010). In education, there are several different sources of power: A person's positional power is the power they get when they have an official position. This is a lawful and legitimate power. The principal is the legal authority figure in schools (Bush, 2007). The second element of power in education is the authority of expertise, which implies that in professional organisations, those with substantial competence have access to a significant reservoir of power. For example, teachers who have rich experience in curricula have power and authority that adds considerable weight to a decision (Bush, 2007). The other source of power in education is personal power, which is an aspect of power that is gained by individuals who have charismatic characteristics and skills. This aspect of power is different from the positional power that individuals have as a result of holding a position in an organisation (Bush, 2007). Another source of power in education is the control of rewards. This means that in schools there are individuals who determine rewards, such as promotion and incentives. The individuals who determine the distribution of rewards have control and power over the behaviour of the teachers who seek one of these rewards (Bush, 2007). Coercive power is also a source of power in education. It is about the ability to enforce compliance, to block, to interfere or to punish (Bush, 2007).

Political theory provides a descriptive and analytical framework of conflict and power in schools. However, it has some limitations. One of these is that it is strongly immersed in the language of conflict and power in a way that neglects other aspects of an organisation. There is little focus on the implementation of policy and on the fact that organisations operate according to a bureaucratic system. The theory also endorses the outcomes of bargaining and negotiation. The other limitation is that there is a great focus on interest groups and their role

in decision making. Another limitation of political theory is that there is too much focus on conflict and neglect of professional collaboration that can lead to agreed outcomes. For example, the claim that teachers are involved in a calculated conflict of their own interests can underestimate their capacity to work collaboratively for the students' benefits; this makes political theory and its models unacceptable for many teachers and educationalists for ethical reasons (Bush, 2003). Again, this theory is not adopted in the Saudi context because the instructions, teaching methods and curriculum all are dictated by the Department of Education and they are not discussed; they are taken for granted and agreeing with them is a must.

#### 2.9.4 Subjective theory

The persons involved in the educational substitute, rather than the institution itself, are the emphasis of this idea. According to this view, each individual has a subjective and selective impression of the institution. Individuals may interpret events and situations in different ways. The idea contends that it is the individual's values and beliefs, not the tangible reality reflected in bureaucratic models, that give the institution its meaning (Bush, 2003). An organisation is perceived as a social construction that is formed as a result of the interaction between its participants (Bush, 2003). The subjective theory has the following features. First, the focus of the theory is the individual rather than the organisation as a whole or the interest groups. The second feature is that the focus is on the meaning that individuals give to events. Every individual has a different interpretation of an event, and the theory is more concerned with these interpretations than the actions themselves. The third feature of the theory is that it posits that the interpretation of the individuals of the events is based on their values and beliefs. These values are taken into account and considered more important than the leaders' meanings that are taken as objective realities. The fourth feature of subjective theory is that it considers structure as the outcome of human interaction rather than something that is pre-determined or fixed. It perceives human behaviour as a reflection of the aspirations and personal qualities of the individuals rather than the official roles they have. The fifth feature of the subjective theory is its emphasis on the importance of individual goals and its denial of organisational goals.

However, subjective theory has some limitations. Firstly, it is normative in the sense that it reflects the beliefs and attitudes of its adherents. Therefore, it consists of a group of principles rather than a coherent body of theory. Secondly, this theory assumes the existence of

organisations where individual interpretation and behaviour occur, but in practice there is no indication of the nature of that organisation (Bush, 2003). Subjective theory is based on the interpretation and meaning of individuals. By so doing, it neglects the institutions where individuals derive meanings and interact (Bush, 2006). Thirdly, the theory considers that meaning is subjective, and this opens the door to many interpretations as every individual has a different meaning. This exclusive focus on the individual as a theoretical entity hinders collective enterprise analysis. In other words, “the individual” cannot reduce social phenomena. Fourthly, subjective theory can hardly provide guidelines for principals because according to its tenets, leaders are expected to adopt the different meanings of events given by individuals in an organisation; this stance is not reliable and less secure than the formal bureaucratic theory (Bush, 2003). Being a collective culture, schools in Saudi Arabia do not give support to the occurrence of subjective theory. The devotion and loyalty in Saudi society are to the group and its norms and values rather than to the individual interests and interpretation (Wright, 2016).

#### 2.9.5. Ambiguity theory

Complexity and uncertainty as well as unpredictability and instability in organisations are the focus of ambiguity theory. The theory posits that ambiguity is a prevalent feature of educational institutions, which have problematic goals, meaning that these institutions are based on a collection of changing ideas and inconsistent preferences. Ambiguity is also a feature of the institutions, which have unclear technology, i.e. they lack the understanding of their own processes (Bush, 2007). They operate on the basis of trial and error procedures, learning from past experiences and imitation. Ambiguity is a feature of institutions that have fluid participation, which means that the people who work for the organisation devote extra time and effort to the organisation. The main contribution of ambiguity theory is that it uncouples choices and problems rather than suggesting a rational decision-making process (Bush, 2010).

Nevertheless, ambiguity theory has some limitations. Firstly, it is difficult to combine ambiguity perspectives with the structures and processes of schools. Some specific goals may remain unclear and participants may participate in the process of decision making, but the policy framework has the greatest influence on the result of discussion (Bush, 2006). Secondly, in its tenets, ambiguity theory exaggerates the ambiguity and uncertainty in schools. In real

life, students and teachers behave according to agreed norms and regulations, and a school is governed by laws and regulations. Class activities are organised according to a timetable. Schools are more stable and predictable than ambiguity theory predicts; this explains why ambiguity theory is less appropriate for stable educational organisations (Bush, 2006). Thirdly, ambiguity theory offers less practical guidelines for schools because it can offer nothing tangible except contingent leadership, while bureaucratic theory emphasises the role of the head in decision making and the collegial model emphasises the role of teamwork in decision making (Bush, 2006). It is difficult to say how this theory applies to the Saudi context because the targets and goals of education are set by the Ministry of Education, which has clear goals such as teaching the next generation to be citizens who are proud of their language, religion and homeland (Parolin, 2009).

#### 2.9.6. Cultural theory

The focus in cultural theory is on the informal aspects of an organisation rather than the formal structures and elements. The theory emphasises the individual's norms and beliefs in an organisation and how these individual meanings merge into shared organisational meanings. The cultural theory is manifested through symbols and rituals rather than official structures in a school (Bush, 2010). It has the following features: First, the focal point is values, beliefs and norms, i.e. shared meanings, shared understanding, and shared sense-making. Second, the focus is on a single culture or dominant culture in an organisation, but this does not mean that all individual values are in harmony. There may be different culture systems at one organisation, which creates a mosaic of organisational realities (Bush, 2010). Thirdly, the interaction between members of an organisation leads to behavioural norms which gradually develop into cultural features of the organisation (Bush, 2010). Fourthly, culture is expressed through rituals and ceremonies; these symbols are essential for meaning construction (Bush, 2010). Fifthly, cultural theory assumes the existence of heroes and heroines who represent the values and beliefs of an organisation and whose achievements express the culture of the organisation. However, cultural theory does have some weaknesses: Firstly, there are some ethical concerns about the way this theory works. In other words, creating a monoculture may be understood as an imposition or ideological control of the leader's culture over other participants in an organisation (Bush, 2007). Secondly, while leaders can determine the organisational culture through espousing desired values, they cannot ensure the formation of a

monoculture. In other words, they cannot coalesce all the subcultures that can be found in a school (Bush, 2007). Thirdly, the focus of cultural theory on rituals and ceremonies may mean that the other elements of the organisation are not considered or are underestimated (Bush, 2007). This theory can be found in the Saudi educational context in the sense that there is a focus on the individuals' beliefs and norms, and this is manifested in rituals and ceremonies that take place every day in schools in the Kingdom, such as singing the national anthem. Students belong to one culture and they speak one language and they practise one religion. The focus of the Department of Education is on creating generations who are attached to their religion and language and embody the Saudi culture in all their actions and behaviour. The role of the teachers and headteachers is to teach the students how to conform to the Saudi culture and acquire its values and norms. The group norms and values determine how a person thinks and behaves. In other words, one of the primary goals of schools is to create a homogenous upbringing for all the children who come to school (McKeganey et al., 2004). The culture that dominates Saudi society does the same in the classroom and school. In fact, the classroom is viewed as a microcosm of the bigger society that shapes the behaviour and understanding of the smaller society (Ballantine and Spade, 2007).

## 2.10 Contingency Theory

Contingency theory has been used in different fields of management, including that of schools (Wadongo and Abdel-Kader, 2014; Yap and Ferreira, 2011; Greatbanks et al., 2010; Greiling, 2010; Moxham, 2010; Chenhall, 2006). According to contingency theory, there is no one uniform technique of managing that can be applied to all organisations; rather, management systems should take into consideration contextual elements and the uniqueness of each organisation, which influences their performance (Wadongo and Abdel-Kader, 2014; Ferreira and Otley, 2009; Rejc, 2004; Otley, 1980). Contingency theory perceives organisations as systems composed of sub-systems. This system is delineated from its environmental supra systems by identifiable boundaries. Contingency theory seeks to identify the interrelationships among and within the subsystems and between the organisation and its environment. Moreover, contingency theory aims to define patterns of relationships. The theory also attempts to understand how organisations operate under specific circumstances and different conditions. The theory is an attempt to create managerial practices and organisational designs that work in specific situations (McGrandle, 2017).

The theory states that there is no single best way for managing and organising. Every organisation has its unique context and circumstances, and what is workable for an organisation may not be so in another one. The best way of management, decision-making and leadership is the one that is consistent with the organisational situation and unique environment because organisations are interdependent on their environment (Wadongo and Abdel-Kader, 2014; Grötsch et al., 2013). There are two types of an organisation environment: the internal organisation environment, which includes the organisational culture, employee behaviour, processes and organisational structure (Schein, 2010), and the external environment, which is the political, economic, technical and institutional influences (McAdam et al. 2016; McGrandle, 2017). This necessitates that organisations diagnose environmental variations (Fredrick, 2015) to avoid using a universally generalised approach of management that cannot fit in their contexts (McAdam et al., 2016; Donaldson, 2001).

The significance of contingency theory in the current study is that it engages in assessing the different management methods that have been applied successfully in other countries yet allows the specific risks of a lack of adaptivity to be addressed. It also supports the discovery of a management method that fits the Saudi environment and context (Radin, 2006). The limitations of this approach are connected to the challenges of being able to find an appropriate form of strategic management for education for the Saudi cultural context, but also because contingency theory is limited in its ideological scope. As noted above when citing some of the examples from applying Western forms of strategic management in schools in Africa and Asia, there is a need to address the underlying lack of interest in a methodology that supports an open-minded approach to the questioning of authority in a classroom. Contingency theory addresses the risks but does not necessarily consider the need for a value-driven shift towards globalisation in Saudi education that may be offered by other theoretical approaches. This theory sheds light on how the political and environmental circumstances of organisations shape the methods they adopt in management, which differ from one organisation to another (McGrandle, 2017; Wadongo and Abdel-Kader, 2014); however, it does not look at how social shifts may also need to take place.

The theory of contingency has been introduced to point to the fact that there is no single ready management method that can be applied to all organisations and that the contextual factors and varied circumstances of an organisation should be the influential force in creating any



management system for an organisation. This discussion paves the way for this dissertation to diagnose the Saudi cultural and social background to understand the appropriate management system that can be effective in Saudi Arabia.

Further, Hisrich (2017) systematically reviewed ten published articles that addressed the themes of contingency theory and situational leadership theory in the context of higher education in the United States. His study reviewed the rudimentary premises of these theories, wherein he found that leaders make decisions based on the situational conditions. Moreover, as Fiedler (1972, p. 391) explains, contingency theory “*postulates a contingent relationship between leadership performance and a leadership style score, called the esteem for the Least Preferred Coworker (LPC)*”. It should be mentioned that this relationship interrelates with a portion of “situational favourableness” in those leaders with contrary LPC scores who accomplish better or worse contingent on how promising the situation is for leadership. According to da Cruz, Nunes, and Pinheiro (2011), using these two categories Fiedler developed a matrix of situations and styles into 8 “octants” (p. 14). Moreover, based on Fiedler’s (1972) ideas, those in leadership positions should be active in trying to change the situations they lead or manage.

Moreover, according to Hisrich (2017), situational leadership theory instigated by the 1969 publication of Hersey and Blanchard’s article “Life Theory of Leadership” (Blanchard et al., 1993) states that “*The theory and its name were inspired by the changing leadership style needed by parents as a child grows from infancy through adolescence to adulthood*” (p. 22). The name was later changed to SLT in the 1972 edition of their book *Management of Organisational Behavior* (Blanchard et al., 1993). “As followers mature,” write Blanchard and Hersey, “a leader should move from high-relationships/low-task behaviour to low-task/low-relationships behaviour” (Blanchard and Hersey, 1996, p. 46). The early language of “maturity” was later dropped in favour of a “situational-leadership, task-specific view” (p. 46). As with Fiedler, Blanchard and Hersey developed a matrix for leaders to evaluate followers and determine what mix of tasks and relationships focus they should bring to each situation – the Leadership Effectiveness and Adaptability Description (LEAD) tool (Hornstein *et al.*, 1987).

Tsolka (2020) observed that in an educational leadership setting, the application of contingency and situational theory emphasises the prominence of examining the contemporary condition and the variables that affect the organisation's framework that enable an administrator to be operative. Whatever the education system the study is highlighting, it is practically worthless to study leadership styles without knowing the implication of the school background. A school is a compound institute, an open system that seems to have a very ambiguous atmosphere. For the leadership to be operative in this undefined atmosphere, the leaders should espouse a complete method. Several leaders evade high hesitation by applying typical functioning measures and creating old-style administrative answers in each circumstance (Wheelen, et al., 2017). It should be noted that the contingency and situational theories might provide school leaders with the chance for a compacted foundation in additional sanitising of administration policies and practices.

Moreover, Tsolka (2020) explains that contingency theory is grounded on the supposition that there is no sole leadership style suitable in all circumstances. Conferring with this theory, the leadership style is pretty unbending. Consequently, school efficacy depends on corresponding interior structural features with conservational circumstances. Thus, operative leadership depends on whether the leader's style contests the requirements of the separate circumstance. The contingency theory applies better to educational systems where the selection of principals is done through an open recruitment process. One useful tool of this theory is contingency planning or forecasting. On the other hand, situational theory demands that leaders familiarise their style to match their staff's characteristics and necessities. It should be recalled that in the education systems where the employment and selection of school principals lie with the central government, situational theory can be a valuable instrument for the principals. When principals are located in a new school, they should select the greatest sequence of actions grounded upon the present situations. It should be mentioned that flexibility is crucial in handling a team efficiently. Finally, the key variance between the two theories is that in the first case, we put the correct individual in the exact job whereas in the second, leaders regulate their elegance contingent on the school setting.

Further, Peretomode (2012) assumes that unlike situational theories, contingency leadership theories are based on the premise that leadership styles are truly or comparatively unbending. Consequently, it is difficult, if not unbearable, for a dictator or a task-oriented leader to change

his / her style to that of a participative or employee-oriented leader. This group, hence, proposes that for a school head to be fruitful or operative, the officials in the Ministry of Education in charge of the deployment and re-deployment of school heads should be able to identify a school condition and choose a frontrunner with a suitable style to match the situation.

### 2.11 Applying Contingency Theory in the Saudi Educational Context

Over recent years, the education sector in Saudi Arabia has undergone a process of reform, with leadership roles and responsibilities being recognised as a key issue, and within the early school education sector (especially kindergarten schools), as one of the major targets for development (Alameen et al., 2015). Schools in Saudi Arabia were formerly administered according to traditional management functions, such as classical planning, organising, staffing, coordinating and directing. This meant that principals were not addressing the daily challenges facing their schools, and this deficiency arose from the inability to apply strategic management tools and concepts (especially in kindergarten divisions) (Al Sulimani et al., 2011). Considering that kindergartens are now an essential part of the school system, forming the first step in the educational system at the global level, there have been strong indications of a shift towards increased demand for kindergarten institutions in Saudi Arabia since the 1970s (Khan, 2016).

To address global developments, ensure regulatory productivity and guarantee viability and an ideal exhibition, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia started to lead the pack, initiating key administration strategies to foster a suitable commanding practice provided by the Ministry of Education to improve the schools' management system and to implement good governs. This outward-looking point of view establishes the tone for a lot of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 – and the Public Change Program "NTP" (Khan, 2016) that originates from it, setting out an ambitious roadmap for educational reform in the Kingdom. This is reflected in the essential goals of the NTP, which include:

1. A comprehensive framework for the professional development of teachers and educational leaders.
2. The development of key performance indicators at the sectorial level.

3. Establishment of a Transformation Office and an office of strategy management to implement the relevant sections of the NTP; and
4. Encouraging the private sector to invest in public education, including at the kindergarten level (Khan, 2016:11).

Vision 2030 of the Saudi Arabian government aims at targeting 80% of Saudi families who participate in their children's school activities by the end of 2030. There is a great aim in that families take part in their children's school activities and are aware of what is going on in schools (Kakonge, 2017). The Saudi vision aspires to change Saudi society into a vibrant and ambitious nation. It seeks to implement the culture of research, innovation and autonomy in educational institutions. It also aims to create an appropriate environment for education that is learner-centred and encourages analytical thinking, problem-solving and technology-based learning. The goal of these is to prepare the youth for the job market and create independent learners (Khan, 2018).

However, to achieve this, all these steps should be managed through strategic planning that is effective and efficient. Strategic planning is anticipated to improve school productivity and move it forward from being reactive to becoming proactive and promoting teamwork. Strategic management is essential for creating effective learning and making the students autonomous and skilful.

## 2.12 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Thesis

The preceding sections reviewed the literature on the concepts and theory used in this study. From both theoretical and empirical perspectives, the concepts reviewed were strategic management and strategic planning in educational institutions. Theoretically, the literature on the contingency theory of management was reviewed among other theories such as bureaucratic, political and cultural theory. Research has demonstrated that the use of strategic management in educational institutions enables school administrations to be proactive in shaping future achievements as well as realising their missions and visions (Berry, 2007; Salmah, 2005). However, the challenges impacting strategic planning, especially with implementation, include poor leadership style, the unavailability of accurate information, uncertainty, the organisational structure and culture, and human resource management

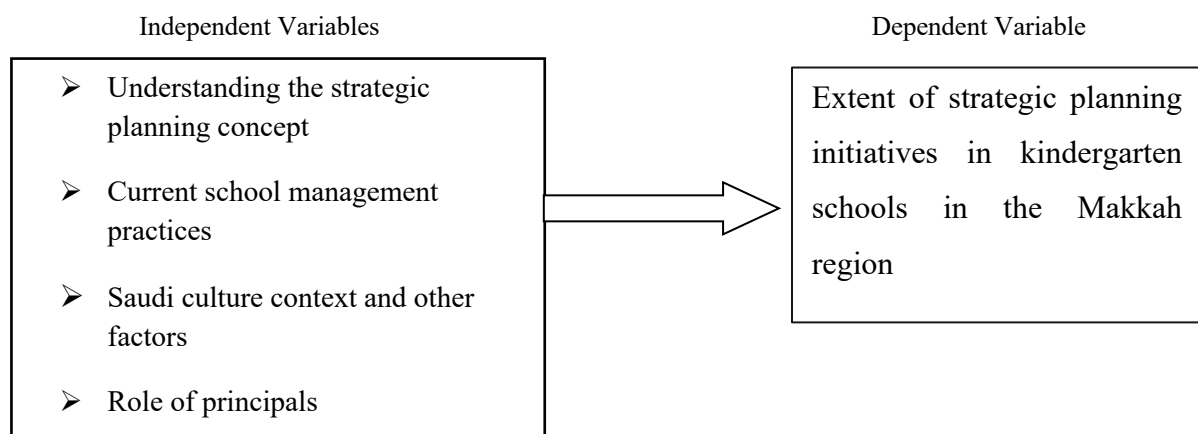
(Alexander, 1991; Cater and Pucko, 2010; Lorange, 1998; Rajasekar, 2014). The application of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia has previously not been covered in depth. However, some of the literature has revealed that contingency theory is flexible and that no a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach can effectively manage organisational processes; rather, it depends on the specific organisational context or situation. Therefore, the study seeks to apply the principles of contingency theory as a theoretical framework for the phenomenon under investigation to improve the management styles in the schools under study. In addition, the literature shows that there is a paucity of written materials on strategic planning from the Saudi perspective. This study, therefore, explores the implementation of strategic planning in educational institutions with reference to kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia.

Consequently, the study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent is the concept of strategic planning understood in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?
2. What is the current state of the application of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?
3. What are the main factors that affect the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?
4. To what extent do the principals facilitate the use of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?

Figure 2.1 shows the conceptual framework that the researcher adopted in this study.

*Figure 2.1: The conceptual framework*



*Source:* Developed by the researcher

The diagram above provides the framework that will guide the study. An establishment of effective strategic planning can be achieved if the Saudi Arabian kindergarten institutions embrace efficient strategic management skills. However, the realization of the mentioned aspects largely depends on the established education system. Inadequate knowledge and skills among the Saudi Arabia principals also impact the ability to utilize strategic management and planning in the institutions. Having inadequate funds thwarts the principals' efforts to implement plans or embrace strategic management in aspects that require finances. The establishment of regulations and rules in the Saudi Arabian curriculum equally affects the principals' efforts to implement effective strategic management and planning.

The above-mentioned factors can be manipulated in the study, and this qualifies them to be independent variables. The manipulation of the illustrated independent variables can result in the achievement of success in the implementation of strategic planning initiatives in the kindergarten learning institutions in light of the changes experienced by the Saudi Arabian education system over the recent years. The variables that are being measured in the research are strategic planning and strategic management, which make them the dependent variables. Both the Saudi Arabian culture and the principals' role influence the achievement of strategic planning and management as well as the establishment of the education system, curriculum, rules and regulations. Culture influences both the independent and dependent variables, and this makes them confounding variables.

### 2.13 Chapter Summary

With regards to the literature review in this chapter, the effectiveness of the principals' management in Saudi schools and kindergartens was found to be critically important in strategic planning in the learning institutions they lead. As reflected in this chapter, many strategic management initiatives in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are influenced by various socio-economic, legal, behavioral and organizational factors". One of these issues is that the role of the principal in Saudi schools and kindergartens is based on a non-strategic approach to operating their schools. As O'Donnell (2005) stated, the principal's role is thought to be more effective when the principal performs the responsibilities and duties of a principal and a leader. Strategic planning may face obstacles that affect its implementation, which refers to the

hierarchal nature of Saudi society hampers communication between the administration and other stakeholders due to the limitations imposed by the position of each in the hierarchy.

However, the transitional Vision 2030 in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia aspires to achieve the development and transformation of the Kingdom into a society that is based on knowledge, the application of technology and the involvement of the community in schools and the learning process. Though urgent, this transformation should take place in a gradual manner to avoid the reversal of the results. For example, listening to different opinions and accepting them can take a long time and it requires many meetings to be held to teach people how to listen to opinions that differ from theirs. Most likely, people at first will find it difficult to be involved in the process of planning for the schools and the activities designed to cope with the transitional period. Consequently, this study may contribute to the transitional period by finding ways and solutions to take on challenges that might prevent the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. In light of the changes being experienced in the Saudi Arabian education system over the recent years, this study seeks to explore how the factors of Saudi society, level of understanding of strategic planning, current school management practices, school principals' role, and resources in schools influence the extent of strategic planning implementation in kindergarten schools in the Makkah region. In the next chapter, the methodological approach and research theory adopted in this study to investigate the research problem are discussed.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

The current study aims to explore the challenges that confront the adoption of strategic planning in Saudi kindergarten schools and the role of principals and Saudi culture in emphasising these challenges. This section discusses the overriding philosophical underpinnings of the research methodology, comprising the ontological and epistemological orientations that shaped its overall design. The qualitative case study approach, together with its ancillary techniques such as case selection, sampling, data collection and analysis, ethics and critical aspects of ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings that undergird the study, are discussed.

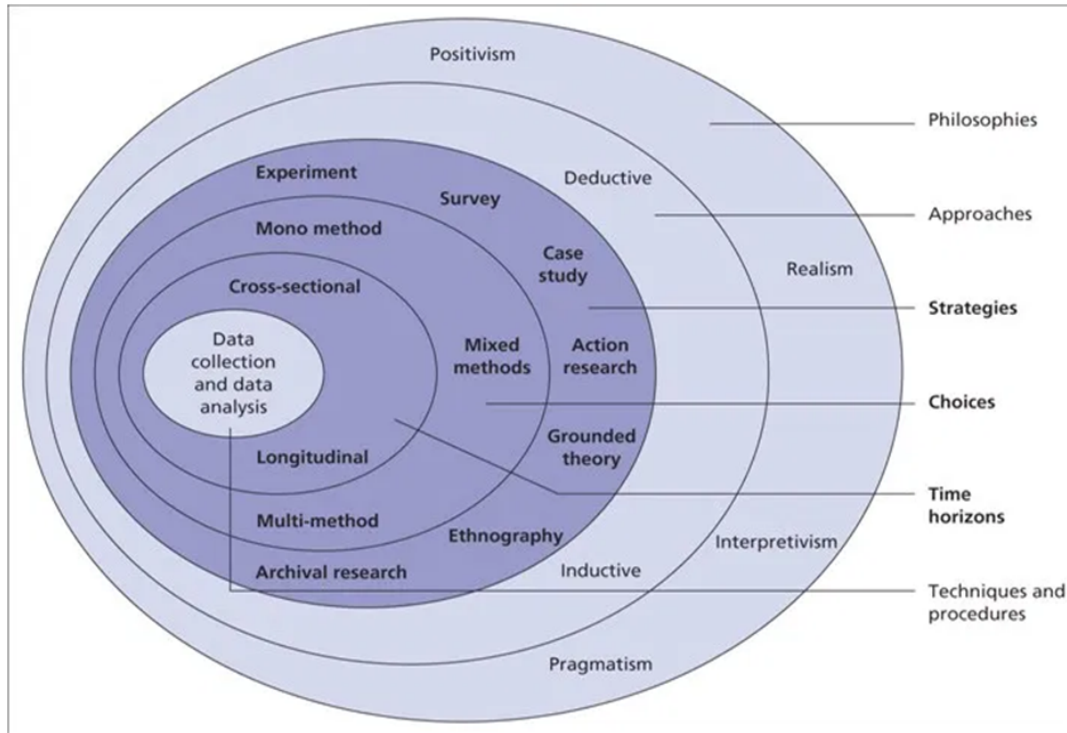
### 3.2 The Philosophical Foundation of the Study

The focal point of the current study is the comprehension of the organisational practice, particularly the process of strategic planning and the organisational consequences for society. The study is faced with an array of philosophical choices that direct the study design (Duberley et al., 2012). In order to apprehend and decide on the necessary methodological philosophy, theories, and processes to lead the study, the research onion by Sanders (2016, p. 124) is adopted. The model highlights the vital considerations of any research design. As mentioned, the model guides the study's design and further describes the stages of the research procedure, right from beginning to end. The outer-most oval of the onion represents the all-embracing philosophical base that encompasses other connected parts. The parts include (a) the approach to theory development such as deduction, abduction, and induction, and (b) a methodological option that includes mono-quantitative design, mono-qualitative design, multi-method quantitative design, multi-method qualitative design, mixed-method simple design, and mixed-method complex design. Sanders (2016) claims the strategies employed include case study, action research, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and quantitative approaches such as survey and experiment. Time demands for research are categorized into a cross-sectional study, which involves a one-time study, and a longitudinal study, which entails studies that go on for a long period. According to Collis (2013) and Sanders (2016), the major philosophies are positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, critical realism, and post-modernism,



envisioned in the research onion. Other considerations that promote the research are mostly reliant on a selected philosophical perspective.

Figure 3.1 Paradigms in the research methodology



Source: (Aunders,2016, p.124)

### 3.2.1 Ontological position of the study

Neuman (2014) explains ontology as a sector of philosophy that focuses on the nature of being, or what exists, and the basal divisions of reality. In the execution of the study, some assumptions about the object of the study and its position in the world were made (Ibid). Klenke (2016) insists that it is vital to acknowledge that every researcher possesses assumptions in the research operation. The current research moderately adopts the social constructivist or interpretivist perception, insisting that the world exists independently from humans and their expositions. Constructivism insists that the world is populated by humans who regularly interact with their environment, consequently making sense of every experience. Berger and Luckmann (1967) support this claim by insisting that people in a society constantly construct social meanings. To add to this, Thomas (2004, p.44) explains that researchers cannot

understand human mannerisms unless the observer comprehends the meaning of the behaviours, which have to be analysed according to the circumstances in which they happen. Fundamentally, the constructivist perception adopted in the study acknowledges the vitality of the subjective human creation of meaning, but does not refute some opinions of objectivity (Miller and Crabtree, 1999, cited in Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 545). Accordingly, the study is of an anomalist opinion that comprehends that humans never directly encounter a reality that is “out there”. Rather, the “real world” encounter constantly happens through a lens of exposition and inner subjectivity (Ibid). Therefore, the research is relatively positioned because it is based on the understanding that subjective-cultural features are non-negotiable lenses that unavoidably have a large impact on the formation of human experiences in both the physical and social worlds. The socially constructed opinions of stakeholders thus had to be established to comprehend how efficiently a researcher can enforce a strategic planning approach to the administration of Saudi kindergartens and other educational institutions. The stakeholders include teachers, parents, learners, and principals. Their sentiments account for part of the data from which the findings were procured. The researcher found that reality does not reside in one person because personal principles have subjective consequences for strategic planning.

### 3.2.2 Epistemological view of the study

Epistemology refers to the philosophy of reality, meaning how individuals understand the difference between real and not real (Krauss, 2005, p. 759). There is contention in the question about the nature of knowledge in that it links epistemology to the methodology, aiming to determine which practices will be used to achieve it (Krauss, 2005, p. 759). There are multiple paradigms in qualitative research. As per Kuhn (1962, 2000) and Creswell (2009), these are, among others, interpretivism, constructivism, pragmatism, and symbolic interactionism. Qualitative research uses a constructionist view, with the epistemological supposition that knowledge is derived from meanings that emerge from the studied events. Furthermore, qualitative research implies the acceptance of the fact that in order to obtain data, the researchers must engage with the research subject. This interaction relies on both the researcher and the subject, whereby the knowledge is context- and time-dependent (Krauss, 2005 p. 759). Hence, as part of the study, to fully capture the phenomenon, i.e. strategic planning in kindergartens, the researcher considers it paramount to perform the observations within the right context (Creswell, 2011). Such a process of observation is required because certain

meanings shaped by the investigated object are thought to have been assembled by social actors. Thus, there is a considerable distance between the researcher and the “other” who is being researched, i.e. the participant, and the information basis (Schwandt, 1994, cited in Thomas, 2004, p. 44).

### 3.2.3 Axiology

The study is clear in its axiological assumptions as it denies the idea of “value-free” research, disputing the ideals of objective knowledge and arguing that it is both impractical to achieve and undesirable (Day, 2012, p. 62). While conducting the study, the researcher’s presence is obvious and recognized in the discussions of values that direct the narrative in collaboration with the participants' understandings (Creswell, 2014; Day, 2012). The importance of the axiological dimension is better explained by Kraus (2005, p. 767), who claims that epistemologically, the researcher is occupied in the setting and engages in the act of being with the participants and their lives to award meaning to them. In qualitative research such as this, the researcher is engrossed in the detailed interviews and the focus group discussions to give meaning to the vital role of strategic planning. The various standpoints from principals of kindergartens, parents, and teachers were contemplated while deciding on the “meaning”. The researcher did not detach themselves from the process. Rather, they were engaged in the process.

### 3.3 Methods and Study Strategies

In the current study, a methodological process is defined as the general approach to a problem incorporated in the research process, from the theoretical basis to the gathering and evaluating of data (Remenyi et al., 2003). Strategic planning at the kindergarten level in Makkah is the focal point of the current study. The qualitative case study is the desired study design because it supports the idea that reality is socially constructed in a given context. The type of reality and knowledge under investigation warrants the use of small samples to award the researcher the chance to record the real-life experiences of respondents under various circumstances. It is important to note that the researcher was actively involved in constructing knowledge (Bryman, 2016). Overall, the study embodies interpretive philosophy in computing empirical knowledge through the real-life experiences of the research respondents (Creswell, 2013; Saunders, 2016).

### 3.3.1 Qualitative approach

Yin (2011, p 76) claims that the existence of multiple designs gives researchers the option of selecting an approach that is best suited for specific situations. Since there is no direct typology of blueprints, every qualitative study will differ in its design. The study adopted a qualitative study approach, permitting an examination of the phenomenon of strategic planning at the kindergarten level in Saudi Arabia while using multiple data sources. Yin (1993, p. 3) asserts that the qualitative case study is a preferred method when the phenomenon under investigation is not easily differentiable from its context. Therefore, the qualitative case study design is holistic, thereby examining a phenomenon from various angles and traversing a noteworthy period. Generally, the design guarantees that the issue is not investigated through one lens but rather an array of lenses that permit numerous facets of the phenomenon to be exposed and comprehended (Baxter and Jack, 2008 p. 544). Additionally, the qualitative case study design is better suited to new research areas where prevailing research is perceived as inadequate (Eisenhardt 1989 p. 548-9). For example, little is known about the current function of strategic planning at the kindergarten level in Saudi Arabia, necessitating a qualitative investigation into individual units to better understand the phenomenon. The case study is similar to gradual theory development in scientific research, where it is useful at the start of a project or when a new perspective is necessary. It is also applicable to all sorts of research, including exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory studies (ibid; Yin 1994). In light of the reasons mentioned earlier, the qualitative approach is most suitable for this research, especially because the design is based on a phenomenological underpinning. The underpinning enables the stressing of respondents' commitment to discover the social world and the fondness of contextual understanding, whereby specific conditions give definite direction. For instance, (Yin 2003, cited in Baxter and Jack, 2008, p.545) insists that the case study design is inevitable when “(a) *the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study, or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context*”. The conditions mentioned above underline the researcher's choice of approach since they noted all the conditions at the beginning stages of the problem conceptualization. Hence, the study is focused on examining the problems in implementing strategic planning in Saudi kindergartens to build an in-depth insight on what generates the obstacles and the best methods to apply to deal with the obstacles. The in-depth

discernment can be offered by adopting a case study strategy that permits the researcher to investigate the issue in a natural setting (Yin, 2009). To add to this, the benefits of selecting a case study approach are its usefulness in mapping and relationship building, theory building and testing, refutation, and the recognition of more research needs (Saunders et al., 2009; Vissak, 2010). In contrast to positivist methods focused on statistical correlations with minimum stress on exploring fundamental explanations, case studies aid in establishing casual relationships and fashioning interesting and engaging descriptions (Vissak, 2010). However, it is important to note that the qualitative case study design possesses the disadvantages of being time-consuming and more laborious than other surveys. Additionally, there are setbacks concerning finding a balance between depth and breadth because “a multiple case study increases the latter but decreases the former” (ibid).

### 3.3.2 Case selection

How individuals decipher “reality” or approach truth finding is burdened with controversy (Krauss, 2005). The study is aimed at the research context and problem as it is concerned with the complexity and specific character of the case (Stake, 1995, cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 66). The term “case study” is used particularly for situations where the “case” is the centre of interest in its own right and contrary to its relationships with fieldwork performed in one location, such as in a community or organisation (Bryman, 2012). Baxter and Jack (2008) insist that establishing the unit of analysis (case) in any study is an obstacle for any researcher. To add to this, Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in ibid, p. 545) explain that the case is a phenomenon transpiring in bounded context; i.e., its effect is the unit of analysis. The case in the current study is the kindergarten schools in the Makkah region and the major stakeholders, including principals, parents, learners, and teachers. The focus was on binding the case to determine that it will not be in terms of inserting restrictions to avert an explosion of many objectives. Fundamentally, nailing down the case by time and place, time and activity, or by definition and context, as used in the current study, guarantees the research’s resemblance to the advancement of inclusion and exclusion criteria for sample selection in quantitative research. It is vital to note that these boundaries also highlight the breadth and depth of the study and not the selected sample (ibid).

### 3.3.3 Sample population

The study population is selected on three levels. On the first level, the researcher established that the city of Makkah had 120 kindergarten schools. From this number, 37 kindergarten schools were chosen randomly using a computer-generated random table. The second level was the principals, teacher and mother population. Yin (2011, p.89) claims that random sampling is not formally adopted in the majority of qualitative studies because the motive of such studies is not to generalize the results, but rather to discover the scope in the practice of strategic planning. Nevertheless, the researcher opted to choose the teacher participants and parent respondents conveniently.

### 3.3.4 Sampling

Neuman (2014) insists that sampling is vital in research because researchers do not possess the time and resources to investigate all elements in a population. Further, Becker (1967) claims that, overall, sampling is a challenge for all types of research because of the constraints of time and resources. Robinson (2014) underlines the motivations of the sampling process. He asserts that some vital steps normally characterize a qualitative sampling procedure. These are shown in the table below:

*Table 3.1: The four-point approach to qualitative sampling*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>definition</b>	<b>Key decisional issues</b>
Point 1	Define a sample universe	Establish a sample universe, specifically by way of inclusion and/or exclusion criteria	Homogeneity vs heterogeneity, inclusion and exclusion criteria
Point 2	Decide on a sample size	Choose a sample size or sample size range, by taking into account what is ideal and what is practical.	Idiographic (small) vs. nomothetic (large)

Point 3	Devise a sample strategy	Select a purposive sampling strategy to specify categories of persons to be included in the sample.	Stratified, cell, quota, theoretical strategies
Point 4	Source the sample	Recruit participants from the target population.	Incentives vs. no incentives, snowball sampling varieties, advertising

*Source:* Robinson (2014, p. 26)

After consideration of the specific nature of the study, the purposive sampling technique was applied due to the vitality of comprehending the research problem selection of the necessary case as directed by the epistemological stance of the study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative researcher wants to comprehend respondents' subjective experiences and world opinions because they claim that the occasion to learn supersedes the idea of representativeness. The researchers, therefore, insist that it is more useful to carry out an in-depth study of a case with particular characteristics (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The researcher enlisted a sample of 37 Saudi female professionals (principals), 20 teachers, and 12 parents of children attending the kindergarten school in the Makkah region in Saudi Arabia. Purposive sampling aligns with the investigative nature of the research since this sampling strategy will guarantee the capture of the details of data (Kuzel, 1992). Purposive sampling awards the chance to develop theories and concepts. Therefore, the study chose “information-rich participants, individuals, groups and organisations that issued the most insight into the research themes” (Yin, 2010).

The researcher considered various factors to establish the necessary sample size, including the homogeneity of the target population (Trotter, 2012). Additionally, the research aims and nature of the subject under study were considered. (Morse et al., 2002). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) assert that a sample size of 50 or fewer participants is enough for qualitative research. However, Mason, 2010 realized that most qualitative PhD projects use sample sizes between 20 and 30. As shown in Table 3.2, the researcher used a sample size of 69 participants for the current study. This comprised 37 principals, 20 teachers, and 12 parents.

Table 3.2: Sampling distribution of the participants

The Region	Numbers of participants	Participants		
		Principals	Teachers	Parents
North of Makkah	18	11	4	3
South of Makkah	17	8	6	3
East of Makkah	19	10	6	3
West of Makkah	15	8	4	3
Total	69	37	20	12

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

### 3.4 The Fieldwork

Scientists advanced the fieldwork methodology in anthropology due to some of the earliest anthropologists transmitting their ecological or natural science practices into the science of studying people in their natural environments. Researchers can track fieldwork to anthropologists who led social inquiry by residing in communities for long periods. The methodology is currently the most common method used by social scientists whose focus is to study people and their day-to-day activities (Gambold, 2012). Gambold (2012, p. 400) claims that *"Fieldwork is usually undertaken because the nature of the problem or theoretical topic chosen by the researcher can be best addressed through such a research program."* The current research adopted the fieldwork method for the same purpose, as explained by Gambold (ibid). Unlike in other circumstances, where researchers experienced hurdles while living in specific cultural settings, the researcher originates from the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and therefore had no culture shock. The study awarded the researcher the chance to interact with the workers at the kindergarten schools to understand a specific reality: the issue of strategic planning at the very basic level in Saudi schools.



### 3.4.1 Negotiating access

One of the most vital steps in the data gathering process in research is access to information. Without access, the researcher cannot achieve the study aims and objectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Van Manen (2016) explains gaining access as a continuous communication process between the researcher and the participants. Researchers, in most incidences, have to consult influential gatekeepers who, at times, are imperious. Gatekeepers are typically focused on the well-being and safety of organisations and require persuasion by formal approval, which is presented to them by researchers (Bryman, 2012).

Upon arrival in Saudi Arabia, the researcher corresponded with the head of the kindergarten department in the region on Makkah. The researcher held the meeting to deliberate on the procedures and documentation required for the conduction of the study. The discussion was fruitful as the head of the kindergarten awarded the researcher the appropriate material and information needed. The head of the kindergarten department helped by disseminating circulars to all relevant institutions in Makkah, alerting them on the researcher's visit, the purpose of the visit, and evidence of authorization of the fieldwork. In collaboration with the relevant personnel of the schools in Makkah, the researcher scheduled specific times for the appointments. The researcher randomly selected the schools using computer-generated software that created random numbers for sample selection. The researcher then communicated with the principals via phone calls to ensure the relevant circulars were received and to make interview appointments. The researcher also acquired permission from principals to meet with selected teaching staff members in focus groups. Additionally, the researcher also requested the principals to nominate some mothers for interviews. The principals all adhered to the researcher's requests.

### 3.5 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Tracy (2013) insists that 90% of all studies in social science depend on interviews. Interviews are essential due to the following reasons. Firstly, for the acquisition of important information through personal engagement (ibid). Secondly, interviews are needed to comprehend a person's background, which accounts for their perceptions. Further, interviews provide a stage for probing and acquiring ample information from unavailable informal documents or exempted from biased stories created by those in powerful positions.

### 3.5.1 Interviews and typologies

Barlow (2010, p. 2) describes interviews as “*conversations with purpose and direction.*” Barlow also notes that other researchers, especially postmodernists, define interviews as “*dynamic meaning-making occasions that result in a collaborative production of knowledge.*”

Interviews are a way of gaining and understanding information by conversing with others. Structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews are the three types of interviews. Interviews can be conducted either individually or in groups. The reliability and validity of data obtained through interviews are determined by the type of interview and the experience of the interviewer. Participants in interviews should be carefully chosen rather than randomly selected, according to Doyle (2004) and Gubrium and Holstein (2002).

### 3.5.2 Structured interviews

Structured interviews, according to Frey and Oishi (1995), are meaningful conversations where the interviewer has pre-prepared questions for the respondents. Structured interviews compel the respondents to answer questions that do not necessarily resemble their personal opinions and feelings (Moscoso, 2000). As such, structured interviews are rigid and not recommended for qualitative research. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews often begin with a simple introductory question that is succeeded by more complex and probing questions. Though better suited for qualitative research than structured interviews, this technique is best suited for the main section of a study and not the pilot. Such interviews are founded on the supposition that the respondents have had experiences that can be deliberated on. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher analyses the situation at hand before the interview, and therefore, the interviews act as an additional source of information. The researcher guides the questions and focuses on the participant’s subjective experiences, permitting the respondent to answer the question wholly. Additionally, the interview allows the researcher to further examine the respondent by asking follow-up questions (Nichols, 1991).

Semi-structured interviews are best suited for respondents within management positions such as the principals of kindergarten schools in Makkah. Additionally, they are most appropriate for participants who are thought to hold information vital to research. However, semi-structured questions have a restricted period, warranting the preparation of questions

beforehand. It is also advisable to make the list of questions available to respondents before the interview unless the researcher feels they will infringe on sensitive sectors (Qu and Dumay, 2011; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009).

### 3.5.3 Unstructured interviews

An unstructured interview is an informal interview characterized by having no pre-prepared list of questions. This type of interview technique allows fieldworkers to handle topics of interest that may paraphrase questions deemed fit to the circumstance (Nichols, 1991). An unstructured interview is especially useful in a preliminary study whose aim is to assess the responses from an interviewee or group of interviewees and are likely to concern a specific topic (Qu and Dumay, 2011; Seidman, 1998).

### 3.5.4 In-depth interviews

Fontana and Frey (1998, p.47) underline the importance of interviews in comprehending individuals' life worlds. They also state that interviews serve sociological sociability, wherein both interviewer and interviewee are placed on the same level. In this study, the interviews were held in-person, with the aim of gaining in-depth insight into the lifeworld of the respondents (Fontana and Frey, 1995 cited in Wet al. et al., 2002, p. 612). As per Seidman (2006), such interviews base on the importance of the respondents' experiences. This study conducted extensive personal interviews with the participants to investigate their views on specific situations. In-depth interviews are tools utilized by researchers to provide familiarity, trust, and connection (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Additionally, in-depth interviews are appropriate for the study as it seeks to recognize individual perceptions to address questions on fear and evaluate personal experience (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). In conformity with the epistemological and ontological view of the study, a predisposition towards experiences shared by respondents was regarded as an appropriate source of data. Vygotsky (1987, cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 7) insists that every word the participant uses mirrors their consciousness. Therefore, the current research comprehends interviewing as a foundation of inquiry as it interprets subjective experiences and perceptions from the respondent's viewpoint because, *"If given a chance to talk freely, people appear to know a lot about what is going on"* (Bertaux, 1981, cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 8; Tracy, 2013). Interviews permit the collection of vital information when investigating complex phenomena. Further, interviews are instrumental

in constructing meaning, which is fashioned between the respondents and interviewer (Tracy, 2013). For instance, interviews make it possible to amplify the information gathered by examining the respondents' gestures (Opdenakker, 2006).

In the current study, the respondents received emails with attached consent forms from the General Directorate of Education in the Makkah Region. The participants were requested to select an appropriate day and time for the interview. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher created a good rapport and obtained the interviewees' trust (Legard et al., 2003). The conviction was attained by guaranteeing respondents' privacy and confidentiality and describing the research aims and objectives (Legard et al., 2003). The researcher incorporated semi-structured questions to direct the interviews. Further, to ensure no language barrier, communication was carried out in Arabic (King and Horrocks, 2010).

### 3.5.5 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions began in 1940 in market research, and due to the method's success, other fields embraced the idea. A focus group is a group of people who assemble to participate in a conversation. Focus groups are “*established and accepted part of the range of methodological tools available to academic researchers*” (Parker and Tritter, 2006, p. 23). They are regarded as appropriate data collection tools concerning group norms, meanings, and processes. Hollander (2004) notes that four significant factors influence group members' relations during the discussions, as indicated in the table below.

*Table 3.3: Contextual influences of group members' responses*

Social context	Description/features
Associational context	Participants are united by a common characteristic
Status context	Positions of participants in local or societal status hierarchies
Conversational context	This refers to the flow of the discussion and types of discussion within the group
Relational context	Thus, the degree of prior acquaintance with participants

Source: Hollander (2004)

The researcher constituted groups bearing in mind the group dynamics that resulted in the most convivial atmosphere for discussions. Taking into consideration the nearly homogeneous nature of the target teachers and the comfortable relationship between them, this research project used focus group discussions to gather data from the teachers. Each group consisted of three participants from each school, which is in line with the literature that discusses the suitable sample size: Bloor et al. (2001) argued that the optimum number of participants in a focus group should range between six and eight – with a minimum number of three and a maximum number of fourteen participants.

This researcher employed the focus group method to provide a deeper understanding of the subject at hand. Focus groups were conducted with teachers who worked with children and were intended to assist in the gathering of in-depth information with respect to different perspectives on the functionality of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in the Makkah region of Saudi Arabia. A moderator or “facilitator” leads a focus group. This is a research method that seeks to obtain the attitudes or opinions of participants in respect to a specific topic. It is considered to be a qualitative research method, the results of which cannot usually be generalised, with the participants representing only themselves and their own opinions and experiences (Lambert and Loisel, 2008). Even so, focus groups can provide insight into how people make sense of situations and how, given their practical hands-on experience with those situations, they are inclined to see the issues being discussed (ibid). As a result, focus groups can be a unique and important source of information, especially if the topic to be addressed is properly picked before the focus group meets. This normally necessitates that all questions are well-prepared in advance and that the moderator is given a suitable way to ensure that the group's general area of emphasis is maintained throughout the interview process.

### 3.6 Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation

Braun and Clarke (2006) designed a six-phase analysis for use as a blueprint for the current design. They recommend that data analysis commences with gaining acquaintance with the data collected by reading and re-reading it. The second step should be coding, which involves creating concise labels connected to the general research question to address the semantic meanings of collected data (ibid). The third step is theme sorting, which includes coding to establish resemblance in data (ibid). The researcher's judgment was vital in determining what

the general research focus is concerning the themes. Some themes were awarded a lot of space in data items, while others were not (ibid). The concluding phases include the evaluation of themes, defining and naming themes, and conjoining the analytic narrative. The researcher thus gives the reader precise data extracts, offering them a comprehensive explanation of the results (ibid).

The researcher gathered copious amounts of qualitative data to analyse the phenomenon. The researcher recorded the data acquired from the interviews and focus group discussions through note-taking and digital tape recordings. The researcher took note of the respondents' verbal expressions, gestures, and the inner meanings of words because "*words are a mode of expression with greater open-mindedness, more capacity for connecting various realms of argument and experience, and more capacity for reaching intellectual audiences*" (Collins, 1984, cited in Neuman, 2014, p. 479). Ensuring the quality of data involves both gathering large quantities of information and analysing it. The study incorporated thematic analysis as the pivotal method of qualitative research. Braun and Clarke (2014, p. 6) explain thematic analysis to be an "*a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data*" The study aimed at evading the drawbacks associated with quality analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher designed vital questions to be answered during coding, including:

- a. Of what general category is this item of data an instance?
- b. What does this item of data represent?
- c. What is this item of data about?
- d. Of what topic is this item of data an instance?
- e. What question about a topic does this item of data suggest?
- f. What sort of answer to a question about a topic does this item of data imply?

(Lofland and Lofland, 1995, cited in Neuman, 2014, p. 575)

The research used general research objectives and questions to avoid the drawbacks of incoherence and inconsistency. The researcher read and edited the transcribed data to comply

with the initial codes/themes. The researcher allocated a lot of time to coding because "*Coding in qualitative data analysis tends to be in a constant state of potential revision and fluidity. The data are treated as potential indicators of concepts, and the indicators are constantly compared to see which concepts they best fit with*" Neuman (2014, p. 568). As directed by the questions in the semi-structured questionnaire, the original themes were helpful in the management of data and the designing of codes. Charmaz (1983, p. 186) insists that "*Codes ... serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data.*" The analysis phase was the most difficult because it needed an ongoing referral to progenerated codes to guarantee that the researcher successfully could manage the codes. The stage is concerned with the discernment of both concealed and noticeable patterns and affiliations in the data. Habitual classifications, articulations, and discourses were isolated and interpreted. Researchers put the focus on relating specific data to concepts and theories that tackled research questions.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations of the Study

Thomas (2004, p. 90) explains that "Ethics are moral principles intended to guide a person's behaviour in society. Professional ethics are more narrowly concerned with regulating behaviour in the context of a specific occupation." Denzin (2009, p. 277) defines ethics as "pedagogies of practice." International best practice demands that every study observes the code of ethics and moral standards. Researchers should do the right thing in conducting studies that use human participants (Lahman et al., 2011). The researcher undertakes specific procedures to decrease the effects of ethical problems in research (Thomas, 2004). According to the Academy of Management (2000, p. 1296), "The research of Academy members should be done honestly, have a clear purpose, show respect for the rights of all individuals and organisations, efficiently use resources, and advance knowledge in the field." The current study is bound by the principles indicated in the statement because it lies within the jurisdiction of management. The researcher read the University of Manchester's code of conduct to ensure ethical compliance. Additionally, the study underwent ethical examination at the school level, and clearance was awarded before the conduction of the study.

#### 3.7.1 Voluntary informed consent

Denzin (2009) insists that three vital ethical principles pertain to respondents in any study. The principles include respect, beneficence, and justice (Denzin, 2009). Respect involves how the

researcher relates with respondents. The researcher is ethically obliged to consider respondents as autonomous agents and to guarantee they are treated with dignity and shielded from harm. The researcher should inform respondents of their rights before conducting the study. For instance, the researcher educated participants on their right to quit the study at any given time. Thus, in the current study, the researcher dispensed consent forms and participant information sheets that explained all research processes. Beneficence, which tackles risks and advantages, is an equally important issue that inspires the researcher to exploit the benefits individuals and society acquire from research. The researcher would accomplish the principle of beneficence if the results influenced policy change that would advance pedagogy in schools in Makkah. During the data collection stage, the researcher decreased prospective risks, including protecting respondents from high-stress environments.

### 3.7.2 Addressing issues of confidentiality

Safeguarding the privacy of participants is paramount. The British Sociological Associations (BSA) statement, cited by Bryman (2012, p.136), advises social scientists to "think carefully about the risk that the study experience will be distressing." As a result, the researcher used aliases for the schools that provided the subjects. In addition, the researcher protected the audio files by encrypting them using passwords. Furthermore, the researcher transcribed audio files in private, and as the last step, individual codes for transcripts were created to prevent respondents from being identified. The researcher followed the important data protection rules outlined in (2012, p. 137) and stated in the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), namely fairly and lawfully processed, processed for limited purposes, adequate, relevant and not excessive, accurate and up to date, not kept for longer than is necessary, processed in line with respondents' rights and secure. These concerns were addressed throughout the data gathering and write-up of the thesis.



Table 3.4: Trustworthiness of the study

Quality criterion	Steps taken by the researcher to apply principles
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of appropriate, well-recognized research methods</li> <li>• Development of early familiarity with the culture of participating organisations</li> <li>• Random sampling of individuals serving as informants</li> <li>• Triangulation via the use of different methods, different types of informants and different sites</li> <li>• Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants</li> <li>• Iterative questioning in data collection dialogues</li> <li>• Debriefing sessions between researcher and superiors</li> <li>• Use of “reflective commentary”</li> <li>• Member checks of data collected, and interpretations/theories formed</li> <li>• Thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny</li> <li>• Examination of previous research to frame findings</li> </ul>

Source: Guba (1981, cited in Shenton, 2004, p. 73)

### 3.8 Ensuring the Study’s Trustworthiness

Every credible research encompasses the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data. Maxwell (2009) and Yin (2011) both agree that ensuring the validity of findings of a study is paramount and to do so, the researcher needs to adhere to specific criteria. The criteria, which are motivated by Guba’s four principles of trustworthiness, include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Three of the four principles were adhered to in the current study, as highlighted in table 3.4.

The study results from an extensive literature review that discusses strategic planning concerning institutions of early education. The researcher reviewed the impact of socio-economic and organizational factors influence on strategic planning and the theories of

leadership, and contingency on strategic planning. Gaps recognized in the literature formed the foundation of the current study. Guba (ibid) claims that careful analysis of existing literature is a pivotal credibility standard. A cautiously fashioned research design influenced the research by highlighting the research problem, aims, objectives, study context, methodology, data collection, analysis and discussion, and significant findings.

Interpretivism and social constructionism embed the epistemology and ontology of the study. The researcher acquired the data that produced the conclusions from the respondent's subjective perceptions of the reality of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The researcher selected respondents both randomly and purposively. There was continuous authentication of the data collected from the transcripts and constant communication with respondents to confirm that the transcribed statements used the exact words during interviews. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and then translated into English, then the interviews were re-translated into Arabic again in order to ensure the correctness of the meaning, and as part of a test for validity of data. The researcher attained data triangulation by incorporating three groups of respondents, namely principals, teachers, and parents. The individual views and perceptions of the role of strategic planning of the three groups complemented each other. The discussion of the data included a detailed report, and the researcher confirmed the credibility of the findings.

### 3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the study's methodology. Qualitative approach was used, the chapter also presents primary source of data which are face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion. This study was conducted in the City of Makkah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during six months of continuous fieldwork.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SETTING

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, allowing the reader to become familiar with the unique nature of its society, economy, and culture and how they influence education in the country. The chapter is organised into seven sections; the first describes its location within a broader geopolitical community and gives a brief outline of its economy. The second section shines a spotlight on the national culture and religion, which both largely shape its value systems. The third section highlights the purpose of education in Saudi Arabia, and the fourth and fifth sections respectively discuss the education system and the Ministry of Education – a critical player in education service delivery in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The sixth section explores government expenditure on education. Finally, the last section reviews the history and the purpose of kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia.

### 4.2 An Overview of Saudi Arabia



Figure 4.1: Map of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Main regions and cities (nationsonline.org, 2022)

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the largest Arab country in the Middle East, shares borders with Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It is bordered by the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. Encompassing most of the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia covers an area of 2.15 million square kilometres and has an estimated population expected to be 33,000,000 in 2018, (Niblock 2015). According to KSA General Authority for Statistics (2021) “the total population in KSA amounted to 34.1 million in 2021 (mid-year), according to estimates by the General Authority for Statistics – a decrease of 2.6% compared to mid-2020, when the total population stood at 35.0 million. The main driving factor of the decline in the overall population in 2021 was the decline in the non-Saudi population by 8.6%, with many non-Saudis exiting the country during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Saudi population increased by 1.2% during the same period. Males accounted for 56.8% of the total population, or 19.4 million individuals, females made up 43.2% of the total population, with a population of 14.7 million females”.

It should be noted that the first Saudi State was established in 1774 (House, 2012), the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formed in 1902. The proclamation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as it is formally known today, was made by royal decree in September 1932. Prior to this, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was composed of two dual kingdoms: the Hejaz and Najd (House, 2012). Its government is a monarchy, where the King heads the Council of Ministers and the government. Matters of the state, particularly governance, are heavily inspired by Islam, a universally accepted religion that serves as the basis of common law as codified in the Shari’ah. Formal education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia varies across genders, but is available to all citizens irrespective of their status (Nag, 2018). It is divided into three systems, namely general education for boys and girls and Islamic education. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone a long period of development and has experienced significant changes to attain its current level, especially in the sphere of education. Its religion and its traditions form the basis of all aspects of citizens’ lives.

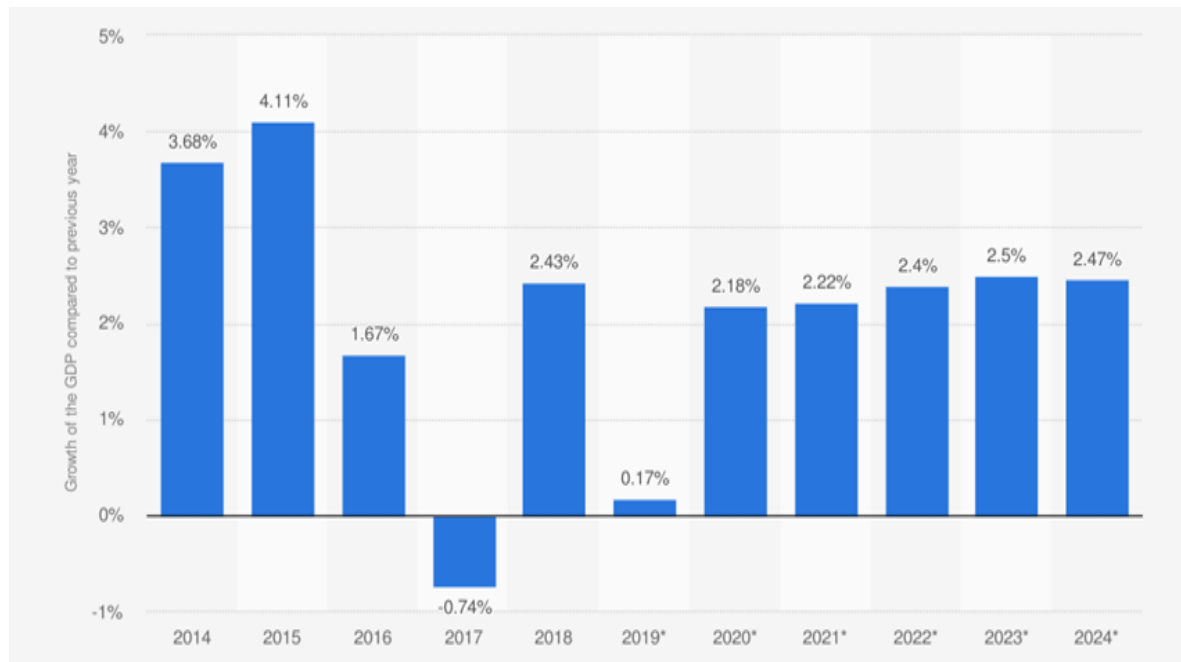
#### 4.2.1 The economic performance and growth outlook

Economists argue that the Saudi economy is over-dependent on oil revenues. Recently, the price of crude oil has been fluctuating on the international commodities markets, with serious consequences for the global economy (World Bank, 2019). Other prominent domains of the

Saudi economy are agriculture, water supply, sanitation, and tourism. In fact, Saudi Arabia has a sophisticated economic structure, meaning that the focus solely on oil resources is misplaced. At the beginning of the 1990s, petrol and oil prices started to fall, making the country shift its focus (Vassiliev, 2013), and the transport and communication industries, manufacturing, and the financial sector are now key to the Saudi economy as it has become more capable of supporting its original markets and industries (Vassiliev, 2013). Hence, homegrown policies of controlling budget deficits and diversifying the Saudi economy have been critical growth paths for the Saudi economy. According to the World Bank (2019), the Saudi government recently embarked on an expansionary fiscal policy. This policy initiative is expected to increase the disposable incomes of households, triggering an increased level of spending in the economy and allowing the government to increase its investment in large infrastructure projects, with beneficial spill overs for the national economy. Figure 4.2 depicts the Saudi economy's predicted performance. Except for 2017 and 2019, when real domestic product was -0.74% and 0.17%, respectively, the economy grew at a rate of between 2.4 and 2.5%. Despite the government's purposeful diversification efforts, oil continues to play a critical role in the management of the national debt, according to the World Bank (2018). Government spending increased by 10.8% in 2018, and the recent adoption of value-added tax (VAT) and other excise levies demonstrates the government's commitment to achieving the Vision 2030 agenda's goals through a variety of domestic income mobilization methods. For example, the 2019 budget targeted a deficit of 4.7% of GDP. Similarly, significant for public authorities to meet the 2030 Vision commitments is expanding the intermittent consumption to 7.4% of GDP. The monetary area changes have benefitted the private area, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), leading to the creation of insolvency regulation and the utilization of different energy wellsprings, among others (World Bank, 2018).

There have been significant changes in the employment as part of an initiative known as the Saudisation Plan. The focus hereby is on enhancing the number of Saudi nationals in the labour force, particularly enabling that women can play a strong role in the job market. The high staff turnover rate and the slow rate of replacements are a concern for both the public and private spheres (World Bank, 2018, 2019). The unemployment rate hovers between 10.5% and 12.8%, which is a fairly high level. Meanwhile, the private sector remains in a low gear, and experts assert that stimulating the private sector in the Kingdom will reduce the high unemployment rate.

Figure 4.2: Real domestic product growth trends (2014 – 2024)



Source: Pletcher (2019)

The reform agenda driven by Vision 2030 targets rigorous and substantial expenditure by the public sector. (Education, Health and the Civil Service) are no longer sustainable against the backdrop of such massive transformations. As a result, the education sector must re-engineer its strategy to fit this agenda, and a focus on kindergarten education is a good step towards developing the human capital the Saudi economy needs beyond the 2030 agenda.

#### 4.2.2 National culture and religion of Saudi Arabia

The National Constitution of Saudi Arabia is based on the Quran (Koran) and *Shari'ah* Law, while the national culture is determined by the Islamic religion. Hence, all aspects of cultural and social life in the Kingdom are based on religion and religious identity (Bowen, 2014), including education. The local society is deeply religious and conservative and thus focused on traditions and the family, while many elements of the national worldview and attitudes date back to ancient times and are derived from the Islamic heritage and Arabic civilisation (Nag, 2018). Recently, however, Saudi Arabia's culture has been influenced by the rapid change and

transformation taking place in the country, as part of its position as a rich producer of commodities.

Education is viewed by Islam as a religious duty of all people, irrespective of their gender. In other words, Islam suggests that learning is an obligation of every Muslim, and this obligation imbues education with the religious duty status. All national holidays are related to important religious events; for example, the holy month of *Ramadan* is strictly observed in the Kingdom. As Islam is the foundation for the development of education, schools at all levels, together with all stakeholders in education, are considered accountable to religious and societal values (Smith and Abouammoh 2013). The religious beliefs and the Islamic code of conduct penetrate all spheres of life. Of crucial importance is ensuring a careful mix of societal values and other ideas that cannot be avoided in a universal global context. Therefore, there is a strong need for an informed strategy at the formative stages in the Kingdom's education system. All students receive religious education and are aware of the Islamic traditions, and thus religion plays a central role in the system of education, both in the behaviour patterns of teachers and students and in other aspects of education. This situation puts a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of the developers of the national educational curriculum as all formal strategy formulation, planning and implementation should be built on cherished societal values. The obvious challenge that such a system faces is adherence to its values in the face of modernisation or the Westernisation negative sides for education development. This calls for deep reflection and a careful strategy in the education sector to balance between the Saudi culture and what should be adopted from other cultures' management styles that can enhance the Saudi management culture or management style in considering the positives sides.

#### 4.2.3 The philosophy and purpose of education in Saudi Arabia

The primary goal of Saudi education is to promote the country's economic and social characteristics. The most active and renowned sectors are supplied with competent workers who have experience in other countries and can thus provide a fresh perspective for Saudi Arabia's native industry. There are also social issues to consider. Serving the fundamental economic forces, for example, entails ensuring social welfare in healthcare, business, infrastructure, agriculture, finance, and many other areas that contribute to national well-being (Smith and Ammouammoh, 2013). As a result, the unified educational system performs

exceptionally well in this area. This technique has successfully used new technology in teaching and instructing in Saudi Arabia, leading to excellent student outcomes.

Primary education in Saudi Arabia is compulsory and free, although the gross enrolment for boys is 99% compared to only 96.6% for girls (Alsaeh, 2012). The roots of education in the Kingdom go deep into the Islamic tradition, which has played a critical role in the establishment of schools, universities, and other educational institutions based on the philosophical pillars of Islam. Religion and education are considered indivisible concepts that are closely intertwined and interconnected throughout the history of Saudi Arabia. The purpose of education in the Kingdom is thus to build an integrated understanding of Islam and propagate its creed. In addition, the aim is to support students in acquiring various competences, extended knowledge, and skills, as well as to nurture constructive behaviour and attitude (Alyami 2014). The local education targets the development of the society in the domains of culture and economy, thereby turning all individuals into beneficial members of society (Alnahdi, 2013). The goals of education in Saudi Arabia can be clearly discerned at different education levels. The purpose of nursery and kindergarten education is to guide children and prepare them for the different phases of life.

The goal of primary-level education are to prepare young learners to adapt to a rapidly changing society by assisting them to understand the basic beliefs and concepts in addition to practical knowledge such as numeracy skills, reading, writing, and critical thinking. Acquiring these skills at an early stage is thought to prepare young learners to grasp more difficult concepts at higher levels of education later in life. The intermediate-level education, on the other hand, seeks to increase students' cultural awareness and provide a holistic Islamic education (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission 2013). Meanwhile, the secondary education level in Saudi Arabia, which lasts three years, is when students have to choose between proceeding with the general education or enrolling in specialist education at a technical institution. Vocational training also involves three years of study, focusing on developing students' traits and preparing them for professional life (Alamri 2011). The most popular educational fields are finance, business, and manufacturing. Therefore, education is aligned with the economic and social needs of Saudi Arabia (Alamri, 2011). On a separate note, the Saudi government has established more than 150 vocational training centres, aiming to generate 3 million jobs within 10 years to reduce unemployment and boost the domestic economy (Asiri et al., 2012). Finally, the higher



education level seeks to provide students with opportunities for practical specialisation in their chosen professions. It is aimed at talented individuals and further develops their skills, thereby fulfilling the community's needs and facilitating the achievement of the national development goals (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2013).

The education system aims to tackle the issue of illiteracy among the adult population, using designed programmes to ensure that every Saudi national has an acceptable level of literacy as a catalyst to national development. Meanwhile, to attain a holistic human resource development objective, specific programmes are tailored to meet the needs of physically challenged persons in society, with special curricula and cultural training programmes being used to meet the special needs of such learners (Alrubiyea, 2010; Alquraini, 2011; Alharbi, 2016). Finally, due to the government support for all levels of private education in Saudi Arabia, private education has become the subject of administrative and technical supervision by relevant authorities (Hamdan, 2015).

Based on the above, it can be stated that the goal of the education system in Saudi Arabia is providing people with a quality education based on the teachings of Islam (Al-Youbi 2017). It hereby targets all education levels and considers the development and abilities of different age groups of learners (Allothman, 2016). Special attention is given to adults as many of them are illiterate. The State also supports the development of talented and gifted individuals, providing them access to special programmes, e.g. in commerce, arts, and sciences, as well as quality training programmes embedded in undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctorate programmes. For instance, the Custodians of the two Holy Mosques' overseas scholarship programmes, the Centre for Competitive Funding Programme, IDB-KAUST Joint PhD Scholarship Programme, and others aim to make each individual a productive member of the local community (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

The Ministry of Education has established a well-defined plan that assists in achieving the educational targets, with the local educational system offering appropriate education across different the age groups of learners (Alyami, 2014). For example, the idea has been put forward to incorporate national issues into lesson plans to instil pride for the nation among students (Amber, 2017). In addition, there is a need to focus on such fields as science and mathematics to prepare local students for international positions (Yakaboski, Perez-Velez and Almutairi,

2017). Meanwhile, the school curriculum is directly related to Islamic beliefs, and teachers are trained according to a ten-year plan.

Other goals of the education system in Saudi Arabia include increased community participation in education, responsiveness to the general population's needs, the provision of individual programmes for learners with special needs, and the increased effectiveness of public education (Scholaro, 2018). Furthermore, the system aims to establish a modern framework to enhance communication and information technology (Al-Mousa, 2010). According to the plan, education is an essential tool for turning children into grown-up individuals by preparing them to become productive members of society (Amber, 2017). Such well-educated people will create the human capital of Saudi Arabia, contributing to the economic performance, growth and living standards in the region. Most of the education provided to boys and girls should be segregated at all levels, and this also extends to their building and the teaching staff, for example. The local education system aims to ensure that students can effectively and successfully exist in the modern world with an emphasis on meeting the country's religious, economic, and social needs.

#### 4.2.4 Education system in Saudi Arabia

The education system of Saudi Arabia has undergone a significant transformation in recent years. After the Kingdom was established in 1932, only a limited number of people could access education (Alnahdi, 2013), meaning that only children from wealthy families in the major cities could attend school. Later, education became available to almost all people. Currently, the education system of Saudi Arabia includes more than 50 public and private universities, over 30,000 schools, and several other educational institutions that are open to all citizens (House, 2012). Students have access to free education, educational material, and health services.

The study of Islam is the focal point of the Saudi schooling system (House, 2012). Meanwhile, the advanced framework gives quality guidelines in various areas of science, aiming to prepare the students for their professional lives (Bother, 2018). Schooling is a necessity for each Muslim, as the significance of learning has been underlined by the Sacred Qur'an and the Hadith. Training in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is constrained by government organisations, including the Ministry of Higher Education, the General Organisation for Technical Education

and Vocational Training, and the Ministry of Education (Amber, 2017). The decision to enrol a child in a kindergarten or preschool is made by the parents. Public education is provided at no cost and is available to the entire population. It consists of clearly defined levels, including the primary, middle, and secondary stages (Alnahdi, 2013). Education at a primary school takes six years, while the middle and secondary school levels require three years each. School attendance is mandatory.

Both girls and boys are taught a similar educational program, although they learn in separate study halls (Golden, 2017). Students can select projects to join, for instance, technical studies, expressions, or trade. Student assessments at secondary school are under the authority of the Service of Instruction (Alnahdi, 2013). Local schools have diverse educational curriculums that include different subjects, e.g., history, Arabic, math, Islam, and others (Gahwaji, 2013). When students reach secondary school, they must make the decision to continue with general education or switch to secondary education provided by technical or secondary institutions (Alnahdi, 2013). There are more than 150 vocational schools in the Kingdom that prepare learners for their future professional lives (Scholaro, 2018), and new educational establishments are opening every year under changing national needs.

Twenty-four government universities in Saudi Arabia offer degrees in various fields, including Yanbu, Turaif, Uqair, Saihat, Khobar, Lihyan, Hai'l, Gerra, Thwal, and others (Service of Schooling, 2019). Classes are accessible to students of all ages. Consequently, older students, or those who cannot go to classes consistently, may graduate. The Service of Instruction sets the norms and administers training for students with learning difficulties (Service of Schooling 2019).

#### 4.2.5 Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education is a governmental body that oversees the implementation of educational and law enforcement policies at all levels of the educational system. As a result, the ministry's principal purpose is to control and update the educational curriculum in conformity with contemporary economic and social conditions (Smith and Ammouammoh 2013). The establishment of the Directorate of Knowledge in 1925 marked the launch of the first educational system in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education, 2019). The directorate became the centre of the boys' educational system. In 1927, the first council for knowledge was

established, aimed at developing an educational monitoring/evaluation system that could monitor education; first limited to the Hijaz region (Ministry of Education, 2019), it was later, expanded to cover the whole Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia was created in 1952 (Scholaro, 2018), and in 2015, the Ministries of Education and Higher Education were combined into the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2019).

The Ministry of Education in the Kingdom aims to develop an exceptional educational system that contributes to building a globally competitive community based on knowledge. In addition, it seeks to ensure that local citizens can obtain high-quality education through the education policy framework of Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission 2013). Moreover, the ministry has the authority to issue licenses for private schools and institutions that provide specialised education (Ministry of Education 2019), although these licenses can only be issued to local citizens. The state also supervises private education to ensure the proper level of education and that the Islamic requirements are met.

The Ministry of Education's principal goal is to develop students' Islamic, national, and intellectual character by improving their knowledge, competence, skills, and values. It also aims to give equal access to all students, improve quality, raise educational standards, increase instructors' capacities through lifelong learning, and expand the construction and upkeep of educational facilities (Mazi and Altbach 2013). The ministry strives to encourage students to participate in research and improve the educational output level through the creation of the National Education Platform, Saudi Digital Library, and Research Works Development Centre, among others (Ministry of Education 2019). Finally, it aims to provide students with overseas scholarships, apply information and telecommunication technologies (the Internet and communication satellites), invest in education, as well as improve both local and international partnerships through different programmes, including doctorate programmes and the Nashr Programmes (Ministry of Education 2019).

Thus, the Ministry of Education works to raise the educational outcomes, increase the effectiveness of scientific research, develop community partnerships, encourage innovation and creativity, and promote the capabilities and skills of students. It ensures the provision of knowledge and skills to learners, making them not only intellectually sound personalities but also compliant with Islamic teachings and principles.

#### 4.2.6 Government budget for education

The government of Saudi Arabia introduced its Vision 2030 program in 2016, initiating a wide range of changes in all spheres of the country (Dudley, 2018). The government of Saudi Arabia has made efforts to raise educational levels in the country. As a result, it provides high-quality teacher training to improve student evaluation standards and ensure the use of appropriate educational technologies in teaching and assessment. The government has made enormous investments in education, which is a key component of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. As a result, the sector's financial allocation has increased significantly in recent years, rising from SR105 billion in 2008 to SR192 billion in 2018. (Ministry of Education, 2019). The budget for 2019 is expected to be the most significant spending so far, targeting the reformation of the economy, education, finance, and other sectors. The most recent budget was \$295 billion, whereby \$54 billion was devoted to the segment of education (Dudley, 2018). Such large investment can be explained by the aforementioned tendency to align the educational and current economic needs of the country, which is why a more profound approach is being considered for the future (Mousa and Ghulam 2019).

The government spent SR14.7 billion on the Holy Mosques Foreign Scholarship programmes, aimed at supporting citizens in their search for education at prestigious universities worldwide (Ministry of Education, 2019). Sustainable growth and a knowledge-based economy are the main goals in this regard, with human capital acting as the primary driver of change. Importantly, \$3.92 billion is being invested in scholarships that allow local students to study abroad (Mousa and Ghulam, 2019), thereby increasing their intercultural potential and knowledge so that they can offer new insights into the workplace practices of other economies. Budget allocations for education in Saudi Arabia are evidently valid and effective in the context of Vision 2030 changes, and thus these investments are likely to deliver positive outcomes in the future.

The education sector receives the largest funding share from the budget, at about 18% in 2019 (KPMG, 2018). There is likely to be a greater emphasis on value-added education that presupposes the use of emerging technologies, e.g. robotics, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence. The current needs and objectives of the Saudi preschool education system are congruent with the general education and economic outcomes of Vision 2030, which has

triggered a proactive investment in the segment of preschool education. More than \$36 million was devoted to the development of preschool education and kindergarten facilities.

The increase in investment has produced positive results, with the Ministry of Education investing in 1,400 kindergartens across the country (Rabaah, Doaa, and Asma, 2016). Meanwhile, the private sector is being proactively developed and the investments in 1,100 preschool education institutions in the country suggest that there is high competition within the preschool education sector (Rabaah, Doaa and Asma, 2016). This evidence implies that Saudi Arabia is emphasising a profound and sophisticated education system, intending kindergartens to serve as the bedrock for the successful academic attainment of Saudi children (Sobahe, 2017). Primary schools are undergoing a similar change, and their development may continue similarly. Meanwhile, there are verifiable changes in women's scholarly accomplishment; thus, it is feasible to infer that Saudi Arabia is making critical headway in the advancement of its school system, and that its shift to an information-based economy is delivering compelling outcomes that are diminishing the country's dependence on gas and oil. Based on these achievements, it is clear that the government has made major investments in education to raise residents' literacy levels. In addition, a significant percentage of the national budget is invested to fund programs and scholarships that attract young people and enable them to compete on a global scale.

### 4.3 Kindergarten Schools in Saudi Arabia

#### 4.3.1 History

The idea of establishing kindergarten education in the country was raised in 1974, and the first preschool and kindergarten education curricula were developed in 1975 (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016), although the first kindergarten school in the private sector was established in 1966. Kindergarten education refers to preschool education that consists of three stages (for children aged three, four, and five years). In 1970, essential steps were taken in the education sector to accelerate the development of education at different levels. In 1994, there was only one kindergarten school under the jurisdiction of the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education (Aljabreen and Lash 2016). It had nearly 475 students and a staff of 52 teachers (Saudi Arabia 2019). From 1994 to 1995, more than 200 girl-only kindergartens were established, and together they had nearly 17,000 students (King Khalid Data Base 2015). In addition,

approximately the same number of kindergartens was opened for boys. During that period, more than 340 private kindergarten schools existed in the country (Saudi Arabia 2019). More recently, kindergarten education in the Kingdom has been referred to as the initial stage of formal education. Currently, kindergarten enrolment in the Kingdom is very low compared to other Middle Eastern countries, including less than 14% of the total eligible population. It is estimated that this number will increase to more than 17% by 2020 (Strategic Gears Management Consultancy, 2018). Although kindergarten education is not obligatory in the country, it plays an essential role in child development. Moreover, it prepares young learners for primary education and equips them with the necessary skills for life. Therefore, the government has focused on the provision of high-quality kindergarten education.

#### 4.3.2 Purpose of kindergarten schools

Unlike first, second and third-cycle education, preschool educational institutions do not experience profound control by the government; hence, their curricula may vary (Al-Jadidi, 2012). Nevertheless, following standardisation in 2009, preschool education has been able to serve specific purposes and strive for the attainment of distinct goals set by the government. Contemporary preschool education in Saudi Arabia started to resemble systems that can be observed in countries with a well-developed education system. The primary aim of kindergarten education is to enhance the development of some basic skills through, for instance, the promotion of healthy habits, physical activity, and growth of strong bodies (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016). After preschool education, children are more prepared for primary school than their peers who have never attended such establishments (King Khalid DataBase, 2015). Thus, it is reasonable to state that kindergartens provide young learners with behavioural, cognitive, psychomotor and social skills that make further education easier (Alghamdi, 2016).

The goals of the kindergarten stage of education include the refinement of the innate character, the learner's mental, physical, and moral growth, and the introduction of the rules of conduct (Saudi Arabia, 2019). While these goals are shared by various educational systems, readiness for elementary school is particularly valuable for Saudi Arabia as primary and secondary education is supposed to build a strong foundation for future professionals across various fields and industries. Moreover, children's socialisation, cooperation, interaction, and engagement in

various social connections are nurtured at this stage (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016). The curriculum is particularly oriented at fostering strong social skills and devotion to the community as the country expects the next generations to make important contributions in all spheres of life. In addition, young learners become aware of Islamic values and virtues grow are familiar with the school environment, while developing their creative and motor skills and learning how to protect themselves from danger.

The current needs and objectives of the Saudi Arabian preschool education system are congruent with the general education and economic outcomes of Vision 2030. This notion has triggered a proactive trend of investments into the segment of preschool education, with more than \$36 million being devoted to the development of a preschool education and kindergarten network (Alshantiti 2018). The increase in investment has led to positive results. The Ministry of Education has invested in 1,400 kindergartens across the entire country, while the Ministry of Social Affairs has invested in 200 (Rabaah, Doaa, and Asma 2016). Although the private sector is developing proactively, the investment in 1,100 preschool education institutions suggests that there is high competition within this sector (Rabaah, Doaa, and Asma 2016). This evidence indicates that Saudi Arabia is focusing on education in a more sophisticated and profound manner as kindergartens have started to prepare Saudi children for successful academic attainment (Sobahe, 2017). The same tendency can be observed with primary schools, and their growth is underpinned by the same factors. Overall, it is evident that Saudi Arabia has made significant progress in the development of its education system, and its orientation towards a knowledge-based economy is presenting effective results that will protect the entire economy from its dependency on gas and oil prices.

#### 4.3.3 Administration

Several government agencies are responsible for the administration of education in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education sets the educational standards and controls education for people with special needs. Also, it administers most kindergartens in the country. Female students' access to education has enhanced the creation of the General Presidency of Girls' Education, which administers girls' schools and colleges and nursery schools and sponsors literacy programmes for female learners. The General Organisation for Technical Education and Vocational Training is in charge of the development plans' coordination and execution



(Ministry of Education, 2019). All staff and management posts in kindergartens are held by women in the country. As a result, kindergarten education has undergone various stages before arriving at its current position, and it has certain objectives that necessitate good management. Finally, educational institutions are governed by several agencies that undertake various responsibilities to assure quality.

#### 4.4 Chapter Summary

The discussions in this section have revealed that the culture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is defined and outlined by its Islamic heritage, local traditions, and history. Saudi society and education have evolved over the years, adapting to new trends and modernisation. Local education is providing high-quality instructions in different fields, preparing citizens for effective work and a successful life in a global and highly competitive economy. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is placing a sustained emphasis on the value and significance of education. The history of education indicates that education in Saudi Arabia has undergone various significant transformations. Moreover, with education being free at all levels, it is expected that parents send their children to school. However, unlike general education, kindergarten education is not compulsory. The Ministry of Education is focusing on improving educational outcomes, planning, and overseeing the development and public awareness of programmes and projects. Also, it supports local educational establishments, expanding learners' opportunities to obtain scholarships and study internationally. Finally, education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a necessity that allows citizens to realise their aspirations towards advancement, development, and progress in knowledge and science. The current waves of change at the socio-economic and political fronts demand a constant review of educational strategies in tune with the rapid transformations at all levels of national endeavour. Therefore, this chapter places the study in the context of the entire discourse of strategic planning in the public and private education sectors. The chapter that follows focuses on the first empirical objective of the study, thereby addressing the extent to which strategic planning is understood in kindergartens in the Kingdom.

## CHAPTER FIVE: AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING IN SAUDI ARABIAN KINDERGARTEN SCHOOLS

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the first and second research questions, which seek to know to what extent the concept of strategic planning is understood in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. The results presented here are answers to the core interview questions: (i) whether strategic planning is used and understood by kindergarten principals and teachers and (ii) how strategic planning is being adopted in educational institutions in Saudi Arabia. Overall, data was gathered from 69 participants, comprising 37 principals, 20 classroom teachers and 12 parents. The data provides insights that ultimately attain the aims of the study. The chapter first establishes that there are various views of the concept of strategic planning portrayed by the principals of the kindergarten principals and teachers. Further, it then presents how strategic planning is being adopted in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. The chapter then draws its conclusions after the presentation of the results from the field.

### 5.2 Conceptual Issues

A strategic plan is a roadmap for success, it is a time-tested managerial tool used by leaders of Organisations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. As a management principle, it refines the organisation's vision and mission statements to guide its business operations holistically. For strategic planning to achieve its desired goals in the first place, the kindergarten staff must understand the practical meaning of the term or concept before implementing it. Though other workers within the kindergartens play certain roles in strategic planning, this chapter focuses attention on the principals as the lead implementers of the plan at the school level. From the interviews, the participants demonstrated a diverse understanding of the concept and based on their understanding, I categorised them into three groups: *Minimum understanding*, *Moderate understanding*, *Good understanding*. Conceptual clarity is the initial step in the implementation of any managerial idea by any group of managerial staff. This fact underscores the very essence of the extent to which strategic planning is not understood in the basic educational setting in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## Minimum understanding

Minimum understanding refers to participants' views or opinions about the concept that demonstrate that they have no idea what this concept means or what it stands for. When the researcher visited the kindergartens and met the principals, she noted that some principals came up with last-minute excuses, ostensibly to evade participating in the interviews. When they were asked what this meant, their responses indicated a lack of knowledge of the concept, and in some instances, others simply said they didn't know. Their justification for not knowing was that they were new to administration and they had never made or implemented a plan before:

*"The concept of strategic planning is not common in kindergarten schools, and for me, I don't know what it means; this is my first year as a principal." (Pr 001)*

The principal's answer was very brief, and it presupposed that the concept was not commonly used by professional heads in kindergartens in the region. This singular testimony was perhaps not an isolated case, for she indicated that as a principal, she has had two years' experience in kindergarten management, and had not had to use the term or tried to understand its meaning before. The participant was one of the kindergarten principals located in a less-resourced area in terms of service provision. The researcher, upon visiting the kindergarten, noticed it was less endowed, perhaps because the kindergarten environment, together with its buildings in general, was comparatively under-resourced. Although there was agreement and prior arrangement for the time of the interview, the researcher noticed the extent of confusion in the administration of the kindergarten, for instance, the principal often interrupted the dialogue, either because of a sudden, unauthorised departure by the mother of a child in the kindergarten, or she was asked about something that could have been delegated to a staff member or kindergarten representative.

Responses from a second participant were not entirely different; another principal remarked:

*"Yes, I have heard of this concept, but honestly, I do not know the exact purpose of it. Can you remind me please what it means?" (Pr 002)*

From these close interactions, we note that most principles had heard about the concept of strategic planning; however, they lacked a deeper understanding of what it meant since they

could not readily offer clear-cut answers to questions posed. From the foregoing, we concluded that the kindergarten principals demonstrated, to some extent, a lack of confidence in the use of strategic management and strategic planning. In an increasingly globalised world, the adoption of Western effective management systems in other cultural contexts such as Saudi Arabia is considered valuable in solving organisational challenges.

Another principal's response was as follows:

*"We heard about strategic planning, just hearing as a concept discovered on through reading" (Pr 003)*

*"Yes, I think I heard this term before, but currently it does not bring me meaning if you could explain to me what it means?" (Pr 005)*

This response equally supports our conclusions. Although the definition was present in the participant information sheet of the interview, it becomes clear to us that she did not read the newspaper or care about her idea, and even after the researcher explained the definition to her in a simple way. The principal confirmed that for the first time she understood what it meant:

*"I heard about the concept and know its meaning. Do you want me to mention the concept to you? Wait a minute, I need to open the laptop, as it contains all the information about planning and the plan that we are going through in our kindergarten." (Pr 004)*

From the principal's response to the question here, it appeared to us that her knowledge of the concept of strategic planning was quite inadequate because she requested some time to refer to her personal laptop to cross-check her facts by reviewing what happened, even though the question was clear about the concept of strategic planning and not the terms of the plan or its steps. Two categories of principals were identified: those who never heard of the concept before in their professional roles, as reflected in their statements during the interviews, and those who truly demonstrated their knowledge when asked about the concept of strategic planning, perhaps due to their experience in the field of management.

When teachers were asked about the concept of strategic planning, the answers were as follows:

*“There are kindergartens that understand this concept, but we only heard about it from the school supervisor and not the principal regarding only the curriculum and the units.” (Tr 001)*

*“The concept exists but is not activated. We heard about strategic planning, but in a general concept we need a clearer and more accurate view of the concept.” (Tr 002)*

The teachers’ assertions indicate that the concept of strategic planning was not a popular managerial exercise undertaken by kindergarten principals because they did not understand it and needed more compelling awareness to understand, apply and believe in it. Unfortunately, in the context of the study, planning has become ink on paper that is not applicable to real-life situations nor a guide to organisational success. Whereas some principals, and teachers displayed some ignorance about the strategic planning concept, others in some kindergartens demonstrated familiarity with the idea. The affirmation made by the teacher below shows how proactive some can be in understanding current organisational best practices in managing teaching and learning.

*“I became familiar with the concept through reading in terms of what I needed from the curriculum, goals, parameters, and to project the future programmes for the coming years, and defining the goals to be achieved in the kindergarten” (Tr 003)*

Some principals showed some apprehension when asked about the concept of strategic planning, although there was a prior agreement between the principals and the researcher on the time and date of the interview; however, some principals were hesitant in conducting the interview. This could have been because they did not want to show a lack of knowledge of the concept or because of their fear that the interview was an evaluation of their work or their experience as kindergarten principals.

*“The reason for the slow and inelasticity in the strategic planning of kindergarten is the lack of experienced staff in the management of kindergarten.” (Pr 21)*

However, according to the current study, with regard to the principals of kindergarten schools in the Makkah Al-Mukarramah region, the cohort of respondents interviewed did not attach much importance to strategic planning in the running of kindergartens; clearly, they prioritised the daily operational planning in dealing with their internal and external environments. Such a

situation might have arisen because strategic planning was perceived by teachers to be the responsibility of top management. The assertion below sums up the current situation in some of the kindergartens in the study area.

*“We are just implementing, not planning. I am required to work out a strategy with specific goals that I will submit to senior management.” (Tr 004)*

Some principals thought that the five-year school strategic plan was inflexible and underdeveloped in contrast to the three-year general education plan, which makes the organisational and procedural evidence for early childhood development slow in terms of units and standards; for instance, the kindergarten child studies the same units and topics that a child was studying now at fourth grade.

*“Although the top management is conducting meetings with us as principals to take our views, but there is no realistic and real implementation of it, we feel these meetings were a routine mock-up that is not beneficial to anything and has no beneficial consequences” (Pr 005).*

The story presented by participant Pr 005 is indicative of an underlying bureaucratic process within the kindergartens. It appears that management had always followed due process by involving the rank and file to solicit their views, but such views were not used to enhance organisational performance through the strategic planning process.

From the above, it becomes clear that the concept of strategic planning is not fully adopted at the kindergarten level as a means to attain the organisational mission and vision through the optimal use of organisational resources. Fairly, participants had heard about the concept, but without a clear understanding. Planning is currently based on the idea of what is to be achieved in the coming years through future programmes in curriculum planning, buildings, security, and safety, and how workers can achieve this.

### **Moderate understanding**

Moderate understanding means that participants have heard about the concept, and when they were asked about the meaning they showed little understanding. For instance, a participant

confirmed hands-on experience as a principal in creating and using a strategic plan at the basic level of teaching and learning:

*“Yes, it is commonly used and means the plan required of us by the kindergarten administration and it contains specific steps and goals that we are required to achieve during the coming years.” (Pr 014)*

*“I have knowledge according to what we took in the course of the strategic plan carried out by the kindergarten administration, but as an academic study the plan was not clarified and applied and therefore this concept is intended according to our knowledge to determine the existing reality and on the basis of which we plan new plans based on the goals that we want.” (Pr 006)*

The above assertion sums up some of the principals’ knowledge of the concept of strategic planning, but the picture is not entirely clear to them. Their knowledge of it is limited either because of their experience or because they attended some training courses related to it, but there seems to be a gap between theory assimilation and practical implementation of the knowledge acquired through training.

### **Full understanding**

Full understanding here means that they heard about the concept and knew exactly what it meant. The views expressed below demonstrate that some participants had a full grasp of the concept by providing some detail with reference to its dimensions practically speaking:

*“Of course, I heard about the concept of strategic planning, which is the plan that is applied for a period of three or five years, depending on the administration It is based on specific foundations, conditions, and achievable goals ”.(Pr 007)*

*“Certainly, I heard about the concept of strategic planning, which means long-term planning between 3 and 5 years, through which we define the goals of the school and draw a map of how to reach it, then we start implementing operations and follow specific steps to achieve them.” (Pr 008)*

*“The Strategic planning considered to be a long-term plan, unlike, the short plan such as five year or less plan, as the strategic planning plans for long term almost ten years or more. It should be consideration to know its strengths and weaknesses compare with the actual existing management system that should be improved via applying the proposed strategic planning”. (Pr 009)*

It can be noted that the understanding of the concept of strategic planning in schools led to improvements in the organisation of activities at the school level, but it was generally not clear or understood by a large segment of kindergarten principals, especially new administrative principals who had only some basic level experience in the field of management. To some extent, most teachers appeared to have understood the parameters involved in drawing up strategic plans; nonetheless, for some, their knowledge of planning was limited to planning curricula or educational units for the classes.

### 5.3 Processual Dimension

The formulation of any formal organisational strategy requires focused engagement among staff. Therefore, it requires not only a good understanding of the concepts, but the interconnectedness of the processes involved. The creation of mission and vision statements provides signposts in the establishment of strategic objectives. The operationalisation of the objectives eventually requires the allocation of resources both human, financial and physical. Consequently, an understanding of the processes involved is a requirement for organisational effectiveness. The administrative units of kindergartens are responsible for developing their plans, and as a result, they are in a way required to implement them. It was observed during discussions in the field that the lack of experience of most principals was problematic: they understood strategic plans to be of at least five years duration, whereas kindergartens can plan for three years. The idea of drawing up plans and policies to last 3 years was quite a challenge.

The slow development and inflexibility in planning may be due to the lack of administrative, organisational and planning competencies of the kindergarten management who, consider that the kindergarten stage is not important. Meanwhile, the early childhood stage constitutes 75% of its importance in the educational classes in the following stages, especially the first and second primary levels. Also, one of the reasons for the slow development of planning in



kindergarten schools is due to the kindergarten administration being an independent department, which is not helpful in strategic planning, while joining the kindergarten administration to the general education department will obtain a higher share of planning and methodology as well as more flexibility if subject to laws public education.

### 5.3.1 Pre-planning:

The first stage of strategic planning is the stage that precedes the development of the plan where the external environment is analysed to identify the available capabilities, challenges and opportunities to set goals based on them. Each school has its capabilities and capabilities through which to assess its reality and determine its course of action.

When the principals were asked about the stages they went through when setting up a kindergarten plan, their answers were as follows:

*“We start first by identifying the strengths and weaknesses and what opportunities and challenges we will face during the implementation of the plan.” (Pr 010)*

*“There is a schedule that consists of four main boxes, I think they are weaknesses and strengths, and .... unfortunately, I do not remember the rest, but I usually do them before I start planning, and they are required by the kindergarten principal and the school supervisor reviews them on her visit to the kindergarten.” (Pr 011)*

The principal's response suggested that a key procedure of the strategic planning process (SWAT analysis) was adhered to by most of the principals because it is a requirement demanded by their superiors from the Ministry of Education when they come for supervisory visits. It was equally observed that documentary evidence of complying with managerial standards was usually required. However, it was uncertain if supervisors engaged principals in ascertaining whether the practical effects of a strategic process on the school's operations were attained and how that was important to the general performance of the kindergartens.

Through the principal's answer, it was obvious some kindergarten principals did a SWAT analysis they did not understand, but they had to carry out such a task because it was a formal

requirement of their duties. More so, it was observed that the benefits of carrying out a SWAT analysis were not derived because it was reduced to a routine activity within kindergartens.

The assertion above was made by a principal who was equally a post-doctoral researcher in kindergarten studies with many years of experience.

*“The first stages of our plan constitute a committee of experienced and skilled teachers, and then we agreed on a day to discuss the plan, its weaknesses, its strengths, its goals, its extent to achieve it, the challenges, and the available opportunities.” (Pr 013)*

The process is an inclusive one, bringing teachers and other administrative staff and parents to meet and discuss matters of crucial importance to the effective operations of kindergartens. It entailed soliciting views of every stakeholder in establishing the specific goals to attain in the planning process. It focused on the participation of kindergarten workers, i.e. for meetings and discussions, in addition to a clear understanding of environmental analysis in all aspects and submitting questionnaires through which to communicate with parents to get acquainted with their views when building goals and drawing plans; therefore, there is knowledge from all the beneficiaries of the school concerning the goals and directions of the school.

As evidenced by one principal’s assertion, most experienced principals emphasised the creation of effective teams and equally encouraged teachers to participate in the pre-planning stage whereby they are required to choose their work teams based on the experience, knowledge, skills and talents of colleague teachers. Hereby, each team member is considered as an important factor for the success of the plan and the development of the kindergarten.

*“There must be a working team that starts from the leader to the follower of the programme, so each team in the team must be responsible for something in the program documented by its name in the program and has a file that defines its work.” (Pr 013)*

A principal, who has been working in the field of school administration for the past 14 years and worked in several schools, stated that the stage of identifying opportunities and challenges facing kindergartens and analysing their physical and human ramifications is one of the most important stages of preparing the plan. Kindergartens can leverage opportunities that have been

identified whilst at the same time adopting strategies to deal with challenges that might hinder the optimal use of resources to achieve targets, they set for themselves. When asked about the first planning stages that she undertakes while developing the plan, a principal stated as follows:

*“I worked in the field of school administration for more than 14 years, during which I acquired many experiences with regard to management and planning, the situation was not as it is now, but school administration was done in a random manner, but now we are asked as principals to set goals and draw plans that we are going to follow; for me the first stage is where I do an environmental analysis, or what is called the SWAT analysis, so that I know the challenges or problems that I faced during the past year, and then after that I start building on this analysis by setting my goals and my plan.” (Pr 016)*

She added that successful planning entails collective effort:

*“For the plan to succeed, it must not be limited to one person or a specific individual. There must be a comprehensive and integrated work team ” (Pr 016)*

*“Meeting by gathering the committee, consisting of leadership, teachers, and administrators. Through the committee, we set goals according to the material capabilities according to the conditions of each kindergarten. The leader is the team that forms the team and distributes its tasks.” (Pr 018)*

*“Responsible for planning in the school and school agents, teachers, mothers. Planning is not limited to one individual to achieve a comprehensive and comprehensive teamwork plan.” (Pr 019)*

### 5.3.2 Setting goals

Setting goals is the process of identifying something that you want to accomplish. After the school environment and its capabilities are analysed through the findings, it is possible to identify the kindergarten’s needs and determine its goals. The process of setting goals is no less important than implementing them, but it may be one of the most important stages of strategic planning, so they must be based on sound judgement to be achieved.

There was some difference between the responses of the kindergarten principals; some stated that each kindergarten was responsible for setting its goals, which are usually related to its capabilities, whether material or human.

*“Each kindergarten has its goals according to its capabilities, whether the kindergarten is large or small, independent or shared” (Pr 020).*

Some principals mentioned that the plan and goals are from the kindergarten radar, are specific and ought to be implemented even if they do not fit their capabilities or environment.

*“The plan comes with general objectives for education from the kindergarten principal, and on the basis of which I set the operational kindergarten plan with programmes and reports. We are just implementing and not planning. I am required to make a strategic plan with specific goals that I submit to the higher management and the general supervisor of the kindergarten.” (Pr 021)*

With regard to setting goals, some principals complained that the goal-setting stage was considered one of the most difficult stages of planning:

*“I am facing great difficulty when setting goals, perhaps because I am new in management and I have never had a plan before and when I asked the school supervisor who should give me a clear answer as to how to set goals correctly, I don't find the answer I need.” (Pr 022)*

Some principals indicated that the plan comes from the ministry, with general objectives for education; then, based on these goals, they prepare their plan and clarify and operationalise it through programmes and reports. The setting of goals is one of the most important stages of planning, and accordingly, the success or failure of the plan depends largely on the clarity and specificity of goals because through the set goals the organisation can know its destination and where it wants to go. From the principal's statement here, we see that she mentioned two main reasons for her inability to set goals. The first is that she had never set a plan before. The second reason is that the supervisor of the kindergarten did not give her a clear answer to her questions; therefore, it was obvious she did not have experience or knowledge of how to set goals. The

goals should be clear to everyone so that workers in the kindergarten know where they are, where they are going and have the motivation and enthusiasm to get there.

There was a difference in the principals' answers with regard to setting goals, whereby some principals mentioned that they are the ones who set goals based on the kindergarten's reality and its capabilities, while others mentioned that they do not set goals but derive them from the goals of senior management and only translate them in line with the current circumstances or reality of the kindergarten.

*“The goals are presented to us by the administration, and we are going through them in a sound way, and this is better for us than setting goals and we have not pursued them in a sound way” (Pr 023).*

The stage of setting goals requires that there be participation by all workers in the kindergarten because their faith and knowledge of the path the kindergarten is taking and what they aspire to achieve operationalising the plan makes them more willing and motivated to participate in it. When the researcher visited the kindergartens, there were divergences in opinion between the responses of the principals. For example, one of the principals mentioned that she was the one who set goals and the plan as a whole because that saved her time and great effort to persuade the teachers to set goals and the changes related to them. This was because she knew that there would not be a consensus among the teachers or workers in the kindergarten on the goals that they wanted to achieve.

It could be said that some of the principals had insufficient capacity in communicating with kindergarten workers, i.e., listening to their suggestions or identifying their problems whereby the plans had to be accomplished at a specific time. Therefore, due to the exigencies associated with the submission of plans, some principals were obliged to take singular measures to beat time and also to safeguard their integrity. A typical example is the answer below:

*“I am the one who puts the entire plan and does not discuss the parameters, because I tried it before that and found that it is impossible to reach specific points and goals on which all the parameters agree, which delays the work and the plan a lot, therefore I put it and met them only when the situation is completed to divide the tasks between them.” (Pr 025)*

As was the opinion of another principal:

*“The process of engaging teachers in setting the goals of the plan is a headache for me as a principal because they all have an opinion and desire, and therefore I cannot reach a conclusion when discussing them, so I am setting them up, and I am the only kindergarten representative.” (Pr 022).*

Concerning one of the principals with experience in administrative work, the importance of involving workers in the kindergarten in the planning stage to set goals is of crucial importance; it is one of the factors for the success of the plan and the development of the kindergarten.

When we asked the teachers about this, their answers were mixed, but the majority of them stated that at the stage of setting goals, there is a meeting that brings them together with the school principal, but setting strategic goals are neither discussed nor their points of view are taken; instead, these goals were dictated to them as specific and inevitable goals coming from the kindergarten administration and they are required to implement them.

*“In our meetings with the principals, we do not discuss our goals or aspirations, but meetings are often used to mention new laws and circulars. In the meeting, committees are formed, and activities are divided among us.” (Tr 024)*

### 5.3.3 Implementing the plan

Implementing the plan is the process that turns strategies and plans into action to accomplish strategic objectives and goals. During the implementation of the plans, most principals stated that they are based on specific schedules and dates for each programme, as one of the principals noted:

*“After we set the goals, we start the stage of implementing the plan, but unfortunately sometimes we cannot implement our plan, either for lack of budget or delays with approval by the higher management, as a principal I do not have sufficient authority to implement any programme except after approval has been obtained from the administration and sometimes the response never comes, so I had to cancel it.” (Pr 028)*

One of the most important problems facing principals and teachers in the implementation phase are the programmes, activities and initiatives proposed by the kindergarten administration; thus, it becomes difficult for them to be able to keep up with all these requirements, which frustrates them. Most of the teachers complained that these programmes come to them from the top management, and most of them must be implemented in a short period, thus consuming a lot of effort and time and delaying the implementation of the plan or basic programmes. In this context, one of the teachers lamented:

*“It is a difficult and stressful process for us teachers, so we are required to do our work related to the education of children and guide them as we are required to carry out the tasks related to the plans in addition to that we were surprised every time running kindergartens with sudden activities and we are required to apply them immediately in a maximum period of a week, so how, with all these pressures, can we accomplish business demands or creativity in it?” (Tr 029).*

As confirmed by one of the principals:

*“Often we are asked by sudden programs and activities that require me as a principal to neglect all of my planned work and direct my effort towards this activity that is required to be implemented. Therefore, there is poor planning from the kindergarten administration itself.” (Pr 031).*

The opinion above hints that the most important problems facing planning during the implementation phase are the programmes and activities that are requested from principals and teachers in the middle of the year without notice and are required to be implemented within a short time. If they are not implemented, the school performance is evaluated as weak because they did not comply with the deadlines. When the principals asked how the staff were selected, one answer was:

*“There is a meeting for the teachers, then I divide the tasks according to their abilities and desires. For example, educational teachers are part of the Family Awareness Committee or those who have experience in first aid, I put them in safety and security, and so then I follow them and there is also a supervision committee that follows them.” (Pr 032)*

#### 5.3.4 Monitoring and evaluating the strategy

It is the most important stage of strategic planning, i.e., evaluating the work achieved in the previous stages and identifying the difficulties and problems that confronted the implementation of the plan to avoid them in the coming year.

From my questioning to the principals, most of their answers implied that the evaluation stage does not seek to know what was implemented or otherwise. A principal testifies in her statement below:

*"We have plans for everything related to kindergarten, from budget, environment and programs to the end, which is implemented from them and applied. We put a checkmark in front of it, and if it is not implemented, we transfer it to the next month or postpone it for the next year because there are new things that enter us, so we have to replace the plan." (Pr 026)*

The answer above implies that there were no specific items or clear evaluation criteria to ascertain the success or failure of the applied plan, but it was done randomly or haphazardly. As one of the principals mentioned, the stage of evaluating the plan usually takes place at the end of the year, but unfortunately, no kindergarten administration was interested in the evaluation process or provided clear guidance for it. Supervisors only visited at the end of the year; it appeared that they were preoccupied with the kindergartens' performance regarding meeting the targets set out in their plan.

Another principal also mentioned that the process of evaluating the plan took place at the end of the year, to identify weaknesses and strengths and work to improve the plan for the coming year.

*"We know for the coming year the weaknesses and strengths of the applied plan, and this is our evaluation of the plan only. This evaluation continues for the next year, for which we are developing a new plan based on the evaluation of the old plan." (Pr 033)*

When we asked the teachers to know the criteria by which the success of their tasks in the plan was measured and whether they were clear or not, the answers of the vast majority of them pointed out that the only way to assess the success of activities and programmes related to



strategic planning is whether or not they were implemented; for them, this was not sufficient and did not contribute to developing plans and other related activities.

*“We are implementing the plan and trying to apply what we can apply from it but often we face developments due to which we cannot implement the plans and there are no specific criteria or indicators that are measured through the success of the implementation of the plans except with regard to teaching only where there are performance criteria evaluated by the kindergarten supervisor and the principal of our performance in the classroom only.” (Tr 011)*

At this point, it can be observed that there is a complete agreement between principals and teachers and that there are no basic or specific criteria for evaluating planning in kindergarten schools. However, most of the time these plans are not implemented as required, as all that is reviewed by either the kindergarten principal or the supervisor is the extent to which the plan is implemented or not.

#### 5.4 Chapter Summary

It can be summarised that the concept of strategic planning used in kindergartens is ineffective, and most principals do not understand the meaning of the term. However, most of the teachers are interested in understanding the term and transferring it to school leaders. Therefore, the researcher found that there is confusion between leaders and teachers, the concept of strategic planning, and the concept of the operational plan. Hence, very few principals realize the difference between strategic planning and a short-term operational plan. Also, more realise that the strategic plan is better and more important than the operational plan because it gives room for development and excellence. Whereas the current plan in preschool monitors a reality without flexibility or changes in its programmes are small, and the management of the strategy in its programming is bigger and more important. Despite this, the principals see that strategic plans have been not applied in the schools under study due to the rigidity of thought and the absence of enlightened minds to implement them. Concerning the knowledge of the stages of strategic planning, principals and teachers conducted these at random, most of which were not based on the required principles governing the processes. This may have been due to the lack of experience of school principals and supervisors regarding the principles of planning.

## **CHAPTER SIX: IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC PLANNING: FACTORS AND CHALLENGES**

### **6.1 Introduction:**

This chapter explores the factors that affect the implementation of strategic planning at the selected kindergartens in Saudi Arabia. It addresses the third research question, “What are the main factors that affect the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?” In view of the transformations sweeping across Saudi society in recent times, the term “strategic planning” has become an important issue in current discourses amongst the leaders in the education sector. In terms of kindergarten schools being the bedrock of education in any society, there is a growing need to understand strategic planning and its impact on learning and students’ achievement. The strategic planning process confronted many challenges and difficulties that affected its implementation. These factors affecting kindergarten principals together with their teachers, their reactions to the strategic planning implementation by the higher management (kindergarten management), and the extent of the positive contributions or negativities from an administrative or supervisory point of view, can only be fully appreciated when all processes of the school system are taken into account. They are presented on the basis of themes generated from the primary data (collected from both experienced and current staff comprising principals, teachers and other key staff) actively managing and teaching in kindergartens in the study clusters. These are discussed under the following headings: environmental factors, teacher transfer, change management, issues bordering the vision and mission, weak internal communication strategy, financial capability, training courses, role of top management and cultural influences. The complex interplay of these factors indicates that the strategic planning process was weak and beset with many challenges. The chapter ends with a summary.

### **6.2 Factors Affecting Strategic Planning**

The management system of the Saudi education sector has been noted as an area of concern in the quest for proactive and sustainable ways to improve the management of teaching and learning in schools in the Kingdom (Abdel-Moneim, 2015). Further, Alghamdi and Malekan (2020) explain that Saudi management systems and practices are undergirded by Arab cultural value systems, giving rise to a clash of cultures that should be modified in order to the

transfer Western educational management ideas into the Saudi schools. The ramifications of this situation are the factors this chapter seeks to unearth in response to the second research question stated in the introductory chapter. The subsections below reveal, to a large extent, the factors constraining the implementation of the strategic planning processes in Saudi kindergarten schools.

### 6.2.1 Environmental factors

The physical environment in the kindergarten means everything surrounding the teacher and the child that supports teaching and learning, and as such these should be carried out in a congenial atmosphere in order to attain set goals that are indicated in the mission and vision statements highlighted in the strategic documents; this includes basic classroom furniture such as tables, chairs, storage cupboards, materials and equipment. Further, the physical environment equally constitutes a part of the kindergarten learning environment that supports activities that positively enhance learning in and out of the classroom are also included. Indoor audio-visual games, fun books and a plethora of other devices that affect the child's development and the integration of his personality in a direct and indirect way are equally important.

The general shortage of facilities inside and outside the classrooms happened to be one of the most important factors that worked against planning in general. The physical environment was not suitable for kindergartens in terms of facilities such as teaching and learning equipment. Also, the lack of an adequate number of teachers to manage pedagogical activities meant that the optimal use of time and space were hindered. For instance, the large unexploited spaces allocated for children's games were not air-conditioned, and for that reason, they were unfit for use due to the high temperatures for most of the academic year. It was observed that the safety of children in some schools was not given the attention it deserved. For instance, in some of the schools visited, maintenance works were being carried out whilst teaching and learning were in progress and in some cases school sessions were cancelled to allow for serious maintenance works to be carried out; such disruptions certainly affected the number of contact hours teachers planned to achieve. In this regard one of the participants, Pr 037 cited some perennial operational difficulties she faced at her kindergarten:

*“One of the difficulties I face is having to use old devices and tools such as photocopiers, which compels me to send paper to a place for printing from my own account. Also, children's games, some of which are worn out have not been replaced due to the lack of funds covering their ongoing maintenance. Therefore, I can say that we create something from nothing.”*  
(Pr 037)

The matter raised by the principal is critical to the effectiveness of kindergartens. Effective teaching and learning can only take place if teaching and learning aids are functional and serve the purpose for which they were acquired. Time is of the essence in a school setting where every activity is planned and allotted some time. Therefore, in the interest of ensuring all school activities are carried out without hindrances, play objects and other teaching devices should be functional and convenient for children to play with. However, replacements of obsolete equipment were not possible due to budgetary constraints.

Most principals also pointed to an important factor pertaining to environmental cleanliness and school hygiene as critical factors in the wellbeing of the children. They noted the lack of insufficient numbers of cleaners in schools (in most cases only two cleaners were employed) to ensure the thorough cleaning of offices, classes, washrooms and other essential facilities; such a situation resulted in ineffective cleaning, which possibly created unhealthy and inappropriate conditions in which children carried out their learning activities with the attendant health risks coming from the emission of bad odour in many cases. Generally, kindergartens by their very nature and function require periodic and continuous cleaning, which differs from the rest of the educational stages. The majority of workers intimated the absence of general hygiene at the kindergartens and health facilities in particular. The opinion below was stated by participant Pr 037 to substantiate some of the difficulties she faced in the face of staff shortage at some kindergartens:

*“In this kindergarten, I have a difficulty with the number of workers responsible for the kindergarten's cleanliness, and we often have some challenges cleaning bathrooms periodically, as you know, children use them, which requires constant monitoring and cleaning on a regular basis, but what can I do? I have only two cleaning agents, I don't have a solution.”* (Pr 037)

Regarding cleanliness, many teachers noted that the kindergartens' environment was beset with difficulties and the provision of immediate alternatives that could contribute to improving their school environments so that they could implement their plans and perform activities successfully were always difficult to find.

The state of the physical structures, such as buildings, was highlighted in the discussions that ensued in the interview sessions. As indicated, buildings and other structures were quite old and needed refurbishment. To buttress this view, one of the participants explained that:

*“The kindergarten environment is old and dilapidated, and most of the kindergarten buildings are not suitable for protecting us from our usual very high temperatures. Although we submitted a request to the public administration to assist us to solve the problems; we have not yet received any response.” (Tr 011)*

Generally, buildings that accommodated the kindergartens were quite unsuitable and needed some refurbishment by way of design and care to make them suitable for children. Also, it was observed that buildings did not have enough air conditioners; for a fact, teaching and learning in enclosures at very high temperatures poses a health risk to children. Equally worrying were the few cleaners in the schools; it was a huge challenge for these cleaners to keep up with the task of ensuring a very high level of cleanliness in washrooms and other floors where children congregated to play or perform activities. Principals lamented the silence of the authorities to their pleas to refurbish their buildings. A timely response to such demands should help to solve some of the challenges kindergartens face in their communities throughout the Kingdom

The next section discusses an important factor that principals considered detrimental to their pedagogical activities, this concern borders on unproductive routine procedures in kindergartens.

#### 6.2.2 Overbearing routine processes

This section focuses on the daily repetitive routines that principals are obliged to follow in performing their duties; necessary as these administrative demands may have been, they diverted attention from the core duties of principals, that is, ensuring the wellbeing of children as they played while learning.

From the point of view of many principals and teachers, a major challenge is how to cope with the routine demands of their jobs. Incessant calls coupled with writing official letters to senior-level authorities form the core responsibility of principals. They argued that such routine administrative demands are burdensome and distractive. For instance, they noted that they were always caught between meeting the needs of the children and pleasing their superiors. It was observed that the huge burden of repetitive official routines required daily from staff detracted from their performing their main functions, which affected the progress of work and implementation of planning because there was no possibility or means to communicate with government institutions at the close of day. Rather, principals are overburdened with sudden and additional work, negatively affecting their performance as regards the work plan. One of the principals buttressed this fact in her statement:

*“We school principals suffer from a lot of routine work that is required from us, as they require a great effort and time, and that of course occupies us a lot about creativity and planning.”*  
(Pr 034)

Another participant made a related observation on supervisors’ mundane supervisory demands as follows:

*“When the kindergarten supervisor visits us, she asks us for a lot of records and papers that are often without interest, most of them are on the shelves. Viewing them is only formal, but their content is of little use.”* (Pr 035)

As many principals indicated, routine work is stressful for them, and most of it is paperwork that has little benefit; however, it is the most important thing that is reviewed by the supervisor when she visits the kindergarten. Thus, the principals focus on it as well so that they are not subjected to accountability. As it appears, much time and effort is being put into things that do not matter; ultimately, less time is spent on creating or planning to develop the kindergartens.

As for the teachers, their responses were identical to what most principals mentioned, i.e. that the focus of principals in completing routine work that had no benefit whatsoever to the system also affected their performance in class. Additionally, teachers were also not spared the trouble in terms of the large number of papers and questionnaires they were asked to fill out in preparation for their periodic review by principals. Unfortunately, these assigned tasks take a

lot of time; therefore, teachers are denied the time to improve on their work. Comments by two teachers during the interviews put these issues into perspective:

*“We do not disagree that routine work is mostly outdated and has little benefit. We are at a time when we need to develop it and everything can be registered electronically instead of paper, but what can we do? Also, we cannot blame the principal when she asks us to hand over the required work because she is obligated to do so by senior management for the review of that supervisor, and any shortcomings could make her accountable or a lack of evaluation of her performance.” (Tr 013)*

*“Repetitive routine work kills creativity among all kindergarten workers because it is boring and repetitive, and we are at a time when we need to use technology more; papers are stacked everywhere in addition to the required work to be completed either daily or weekly needs to be reviewed because they are just a waste of time.” (Tr 012)*

The views of the participants deplored the emphasis on administrative processes and bureaucracy at that level. The need for schools to revert to paperless communication at that level was highlighted as a solution to the use of large quantities of paper, which are often difficult to manage. These assertions by the teachers pointed to the pursuit for change in the educational processes in the education sector in line with current global trends; especially in the western and Asian countries (particularly China), where technological innovations are used to revolutionise teaching and learning in classrooms (Manohar et al., 2016).

The section that follows considers what participants considered as the erratic transfer of teachers as another obstacle to attaining the objectives of any strategic planning process. The consequences of such an action are presented below.

### 6.2.3 Uncoordinated teacher transfers

The section below highlights the frequent transfers of teachers from one kindergarten to the other – a situation that is deplored by school principals, teachers, children and parents. Teacher transfer means the movement of teachers from one kindergarten to the other at any time of the school year. Generally, when teacher transfers are based on school needs assessment and done at the right time (before schools reopen), they facilitate planning by principals; however, as

participants noted, most transfers were done on an ad hoc basis. The views of participants together with the researcher's ensuing comments are presented below. Adequate teacher presence in a school is a necessary condition for organisational success.

One of the obstacles that made the situation worse and created a negative impact on the progress of the strategic planning process was the transfers. The large number of teacher transfers and reassignments from one kindergarten to another led to a lack of stability in terms of the numbers of teachers and children. Principals were confronted with the difficulty of relying on teams because they did not know if teachers would stay with them or not, which frustrated the entire staff within kindergartens; also, teachers and principals and their enthusiasm for planning and change waned. A teacher *Tr 014* pointed to the fact that teachers felt insecure wherever they were because anyone could be transferred without notice at any time within the school year, as clarified in the following statement:

*"We do not have job security because we, as teachers, do not know whether or not we will continue in our kindergartens." (Tr 014)*

As the situation suggested the continuous teacher movements not only made teachers feel insecure, but it also affected the psychological state of the children, as the children at this stage were very attached to their teachers and changes may have negatively affected their psychology and motivation, as well as their ability to adapt to their new teachers. Parents raised concerns about this during discussions at the school level. Two mothers *M 001* and *M 002* shed light on staff transfers and their effects on parents and their children:

*"My child suffered a lot when his teacher was changed, and he always asks me when she would come back, and often he asks not to be sent back to that kindergarten because he did not accept the new teacher." (M 001)*

*"I was surprised during this year when my child's teacher was changed more than once and the reason was that the teacher was assigned to another school in the middle of the semester, and we were not notified of that; when we inquired about it the response came from the administration that the issue was surprising even to them and Senior management. They said they were equally not informed before, and I noticed that my child did not want to go to kindergarten for more than once. So, he did not benefit*



*from the activities or programmes provided based on the confusion that resulted from the change that occurred. I think this is a problem that requires focusing on and addressing it because it affects the child's psyche." (M 002)*

The teacher needs sufficient time in order to get to know her children and their family backgrounds and the environment in order to be able to handle them appropriately. However, the constant movement of staff led to situations where teachers did not have enough time to get to know the children either because of their arrival in the middle of the semester or because the mandated teacher was unable to deal with the children.

Therefore, the personalities of the kindergarten teachers in general matter, whether they are delegated or not, young or old, able to understand the characteristics of children's development and their ability to bear their problems such as aggression or gossip, hyperkinesia, and so on, make a difference in winning the confidence of children at that level. Further, teachers' feelings of frustration and lack of job security coupled with their sense of anxiety in terms of the uncertainties at the kindergarten level usually resulted in the absence of many teachers and consequently led to the non-attendance of children as well. Quite clearly, the effects of arbitrary teacher transfer come into play with undesirable consequences in the overall strategic direction of kindergartens. A participant's view clarifies the challenges teachers face:

*"The biggest obstacle for principals is that the cadres of workers that are with them are unstable, and at any time they can be changed, which does not help us as principals to establish strong and good relations with the teachers or the educational staff as a whole" (Pr 024)*

It came to light that the transfer of staff is not limited to teachers only, but that there is equally a constant reassignment of kindergarten principals as well, which impedes planning for kindergartens. One of the principals indicated that the

*"Principal of the kindergarten has been changed four times in one year." (Pr 028)*

The large number of changes in the kindergarten administration, teachers and workers impeded the attainment of the strategic direction goals of the kindergartens. The large number of changes was accompanied by yet another obstruction that may have adversely affected the kindergarten

planning process, namely the small number of the educational and administrative staff left to effectively manage the kindergartens, particularly the large kindergarten buildings and the increase in the enrolment of children. In such situations, principals distributed teachers between classes, which constituted an additional burden for them to follow-up, teach and care for the children; hence, teachers did not have an opportunity to create or participate in the operationalisation of the kindergarten plans. Participant (Pr 08) dilated further on the issue of understaffing in her comments:

*“The lack of the educational staff in kindergartens increases the teachers’ class size to 30 children per semester, whereas the organisational guide specifies 15 children for the teacher, which results in the teacher’s inability to accomplish her job assignments; and the large number of children creates a gap in the relationship between the teacher and the children due to her inability to focus on them.” (Pr 08)*

With the increase in the number of children and the consequent increase in class sizes against the backdrop of the lack of educational staff, the burden on principals increased, particularly occupying them with tasks that were beneficial to neither the educational establishment nor the children and the educational process. Thus, these kept them away from their main roles in developing education, creativity and innovation. The plans may have been good, but the principals and teachers were torn between routine work and professional pressures, and with the increase in the number of children as well as their overcrowding in small classes, the ability of teachers to be creative and productive became limited, especially with principals demanding curricula activities that must be documented on paper and practice. The effects of an overburdening routine work are fatigue and absenteeism, adding to their sense of frustration at the lack of concrete incentives, which eventually affected their performance at work and their achievement.

The next section looks at managing change within kindergartens, another obstacle that confronts any strategic initiative; therefore, challenges to the management of kindergartens' strategic processes are discussed below.

#### 6.2.4 Resistance to the change process

Resistance to change was one of the important themes that came up in the data analysis. Change, particularly, within an organisational setting is very often challenging due to the varied perspectives of people within, their interests and the comfort of operating within the status quo because change usually comes with lots of disruptions and accompanying uncertainties.

The vast majority of principals indicated that younger kindergarten teachers had a youthful spirit, and the desire and ability to change and develop more than older teachers in government schools, who did not have the desire to attend conferences and courses, and usually, were not convinced of the importance of development and change. A comment by one principal elucidated the challenges they faced:

*“With older teachers, the matter remains what it is, they’re not willing to change and do not accept change easily, especially with the lack of incentives, there is no motivation for change and planning for teachers, and that increases the lack of conviction of some teachers about the kindergarten plan and their lack of response to it.” (Pr 026)*

Going by the principals' submission, the age factor had a significant influence on the level to which teachers accepted the changes resulting from the planning since most of them, especially in government kindergartens, had been working for many years within the same system and routines. When the principals encouraged staff to change and renew their knowledge, skills and abilities based on the new kindergarten plan, they encountered some resistance from the older cadres of teachers. To all intents and purposes, they did not want to make an effort to make the plans successful. A comment from a principal highlights the difficulty of getting older staff to accept the new changes that were introduced in the planning process:

*“I cannot work alone, it takes both hands to clap, and the reality in my kindergarten is that most of the teachers are old or have had a long period working on the same system and when I ask them to change or renew their ideas based on my plan, they were not enthusiastic.” (Pr 023)*

On the other hand, many principals praised the newly graduated and young teachers because they showed a great desire for change. The principals were amazed by the knowledge they had

acquired at university. Consequently, these youthful professional cadres with renewed ideas and greater physical ability were performing the tasks and activities required of them. Change, as one principal observed was becoming to take root:

*“As it is, we are gradually moving away from our old ways.” (Pr 024)*

A principal explained the evidence of teachers' gradual acceptance of the much-needed change in her submission below:

*“In fact, I find enthusiasm and a desire for change in the newly graduated teachers from the university, many of whom are creative and have renewed ideas, and I may find it more difficult when convincing older teachers, especially when I have nothing to motivate them with.” (Pr 017)*

From participants' views, the success of a new strategic change for kindergartens in the kingdom seems to rest on the shoulders of the youthful, newly graduated cadres of teaching staff and principals. Participants believed that change usually comes along with some new responsibilities and some disruptions to existing operational activities in the school setting. The statement that follows is a teacher's view of the level of acceptance of the new order in planning:

*“I have been working in the kindergarten for fifteen years. I see that change is necessary, but we do not have enough time. We, as teachers, are committed to new tasks. I have work for the class, and I have reports that need to be filled continuously. In many meetings, the tasks required of us disrupt our work more than they benefit it.” (Tr 015)*

The situation depicted here is one of an acceptance of new ideas as important at the school level; nonetheless, the basic classroom activities, such as assigning children some exercises to do, being performed at the same time as ensuring other administrative tasks (attending meetings) and writing reports was the stark reality that teachers had to grapple with daily. In the midst of all these tasks, some teachers indicated their commitment to the change process by accepting responsibilities from their principals. Others, it appeared, had to be persuaded to comply. A teacher explained why this was so:

*"Some teachers do not see the relevance of their role in the kindergarten, but they are forced to do it by the administration."*  
(Tr 013)

The feeling of not being a part of the change process emerged when some teachers intimated their opinions were not considered in the entire process. They decried the situation where plans were imposed on them without much clarification and extended dialogue; a teacher felt marginalised in the change management process, as highlighted in her submission below.

*"In meetings, neither are we consulted, nor our opinions taken, but in many cases plans are imposed on us as orders either from the principal or in the form of urgent circulars that come to us from the top management, and even when we present our points of view, our proposals are brushed aside; we are often marginalised."* (Tr 015)

Therefore, principals should consider the needs of teachers and be convinced of their effective role in the kindergartens so as to encourage them to innovate and accomplish the important tasks that have been assigned. Undeniably, resistance to change needs to be managed for successful planning at the school level.

The section below concerns a very important factor of kindergartens, namely working with a compelling vision and mission statements. It unearthed the usual challenges confronting any change process, e.g., resistance, conflicts, confusion and conceptual misunderstandings, and the Saudi kindergarten situation is no exception.

#### 6.2.5 Staff perception of vision and mission statements

A statement of mission is an open revelation that organisations use to portray their compelling reasons for existence, and the major authoritative responsibilities and the vision describe the direction of the school in the long term (Armstrong, 2011, pp. 56-59). Within the new disposition, it is equally the responsibility of teachers to assist in setting the mission and vision for kindergartens. Unfortunately, but understandably, teachers' lack of enthusiasm to develop vision and mission statements with their related development plans for kindergartens stemmed from the fact that the concept of a vision and mission for kindergartens was not a phenomenon

that was clearly articulated and understood from the very beginning. When the researcher asked the principals about how the kindergarten vision and mission were developed, the responses of most principals were that they were not the ones who crafted the vision and mission messages. In the statement below, a principal explained how her reassignment in the middle of the school year interrupted her planning activities:

*“I was assigned to the kindergarten in the middle of the year, and before my arrival the kindergarten had no principal for two months. Therefore, when I came, I faced many problems, and the time lag did not permit me to change the vision and message for the kindergarten, but I had to contend with what was put before I came.” (Pr 033)*

Through the interviews, it became clear that most of the principals did not play a prominent role in setting the kindergarten vision and mission statements of their kindergarten, and justifiably, they were confused when asked about operationalising them in their planning activities. It appeared that a common justification was the sudden transfer of principals from one school to the other in the middle of the year, which could have prevented them from finding the time to engage staff on such important operational matters. When two principals (Pr 025) and (Pr 031) were asked about their plans and how they were related to the school's vision and mission, their opinions were as follows:

*“The vision and the message, to be honest with you, are just slogans present in the kindergarten, but the majority do not follow them or depend on them when setting the goals of their kindergartens, we set our goals according to the information available to us and according to what we are required to achieve from the administration.” (Pr 025)*

*“Certainly, when setting the goals of my plan, I make sure that they are linked to the vision and mission of the kindergarten, as we are taking steps in pursuit of it, it gives me a vision of what we want to reach in the future and therefore must be linked to the plans.” (Pr 031)*

Two contrasting views are presented here: whereas some principals accepted the challenge to engage their staff in the planning process, others stuck to their old practices. It appeared to suggest that the question of ownership was not clearly understood generally. To some, the

mission and vision idea was foreign and interfered with their operational activities. Other principals also believed that crafting vision and mission statements for their kindergartens had no bearing on setting goals.

From the perspective of teachers at the frontline of creating activities for their kindergartens, the majority noted that they were linking the goals of the kindergarten to their plans. This discrepancy evolved because many teachers did not understand what it meant and, for that matter, could not apply it to their work, notwithstanding their overriding importance in guiding teachers to create their plans. It was also observed that some teachers did not have prior training in their use to improve performance at the kindergartens. Two teachers (Tr 016) and (Tr 015) intimated their sense of loss in the statements that follow:

*“As a teacher in the kindergarten, if you ask me about the vision and mission of the kindergarten, I do not know exactly what it is. We have not been trained on the necessity of working with it. They are just slogans.” (Tr 016)*

*“In the kindergarten here, we are aware of the vision and mission of the kindergarten, but we have not discussed it or taken a close view of it, it is present, and we always repeat it, but I do not think that the goals of the kindergarten are directly related to it.” (Tr 015)*

Views of parents were solicited on the relevance of vision and mission statements in the performance of kindergartens. Most of them explained that they considered factors such as location and environment above any other. The situation seemed to suggest that the inscription of such statements on the doorposts of schools did not attract the required attention. The viewpoints expressed below clarify the opinions of mothers about the relevance of vision and mission statements at kindergartens:

*“Really, I don’t know exactly what it means by assessing a kindergarten’s mission and vision, but it isn’t the basis for me when registering my son in this kindergarten, but I don’t have another reason.” (M 001)*

*“No, neither did I look at the kindergarten vision and mission, nor did I about it when my daughter was enrolled in the kindergarten.” (M 002)*

From the responses of the participants, it was discernible to us that some principals and teachers, considered as frontlines, lacked the basic skills in the strategy implementation. Also, parents were not sensitised to the importance of the vision and mission messages, and hence their lack of interest in it when choosing a kindergarten for their children. Their only concern was to register their children in any kindergarten for several reasons that had nothing to do with the direction and goals of the kindergarten.

Summing up, it was discernible from participants' responses that the relevance of vision and mission statements was not fully grasped by principals, teachers and parents in the entire scheme of crafting out a realistic strategy for kindergartens.

The section that follows focuses on the role that internal organisational communication plays in the implementation of strategic planning at kindergartens in the Saudi context.

#### 6.2.6 Managing communication in strategy implementation

Skill is convincingly performing a specific task or activity with appropriate methods and procedures in an acceptable manner. Many teachers implemented decisions passed down from senior management, and very often they were unable to communicate with principals because decision-making is mostly their prerogative. Teachers lamented their exclusion from taking part in decisions regarding the work they do. From the submissions of many teachers, the principals lacked the ability to communicate with kindergarten workers; particularly, they lacked the skill to listen and accept the opinions of the other staff. The following views from some teachers brought the challenge of decision-making and interpersonal relationship to the fore:

*“Building and implementing the plan requires many skills that must be provided by principals. For example, the principal cannot successfully implement the plan if she does not have the skill to communicate with all workers in the kindergarten, because it is the basis for acceptance.” (Tr 019)*

*“We, teachers, need a principal who has skill in managing dialogue and meetings, because building the plan and implementing it requires our participation. Therefore, our views must be taken into account, but what happens is that the meeting is managed in a way that lacks open discussion; we are given*



*orders and we are required to work silently without objection.”*  
(Tr 020)

Training and developing staff at kindergartens is one core function of principals in a school setting. At the kindergarten level, helping staff develop the requisite skills in strategic planning and formulating goals is deemed relevant because it is the basis for all other activities to succeed. Principals noted they needed more training to develop their critical planning skills to apply to their work. A principal's argument is presented thus:

*“To be frank with you, most principals do not have the skill of planning and, we suffer a lot when formulating goals. Yes, as a principal It is the core of my work to be able to plan, but in reality, I have not mastered that.”* (Pr 020)

Many principals considered that the lack of leadership skills in leaders was the main obstacle that hindered planning development, as highlighted in the following assertion:

*“We, principals, suffer when designing plans because there are no competent top management staff that help and guide us when we're preparing the plans, as well as when implementing them. The school supervisor does not have a background on scientific foundations regarding planning and this is an obstacle for us.”*  
(Pr 011)

This opinion was also confirmed by another principal, who explained that:

*"The role of the school supervisors is limited to looking at the plan on paper only and evaluating it with the number of programmes that have been implemented, and which have not been implemented. We want a direction based on foundations that help us build our plans to be successful and effective." (Pr 024)*

Some teachers also believed that the lack of competences in senior management, as well as in school administrators, is an obstacle to planning, for example, when an administrator does not know how to use a computer or is not prepared to learn what is new. To make matters worse, there is not only a lack of competent administrative cadres, but also a poor distribution of the kindergarten administrators: some kindergartens have only two administrators, and others have one administrative assistant who may not be able to do all the work. As noted by the principal:

*“School administration is a main and primary basis for the teachers, but the senior management does not care about that.”  
(Pr 004)*

The next section highlights the issue of budgetary constraints faced by principals of kindergartens in the management of these kindergartens; even more challenging is the reality that strategic planning at that level may not be realised as it should.

#### 6.2.7 Weak financial capability of kindergartens

This section discusses a very critical aspect of the management of kindergartens, particularly the challenge of inadequate funding. Kindergartens are organisations in their own right and are managed by staff to attain the goals enshrined in their strategic plans.

Participants pointed out during interviews that it was practically impossible to operate without adequate budgetary support for schools. The majority of the kindergarten principals who were interviewed agreed that there were inadequacies in the budgets for kindergartens and that this constituted a major obstacle to their ability to implement their plans successfully. Because of the lack of financial support, principals could not accomplish much of their work. For instance, the provision of equipment to facilitate teaching and learning was severely hampered. Also, principals were not able to incentivise and reward contributors to the planning process as they struggled to keep plans on track. Statements made by two kindergarten principals (Pr 005) and (Pr 006) below indicate that budgets were directly related to the kindergarten maintenance works:

*“The most important factor and the first factor that affects our planning process in kindergarten is the budget, and if I ask any other principal other than me it will be the same answer as the budget and then the budget.” (Pr 005)*

*“Of course, the budget is the most important factor, we are without an appropriate budget, we cannot accomplish much of the work requirements because everything depends on it. For instance, we engaged in lots of activities; games or maintenance and the payment of salaries of cleaners are all necessary, and all have a significant impact on the kindergarten budget, and we discussed and asked for an increase in the budget many times, but we did not get a response.” (Pr 006)*

The kindergartens are provided with some equipment and games that require maintenance periodically in order to preserve the safety of children and to ensure the continuation of the pedagogical activities. Most principals stated that the poor budgetary allocations affect the performance of the kindergartens. The weak budgets affect not only the completion of maintenance work, but also the lack of tools and materials for children. One principal pointed out that:

*“The devices are old, such as cameras and games. The buildings are dilapidated, and the activities are few, even the favourite activities of the children are not repeated over the year, only once or twice, due to the lack of funds or a poor budget that is not sufficient for the needs of the kindergarten.” (Pr 006)*

Many principals also complained of their suffering in many situations from the delays in expanding the budget as a result of the cumbersome official procedures instituted by senior management to refurbish the buildings and other important facilities. Weak planning ramifies other issues, rendering the situation more complex than intended. In summary, shortfalls in the budgets of kindergartens led to some difficulties in managing the schools effectively. Old equipment could not be replaced, maintenance works were delayed, and teaching and learning activities were equally hampered to some extent.

The next section highlights the issue of capacity building of the critical staff who are needed to implement operational plans towards the attainment of organisational goals.

#### 6.2.8 Staff capacity building

Staff capacity building holds the key to organisational effectiveness. The nature, quality and quantity of skills available in an organisation ensure high organisational performance through an effective workforce. Consequently, for kindergartens to attain their goals, their staff should exhibit the requisite skills. Most kindergarten principals unanimously agreed that one of the most important obstacles to the application of strategic planning within kindergartens was the severe shortage of skilled staff to operationalise the concept procedurally in stages by guiding principals and teachers in its implementation. Therefore, to all intents and purposes, it is not just about organising training sessions in strategic planning for principals, teachers and other supporting staff at the kindergarten level, as noted by participants of the study, but also about

ensuring that key staff are guided through practical activities to develop the needed skills. Participants deplored the theoretical nature of training sessions they attended in the recent past and the lack of practical sessions to help them build their skills. Besides, the duration of courses was quite short and ineffective, as noted by participants. Therefore, the impact of these courses from the principals' point of view are ineffective, as they explained below:

*“In the courses, there is no clear knowledge of planning and its goals in practice. The courses that we attended are repeated and theoretical. That does not give us a clear picture of strategic planning. We need practical courses in which we develop plans and set goals and we are guided so that we can apply them carefully.” (Pr 010)*

Another principal confirmed this observation:

*“There are planning courses, but courses are useless. I see them as a waste of my time. I had to leave school and go to attend one such training, but I did not find the desired benefit. These were theoretical courses. We need training in how to set goals and translate them into plans. We need training and evaluation, not just words that we can read. There are lots of stuff in books and websites.” (Pr 011)*

According to the principals, the content of training courses was not their challenge; but many course participants complained about the duration and frequency of courses. Courses are held once in the academic year. Further, organising training when schools are in session, and the fact that training sessions were scheduled in the better part of the day and at venues many considered inconveniencing, made them disruptive. For instance, principals complained that staff participating in courses needed to be transported to distant course centres, and that constituted an additional burden. One of the principals had this to say:

*“The training courses took place during the official working hours, which hindered and delayed my work, as these courses are held every year in the same place, besides, they are far from many schools, including my school. So were which compels us not to attend because there is no transportation or lack of time to attend.” (Pr 033)*

The large volumes of routine work and the lack of incentives to whip up the enthusiasm of principals to attend training sessions were factors hindering staff from benefiting fully. These factors affected the progress and change in kindergartens from our point of view. To ask a rhetorical question: How can kindergartens develop without the active involvement of staff in prescribing training programmes? Some principals also believed that many teachers were denied the opportunity of benefiting from courses because of their limited nature. The criteria used by management in the selection of participants were also not clarified. Below are comments from teachers that confirmed the worrying situation.

*"Strategic planning courses are limited to a small number of principals and agents without teachers, which affects their performance at work." (Tr 014)*

*"Teachers often felt marginalised and had no effective role in attending these courses, therefore, they do not feel the importance of their participation in planning." (Tr 011)*

This sense of marginalisation is reflected in the performance of their duties. The setting of vision and mission statements for kindergartens requires participation by each staff member. One of the teachers explained:

*"Why put in the effort in participation when we do not have an important role to play?" (Tr 017)*

It can be argued that teachers' sense of marginalisation and their perceived lack of importance in kindergartens led to a loss of their enthusiasm to participate in training. Furthermore, the ad hoc nature of training sessions conducted by top management indicated that training was not planned in advance as kindergarten teachers were always taken unawares – a situation that hindered their active engagement with trainers. The implementation of strategic plans conflicted with normal work plans, hindering the progress of the *Rawda Plan* and leading to the consequent cancellation of some other assignments.

Also, what affected strategic planning was not only the absence of courses with appropriate content to facilitate participants' understanding of the concept, and also how to implement it in practical terms, but also the fact that there were no model plans to serve as a guide for staff in planning. Equally important was the fact that most principals thought they did not acquire

new skills from training; they explained that training sessions were quite redundant. A principal explained what they needed to make planning processes effective:

*“We are in dire need of a quality advisory plan that we can follow because the courses and training programmes do not have anything new from what we know as kindergarten principals, whether in terms of the curriculum, plans or educational means and tools, which makes the principals' experiences in planning simple surface experiences that do not contribute to the development of planning.” (Pr 012)*

In light of genuine difficulties faced by principals and teachers in creating plans, the Ministry of Education approved training courses of 150 hours duration for those who did not have a kindergarten specialisation to enable them to carry out their responsibilities. These courses not only undermined the importance of the kindergarten stage, but they also called into question the professional status of teachers who specialised in early childhood education.

This section highlighted the important facet of organisational learning, specifically the renewal of employee skills within kindergartens in the Saudi context. It revealed that training as organised within kindergartens does not bring about the expected benefits.

The section that follows examines the role of senior principals in understanding and implementing strategic plans within kindergartens.

#### 6.2.9 Top management contributions

Top management roles are clear-cut in most organisations. Management is required to offer strong leadership and support to middle-line principals. A core function of principals is to offer supervisory guidance to other employees to ensure organisational goals are attained. Therefore, for kindergartens to steer a strategic direction, senior management should show the way.

Senior management contributed immensely to the planning process by providing training for the kindergarten teams, as mentioned earlier; however, training sessions were short and for this reason, participants did not have sufficient time to develop their planning skills. For such training sessions, the theoretical emphasis outweighed the practical application of planning principles. Several principals also mentioned that the contributions of top management are

usually focused on repetitive routines that are often a waste of time from their point of view. Below is a principal's observation to help clarify the situation further:

*“These actions do not leave room for creativity or development or leave time to attend courses in training and planning, and these are actions that top management requests to prevent them only without any benefit from them, which affects the implementation and success of planning.” (Pr 022)*

One kindergarten principal indicated that a top management official decided to order the demolition of a wall between a kindergarten and an elementary school in order to expand the children's playground without realising that the decision put the kindergarten children at risk. Notwithstanding the danger such a decision posed, it was implemented against popular opinion. Therefore, many kindergarten principals and teachers indicated that the top management is sometimes not flexible in their decision-making and staff are compelled to comply with their routine demands. A kindergarten principal argued passionately how she felt in the following statement:

*“We suffer from the centrality of senior management in developing plans. As kindergarten principal, my views are not considered but I am aware of the reality and nature of my school and some of the plans are not appropriate for the kindergarten environment also I am more familiar with and understand the kindergarten needs more than senior management, and the failure not to take our opinions as kindergarten principals in the design of plans has resulted in the lack of coordination and inconsistency between our programmes and plans.” (Pr 05)*

Therefore, the vast majority of principals indicated that poor planning by senior management was evident in the lack of involvement of principals in strategic planning; as the case usually is, they were surprised at the sudden decisions taken without considering their opinions on matters of crucial importance. Also, the non-responsiveness of senior management to the suggestions of principals and teachers was a hindrance in the attainment of the desired change.

Many principals and teachers also indicated that the senior management of kindergartens lacked proper planning in terms of assigning teachers and administrators to kindergartens; allocations were also not based on class size and the needs of schools. In principle, administrative agents or assistants were assigned to schools based on the increase in the number

of classes and children. Planning was equally affected as a result of inadequate supervisory arrangements. One kindergarten principal stated the difficulties they encountered:

*“In my kindergarten, I have seven classes that are supervised by only two administrative assistants. This causes work pressure and does not allow us to change or develop, besides that the kindergarten administration does not meet the kindergarten needs and requirements.” (Pr 026)*

Some principals also mentioned that senior management did not exploit the available resources adequately; as they indicated, there is an activity hour at the end of school hours, but it is not activated or put to good use. Very often children are left in the yard without supervision at the mercy of very hot weather, and in some instances, children remain seated in the classrooms. Just as the principals had opinions and reservations about the role of senior management in kindergartens, teachers also had comments about this; the majority of them indicated as follows:

*“We implement decisions that are not feasible but we are forced to implement them all the same, even if we are not convinced about them because they are decisions imposed on everyone, and whoever is put in place by an administrative person who has never taught or worked in kindergarten, does not know their psychology because they have never experienced the situation.” (Tr 018)*

Regarding management supervisors and their influence on the planning process, school supervisors in general and kindergarten supervisors in particular play a vital role in directing the progress of the educational and administrative processes. Therefore, the kindergarten supervisor should be knowledgeable and familiar with the rules and principles of planning so that they can guide the planning process and evaluate the performance of principals. The reality about performance assessments at that level was that principals determined their own criteria; for example, supervisors focused primarily on records (papers, files) that had no bearing on the progress of planning and its effects on kindergarten children. It seemed to suggest from the experience that supervisors followed operational plans only in theory. A principal (Pr 013) made the observation below:



*“The supervisor comes only once, in order to sign the records and papers without directing the plan or specifying its pros and cons because they are usually in a hurry, as each supervisor supervises five kindergartens.” (Pr 013)*

Going by this assertion, planning efforts at kindergartens lacked the needed support from senior management. Principals expected concrete feedback from supervisors on the operational challenges of planning and to offer guidance; however, it turned out that they were rather absorbed in meeting the routine demands of their jobs; for instance, the greatest attention was focused on records and other forms of paperwork. The accumulated effect of the over-emphasis on paperwork resulted in a stockpile of official documents to be summarised into one or two files by principals. Hereby, one principal noted that:

*“The kindergartens of Makkah are full of paper” (Pr 016)*

This clearly paints the picture of an office environment with stockpiles of *paper*, whereby the greatest focus of the supervisors is to work on them. In this regard, concerning supervisors’ interest in following up routine work, one principal noted:

*“The superiors insist that some routine work wasted the time and effort of the kindergarten workers, while it has no benefit and creates piles of paper without relevance.” (Pr 028)*

The tedium associated with administrative work is made reference to and, as she stated, it is of little benefit to the development of kindergartens. Another principal also made the following comment on a supervisor’s visit to a kindergarten:

*“The supervisor's visit to the kindergarten is done hastily; it is for a superficial view of the business, without attention to planning or development.” (Pr 018)*

For instance, attendance sheets were closely monitored for data. Attendance for each child was captured on a card, and that totalled thirty cards for a month, which generated stacks of cards over time. Perhaps, a more cost and time-effective method could have been the recording of children absent from school on one card specifying the day and month, as a practical measure to prevent creating heaps of paper in kindergartens. Many principals also complained that some supervisors interfered in the work of principals’ tasks that took time and effort to accomplish, especially with regards to plans and programmes. In situations where superintendents rejected

programmes that the kindergarten principals deemed appropriate in light of the environmental realities of kindergartens, one of the principals explained that there were conflicting views between principals and supervisors:

*“Supervisors imposing their contrary opinions creates inconsistency and anarchy in the work, which frustrates the principal and makes her feel that her time and effort are not appreciated.” (Pr 029)*

Similarly, at the level of supervisors of kindergartens, there were indications of discordance in instructions they gave out to principals; while some determined which tasks to be implemented, others came to oppose the earlier instructions. Naturally, in such conditions chaos is created at work and principals find themselves at a loss. And when the views of teachers were solicited regarding this matter, the majority noted that the supervisors lacked the flexibility to accept opinions. There was the absence of common ground among supervisors since in the application of principles and procedures, everyone had their own ideas about what was appropriate. So, some teachers stated that this is one of the most important reasons why they did not easily accept the changes resulting from planning because the ideas came from senior management supervisors who were fault-finding. Supervisors are powerful, authoritative and subjective, believing only in their own opinions. Their visits to kindergartens created anxiety and stress among teachers. Moreover, principals and teachers indicated that some supervisors did not give useful guidance to them on implementing the kindergarten plans. A principal recounted her ordeal on the job with regards to training as follows:

*“I have been following the same plan and the same routine without being identified or trained for years.” (Pr 029)*

This seems to suggest that not all staff benefit from training on designing operational plans in line with the strategic imperatives for kindergartens. Here, most principals and teachers agreed that generally the plans used by senior management were old, repetitive, and unhelpful, as one of the teachers stated:

*“The plans are repetitive and routine, and they do not have the positive effect we aspire to” (Pr 030)*

Quite clearly, the challenge was one of the operational conflicts coming from old and new ideas in the system. Another challenge raised by a principal was the systemic inefficiencies in the

education sector generally that equally affected the kindergartens; their most urgent needs were not heeded to most times, and even if they were met, it took such a long time that the actions were practically redundant. The comments of participants Pr 030 and Pr 031 illuminate the situation further:

*“There is a gap between the kindergarten administration and the higher management due to the slow manner in which senior management responds to the kindergarten's problems; feedback may take months or years that is even after writing many letters and going through many long routine procedures.” (Pr 030)*

*“If the kindergarten sometimes needs the participation of parents in the kindergarten planning and development process, we need permission from the top management and a permit that takes a long time, and impedes their participation in many times, and it is not implemented to delay obtaining approval despite its importance for the kindergarten and children.” (Pr 031)*

From the principal's statement, bureaucracy seems to be one of the key obstacles to the effective management of kindergartens. It manifests itself subtly in the operations of schools through various rules and regulations, and oftentimes overt laxity on the part of top officials at the Ministry of Education.

To sum up, the section delved into the top management actions in the implementation of strategic plans; largely, it emerged that the work of principals, teachers and other essential staff in kindergartens was severely constrained based on the views of the participants during field interviews. To a large extent, senior management needed to focus more to help the key staff of kindergartens develop skills in strategic planning because the success of kindergartens in the Kingdom depends largely on the development of the strategic capabilities of key stakeholders.

The next section looks at the Saudi culture and how it impacts strategic planning at the kindergarten level.

#### 6.2.10 The cultural influence of society on planning

The culture of a society plays an essential role in the strategic planning process in terms of setting goals, designing the plan, and implementing it as well as in terms of the thoughts, world views and behaviours of people (Vong and Li 2016). Culture equally influences the

effectiveness of families and social partnerships from parents to community institutions and schools, particularly in the way they are organised and function. Therefore, kindergartens are influenced by the culture in which they are situated (Vong and Li 2016).

Many participants complained about the lack of cooperation of parents, which manifested in their low levels of interest and participation in the kindergarten activities; even the educated ones exhibited a total lack of awareness in matters concerning their children's well-being at school. A principal at one of the kindergartens commented on the importance of societal culture on kindergarten activities:

*“The culture of society as a whole and the minds of parents also underestimate the importance of the kindergarten stage and lack awareness of the importance of early childhood and the importance of planning for kindergarten.” (Pr 033)*

Many principals stated that parents saw kindergartens as just places for children to play and not places where children acquired experiences through interactions with others. Children build life skills and become familiar with the rudiments of reading and writing. One principal's explanation buttresses this point:

*“Parents of children do not give the stage to irrigate children that importance and have no idea about the kindergarten classes nor even the nature of the activities in which they are carried through, which affects the success of planning in my kindergarten.” (Pr 023)*

Planning was not taken seriously by some mothers as an activity that impacted positively on the lives of their children, although a few informed mothers had a different opinion. Such mothers considered the kindergarten as a place not only for playing with others, but equally a place for education and personality development and a foundation for the educational stages that follow later in life. Therefore, principals believed that some mothers limited their participation to kindergarten activities to attendance only and did not actively engage with teachers and principals by giving suggestions to improve the learning conditions within kindergartens. This was because many mothers only took their children to be admitted to kindergarten in order for them to continue the following year. According to the regulations of the Ministry of Education a child must spend two years in kindergarten before they are enrolled

in school, and this for them was the main reason. Kindergarten departments tried to sensitise parents to the personal hygiene and nutrition needs of their children through sensitisation campaigns that were held in kindergartens as part of family and community partnerships and awareness activities. This resulted, as the principals in kindergartens believed, in convincing a few parents of the importance of the partnership between them and the kindergarten principals in the form of meetings that discussed the disorders and problems of children such as autism, hyperactivity and other learning disorders.

At these sensitisation meetings, some principals were keen to educate mothers about the problems of their children. In some cases, most of them were not aware of the presence of such health conditions in their children, let alone understood or responded to these problems. Many of them did not want to admit that their children suffered from any health problems. The matter was not only limited to the kindergarten principals, and mothers or guardians were also concerned with the psychological or behavioural problems of their children. In fact, some principals involved parents by conducting surveys with questionnaires that revolved around the extent to which kindergartens discover children's hobbies and talents, aiming to help them rediscover their children.

Therefore, it appears that the participation of the parents was limited to what concerned their children only, as some principals had not been informed of the changes and development that the kindergartens are ongoing in terms of goals, implementation and evaluation. Regarding this, one principal intimated:

*“There is no parental involvement at any stage of the planning.”*  
similarly, another principal concludes: *“I do not think that parents have a desire to participate in the plans, so they are only consulted about their children.” (Pr 024)*

However, there were a few mothers interested in participating in one stage of strategic planning, which was the stage of setting goals for the kindergarten plan; as one of the mothers equally noted:

*“It is the basis and it is the most important stage in planning. I hope there will be an opinion or a role in it.” (M 006)*

Participation of mothers in meetings organised by the administration allowed principals to obtain the views and suggestions of the mothers for the benefit of their children in the kindergartens. Despite mothers' involvement in the very important first step in planning, that of setting the goals of the kindergartens and contributing to their implementation, many of the parents refused to participate in the activities of the kindergartens for financial reasons; some were worried about the financial commitments such activities entailed. Here, a kindergarten principal stated:

*“Many parents refuse financial costs and say that the nursery is governmental, and we are not obligated to spend on it because the official is the government and not us.” (Pr 020)*

The fear of mothers incurring costs in the education of their children increased their lack of participation in the kindergarten plans and activities; hence, there were some manifestations of poor planning in kindergartens. As one of the mothers observed, mothers are sometimes assigned some activities by teachers to assist their children to perform, and those activities involved some expenditure borne by parents. That notwithstanding, sometimes the activities are planned by schools without warning mothers – a situation some mothers or parents considered unhelpful. Participants noted that such situations came up because teachers may not have informed the principal of the activity or may have assigned another class teacher to do it. Indeed, the communication lapses resulted in material losses for parents and emotional stress for children because they were not able to attend the activity despite their preparation and willingness to participate. To make matters worse too, some kindergartens-imposed restrictions on mothers in that only those who participated in an activity were allowed to attend with their children, which represented psychological trauma for those children whose parents could not attend due to non-participation. A mother expressed her concern at a focus group discussion in the statement that follows:

*“On the next day of activity, pictures of activities are downloaded in kindergartens, and only children whose parents were involved financially are photographed, and this affects our children’s psyche.” (M 008)*

With regards to kindergartens in the villages, the principals stated that parental awareness was increasing, which demanded sustaining it and also sensitising parents about the importance of

early childhood education and how to deal with it because many children in the villages suffer from the cruelty of parents. A teacher made the following observation:

*“I note in some of the children here the cruelty of the parents in dealing with them, and this is evident through their behaviours with us as teachers or with other children.” (Tr 011)*

Also, another teacher shed more light on the lack of knowledge of parents in dealing with the special needs of children at the kindergarten stage:

*“Here in the village we have a lack of awareness and understanding of the stage of early childhood and methods of dealing with the different stages of their development, and we notice this in children as well when discussing with mothers.” (Tr 020)*

Although one community’s culture applies to villages and cities, the form of community participation in villages differs from what pertains to cities. Community participation in the countryside is concentrated on what is available in these villages through the exhibitions of productive families; for example, civil society participation is carried out through book fairs and donations of clothes and tools. The kindergarten principals generally believed that society’s culture still hinders planning when the culture takes precedence overcomes and personal interests triumph over the public interest. The culture influences planning and thus hinders progress and development. Two principals’ comments on the situation are presented below:

*“If we limit planning to a year, we will see its negative impact in the coming years. Planning is for the public interest and not for the private interest, which greatly affects the mediation planning. Sometimes the kindergarten can only bear a certain number of children, but we have to accept a greater number because we receive a call from the public administration that orders us to accept a child in that case we cannot refuse and have to accept.” (Pr 025)*

*“Wasta is a pervasive problem in society and not only in kindergartens. We suffer from it when accepting children, which puts us in an enviable position with the rest of the families whose children were rejected, we waste a lot of time to justify them and*

*apologise and it is disturbing us at the beginning of each year to focus on our plans and goals and ways to achieve them.” (Pr 023)*

Although the culture of society is still dependent on *wasta*, the position of some kindergarten principals was different, as one of the principals argued in the following submission:

*“We as principals understand the difference between *wasta* and taking into account the working conditions and critical situations of employees who do not find a place for their child in kindergarten after the registration has ended due to their move from one workplace to another, but the community does not understand that the position of the principal here from the *wasta* where the suffering and troubles of the principal do not stop from the culture of society in particular Towards *wasta*.” (Pr 076)*

To sum up, culture, as discussed above, has some influence on how important matters of strategic planning are perceived by parents, who are strategic partners of kindergartens in the Kingdom. It was observed that the active participation and commitment of parents to the strategic processes was still lower than expected.

### 6.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we reviewed the challenges that strategic planning faces and the most important factors affecting it through the different views of principals and teachers in kindergartens. These were discussed under the following: physical capabilities of kindergartens, training courses, and the extent to which teachers accepted the changes resulting from strategic planning and the effectiveness of management's contribution notwithstanding the fact that kindergartens have strengths and weaknesses in the planning process. Also, the role of the cultural influence of society and the awareness of parents about the importance of kindergarten and early childhood was discussed. Essentially, the key findings of this chapter are that bureaucracy continues to be the main factor impeding the rapid change envisaged for kindergartens in the study context. Also, low budgetary allocations to kindergartens continue to hinder teaching and learning activities in classrooms across a wide range of schools in the study area. Furthermore, building staff capacity is seen as critical to the performance of kindergartens; without this, the set goals may never be achieved. Finally, communication by top management on crucial matters such as strategic planning was a weak link in the implementation process.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ROLE OF KINDERGARTEN PRINCIPALS IN APPLYING STRATEGIC PLANNING

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the fourth research question addressing kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia, and the results presented here are answers to the core interview questions: (i) To what extent do the principals facilitate the use of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia? Kindergarten principals play a vital role when it comes to planning, particularly in terms of setting appropriate goals and methods of implementation, along with the subsequent follow-up and evaluation. Therefore, a kindergarten principal's awareness of the importance of strategic planning is reflected in her own performance, as well as that of her staff, teachers, and workers.

Additionally, in order to ensure the success of her strategic planning, a kindergarten principal requires the skills and competencies to implement such plans, as well as the ability to draw up the plans themselves. Therefore, this requires senior management to delegate to her the authority and incentives to succeed in designing and implementing strategic planning to its fullest extent. This chapter examines the skills and experience required of kindergarten principals to enable them to design and implement effective plans, as well as the powers of the kindergarten principal. These factors are examined from the point of view of both principals and teachers.

### 7.2 Choosing a Planning Team

Planning is a collective process requiring the establishment of an appropriate team. The kindergarten principals in this current study described their selection method for the setting up of such teams as follows:

*“I hold a meeting with the teachers and administrators in the kindergarten. I divide the work according to their capabilities, capabilities and desires. For example, a teacher who is part of the committee responsible for Islamic awareness, or another who is skilled in First Aid, tend to be placed within the Security and Safety Committee, and so on. I then clarify the work they are*

*required to accomplish, and I also help them by undertaking the role of committee supervisor.” (Pr 006)*

*“I take a number of aspects into account when choosing a team. I choose distinguished older teachers to benefit from their considerable experience, as well as newly appointed teachers in order to benefit from their renewed ideas. So, I need to be careful when choosing the team to ensure has a range of age and experience.” (Pr 009)*

*“With regard to choosing a team, the principal identifies, and then meets with, the participating members. Sometimes these may be individual meetings with each committee, rather than fully understanding, and then participating in the plan. But the meeting takes place with each team and determines the required tasks.” (Pr 007)*

Further, a teacher added that:

*“At the beginning of the year, there is usually a meeting to create a working team and to establish what is required of us, but not to discuss our wishes and opinions. Rather, the principal is usually the one who decides, using the pretext that there is not enough time for discussion or voting. This means she may place a teacher as part of a committee she is unwilling to join or does not agree with the views of its members.” (Pr 005)*

Another interjected by noting that:

*“I disagree with her because if teachers can choose their own teams, this will generate problems for the principal as each teacher has a different motive. Maybe she wants to only take on simple work, or she wants to rely on working with a specific committee. It’s then a waste of time asking the teachers about which committee they wish to join and the work they wish to do. It may also cause partisanism between the teachers and the principal, as some may believe that the administration favours one teacher over another.” (Pr 010)*

The above comments confirm that the kindergarten principal tends to be responsible for the selection of work teams, based on her knowledge of each teacher. However, a number of teachers clearly considered that the methods used by principals for selecting such teams are

often inappropriate for a number of reasons; for instance, selected team members are unable to work in a harmonious fashion, with some being unwilling to join that particular team. However, others acknowledged that it was both practical and appropriate for the principal to make the choice of work teams, particularly as it could prove a lengthy process if the teachers were given the freedom to choose, which could also generate additional issues due to each teacher wishing to join the same team. When the researcher asked the teachers about the role of the principal in the strategic planning process, their opinions were as follows:

*“The principal distributes tasks and discusses aspects of the plan with us, and also carries out the monitoring and evaluation process.” (Tr 001)*

*“The principal holds a meeting in which the required tasks are distributed. This is based on what the principal deems appropriate, as she is the one who decides the tasks and responsibilities for each of us, as well as giving us directions. In addition, there is another team responsible for the follow-up and evaluation of our work.” (Tr 003)*

*“With regard to choosing a team, the principal identifies the participating members and holds meetings with them. Sometimes these meetings may be individual ones for each committee. This is not to fully understand and then participate in the entire plan, but the meeting takes place with each team and determines its specific tasks.” (Tr 009)*

### 7.3 Experience and Skills

Both the kindergarten principals and teachers stressed that one of the most important tasks facing a principal is to provide a calm and reassuring environment. This can be achieved through sympathetic supervision of all of their employees, including promoting confidence and giving praise and thanks, as well as respecting their opinions. This can establish a family atmosphere promoting a feeling of security and thus leading to high-quality work.

*“We as principals work hard to provide a safe environment for kindergarten workers, because we know this will have an impact on the educational progress of the kindergarten in general.” (Pr 012)*

A number of teachers raised the issue of principals being appointed without their knowledge. They also noted that some of these principals had little understanding of management and had no real wish to undertake the position, recognising that they did not have the experience and dedication required of a principal. Such individuals were unable to manage their kindergartens; they were undertaking only basic tasks and avoiding anything that required any additional effort, including planning and development. In addition, they stated that they informed their supervisors that they had been forced to take the position and had no wish to undertake this work but were told that had no choice in the matter. One of the principals noted:

*“The kindergarten principal has imposed on me many burdens, requirements and responsibilities. I have been working as a principal in the kindergarten for three months. This was a position I was given against my wishes and without being consulted. I feel that administration is an art requiring skills and experience I haven’t yet acquired. As soon as I was appointed, I informed senior management that I did not have sufficient experience and information to manage the kindergarten. But their only response was that I should make an attempt to fulfil the role because there was no alternative. So, I am trying as hard as I can to make this work.” (Pr 012)*

The responses of the previous principals indicate their awareness of the importance of their role and its significant impact on the success of their kindergartens. However, the majority highlighted the issue of arbitrary appointment without consultation, despite their lack of sufficient experience. They stated that they found this an obstacle facilitating the strategic planning process. They also noted that their unwillingness to undertake the role, combined with their lack of experience, tended to result in a preoccupation with administrative matters that took up much of their time. This subsequently impacted their ability to be creative, as well as to undertake innovation and planning, resulting in being focused simply on issues of attendance and absence and managing the kindergarten in a traditional manner. However, they recognized that the ability to innovate and plan is an important characteristic required of a kindergarten principal, particularly for ensuring successful programs and development. This aspect was supported by a comment from one of the principals:

*“It is important that headmasters in general, and particularly those of kindergartens demonstrate some characteristics; one of*

*the most important being the ability to innovate, develop and plan. But what we have at the moment is that many principals lack such skills which therefore hinders their administrative performance. When I was appointed as a kindergarten principal, I tried hard to fulfil requests from both the kindergarten and senior management. In order to develop the skills required for effective planning, I am now improving my abilities through reading and watching programmes on YouTube. But to be honest with you, I feel that this is not enough.” (Pr 022)*

The majority of the principals also believed in the importance of human relationships within kindergartens.

*“I strive to develop the skills of communication and human relations between myself and all workers in the kindergarten.”  
(Pr 023)*

On the other hand, some principals complained of difficulties in being able to communicate with or comprehend the wishes of teachers or kindergarten staff because they were required to ensure they did more than simply complete their work. The principals found themselves being responsible for every aspect of their kindergartens. A principal noted:

*“In fact, I believe that there are important skills that can help the Principal of Kindergarten Development when it comes to planning and development, one of the most important being an ability to develop good relationships. Some teachers can understand my approach to the assessment of a particular issue and help me with other teachers who may be biased against my actions without understanding the reasons. I may be dealing with a health problem or a family problem among my staff, but some teachers may not understand, and may therefore incite other teachers to oppose me, or they may use the matter to file a complaint against me to the senior management. I therefore find this a complex issue.” (Pr 011)*

On the other hand, when the teachers were asked to identify the most important skills necessary to enable kindergarten principals to implement strategic planning, their answers were as follows:

*“Principals need many skills in order to be able to apply strategic planning in a kindergarten, one of the most important*

*is communication between those working there and taking into account their individual circumstances. We work in the kindergarten and outside it, and we pay from our pockets, and in most cases, we are assigned tasks that are not within our competence.” (Tr 014)*

*“In my view, I see that principals need many skills, the most important being the skill of participating and communicating with us as teachers, so that we feel valued and that our opinions are considered important, without regard for our circumstances ”. (Tr 011)*

Another teacher added that:

*“Principals have insufficient understanding of planning. Personally speaking, I have a background in planning and how to draw up plans, but to be frank with you, this is not true of the kindergarten principal. I don’t see that what she does is important, but it tends to be work she is required to do in order to generate reports. The goals that are set have nothing to do with any kind of vision or message related to the running of a kindergarten, so how can you succeed and implement such requirements correctly?” (Pr 024)*

The above statement indicates differences in the viewpoints between principals and teachers, with each side considering they are prevented from contributing to or participating in planning activities. They, therefore, insist on relinquishing responsibility, while attempting to carry out the required work with what is available and appropriate for the current situation, so that principals can complete their paperwork. Despite being required to take part in planning, the teachers are unwilling to participate due to principals’ style and attitude. Most of the principals and teachers considered that successful planning requires the ability to be creative and innovative and to develop an advanced programme, facilitating an improvement in the kindergarten’s productivity and progress. Two of the principals noted that:

“Strategic planning largely depends on creativity and innovation. As I mentioned to you earlier, there are various aspects that govern a kindergarten, such as the budget and the number of employees, and it therefore requires the principal to be innovative in order to balance between what is available and what can be accomplished. However, the result is often a large number

of complaints from principals lacking in focus and creativity. They then stand idly by, under the pretext of being constrained from acting by circumstances.” (Pr 026)

*“I think that creativity and innovation in planning are very important, so that I, as principal, can develop my plan in light of the available conditions and capabilities.” (Pr 021)*

The teachers confirmed the importance of providing creativity and innovation to facilitate appropriate planning:

*“Principals need to be trained in the skills of creativity and innovation. We suffer from stagnation in terms of plans and goals. Most of these are repeated, and even renewed, from a previous era. This means they have not been examined and can therefore prove a burden, hindering rather than benefitting our work.” (Tr 017)*

*“I consider that in this kindergarten, our plans are developed, and the principal has a clear impact on their success.” (Tr 018)*

The above quotes highlight the importance of developing the skills of creativity and innovation enabling kindergartens to successfully implement strategic planning. In addition, the responses of the participants indicate the importance of effective decision-making and financial planning. As noted earlier, this is related to a number of important skills required by kindergarten principals, i.e. flexibility and effectiveness in various situations. Strategic planning depends on a number of aspects, including the problems being experienced by the children along with community partnerships. Many of the teachers observed that one of the basic skills for applying strategic planning (which they noted as lacking in many principals), is the ability to make decisions when faced with any issues that may arise, as indicated in the following responses:

*“One of the basic skills that principals need is the ability to make decisions. It is important for the principal to be able to take responsibility and make the appropriate decision or they will not be able to accomplish their planning goals.” (Tr 019)*

*“The plans we are developing require taking many decisions and being flexible in order to achieve our goals. Such decision-making skills need a principal with experience and confidence, because any delays or hesitation may disrupt the plans.” (Tr013)*

*"Strategic planning also needs the skill of decision-making, as planning includes many goals, stages and steps. The main motivator is the principal, so if the principal is weak and unable to make a decision, not only will the plans be disrupted, also the running of the kindergarten. We are governed by an administration experiencing many restrictions, but the principal should be able to distinguish between what is permitted and what is not, in order to properly make her decisions." (Tr 014)*

The teachers' responses supported those of the principals, noting decision-making as a vital skill, one that demands a principal to have a strong personality, as indicated below:

*"The previous kindergarten principal was very hesitant. When we wanted her to solve a problem or situation for us, whether or not it was related to planning, she was unable to act until she had contacted senior management. She then waited for their response, even though these were matters under her control. She evaded her responsibilities, which had a negative impact on us as teachers and on our goals and plans in general. This experience has led me to believe that the principal should be capable of taking responsibility to make decisions until she develops her own abilities and achieves her goals." (Pr 025)*

Another teacher added that she stressed the importance of managerial decision-making skills:

*"The situation was so tiring that we stopped trying to enter into a discussion with her because she would never seek to find a solution or make an appropriate decision. Her response was always that she had to obey commands from her superiors, and she had no power to resolve the issue until she had consulted senior management, or that she was waiting until the supervisor's visit to kindergarten to take her opinion and gain her approval." (Tr 017)*

The answers given by the principals and the teachers in this study demonstrate the importance of providing principals with decision-making skills in order to ensure a successful implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools. The answers of the participants during the interviews also revealed the importance of the principal being able to act as a leader in terms of both theoretical and practical aspects. Furthermore, from the theoretical side, the kindergarten principal needs to be flexible and familiar with any innovation concerning



leadership and administrative matters, as this is important to take advantage of the experiences of others. Excerpts of some of the participants' comments are presented below:

*"It is important for the kindergarten leader to be knowledgeable and well-educated, with a high level of leadership ability. One of the most important demands of a principal is to possess leader qualities in terms of her ability to motivate as well as to enjoy the art of effectively managing the work team to enable them to successfully achieve their goals." (Pr 029)*

*"It is important, according to my experience that the principal is not only focused on administrative aspects, but that she is directed, guided, cooperative and understanding. That is, she has the right leadership qualities. But I have to be honest with you, this only contributes to the success of the kindergarten outputs as a whole." (Tr 013)*

The teachers, therefore, viewed planning as requiring an empowered leader, one familiar with any innovations that may arise. They considered that a leader should not simply depend on the available courses but develop herself to benefit her school and ensure the success of her vision. One of the principals highlighted the significance of a kindergarten principal being not only familiar with books on leadership and the art of management, but also all the regulations related to kindergarten administration. This can prevent any unexpected barriers arising during the drawing up or implementation of work plans. In addition, the principal should be able to ensure that her opinions are considered by senior management.

On the practical side, the vast majority of principals were seen as only proving effective when they had previous experience of leadership. This was generally seen as a result of the career progression from being a teacher to working as a principal, or from agency to management. Considerable management experience was also viewed as playing an important role in ensuring that the knowledge and skills of a principal are put to good use. This is due to the transition from teacher to principal potentially resulting in many issues that can arise from a lack of management experience, as stated by one of the principals:

*"In some schools, due to an urgent need arising, a teacher can be suddenly assigned to administration. This teacher may also only have recently joined the profession and therefore has insufficient experience and knowledge when it comes to*

*management, which can cause many problems. It is better for an individual to graduate, as this gives her an opportunity to understand the nature of the school and its requirements. Then I can appoint her as an agent until she becomes receptive and understanding of the administrative position and only then appointed as a principal. I think that saves a lot of effort not only for the principal but also the supervisor.” (Pr 023)*

When it comes to the difficulties faced by principals during the implementation of the planning process, most of the principals stated that if they encountered an obstacle during the implementation of planning in the kindergarten, they either postponed the relevant programme until the following year (as their workload leaves them within sufficient time to search for solutions) or are forced to cancel it altogether. One of the principals noted:

*“Often, I encounter problems during the implementation of the plan and according to the problem, I deal with it. If it is simple and solving it does not require much time and effort, I try to resolve it. But if it takes more effort, I transfer it to the following year.” (Pr 007)*

This was confirmed by another principal, who noted that:

*“In the event that the implementation of a plan results in difficulties, I tend to cancel the programme, because it may generate problems in other areas. I have to, otherwise, I would have to delay other work in order to devote myself to solving the problem. This results in the best solution being cancelling it altogether.” (Pr 024)*

Only a small number of principals stated that they would hold an emergency meeting to solve the problem as soon as it occurred, as indicated by one of the principals:

*“My way of facing the problems that may arise during the implementation of planning is to hold a meeting with the committee responsible in order to find out the reasons and discuss possible solutions, then decides what must be done.” (Pr 007)*

Following a review of the different experiences and skills required by a kindergarten leader, as highlighted in the interviews, the researcher identified the most important skills necessary for

the success of the planning and implementation process. This concerns firstly, planning skills enabling the implementation of a strategic plan for kindergarten, and secondly, the ability to set objectives and measure the outcomes in order to judge their educational, administrative and environmental effectiveness. This demands that a kindergarten principal draws up a precise and comprehensive strategic plan, one capable of overcoming any unfavourable conditions (i.e. material deficiencies or an unhealthy environment), along with an ability to exploit its capabilities. In addition, it is important that the principal should be able to adapt to the possibilities of her kindergarten, and thus overcome the restrictions of her financial and human resources, in order to ensure optimal budget distribution to benefit children in the first place, along with cooperation from parents and the establishment of training courses.

Furthermore, the vast majority of kindergarten principals agreed that they tended to lack previous experiences in the field of planning, including due to not having specialised in kindergarten teaching as a career. They considered such specialization as important for acquiring experience of children in early childhood, particularly in terms of their developmental characteristics and any problems that may arise. They also agreed on the importance of specializing in kindergarten administration, in order to facilitate the successful implementation of strategic planning.

#### 7.4 Administration Power

Administrative power refers to the process of an official granting his/her subordinates the necessary authority to assist in making organisational decisions, as well as to give them the flexibility and freedom to achieve the organisation's goals. In order to understand the reality of strategic planning in the kindergarten, it is vital to establish the powers granted to school principals along with their effectiveness, both from their own point of view and that of teachers. In the interviews conducted by the current researcher, many principals agreed that the powers granted to them by the senior management of kindergartens were not sufficiently codified and restricted by laws and regulations. One principal noted:

*“I cannot make any decisions about the kindergarten except after written approval from senior management. This is due to the principal lacking the power to implement the program. This can be a lengthy process, requiring considerable effort, resulting in disruption to the process of implementing the plan.” (Pr 004)*

*“Kindergarten principals suffer from administrative and routine procedures that prevent flexibility and speed, because it is not possible to implement an order in the kindergarten until it has been approved by senior management.” (Pr 001)*

Another principal noted that:

*“Principals have no actual powers, which are only set down on paper.” (Pr 015)*

The principals clearly viewed themselves as bound by the ministry’s plan, without the possibility of making any changes to the conditions and possibilities of the kindergarten. In addition, a principal added:

*“The Ministry’s plan is repeated every year, just as it is, without change or renewal.” (Pr 025)*

A principal also confirmed being obligated to implement the ministry's plan in its entirety:

*“The task of the principals, as the senior management sees it, is to implement what is dictated to them, without discussion.” (Pr 008)*

Furthermore, the principals stated that they were not permitted to change or amend the ministerial plan in the absence of approval from higher management, which is often withheld. One of the principals stated that some powers allow the kindergarten's leader to set her own plan, but that she has no powers to reject any of the existing programs, including those she is forced to implement at specific times, which may thus not permit her to replace them with her own ideas:

*“We are forced to implement many things, and this puts pressure on us as principals and can obstruct the implementation of the kindergarten plan which may be postponed or cancelled. I am also unable to discuss any of its aspects and put my point of view.” (Pr 002)*

In addition, one of the teachers stated that the authorities sometimes fail to control principals' improved powers, justifying this as follows:

*“It is better not to give the principal any further authority because we often find her an obstacle, rather than a facilitator. It is better when we follow a specific and clear system set by higher management.” (Tr 011)*

Further, other teachers added:

*“The validity is in the hands of the principals. Sometimes it impedes us as teachers, so whatever we want to achieve or when we want to implement something new, the principal can prove an obstacle to our achievement.” (Tr 015)*

*“Can you imagine that all we wanted to do was achieve something in the kindergarten, even if it was a very small achievement? The principal would tell us that she did not have the authority to permit that. We have to go through a very rigid system, and the principals make it more complicated, because they do not want to bear the responsibility for any decision or behaviour.” (Tr 013)*

On the other hand, some principals considered that they had been granted beneficial powers, but that it is important for principals to use them effectively, and not use the excuse that they cannot do anything without referring to senior management. They stated that if they continued to strive and create good ideas, they may find that the powers granted to them are beneficial rather than obstacles.

*“As a principle, I have beneficial powers. I worked hard for this. For example, after I became familiar with the educational system in place between the fourth and the sixth year of my primary school, I improved the academic achievement of my pupils by giving them surprise test questions without the teacher's knowledge, in order to establish their level. I thought this may be a beneficial innovation for kindergartens and children. Each principal can use the powers granted to her in different and innovative ways that do not conflict with existing laws and regulations.” (Pr 020)*

The responses above clarify that the majority of the teachers viewed their principals as lacking complete knowledge of the powers granted to them by higher management. This led the teachers to indicate that they did not support giving the principals powers. This may be due to the principal failing to use this authority in an appropriate manner, or that their own relationship

with the principal tended to be strained. In addition, another group considered that their principal did not wish to take responsibility for any particular decision, using the pretext that this was not within the scope of her authority.

### 7.5 Evaluation Criteria

In order for the organisation to measure the success of its plan, it needs to set evaluation criteria through which it can estimate firstly, the stage it has reached; secondly, how to respond to the plan; and thirdly, whether it needs to make changes. The strategic planning evaluation criteria are based on specific foundations aimed at assisting the administration to determine its course, with the principal being responsible for setting the standards and monitoring their achievements. When the kindergarten principals were asked whether they had standards that enabled them to understand the course of their plan, as well as the extent of its success, they gave the following responses:

*“The application of the programme is the standard. For example, if you put together a programme that follows my plan, we then implement it, if you subsequently find that the programme does not work or has no effect on children, then I know that it needs to be changed. I always know when there is a problem.” (Pr 009)*

The principals gave little information concerning the existence of criteria for evaluating their plans; however, a number gave the following responses:

*“Yes, I have criteria set out in order to evaluate my plan. As I told you previously, I have a master's degree in educational administration and so I am aware of these matters. I base my criteria on the terms, programmes and activities of my plan. I also specify the participants for whom I set the standards for each committee to evaluate, including if it does not succeed or does not implement any programme from my plan, as well as specifying the reasons for its failure. These criteria are my own, meaning that I am the one who both set them up and follow them up, while the supervisor did not ask me to show them to her and rarely sees them.” (Pr 010)*

When the teachers were asked whether they were given criteria for evaluating the plans for their kindergartens, their submissions were as follows:

*“No, there are no specific standards to my knowledge. Or they may exist, and I do not know about them. I work on the Security and Safety Committee and the only criterion that I know is a general mention in the file as to whether or not the programme was implemented. We only note the reasons why it might not have been implemented.” (Tr 015)*

*“There is a responsibility for monitoring or following up the planning implementation process in the kindergarten. She follows up on what we do for a while, but I do not know about the standards, apart from those related to teaching or through which the principal evaluates my performance in class. Other than that, I don't know.” (Tr 002)*

The above statements indicate that most of the principals and teachers agreed that in reality, kindergartens lack any evaluation criteria by which they can assess their progress and evaluate their planning. If an evaluation process is provided, it tends to be random in nature. This is in response to a desire to clarify the reasons that led a supervisor to prevent the implementation, primarily due to conforming to the wishes of the kindergarten administration rather than focusing on developing and improving the plan itself.

## 7.6 Requirements and Suggestions for Applying Strategic Planning

Before commencing this review, it is important to first differentiate between the concepts of the requirements and what proposals mean, so that the difference between them is clear going forward. *Requirements* are imperative and urgent needs to bridge the shortage in reality (Becher, 1984), and *proposals* are new and creative ideas that are proposed to make the reality better. In addition, they are ideas that result from professional experiences and practices that add reality to improve and facilitate work (Charalampos and Sara, 2006). Therefore, the requirements and suggestions made by the participants can be regarded as tools that, if achieved, will change and improve reality for the better.

### 7.6.1 Strategic planning requirements from the perspective of kindergarten principals and teachers

The first major demand identified by the kindergarten principals and teachers was the need to focus on the educational and practical processes of the child and to care for their psychological,

emotional, physical, sensory, mental, social, and linguistic needs. For this to happen, the vast majority of kindergarten principals reported wanting senior management to increase training in strategic planning for kindergarten teachers and principals — of which there is currently a significant shortage — in order to facilitate the implementation of strategic plans at the kindergarten level. Indeed, many principals identified the need for extensive training courses to better understand how to plan and define goals and how these plans can be implemented in reality. The principals confirmed that one of the most important basic requirements for successful strategic planning in kindergartens and schools in general is that courses be relevant and practical rather than theoretical. Training of principals and teachers should focus on how to construct plans step by step and practised during sessions in order to facilitate the acquisition of planning skills. Therefore, principals should organise workshops that inculcate planning practice in order for participants to obtain a clear understanding of the concept of strategic planning in terms of its types and goals, how it is built and planned, and what it should include to achieve success in kindergartens; this is only possible through awareness and the establishment of practical training courses. For example, the following is a response from one of the principals regarding the requirements for implementing strategic planning in kindergartens:

*“Before they ask us to implement strategic planning, they should first provide us with training that to help us understand strategic planning and its steps and how to evaluate our success in it from failure. This is our first requirement.” (Pr 006)*

The importance of these courses relates to the kindergarten principals' view of the concept of strategic planning as new, their lack of understanding of why principals reject plans, and the lack of training to help them understand and clarify the concept. For example, a respondent explained:

*“As I mentioned to you earlier, the concept is fundamentally new. We have heard about it just by hearing, but we do not understand its reality or what it is, and in order to understand its ideas, we need a training course that explains strategic planning in detail.” (Pr 003)*



Therefore, the participants highlighted the need for more awareness and training in strategic planning in order to increase understanding of the concept and to justify the investment in it because otherwise strategic planning is

*“just ink on paper that is neither applied nor implemented.” (Pr 009)*

The participants also described how principals themselves lack the ability to plan, prepare plans, and discuss and distribute tasks via plans, and so they are also in urgent need of intensive and continuous training courses in order to develop a clear understanding of what planning is and how it is carried out. The principals and teachers also emphasised the need to provide courses that contribute to the success of strategic planning in which principals are prepared and taught about human relationship skills based on how principals deal with teachers and all kindergarten workers. Some also claimed that most principals who are not specialised in kindergarten should take training courses to be able to identify children's problems and understand their psyche, so that they are fully aware of the psychology of child development and take this into account when developing plans for kindergarten. Indeed, one of the teachers said:

*“In fact, most of the principals who have been appointed do not have a solid background in early childhood, they are not specialists in kindergarten, and therefore there is a need for training courses that give principals an idea about the psychological and physical characteristics of this stage that then become the basis for developing a plan and defining its goals.” (Pr 008)*

With regard to dealing with parents, the respondents highlighted that kindergarten principals require senior management to encourage teachers to attend courses by providing solutions to teachers' problems that are reflected in their work. They also offer material and moral incentives to encourage them to change, develop and plan for kindergarten, which is only possible with the establishment of a budget and financial support for the kindergarten. As mentioned previously, an important requirement identified by both principals and teachers was that kindergarten principals and their deputies should specialise in kindergarten education. They also emphasised that what is taught to students at the university about modernisation and development of kindergartens and their units is not applied in the kindergartens: the units are

still in the kindergarten as they are, they have not changed and have not evolved for years, and most of them are as old as the buildings themselves. The principals and teachers also said that they were not taught many relevant skills at university, and what they did learn was not applicable to the kindergarten context. For example, one respondent explained:

*“I graduated last year and was appointed to kindergarten. I do not hide from you my shock at the completely opposite reality from what I studied for the past four years at the university. From my point of view, one of the most important concerns is that kindergarten curricula should be developed in line with the age in which we live, so that kindergartens and their various levels can proceed in a specific and developed direction.” (Pr 005)*

Therefore, the principals reported wanting to replace older resources with modern technical ones that fit the vision of kindergarten education in 2030, such as iPads, smartphones, and laptops, so that children can learn about the drawbacks and benefits of these modern devices. Thus, the respondents identified the requirement for senior management to avoid stereotypes and routines in setting plans, because these are the basis on which principals develop plans for kindergarten. Consequently, the participants stated that old resources should be replaced with modern and advanced ones in order to fulfil the vision of education in 2030. For kindergartens to fulfil this vision, the kindergarten workers must be trained in completion and accuracy skills, the ability to make decisions, and follow-up and evaluation skills because of their important positive impact on plan implementation.

In particular, the kindergarten principals argued that achieving the vision requires greater flexibility and innovation and the introduction of up-to-date technology. In order for the vision to be fulfilled, the principals demanded leverage in the efficiency of the principals responsible for strategic planning in kindergartens, and stated that from the beginning of their appointment they should be trained to build strategic plans, tackle problems, and deal with the workers under their management through training that qualifies them to do so. Without this training, some principals resort to the use of plans made by other principals of other kindergartens, which do not match the reality of their kindergartens and capabilities. Therefore, one of the most important requirements for principals is to solve the shortage of practical training courses by introducing practical training, as current training courses on planning are only two or three

days long and theoretical, which is not sufficient for understanding planning and how it is implemented and applied in practice. Similarly, the principal must have experience of administrative work, which involves a career hierarchy whereby a kindergarten teacher becomes an agent, then a principal and finally a principal. As one of the kindergarten teacher respondents explained:

*“The basis of the strategic planning process is the principal. Whenever the principal has experience and knowledge of administrative matters, this encourages the success of plans and their implementation, so career progression is a necessary requirement.” (Pr 019)*

Thus, the respondents argued that it is a mistake to appoint a kindergarten principal without previous experience in kindergarten administration; at least it should be one who has attended training sessions and is able to conduct meetings related to strategic planning. The principals also highlighted the importance of making a good choice of teachers to be appointed according to specific requirements because the teacher is the closest point of contact to the children. A poor choice of teachers could adversely influence their behaviour and cause problems for the principal. An unsuitable teacher might prevent the principal from performing basic tasks, or create conflict with another teacher or a parent, which further impedes the development of the kindergarten plans in general. For instance, one principal stated:

*“In most cases, teachers are appointed who are not distinguished or do not undergo tests before being appointed. From my point of view, a kindergarten teacher should have capabilities and characteristics that differ from the teachers of other age groups, but in many cases, appointments are influenced by ‘wasita’. So, it is an important requirement to be careful about employing empowered teachers to help us achieve our plans and be a skilled team in the kindergarten.” (Pr 017)*

The selected qualified staff should be able to put their skills into practice and manage crises and problems, both with children and parents or the facility itself. Moreover, they should be able to carry out tasks according to what is appropriate and contribute to the educational setting overall. Thus, the requirement is to place the right person in the right place. Therefore, the principals stated that teachers should be evaluated on job performance and outcomes and existing evaluation methods that are unfair. One principal explained that:

*“We do not differentiate between creative and non-creative teachers, nor do we differentiate between vigorous and active participation and the complaining objectionable teacher who is defined by her desire to continue at the same pace without any effort.” (Pr 030)*

Most of the principals agreed that existing methods for evaluating teachers do not give diligent teachers sufficient recognition or prompt sufficient evaluation of non-diligent teachers because they are out of date and need to be re-examined. The principals also explained that whenever there are methods for evaluating teachers, they need to have their efforts rewarded. That is, the principals demonstrated support for the importance of fostering motivation at work, but reported having had no resources such as the budget or authority, to do so:

*“As a principal, I recognise the teachers that have creative energies and a desire to participate and develop and can distinguish them from those who do not contribute in any way, and I know that a diligent teacher is a resource that should be preserved and motivated which can only be achieved with motivation and encouragement. If I had more power, the distinguished teachers would be rewarded in more than one way, either with a day off or cash rewards. Therefore, one of the requirements for fostering greater motivation is to have an adequate budget and flexible powers to allow us to do so.” (Pr 007)*

One of the most important requirements agreed upon by principals and teachers was the need to follow up on the kindergarten senior management’s implantation and application of strategic planning in the kindergarten and track the impact of their plans on the schools and their outputs; participants observed such assessments were not being done based on what had been implemented. Therefore, they demanded the existence of an organised planning mechanism to be used for the development of kindergartens, such as a clear procedural organisational guide from the end of the year until the next year explaining the progress of the plan, its programmes and dates. They claimed that existing guides often change a month after the beginning of the year and plans change completely; therefore, feedback on plans would be useful because it would contribute to determining their success or failure.

As a result, the principals themselves reported learning how to change and amend plans in order to maintain success and failure. They also suggested asking kindergarten senior

management to offer financial rewards and certificates of appreciation for the implementation of successful plans. Similarly, the principals and teachers expressed the need for not only experienced and skilled principals or practical training on strategic planning, but also diverse frameworks to guide them in setting strategic plans for kindergartens and choosing the most appropriate plan according to the environmental and material capabilities of the setting. Plans are required to determine the goals and methods of implementation and evaluation. The following are responses from kindergarten principals related to these ideas:

*“We strongly demand that an organisational guide be provided in which the steps for developing the plan are identified, as well as the specific dates of the most important programmes and activities. This would help us understand the kindergarten management plan which would enable us to organise other programmes.” (Pr 004)*

*“So that we do not work, discuss, and meet in the kindergarten only for our efforts to be wasted, there needs to be a model plan that we can emulate, whether it is from the kindergarten administration or a successful plan followed by one of the principals that had a tangible effect or success that our administration would benefit from it, and it would become motivation for other principals to innovate. It is an honour for a school principal for setting a plan that is emulated and sets an example for all kindergartens.” (Pr 011)*

Understanding operational plans requires training, and this needs more focus by leaders and teachers; hence, there was a consensus among the respondents regarding the important need to reduce the burden, work efforts, and daily preoccupations due to the large number of tasks and paperwork. This increases the efforts and initiatives implemented by senior management preventing sufficient time for development and change. For example, one respondent stated:

*“If the drawers and cupboards here in my office were opened for you, you would be shocked by the amount of files that we are required to complete, so we demand that in order to implement strategic planning and implement it in its correct sense to review our work as principals, daily work that has no use should be dispensed with to give us more time to accomplish more meaningful work. Planning requires time and a clear mind, whereas I work all day and fill in papers that take up a lot of my*

*time and effort. Therefore, we ask for a review of the many routine tasks that waste our energies.” (Pr 012)*

Therefore, the principals highlighted the necessity of reducing the burden of these tasks that impede the progress and development of kindergarten plans. As a result, they stated that principals who run the large kindergartens in the area with a large number of children should have two administrative aids since one is not sufficient, especially considering the lack of administrative assistants:

*“My school is considered one of the big kindergartens in terms of space and number of children, but I only have one assistant. In another school that is smaller than my kindergarten and has fewer children, there are two assistants. The issue of reviewing the appointment of aids according to the kindergarten’s needs is an important requirement. As a principal, I cannot accomplish all the administrative tasks on my own.” (Pr 026)*

Additionally, one principal explained that each kindergarten supervisor supervises five kindergartens and suggests reducing the number of kindergartens as the supervision tends to be high level and exhaustive:

*“Do you know that my kindergarten supervisor oversees five kindergartens? I do not blame the supervisor sometimes if her visit is quick and for perusal only, because she herself does not have enough time. We ask that the matter return to the same as before, when each supervisor supervised two kindergartens, so her visits to us were more thorough and she found enough time for review and follow-up.” (Pr 028)*

From this point of view, the principals and teachers demanded that things return to the same as before, when there was one supervisor assigned to two kindergartens: an administrative supervisor for the budget and another supervisor for the teachers and plans. One supervisor, as is now the case, comes to sign documents only without talking or discussing plans or events with the workers, which means planning is delayed and impeded because it is undirected. The principals and teachers, therefore, demanded that kindergarten supervisors follow up on the tangible results of programmes or kindergartens’ plans and their impact on children. Reports should be submitted to supervisors and senior management rather than sent to administrative offices.

Thus, the respondents indicated that tracking the impact of plans and programmes is better than reporting with no benefits and without feedback. This is related to the principals' request to increase the supervision and follow-up of kindergarten plans by senior management supervisors because of their greater level of experience in this field:

*“The kindergarten supervisor does not have any background or knowledge related to planning; the matter is just a job that she must perform. She does not follow the plans, but only follows up the papers and submits a report about whether a plan has been implemented or not, and judges the operational plans as good or bad according to her mood and her own opinion, which is not based on a correct scientific background.” (Pr 020)*

The principals subsequently demanded greater authority for themselves, through which they could save time and effort and provide a better opportunity for developing plans. As one principal explained:

*“We hope for an increase in our authority, because it is currently restricted to the senior management, especially since the evaluation for the teachers are also weak and not fair or comprehensive and must be changed which the kindergarten principal is not able to do.” (Pr 024)*

The principals added to their demands a further necessary requirement – to provide a means of communication with higher management, private institutions, and government agencies such as medical centres or dispensaries, or to fulfil the kindergarten's need for a permanent doctor as such communication would improve community participation and save time and effort in the management of kindergartens. Thus, the kindergarten teachers claimed that one of the most important requirements of strategic planning is the provision of psychological support and moral consideration for teachers in a suitable environment. Many teachers complained about the lack of a comfortable room or a dedicated office for each of them to enhance their performance at work. For example, one of the participants indicated that:

*“We demand that there be appreciation for our efforts and the fact that we work all day long and need a place to relax and have a cup of coffee so that we can continue the day actively, but as you see all the teachers meet in this small room. Even with the air conditioning, we are the ones who bought it with our own*

*money, and we bought the tools we need like the kettle and others. We ask for a comfortable place to gather our activities to continue the rest of the day.” (Tr 020)*

In summary, the most important requirements for implementing strategic planning in kindergarten schools are the knowledge and participation of the principals and teachers in drawing and implementing plans, the beneficial opinions of supervisors with planning experience, the provision of an appropriate budget, and the provision of proper feedback from the kindergarten administration.

#### 7.6.2 Environment requirements

One of the most important requirements identified collectively by the principals, teachers, and parents in order to implement strategic planning successfully was the provision of an appropriate healthy environment that facilitates implementation. For example, one principal stated:

*“We put plans and determine the cost of their programmes, objectives, and activities, but there is no preparation for creating a suitable environment for the children in terms of maintenance, cleanliness, buildings, and equipment. Therefore, we suggest that buildings be reconsidered, or prepared for the inclusion of basic facilities such as classrooms and squares because they are the two areas we depend on, whether for activities, games, or teaching. I know that it is difficult to change buildings, but at least the kindergarten administration is making a plan to renew and develop them. The buildings have a specific and independent budget by the ministry so that the kindergartens are visited, their needs are determined in a deliberate manner in stages, so we feel at least that we are on the same path of improvement in terms of development” (Pr 018)*

Therefore, it is necessary first of all to provide an integrated environment for the proper implementation of plans on the ground. The responses indicated that the vast majority of kindergartens are dilapidated and old, have not been refurbished for a long time, and are in need of maintenance despite the presence of a large number of children in them. In addition, a large number of kindergartens do not provide suitable playgrounds or even equipment and



games. Thus, it is important to expand the buildings and create suitable spaces for play and education to ensure the children's safety and freedom of movement.

### 7.6.3 Budgeting process

A budget is an essential and important element of effective strategic planning. Therefore, kindergartens need to provide an appropriate budget because kindergarten programmes depend on modern technologies such as smartboards, computers, display tools, etc., in addition to games, planning, and maintenance – all of which play an important role in the success or failure of the implementation of a plans' objectives. However, kindergartens suffer from a lack of budget, which hinders their development. Providing a sufficient budget to meet the needs of the kindergarten is a prerequisite for the success of its programmes and plans, as it primarily benefits the children. The following presents some of the principals' answers

*“The budget is not enough at all we have programs at the kindergarten that we need to cover, and the budget goes to it, if there is something, I recommend of course the good amount of budget.” (Pr 003)*

*“The most important recommendation is budget and budget and budget” (Pr 010)*

*“We need a good budget to present a successful plan” (Pr 012)*

The budget was a major requirement for the vast majority of principals, whether in private or government schools, and whether they were in cities or villages.

### 7.6.4 Community partnership

One of the most crucial requirements identified by respondents to improve the success of strategic planning was an increase in the partnership between principals and teachers and communities in their catchment areas due to their significant influence. Participants explained that although diversity and the involvement of different parts of a community contribute to the success of kindergarten plans, existing kindergarten planning behaviours tend to involve limited community partnership and only a few contributing parties; thus, there is a need to facilitate greater participation from the community bodies. For example, one principal explained:

*“The child in this age group needs to become acquainted with new information presented to him through an innovative idea and from a new perspective away from home and away from kindergarten, which renews his desire to learn and learn about new things and information that contribute to enriching an idea as well as contribute to building solid values and foundations. It came from the lips of the teachers.” (Pr 031)*

Another interviewee stated that:

*“The children need to see new faces that give them information in a different way, as they are with their mothers for 24 hours in the hostel. Also, they see their teachers daily for long hours, so they need to be refreshed.” (Pr 033)*

In this way, the respondents argued that children accept new information and ideas that are presented to them through different ways and means.

#### 7.6.5 Suggestions and proposals on the way forward

##### Suggestions from principals and teachers

###### a) Need for greater authority and autonomy among the principals

According to the kindergarten principals and teachers, one of the most important values that strengthen strategic planning is the enthusiasm of kindergarten workers and their desire for change and development. What contributes to and helps facilitate this is the participation of the principal in the planning process and the drawing of goals so that teachers are made aware of the importance of their role. If a teacher understands the importance of their effective role, they are more motivated to participate and contribute to the success of the plans. On the contrary, if they feel marginalised or think that their role is ineffective, they do not have the desire to participate or change. For example, one principal explained:

*“We suggest that we have greater authority to help motivate our planning team in the kindergarten, particularly the teachers. Their enthusiasm has a positive impact on volunteering and participation, and it has the greatest impact on the success of the plan. I suggest that the participating groups be stimulated, and their enthusiasm increased, not from our side only, but from the*

*ministry and the kindergarten administration. Paying attention to capabilities and competencies generates great creative energies and neglecting them extinguishes their lustre.” (Pr 016)*

Meanwhile, another view presented by a teacher is:

*“We have here in the kindergarten creative and distinguished teachers, whether they are experienced or even recent graduates, there is a consensus on their energies and creativity including all other workers in the kindergarten. However, we see their effort day and night and presenting ideas and proposals and seeking to implement them, but they face frustration which kills their enthusiasm, either because of a lack of interest in their skills or through being ignored by the kindergarten administration up to the top management. Enthusiasm is an essential element.” (Tr 002)*

The responses thus highlighted the desire of principals and teachers to obtain support and encouragement, which they positioned as the fuel that facilitates better achievements and work. They argued that without enthusiasm, workers become frustrated and thus cannot accomplish goals, which affects the progress of a plan, especially since it has gradual and interrelated stages, each of which requires work and effort. Hence, the principals suggested that each kindergarten should have its own plan that suits its capabilities, circumstances, environment, and needs as well as offers greater flexibility for planning, thereby facilitating the participation of teachers and taking into account their needs. This is because when teachers are restricted by a plan and a specific timeframe, they are unable to find enough time to participate and change, which makes them carry out what is required of them without enthusiasm or the desire for change:

*“We feel this every year and to be honest with you. We’ve got used to that, yes, I have been a principal for 15 years, but I have been waiting for orders only. I feel compelled to implement them without discussion. I suggest that you give some space of freedom for making plans. Strategic planning is a coherent and continuous process in which opportunities and risks are identified. It is based on certain foundations and requirements which I define based on the capabilities of the kindergarten. I suggest that you give us some freedom, of course, under the supervision of the administration, where I feel that I can define*

*my needs which may be different from any other kindergartens.”*  
(Pr 027)

Meanwhile, the teachers noted a similar issue. For example, one teacher stated:

*“We suggest this so that the plans are not burdensome on us because we are usually tensed up every year waiting for the kindergarten administration circulars that come to us in the form of orders. There is no justice, as flexibility in developing plans commensurate with their circumstances is essential for the success of strategic planning in kindergartens.”* (Tr 001)

Another suggestion that kindergarten principals and teachers made was to merge the kindergarten administration with the general education administration because the current separate units of administration do not benefit the strategic planning of the kindergarten. Such as merger would mean a more coherent planning and implementation authority, as well as the ability for greater flexibility and development if it was subject to the education laws. However, the existing kindergarten administration has not changed and has not developed, and its laws still restrict principals in planning or evaluation and job performance, and even in the criteria for accepting children. For example:

*“I suggest that kindergartens be merged with the Ministry of Education, meaning that they are not an independent department from the ministry but rather subordinate to it, in order for us to have a share of the benefits. We feel that the kindergarten administration is marginalised and has no privileges.”* (Pr 029)

Similarly, a teacher reported the following:

*“If you ask all kindergarten teachers, their answer will be that we are at a stage that we do not receive enough attention from the ministry. The kindergarten administration is separate and does not follow the laws of the ministry, so the other units have more than ours. So, we suggest that the kindergarten be affiliated with the ministry, especially since it has become a mandatory stage.”* (Tr 001)

The responses of the principals and teachers were consensual that they felt neglected and marginalised and that they did not receive the same amount of attention and support as the other stages of the educational system. Thus, they suggested becoming affiliated with the

ministry in order to enjoy all the privileges and rights given to other education stages. In addition, the respondents also proposed the creation of a special planning department in the Ministry of Public Education, with the specific task of reviewing, developing, and approving plans submitted by kindergartens in order to evaluate and provide feedback.

b) Establishment of a strategic planning department

According to the suggestions made, this department would have specialised supervisors in order to ensure the greatest benefit because existing supervisors have other burdens that hinder them from supervising plans, meaning they are not fully aware of how to develop plans. The provision of a planning authority department was a notable suggestion for achieving successful implementation of strategic planning in kindergartens. The following comment was made by one principal:

*“We suggest that a department specialised in planning should be created in kindergarten management in order to provide competent people empowered to contribute to drawing up plans, helping us and guiding us in them, and then evaluating the plans and providing feedback based on sound scientific foundations.”*  
(Pr 010)

One of the most important suggestions made was that there should be a fixed and unified curriculum for kindergartens, because current kindergarten curricula are not standardised or change every year – each institution sets the curriculum from its own perspective or uses its specific knowledge, whether right or wrong, and the principal is required to follow it. Thus, the principals argued that a unified curriculum would give more room for thoughtful and useful curricula created by experts in the field of early childhood rather than individual endeavours, which in turn would give more room for kindergarten management to develop and change other matters:

*“The standardisation of the kindergarten curriculum will help us a lot in saving time and effort when it is presented to us in the form of a specific template that requires the effort of the teachers to prepare each lesson according to their ideas and understanding and demands my effort as a principal in the evaluation and follow-up. So, we suggest that the curriculum be standardised by specialists who are fully aware of the*

*characteristics of early childhood. Upgrading our educational outcomes would give me more space for planning.” (Pr 025)*

Similarly, the teachers argued that standardised curricula would mean that they could benefit from the knowledge of experienced teachers in developing themselves and their teaching methods.

*“Preparing for the curriculum in the kindergarten takes a lot of effort from us, and some of them are new. We do not have enough knowledge about it. If the curricula were standardised so that they were presented to us in a clear way, we could rely on them and be correct. It would help us save a lot of effort and save the long time that we spend preparing and contributing to the development of the kindergarten and working to achieve its goals.” (Tr 015)*

Also, the respondents explained that fixed advisory plans provided by the kindergarten administration could contain the main points to be followed, while including some flexibility to change items according to the capabilities of each kindergarten’s vision and mission. Thus, the principle would remain the same, but its application would change according to the conditions of the kindergarten. Therefore, some principals suggested that changes and developments should be made in the kindergartens by introducing new and developed programmes that establish the institution as more than just a place for entertainment and play, such as English and other languages needed for education and creative thinking programmes. This would generate outcomes that benefit students in the later school stages. Another suggestion made by principals and teachers was to provide training that facilitates the practical rather than theoretical learning of strategic planning, thereby guaranteeing a comprehensive understanding and knowledge of the required rules and steps and how to apply and achieve them properly in the kindergarten, and continuing with these courses in a permanent and renewable manner:

*“There are courses, but they are held every year with the same content and methods. I suggest that they be updated and developed to fit the new vision and our aspirations. So, the training course is not just for attendance and obtaining a certificate, but rather a systematic process that is tested if necessary, in order to ensure that it achieves the required*

*outputs, otherwise, to be honest they are a waste of money.” (Pr 012)*

c) Strategic management courses for principals and teachers

In addition, participants noted that as courses are designed for principals and teachers, they should take place before the beginning or at the end of the school year. Furthermore, the timing should be chosen by the principals and teachers, perhaps through a vote, so that they can attend and participate, because during the school year it is difficult for many to do so, either because of the distance or because of the work that they must complete:

*“When setting the course dates, I suggest taking into account the appropriate timing and not placing it in the middle of the semester so that it is not used because the plan has been developed and also many cannot attend it due to the daily work required of them. Therefore, I suggest that the timing be either at the beginning of the school year before the children attend or at the end of the school year in the period in which free time is available for either the principal or the teachers.” (Pr 009)*

There was consensus among the principals that the courses should be conducted at the end of the school year rather than the beginning because this is when the principal begins to develop her plan and define her goals, operational timelines and other important activities. Additionally, the beginning of the year is the period of the beginning of the registration and acceptance of children, so the principal is busy with parents and teachers as well as administrative matters. Therefore, it is difficult to find time to attend training sessions, as they require clarity of mind for the knowledge to be fully understood and assimilated:

*“Often the timing of the training sessions is not appropriate. We suggest that these courses are at the end of the school year, as you know here in kindergarten, we finish teaching early and before the school’s end, so the situation is calmer at the end of the year and there would be plenty of time for me as a principal to attend the courses and focus on my development, especially with regard to strategic planning. The end of the year is an appropriate opportunity to review my previous plan and work on developing it immediately after I attend the session, so I can prepare it and meet with the planning team and draw the basic*

*lines that we will follow during the next year, so I strongly suggest that the course date be at the end of the year.” (Pr 026)*

Furthermore, two principals noted that the sessions should take place in training centres close to schools; that is, a specialised training centre should be created in each region and sited close clusters of schools. Then, if the courses are offered during the school year, they can be offered in the evening so that participants do not have to be absent from the kindergarten, thereby minimising disruption to work:

*“I work as a principal in an area very far from the training centre, so in many cases, I apologise for attending the courses despite my need and desire to benefit from them. The distance means there is a barrier between me and the courses, so why not ensure that training centres, for example, are close or mobile in order to serve all schools and ensure that I don’t have to delay working in my kindergarten because I attend a course.” (Pr 005)*

Thus, the respondents indicated that training centres are usually located in areas that do not benefit all regions. Indeed, there was a significant consensus that the location of centres does not serve all kindergartens. Therefore, the proposals made focused on whether training centres could be mobile or whether each region could have a training centre serving it. Another proposal submitted by the principals and teachers was that training could be offered in the kindergarten itself so that the principals and teachers do not have to leave the kindergarten. Alternatively, it was suggested that experienced teachers could attend a training course and then present it to their colleagues at kindergartens in order to maximise the benefit for the largest number of teachers and save a lot of time and effort. Indeed, one of the teachers suggested:

*“In fact, as a teacher, I do not have enough time to attend courses during the school day, and I do not have a driver or means of transportation to help me go, so why do we not take advantage of the teachers who have the ability to attend strategic planning courses so that one or two teachers go and then present these courses to us after returning from them at a time to be set by us and suitable for everyone, so that we all benefit without having to leave our work?” (Tr 018)*



#### d) Exchange and Benchmarking Programmes

Participants also proposed the implementation of a scheduled programme that allows principals to visit other kindergartens, especially model ones in which the effectiveness of the plans implemented has been proven, thereby giving them opportunities to expand their perceptions and see the achievements on the ground. For example, one principal stated:

*“We are currently visiting model kindergartens to learn about their activities and renewable methods. We visit the model kindergartens to see their strategic plans and to identify the strengths and weaknesses that the principals experienced and how to overcome them, which would help us to develop our own plans, benefit from their experiences, and avoid similar problems in the future?” (Pr 019)*

The same suggestion was made by a principal:

*“The benefit from the exchange visits between kindergartens should not be limited to activities and teaching methods; rather, it is important that we look at examples of plans implemented in developed kindergartens in order to benefit from them and gain experience.” (Pr 003)*

According to the principals and teachers, one of the most important factors in achieving the success of strategic planning in kindergartens is the provision of a healthy environment for the children. Therefore, they called for legislation of job descriptors for individuals working in the kindergarten. Kindergarten staff need to be proficient in first aid, which requires the existence of a room dedicated to first aid with a doctor or a nurse stationed during the school day who monitors the condition of the children, especially since the lack of space and a large number of children makes the spread of infection significantly easier. Thus, the participants highlighted the need to have a room equipped and prepared to receive children that meets strict standards of maintenance and cleanliness in order to help ensure the safety and security of the children. As one of the principals explained:

*“We suggest that we have a nurse responsible for monitoring the health status of the children; as you know the children interact a lot in kindergarten due to the nature of the activities, and even in the classroom they sit in the form of a circle which makes the*

*infection move between them quickly, which often forces us to stop our daily work and focus on a child with a stomach ache or high temperature. Every child in the kindergarten is under our responsibility. Sometimes we communicate with their parents, or in critical cases, if the parents do not respond we take them to the nearest hospital, so the presence of a nurse who monitors their cases is important for the child's safety first and for the distribution of tasks in the kindergarten second.” (Pr 016)*

Similarly, one of the teachers stated:

*“The presence of a room equipped with health services is among the suggestions we made to the kindergarten administration in order to ensure the safety of the children, because they are under our responsibility. If a child is exposed to a health problem and I am the only school worker in the class, I have to leave my work and leave the class to take care of the child. If a responsible nurse was available to monitor the children's conditions and communicate with their families, this would help us focus on our other tasks.” (Tr 013)*

Thus, the above statement makes clear that a nurse responsible for the health of children is important, as it would allow teachers and principals to focus on the completion of their own tasks and responsibilities without delay and without pressure from other responsibilities. The participants also highlighted the need for a specialist or psychological counsellor with whom children mothers could communicate in order to solve problems of their children by receiving appropriate guidance and support and increasing their awareness of how to properly manage abnormal behaviour. Two principals also strongly emphasised the need for a security official in the kindergarten who specialises in monitoring the children as they enter and leave the school and checking their data and the data of the parent receiving the child in order to avoid any related problems and risk of the child leaving with an unauthorised person, for which the principal and teachers would be liable:

*“I work in a poor area in terms of services and capabilities, inhabited by individuals with low economic status and educational levels. I see things that cannot be believed in terms of child treatment, so we suffer from bad behaviour that comes from some children, whether behavioural or verbal, and this has a great impact on the rest of the children. Parents need to be*

*contacted if psychologists are to be invited to follow up on their cases and holding meetings with mothers of children and discussing their psychological situation. My directives are not enough, parents need awareness of the importance of childcare. Imagine that some children come to us with signs of beatings and violence and when we discuss these with their mothers, their fathers explain that it is their method for dealing with their children, and I can't do anything.” (Pr 028)*

*“We suggest that there be a psychologist approved by the kindergarten administration in order to raise awareness among mothers about the methods of education and the importance of early childhood. Some parents treat children cruelly and severely due to the education they received growing up, which makes us suffer from the presence of hostile and stubborn children. Being influenced by their peers, in order for strategic planning to succeed, I suggest raising awareness among people, because we are an integrated system and we cannot accomplish our goals without their participation.” (Pr 002)*

One of the teachers also added:

*“Whenever psychological support related to early childhood stage is available, we will guarantee healthy children which makes it easier for us to work on programme output achievement and development. It should be noted that usually have a child or two children in the class suffering from abuse at home, and every time I discuss the situation with their mothers; I find no interaction or interest due to the lack of awareness among parents. So, my approach in the classroom is to modify poor behaviour, such as vocalising or abnormal behaviour, not for one child, but for the whole class; however, if a psychologist was available, it would not be necessary for her to stay in the kindergarten; she could visit us at certain times and provide directions and advice to mothers. This would help us a lot in raising awareness among parents, which would reflect on the children and on our performance as teachers.” (Tr 017)*

From the above examples, the principals and teachers highlighted the need to increase awareness among parents by providing educational lectures by psychologists accredited by the ministry, which would help them solve children's problems and ensure the safety of their mental health. This, in turn, would enhance kindergarten plans and improve their outputs.

Among the proposals unanimously agreed upon by the kindergarten principals was that meetings should be conducted periodically between them and the supervisors of the higher administration of the kindergarten in order to facilitate cooperation in drawing up plans and solving the problems of kindergartens. Such meetings would prompt the discussion of mutual opinions, as opposed to meetings based on the application of orders from the higher management without discussion or clarification of the kindergarten problems.

For example, two principals explained:

*"I attended many meetings with supervisors and officials from the kindergarten administration regarding the strategic planning and development of kindergartens, but every time I feel that quite helpless. Yes, we offer suggestions and present problems, but we do not find anyone who interacts with us and no one takes our views on board. If I am honest with you, I no longer go to meetings and I do not want that. I suggest that these meetings be held in an organised manner in which our opinions are taken, because we, who are on the ground, want to participate and feel that our voice is heard." (Pr 016)*

*"We suggest that we, as principals, participate with the higher management and supervisors in developing the strategic plan for kindergartens. We are in 2020 and we still receive orders without discussion. Whenever we participate in developing the plan, our enthusiasm for achieving it is improved and the more we know about it." (Pr 027)*

These responses indicate that the participation of principals in the strategic planning of the kindergarten, their knowledge of a plan's steps, and their participation in setting goals help them understand the strategic plan and increase their enthusiasm for its implementation; this is in contrast to when they are surprised by its provisions without discussion and without their opinions and suggestions being taken into account. The teachers also stressed their significant desire to participate in strategic planning and the need for their opinions to be considered. They argued that because they are the ones actually teaching the children, they have the right to participate in planning and discussing their views and ideas related to the plans and goals set by the higher management. They know more about the child's characteristics and problems than anyone else in the kindergarten, so they need to be part of the plans of the senior

management in order to best understand their role in the plan and the actions to take. For example, one teacher explained:

*"We do not have an opinion, and all we have to do is listen and obey. Our participation and taking our opinions into account are important for our understanding of the road we are walking on and ensuring we can all reach a specific destination." (Tr 020)*

With regard to kindergartens' vision and mission, the teachers suggested that these should be the responsibility of everyone in the institution, not just the principal, because they work in an integrated system and therefore should see and participate in everything that concerns the kindergarten. They viewed themselves as the most important tools for achieving these goals; therefore, they perceived their knowledge and participation as essential. Two teachers made the following suggestions:

*"The vision and mission of the kindergarten are everyone's responsibility, and to my understanding, they are the basis on which we build our plan and our goals. Why do we not discuss them and receive an explanation of them so that we feel enthusiastic about them, and everything we do is for one common goal that everyone seeks?" (Tr 013)*

*"We suggest, first of all, and before we set goals and work in planning that we first participate in laying out the vision and mission of the kindergarten and have an opinion on it, so that we are aware of, and understand which way we are going." (Tr 021)*

Also, among the proposals submitted by teachers was the need to review recruitment laws. They described facing many problems in recruitment, especially when their housing and family conditions were not taken into account and they were forced to move to a city or region far from their place of residence, which affected their psychology and wellbeing. For example, one teacher described her difficult living circumstances and how they affected her:

*"I suggest reconsidering the appointment of teachers and reviewing this periodically to guarantee us peace, especially those among us who are married and support their family, and those among us who live with their elderly parents. All matters that should be considered when appointing a teacher, and these should be reviewed periodically so that we can contribute and*

*achieve and work. Providing us with psychological peace as teachers has the greatest impact on our job performance.” (Tr 019)*

One principal also made a point regarding experience and highlighted the benefits brought about by new teachers who have obtained scholarships abroad after completing their studies:

*“We need new minds and new blood, so we need to learn new things that serve our plans and serve the educational process.” (Pr 003)*

And as another principal put it:

*“We need enlightened minds that accept change, as making use of new blood helps us in development and planning.” (Pr 001)*

The highlights above indicate the benefits of investing in new teachers and their use in developing kindergartens and building their goals and plans due to their desire to implement new ideas that serve their careers.

Parents’ suggestions

e) Novel initiatives should be brought on board

Many parents agreed that the activities related to planning in the kindergarten should be thoughtful and renewed and not repetitive. They also noted the importance of being informed promptly so that they can participate and contribute within the limits of their abilities. For example, one mother said:

*“I suggest that we are presented with the activities and programmes in the plan well in advance, because that will give us enough time to participate and provide suggestions regarding what we can offer, and we can also prepare our children for it.” (M 001)*

And another parent stated:

*“We suggest that there be a renewal in the activities. It is preferable if we are consulted about them so that we have prior knowledge of them. How many times have we been informed of*

*a specific programme or activity two days before which is inappropriate.” (M 005)*

f) Good understanding of each learners’ needs

The mothers also highlighted the need to understand childhood and increase their awareness of the problems and characteristics of this stage because they are the basis and can contribute to what is directed and taught in the kindergarten. Thus, they suggested that programmes could be implemented to teach mothers how to prepare their children to enter kindergarten, including psychologically. For example, one mother commented:

*“I wish there were awareness lectures and individual counselling regarding the child's mental health and how to treat his problems, because frankly I suffer with my son and I do not know how to deal with him, so I hold meetings, for example, between me and a certified psychologist, to discuss the situation of my son and follow up his case with his school.” (M 008)*

These examples indicate that the participation of the mothers was based on awareness and knowledge that increased their responses and interaction, which contributed to their increasing awareness of the culture of society as a whole. The examples also show that the mothers agreed with the proposals submitted by the principals regarding the provision of a psychologist to assist them by providing advice and guidance on raising children and tackling their problems.

## 7.7 Conclusion

The aspects discussed in this chapter have led the current researcher to conclude that a principal's powers require considerable flexibility, in particular, due to being restricted and highly specific in nature. For example, the form of social partnership available for a kindergarten is strictly defined, including with whom such a partnership can be made, i.e. parents or community institutions. In addition, these powers are not restricted to written approval from the kindergarten’s senior management, but also form an aspect of the oversight of education, including more complex matters, leading to an obstruction of the process of strategic planning in the kindergarten. Thus, the powers given to kindergarten principals lack flexibility due to the rigid systems and regulations of senior management or the Ministry of Education, both of which tend to ignore any suggested amendments to the regulations requested by the kindergarten principals.

Further, this section reviewed the requirements that must be met to implement strategic planning in kindergarten schools from the point of view of principals and teachers. The most important requirements unanimously identified by respondents were the provision of an appropriate budget, the establishment of an appropriate educational environment for children and kindergarten workers, the participation of all kindergarten workers in drawing up a plan and setting and implementing its goals, and the provision of directions and advice by senior management and supervisors to support effective kindergarten planning. The second section of the chapter reviewed the most important proposals made by principals, teachers, and mothers of kindergarten children regarding how they can help facilitate successful strategic planning.



## CHAPTER EIGHT: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

### 8.1 Introduction

This section presents a critical analysis of the findings obtained in this study based on the existing literature and practice. The findings are interpreted and discussed in the context of existing theories, literature, and practice on strategic planning in the context of the school environment in the region of Makkah. To have a clear idea of the findings to be analysed and discussed in this section, Table 8.1 below presents a summary of the findings as presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in light of the research questions.

*Table 8.1: The main Findings*

Research Question	Main Findings
1. To what extent is the concept of strategic planning understood in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• At the kindergartens, understanding of strategic planning was at three levels: minimum understanding, moderate understanding and full understanding.</li></ul>
2. What is the current state of the application of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategic planning was not a core managerial practice among principals and teachers in kindergartens, particularly for young teachers and staff in remote locations.</li><li>• A lack of community participation in strategic planning activities</li><li>• Strategic planning was perceived as the responsibility of senior management.</li><li>• Principals and teachers did not demonstrate full mastery of planning processes.</li><li>• Implementation of strategic plans was confronted by a myriad of challenges.</li><li>• Monitoring and evaluation of plan implementation did not have clear-cut criteria.</li></ul>

---

3. To what extent does the principal facilitate the use of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?

- Lack of effective leadership for the planning processes.
- Creating an enabling environment for the seamless implementation of strategic plans.
- Principals had limited administrative powers to execute certain functions in kindergartens.
- Principals lacked the skills/know-how in setting up the plan implementation criteria.
- Ad hoc and arbitrary appointment of principals.

---

4. what are the main factors that affect the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?

- Disruptions of the strategic planning process occurred due to Socio-economic and behavioral factors.
- Unconducive teaching and learning environments.
- Daily administrative tasks performed by teachers interfered with plan implementation processes.
- Evidence of disruptive bureaucratic processes.
- Uncoordinated teacher transfers.
- Resistance of kindergarten staff to the planning processes.
- Unfavorable perception of principals and staff to change process
- Principals, teachers and other staff did not appreciate the relevance of charting strategic courses of action.
- Decision-making challenges at kindergartens.
- Weak funding/budgetary support for kindergarten schools in the region.
- Ineffective capacity building initiatives within kindergartens.
- The school principals are not much empowered in making crucial decisions associated with strategic planning.

---

*Source:* Based on Fieldwork – Primary Data, 2019

## 8.2 Discussion on Understanding how Strategic Planning is Being Adopted in Educational Institutions in Saudi Arabia (First Objective – Chapter 5)

Overall, data was gathered from 69 participants, comprising 37 principals, 20 classroom teachers and 12 parents. The analyses were done based on the most important and prevalent themes from the data, notably conceptual issues (minimum understanding, moderate understanding and full understanding) and the processual dimension. These were discussed under the following subthemes: pre-planning, goal setting, plan implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. From the analysis, it was established that there were various levels of understanding of the concept of strategic planning portrayed by principals of the kindergarten and teachers. Key findings associated with the chapter include (i) strategic planning is not a core managerial function of principals; (ii) strategic planning is perceived by staff as a senior-level responsibility; (iii) ignorance of some principals about the concept of strategic planning; (iv) unfavourable perception of strategic planning by principals, teachers and other staff; (v) planning was associated with the implementation process; (vi) principals and teachers did not demonstrate full mastery of planning processes; and (vii) lack of clear-cut criteria for monitoring and evaluation of plan implementation processes.

### 8.2.1 Understanding the concepts of strategic planning: The basis of action

Over the last two decades, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed unprecedented transformation on all fronts, economically, politically and socially. Even more compelling in recent times is the government's determination to transform the economy into one that thrives on knowledge, skills, creativity and innovation rather than a total dependence on oil. Achieving such an ambitious objective means Saudi's educational system cannot rely on its conventional school system, which trains citizens in skills that are considered somewhat outmoded both nationally and in a competitive globalised environment. Therefore, change must start from the cradle, that is, the Kingdom's kindergarten schools, which number in their thousands. The strategic change envisioned in the government's Vision 2030 agenda must start from the very basic level with a farsighted curriculum that hinges on creativity and innovation as high points in teaching and learning at all levels of the Saudi educational system. Consequently, the adoption of strategic planning at the very basic level of the school system is a commendable educational policy. Improved school performance has been associated with strategic

management in some parts of the world (Odden and Kelly, 2008); hence, there is a need for the government of Saudi Arabia to ensure that schools in the Kingdom are abreast with current trends globally.

Strategic management refers to the management of an organisation's resources to achieve its goals and objectives. It involves setting objectives, analysing the competitive environment, analysing the internal organisation, evaluating strategies and ensuring that management provides leadership through carefully crafted processes and relevant strategies across the organisation. Additionally, organisational leadership is increasingly turning to strategic management principles to facilitate the resolution of turbulence and related risks and uncertainties (Hill, Jones and Schilling, 2014). The adoption of strategic management and strategic planning in Saudi kindergarten schools has proven quite challenging. It was, therefore, no surprise to witness the frustration of many teachers at that level, particularly because they were being led through a process many of them had never experienced before. For kindergarten schools to achieve their strategic objectives, principals and teachers should be very clear in their minds what the key concepts are. Conceptual clarity is the first step towards success in any endeavour. A key finding from the data was the fact that a sizeable proportion of principals, principals, teachers and other auxiliary staff had no clue, whatsoever, what strategic planning meant. Referring to the staff's knowledge about strategic planning, the data revealed three scenarios, namely staff with minimal knowledge, moderate knowledge and good knowledge. Regarding staff with no knowledge of strategic planning, experts have warned that such a state of affairs poses a serious risk to the attainment of goals in kindergarten schools. Barney (2017) asserts that in every organisational context serious risks can never be fully ascertained or predicted, but it is the responsibility of principals to strategies to mitigate such risks.

### 8.2.2 Providing initial strategic guidance

The finding obtained in this study revealed that a greater number of teachers felt that strategic planning was the main responsibility of senior management, and for that reason, they ought not to have been involved that much. Also, it emerged from the data that not only were some principals as clueless as to their staff, but they also lacked the requisite abilities to lead in the planning processes. These findings are particularly interesting for the study context, and also a common phenomenon faced by many organisations not only in Saudi Arabia but also beyond.

If we turn to principals' weak abilities related to planning, this finding reflects those of Thompson et al. (2014, p. 88), who emphasise that “*virtually all organisational capabilities are knowledge-based, residing in people and in a company's intellectual capital or in organisational processes and systems, which embody tacit knowledge*”. It may be the case, therefore, that this finding is not only limited to the Makkah region where the study was undertaken, but it could be that the problem was widespread among the staff of all kindergartens in the Saudi Kingdom, as suggested further by data that strategic planning was not a popular managerial practice among principals and teachers in kindergartens. Coming to the concern raised about strategic planning being the responsibility of principals, we find that this is consistent with the tenets of bureaucratic theory. According to the theory, a kindergarten school, like any other formal organisation, has a hierarchal structure where power or authority is invested in those at the upper echelon of the structure (Bush, 2003). For example, kindergarten principals by design should be knowledgeable or experienced enough to assist staff in implementing school plans as the case may be. This finding is also consistent with subjective theory (Bush, 2000), which postulates that it is the values and beliefs of individuals that shape meanings assigned to events in an organisation, rather than mere organisational structures.

### 8.2.3 Navigating the strategic planning process at the school level

A finding that raised intriguing questions in the mind was that most principals and teachers did not demonstrate full mastery of planning processes, and that it was uncertain if supervisors ensured that principals knew the critical stages of planning and what they entailed. So, as it stands, one of the issues that emerged from these findings was that strategic planning at kindergarten schools in the Makkah Al-Mukarramah region was confronted with serious challenges that could render such processes ineffective and inefficient. The extant literature abounds with techniques that should be followed in the pre-planning stage; these are goal setting, implementation and monitoring and evaluation stages. Notwithstanding this fact, many principals, teachers and staff were deficient in the knowledge and skills required. Considering the crucial importance of pre-planning as a critical first step in strategic planning, Agwu (2018), Kraja and Osmani (2013) and Barney et al. (2010) posit that doing a SWAT analysis assists an organisation in identifying its opportunities and threats, and the internal analysis identifies the distinctive competencies of the organisation.

From a practice point of view, only a few principals and teachers in some kindergartens indicated that they implemented plans without difficulty. Also, goal setting appeared to be equally challenging for principals and teaching staff. According to the data, some principals led their teams to set goals through a participatory process, whilst others lacked the skill to do so. Further, some teachers explained that they did not participate in setting goals for their schools, but they were imposed on them, depriving them of their participation. Therefore, the situation of kindergartens in the Makkah region appeared to be one of conflicting views and perceptions about the standard procedure. Here, ambiguity theory might prove useful in expanding our understanding. First and foremost, the theory explains complexity, uncertainty and instability as prevalent phenomena in organisations. Furthermore, a peculiar feature of organisations is that they have problematic goals, which seems to explain why kindergarten supervisors, principals and teachers were struggling to set goals. Conceivably, they also lacked a clear understanding of their own processes (Bush, 2003). A possible explanation for the state of affairs in kindergartens is that the attention of supervisors, administrators and principals has not been on building the capacity of teachers to understand their environment and relate such an understanding to planning in general. Success in implementing plans at the school level invariably depends on priorities and choices of action by principals and guiding teachers to understand how strategic planning translates into teaching and learning whilst directing, coordinating and controlling other staff in the school to ensure that their efforts align with the set goals (Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson, 2012). The failure of most strategic planning initiatives in organisations has been blamed on leaders or management disregarding the interests and needs of the school and the staff (Lattore-Medina and Blanco- Encomienda, 2013).

#### 8.2.4 Low levels of parental involvement in planning

The involvement of community members in the strategic planning of their children's education is an important partnership arrangement through which community aspirations are catered for in planning in schools. According to Weyama (2018), an adjustment of educational programmes relies on social, political and economic factors. That is to say, schools are not islands in themselves, but must conform to the values of the bigger national system and beyond. Weyama (ibid) opines that parents should engage with the school leadership and teachers to assist them in the development of the full academic potential of the students and serve as the decision-makers in the context of the policies (Jaiswal, 2017). Contemporary developments in

education in most countries point to the adoption of the community school model as an example of the value of the comprehensive approach to the child's needs in the promotion of educational achievements (Fehrer and Leos-Urbel, 2016). Leveraging community partnership is an effective expansion of traditional schooling as a sure way to improve the students' achievements. Schools are essentially about the well-being of children in any country, and parental involvement or interest in all school activities is commended by schools.

This notwithstanding, data from the fieldwork revealed the contrary. In most kindergarten schools in the study area, high levels of parental apathy were recorded, in stark contrast to empirical findings in the extant literature (Fehrer and Leos-Urbel, 2016; Jaiswal, 2017). Kindergarten school principals and teachers decried the lack of cooperation of parents with teachers in managing schools, a manifestation of which was in their low levels of interest and participation in the kindergarten school activities. More worrying was the behaviour of even the educated ones, most of whom exhibited a total lack of awareness in matters concerning their children's well-being at school. Mahmoud (2018) posits that in Saudi Arabia, the non-involvement of parents (mothers and fathers) in their children's school activities could be attributed to a host of factors, but more important is the lack of awareness of the importance of their role in the development of their children's schools.

From the findings, it is unimaginable, particularly in the case of early childhood education, for parents to exhibit such low levels of interest in the development of their children whereby opportunities to engage in strategic planning were apparently ignored. Evidently, the benefits of parental involvement in school affairs at all levels have been known to contribute largely to children staying in school, and the likelihood of graduating from secondary school is high (Calvin, 2020). Proponents of school-based management argue that parental involvement in decision-making in schools results in favourable outcomes in terms of teaching and learning (Fontaine and Ahmed, 2013). Similarly, Hallinger and Ko (2016) and Leithwood and Prestine (2002) assert that parents' educational level and their family life impact children's learning. In the Saudi study context, however, it did not matter whether parents were educated or not; parents showed less interest in school-based strategic planning than was hoped for. The behaviour of parents (predominantly women) in the kindergarten schools studied was unexpected. Mothers and indeed parents, in some countries, are noted to exhibit some care or concern in matters of their children's welfare.

### 8.2.5 Monitoring and evaluating the strategic planning process

A core segment of every strategic planning programme is monitoring and evaluating the entire process. Unfortunately, the data showed that in most kindergartens in the Makkah region, supervisors, principals and principals did not insist on carrying out this crucial process. Teachers in schools noted that in cases where there was a semblance of monitoring and evaluation, it was to satisfy the records; it was also noted that in some cases, plans were even not carried out at all. In most kindergarten schools, teachers and other staff were not given any list of criteria to guide their plan implementation processes. Therefore, it can be concluded that strategic planning was generally not part of the culture of kindergarten schools in the study area. Be that as it may, the kindergarten schools were denied the benefits associated with planning strategically. An explanation that might account for such situations could be that staff either did not have the skills to implement their plans or did not see the need for planning.

### 8.3 Discussion on Exploring the Factors that Affect the Implementation of Strategic Planning in Kindergarten Schools (Second Objective – Chapter 6)

The chapter presented the data from participants' responses to the second research question: *What is the current application of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?* It focused on the implementation of strategic planning at the school level, taking cognisance of the most important factors affecting it from the varied views of principals and teachers in kindergartens in the study area. Thematically, the data was presented as follows: physical capabilities of kindergartens, training courses, acceptance of the changes resulting from strategic planning, and the role of the cultural influence of Arab society on the planning process. The other factors beside the cultural contents that are indicated as the key findings of this chapter are (i) staff resistance to the change process; (ii) evidence of bureaucracy, which continues to be a factor impeding the rapid change envisaged for kindergartens in the study context in subtle forms; (iii) interference from routine administrative tasks; (iv) uncoordinated staff transfers; (v) uncondusive teaching and learning environments; (vi) low budgetary support to kindergarten schools; (vii) non-inclusive decision-making processes in schools; (viii) ineffective capacity building initiatives within kindergartens; and (ix) poor communication of the strategic change processes. These factors can be improved via training



and programmes to develop good interpersonal skills that can help to enhance strategic planning implementation in the schools under study.

### 8.3.1 Poor communication of the strategic change processes

Communication is one of the most vital tools of management in modern organisations. At the root of many successful communication strategies in ensuring change, according to Ocasio et al. (2018), are tools such as the rhetoric, discussions, pep talks and vocabulary used in communicating change. Komodromos et al. (2019) pointed out that communication by leadership in any organisation ensures trust-building between leaders and staff, which has a direct impact on the acceptance or rejection of proposed change initiatives. As noted by Bafadal et al. (2020), effective communication facilitates a high level of performance at all levels of an organisation since every employee is well informed about what needs to be done, where, how, by whom and at what time. Additionally, Anderson and Anderson (2010) equally assert that leaders equipped with problem-solving and communication skills can effectively strategise and implement the required changes through strategic planning. Poor communication, therefore, could be a very serious obstacle to planning in a strategic management process, as observed in the data analysis. At the school level, it behoves leadership to ensure that effective communication channels between all layers of management are provided (Van Niekerk and Van Niekerk, 2006). If communication is impeded in an organisation, for whatever reason, the consequences on performance could be damaging.

Further, Alhazemi, Rees and Hossain (2013) note that the duties of the leader are to create a suitable communication climate that empowers stakeholders and inspires them to work towards achieving the vision and mission of the school. This involves nurturing and coaching staff, clarifying ambiguities, caretaking, directing and navigating vital planning processes. A similar idea is developed in a study by Stamatis and Chatzinikolaou (2020), who emphasised that communication behaviours of the leaders predict a positive environment, better task performance, and goal achievement. Nonetheless, the communication between leadership and staff may not be that simple due to key factors mentioned above. Further, the staff perception of leadership and authority, especially in a school context in Saudi Arabia, is something that may not be challenged due to the existence of a high-power distance in society. Hofstede (1991) explains that in cultures characterised by high power distance, people in the lower echelons of

society accept instructions given by their bosses without difficulty. The success of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in the study area could be achieved if leadership adopts a collegiate attitude of collaboration (in which the power distance between leaders and staff is narrowed to allow for interaction) between staff in the school to work together to achieve set goals. At the kindergarten level, just like any other, the principal's key role is to communicate to staff the scope and nature of the planning, why it is needed, and to whose benefit those changes go (Fontaine and Ahmed, 2013).

### 8.3.2 Non-inclusive decision-making processes in schools – teachers' perspective

Decision-making in a school organisation, like in many other organisations, requires specific answers to three key questions: who, what and how. The 'who' requirement specifies the key actors in the decision-making processes; clearly, teachers and other school staff are important members of the school and their voice is critical to the success of the strategic planning process. Brohammer et al. (2018) explain that the main actors in decision-making in a school include the school board of education, the administration, the community, and school staff and other personnel. Their participation in facility planning ensures consensus-building, which supports all processes of planning. The 'what' question describes issues of critical importance that have to be tackled. Finally, addressing the 'how' question requires specifying how decisions are to be implemented (Mukherjee et al., 2017).

Justifiably, teachers in kindergarten schools in the Makkah region are expecting a reform of the educational system where teachers and other school staff become key members of decision-making processes, as it emerged from data:

*“We, teachers, need a principal who has skill in managing dialogue and meetings, because building the plan and implementing it requires our participation. Therefore, our views must be taken into account, but what happens is that the meeting is managed in a way that lacks open discussion; we are given orders and we are required to work silently without objection.”*  
(Tr 020)

A good decision-making process is a *sine qua non* for an effective strategic planning process. Ishak and Hamzah (2018) point out that the decision-making process predetermines the effectiveness of strategic planning as it creates a solid framework for the essential processes in

the organisation; therefore, notwithstanding the context in which principals operate, kindergarten principals should ensure, in the spirit and letter of good management practice, that the concerns of staff are taken into consideration in school management decisions (Freeman, 2010).

A widely inclusive or participatory decision-making process is essential for principals to put in place management frameworks that support strategic planning in kindergarten schools (Bush, 2006). Frick (2009) highlights what decision-making entails in a school: “*school management decision making requires more than the mechanical application of existing rules, regulations and various levels of school and school-related policy*” (p. 51). The very essence of decision-making in schools is to improve the performance of teachers and students. In addition, perspectives from the political theory of strategic management seem to support the conventional management principles mentioned earlier. Within the ambit of the theory, decision-making involves bargaining and negotiation between stakeholders over an issue of concern where interests or stakes of parties are adequately catered for in a decision or policy (Bush, 2003).

### 8.3.3 Resistance of staff to the change process

An important finding from the fieldwork data was staff resistance to the strategic change process in kindergarten schools in the Makkah region. Staff resistance to change is a very common phenomenon in modern organisations. At the individual staff level, resistance to change sets in when they perceive an action or set of actions to be unnecessary; staff more often than not may have genuine concerns about the effectiveness of a change model. They argue that they can foresee challenges with specific recommended changes (Jacobs et al., 2017). Also, experts note that the level of risk associated with the change process might lead to resistance; for example, new skills may have to be learnt and old ones discarded. With reference to the kindergarten schools’ strategic change, it means the creation of new roles and the adoption of new teaching methods, which can be challenging for staff (Twyford, 2016; Öznacar and Yilmaz, 2019). Abdel-Moneim (2015) argues that management systems and practices in Saudi Arabia, as well as in other Middle Eastern countries, are influenced by Arab value systems and culture, which fundamentally could be the basis for resistance to change.

Tayeb (1988, p. 42) defines culture as “*a set of historically evolved learned values, attitudes, and meanings shared by members of a given community.*”

#### 8.3.4 Bureaucratic impediments in planning

Unsurprisingly, bureaucracy emerged as an important theme in the data for the popular reason that most formal organisations are essentially structured bureaucratically. With specific reference to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, bureaucracy has become an inherent part of the education system as the school system has been centralised since the laying of its foundation as a modern state, notwithstanding its global Islamic leadership (Alyami and Floyd, 2019). Classical management theorists argue it is an “*efficient form of management*” (Bush, 2003, p. 47). It is believed that efficiency is attributed to a deep reverence for rules and regulations, very much at the heart of public sector organisations. Researchers and experts of the public sector deplore the lack of flexibility with regards to playing by rigid rules in organisations irrespective of their size. At most kindergarten schools in the Makkah region, the participants, specifically the teachers and other staff, intimated there was an emphasis on administrative routines involving lots of paperwork, which was burdensome and distractive to their planning schedules. This assertion is strongly supported by Al-Ajmi (2020) in his study of capacity building among Saudi senior public servants. In a typical Saudi school setting, the system is hierarchal and replete with numerous chains of command. Going by this management approach, it is believed that bureaucracy creates stability in the school, i.e., everyone in the school does their job without discussing or attempting to subvert the ongoing processes (Bush, 2007; Alhammadi, 2017). Usually, personal initiative in settings such as this one is swallowed up in the constant observance of rules and regulations. Unfortunately, some researchers believe that bureaucracy has a detrimental impact on the motivation of school staff (Al-Ajmi, 2020). Al-Ajmi’s (2020) research reveals that achieving only administrative efficiency, instead of focusing on the success of every school programme and addressing staff concerns, is equally unproductive.

Interestingly, participants in the studied kindergarten schools forgot that the entire planning process was the brainchild of the bureaucratic system. Perhaps perspectives from contingency theory may provide better insight in support of this finding; thus, the theory identifies and defines interrelationships among and within subsystems and between the organisation and its

environment. The theory also attempts to understand how organisations operate under specific circumstances and different conditions. Within its tenets, the theory is an attempt to justify the creation of managerial practices and organisational designs that work in specific situations (Mc Grandle, 2017). To this end, Dammas (2020) explains that in the settings of Saudi schools, bureaucracy often becomes an effective tool of behavioural control and the improvement of the effectiveness of the staff work. Bureaucracy appears appealing to Saudi public sector organisations perhaps due to the kingdom's social structure, which have often been described as authoritative. In light of this, kindergartens schools could adopt practices that best meet their specific needs, rather than blindly following strict rules and regulations that are counterproductive to school performance. It has been argued by organisational management experts that the adoption of distributional leadership might prove beneficial in managing bureaucratic situations in organisational settings, as exemplified in the kindergarten schools in the Makkah region in Saudi Arabia. In the Saudi government's quest to transform the kingdom in light of the 2030 Vision, bureaucracy is cited as a key obstacle to the achievement of the goals envisioned (Alhazemi, 2017)

#### 8.3.5 Ineffective capacity building initiatives within kindergartens

One of the primary concerns of teachers and other staff in kindergartens in the Makkah region was the general inadequacy of skills training for staff in schools. It is a widely held view among educational leaders that building staff capacity, especially through training of any form, ensures that every individual in a kindergarten school is equipped with the requisite skills to perform their allocated tasks effectively. Therefore, capacity building is considered to hold the key to organisational effectiveness. The nature, quality and quantity of skills available in an organisation ensure high organisational performance through an effective workforce. Marzano (2006) asserts that managing talent in schools is yet to be fully exploited by leadership in schools, and this is even more important for kindergartens, where children are beginning to discover their worlds. Educators believe that effective, quality-oriented teachers enhance student learning more than any other aspect that can be controlled within the school (Marzano, 2006). Quality teachers are capable of inspiring significantly greater learning gains in their students when compared with their weaker colleagues (Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq, and Berhanu, 2011). Danielson (2007) also noted that quality teachers must have good knowledge

of content and pedagogy, in that teachers' plans and practice reflect extensive knowledge of the content and the structure of the discipline.

Having noted the benefits that schools can derive from capacity-building, the negative consequence of its absence cannot be gainsaid. Therefore, the lack of training in strategic planning at kindergartens in the study area has serious implications for the Saudi economy in the long term. Proverbially, the lack of skills by teachers to plan might equally mean planning to fail (DuFour et al., 2010). Additionally, Wanjala and Rarieya (2014) in a study of Kenyan schools, for example, noted a range of critical constraints in planning that are quite similar to the ones in the Saudi kindergarten schools in the study area, such as a lack of knowledge and awareness of strategic planning, traditional leadership style in schools, a lack of experience, weak physical and financial resources, and a lack of professional development, which led to a need for planning to accommodate all contingencies. These findings are relevant to both practitioners and policymakers in most contexts.

#### 8.3.6 Low budgetary support to kindergarten schools

Fundamental to all strategic planning processes in organisations is strong budgetary support, without which much effort and time could be wasted. The importance of budgets cannot be overemphasised in strategic planning since phases of planning can be budgeted for to give an idea of the total cost outlay to inform management to prioritise planning to maximise outcomes. Notwithstanding the inherent benefits that budgeting offers, some researchers criticise budgeting as being tiresome, exhausting, and inflexible, and propose the “beyond budgeting” approach with no fixed targets (Weigel et al., 2018). Budgets are indispensable as many organisations still choose budgeting as essential support for effective strategic planning. Larry (2019) established a strong empirical link between planning and budgeting. Although planning cycles and budgeting do not occur concurrently, their components are closely integrated and ensure the availability of the necessary resources at a particular time (Kim et al., 2020).

Additionally, according to strategic management theory, planning creates the basis for budgeting, performance, and effective change promotion (Johnsen, 2016). Therefore, in support of the empirical evidence presented in the data, low levels of funding for kindergarten schools came up as a major concern amongst the administrators, principals and teachers of kindergarten schools in the Makkah Al-Mukarramah region. It was judged as the lifeblood of

all activities in schools, without which no meaningful activities could be carried out, and strategic management and planning are no exception. To support this finding, one principal's testimony was particularly insightful:

*“The most important factor and the first factor that affects our planning process in kindergarten is the budget, and if I ask any other principal other than me it will be the same answer as the budget and then the budget.” (Pr 005)*

Empirical evidence from South Korea revealed that progress in the achievement of effective strategic goals is possible as a result of strong budgetary and a well-planned distribution of resources (Im and Kwon, 2019). The problem of low levels of funding for primary schools appears to be not only limited to Saudi Arabia but also extends to many nations of the world (Fernandez, 2011; Murphy, 2009). To tackle such funding inadequacies, the IMF (2013) has encouraged nations to adopt specific policy strategies, such as prioritising sectorial spending in favour of social projects, especially education. The IMF (2013) explains that with adequate sectoral funding, nations can promote managerial approaches to strategically transform human resource management and development in the education sector in developing countries, for instance, improving teacher training in management, supervision and leadership. Clearly, strategic planning may just be another blueprint if adequate funding is not provided to kindergarten schools in the study area.

#### 8.4. Discussion on Investigating the Role of the Principals in the Implementation of Strategic Planning in the Context of Kindergarten Schools (Third Objective – Chapter 7)

In this chapter, the data was presented from participants' responses to the third research question: *“To what extent do the principals facilitate the use of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia?”* Facilitation of this very important process demands knowledge and skills on the part of principals. The chapter sought to understand how kindergarten school principals organised the strategic planning processes at the school level. The data were presented using the main themes as follows: the creation of planning teams, using the skills and experience of principals as levers, the delegation of authority, community involvement and evaluation criteria. The key findings of this chapter are (i) a lack of effective leadership for the planning processes; (ii) creating an enabling environment for a seamless implementation of strategic plans; (iii) principals had limited administrative powers to execute

certain functions in kindergarten schools; (iv) principals lacked the skill/know-how in setting up the plan implementation criteria; and (v) the ad hoc and arbitrary appointment of teachers.

#### 8.4.1 Providing leadership for the planning processes in kindergarten schools

Strong leadership is often considered an important link in the overarching strategic planning strategy of an organisation. Good strategic plans may not yield the expected outcomes without good leadership. It was, therefore, no surprise to observe variables such as good and effective leadership, creating an enabling environment, decision-making and team selection emerge strongly in the data. In a study of a kindergarten in Tri Dava, Sudrajat and Agustin (2020) concluded that a principal who demonstrates strong leadership skills eventually inspires staff in the implementation of a school's mission and vision, which ultimately leads to the attainment of organisational goals. These issues are closely related to the research question and provide insights into the main research problem. Strong leadership has always been associated with a management approach that leverages both leadership and managerial roles. For instance, effective strategic planning can only be realised in kindergarten schools in the Makkah region if principals play both leadership and managerial roles. This assertion is consistent with the extant literature as Leithwood and Prestine (2002) posit that there is a strong relationship between leadership functions and the operational functions of management in a school setting.

#### 8.4.2 Effective leadership at the school level

Selection of teachers and other staff by principals to constitute strategic planning teams was a sub-theme under leadership. In the extant literature on strategic management, the establishment of teams constitutes an important strategic step in the planning processes. In some schools, the principal encouraged staff to join the various teams created where they could best contribute their expertise, even if this was not a very popular exercise with teachers, and reasons could not be assigned why this was so. It was revealed in the study that this function was considered the responsibility of kindergarten principals.

Naturally, school principals know their staff and their abilities and are better placed to know where they should be. Experts believe that effective leadership resides in the leader's ability to foster collaboration among teams in the planning process (Freeman, 2010; Kassim and Habib, 2011). This engenders the adoption of the participative leadership style that ensures that



teachers and other staff actively engage with senior management in the strategic planning process. Unfortunately, in some kindergarten schools some principals still adhered to the authoritarian leadership style characterised by the strict control of teachers and staff activities oblivious of their views and preferences. This finding is important because the extant literature on strategic management and planning highlights democratic/participatory leadership models as necessary conditions for success, as opposed to the Saudi school context where authoritative leadership styles abound (Alargini and Male, 2014). As a corollary, Albugami and Ahmed (2015) note in their study on the Saudi education system that in some situations, principals did not have the mandate to select teams for important school activities, including strategic planning.

#### 8.4.3 Decision-making at the school level – principals’ perspective

Following the assertion of a participant in the data as regards decision-making, she argued:

*“One of the basic skills that principals need is the ability to make decisions. It is an important point for the principal to be able to take responsibility and make the appropriate decisions without which he may not be able to accomplish or achieve planning goals.” (Pr 022)*

Generally, people tend to be pragmatic and accept change as part of their social reality due to perceived benefits at the end of the process. In terms of management, societies with a high level of uncertainty avoidance will be more cautious in terms of decision making, and they will adopt solutions that have been tested and are successful somewhere else. Decision-making according to political theory is the result of processes of negotiation and bargaining; the theory further states that the management of an organisation is directed toward regulating political behaviour (Bush, 2003). The nature and quality of decision-making within kindergarten schools in the study area was an issue that was extensively debated in the data. For Saudi teachers, the principals, principals and administrators should be skilful and experienced enough to make good decisions in the interest of their organisations.

When leaders make good decisions, all aspects of organisational processes function properly, which leads to desirable outcomes in terms of performance. However, decision-making in schools continues to be a challenging task for most principals in Saudi kindergarten schools.

Strategic management principles are the guiding principles in the spirit of “*Tatweer*” in most Saudi schools. Saudi school principals are expected to acquire knowledge and skills in strategic management and planning to carry out their roles professionally, but these expectations are largely still not met (Alameen et al., 2015; Khan, 2015).

#### 8.4.4 Professionalism of principals and teachers

A lack of early childhood education knowledge and skills by principals and teachers was observed in the data as one factor that worked against strategic planning at the kindergarten schools in the study area. Numerous principals intimated that their lack of professional training in early childhood teaching and learning affected their planning capabilities. To a large extent, the preoccupation of principals in planning, just like teachers in the classrooms, is controlling staff behaviour rather than developing people’s capabilities (Fontaine and Ahmed, 2013). Planning tasks require a lot more experience and skill to guide teachers and staff in kindergarten schools to appreciate the important links between the present, the short term, the medium term and the long term in plan preparation. Strategic planning offers tremendous benefits to schools if teachers and principals are professionally sound. For instance, teaching and learning could be planned in a manner that would lead to the practical acquisition of skills, as opposed to relying on the traditional operational plans that are mechanistic and without any focus to attain targets.

Currently, all curricula in Saudi Arabia are derived from a national curriculum under the control of the Saudi Ministry of Education. Under this homogenous system, children in kindergarten schools are taught the same things throughout the kingdom, unlike in some Western countries where schools have the authority to determine what is taught and through specific methods of teaching dictated by teachers and communities. Dealing with systemic rigidities calls for professionalism on the part of principals and teachers to create and innovate through strategic planning to improve operational effectiveness and overall accountabilities for the benefit of children’s learning (Sigmund, 2016). Strategic planning in kindergarten schools leads the way to establish an acceptable educational system that conforms with local and internal standards.

## 8.5 Staff Voice and Expectations in Strategic Planning at the School Level

This section discussed the staff voice and expectation form strategic planning blueprint preparation that should be consider before the strategic planning implementation in the school under study.

### 8.5.1 Demand for a blueprint for strategic plan preparation

There was a demand by participants for a standard document, in terms of plan preparation criteria, to guide kindergarten staff in their strategic plan preparation. Staff's concern for the flawless implementation of plans at schools was best captured as:

*“We strongly demand that an organisational guide be provided in which the steps for developing a plan are mentioned, containing the most important programmes and activities with specific dates. This helps us understand the kindergarten management plan, which enables us to organise other programmes.” (Pr 013)*

Wheelen and Hunger (2010) explain that a guided process is highly advised, particularly, in the school context where staff have not had prior experience of strategic planning. They note that six elements usually characterise an implementation stage: (i) specific actions to be taken to make programmes operational; (ii) dates to begin and end each action; (iii) a person, identified by name, title, organisation and phone number or e-mail address responsible for carrying out each action; (iv) a person responsible for monitoring the timeliness and effectiveness of each action; (v) expected financial and/or physical consequences of each action; and (vi) contingency plans if current plans don't work or are not approved. Therefore, an organised planning mechanism is required in kindergarten schools to guide their development. This can be done by developing an acceptable procedural guide to be used across all kindergartens in the region.

### 8.5.2 Focused practical training for school staff

The staff of kindergartens in the Makkah region were resolute in their demand for more extensive training programmes in strategic planning to be introduced for principals, teachers and other staff to develop their planning skills to make them effective in their schools. School principals, principals, teachers and other staff could not plan, specifically in the area of plan

conceptualisation, preparation and implementation. Therefore, as it stands, staff are in urgent need of guidance for a clear understanding of what the planning is and how it is implemented; this can only be done through intensive training programmes. Strategic planning in a school context is essentially about putting human and physical resources to work to achieve goals that have been set by leadership and staff (Berry, 2007). Al-Seghayer (2014) and Salmah (2005) aver that strategic management is also vital in enabling a school organisation to be proactive in shaping the future achievements of its students. To this end, Abas (2005) explains that school principals should master strategic planning skills and model themselves as leaders who are visionary, capable, and efficient in handling problems, otherwise they will only be operating as crisis principals.

In the Makkah region, principals confirmed that one of the most important basic requirements for the success of the implementation of strategic planning in kindergartens schools in general is that theoretical courses should be complemented by intensive practical sessions to enable school leadership and staff to develop the needed competences to play their respective roles in implementing strategies for the envisioned change. The IMF (2013) argues that basic schools, including kindergartens, need to improve their leadership and managerial planning competences to achieve their educational outcomes. Particularly in the studied schools, principals should encourage teachers to attend training programmes to improve their skills through moral and material incentives. Also, kindergarten principals and supervisors should equally be trained in strategic management and planning to understand planning processes; only in that way can they support principals and teachers and staff in improving the overall performance of schools.

University training programmes in Saudi Arabia on kindergarten management appeared not to have provided principals and teacher trainees the requisite skills in strategic planning:

*“I graduated last year and was appointed to a kindergarten. I do not hide from you my shock from the completely opposite reality of what I studied for the past four years at the university, and from my point of view that kindergarten curricula should be developed in line with the age in which we live in one of the most important demands so that kindergarten and its various levels proceed in a specific and developed direction.” (Tr 003)*

It is evident from the participant's statement that there is a gap in knowledge, skills and abilities that some kindergarten teachers acquired at university and the actual skills and abilities demanded in jobs in schools.

### 8.5.3 Creating an effective curriculum for kindergartens

The curriculum of kindergarten schools in the study area needed reassessment considering current developments in teaching and learning, particularly, in the use of modern technology in the classroom. An updated curriculum will inculcate the right knowledge and skills in children, and such an intervention will enable kindergarten schools to meet their desired goals. As a result, there is a demand for all key actors in education, such as the Saudi Ministry of Education, parents, teachers and experts in early childhood education, to deliberate on creating a new curriculum to meet the current needs of children in terms of knowledge and skills development. Alhamadi (2018) notes that efforts are rife at the Ministry of Education in Saudi to stack up curricula in line with national priorities and needs, both in the short and long term, to give Saudi children the skills and competences they will need in the future. Critical areas for intervention could be in the methods of teaching in early childhood centres, and kindergartens need to be developed to match up the new curricula that are to be developed. Curricula should be developed with a focus on the use of information, communication and technology to encourage the early use of computers, iPads, smartboards, display tools, and similar play devices to develop the necessary skills in children in preparation for the future. Some researchers noted that the use of modern teaching methods involving information, technology and communication are not adequately explored by teachers in kindergartens, which points to the urgency of actors in the early childhood sector to redesign the sector's curricula.

### 8.5.4 Addressing quality control concerns

Early childhood education is a specialised area and needs to be managed by trained staff to handle children in their early stages of development; this responsibility cannot be left to chance because it is the basis for future social and academic development. As a corollary, the sector management of kindergartens at the Ministry of Education, together with schools, should take quality assurance concerns seriously at all levels of early childhood education in the Makkah region. For this reason, staff recruitment for kindergartens should factor in specific desirable skills. Quality assurance concerns were raised in the appointment of teachers in schools in the

study area. It was pointed out that teachers were appointed without any laid down criteria that ensured they had the right competences academically and socially to handle children in schools.

*“In most cases, teachers are appointed who are not assessed or do not undergo tests (Pr 028)*

*“From my point of view the kindergarten teacher should have capabilities and specifications that differ from other teachers.”  
(Pr 003)*

Quality criteria need to be clarified to serve as a basis for staff recruitment in kindergarten schools. This raises the need for the regular assessment of teachers’ competences and skills to ensure they are matched with the current demands of their jobs. Those found to be lacking in the right skills should be retrained to meet the requisite standards.

The quality of human resources in an organisation has been noted as a very crucial factor in effective organisations, and kindergarten schools are no exception (Alexander, 1991; Cater and Pucko, 2010; Lorange, 1998; Rajasekar, 2014). In the case of kindergarten schools in the Makkah region, inappropriate evaluation methods were used, which failed to distinguish non-performing teachers from high performers. Such an evaluation mode may potentially demotivate well-performing teachers; also, if such a system continues, non-performing teachers may not see the need to seek to upgrade their skills.

#### 8.5.5 Assessing plan impact on educational outcomes

Once strategic plans are implemented, a retrospective view of the entire process is needed. As demanded by staff, supervisors in schools should seek to assess the impact of strategic planning by questioning all previous decisions at all levels of the organisation for corrective action early on, if any, to avoid risks and associated costs that were not budgeted for (David, 2010). Staff demanded that kindergarten supervisors should follow up on the impact of the kindergarten strategic plans on the children and that tangible results be documented in a report and handed to senior management for necessary action. From this point of view, principals and teachers demanded that things return to the same as before, i.e. when there were two supervisors assigned to each kindergarten: an administrative supervisor for budget and another supervisor in charge of teaching and learning and strategic planning. Planning impact assessment is a legitimate call on the part of the staff within kindergarten schools in the Makkah region.

Berman (2015) suggests that performance assessments should include methods of measuring the organisation's output, such as processes, people, products, and service measurements, which can range from return on investment, turnover rates, absenteeism rates and challenges, process control or other measurements in a typical school setting.

#### 8.5.6 Establishment of an effective and formalised means of communication

Dolf (2017) emphasises that communication is a key component of strategic change processes due to its solid contribution to the better understanding of the cultural and socio-economic situation. There is empirical evidence that communication is one of the basic strategies that favour organisational change; particularly, dialogic communication elaborates cooperation, mutuality, co-learning, and ensures an improved understanding of the positions of others (Syahmi et al., 2019). Staff demanded a formalised means of communication between kindergarten management and other actors in the early childhood education sector, such as private and public sector institutions, such as communicating with hospitals and clinics around kindergartens to ensure children's immediate health needs are met. An effective communication system brings all actors to the same level in terms of information to inform decision-making concerning support for kindergarten schools. Thompson et al. (2014, p. 88) emphasise that *“virtually all organisational capabilities are knowledge-based, residing in people and in a company's intellectual capital or in organisational processes and systems, which embody tacit knowledge”*. Therefore, communicating effectively with teams in a school environment creates an enabling environment that gets things done with clarity, without which much effort could be wasted in seeking further information.

#### 8.5.7 Ensuring an enabling environment in kindergartens

A concern that needs to be addressed is the creation of an enabling internal environment in kindergartens. As an imperative, the internal environment of kindergartens is a very important success factor that needs to be considered to set the basis for strategic planning; this demand was aptly articulated by a staff member in the following statement:

*“We put plans and determine the cost of programmes, objectives and activities, but there is no environment prepared to achieve them, an environment unsuitable for children in terms of maintenance, cleanliness, buildings and equipment. We suggest*

*that the buildings be reconsidered, or at least care should be taken to prepare the basic places in them, such as classrooms and squares, because they are the two areas we depend on, whether in activities, games and teaching. I know that it is difficult to change the buildings, but at least the kindergarten administration is making a plan to renew and develop them. These buildings have a specific and independent budget by the ministry” (Pr 0040)*

Muriuki et al. (2017) and Agwu (2018) posit that the continuous improvement of internal environmental factors, such as the organisation's resources, its human resources, processes and technological systems, should be considered. Early childhood centres such as kindergartens require a lot of teacher presence and support. Therefore, the leadership of schools is encouraged to meet the basic needs of teachers to energise them to work. Improvements in certain working conditions include the provision of comfortable staff rooms for teaching staff to relax during break periods or for staff who needed to wait for brief periods before they take over from others. This then raises the need for staff to demand the creation of an enabling internal environment in kindergarten schools in the Makkah region – a strategy that will boost the energies of staff to achieve more for their schools.

#### 8.5.8 Bridging the resource disparities between urban and rural kindergartens

Attention was drawn to the lack of attention to the needs of kindergartens in rural Makkah. Staff demanded that the education authorities pay serious attention to the development of kindergartens in rural parts of the Makkah region. Kindergartens in the rural areas were deprived of adequate budgetary support, the right number of teachers and general delays in response to their needs and demands. Clearly, the data that follows puts the demand in perspective:

*“The vast majority of kindergartens are dilapidated and old and need maintenance and have not been renewed for a long time, despite the presence of a large number of children in them, in addition to the fact that a large number of kindergartens do not provide suitable playgrounds or even equipment and games, so expanding the building and creating suitable spaces for play and education ensures the safety of children and their freedom of movement.” (Pr 042)*



This part of the data paints a picture of a weak internal environment in rural kindergartens in the study area, which worked against the achievement of set targets of kindergartens as envisioned in their strategic courses of action.

#### 8.6 Implications of the Research Findings for Practice: Suggestions by Principals and Teachers

The suggestions listed below were made by a cross-section of principals, teachers and other staff members in the field and which, if implemented, could lead to the creation of more inclusive and motivated teams in kindergartens. This would allow them to become strategically focused in performing their functions individually and collectively.

- i. Attention should be paid by education authorities to the psychological and emotional needs of teachers. This is important to teachers because they want to feel valued by their superiors as equal partners in the development of their schools. With motivated teachers comes motivated children and motivated parents and communities.
- ii. Strategic planning should be tailored to each kindergarten's unique circumstances and capabilities. This allows staff to plan realistically to attain the outcomes desired for the future.
- iii. To make the strategic planning experience worthwhile, authorities may remove the rigidities that make planning difficult at the school level. Schools need some freedom to decide on budgets and resource allocation without the usual bureaucratic processes.
- iv. The majority of staff suggested a merger of the kindergarten and general education administration sections as this would foster a stronger strategic focus to meet the needs of kindergartens. In a merger, resources can be managed prudently to avoid the wastage of resources and the duplication of roles.
- v. The creation of a special department within the Ministry of Public Education to take responsibility in steering the development of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. Their responsibility could be to direct kindergartens in developing their strategic plans and also to build staff capacity in matters of planning.
- vi. Harmonisation of the curricula of kindergartens was noted as an important step in the change process envisaged for schools. It was argued that carefully planned standardised curricula might help to ensure that all schools are inspired by a clear national

- philosophy of education enshrined in the curricula. Additionally, it would lessen the burden of staff in deciding what to plan for teaching and learning.
- vii. (a). A concerted effort ought to be made to design strategic planning training programmes for kindergartens based on a strong needs assessment. In particular, it should be ensured that training sessions strengthening the hands-on skills of trainees are prioritised over the learning of theoretical concepts.  
(b). Training sessions should be fixed in such a way that they do not disrupt school sessions.  
(c) Selection of venues for training sessions should be made in a manner that caters for the convenience of teachers from remote parts of the Makkah region.
  - viii. Preferably, strategic plans should span a period of 3 years. This will allow their impact to be ascertained, instead of the current yearly plans, which are too short for effective impact assessments.
  - ix. For newly recruited principals, it was suggested that they attend mandatory job orientation training courses in strategic planning to equip them with the requisite skills to perform their responsibilities effectively.
  - x. The Kindergarten Department of the Ministry of Education is admonished to consider organising training in kindergartens, or kindergartens should select experienced staff members to attend training sessions on important matters so that they, in turn, can train their colleague teachers.
  - xi. On the welfare of children in kindergartens, it was suggested that schools should designate infirmaries or sick bays where children who are temporarily unwell can be given care by permanent and experienced nurses or doctors.
  - xii. To enable kindergartens to address children's behavioural problems, it is suggested that principals should recommend the recruitment of child psychologists to be responsible for addressing such issues of bad behaviour in children. School psychologists should also organise periodic seminars in which mothers/fathers are trained on how to effectively deal with their children's emotional/behavioural issues.
  - xiii. It was suggested that kindergarten principals and teachers organise periodic meetings with supervisors to deliberate on very important issues regarding teaching and learning, such as strategic planning and other management challenges that negatively impact the attainment of school goals.

- xiv. It was noted that principals should deliberate with senior management at the Ministry of Education to improve teachers' accommodation conditions to enable them to carry out their teaching without difficulties.
- xv. Authorities to provide opportunities for principals and teachers to attend refresher courses abroad to equip themselves with new or current ideas on early childhood education to eventually apply to their schools to enhance general performance.
- xvi. A proposal mooted to contribute to the success of strategic planning is to increase the intensity of community partnerships with kindergartens. This is because this study found that the involvement of different parts of the community contributes to a diversity of ideas, with the potential for improving school management effectiveness.

### 8.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the most important findings of the study concerning the extent of the understanding of strategic planning, in addition to identifying the current situation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools under study. It also discussed the most important factors that affect the applications of strategic planning, as well as the role of schools' principals in facilitating the use of strategic planning. The chapter also discussed the most important proposals and requirements submitted by principals and teachers

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUDING REMARKS

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the study conducted in this thesis. Key aspects of the entire study, such as the research objectives, study rationale, a summary of the main findings and study implications, the contribution of the study, study limitations, implications of the study for policy and practice, and suggestions for policy and practice, are covered.

### 9.2 Summary of the Research

The research design is organised into nine chapters. The introductory chapter begins with a brief exposition of what strategic management and planning entail, and the importance of their application in the context of organisations, in particular, for schools. It then focuses on the important role of principals in transforming schools through the adoption and implementation of strategic planning tools. This is then followed by the background of the study, presenting the transformative potential of strategic planning at the pre-school level (kindergartens) against the backdrop of the conformist Saudi system. Next comes the research problem, which delves into the role of principals applying strategic planning principles in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. Also, the research aims and objectives, the significance of the study, study limitations as well as the contributions to the knowledge are presented.

In the next segment (Chapter 2), an elaborate review of literature is presented on the characteristics of strategic management and the strategic planning processes in schools. The chapter explores strategic management and strategic planning in educational institutions, drawing out their impact in schools and the role of leaders at the school level in the successful implementation of strategic management. Important theoretical perspectives, such as bureaucratic theory, collegial theory, political theory, subjective theory, ambiguity theory and contingency theory, together with other literature reviewed, help to situate the research problem. Finally, a conceptual framework is developed that shows the nexus between the interrelated dimensions of the research problem. In Chapter 3, the methodology of the study is presented. This study adopts a social constructivist ontology operationalised by adopting a case-study qualitative approach. Data gathering instruments consist of questionnaires, an

interview schedule and a focus group discussion guide. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were extensively used during fieldwork that lasted over six months.

The Saudi national context is the focus of the fourth chapter. This presents a general overview of the study context and particularly devotes attention to the Saudi educational system. The role of the Saudi Ministry of Education is discussed, as is its oversight responsibility for education policy in the Kingdom; then, a look is taken at government funding of the education sector. Finally, the genesis of pre-school education is traced to current times.

The research then recounts the journey across the city of Makkah, where the selected schools were situated. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the empirical data according to the research objectives stated in Chapter 1 and the conceptual framework. The research findings were generated from these empirical chapters. The data analysis was carried out with the assistance of NVivo to derive the related themes. The key findings are discussed in light of the literature review presented in Chapter 2 to unearth the contribution of the study to the wider discourse in the extant literature.

#### 9.2.1 Research objectives and study rationale

This study investigated the contextualised adoption of strategic planning practices in Saudi Arabia and how an effective strategic planning approach can be applied to the management of Saudi kindergarten schools. The study's significance emanated from a need for effective strategic planning in Saudi educational institutions to support recent educational reforms. The study delved into the obstacles that hinder the adoption of effective strategic planning approaches and explored how these obstacles can be addressed in a culturally sensitive way. To shed light on this problem, perspectives from staff in kindergarten schools were sought. To attain the aim of the study, the following objectives were crystallised:

- I. To understand how strategic planning is being adopted in educational institutions in Saudi Arabia.
- II. To explore the factors that affect the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia.
- III. To investigate the role of the principals in the implementation of strategic planning in the context of kindergarten schools.

To operationalise these objectives, each statement of the objectives was transformed into a question that guided the empirical dimensions of the study. In light of the major educational reforms taking effect in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, strategic planning has become imperative for educational leaders to adopt managerial practices that have worked globally, particularly, in the developed countries, to strengthen the administrative management processes in educational institutions with their expected consequential positive impact on national educational outcomes as a way to garner the most important means of future development in the Saudi Kingdom (Buhai, 2010). The management of kindergartens is particularly crucial in the quest to build the Kingdom’s human capital. Nonetheless, socio-economic, organizational and behavioral barriers impede the effectiveness of not only principals and teachers in Saudi schools, but also their overall development.

Within the framework of this thesis, an analysis of the current practice of strategic planning in kindergarten schools, and how Saudi society moderates the adoption of better management practice, was explored in the empirical chapters (c.f. chapter 5). The current study is in response to the National Transformation Plan 2020 (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2016), whose mandate is to strengthen the efficacy of Saudi schools (Moxley, 2003; Reinhorn, 2017) through the adoption of time-tested strategic management and planning practices.

### 9.2.2 Summary of the main findings

*Table 9.1: Summary of the main findings*

<b>Research Objective</b>	<b>Main Findings</b>
<p>To understand how strategic planning is being adopted in educational institutions in Saudi Arabia. (Chapter 5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most principals knew about strategic planning; however, they lacked a deeper understanding of what it means as a concept. Thus, generally, they demonstrated a lack of confidence in the application of strategic management principles. Three categories of principals were identified: those who had never heard of the concept in their professional practice and those who knew little about strategic planning, and those who truly demonstrated their knowledge, skill and abilities in their responses.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers in kindergartens absolved themselves from the responsibility of strategic planning. They perceived it as a core responsibility of senior management.</li> <li>• There were no specific/standard criteria for evaluating planning in kindergarten schools. Additionally, plans were not implemented as required; all that was reviewed by either the kindergarten principal or the supervisor was the extent to which the plans were implemented.</li> </ul>
<p>To explore the factors that affect the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia. (Chapter6)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The inflexibility of senior management in decision-making was cited as a crucial issue. Supervisors were powerful, authoritative and subjective, believing only in their own opinions. Their visits to kindergartens created anxiety and stress among teachers.</li> <li>• The majority of kindergartens were grappling with inadequacies in their budgetary allocations, and that constituted a major obstacle to their ability to implement their plans successfully. Because of the lack of financial support, principals could not accomplish much of their work. For instance, the provision of equipment to facilitate teaching and learning was severely hampered. Also, principals were not able to incentivise and reward contributors to the planning process.</li> </ul>

To investigate the role of the principals in the implementation of strategic planning in the context of kindergarten schools. (Chapter 7)

- Some principals provided leadership within kindergartens by creating workable and motivated teams to accomplish all tasks related to strategic planning, such as carving out the vision and mission of their schools, goal setting, and providing resources to teams to carry out assigned tasks in strategic planning.
- Principals, as it appeared, did wield the power to carry out certain functions; however, the scope of their power and authority was not codified. Further, many laws of the Ministry of Education contradicted their exercise of power.
- A sizeable majority of principals in kindergartens unanimously agreed that they did not have previous experience in the field of planning because they were not trained in early childhood education, particularly, in terms of children's developmental characteristics and associated challenges.

*Source:* Based on Fieldwork data from Saudi Arabia, 2019

### 9.3 Contributions of the Study

#### 9.3.1 Theoretical and empirical contributions of the study

Emanating from the research questions and conceptual framework addressed in this research, the contributions of this study to the body of knowledge are, in some measure, notable. This study, in addition to very few studies on educational management in schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Abdel-Moneim, 2015; Jawhar, 2009; Makhdoom, 2012), has confirmed the findings of the authors already mentioned and extended the boundary of the adoption and implementation of strategic management and planning in a non-Western context in the extant literature. Without being presumptuous, this research figures among the first group of studies exploring the adoption of strategic planning in kindergarten schools in Saudi Arabia, as well as the factors that impede the implementation of effective strategic planning. Additionally, it sensitises the academic community in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the education sector, to the very important issue of pre-school education research and the benefits that the Kingdom could derive from many more studies conducted in the area.



Empirically, notwithstanding the fact this was a singular qualitative case study (limited to kindergarten schools in Makkah), it presents significant empirical insights into how pre-school principals, teachers and staff understand, adopt and implement strategic planning principles in their workplaces. This study's contribution to the knowledge lies in the fact that it extends the empirical boundaries of the extant literature on the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools by sharing empirical perspectives from the Saudi Arabian context. This is particularly important because it sheds light on how school principals in different cultures endeavour to understand and implement strategic management principles.

Methodologically, from the design viewpoint, this study is perhaps among the first qualitative single-case designs to be conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The very few studies on strategic management and strategic planning in schools in the Saudi context were quantitative, while others applied mixed method approaches (Al Ghamdi, 2005; Allui and Sahni, 2016; Alhazemi et al., 2013; Alameen et al., 2015).

#### 9.4 Implications of the Study for Policy and Practice

The first set of findings points to the fact that in kindergartens, strategic planning was not adequately understood by principals and teachers to assure its implementation. Researchers in management advise the enactment of strategic management and planning in educational institutions if a society aims to achieve educational reforms, as well as changes in the educational systems and the teacher and student performance (Odden and Kelly, 2008). The benefits of strategic planning can be achieved if principals in kindergartens set priorities that focus on operational effectiveness in their schools that ultimately lead to higher performance. To achieve these goals, the Saudi government, through the sector ministry (Ministry of Education), could enact policies that specifically target pre-school education by strengthening all aspects of their systems to ensure success in attaining their mandates. For example, the development of a standardised strategic management framework that guides the implementation of strategic planning in kindergartens could have immeasurable benefits.

Indeed, of utmost importance is a provision for adequate resource allocation. It has been argued that organisations too often generate well-constructed plans but fail to resource them appropriately, which leads to the failure to implement plans, and ultimately, poor school performance. Effective resource allocation and budgets should target components such as

capital expenditure, process development, human resource requirements, research and development (R&D), and overheads as well as training, intellectual property and investment strategies (Thomas et al., 2014). An equally important dimension in strategic plan implementation is to develop and train human resources in kindergartens since every role contributes, in no small measure, to the total performance. The Ministry of Education could assist by adopting a more needs-based approach to training for special categories of staff in schools such as kindergartens; for instance, leadership training for principals seemed to have been neglected at that level. Additionally, training of teachers in strategic planning could be mainstreamed for kindergarten teachers not only in strategic planning but also in leadership to ensure that cohorts of teachers are given positions of responsibility in vacancies that exist anywhere in the kindergarten school system. It has been observed that effective strategic planning can be realised in Saudi kindergarten schools if principals practice the dual roles of principal and leader for there is a strong relationship between leadership functions and the operational functions of management in a school (Leithwood and Prestine, 2002).

To sum up, to ensure the success of pre-school education in Saudi Arabia, a review of government policy on funding kindergartens needs to be carried out. Even though the education sector received the largest share of the national budget (18%) in 2019 (KPMG 2018), the targeted funding of specific sectors is required to obtain the required results. Even though more than \$36 million was allocated to the development of preschool education and kindergarten facilities, kindergartens by their very nature demand sustained and adequate funding to ensure they run smoothly.

## 9.5 Recommendations

Following are the recommendations based on the empirical findings to be considered by Saudi Ministry of education and concerning departments for further improvement of schools under study strategic planning in line with Saudi vision of 2030 to transform Kingdom of Saudi Arabia into developed nation.

1. The Saudi Government, through the sector ministry (Ministry of Education), could enact policies that specifically target pre-school education by strengthening all aspects of their systems to ensure success in attaining their mandates. For example, the development of a standardised strategic planning framework that guides the

implementation of strategic planning in kindergartens could have immeasurable benefits.

2. An equally important dimension in strategic plan implementation is to develop and train human resources in kindergartens since every role contributes, in no small measure, to the total performance. For example, for newly recruited principals, it was suggested that they attend mandatory job orientation training courses in strategic planning.
3. To make the strategic planning experience worthwhile, authorities may remove the rigidities that make planning difficult at the school level.
4. A review of Government policy on funding kindergartens needs to be carried out. For example, a specific framework and conditions for spending the budget are lost, so that it varies according to the size and needs of each kindergarten.
5. Creation of a special department within the Ministry of Public Education to take responsibility in steering the development of strategic planning in kindergarten schools.
6. Attention should be paid by education authorities to the psychological and emotional needs of teachers.

## 9.6 Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this research was the unwillingness of some respondents to participate in the study because of the sensitive nature of the topic, particularly in a society where there is a high-power distance. Under such social constraints, some respondents may not have been candid in their responses; thus, they may have responded in a manner that did not reflect their personal opinions, and this could have been a threat to the data quality and internal validity of the study.

Additionally, the research focused on strategic planning (which is monothematic), and therefore most items on the interview questions and guides focused on closely related themes. Researchers often argue that respondents answering a variety of questions on a similar theme may create a unique mindset in some, to the extent that participant responses may have been biased, raising internal validity concerns regarding the study.

Another limitation of the research was the fact that the study took place in one city, even though it is a very important region. Individual perceptions may not have been the same in other cities across the Kingdom. A bigger sample could have provided a more balanced picture of the state of strategic planning in kindergartens in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, some of the interviewees did not consent to having their interviews recorded. This meant that the researcher needed to spend much time manually writing down the interview contents so that nothing would be missed.

Because the interviews were conducted in Arabic in kindergartens and later transcribed into English, there may have been difficulties in translating the submissions of the respondents exactly as they were intended to be. It is argued that in such a situation, data quality can be compromised in a way. Further, the busy work schedule of principals in kindergartens posed a challenge to this research, as principals were constantly engaged in meetings with other stakeholders, which necessitated cancellations and the rescheduling of interview meetings.

Time and financial constraints were notable limiting factors in carrying out this research. To measure change or stability in any research, a considerable timeframe will have to elapse. However, the researcher was time-bound and had to submit the thesis at the end of a period of three years (fieldwork inclusive). Due to unforeseen contingencies, the researcher expended far more than was budgeted, for example, travelling from the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom to Makkah in Saudi Arabia where the study was located and back. Particularly, there was a need to buy flight tickets at unfavourable times of the year, coupled with the dispersed nature of the schools in the city of Makkah, which entailed movement from one location to another to conduct the research.

### 9.7 Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis puts forward the argument that it is through strategic management that school managers and leaders can measure the effectiveness of their staff in realising the mission and vision of their organisations, and to proactively shape future achievements of their students. Otherwise, they may only be operating as crisis principals, as has been the case in some of the kindergartens in this study (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Salmah, 2005). One important area for future research would be to extend the research to include kindergarten schools in other regions of the Kingdom. Findings from an extended study of schools all over the other regions in the

Kingdom would offer new perspectives on the implementation of strategic planning within Kindergarten schools. In addition, the research could be focused on comparing in-country cases to establish reasons for the convergence and divergence of findings among cases to propose policies to address factors that impede the adoption and implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools. Further, studies could be extended to include primary and secondary schools in the kingdom.

## REFERENCES

- Abas, A. (2005). *Empowering instructional leadership (Memperkasa kepemimpinan instruksional)*. Kuala Lumpur: KPM.
- Abdul-Moneim, M.A. (2015). *A political economy of Arab education: Policies and comparative perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Aguinis, H., Edwards, J.R. and Bradley, K.J. (2017). 'Improving our understanding of moderation and mediation in strategic management research', *Organization Research Methods*, 20(4), pp. 665-685.
- Agwu, M.E. (2018). 'Analysis of the Impact of Strategic Management on the Business Performance of SMEs in Nigeria', *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 17(1).
- Al Alhareth, Y., Al Alhareth, Y. and Al Dighrir, I. (2015). 'Review of women and society in Saudi Arabia', *American Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2), pp. 121-125.
- Al Ghamdi, S. (2005). 'The use of strategic planning tools and techniques in Saudi Arabia: An empirical study', *International Journal of Management*, 22(3), pp. 376-395, 507.
- Al Mousa, A.A. (2009), June. Experience of scholarships to foreign universities in Saudi Arabia: A model for investment in human resources & their contribution to development. *In Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education (Cairo, May 31)* (pp. 717-724).
- Al Sulimani, H. (2011). *Future vision for the application of strategic management in the departments of kindergartens in the perspective of the kindergarten principals in Makah*. Master's thesis. Umm Alqura University.
- Al-Ahmadi, H. (2011). 'Challenges facing women leaders in Saudi Arabia', *Human Resource Development International*, 14(2), pp. 149-166.
- Al-Dhaafri, H.S., Yusoff, R.Z.B. & Al-Swidi, A.K. (2014). 'The relationship between enterprise resource planning, total quality management, organizational excellence, and organizational performance-the mediating role of total quality management and organizational excellence', *Asian Social Science*, 10(14), pp. 158-179.

Al-Jadidi, N.A.A. (2012). The professional preparation, knowledge and beliefs of kindergarten teachers in Saudi Arabia.

Al-Seghayer, K. S. (2014). 'The actuality, inefficiency, and needs of EFL teacher-preparation programs in Saudi Arabia', *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 3(1), pp. 143-151.

Al-Youbi, A.O. (2017). *The development and advancement of higher education in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. QS Asia News Network.

Al-Yami, M., Galdas, P. and Watson, R. (2018). 'Leadership style and organisational commitment among nursing staff in Saudi Arabia', *Journal of Nursing Management*, 26(5), pp. 531-539.

Alahmari, A. (2017). 'The state of distance education in Saudi Arabia', in M. Simonson and C. Sclosser (Eds). *Quarterly Review of Distance Education: Volume 18 #2*. IAP.

Alalwan, J.A., 2012. *The strategic association between enterprise content management and decision support*. Virginia Commonwealth University.

Alameen, L., Male, T., and Palaiologou, I. (2015). 'Exploring pedagogical leadership in early years education in Saudi Arabia', *School Leadership and Management*, 34(2), pp. 121-139.

Alamri, M. (2011). 'Higher education in Saudi Arabia', *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 11(4), pp. 88-91.

Albugami, S. and Ahmed, V. (2015). 'Success factors for ICT implementation in Saudi secondary schools: From the perspective of ICT principals, head teachers, teachers and students', *International Journal of Education and Development using ICT*, 11(1).

Alexander, L.D. (1991). 'Strategy implementation: nature of the problem,' *International Review of Strategic Management*, 2(1), pp. 73-96.

Algarni, F. and Male, T. (2014). 'Leadership in Saudi Arabian public schools: Time for devolution?', *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))*, 42(3).

Alghamdi, A.K.H. and Malekan, M., 2020. Saudi science teachers' perceptions of the cultural factors influencing elementary students' science learning. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 15(4), pp.1143-1167.

Alhammadi, M. (2018). *Outstanding schools in Saudi Arabia: Leadership practices, culture and professional development*. PhD. University of Reading.

Alhazemi, A.A. Rees, C. and Hossain, F. (2013). 'Implementation of strategic organisational change: The case of King Abdul Azis University in Saudi Arabia,' *International Journal of Public Administration*, 36, pp. 972-981.

Aljabreen, H.H. and Lash, M. (2016). 'Preschool education in Saudi Arabia: Past, present, and future', *Childhood Education*, 92(4), pp. 311-319.

Allui, A and Sahni, J., (2016). 'Strategic human resource management in higher education institutions: Empirical evidence from Saudi', *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 235, pp. 361-371.

Alnahdi, G. H. (2013). 'Educational change in Saudi Arabia,' *Journal of International Education Research*, 10(1), pp. 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.19030/jier.v10i1.8342>

Alothman, M.O.H. (2016). *Saudi teachers' and university students' attitudes toward computing*. PhD. Heriot-Watt University.

Alquraini, T. (2011). 'Special education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges, perspectives, future possibilities,' *International Journal of Special Education*, 26(2), pp. 149-159.

Alsaleh, S.A. (2012). 'Gender inequality in Saudi Arabia: Myth and reality,' *International Proceedings of Economics Development & Research*, 39(1), pp. 123-130.

Alsubaie, A. and Jones, K. (2017). 'An overview of the current state of women's leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia and a proposal for future research directions,' *Administrative Sciences*, 7(4), p. 36.

Alsuwaida, N. (2016). 'Women's education in Saudi Arabia', *Journal of International Education Research*, 12(4), pp. 111-118.



Alyami, R.H. (2014). 'Educational reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Tatweer schools as a unit of development', *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal*, 5(2), pp. 1424-1433.

Amoli, S.J. and Aghashahi, F. (2016). 'An investigation on strategic management success factors in an educational complex', *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 230, pp .447-454.

Analoui, F. and Karami, A. (2003). *Strategic management in small and medium enterprises*. UK: Cengage Learning EMEA.

Anderson, D. and Anderson, L.A. (2010). *Beyond change management: How to achieve breakthrough results through conscious change leadership* (Vol. 36). John Wiley & Sons.

Anheier, H.K. (2014). *Nonprofit organisations: Theory, management, policy*. Routledge.

Arabia, S., 2016. National Transformation Program 2020.

Armstrong, M. (2011). *Armstrong's handbook of management and leadership: A guide to managing for results*. London, Kogan Page.

Arshad, A., Azhar, S.M. & Khawaja, K.J. (2014). 'Dynamics of HRM practices and organisational performance: Quest for strategic effectiveness in Pakistan organisations', *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 5(9), pp. 93-102.

Asiri, M.J.S., Bakar, K.A. and Ayub, A.F.B.M. (2012). 'Factors influencing the use of learning management system in Saudi Arabian higher education: A theoretical framework', *Higher Education Studies*, 2(2), pp. 125-137.

Ballantine, J.H. and Spade, J.Z., 2007. Understanding education through sociological theory. *Schools and society: A sociological approach to education*, pp.5-19.

Bambrick-Santoyo, P., Lemov, D. and Peiser, B. (2012). *Leverage leadership: A practical guide to building exceptional schools*. London: Jossey-Bass.

Bardus, M., Hamadeh, G., Hayek, B. and Al Kherfan, R. (2018). 'A self-directed mobile intervention (waznapp) to promote weight control among employees at a lebanese university:

protocol for a feasibility pilot randomized controlled trial', *JMIR Research Protocols*, 7(5), p.e9793.

Barlow, C. (2010). 'Interview', in A. J. D. G. & W. E. Mills (eds.) *Encyclopaedia of case study research* Vols. 1-0. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Barney, J. and Clifford, T.G., 2010. *What I Didn't Learn in Business School: How Strategy Works in the Real World*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Barney, J.B. (2017). 'Resources, capabilities, core competencies, invisible assets, and knowledge assets: Label proliferation and theory development in the field of strategic management', in *The SMS Blackwell handbook of organisational capabilities*, pp. 422-426.

Baxter, P. and Jack, S. (2008). 'Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers', *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), pp. 544-559.

Becher, R. M. (1984). *Parent involvement: A review of research and principles of successful practice*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, pp. 1-71.

Becker, H. S. (1967). 'Whose aide are we on?', *Social Problems*, 14, pp. 239-247.

Becker, H.S., 2017. Whose side are we on? In *Sociological work*, (pp. 123-134). Routledge.

Bell, L. (2004). 'Strategic planning in primary schools: A tale of no significance', *Management in Education*, 18(4), pp. 33-36

Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality*. New York, Anchor Books.

Berger, R. Woodfin, L. Plaut, S. N. and Dobbertin, C. B. (2014). *Transformational literacy: Making the common core shift with work that matters*. John Wiley and Sons.

Bergin, C. C. and Bergin, D.A. (2014). *Child and adolescent development in your classroom*. UK: Cengage Learning.

Berman, E. (2015). *Performance and productivity in public and nonprofit organisations*. Routledge.

- Berry, F. S. (2007). 'Strategic planning as a tool for managing organisational change', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 30(3), pp. 331-346.
- Bertaux, D. (1981). *Biography and society: The life history approach in the social sciences*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Blaikie, N. (2007). *Approaches to social enquiry: Advancing knowledge*. Polity.
- Blanchard, K.H. and Hersey, P. (1996). 'Great ideas revisited', *Training & Development*, 50(1), pp. 42-48.
- Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M. and Robson, K. (2001). *Focus groups in social research*. Sage.
- Bowen, W. H. (2008). *The history of Saudi Arabia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Branislav, D. (2014). 'The nature of strategic management', *Archives of Business Research*, 2(4), pp. 28-39.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2), pp. 77-101.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2014. What can "thematic analysis" offer health and wellbeing researchers. *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being*, 9(1), p.26152.
- Brown, A. P. (2010). 'Qualitative method and compromise in applied social research', *Qualitative Research*, 10(2), pp. 229-248.
- Brown, P. (1997). *Strategic planning of school districts*. Paper presented at California School, Report, No. ED 205 29, San Francisco, CA, December.
- Brown, P. and Marshall, M. (1997) *Strategic planning for school districts*. Paper presented at the California school. Report No. EA, 20016.
- Brown, W. A. (2014). *Strategic management in nonprofit organisations*. Burlington: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

- Bruns, B. Filmer, D. and Patrinos, H. A. (2011). *Making schools work: New evidence on accountability reforms*. Washington: World Bank Publication.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryson, J. M. (2017). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organisations: A guide to strengthening and sustaining organisational achievement*. John Wiley and Sons.
- Bryson, J. M. (2018). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations: A guide to strengthening and sustaining organizational achievement*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Budhwar, P. S. and Mellahi, K. (2006). *Managing human resources in the Middle East*. London: Routledge
- Buhai, S., Cottini, E. and Westergård-Nielsen, N. (2008). *The impact of workplace conditions on firm performance*.
- Buhai, S.L. and Kumari, V. (2011). 'The role of law schools in educating judges to increase access to justice', *Pac. McGeorge Global Bus. & Dev. LJ*, 24, p. 161.
- Burugo, V.M. and Owour, D. (2017). 'Influence of strategic management practices on business profitability in Kenya: A case study of Chai trading company limited', *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research (IJIR)*, 3(9), pp. 923-947.
- Bush, T. (2007). 'Educational leadership and management: Theory, policy, and practice', *South African Journal of Education*, 27(3), pp. 391-406.
- Bush, T. (2003). *Theories of educational leadership and management*. Sage.
- Bush, T. (2006). 'Theories of educational management', *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 1(2), p. n2.
- Bush, T., 2010. The significance of leadership theory. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 38(3), pp.266-270.

Carter, S.M. & Greer, C.R. (2013). 'Strategic leadership: Values, styles, and organisational performance', *Journal of Leadership & Organisational Studies*, 20(4), pp. 375-393.

Čater, T. and Pučko, D. (2010). 'Factors of effective strategy implementation: Empirical evidence from Slovenian business practice', *Journal for East European Management Studies*, pp. 207-236.

Chadee, D. Roxas, B. and Rogmans, T. (2014). *Prospects and challenges of Free Trade Agreements: Unlocking business opportunities in Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC) markets*. Springer.

Charmaz, K. (1983). 'The grounded theory method: An explication and interpretation', in C. B. R. M. Emerson and B. Little (eds.). *Contemporary field research: A collection of readings*.

Chenhall, R.H. (2006). 'The contingent design of performance measures', *Contemporary issues in Management Accounting*, 1(9), pp. 92-117.

Coleman, M. Thurlow, M. and Bush, T. (2003). *Leadership and strategic management in South African Schools*. Commonwealth Secretariat.

Collis, J. and Hussey, R. (2013). *Business research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Connolly, U. and James, C. (2014). *Effective change in schools*. London: Routledge.

Conway, J.M. and Andrews, D. (2016). 'A school wide approach to leading pedagogical enhancement: An Australian perspective', *Journal of Educational Change*, 17(1), pp. 115-139.

Conway, J.M. (2014). 'Re-forming leadership at a whole-school level: Teacher leaders and their principal invoking reaction within and beyond their school', *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*, 29(2), p. 32.

Conway, J.M., 2014. Re-forming leadership at a whole-school level: Teacher leaders and their principal invoking reaction within and beyond their school. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*, 29(2), pp.32-46.

Cox, T.D. (2011). *Teachers' perspectives on building a professional learning community*. PhD. Walden University.

Crabtree, B.F. and Miller, W.L. (1999). 'Researching practice settings: A case study approach', *Doing Qualitative Research*, 2, pp. 293-312.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches*. 3rd edn. London: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2011). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. 4th edn. Boston: Addition Wesley.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 3rd edn. CA: Sage: Thousand Oaks.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches*. 3rd edn. London: Sage Publications.

Cristiana, P.Z. and Anca, B., 2013. New perspectives on strategic management process. *Annals of Faculty of Economics and Business Administration*, 1(1), pp.1573-1580.

Crossman, A. (2017). *An overview of qualitative research methods: Direct observation, interviews, participation, immersion, and focus groups*. Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/qualitative-research-methods-3026555>, (Accessed: 26 May 2018).

Crowley, J.D. (2011). *Developing a vision: Strategic planning for the school librarian in the 21st century*. ABC-CLIO.

Nunes, A.J.S., Cruz, M.R.P.D. and Pinheiro, P.G., 2011. Fiedler's contingency theory: Practical application of the least preferred coworker (LPC) scale. *The IUP Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 10(4), pp.7-26.

Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching*. ASCD.

- Denson, N., & Chang, MJ (2009). 'Racial diversity matters: The impact of diversity-related student engagement and institutional context', *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(2), pp. 322-353.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., 2005. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. London, Stage Publication.
- Denzin, N.K. and Giardina, M.D. (2009). *Qualitative inquiry and social justice: Toward a politics of hope*. Left Coast Press.
- Deresky, H. (2014). *International Management: Managing across borders and cultures: Text and Cases*. (8th Ed.). Pearson. Boston, MA.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B. and Crabtree, B. F. (2006). 'The qualitative research interview', *Medical Education*, 40(4), pp. 314-321.
- Donaldson, L. (2001). *The contingency theory of organisations*. Sage.
- Doyle, J.K., 2004. Introduction to interviewing techniques. *Handbook for IQP Advisors and Students*, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA.
- Duberley, J., Johnson, P. Cassell, C. (2012). Philosophies underpinning qualitative research. *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges*, London: Sage.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R. and Karhanek, G. (2010). *Raising the bar and closing the gap: Whatever it takes*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree Press.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Jackson, P. (2012). *Management research*. Sage.
- Eisenhardt, K. (1989). 'Building theories from case study research', *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), pp. 532-550.
- El-Gohary, H. (2014). *Emerging research on Islamic marketing and tourism in the global economy*. Hershey: IGI Global.

Fallatah, R. H. M. and Syed, J. (2017). *Employee motivation in Saudi Arabia: An investigation into the higher education sector*. Switzerland: Springer.

Farooq, M. S., Chaudhry, A. H., Shafiq, M., and Berhanu, G. (2011). 'Factors affecting students' quality of academic performance: A case of secondary school level', *Journal of Quality and Technology Management*, 7(2), pp. 1-14.

Felix, T. B. (2011). *International comparisons of information communication technologies: Advancing applications*. Hershey: IGI Global.

Ferlie, E. and Ongaro, E. (2015). *Strategic management in public services organisations: Concepts, schools and contemporary issues*. New York: Routledge.

Fernandez, K. E. (2011). 'Evaluating school improvement plans and their effect on academic performance', *Educational Policy*, 25(2), pp. 338-367.

Ferreira, A. and Otley, D., 2009. The design and use of performance management systems: An extended framework for analysis. *Management accounting research*, 20(4), pp.263-282.

Fiedler, F.E. (1972). 'The effects of leadership training and experience: A contingency model interpretation', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, pp. 453-470.

Fontaine, R. and Ahmed, K. (2013). *Strategic management from an Islamic perspective: Text and cases*. John Wiley and Sons.

Fontana, A. and Frey, J., Fl.(1998). *Interviewing: The art of science. Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Frantzen, J.L., 2018. *School district leaders' use of strategic planning in a changing educational landscape* (Doctoral dissertation).

Franz, T. M. (2012). *Group dynamics and team interventions: Understanding and improving team performance*. Sussex: John Wiley and Sons.



Fredrick, C., Muthuri, C., Ngamau, K. and Sinclair, F. (2015). 'Provenance variation in seed morphological characteristics, germination and early seedling growth of *Faidherbia albida*', *Journal of Horticulture and Forestry*, 7(5), pp. 127-140.

Freeman, R. E. (2010). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Frey, J.H. and Oishi, S.M. (1995). *How to conduct interviews by telephone and in person: The survey kit*. 4 edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Frick, W. (2009). 'Principals' value-informed decision making, intrapersonal moral discord, and pathways to resolution the complexities of moral leadership praxis', *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47, pp. 50-74.

Frumkin, P., Manno, B.V. and Edgington, N. (2011). *The strategic management of charter schools: Frameworks and tools for educational entrepreneurs*. Educational Innovations. Harvard Education Press.

Fulop, L. (1999). *Management: A critical text*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education

Gahwaji, N. (2013). 'Controversial and challenging concerns regarding status of Saudi preschool teachers', *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER)*, 6(3), pp. 333-344.

Gallagher, E., 2008. Equal rights to the curriculum. In *Equal Rights to the Curriculum*. Multilingual Matters.

Gay, G., 2018. *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: teachers college press.

Gillespie, K. and Hennessey, H.D., 2011. Global marketing 3rd ed. *Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning*.

- Greatbanks, R., Elkin, G. and Manville, G. (2010). 'The use and efficacy of anecdotal performance reporting in the third sector', *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*.
- Greiling, D. (2010). 'Balanced scorecard implementation in German non-profit organisations', *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*.
- Grötsch, V.M., Blome, C. and Schleper, M.C. (2013). 'Antecedents of proactive supply chain risk management: A contingency theory perspective', *International Journal of Production Research*, 51(10), pp. 2842-2867.
- Guba, E. (1981). 'Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries', *Educational Resources Information Center Annual Review*, 29, pp. 75-91.
- Gubrium, J.F. and Holstein, J. A. (2002). 'From the Individual Interview to the Interview Society', in *Handbook of interview research: Context & method*, pp.3-32.
- Gubrium, J.F. and Holstein, J.A., 2009. *Analyzing narrative reality*. sage.
- Gunn, S. (2017). *Globalisation, education and culture shock*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Hamann, A.M., Schiemann, F., Bellora, L. & Guenther, T.W. (2013). 'Exploring the dimensions of organisational performance: A construct of validity', *Organisational Research Methods*, 16(1), 67-87.
- Hamdan, A. K. (2015). *Teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia: Perspectives from higher education*. Boston: Springer.
- Harris, E. L. (2015). *How schools succeed: Context, culture, and strategic leadership*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Hill, C.W., Jones, G.R. and Schilling, M.A. (2014). *Strategic management theory: An integrated approach*. Cengage Learning.
- Hitt, M., Ireland, R., & Hoskisson, R. (2007). *Strategic management: Competitiveness and globalization*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Ohio: Thompson/Southwestern.

Hitt, M.A., Ireland, R.D. and Hoskisson, R.E. (2012). *Strategic management cases: Competitiveness and globalization*. Cengage Learning.

Hitt, M.A., Ireland, R.D. and Hoskisson, R.E., 2007. *Strategic Management Competitiveness and Globalization: Concept and Cases*. Mason, USA.

Hodgkinson, M. and Kelly, M. (2007). 'Quality management and enhancement processes in UK business schools: A review', *Quality Assurance in Education*.

Hofstede, G. (1991). Empirical models of cultural differences.

Hofstede, G. and Hofstede, G.H. (1984). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values* (Vol. 5). Sage.

Hornstein, H.A., Heilman, M.E., Mone, E. and Tartell, R. (1987). 'Responding to contingent leadership behaviour', *Organizational Dynamics*, 15(4), pp. 56-65.

Hossain, F., Kumasey, A.S., Rees, C.J. and Mamman, A., 2020. Public service ethics, values and spirituality in developing and transitional countries: Challenges and opportunities. *Public Administration and Development*, 40(3), pp.147-155.

Howard, B.E.C.K.E.R., 1967. Whose side are we on? *Social Problems*, 14(3), pp.239-247.

Hoy, W.K. and Miskel, C. (eds.) (2006). *Educational leadership and reform*. IAP.

Hsieh, S.W., Jang, Y.R., Hwang, G.J. and Chen, N.S. (2011). 'Effects of teaching and learning styles on students' reflection levels for ubiquitous learning. *Computers Education*, 57(1), pp. 1194-1201.

Hurn, B.J. and Tomalin, B., 2013. What is Cross-Cultural Communication? In *Cross-Cultural Communication* (pp. 1-19). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Hwang, G.J., Yang, T.C., Tsai, C.C. and Yang, S.J. H. (2009). 'A context-aware ubiquitous learning environment for conducting complex science experiments', *Computers & Education*, 53(2), pp. 402-413.

International Monetary Fund, (2013). Guinea: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

Jabbar, A., & Hussein, A. (2017). 'The role of leadership in strategic management', *International Journal of Research-Granthaalayah*, 5(5), 99-106.

Jamil, G. L. Ferrira, P. J. J. Pinto, M. M. Pessoa, C. R. and Xavier, A. (2018). *Handbook of research on strategic innovation management for improved competitive advantage*. Hershey PA: IGI Global.

Jamil, I., Askvik, S. and Hossain, F., 2013. Understanding administrative culture: Some theoretical and methodological remarks. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 36(13), pp.900-909.

Jared, K. (2017). *Handbook of research on pedagogical models for next-generation teaching and learning*. IGI Global.

Jawhar, S.S., 2009. 'Summative vs. formative: Reflection on the Saudi higher education assessment system', *Enletawa Journal*, (2 Jan).

Jung, C.S. and Lee, G. (2013). 'Goals, strategic planning, and performance in government agencies. *Public Management Review*, 15(6), pp. 787-815.

Kadir, B. (2014). *Multidimensional perspectives on principal leadership effectiveness*. Hershey. IGI Global.

Kakonge, D.K. (2017). *Brand your name: Do you know who you are online?* Lulu.com

Kassem, M.S. and Habib, G.M., 2011. Strategic management of services in the Arab Gulf States. In *Strategic Management of Services in the Arab Gulf States*. de Gruyter.

Kern, C. (2007). *Justice between simplification and formalism: A discussion and critique of the world bank sponsored lex mundi project on efficiency of civil procedure*. Germany: Mohr Siebeck.

Khan, C. M.-U.-H. (2016). 'Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030', *Defence Journal*, 19(11), pp. 36-42.

- Khan, M. K. (2018). *Research, innovation and entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia: Vision 2030*. Taylor and Francis Group.
- King, N. and Horrocks, C. (2010). An introduction to interview data analysis. *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, pp. 142-174.
- King, N. and Horrocks, C. (2010). Carrying out qualitative interviews. *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, pp. 42-60.
- King, N. and Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research*. Sage
- Klenke, K. (2016). *Qualitative interviewing in leadership research*. London: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Koech, A.K. and Were, S. (2016). 'Factors influencing strategy implementation at the National Treasury-Kenya', *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management*, 3(4), pp. 269-288.
- KPMG. (2019). *Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Budget Report: A review of the Saudi Arabia 2020 budget and recent economic developments*. KPMG. (online). Accessed at: <https://home.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/sa/pdf/2019/KingdomofSaudi%20Arabia2020BudgetReport.pdf>(Accessed on: April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020).
- Kraja, Y. and Osmani, E. (2013). 'Competitive advantage and its impact in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (Case of Albania)', *European Scientific Journal*, 9(16), pp. 76-85.
- Krauss, S. E. (2005). 'Research paradigms and meaning making: A primer', *The Qualitative Report*, 10(4), pp. 758-770.
- Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J.A., Bridges, B.K. and Hayek, J.C. (2011). *Piecing together the student success puzzle: Research, propositions, and recommendations: ASHE higher education report* (Vol. 116). John Wiley & Sons.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kuzel, A.J. (1992). Sampling in qualitative inquiry.

KSA General Authority for Statistics (2021), Population Estimates in the Midyear of 202, found at <https://www.stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/POP%20SEM2021E.pdf>

Lahman, M.K., Geist, M.R., Rodriguez, K.L., Graglia, P. and DeRoche, K.K. (2011). 'Culturally responsive relational reflexive ethics in research: The three Rs', *Quality & Quantity*, 45(6), pp. 1397-1414.

Lambert, S.D. and Loiselle, C.G. (2008). 'Combining individual interviews and focus groups to enhance data richness', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(2), pp. 228-237.

Latorre-Medina, M.J. and Blanco-Encomienda, F.J. (2013). 'Strategic management as key to improve the quality of education', *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 81, pp. 270-274.

Ibadri, F. and Nasereddin, Y. (2019). Strategic thinking, planning, and management practice in the Arab World. IGI Global.

Legard, R., Keegan, J. and Ward, K. (2003). 'In-depth interviews. Qualitative research practice', *A guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, 6(1), pp. 138-169.

Leithwood, K., and Prestine, N. (2002). 'Unpacking the challenges of leadership at the school and district level', *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 101(1), pp. 42-64.

Lewis, J. and Ritchie, J. (2003). 'Generalising from qualitative research', *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, 2, pp. 347-362.

Li, L., Hallinger, P. and Ko, J. (2016). 'Principal leadership and school capacity effects on teacher learning in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(1), pp. 76-100.

Little, A.W. and Leach, F. E. (2013). *Education, cultures, and economics: Dilemmas for development*. London: Routledge.

Lofland, J. and Lofland, L.H. (1971). 'Developing analysis', *Analysing Social Setting: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*, pp.183-203, Wadsworth Publishing Company, New York, USA.

Lorange, P. (1998). 'Strategy implementation: The new realities. *Long Range Planning*, 31(1), pp. 18-29.

Lumby, J. and Foskett, N., 2009. Leadership and culture. In *International handbook on the preparation and development of school leaders* (pp. 61-78). Routledge.

Mainemelis, C. and Ronson, S. (2006). 'Ideas are born in fields of play: Towards a theory of play and creativity in organizational settings. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 27, pp.81-131.

Makadok, R., Burton, R. and Barney, J. (2018). 'A practical guide for making theory contributions in strategic management', *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(6), pp. 1530-1545.

Makhdoom, A., 2012. *An investigation into the problems involved in the implementation of the suggested strategic planning model for schools in Saudi Arabia* (Doctoral dissertation, Goldsmiths, University of London).

Manohar, A., Gupta, P., Priyanka, V. and Uddin, M.F. (2016). *Utilizing big data analytics to improve education*. ASEE.

Martins, E.C. and Terblanche, F. (2003). 'Building organisational culture that stimulates creativity and innovation', *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 6(1), pp. 64-74.

Marzano, R.J., 2006. *Classroom assessment & grading that work*. ASCD.

Mason, M.(2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. In *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: qualitative social research* (Vol. 11, No. 3).

Mazi, A. and Altbach, P.G. (2013). 'Dreams and realities: The world-class idea and Saudi Arabian higher education', in *Higher Education in Saudi Arabia* (pp. 13-26). Springer, Dordrecht.

McAdam, M., Miller, K. and McAdam, R. (2016). 'Situated regional university incubation: A multi-level stakeholder perspective'. *Technovation*, 50, pp. 69-78.

McAdam, R., Miller, K. and McSorley, C., 2019. Towards a contingency theory perspective of quality management in enabling strategic alignment. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 207, pp.195-209.

McGrandle, J. (2017). 'Understanding diversity management in the public sector: A case for contingency theory', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 40(6), pp. 526-537.

Mckeganey, N., Mcintosh, J., Macdonald, F., Gannon, M., Gilvarry, E., Mcardle, P. and McCarthy, S. (2004). 'Preteen children and illegal drugs', *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 11(4), pp. 315-327.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded source book*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ministry of Education (Dec; 2019)  
<https://www.moe.gov.sa/en/TheMinistry/AboutMinistry/Pages/EstablishmentoftheMinistryofEducation.aspx> 2019

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2016). *About Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved from <http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/ServicesAndInformation/aboutKingDom/Pages/KingdomGeography46466.aspx>

Mitchell, D., Ed. (2006). *New foundations for knowledge in educational administration. policy, politics. London: Lawrence Erlbaum.*

Moore, M.H. (2000). 'Managing for value: Organizational strategy in for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental organizations', *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, 29(1\_suppl), pp. 183-204.

Morden, T. (2016). *Principles of strategic management*. Routledge.

Morse, J.M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K. and Spiers, J. (2002). 'Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), pp. 13-22.



Moscoso, S. (2000). 'Selection interview: A review of validity evidence, adverse impact and applicant reactions', *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 8(4), pp. 237-247.

Mousa, W. and Ghulam, Y. (2019). 'Exploring efficiency differentials between Saudi higher education institutions', *Managerial and Decision Economics*, 40(2), pp. 180-199.

Moxham, C. (2010). 'Help or hindrance? Examining the role of performance measurement in UK nonprofit organizations', *Public Performance & Management Review*, 33(3), pp. 342-354.

Moxley, S.E., 2003. *Strategic planning process used in school districts in the southeastern United States* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Central Florida).

Mphatsoe, M., 2015. *The Role of Deputy Principals in Managing Conflict Among Secondary School Teachers in the Lejweleputswa District, in the Free State Province* (Doctoral dissertation, Welkom: Central University of Technology, Free State).

Muriuki, J.W., Cheruiyot, T. and Komen, J. (2017). 'Strategic management practices and sustainability of state corporations', *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 6(6), pp. 38-49.

Murphy, J. (2009). 'Turning around failing schools: Policy insights from the corporate, government, and nonprofit sectors', *Educational Policy*, 23(6), pp. 796-830.

Nationsonline.org, 2022. Saudi Arabia.  
[https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/saudi\\_arabia.htm](https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/saudi_arabia.htm).

Nestorović, Č., 2016. Islamic Marketing. *Management for Professionals*.

Neuman, L.W. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Pearson Education Limited. Essex.

Niblock, T. ed. (2015). *State, society and economy in Saudi Arabia (RLE Saudi Arabia)*. Routledge.

Nichols, B. (1991). 'The ethnographer's tale', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 7(2), pp. 31-47.

Nichols, P. (1991). *Social survey methods: a fieldguide for development workers* (Vol. 6). Oxfam.

Normore, A. H. (2010) *Global perspectives on educational leadership reform: The development and preparation of leaders of learning and learners of leadership*. UK: Emerald Group Publishing.

Norton, M.S., 2008. *Human Resources Administration for Educational Leaders: SAGE Publications*. Sage Publications.

Odden, A.R., 2011. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL IN EDUCATION: A Framework. In *Strategic Management of Human Capital in Education* (pp. 25-44). Routledge.

Odden, A. R. (2012). *Improving student learning when budgets are tight*. California: Corwin Press.

Odden, A. (2008). *How to create world class teacher compensation*. Freeload Press, Inc.

Opendakker, R. (2006). 'Advantages and disadvantages of four interview techniques in qualitative research', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 7(4).

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010). *Education at a glance 2010: OECD indicators*. Paris: OECD.

Otley, D.T. (1980). 'The contingency theory of management accounting: achievement and prognosis', In *Readings in accounting for management control* (pp. 83-106). Springer, Boston, MA.

Owolabi, S.A. & Makinde, O.G. (2012). 'The effects of strategic planning for corporate performance in university education: A study of Babcock University', *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, 2(4), pp. 27-44.

Parolin, G.P. (2009). *Citizenship in the Arab world: Kin, religion and nation-state* (p. 192). Amsterdam University Press.

Peng, M.W. (2017). 'Cultures, institutions, and strategic choices: Toward an institutional perspective on business strategy. *The Blackwell handbook of cross-cultural management*, pp. 52-66.

Peretomode, O. (2012). 'Situational and contingency theories of leadership: Are they the same', *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 4(3), pp. 13-17.

Qu, S.Q. and Dumay, J. (2011). 'The qualitative research interviews', *Qualitative Tesearch in Accounting & Management*, 8(3), pp. 238-264.

Rabaah, A., Doaa, D. and Asma, A., 2016. Early Childhood Education in Saudi Arabia: Report. *World Journal of Education*, 6(5), pp.1-8.

Rajasekar, J. and Al Rae, A. (2014). 'Organizations' use of strategic planning tools and techniques in the Sultanate of Oman', *International Business Research*, 7(3), p. 159.

Rasche, A. (2007). *The paradoxical foundation of strategic management*. Germany: Springer Science and Business Media.

Reinhorn, S.K., Johnson, S.M. and Simon, N.S. (2017). 'Investing in development: Six high-performing, high-poverty schools implement the Massachusetts teacher evaluation policy', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(3), pp. 383-406.

Rejc, A. (2004). 'Toward contingency theory of performance measurement', *Journal for East European Management Studies*, pp. 243-264.

Renzl, B. (2008). 'Trust in management and knowledge sharing: The mediating effects of fear and knowledge documentation', *Omega*, 36(2), pp. 206-220.

Robbins, P. and Alvy, H.B. eds., 2014. *The principal's companion: Strategies to lead schools for student and teacher success*. Corwin Press.

Robbins, S.P. and Coulter, M.K., 2007. *Management in sociaalagogische beroepen*. Pearson Education.

Robinson, N.R. (2012). 'Preservice music teachers' employment preferences: Consideration factors', *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 60(3), pp. 294-309.

Robinson, O. C. (2014). 'Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), pp. 25-41.

Rugh, W. (2002). 'Arab education: Tradition, growth and reform', *Middle East Journal*, 56(3), pp. 396-414.

Rowley, S., Hossain, F. and Barry, P., 2010. Leadership through a gender lens: How cultural environments and theoretical perspectives interact with gender. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 33(2), pp.81-87.

Saleh, S., Kaissi, A., Semaan, A. & Natafqi, N.M. (2013). 'Strategic planning process and financial planning among hospitals in Lebanon', *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, 28(1), 34-45.

Salmah, S., 2005. *Strategic management among managers Technical School in Perak (Pengurusan strategik di kalangan pentadbir sekolah Kebangsaan di daerah Hilir Perak)*(Doctoral dissertation, Thesis of Master Degree, Universiti Malaya).

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2016. *Research methods for business students (Seventh)*. Nueva York: Pearson Education.

Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. (2013). *Background educational system in Saudi Arabia*.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2009. *Research methods for business students*. Pearson education.

Schein, E.H. (2010). *Organizational culture and leadership* (Vol. 2). John Wiley & Sons.

Seidman, I. (1998). 'Interview as qualitative research', in *A guide for researchers in education and social sciences*. New York: Teachers Collage Press.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. Teachers College Press.

Shenton, A.K. (2004). 'Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects', *Education for Information*, 22(2), pp. 63-75.

Topor, F.S. ed., 2016. *Handbook of research on individualism and identity in the globalized digital age*. IGI Global.

Smith, L. and Abouammoh, A., 2013. Higher Education in Saudi Arabia. *Netherlands: Springer*.

Sobahe, W., 2017. The difference between preschools in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United States in curriculum and classroom activities.

Stead, W.E. (2014). *Sustainable strategic management*. London: Routledge.

Steensma, H. and Vermunt, R. eds., 2013. *Social Justice in Human Relations Volume 2: Societal and Psychological Consequences of Justice and Injustice*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Steiner, G. A. (2010). *Strategic planning*. Simon and Schuster.

Strategic Gears Management Consultancy, 2018. Growth Potential of Private Education in Saudi Arabia.

Suklev, B. & Debarliev, S. (2012). 'Strategic planning effectiveness comparative analysis of the Macedonian context', *Economic and Business Review*, 14(1), 63-93.

Sun, R. and Van Ryzin, G.G. (2014). 'Are performance management practices associated with better outcomes? Empirical evidence from New York public schools', *The American Review of Public Administration*, 44(3), pp. 324-338.

Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P. and May, H. (2010). 'How principals and peers influence teaching and learning', *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(1), pp. 31-56.

Swan, E., Stead, V. and Elliott, C. (2009). 'Feminist challenges and futures: Women, diversity and management learning', *Management Learning*, 40(4), pp. 431-437.

Tayeb, M.H., 1988. *Organizations and national culture: A comparative analysis*. Sage publications.

Thomas, A.B., 2004. *Research skills for management studies*. Routledge.

Thompson, A., Peteraf, M., Gamble, J., and Strickland, A. III. (2014). *Crafting and executing strategy: The quest for competitive advantage*. Concepts and readings, 19th ed. New York. NY. McGraw-Hill Irwin.

Thompson, J. L. and Martin, F. (2010). *Strategic management: Awareness and change*. UK: Cengage Learning EMEA.

Tracy, S.J., 2013. *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. UK: Willey-Blackwell.

Trotter II, R.T. (2012). 'Qualitative research sample design and sample size: Resolving and unresolved issues and inferential imperatives', *Preventive Medicine*, 55(5), pp. 398-400.

Tsolka, A. (2020). Contingency and situational approaches to educational leadership. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2016). *Global education monitoring report summary 2016: education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all*.

Van Manen, M., 2016. *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Routledge.

Van Niekerk, E.J. and Van Niekerk, P. (2006). 'Strategic management in South African education: The leadership dimension', *Africa Education Review*, 3 (1-2), pp. 84-99

Vassiliev, A. (2013). *The history of Saudi Arabia*. Saqi.

Vissak, T. (2010). 'Recommendations for using the case study method in international business research', *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), pp. 370-388.

Vong, K.I.P. and Li, M.Y., 2016. Challenges in establishing kindergarten education system in villages of Guizhou, China: A preliminary study. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 6(2), pp.1-10.

Vygotsky, L., 1987. *Thought and Language*. Edited by Alex Kozulin.

Wadongo, B. and Abdel-Kader, M. (2011). 'Performance management in non-profit organisations,' In *Review of Management Accounting Research* (pp. 450-478). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Wadongo, B. and Abdel-Kader, M., 2014. Contingency theory, performance management and organisational effectiveness in the third sector: A theoretical framework. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 63(6), pp.680-703.

Wanjala, C. et al. (2014). 'Strategic planning in schools in Kenya: Possibilities and challenges.' *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 42(1), pp. 17-30.

Wheelen, T.L., 2011. *Concepts in strategic management and business policy*. Pearson Education India.

Wheelen, T.L., Hunger, J.D., Hoffman, A.N. and Bamford, C.E., 2017. *Strategic management and business policy* (Vol. 55). Boston: pearson.

Wright Jr, J.W. ed. (2016). *Business and economic development in Saudi Arabia*. Springer.

Yap, P. and Ferreira, A., 2011. The complex and multifaceted world of performance management in NGOs: a case study. In *2011 AFAANZ Conference* (p. 37).

Yin, K. R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (Vol. 4). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (1993). *Case study research: Design and methods*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2010). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. London: Sage Publications.

Yin, R.K. (2011). *Applications of case study research*. Sage.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Field Survey via Semi-Structured Questions

This report provides a brief description of the fieldwork carried out in Saudi Arabia during the period of May-August 2019. In addition, it gives some reflection on the journey the researcher experienced, which might help to improve the quality of the research and assist the researcher's personal development progression.

#### Pre-departure

In preparation for the fieldwork in Saudi Arabia, I took time to go through all the mandatory administrative processes before departure. The process entailed providing details of my research through the University of Manchester (UoM) Ethical Review Principal (ERM) and receiving notification of approval for Low-Risk Ethics (System details: Low Risk Ethics Application with reference: 2019-5235-9557) and an approval letter for my absence. In addition, another approval from my sponsor (Saudi embassy in London) to conduct the fieldwork was received. Thereafter, I left Manchester on the 24 of April 2019.

#### Arrival in Saudi Arabia

After reaching the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the researcher contacted the head of the kindergarten department in the Makkah region, to schedule a meeting with her to discuss the needed process and procedure as a preparation to conduct the fieldwork. The meeting was very helpful, and much material and information were provided. One of the procedures she completed for me was that she circulated some documents to all schools in the Makkah region confirming my visit, the purposes of my visit and the permission to conduct the fieldwork in the demographic location stated in the letter. Another necessary arrangement was completed and the contact details of each principals ' contact numbers were received. Once the details were gathered by the researcher, arrangements to schedule the time and set up some appointments were agreed upon them. The researcher chose kindergarten schools from different regions randomly through the assistance of the computer system. Then, the researcher started to contact the principals via a phone call to make sure that they received the circulars from the principal of the kindergarten and to make the final step of arranging to conduct the

interviews at a time of their convenience. Just before interviewing with the principals, permission was received from each principal to meet with some teachers in the form of a focus group by the end of the same day after completing the interview with the principal. The researcher also asked the principals to nominate some of the parents for interviews. The administration responded to the researcher, contacted the parents, and set dates for those wishing to participate.

## Appendix 2 – Observations

### Observations

During my visits to kindergartens, I was most welcome; however, I noticed some fear and concerned facial expressions. Some principals, for example, were unwilling to show their lack of knowledge of some administrative aspects or to leave the teachers alone without their presence during the focus group discussion, although the researcher tried to locate them in an isolated room.

This fieldwork used a qualitative method to explore the implementation of strategic planning in kindergarten schools. Face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were undertaken. The researcher was able to consider the views of the principals; teachers and parents through the semi-structured interview questions that were developed based on the study's five questions and objectives.